



# QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING STATEMENT 2023

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this statement is to articulate The Nature School's (TNS) approach to teaching and learning across both the Primary and Secondary years. TNS strives to have skilled, effective and professional teachers who are committed to improving the quality of their teaching in order to enhance student learning.

## 2. Context

*At TNS our vision is to create a community where children learn and shine through authentic experiences in nature to become engaged global citizens.*

TNS is a leading progressive independent school with a focus on nature. Learners at TNS are scientific thinkers, curious questioners, and articulate communicators, capable of affecting change now and in the future.

TNS seeks to employ highly qualified, experienced teachers whose educational philosophy and life experiences align with the School's vision and mission. While it is not essential that teachers have had professional experience in a progressive environment, a willingness to learn and an understanding of the educational philosophies outlined below are essential.

At TNS learning is regularly taken beyond the classroom. In the Primary years, teachers take students outside on a daily basis during all KLAs, as appropriate to the lesson. Primary Adventure Days are fortnightly offsite excursions into local natural habitats or the local community. Adventure Days are planned in conjunction with Integrated units of work and require a high degree of teacher planning and understanding of curriculum. In the Secondary years, teachers are encouraged to consider the most appropriate contexts for taking learning outdoors in each subject. Field Studies Days provide Secondary students with a weekly opportunity to apply skills and knowledge in natural environments.

### **3. Educational philosophies**

Teachers at TNS are expected to be familiar with the following key education philosophies and approaches:

#### **3.1 Innovative education**

TNS offers innovative education which uses an experiential, learner led approach with a 'green focus'. There is a de-emphasis on textbooks in favour of varied learning resources. Classes have a high teacher-student ratio that allows us to focus on the needs of the students as individuals. Teachers encourage students to take risks, make mistakes, persist, think outside the box, assess situations from different perspectives and work cooperatively. Creativity, problem solving, independent thinking, communication and collaboration are encouraged and fostered. TNS has strong community involvement. We engage experts in various fields from our community by inviting them to our school, or taking our students to them through regular Adventure Days, Field Studies trips and other excursions.

#### **3.2 Connection to the Natural Environment**

The natural environment provides opportunities for challenge and experiential learning. Nature based education supports a child's development in social and emotional intelligence, problem solving and environmental understanding. In a

world overloaded with virtual distractions, TNS students are given time and space to come down to earth and engage with the natural world. Nature offers children the chance to learn about themselves and the world around them, and builds emotional resilience they can use throughout life. Connection to nature and our environment allows us to teach the importance of our collective eco-footprint and the hope of creating respectful custodianship. The *Learning Naturally Framework* supports teachers when planning all units of work.

### **3.3 Inquiry based learning**

Inquiry based learning is facilitated by teachers who pose questions or scenarios, rather than simply presenting established facts or portraying a smooth path to knowledge. As students develop skills and expertise through the years, they are increasingly capable of posing their own questions to investigate. At TNS, inquiry based learning:

- occurs both during planned units of teaching, and through multi-age interest groups
- focuses on scientific exploration through real world experiments
- emphasises learning by doing – often outside (hands on projects, expeditionary learning, experiential learning)
- may involve collaborative learning projects and the associated development of social skills
- may involve individual learning projects specific to the interests or learning needs of students
- should incorporate some form of presentation of findings at the conclusion of the investigation

### **3.4 Indigenous and cultural learning**

TNS seeks to foster authentic relationships with Birpai Elders and focus on local Indigenous knowledge through story, song and Language (Gathang). This is facilitated by our Aboriginal Education Officer, who also sits on the Birpai Land Council. When possible, Indigenous consultants or Elders will be invited to join our learning on Adventure Days at places of cultural significance. Teaching staff also regularly

incorporate Acknowledgement of Country, including during all all offsite learning days (Adventure Days / Field Studies Days).

### **3.5 Place-based education**

At TNS we take advantage of our stunning location through immersive learning in the community and natural environment to create authentic, meaningful and engaging learning for students. Through place-based education we seek to engage students in local heritage, cultures, landscapes, opportunities and experiences, and connect these with learning outcomes across the curriculum. Regular visits to our local bushland at Innes Lake Nature Reserve are facilitated through a partnership with our National Parks and Wildlife Ranger. This allows students to intimately know one natural environment, including its seasonal cycles, flora and fauna, and experience changes there over an extended period of time.

## **4. Quality of Teaching**

The Head of School is responsible for monitoring the quality of teaching within the School. Teaching programs, assessment schedules, timetables, and reports are reviewed by the Head on a termly basis and written feedback is provided. The Head functions as a mentor for teachers, and may coach less experienced staff members or observe colleagues to provide feedback on a specific area of teaching practice, in line with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST). At TNS we acknowledge that teachers are learners too, and teaching staff are expected to consistently demonstrate and share their own learning.

## **5. Professional Learning**

All teachers at TNS must maintain their accreditation with NESAS. Conditionally or Provisionally registered teachers must diligently work towards achieving Proficient status within the required time frame. The Association of Independent Schools (AISNSW) functions as our Teacher Accreditation authority (TAA) and provides

substantial support in this area. Proficient teachers in the maintenance cycle must continue to demonstrate and document their practice against the seven standards of the APST.

There is a strong focus on the professional learning of all staff at TNS, and continuous engagement with informal and formal professional development opportunities is expected. In consultation with the Head, teaching staff are required to set professional learning goals that are connected to the APST and aligned with the School's philosophy. Professional development days for staff are scheduled throughout the year. At the first Professional Development day in the academic year, new staff will participate in an induction program as part of their learning. Weekly meetings provide an ongoing opportunity for collegial conversations, and for the Head to meet with collaboratively or individually with staff members.

## **6. Curriculum and Programming**

Teachers at TNS are expected to have deep curriculum knowledge and be familiar with current NSW syllabus documents in all relevant Key Learning Areas / Subjects, including an understanding of the cross curriculum priorities and general capabilities. This depth of understanding equips teachers to write high quality programs, while allowing opportunities to connect student-led learning back to the curriculum. It also enables teachers to connect learning outcomes from different KLAs into Integrated programs at times. Teachers at TNS are expected to document both planned and unplanned learning experiences. The *Learning Naturally Framework* is an important school document that supports teachers to incorporate a nature perspective across the curriculum.

The Head of School has oversight of the yearly overview, percentages, scope and sequence documents, term overviews, assessment plans, and programs. Teachers are provided with a planning template and guidelines for programming. A similar structure may also be used in Program Builder. Assessment for, as and of learning should be embedded throughout programs. Teachers are encouraged to first design rich

assessment tasks based on syllabus outcomes that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, and then backwards plan units of work that prepare students for success at these tasks.

## **7. Monitoring Student Achievement**

Evidence of learning may take a variety of forms and should be collated in student portfolios. Records of grades awarded for each semester are also maintained in Sentral (student management system). These files are accessible to all teachers to enable monitoring of a student's progress over time. NAPLAN data may also be used to track a student's progress if available.

In all year levels, teachers must also retain work samples both for moderation of student grades and for monitoring the standard of teaching. Work samples should represent the upper, middle and lower range of achievement, and illustrate various points in the distribution of A to E grades (for Years 1-10).

## **8. Staff Expectations**

Staff are expected to:

- be familiar with and adhere to all policies, statements and guidelines
- arrive at least 30mins before morning supervision starts to prepare for teaching and learning (8:10am)
- remain after school for at least 30mins after student supervision ends to mark student work, reflect on teaching and plan for learning (3:50pm)
- actively participate in and contribute to staff meetings and professional learning meetings (Wednesday afternoons 3:30-4:30pm)
- actively participate in professional learning opportunities (including team meetings, stage meetings, individual meetings with Head, readings, or other work towards individual PL goals, as well as external opportunities)
- see themselves as learners and be highly reflective practitioners

- regularly take learning outside of the traditional classroom walls in all KLAs / Subjects
- experiment with teaching strategies and be willing to try new approaches
- independently undertake professional reading around progressive education, nature pedagogy, bush/forest schools, etc
- produce strong, succinct programs that cover required learning outcomes without unnecessary over-programming
- look for authentic assessment opportunities over ‘tests’, particularly in the Primary years
- provide differentiation for support and extension in all programs
- make adjustments as necessary to ensure access to learning for all students ‘on the same basis’
- guide students towards accepting responsibility for their learning
- annotate and evaluate all teaching programs
- use feedback provided to improve teaching
- be team players who work cooperatively and collaboratively with other staff
- respect students’ voices

## **9. Staff Appraisals**

The Head of School is responsible for the annual appraisal of teaching staff, and the appraisal of any staff member on a probation period. Appraisals involve both written reflections and collegial discussion. Informal feedback meetings may occur termly, while official appraisals are held annually. Teaching staff are expected to use the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) to critically reflect on their practice before the appraisal, and set new professional learning goals.

If any teacher at TNS is deemed in need of support to improve an aspect of their teaching practice, the Head will assume a coach or mentor role, and use a range of targeted strategies to set clear goals and monitor progress. For repeated issues or multiple areas of concern, a Performance Management Plan will be enacted.