About the census

What is the AEDC?
The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is an Australian Government Initiative. It measures the developmental progress of children as they start their first year of full-time school and tracks at groups of children in the community, not individuals.

The census involves teachers of children in their first year of full-time school completing a research tool, the Australian version of the Early Development Instrument. The Instrument collects data relating to five key areas of early childhood development.

Who uses the AEDC results?
The census is used by early childhood educators and health services, local councils and community groups, schools and governments. The AEDC results are used to help plan and allocate the right type of services, resources and support for communities.

Why is the census completed in the first year of full-time school?
Research shows that the experiences and relationships that babies and children have during the early years strongly affect their future development. Providing the right kinds of services, resources and support during the early years brings lifelong benefits to children and the whole community.

How long has the census been running?
In 2009, the AEDC (formerly known as the Australian Early Development Index or AEDI) was conducted nationally for the first time, with a second national collection in 2012. More than 55 per cent of schools with eligible children participated in each collection.

Why should schools participate?
The AEDC results provide information for schools, communities and governments to more effectively allocate the services, resources and support that will help shape the future and wellbeing of children in Australia.

At the school level, teachers reported that participating in the census raised their awareness of the needs of individual children, as well as the needs of the class as a whole. They also reported that completing the AEDC assisted their planning for transition to school and developing programmes of work for their class.

Results from previous data collections have been used to help young children and families in a range of ways:
- Communities start new playgrounds and parental services;
- Schools seeing improved student performance through new literacy programmes; and
- Governments using the data as evidence to develop better policies for children.

How reliable is teacher reporting?
Teachers will undertake one hour of training and be provided with detailed information to help them accurately complete the instrument for the children in their class.

Studies have confirmed the reliability of teacher reporting by using different teachers to report on the same children.

Data collection

Who collects the census data?
After participating in training, teachers assess each child in their class and answer around 160 questions across five important areas of early childhood development. Teachers will complete the Australian version of the Early Development Instrument for each child in their class. The data is then submitted online through a secure data collection system for processing, and published the following year.

What is assessed during data collections?
The Instrument measures five key areas of early childhood development:
- Physical health and well-being
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- Communication skills and general knowledge.

Teachers complete an assessment on each child, but the published data only represents groups of children at community, state/territory and national levels. Individual children and individual schools are not identified in the final reports.

What is required of each child?
Nothing, children do not need to be present; teachers use the Instrument to record their observations.