Schools: Language diversity in NSW Government schools, 2023
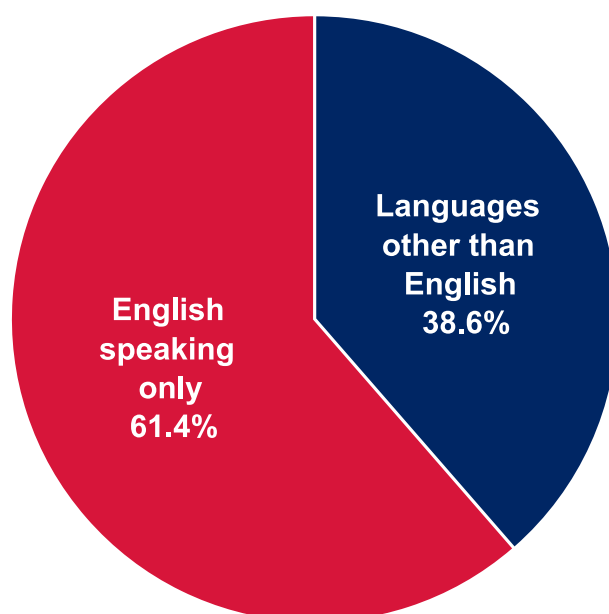
Language background other than English (LBOTE) enrolments

In March 2023, 61.4% (487,065) of students enrolled in NSW Government schools came from homes where English was the only language spoken. More than one-third (38.6% or 306,269) of students came from homes where languages other than English were spoken (Figure 1) by either the students and/or at least one parent or carer. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data from 2021 shows that 28.2% of the NSW population spoke a language other than English at home and 71.8% spoke only English.

Enrolment figures of LBOTE students in 2023 increased by 4,115 from 2022 (37.7% or 302,154).

The proportion of LBOTE students has grown from 30.9% in 2013, an increase of 7.7 percentage points in 10 years. LBOTE enrolments increased by 0.9 percentage points from 2022 to 2023. While 2021 and 2022 saw smaller increases in the LBOTE percentage (likely to be affected by reduced immigration due to COVID-19), the increase in 2023 is more comparable to the increases experienced in each of the 5 years prior to 2020.

Figure 1: Language background of students in NSW Government schools, March 2023

A student's country of origin cannot be inferred from their language background, as country of origin is where the student was born, while language background refers to the languages spoken by the student and their family. French, for example, is the official language of approximately 30 countries, with many more countries, including Australia, having French speakers as citizens and migrants.

Language breakdown

Students from language backgrounds other than English in NSW Government schools came from 247 different language backgrounds.

60.1% of all LBOTE enrolments came from 5 language backgrounds. Indian and Chinese (both comprised of several languages) accounted for 22.8% and 15.4% of LBOTE students respectively. The other main language backgrounds were Arabic (13.4%), Vietnamese (5.2%) and Filipino/Tagalog (3.4%).

Arabic

In 2023, the largest single language spoken by LBOTE students and/or their parents/carers was Arabic with 40,890 enrolments (13.4% of all LBOTE students).

Indian languages

Collectively, Indian languages accounted for 22.8% of all LBOTE students. Of the 25 Indian languages reported, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Tamil, Punjabi, Nepali and Gujarati each represented the backgrounds of more than 5,000 students.

There were 5 other Indian languages with more than 1,000 LBOTE students each at NSW Government schools in 2023 – Telugu, Malayalam, Sinhalese, Marathi and Kannada. Refer to Note 2 for a list of Indian languages with fewer than 1,000 students.

Chinese languages

Students from a Chinese language background made up 15.4% of LBOTE students in 2023 (47,080 students), with the largest number of these students (30,364 or 9.9%) coming from a Mandarin speaking background. There were also 13,701 students from a Cantonese background and 3,015 students from other Chinese language backgrounds, including Teochew, Hokkien, Hakka, Wu, Min Nan and Chinese other.

Notable increases

Aside from the 5 top language backgrounds, 7 languages in 2023 increased by more than 5% and 100 enrolments from 2022. These were Ukrainian (130.6%), Mongolian (40.7%), Pashto (13.9%), Hebrew (11.5%), Persian (excluding Dari) (8.4%), Aboriginal English (7.5%) and Dari (7.1%).

Of the Indian languages, Nepali, Telugu, Urdu and Bengali also increased by more than 100 enrolments and more than 5% in 2023.

Mandarin recorded the greatest numerical increase of 1,136 enrolments, or 3.9%.

Figure 2: Language backgrounds in NSW Government schools by region/language groupings, March 2023
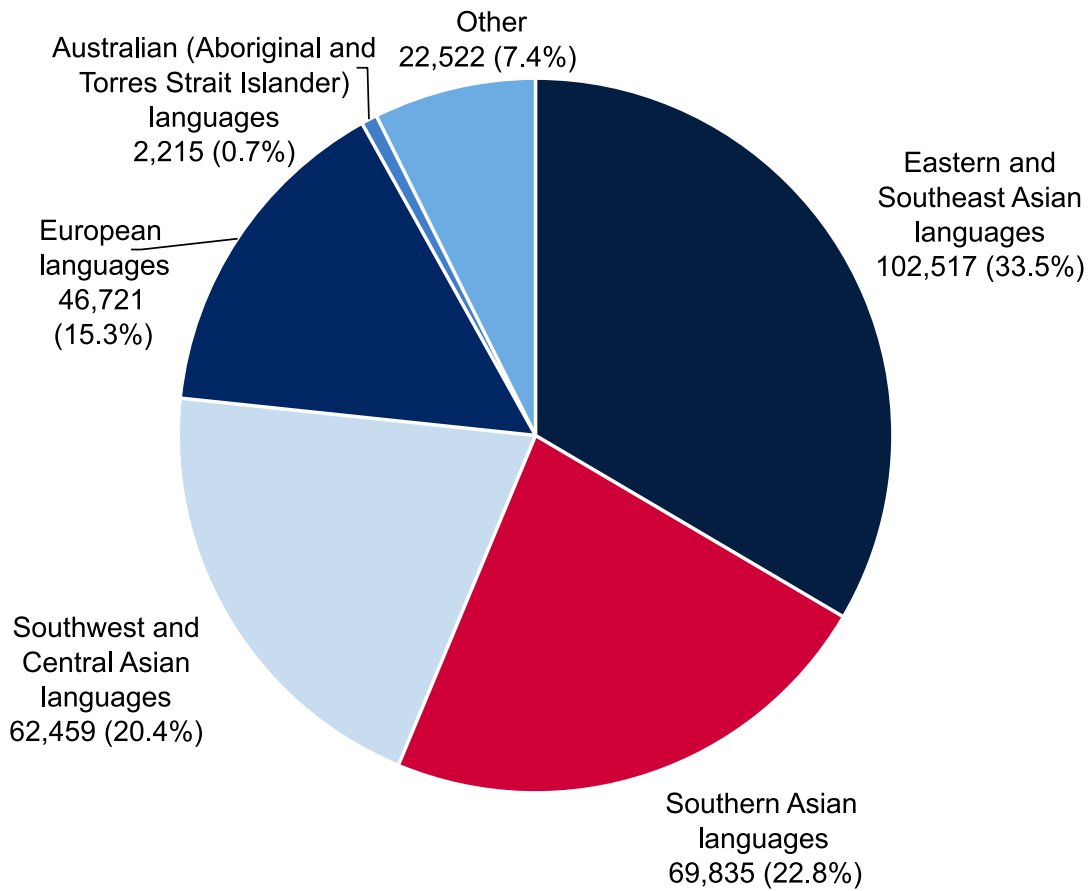

Other
22,522 (7.4%)

Australian (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) languages
2,215 (0.7%)

European languages
46,721 (15.3%)

Eastern and Southeast Asian languages
102,517 (33.5%)

Southwest and Central Asian languages
62,459 (20.4%)

Southern Asian languages
69,835 (22.8%)

Figure 3 (a): Language backgrounds in NSW Government schools – languages with over 1,000 speakers, March 2023

Region/language grouping

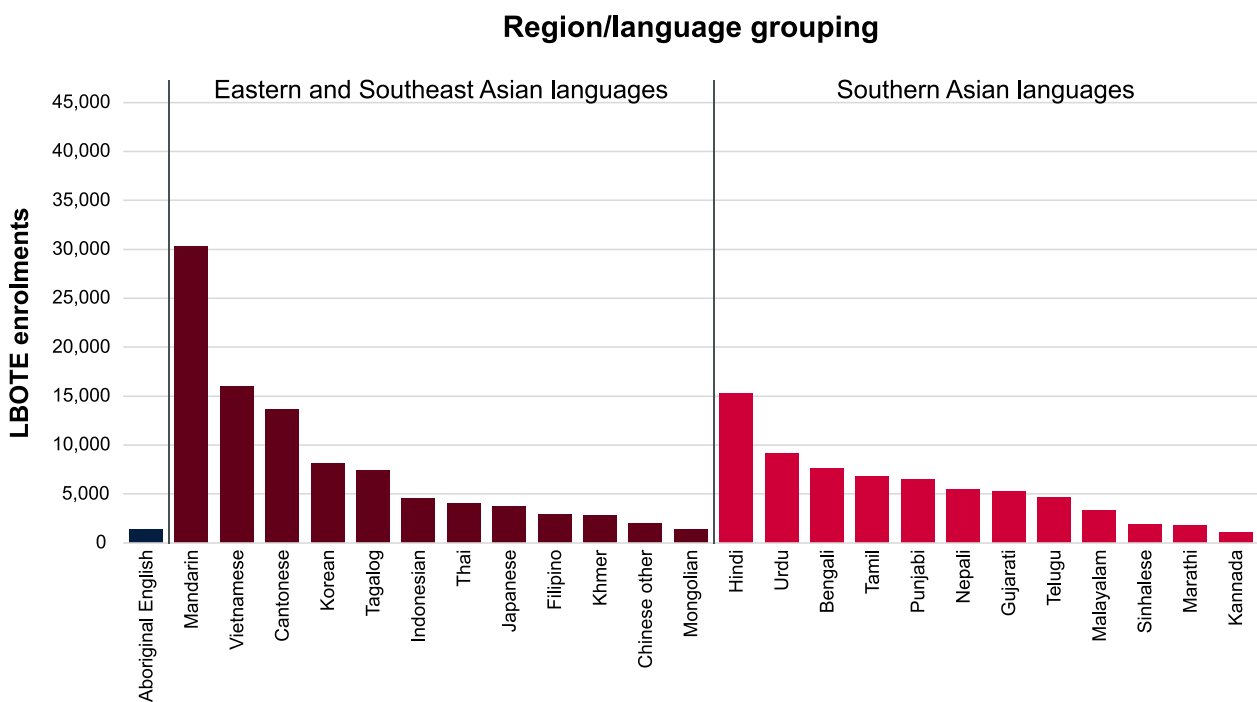Eastern and Southeast Asian languages | Southern Asian languages
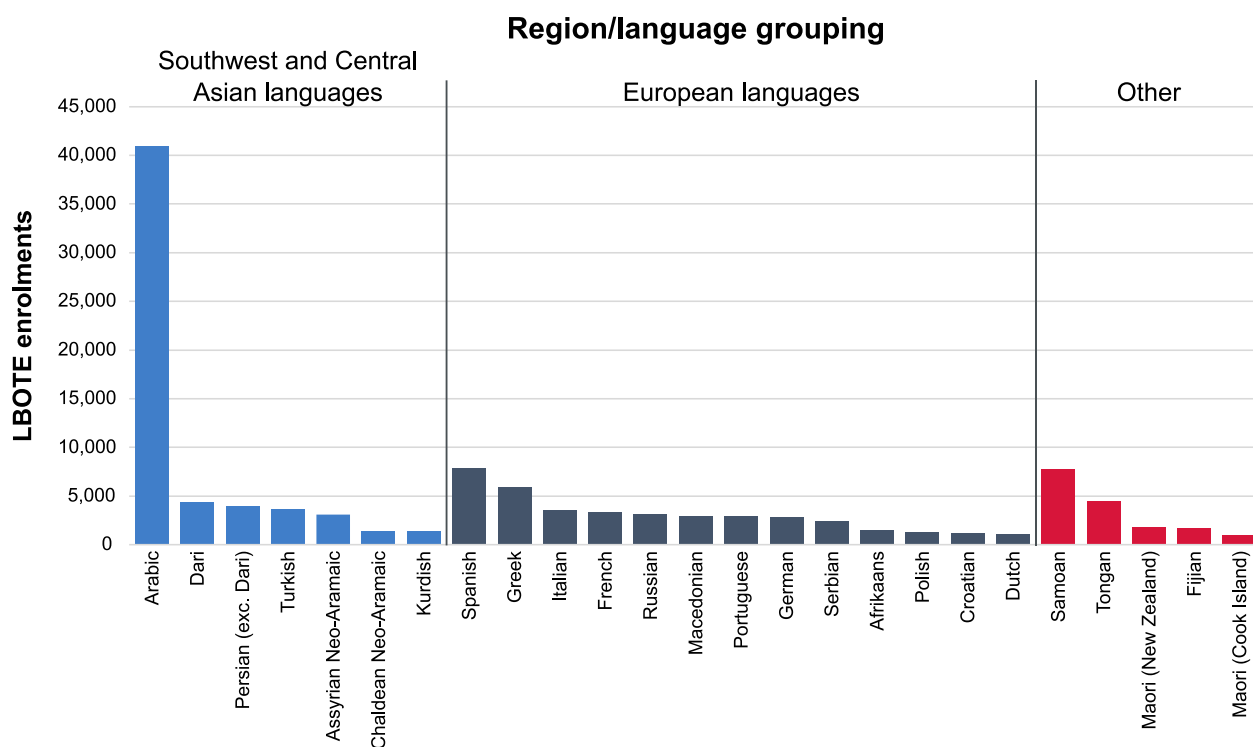
LBOTE enrolments

Figure 3 (b): Language backgrounds in NSW Government schools – languages with over 1,000 speakers, March 2023

Diversity in language background of students has remained relatively stable since 2013, fluctuating between 231 language backgrounds in 2013 to 247 in 2023.

For more information visit Enrolments of LBOTE government school students by largest language groups on the NSW Education Data Hub.
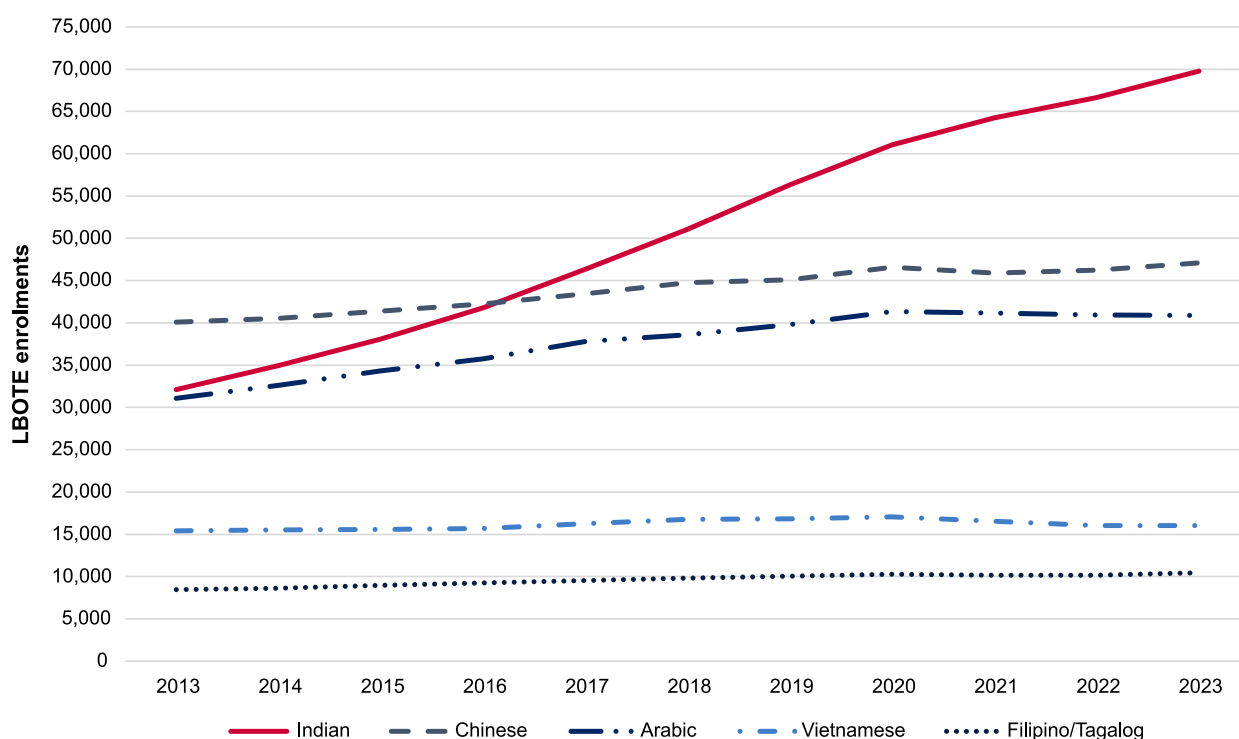
Largest language backgrounds other than English, 2013 to 2023

According to 2021 ABS census data, 26 language backgrounds accounted for more than 1% each and 80.3% total of all language backgrounds other than English across NSW.

In March 2023, NSW Government school students came from 32 language backgrounds that each accounted for more than 1% (or approximately 3,000 students) and 82.7% total of all LBOTE students. There were 50 language backgrounds which more than 1,000 students identified as their language background.

Of the 5 largest language backgrounds, enrolments of students from Indian language backgrounds rose by 3,149 (4.7%), Chinese language backgrounds rose by 850 (1.8%) and Filipino/Tagalog rose by 266 (2.6%). Both Arabic and Vietnamese language background enrolments fell for the third consecutive year.

Figure 4: Five largest language backgrounds other than English, 2013 to 2023

For more information visit Schools: language diversity in NSW on the NSW Education Data Hub.
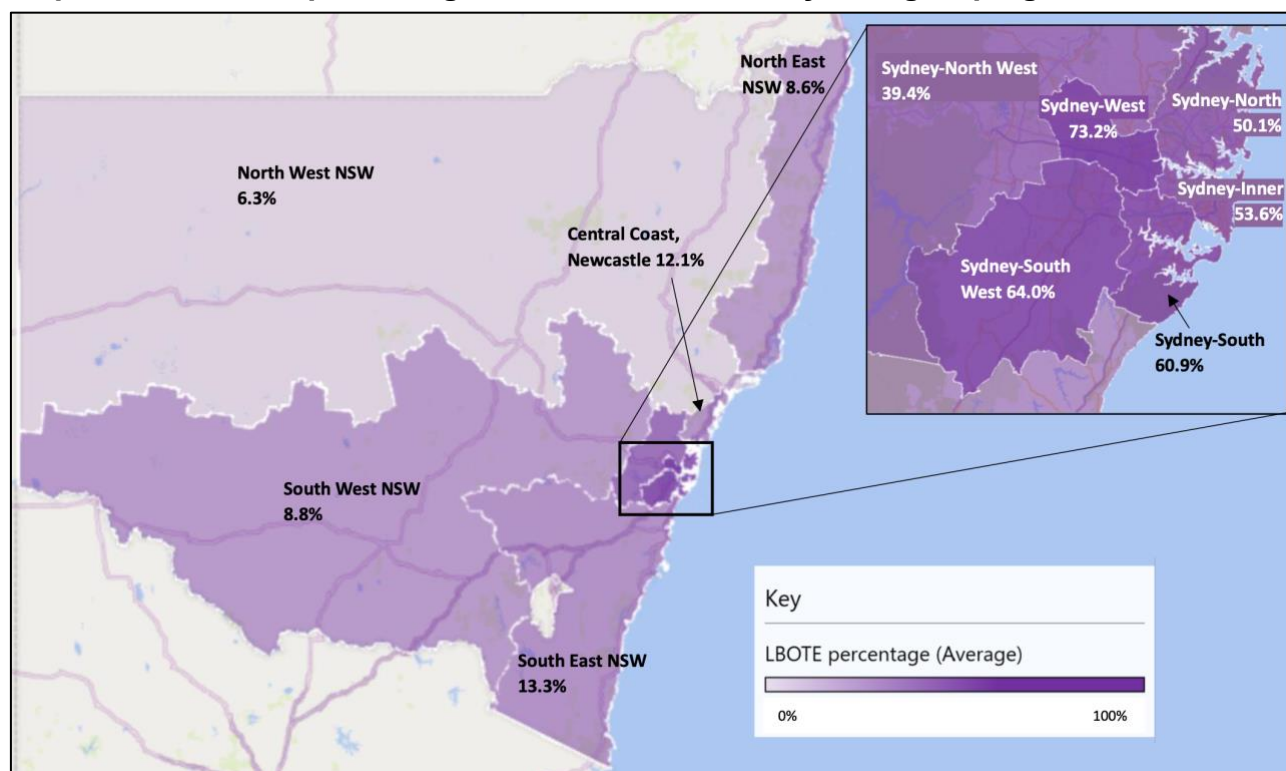
LBOTE enrolments in NSW Government schools by Statistical Area Level 4 groupings

The map below shows the concentration of LBOTE students across NSW, using a geographical structure based on the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) 2021. The ASGS is maintained by the ABS and is widely used as it allows comparison of statistical data. ASGS Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) boundaries in NSW have been combined by the NSW Department of Education into 11 groups for reporting and publication of department data.

There were greater concentrations of LBOTE students in the Sydney metropolitan area than in other parts of NSW. Across all Sydney schools, 58.1% of the students were from language backgrounds other than English compared with 10.1% of enrolments in regional NSW.

Details of the SA4 groupings are included in the notes at the end of this fact sheet.

Map 1: LBOTE as a percentage of total enrolments by SA4 groupings, March 2023

At 73.2%, Sydney-West remained the area with the largest percentage of students from a language background other than English. The areas with the next largest percentages of LBOTE students were Sydney-South West (64.0%) and Sydney-South (60.9%). South East NSW had the highest percentage of LBOTE students (13.3%) in Regional NSW. The area with the lowest percentage of LBOTE students across NSW was North West NSW with 6.3%.

Table 1: LBOTE enrols by SA4 and education level, March 2023

SA4 group	Primary total	Secondary total	All enrolments	Percentage LBOTE
Sydney-Inner	16,241	13,474	29,908	53.6%
Sydney-North	27,265	16,323	43,771	50.1%
Sydney-South	26,542	18,477	45,464	60.9%
Sydney-South West	32,820	25,444	58,692	64.0%
Sydney-West	45,368	23,709	69,595	73.2%
Sydney-North West	16,136	10,228	26,506	39.4%
Sydney total	**164,372**	**107,655**	**273,936**	**58.1%**
North East NSW	3,119	1,856	4,982	8.6%
North West NSW	2,520	1,563	4,102	6.3%
South West NSW	2,773	1,625	4,459	8.8%
South East NSW	5,591	3,711	9,366	13.3%
Central Coast, Newcastle	5,336	4,029	9,424	12.1%
Regional total	**19,339**	**12,784**	**32,333**	**10.1%**
NSW total	**183,711**	**120,439**	**306,269**	**38.6%**

Note: 'All enrolments' is greater than the total of the primary and secondary columns, as it includes ungraded students.

For more information visit Enrolment of LBOTE students in NSW Government schools by SA4 groupings on the NSW Education Data Hub.

Language backgrounds of newly arrived students in NSW Government schools

Languages spoken by 'new arrival' students are counted on a different basis from LBOTE. The count in Table 2 is based on the main languages spoken by the students, while the LBOTE count includes students who speak another language and those with a parent/carer who speaks another language. New arrivals data is collected through the English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) Annual Survey conducted in June each year.

The total number of new arrival students in 2022 was 8,608 and they spoke 138 different languages. Arabic was the most common single language, accounting for 13.0% of these students. However, 24.0% of new arrival students spoke an Indian language and 12.9% spoke a Chinese language.

Table 2: Main languages spoken by new arrival students, 2022

Language	New arrival students	Percentage of new arrival students
Indian languages	2,062	24.0%
Hindi	470	5.5%
Urdu	297	3.5%
Tamil	263	3.1%
Telugu	210	2.4%
Bengali	176	2.0%
Nepali	162	1.9%
Malayalam	126	1.5%
Punjabi	104	1.2%
Indian (other)	254	3.0%
Arabic	1,115	13.0%
Chinese languages	1,108	12.9%
Mandarin	640	7.4%
Cantonese	426	4.9%
Chinese (other)	42	0.5%
Filipino/Tagalog	487	5.7%
Dari	435	5.1%
Vietnamese	402	4.7%
Assyrian/Chaldean	266	3.1%
Ukrainian	237	2.8%

Language	New arrival students	Percentage of new arrival students
Mongolian	234	2.7%
Persian (excluding Dari)	208	2.4%
Russian	162	1.9%
Samoan	160	1.9%
Spanish	156	1.8%
Indonesian	134	1.6%
Korean	133	1.5%
Thai	129	1.5%
Japanese	110	1.3%
Other languages	1,070	12.4%
NSW total	**8,608**	**100.0%**

Notes:

- From 2016, new arrivals data up to June is collected through the EAL/D annual survey conducted in that month every year. Complete data is not available until the following year.

- New arrivals are defined as students who are enrolling in an Australian school for the first time, within 6 months of arriving in Australia (18 months for Kindergarten), speak a language other than English as their first language, and are in need of intensive EAL/D instruction.

Further information

The [NSW Education Data Hub](#) provides further information on LBOTE student enrolments, including data for previous years, data underpinning the figures in this fact sheet and additional information such as breakdowns of LBOTE enrolments by scholastic year.

Definitions

Language background other than English (LBOTE)

A student is considered to have a language background other than English if the student, their parent(s) or other primary caregiver(s) speak a language other than English at home. For example, a student who only speaks English, but whose parent or primary caregiver speaks another language, will be included in the collection.

For students who speak multiple languages at home, priority is given first to the primary language spoken by the student, and then the language spoken by caregivers. On the enrolment form and in the department's enrolment and registration number (ERN) system, the primary language is recorded for parent 1, then the language for parent 2 (in that order). LBOTE students may come from different countries within the same language background; have varying levels of literacy in their first language; can be multilingual; may speak English as a first language, fluently or with varying levels of proficiency; have differing prior schooling experiences; and represent various socioeconomic and family circumstances.

Aboriginal English

Aboriginal English is the name given to dialects of English spoken by many Aboriginal peoples across Australia. Aboriginal English differs from other dialects of English in linguistic structure (sentence formation and word meanings) and cultural usage.

Note: The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), through the addition of the 'D' in EAL/D, has intentionally included students who speak a variety of Aboriginal English as their first language, and who do not yet have full proficiency in Standard Australian English, as part of the cohort that requires targeted classroom support.

Explanatory notes

The census of LBOTE students was conducted on 10 March 2023 in all NSW Government schools, including preschools, Intensive English Centres and distance education centres.

Since 1996, information on LBOTE students has been collected in the first half of the school year. Until 2012, comparative enrolment information for all students was extracted from the School Entitlement System (February enrolment data) and this was the basis of the LBOTE proportion previously published in 'Schools: Language diversity in NSW, 2012'. From 2013, comparative enrolment information for all students is extracted from the enrolment and registration number (ERN) system in March, at the time the LBOTE data is collected.

1. Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL)

For information on languages, refer to Australian Standard Classification of Languages, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ASCL catalogue 1267.0).

2. Combined language groups

Other Indian languages with less than 1,000 total LBOTE students in 2023 include Konkani (ASCL 5204), Fijian Hindustani (ASCL 5217), Sindhi, (ASCL 5208), Oriya (ASCL 5216), Tulu (ASCL 5105), Indo-Aryan not further defined (ASCL 5200), Assamese (ASCL 5213), Kashmiri, (ASCL 5215), Dhivehi (ASCL 5214), Dravidian/Dravidian (Other) (ASCL 5199), and Other Southern Asian languages (ASCL 5999).

Other Chinese languages with less than 1,000 total LBOTE students in 2023 include Teochew, Hokkien (ASCL 7107), Hakka (ASCL 7102), Wu (ASCL 7106), Min Nan and Chinese, not elsewhere classified (ASCL 7199).

Filipino (ASCL 6512) and Tagalog (ASCL 6511) have been combined into one language group.

The 'Assyrian and Chaldean' language group includes Assyrian Neo-Aramaic (ASCL 4206), Chaldean Neo-Aramaic (ASCL 4207), and Assyrian (ASCL 4203).

'Other languages' groups are those languages (not mentioned above) with fewer than 1,000 total LBOTE students in 2023 or 100 new arrival students in 2022.

3. Statistical Area Level 4 groupings

Data is presented using a geographical structure based on the ABS Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) 2021. ASGS Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) boundaries have been combined into 11 groups for reporting and publication of department data.

Table 3: Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) groupings

Name of SA4 groupings	SA4 name
Sydney-North	Sydney - North Sydney and Hornsby, Sydney - Northern Beaches, Sydney - Ryde
Sydney-Inner	Sydney - City and Inner South, Sydney - Eastern Suburbs, Sydney - Inner West
Sydney-South	Sydney - Inner South West, Sydney - Sutherland
Sydney-South West	Sydney - Outer South West, Sydney - South West
Sydney-West	Sydney - Blacktown, Sydney - Parramatta
Sydney-North West	Sydney - Baulkham Hills and Hawkesbury, Sydney - Outer West and Blue Mountains
North East NSW	Coffs Harbour - Grafton, Mid North Coast, Richmond - Tweed
North West NSW	Far West and Orana, Hunter Valley exc Newcastle, New England and North West
South West NSW	Central West, Murray, Riverina
South East NSW	Capital Region, Illawarra, Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven
Central Coast, Newcastle	Central Coast, Newcastle and Lake Macquarie