

Support tiered interventions

Monitor for additional learning needs and support access to tiered interventions

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The multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework guides you in using evidence-based instructional practices to meet your students' learning needs. It helps you identify gaps in achievement, indicating students who may benefit from targeted support to address additional learning needs. A key focus of MTSS is monitoring the impact of your instruction and interventions to ensure they're effective.

This practice guide will help you to understand:

- the elements and characteristics of MTSS
- the importance of consistent, evidence-based practices for whole-class instruction and targeted support
- the role of a classroom teacher within MTSS.

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) has published a range of [guidance on MTSS for school leaders in secondary schools](#), with a focus on literacy and numeracy.

Monitor for additional learning needs and support student access to tiered interventions (*Support tiered interventions*) is one of 18 interconnected practices in our [Teaching for How Students Learn model of learning and teaching](#). This practice sits in the **Instruction** phase, which focuses on managing students' cognitive load as they process and acquire new learning. This practice is interconnected with:

- **Enabling**, which focuses on responsive, respectful relationships in a culturally safe, learning-focused environment
- **Planning**, which focuses on developing and using a sequenced and structured plan for the knowledge and skills students will acquire
- **Gradual release**, which focuses on maximising students' opportunities to retain, consolidate and apply their learning.

Enabling

Planning

Instruction

Gradual release

Understanding this practice

These lists demonstrate what monitoring for additional learning needs and supporting access to tiered interventions might look like in the classroom, and potential misapplications in practice.



What it is

- A coordinated system of learning supports across a sliding scale of increasingly intensive tiers.
- Delivery of high-quality, evidence-based instruction across all tiers of intervention, carried out by highly trained staff.
- Early administration of universal screening assessments to identify students who need targeted support, followed by diagnostic assessments for these students to align intervention to the skill gaps identified.
- Data-based decision-making to determine the levels of support required.
- Use of monitoring tools to track progress, ensuring that interventions are having the intended impact.



What it isn't

- Planning screenings, interventions and progress checks without a whole-school approach.
- Instructional approaches that work for most with add-ons for some students.
- Assuming students with gaps in achievement need intervention beyond the classroom without first ensuring they experience high-quality, evidence-based instruction, including [scaffolded support](#) within regular Tier 1 class instruction.
- Referring every student who requires scaffolds and support during whole-class instruction for intervention.
- Students remaining in intervention groups permanently.
- Intervention only for students with a diagnosed disability.

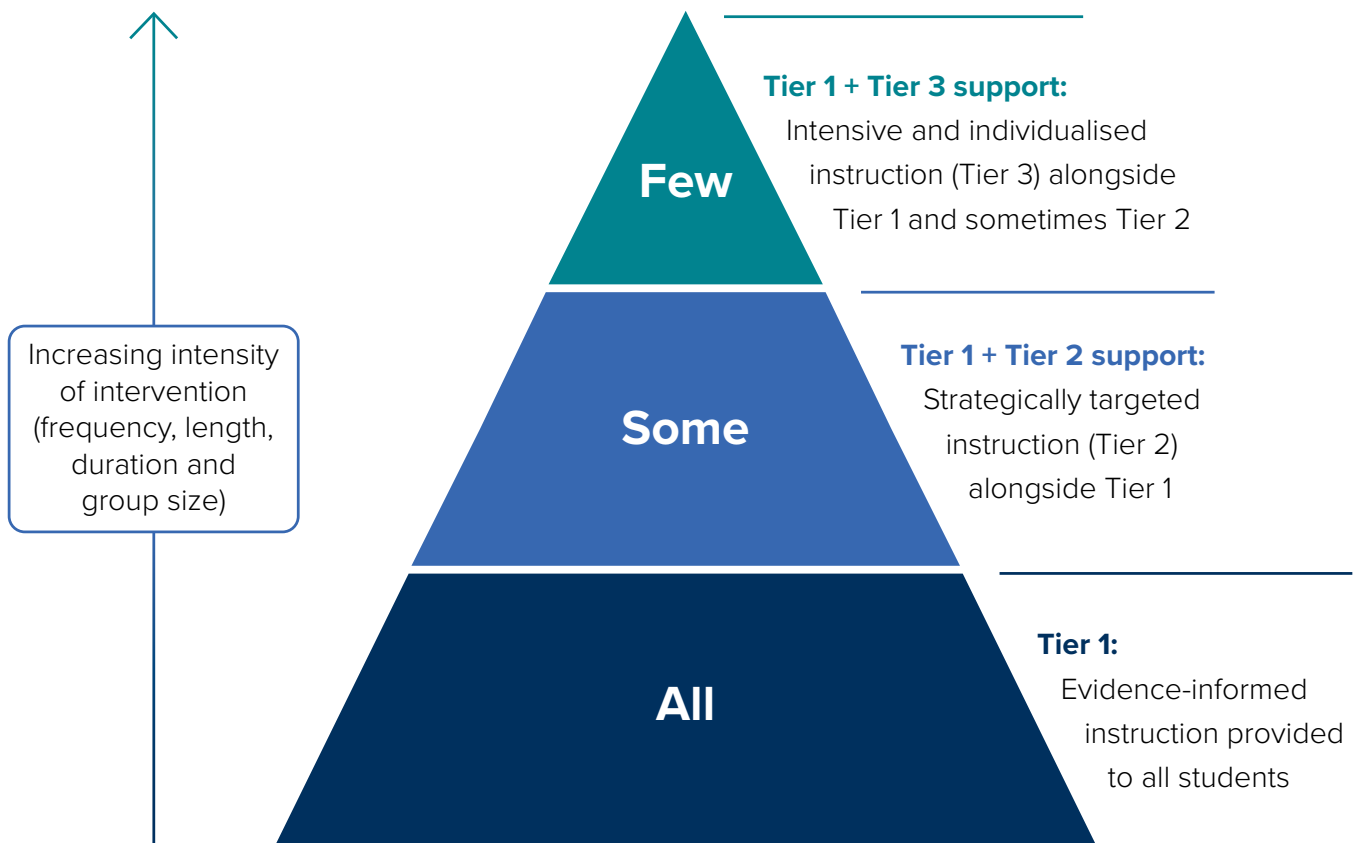
The importance of supporting tiered interventions and monitoring for additional learning needs

Key points from the research

Identifying students with additional learning needs and providing targeted intervention using evidence-based instructional practices can reduce gaps in achievement. A multi-tiered system of supports (Figure 1) for supporting student curriculum learning incorporates:

- **Tier 1** – Evidence based instructional practices and supports delivered to all students. These practices align with [how students learn](#).
- **Tier 2** – Interventions provided to small groups in addition to the high-quality instruction received by all students at Tier 1.
- **Tier 3** – Interventions are targeted to meet specific individual learning needs and further intensified by increasing the frequency and/or length of each session, duration of the intervention, and/or lowering group size.^{1,2}

Figure 1: How tiers of support work in MTSS

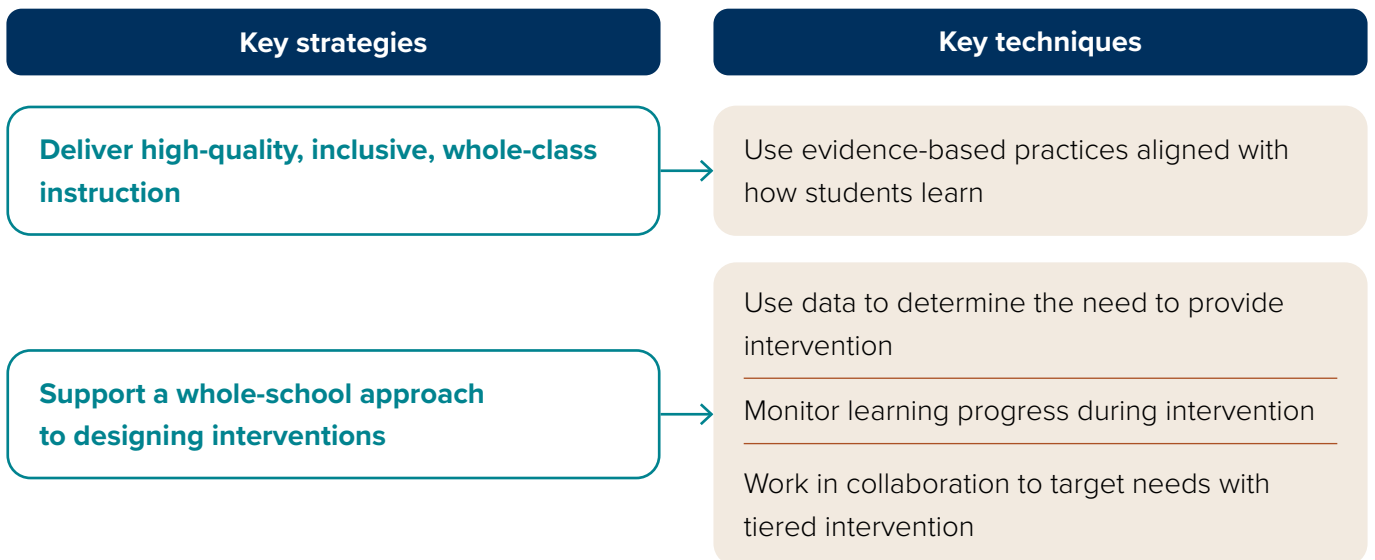


- When Tier 1 instruction is high quality, an average of 80% of students meet benchmarks for progress. Supplementing Tier 1 with additional Tier 2 instruction is beneficial in addressing the learning gaps of most of the remaining 20% of students, with an average of only 6% requiring intensive and individualised intervention at Tier 3, and fewer than 2% needing special education placement. These proportions can vary widely between different schooling contexts and cohorts, but effective Tier 1 instruction can most effectively reduce the proportion of students requiring additional intervention.³
- For Tier 2 and 3 interventions, trained teachers and specialists are the most effective at providing instruction to raise outcomes. Prior studies show that qualified and experienced teachers typically provide intervention that can result in approximately 6 additional months’ progress for students per year.⁴
- Tiered interventions significantly improve systemic outcomes, such as reducing referrals to specialist educational support, and enhance student outcomes by supporting those with limited working memory through strategies such as reducing cognitive load and increasing content relevance.^{5, 6}
- Learning is optimised through a structured and sequenced approach to explicitly teaching new content. Introducing new information is most effective when teachers break it down and teach it explicitly using explanation, demonstration and modelling, especially when students are new to that learning area.⁷
- A strengths-based view is essential for providing effective instruction and supporting all students with accessing learning equitably. This may require making reasonable adjustments to the learning environment, teaching or curriculum in collaboration with students and parents/primary caregivers.^{8, 9, 10}

AERO’s guidance on MTSS

Recent research commissioned by AERO identified the MTSS framework as the best way to organise support for students who are struggling. The MTSS framework supports teachers and educators in implementing evidence-based instructional practices, identifying students who require more targeted support, and monitoring the impact of instruction and intervention. This section describes guidance from AERO on supporting MTSS, including key strategies and techniques (see summary in Figure 2).

Figure 2: AERO’s guidance on supporting MTSS



Deliver high-quality, inclusive, whole-class instruction

Use evidence-based practices aligned with how students learn

High-quality evidence-based teaching should be provided at the general education classroom level (Tier 1), as well as in intervention sessions for students requiring additional support (Tier 2) and for students requiring more intensive support (Tier 3). Tier 1 instruction refers to evidence-based instructional practices and supports delivered to all students in general education classrooms that facilitate achievement of learning defined in the curriculum. High-quality evidence-based instructional practices and supports are outlined in AERO's [Teaching for How Students Learn model of learning and teaching](#). These practices align with [how students learn](#). They include:

- [fostering the conditions of a learning-focused environment](#)
- developing a [teaching and learning plan](#) for the [knowledge and skills students will acquire](#) that recognises the need for prerequisite knowledge
- [managing the cognitive load](#) of learning tasks by teaching explicitly, scaffolding practice and monitoring progress
- [maximising retention, consolidation and application of learning](#).

High-quality, evidence-based teaching in all tiers requires a structured and sequenced approach to [explicitly teaching](#) new content. [Accommodate students' learning](#) needs as required by:

- adapting the frequency and intensity of instruction
- providing [scaffolding](#)
- [revisiting and reviewing](#) learning
- [varying opportunities to practise](#).

[Monitoring progress](#) by regularly checking for understanding can help you to identify and respond to students' learning needs by adjust your practice.

Maintaining [high expectations](#) for students and adopting a [reflexive and responsive approach](#) can help you critically refine your practice so all students have the best opportunity to experience learning success.

Support a whole-school approach to designing interventions

Use data to determine the need to provide intervention

For students requiring scaffolded Tier 1 instruction alongside more intensive Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions, consult data from your school's schedule (e.g., yearly/semesterly/termly, and on enrolment) of universal and diagnostic screening. This data should inform decisions about students' learning and intervention needs.

Contribute to decision-making using [school-wide screening data](#), diagnostic assessment with observations, [formative assessment](#) and other forms of data for student learning. It's not recommended that classroom teachers conduct their own screening independently of the [whole-school approach to MTSS](#).

Monitor learning progress during intervention

Monitoring progress during the intervention involves frequent, formative assessments to determine whether the intervention is working. It helps you decide whether to intensify, reduce or change interventions. This should occur more frequently than Tier 1 monitoring and be part of your whole-school approach. By remaining updated on students' progress through meetings and data, you can effectively adjust scaffolds, such as [fading support](#) as a student gains mastery over that area of learning.

Work in collaboration to target needs with tiered intervention

Staff delivering Tier 1 instruction need to work closely with colleagues delivering Tier 2 and 3 interventions to:

- support careful screening and flexible movement of students across tiers based on data and teacher judgment
- liaise to strengthen connections between in-class and out-of-class learning so that learning is coherent and effective.

This kind of cross-tier staff collaboration can be achieved via case management meetings that involve literacy and numeracy specialists, leaders and teaching staff across all tiers.

Developing your practice*

Consider what's informing your current practices, expectations and beliefs. Use these questions to reflect, make a plan to develop your practice and seek feedback to monitor the impact for your students:

- **How do you ensure high-quality instruction is delivered to all students in your classroom, regardless of their level of ability?**
- **What does the intervention process look like at your school? How do you support and also leverage interventions that some of your students receive?**
- What would others (e.g., colleagues, students, leaders) observe about your approach to supporting students' needs and your enactment of agreed plans?

*Reflexive practice (reflexivity) is a process that critically examines personal attitudes, values and biases, with a view to becoming a more self-aware and effective teacher. Through reflexive practice, teachers, educators and school leaders can appraise and evaluate how their behaviours and ideas influence their teaching and learning.¹¹

Further reading

AERO. (2024). *Introduction to a multi-tiered system of supports*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/summaries-explainers/explainers/introduction-multi-tiered-system-supports>

This explainer introduces the MTSS framework for secondary school teachers and leaders supporting students with improving their literacy and numeracy skills.

AERO. (2024). *Using assessments to support an MTSS framework*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/guides-resources/practice-guides/using-assessments-support-mtss-framework>

This practice guide draws on evidence to help secondary school leaders understand assessments and strategies used to support students in an MTSS framework.

AERO. (2024). *Supporting student wellbeing and engagement in MTSS*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/guides-resources/practice-resources/supporting-student-wellbeing-and-engagement-mtss>

This practice resource is designed to help secondary school teachers and leaders support the wellbeing and engagement of secondary students in an MTSS framework.

AERO. (2024). *Multi-tiered system of supports decision tree*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/guides-resources/practice-resources/mtss-decision-tree>

This practice resource explains how to support students struggling with foundational literacy and numeracy skills using an MTSS approach.

Endnotes

- 1 Australian Education Research Organisation. (2024). *Introduction to a multi-tiered system of supports*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/summaries-explainers/explainers/introduction-multi-tiered-system-supports>
- 2 de Bruin, K., Kestel, E., Francis, M. A., Forgasz, H., & Fries, R. (2023). *Supporting students significantly behind in literacy and numeracy: A review of evidence-based approaches*. Australian Education Research Organisation. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/research/research-reports/supporting-students-significantly-behind-literacy-numeracy>
- 3 Burns, M. K., & Symington, T. (2002). A meta-analysis of prereferral intervention teams: Student and systemic outcomes. *Journal of School Psychology, 40*(5), 437–447. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-4405\(02\)00106-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-4405(02)00106-1)
- 4 Evidence for Learning. (2019). *Making best use of teaching assistants*. <https://evidenceforlearning.org.au/education-evidence/guidance-reports/teaching-assistants>
- 5 Burns, M. K., Appleton, J. J., & Stehouwer, J. D. (2005). Meta-analytic review of responsiveness-to-intervention research: Examining field-based and research-implemented models. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 23*(4), 381–394. <https://doi.org/10.1177/073428290502300406>
- 6 Gathercole, S. E., & Alloway, T. P. (2008). *Working memory and learning: A practical guide for teachers*. Sage Publications.
- 7 Australian Education Research Organisation. (2023). *How students learn best: An overview of the learning process and the most effective teaching practices*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/research/research-reports/how-students-learn-best-overview-evidence>

- 8 Council of Australian Governments Education Council. (2019). *The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*. <https://www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration>
- 9 *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth). <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A04426/latest/text>
- 10 Australian Government. (2020). *Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005*. <https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005/2020-review-disability-standards-education-2005>
- 11 Australian Education Research Organisation. (2024). *Cultural responsiveness in education*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/summaries-explainers/research-summaries/cultural-responsiveness-education>