

2021 Annual Report to The School Community



School Name: Western Autistic School (5290)



- All teachers at the school meet the registration requirements of the Victorian Institute of Teaching (www.vit.vic.edu.au).
- The school meets prescribed minimum standards for registration as regulated by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) in accordance with the Education and Training Reform (ETR) Act 2006. This includes schools granted an exemption by the VRQA until 31 December 2021 from the minimum standards for student enrolment numbers and/or curriculum framework for school language program.
- The school is compliant with the Child Safe Standards prescribed in Ministerial Order No. 870 – Child Safe Standards, Managing Risk of Child Abuse in School.

Attested on 13 April 2022 at 08:35 PM by Adele Field (Principal)

- This 2021 Annual Report to the School Community has been tabled and endorsed at a meeting of the school council and will be publicly shared with the school community

Attested on 29 April 2022 at 02:06 PM by Sinead Bradley (School Council President)

How to read the Annual Report

What does the 'About Our School' commentary section of this report refer to?

The 'About our school' commentary provides a brief background on the school, an outline of the school's performance over the year and future directions.

The 'School Context' describes the school's vision, values and purpose. Details include the school's geographic location, size and structure, social characteristics, enrolment characteristics and special programs.

The 'Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO)' section includes the improvement initiatives the school has selected and the progress they have made towards achieving them through the implementation of their School Strategic Plan and Annual Implementation Plan.

What does the 'Performance Summary' section of this report refer to?

The Performance Summary includes the following:

School Profile

- student enrolment information
- the school's 'Student Family Occupation and Education' category
- a summary of parent responses in the Parent Opinion Survey, shown against the statewide average for Specialist schools
- school staff responses in the area of School Climate in the School Staff Survey, shown against the statewide average for Specialist schools

Achievement

- English and Mathematics for Teacher Judgements against the curriculum

Engagement

Student attendance and engagement at school, including:

- how many exiting students go on to further studies or full-time work

Results are displayed for the latest year and the average of the last four years (where available).

Considering COVID-19 when interpreting the Performance Summary

The Victorian community's experience of COVID-19, including remote and flexible learning, had a significant impact on normal school operations in 2020 and 2021. This impacted the conduct of assessments and surveys. Readers should be aware of this when interpreting the Performance Summary.

For example, in 2020 and 2021 school-based surveys ran under changed circumstances. Absence data may have been influenced by local processes and procedures adopted in response to remote and flexible learning.

Schools should keep this in mind when using this data for planning and evaluation purposes.

How to read the Annual Report (continued)

What does 'NDP' or 'NDA' mean?

'NDP' refers to no data being published for privacy reasons or where there are insufficient underlying data. For example, very low numbers of participants or characteristics that may lead to identification will result in an 'NDP' label.

'NDA' refers to no data being available. Some schools have no data for particular measures due to low enrolments. There may be no students enrolled in some year levels, so school comparisons are not possible.

Note that new schools only have the latest year of data and no comparative data from previous years. The Department also recognises unique circumstances in Specialist, Select Entry, English Language, Community Schools and schools that changed school type recently, where school-to-school comparisons are not appropriate.

What is the 'Towards Foundation Level Victorian Curriculum'?

The Victorian Curriculum is assessed through teacher judgements of student achievement based on classroom learning.

The 'Towards Foundation Level Victorian Curriculum' is integrated directly into the curriculum and is referred to as 'Levels A to D'.

'Levels A to D' may be used for students with disabilities or students who may have additional learning needs

'Levels A to D' are not associated with any set age or year level that links chronological age to cognitive progress (i.e., there is no age expected standard of achievement for 'Levels A to D').

About Our School

School context

Western Autistic School is a Prep- Year 3 school for autistic students located in Laverton in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The school's mission is both to address the influences specific to ASD on student learning and activate individual strengths to optimise educational opportunities for our students when they move into more mixed settings. The school achieves this by providing intensive, individualised strengths-based teaching at the start of each child's schooling to then allow the students to use these strategies in integrated settings. Western Autistic School's values are Diversity, Respect, Learning as an ongoing process, Sharing and growth of knowledge and Collaboration. We respect ourselves, our school and each another, and understand that our attitudes and behaviors have an impact on the people around us. We model and demonstrate care and compassion and take every opportunity to help others that may be in need. We strive for excellence, which means trying our hardest and doing our best. These values provide us with a framework for how we achieve our vision.

In 2021, the enrolment was 307, 69 female and 238 male and there was 1 overseas fee paying student. 20 percent of students have English as an additional language and less than 1 percent are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The school consists of four interconnected pods adjoining the main administration area. The grounds include separate children's playground and courtyards adjoining classrooms. The school's socio-economic band value is: Low - Medium, as calculated based on the Student Family Occupation and Education index (SFOE). The staffing profile is made up of 1 Principal, 3 Assistant Principals, 72 teachers, 50 full time equivalent Education Support staff, 1 business manager and 6 administration staff, 2 allied health staff, and maintenance staff. Less than 1% of staff have identified themselves as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. There are five staff at Autism Teaching Institute. The school has a Marrung Champion and two multi-cultural aides. Western Autistic School is also a Registered Training Organisation (RTO # 21709) trading as the Autism Teaching Institute, as the training arm of the school. The ATI maintains the high standards of our school as a centre of excellence and maintains a commitment to the alignment of the Department of Education statewide inclusive education agenda.

2021 was the first year Western Autistic School returned to being a stand single campus setting, since the deamalgamation of Western and Niddrie Autistic Schools took affect as of January 1st, 2021. The schools remain committed to an ongoing partnership and to building positive outcomes for autistic students in Melbourne's west.

Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO)

In 2021, the school's AIP focused on the implementation of Key Implementation Strategies related to the 2021 DET priorities goal, Learning Catch Up and Extension, Happy, Active and Healthy Kids and Connected Schools. This included:

- The maintenance of existing PLC structures
- Consolidating a framework for individual student conferencing with teaching teams
- Refining a whole school approach to wellbeing
- Developing and Implementing school-wide professional learning, that built on our understanding of individual students and improved student wellbeing
- Building on relationships and engagement with families of at-risk students
- Strengthening and embedding a school wide approach to communication with families
- Building intercultural awareness through school celebrations
- Planning for school facilities and ground works
- Building on student representation of decision-making councils

To support the facilitation of this work, the school appointed a third Assistant Principal to allow for the executive team to have greater capacity to engage with teaching and learning and wellbeing priorities for students. This allowed for each priority area to be delegated to a principal class member, with the addition of the establishment of an Inclusive

Education Outreach Team, and the ongoing delivery of the ATI course.

While survey results demonstrated consistent negative growth across most areas, participation rates amongst the surveys were low and the timing of data collection coincided with a school closure and two week quarantine period for more than 200 students and staff, due to a confirmed case of Covid-19 being connected to a person at the school.

Ongoing challenges with the organisational structure at the middle leadership level were felt, with leaders agreeing on the difficulties maintaining a focus on teaching and learning, particularly for the Leading Teacher- Pedagogy Leader role. Feedback received, and observational data, reflected the pressure the continual growth in student enrolments had on the management of a large organisation with administrative and legislative requirements becoming exhaustive for all leaders and teachers, and alongside the impact of Covid-19 on workforce demands, resulted in higher than average staff turnover for teachers.

Achievement

During the course of the year, as a special education school it was challenging to maintain a focus on the actions and activities that had been identified, due to the need to adapt to the changing context of Covid-19 and remote teaching and learning. Responding effectively to these changes required the middle leadership to play a range of roles including support with the onsite supervision program and the roll-out. This year Covid-19 had a significant impact on the school's capacity to deliver its teaching and learning program. The translation of the school's intensive program into remote teaching for a second year was difficult, and engagement with families was lower than in 2020. Some challenges included:

- Whereas in 2020 partnerships with families provided the foundation for the remote teaching program, in 2021 this engagement was lesser, perhaps in part due to the increased number of families where one or both parents were working part time as well as caring for children as well as a general fatigue felt from students, their families and staff to the ongoing disruption to schooling and the delivery of teaching and learning programs.
- Forward planning for remote learning was significantly more difficult this year, as the duration of remote learning periods was unpredictable. In the first half of the year there were several separate lock-down periods, and it was difficult to prepare for these without knowing how long they might last. Regular updates to health and safety guidelines also impeded our school's capacity to formalise processes and protocols aligned to the delivery of remote and flexible teaching and learning programs.
- The parameters for the onsite supervision program changed this year, and as a result this required significant allocation of school staffing resources onsite. At times the school was required to be supervising almost 150 students onsite whilst maintaining a full remote learning program
- Once the school returned to onsite learning, management of contact tracing, implementation of Covid safe measures and at times responding to outbreaks and transmission of Covid-19 within the school again impacted upon program delivery.

Responding effectively to these changes required the middle leadership to play a range of roles including support with the onsite supervision program and the roll-out and maintenance of remote teaching and learning protocols at the school. Adaptations to remote and flexible learning included:

- Student Individual Learning Plans were adapted to include home learning strategies and support continuity of learning across settings
- Professional Learning for all teachers was provided on remote learning tools and technologies including online demonstration lessons from experienced teachers, learning specialists and leading teachers
- Regular webex or phone call feedback sessions with families to inform the teaching program delivery, which were supplemented by email communications

Alongside this necessary change of focus, the school also moved forwards with several strategic goals in relation to teaching and learning:

- PLC structures were built upon with leading teachers supporting some key curriculum activities such as ILP

and Report moderation, along with a focus on assessment data, observation and student conferencing at the start of the year.

- At the start of the year, the focus on assessment strategies, observation and the use of the pragmatic language profile led to increased fluency and use of these tools.
- Moving to online storage of assessment tools via Sentral has led to increased accessibility which will further support staff in using assessment data to inform goal setting, planning and teaching.
- At the start of the year leaders and several class teams participated in facilitated student conferences as a means of engaging deeply with student learning data, and collaborating on identifying teaching strategies to improve student learning outcomes. These case-conferences were highly successful and feedback from teachers were that they were significantly impactful on teaching practice, however in the second half of the year these were deprioritised due to the need for middle leaders to be supporting classes with implementing the remote and onsite supervision programs
- The school hosted an international guest speaker Peter Vermuelen whose presentations on 'Context Blindness' and 'Happy Autistic Learners' further connected the school to contemporary autism research and received high levels of participation and satisfaction from both staff, ATI alumni and families who attended.
- The school partnered with the ICAN Network to deliver several workshops including a series on student motivation, engagement and learning. As part of this a school wide student interest census was taken, and staff benefitted from hearing personal and professional accounts of the impact that building on student strengths can have on learning outcomes.

Engagement

With another year of moving between remote/onsite learning, monitoring engagement and particularly attendance during periods of onsite learning became a priority for the wellbeing team. For families hesitant for their child to return, the Parent Linkages Support Worker was in regular contact, and developed a health plan for many students, to document parent concerns, and the current Covid-19 climate (such as numbers of daily cases) so that this could be reviewed if parents had continuing concerns about their child's return. By Term 4 when all students returned to onsite, there were just a few students who had continued to choose to not send their child back to school, and the Parent Linkages Worker and Assistant Principal-Wellbeing liaised with the families and teaching teams regarding school support options. Those in the wellbeing roles met regularly with the Health and Wellbeing Key Contacts for our school, though little was found to be effective in influencing those with the strongest reservations for onsite schooling due to the risk of Covid-19 transmission. In almost all cases the causes for this concern was a result of severe medical vulnerabilities for the student or a close family member.

Throughout the year engagement with families varied right across the school. We had up to 150 students participating in an onsite supervision programs at it's peak (due to many parents either engaged in employment in the category of essential workers, or families identifying that their child was considered vulnerable or unable to learn from home). This dual program of onsite supervision and remote learning program stretched all school resources, with teachers managing students in both program and also managing the varying levels of engagement from families.

The school trialed a range of modes to engage families, including information WebEx sessions, emails, phone calls, surveys, and towards the second half of the year the introduction of a regular school newsletter. The newsletter was a useful tool to see data on engagement with this form of school communication, with readers increasing through the year. It was also noted that participation in the Parent Opinion Survey was very low, with only 37 responses.

In 2022 the school will invest in building a larger wellbeing team, to enable greater ability to build proactive strategies to increase engagement and participation and respond to student non-attendance.

Wellbeing

In 2021 health and wellbeing supports were prioritised for staff, students and families. For staff, two sessions were offered by Maria Ruberto (Psychologist and certified Neuro-Psychotherapist with over 25 years' experience in education, clinical and industry platforms) called "Your Wellbeing Matters". During remote learning daily optional social WebEx sessions were offered in a '3pm check in', with many staff who attended commenting on how great these sessions were to help them feel connected to others whilst isolated at home.

Throughout 2021 the school placed a strong emphasis on connecting with and supporting students, families, and staff who were forced into home quarantine for periods of up to 2 weeks, as a result of being identified as a close contact with a positive case of Covid-19. Our school experienced its first Covid-19 case in August 2021, resulting in 32 students and 117 staff (and all of their families) forced into quarantine, and seeing the school closed for several days to undertake a deep clean and to create a plan for remaining available staff to support onsite learning programs once the school reopened. In addition to this case, throughout Semester 2, the school supported over 145 students and 40 staff who were identified close contacts due to school related cases and forced once again into quarantine.

For families, in addition to continual contact with teaching teams, Parent Linkages/Wellbeing AP conducted phone calls and wellbeing checks with families whilst in isolation. The team were able to contact all 40 families in isolation during the school's first positive case, and additionally checked in with many families and staff in isolation during subsequent smaller outbreaks where single classrooms were in isolation. The team were able to link families with services such as the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Disability Coordinator, referrals for in home saliva testing, or provide practical support such as deliveries of specific foods or brands of food that the family required and were not always able to access through delivery services.

The school offered parent information sessions during the school closure, with services such as DFFH and Department of Health (DH) supporting the sessions. The school also conducted regular information sessions and updates about the Covid-19 safe measures in place at school to support families in their decisions about sending their child back to school.

Whilst it was a challenging year on many fronts for student and staff wellbeing, the school's strong commitment to the continuity of learning and providing a safe and secure space for learning for vulnerable students meant that all students had the opportunity to be supported and access continuous learning and wellbeing programs all year. Positive endorsement on the Staff Opinion Survey in the area of Staff Psychological Safety also increased, a reflection of the dedication of all staff to remain engaged, participate in social events and connect with each other.

Families provided feedback that they felt supported and welcomed by the school during remote learning periods, and that support services were helpful in assisting their families throughout the year.

Finance performance and position

Western Autistic School maintained a sound financial position throughout 2021. In addition to the Student Resource Package, in 2021 the school also raised \$24,311 locally and received \$47,335 in Equity Funding. The Autism Teaching Institute received funding for \$340,000 for scholarships for teachers to undertake the Graduate Diploma in Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The 2020/21 mid-year scholarship intake did not proceed in mid-2020 and instead twenty participants began in Semester 1 2021.

Western Autistic School Council began the year in 2021 as a standalone school at the Laverton site, as the Niddrie Campus de-merged from WAS and also became a stand alone school on the 1/1/2021. In 2021 WAS continued to have difficulty in recruiting suitable permanent teaching staff. As a result, \$1,568,247.92 was expended on hiring teachers and teacher assistants through an agency to cover vacancies and some leave. This expenditure can be seen in the support services budget line and is the highest expenditure item after the student resource package.

At the end of 2021 there was a budget surplus. This surplus can be connected to the school spending less than budgeted on Casual Relief Teachers due to many staff working remotely as a result of COVID19 pandemic and also the difficulties in recruiting permanent staff across different positions in the school. Western Autistic School de-amalgamated at the end of 2020 and a portion of the surplus was also held to transfer to Niddrie Autistic School during

2021. The school management team and School Council continue to manage the school finances within DET policy and guidelines to support and achieve the goals and targets of the Strategic Plan and Annual Implementation Plan.

For more detailed information regarding our school please visit our website at
<https://westernautisticschool.vic.edu.au/>

Performance Summary

The Performance Summary for government schools provides an overview of how this school is contributing to the objectives of the Education State and how it compares to other Victorian government schools.

All schools work in partnership with their school community to improve outcomes for children and young people. Sharing this information with parents and the wider school community helps to support community engagement in student learning, a key priority of the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes.

Refer to the 'How to read the Annual Report' section for help on how to interpret this report.

SCHOOL PROFILE

Enrolment Profile

A total of 307 students were enrolled at this school in 2021, 69 female and 238 male.

20 percent of students had English as an additional language and NDP percent were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Overall Socio-Economic Profile

The overall school's socio-economic profile is based on the school's Student Family Occupation and Education index (SFOE).

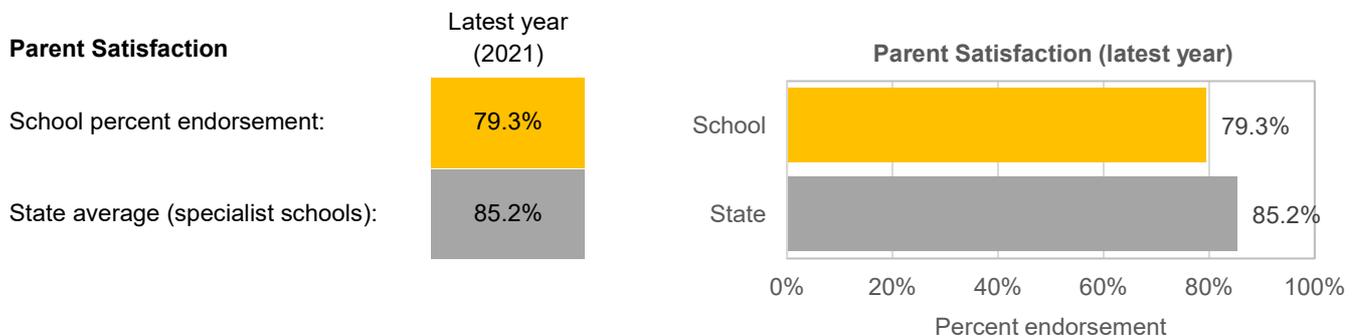
SFOE is a measure of socio-educational disadvantage of a school, based on educational and employment characteristics of the parents/carers of students enrolled at the school. Possible SFOE band values are: Low, Low-Medium, Medium and High. A 'Low' band represents a low level of socio-educational disadvantage, a 'High' band represents a high level of socio-educational disadvantage.

This school's SFOE band value is: Low - Medium

Parent Satisfaction Summary

The percent endorsement by parents on their school satisfaction level, as reported in the annual Parent Opinion Survey.

Percent endorsement indicates the percent of positive responses (agree or strongly agree) from parents who responded to the survey.

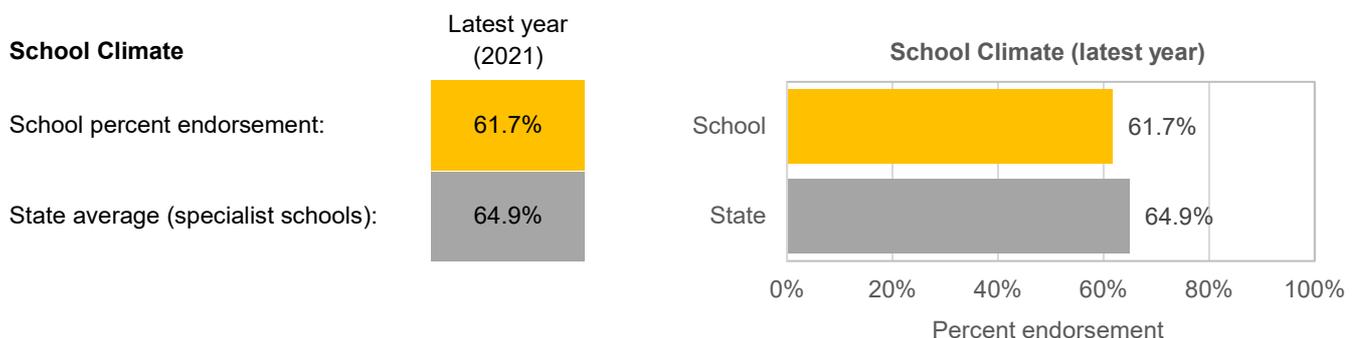


School Staff Survey

The percent endorsement by staff on School Climate, as reported in the annual School Staff Survey.

Percent endorsement indicates the percent of positive responses (agree or strongly agree) from staff who responded to the survey.

Data is suppressed for schools with three or less respondents to the survey for confidentiality reasons.



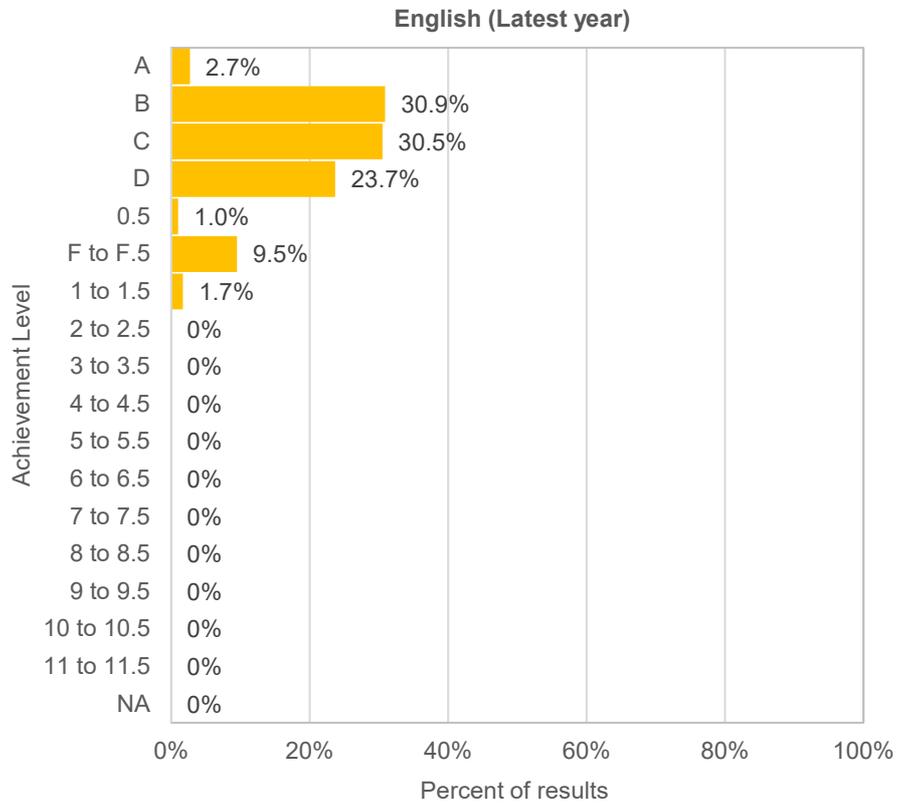
ACHIEVEMENT

Teacher Judgement of student achievement

Percent of results at each achievement level in English and Mathematics.

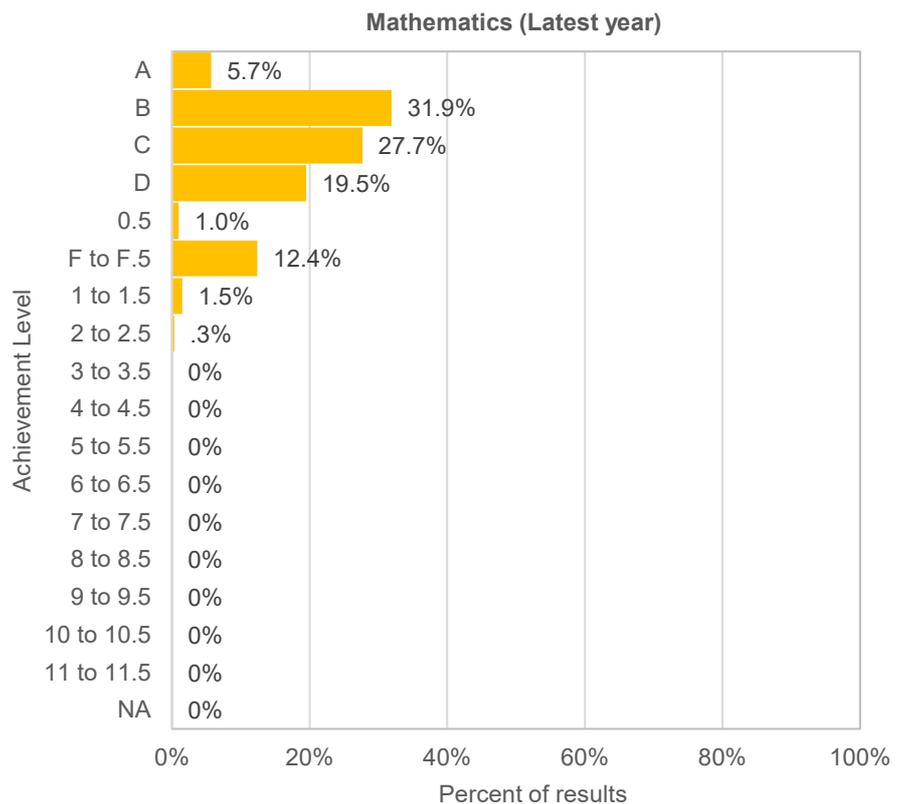
English

Achievement Level	Latest year (2021)
A	2.7%
B	30.9%
C	30.5%
D	23.7%
0.5	1.0%
F to F.5	9.5%
1 to 1.5	1.7%
2 to 2.5	NDA
3 to 3.5	NDA
4 to 4.5	NDA
5 to 5.5	NDA
6 to 6.5	NDA
7 to 7.5	NDA
8 to 8.5	NDA
9 to 9.5	NDA
10 to 10.5	NDA
11 to 11.5	NDA
NA	NDA



Mathematics

Achievement Level	Latest year (2021)
A	5.7%
B	31.9%
C	27.7%
D	19.5%
0.5	1.0%
F to F.5	12.4%
1 to 1.5	1.5%
2 to 2.5	0.3%
3 to 3.5	NDA
4 to 4.5	NDA
5 to 5.5	NDA
6 to 6.5	NDA
7 to 7.5	NDA
8 to 8.5	NDA
9 to 9.5	NDA
10 to 10.5	NDA
11 to 11.5	NDA
NA	NDA



ENGAGEMENT

Average Number of Student Absence Days

Absence from school can impact on students' learning. Common reasons for non-attendance include illness and extended family holidays. Absence data in 2020 and 2021 may have been influenced by COVID-19.

Student Absence	2018	2019	2020	2021	4-year average
School average number of absence days:	23.8	25.8	24.7	28.5	25.6

Students exiting to further studies or full-time employment

Percentage of students going on to further studies or full-time employment.

Note: This measure refers to data from the previous calendar year. Data excludes destinations recorded as 'Unknown'.

Student Exits	2018	2019	2020	2021	4-year average
School percent of students with positive destinations:	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Financial Performance and Position

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE - OPERATING STATEMENT SUMMARY FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER, 2021

Revenue	Actual
Student Resource Package	\$15,000,733
Government Provided DET Grants	\$3,072,209
Government Grants Commonwealth	\$0
Government Grants State	\$0
Revenue Other	\$192,454
Locally Raised Funds	\$24,311
Capital Grants	\$0
Total Operating Revenue	\$18,289,707

Equity ¹	Actual
Equity (Social Disadvantage)	\$47,335
Equity (Catch Up)	\$0
Transition Funding	\$0
Equity (Social Disadvantage – Extraordinary Growth)	\$0
Equity Total	\$47,335

Expenditure	Actual
Student Resource Package ²	\$12,248,702
Adjustments	\$0
Books & Publications	\$2,308
Camps/Excursions/Activities	\$42,138
Communication Costs	\$27,965
Consumables	\$135,959
Miscellaneous Expense ³	\$123,046
Professional Development	\$36,278
Equipment/Maintenance/Hire	\$112,919
Property Services	\$221,793
Salaries & Allowances ⁴	\$96,383
Support Services	\$1,576,293
Trading & Fundraising	\$14,409
Motor Vehicle Expenses	\$17,084
Travel & Subsistence	\$298
Utilities	\$164,120
Total Operating Expenditure	\$14,819,696
Net Operating Surplus/-Deficit	\$3,470,011
Asset Acquisitions	\$0

- (1) The equity funding reported above is a subset of the overall revenue reported by the school.
- (2) Student Resource Package Expenditure figures are as of 25 Feb 2022 and are subject to change during the reconciliation process.
- (3) Miscellaneous Expenses include bank charges, administration expenses, insurance and taxation charges.
- (4) Salaries and Allowances refers to school-level payroll.

FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021

Funds available	Actual
High Yield Investment Account	\$966,370
Official Account	\$64,076
Other Accounts	\$33,555
Total Funds Available	\$1,064,001

Financial Commitments	Actual
Operating Reserve	\$406,629
Other Recurrent Expenditure	(\$95)
Provision Accounts	\$0
Funds Received in Advance	\$20,147
School Based Programs	\$2,500
Beneficiary/Memorial Accounts	\$0
Cooperative Bank Account	\$0
Funds for Committees/Shared Arrangements	\$0
Repayable to the Department	\$0
Asset/Equipment Replacement < 12 months	\$0
Capital - Buildings/Grounds < 12 months	\$210,000
Maintenance - Buildings/Grounds < 12 months	\$50,000
Asset/Equipment Replacement > 12 months	\$0
Capital - Buildings/Grounds > 12 months	\$0
Maintenance - Buildings/Grounds > 12 months	\$0
Total Financial Commitments	\$689,181

All funds received from the Department, or raised by the school, have been expended, or committed to subsequent years, to support the achievement of educational outcomes and other operational needs of the school, consistent with Department policies, School Council approvals and the intent/purposes for which funding was provided or raised.