

2022 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 of the previous calendar year 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 26 April 2023 at 12:18 PM by Adele Field (Principal)

- This 2022 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 26 April 2023 at 05:31 PM by Jim Adamopoulos (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 and an overview of the school's performance over the previous calendar year.

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 'Progress towards strategic goals, student outcomes, and student engagement' section allows schools to reflect on highlights related to implementation of and progress towards the School Strategic Plan and Annual Implementation Plan, and efforts to improve student learning, wellbeing, and engagement.

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

Learning

- 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 had a significant impact on normal school operations over the past three years. This impacted the conduct of assessments and surveys. Readers should be aware of this when interpreting the Performance Summary, particularly when interpreting trend data.

For example, in 2020 and 2021 school-based surveys ran under changed circumstances, and NAPLAN was not conducted in 2020. Further, absence and attendance data during this period may have been affected by the level of COVID-19 in the community and may be influenced by local processes and procedures adopted in response to remote and flexible learning.

Readers should keep this in mind when viewing and interpreting the data presented in the Annual Report.

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 2022, a total of 336 students were enrolled, including 68 female and 268 male students and there was 1 overseas fee paying student. 25% 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, 2 Assistant Principals, 73 teachers, 62 full time equivalent Education Support staff, 1 Business Manager and 7 administration staff, 5 Allied Health Staff, and maintenance staff. Less than 1% of staff have identified themselves as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. There are two staff at the Autism Teaching Institute (ATI). Western Autistic School is also a Registered Training Organisation (RTO # 21709) trading as the Autism Teaching Institute, as the training arm of the school, though this registration expired in August 2022. 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 (DE) statewide inclusive education agenda. During the second half of 2022, the ATI did not accept an intake of students studying the Graduate Diploma of Teaching Students with ASD, and embarked on a strategy review and an inreach professional learning program. The school will seek to re-register as an RTO in 2023 to continue the provision of accredited professional learning programs.

Progress towards strategic goals, student outcomes and student engagement

Learning

In 2022 the school worked towards several strategic goals including building on collaborative practices to improve collective efficacy, engaging with new research and practice in the area of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), and developing coaching structures across the school to build teacher capacity and improve student learning outcomes.

In the area of collaboration, the school learning specialists worked to develop and implement a Professional Learning Community (PLC) inquiry cycle model, aligned with current DE guidance. PLCs were established and met regularly to review student achievement data, identify learning priorities, access professional learning resources, and implement effective teaching practices. Two full inquiry cycles were completed with a focus on maths and expressive communication.

Another priority identified by the school was to update practices around AAC and to align this with current research and guidelines. This work will be ongoing for the school, but in 2022 steps taken included:

- Formation of a working party of staff from across the school
- Introduction of the Communication Matrix assessment tool to track student pragmatic language development
- Implementation of a curriculum day with a focus on the rationale and importance of AAC for autistic learners
- Workshops and lectures for teachers and ES staff to build skills in working with high and low tech AAC systems
- Visits to other Victorian schools to develop a shared understanding of best practices

The school also focused on building staff capabilities through implementation of high-quality coaching practices. Learning specialists accessed professional learning to develop their capabilities and met regularly with teachers for 1:1 coaching sessions. Staff from the ATI also developed and implemented a coaching model, focusing on classroom observation and feedback. Two teachers at the school participated in the Career Start Pilot program alongside leadership mentors, and 11 provisionally registered teachers received mentoring and coaching to achieve full registration.

The ongoing challenges in recruiting suitable teaching staff continued in 2022, felt most profoundly in Term 2 and the initial weeks of Term 4 where staff illnesses were also high, and casual teacher availability was insufficient to cover daily absences and vacancies. The school sought assistance through the newly formed department Support Your School initiative, that aimed to attract retired and out of service teachers back to teaching, and prioritised the work of corporate services to cover teaching vacancies where

appropriate. These challenges certainly had an impact on the quality of teaching and learning programs at the school, and the work of the PLCs was integral to protecting a focus on individual student learning and achievement. The executive leadership team worked to develop a clear strategy for recruitment that included exploration in optimal methods of advertising positions, connecting with potential applicants and offering onsite tours. As always the most effective strategy was in the encouragement of casual staff to apply for substantive positions. In 2023 a focus on building staff resilience and retention of Range 2 teachers will be a priority.

Wellbeing

In 2022 the school had a strong focus on consolidating wellbeing supports and processes for both staff and students. With an expanded wellbeing team structure, the team prioritised building staff understanding of when and how to refer students and families for additional wellbeing support, with an emphasis on data, evidence, and documentation of support and processes. The student and family wellbeing supports in 2022 included:

- Attendance support and monitoring
- Referrals to external support agencies including for NDIS related questions or child safety concerns
- Documented safety plans for students where court orders were in place
- Classroom support for students with regulation, behaviour, and safety support requirements
- Bus travel adjustments and monitoring

Student attendance shows a high level of student absences for 2022, due in part to opening of international borders following covid and student illnesses (average of 42.4 days absence per student). The school has identified a 2023 priority of developing a deeper understanding the individual and cumulative absences for our setting, through improved attendance processes and individualised support.

Staff wellbeing was also a priority for the school in 2022, with state-wide teacher recruitment challenges also impacting on our programs early in the year. In the School Staff Survey, results indicated staff felt their health and wellbeing was highly supported, with the following results:

- 12% growth in Staff safety and wellbeing module in 12 months
- 12% growth for category school support for staff physical safety
- 16% growth for staff psychological safety

Targeted staff health and wellbeing measures in 2022 included a range of supports such as onsite counselling for staff (through Employee Assistance Program), wellbeing 'drop-in' sessions, Term 3 curriculum day with wellbeing focus, school cafe, and targeted leadership communication of valuing staff and encouraging them to share their individual strengths and areas of interest with the school.

Engagement

In 2022, the school understood the importance of re-engaging students following the previous two years of disruption. In Semester One, the School Improvement Team (SIT) prioritised the work of establishing a comprehensive Wellbeing Team to support classroom teachers to engage all students. Targeted intervention for students with chronic absenteeism, included a higher investment of time from the Assistant Principal- Wellbeing, who alongside the teachers and social worker worked strategically to form a school wide process to support these students and their families to address barriers for their child attending school each day. This work also included engagement with the Department's School Attendance Officer and Health and Wellbeing Key Contact for further consultation. This work identified critical issues with attendance recording, including inconsistent coding and record keeping, and low level response rates from families indicating the reasons for student absences. The percentage of students with 20 or more absence days in 2023 was 68%, significantly higher than that recorded by similar and special schools. The incorrect data tracking can be found to be one contributor to this, though it was also clear that there is high absenteeism amongst our students. The impact of illness and exposure to Covid-19 and other illnesses were certainly also a contributing factor, as well as extended family holidays to overseas destinations for families to reunite. In Semester 2 the Wellbeing Team considered this data and analysed reasons for actual non-attendance. A key finding included the amount of students attending therapy appointments during school times. While the school supports the families accessing individualised supports for their child, SIT also acknowledged the importance of future work to build an understanding of the importance of aiming for high attendance at school for all students. In 2023 the school will focus on the Prep cohort to set clear expectations for both families and teachers about absence notification and recording process, and a targeted effort to build sustained high attendance rates amongst these students. While attendance was a key area for improvement in 2023, participation rates in school events increased significantly. High participation rates were noted in school professions learning programs by staff, and school events by the school community. Our open day in April, Harmony Day and student celebration events were full of engaged members of the community, including students and their families, staff and their families and some neighbours. Participation in the School Staff Survey and Parent Opinion Survey were the highest ever recordings totalling

82.8% and 34% respectively. These were significant increases from 2021 rates meaning the data received could be seen as an authentic representation of each cohort's views. In 2023, it will be a commitment to maintain these high rates of participation.

Other highlights from the school year

In May the school council were surprised to receive notification that the Victorian Government were investing further funding to upgrade classrooms and learning spaces at special schools, and that our school was to receive at least \$6.822 million to replace relocatable buildings with new permanent facilities, including art and science classrooms. This was wonderful news for our community and since this time Guymer Bailey Architects has been awarded the tender for this contract. The current project is in the design phase with a projection date for the start of construction in the fourth quarter of 2023.

In 2022 the school facilitated a camp program available to students in their fourth year of schooling. 56 students participated in this program, over a three week period in Term 3. Students travelled to Portarlington to stay at Caloola House, the location of school camps in previous years. This was a highly motivating experience for these students and staff.

The Inclusive Education Outreach Team at the school developed a local outreach policy, outlining two streams of engagement. The first, being a more traditional model of support for schools working to understand and develop learning programs for individual students. The second model developed deep engagement partnerships, seeking to form sustainable collaborative relationships with primary schools in the Western Melbourne Area. A strong partnership with Seaholme Primary School was developed and facilitated an engagement program for students from both schools that aimed to celebrate autism and diversity, explore opportunities for inclusion for students with diverse strengths, interests and skills and bring teachers together to work collaboratively to plan and implement teaching and learning programs. The I CAN Network were engaged in this work and provided fortnightly mentor sessions to these students through their Imagination Club model. On the alternate fortnights, teachers from both schools facilitated programs that worked on Individual Learning Programs. This work was highly successful in engaging these students and building confidence, comfort and happiness for the WAS students that attended. The program was recognised by the DE early in 2023 for its contribution to improving the opportunities for autistic students in Melbourne's West and attended by the Deputy Secretary David Howes and Area Director Silvana Sena.

Following the hardships experienced in 2020 and 2021, DE officials were keen to get back out to schools in 2022 to check in with students and staff and motivate re-engagement. In June the school was visited by Secretary Jenny Atta, Deputy Secretary David Howes and Regional Director Chris Thompson, who toured the school and spoke to staff about the ongoing challenges to recruiting staff and sourcing a sustainable casual workforce. In Term 3, the local Member for Parliament Sarah Connolly also visited the school inviting an opportunity to discuss the current opportunities the Disability Inclusion Reform would offer students in our community and our thoughts on future areas for improvement.

Financial performance

Western Autistic School maintained a good financial position throughout 2022. In addition to the Student Resource Package, in 2022 the school raised \$31,846 locally and received \$42,043 in Equity Funding.

Western Autistic School Council began 2022 with difficulty in recruiting suitable permanent teaching staff. As a result, \$1,719,100 was expended on hiring teachers and teacher assistants through an agency to cover vacancies and leave throughout the year. 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 2022 there was a budget surplus. This surplus can be connected to the school having difficulties in recruiting permanent staff across different positions in the school. The school management team and School Council continue to manage the school finances within DE 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 2.0 (FISO 2.0).

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 336 students were enrolled at this school in 2022, 68 female and 268 male.

25 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).

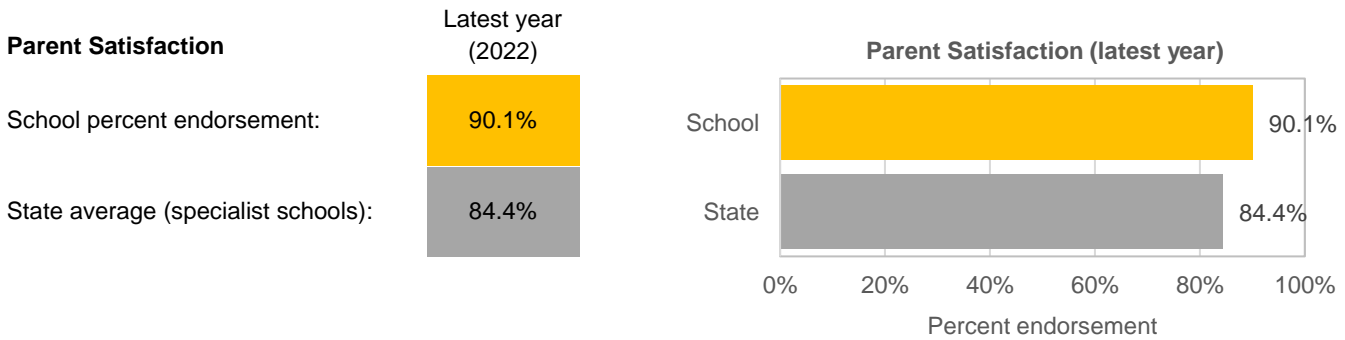
SFOE is a measure of socio-educational disadvantage of a school, based on educational and employment characteristics of the parents/carers of students enrolled at the school. Possible SFOE band values are: Low, Low-Medium, Medium and High. A 'Low' band represents a low level of socio-educational disadvantage,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

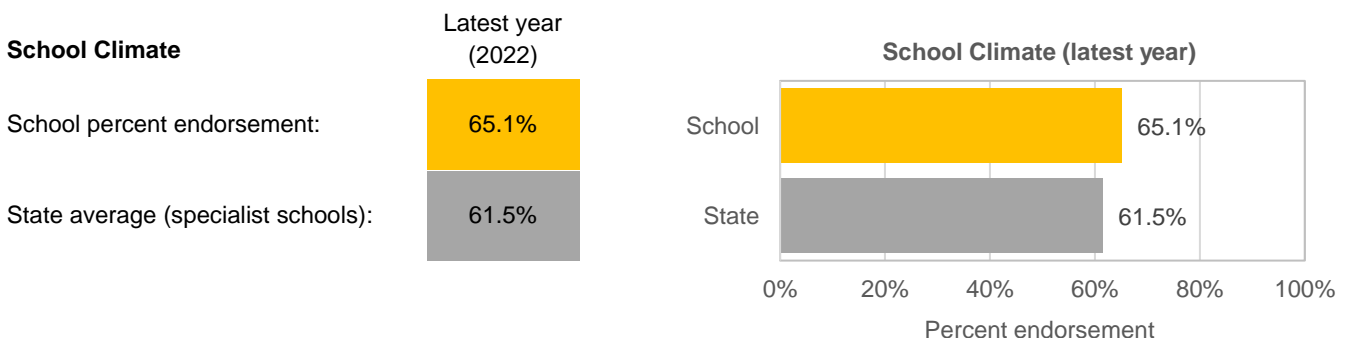


School Staff Survey

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.



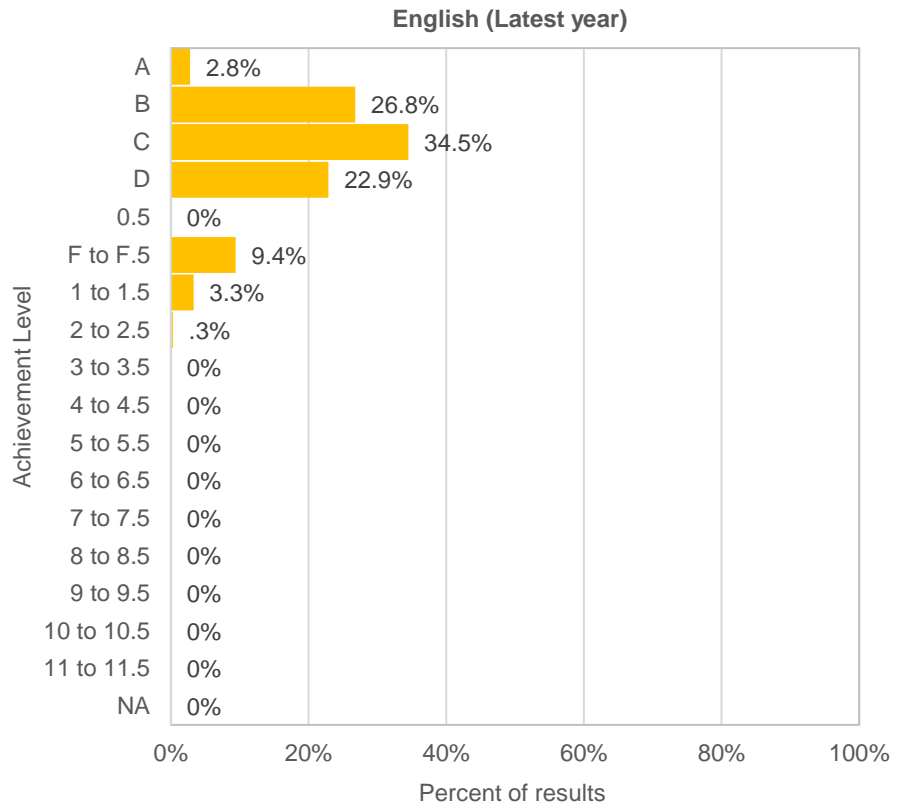
LEARNING

Teacher Judgement of student achievement

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

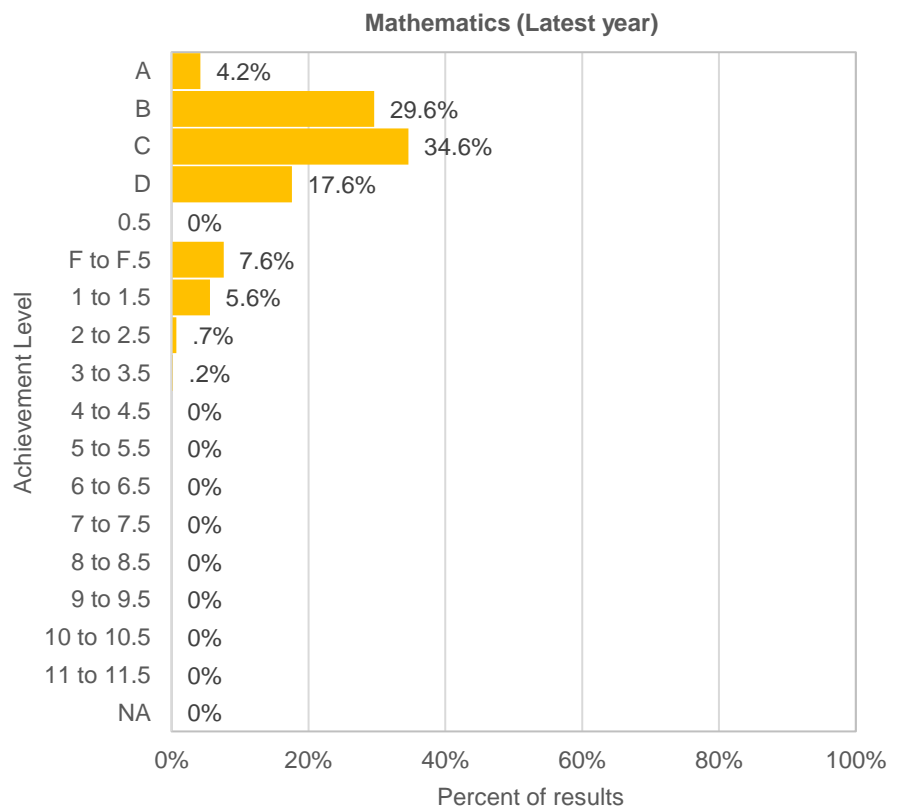
English

Achievement Level	Latest year (2022)
A	2.8%
B	26.8%
C	34.5%
D	22.9%
0.5	NDA
F to F.5	9.4%
1 to 1.5	3.3%
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



Mathematics

Achievement Level	Latest year (2022)
A	4.2%
B	29.6%
C	34.6%
D	17.6%
0.5	NDA
F to F.5	7.6%
1 to 1.5	5.6%
2 to 2.5	0.7%
3 to 3.5	0.2%
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.

Student Absence	2019	2020	2021	2022	4-year average
School average number of absence days:	25.8	24.7	28.5	42.4	29.7

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, 2022

Revenue	Actual
Student Resource Package	\$17,955,183
Government Provided DET Grants	\$2,372,032
Government Grants Commonwealth	\$0
Government Grants State	\$0
Revenue Other	\$109,571
Locally Raised Funds	\$31,846
Capital Grants	\$18,420
Total Operating Revenue	\$20,487,051

Equity ¹	Actual
Equity (Social Disadvantage)	\$42,043
Equity (Catch Up)	\$0
Transition Funding	\$0
Equity (Social Disadvantage – Extraordinary Growth)	\$0
Equity Total	\$42,043

Expenditure	Actual
Student Resource Package ²	\$12,973,042
Adjustments	\$0
Books & Publications	\$14,263
Camps/Excursions/Activities	\$50,675
Communication Costs	\$16,369
Consumables	\$169,207
Miscellaneous Expense ³	\$19,850
Professional Development	\$65,022
Equipment/Maintenance/Hire	\$113,168
Property Services	\$387,281
Salaries & Allowances ⁴	\$428,393
Support Services	\$1,719,100
Trading & Fundraising	\$26,396
Motor Vehicle Expenses	\$22,163
Travel & Subsistence	\$3,501
Utilities	\$167,198
Total Operating Expenditure	\$16,175,627
Net Operating Surplus/-Deficit	\$4,293,004
Asset Acquisitions	\$27,167

- (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 24 Feb 2023 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 2022

Funds available	Actual
High Yield Investment Account	\$273,261
Official Account	\$71,802
Other Accounts	\$45,073
Total Funds Available	\$390,136

Financial Commitments	Actual
Operating Reserve	\$390,136
Other Recurrent Expenditure	(\$95)
Provision Accounts	\$0
Funds Received in Advance	\$0
School Based Programs	\$0
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	\$0
Asset/Equipment Replacement > 12 months	\$0
Capital - Buildings/Grounds > 12 months	\$0
Maintenance - Buildings/Grounds > 12 months	\$0
Total Financial Commitments	\$600,041

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.