



Schools Annual Report 2012

COMMONWEALTH AND STATE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR QUEENSLAND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

The *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (the Act) Section 423 (1)* provides that the Minister may approve a policy about the publication by a state school principal and non-state school governing body of an annual report containing information on the school, its policies and data on the student outcomes for all persons enrolled at the school in the previous year. State school principals and non-state schools' governing bodies must comply with the approved policy.

The policy, which is presented as a checklist of all Queensland and Australian Government requirements, has been approved by the Minister and sets out the annual reporting requirements for all state and non-state schools. By publishing this information, Queensland schools will meet the reporting obligations required by both the Queensland and the Australian Governments.

School sector:

Autism Queensland runs two Education and Therapy Centres in Brisbane at Brighton and Sunnybank Hills that operate as accredited Independent Schools. Both provide a range of group placement options for children diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) from Prep to Year 12.

School's address:

Sunnybank Campus
437 Hellowell Road
Sunnybank Hills Qld 4109
Ph: 07 3273 0000
Fax: 07 3273 8306
Sunnybankschool@autismqld.com.au

Brighton Campus
136 North Road
Brighton Qld 4017
Ph: 07 3631 6300
Fax: 07 3631 6388
Brighton@autismqld.com.au

Contacts:

Jandee Laidlaw (Principal Sunnybank School)
Amra Bazdar (Principal Brighton School)

Website:

www.autismqld.com.au

Total enrolments for 2012:

Average student enrolment for 2012:

160 students attended placement across the period of 2012 school year.

Year levels offered:

Prep to Year 12.

Co-educational or single sex:

Co-educational.

Distinctive curriculum offerings:

Autism Queensland's Autism-specific curriculum for students in **Year 1 - Year 12** is linked to the Australian Curriculum for English and Mathematics and Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) for Health and Physical Education (HPE), Studies of Society & Environment (SOSE) and Information Communication Technology. As further curriculum areas are released by ACARA (Australian Curriculum & Reporting Authority) they will be incorporated as appropriate to Autism Queensland Schools.

Preparatory year students access Autism-specific curriculum linked to the Early Years Curriculum Guidelines and the Australian Curriculum following the Foundations for learning: Relationships between the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum document (ECA & ACARA; 2011). Curriculum taught in the preparatory year is accessed through the Early Years areas of Social and Personal Learning, Health and Physical Learning, Language Learning and Communication, Early Mathematical Understandings and Active Learning Processes.

AQ's comprehensive educational approach for school aged students is a curriculum focused on the core characteristics of Autism, these being:

- Social Skills
- Communication
- Sensory Information Processing
- Adaptive Behaviour
- Stress Management
- Daily Living Skills
- Community Access
- Play and Recreation Skills.

This is achieved through:

- Modified academic curriculum
- Individualised programs tailored the students developmental needs and strengths
- Small group setting
- Multidisciplinary team including teachers, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists and social worker
- Inclusive programs which support students maintaining and improving participation in their local school setting
- Collaboration and consultancy with key stakeholders
- Structured learning and skill building based upon positive behaviour support techniques
- Focus on functional life skills
- Environmental modifications and supports
- Emphasis on generalisation
- Supported transition
- Parent education and training.

The role of the AQ Schools is to assist students to develop strategies to overcome, minimise or manage difficulties associated with their ASD so they can experience success as learners in their 'home' school, participate in all aspects of the mainstream school curriculum and complete their formal education.

Extra-curricular activities offered at Autism Queensland:

- Community Access
- Parent Support Groups
- Parenting Programs
- Sibling programs and activities
- Annual Go Blue For Autism fundraising and awareness campaign
- Sports Day/s
- End of year Concert and Markets
- Holiday Programs

Social climate:

Autism Queensland's philosophy and approach, which permeates all aspects of service delivery especially within the Schools, is based on the following:

Our Mission

Support the successful transition through every stage of the lives of people living with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Our Values

We value:

- ***Excellence in practice***
- ***Realistic and honest communication***
- ***Urgency in actions***
- ***Embrace diversity***
- ***Inclusive of all stakeholders***
- ***Outcome orientated.***

Autism Queensland's educational approach is based on the organisation's commitment to individuals with Autism, and their families. Our approach is based on the needs of the individual child and the needs identified in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). Autism Queensland's model of services is comprehensive and does not follow any single recognised educational approach or methodology. Many of the single-strand philosophical notions (e.g. discrete trial instruction or facilitated communication) have many valuable strategies but are not appropriate or sufficient for every individual.

An eclectic or comprehensive approach allows teachers and therapists to use elements of several effective approaches in a way that meets the needs of each child. "There is consensus among well respected scholars in the field of Autism that there is no empirical basis for recommending one approach or endorsing a single program as being superior for all individuals with ASD" (Dunlop & Fox, 2002; Heflin & Simpson 1998a).

The goal we have for all students enrolled in a group placement at AQ Schools is to develop in all students the skills that will enable them to participate to the fullest extent in their home school and local community. In providing this, Autism Queensland follows the "Principles for Effective Education in ASD" (Jordan, R; 2005).

These are to:

- reduce stress
- harness the strengths and interests of students
- compensate for weaknesses
- develop independence
- increase social and emotional understanding
- improve communication
- facilitate flexibility.

Parental involvement:

Autism Queensland is committed to working within its school campuses in a highly collaborative model. A full range of professionals - teachers, occupational therapists, psychologists, speech pathologists, social workers, teacher aides, parents and other professionals and care givers develop appropriate Individual Education Plans. Because of this wide involvement with goal setting and strategies, our programs are owned by the whole school and all elements of the student's human network.

This approach ensures generalisation of knowledge to other settings such as home, local school setting, and the community. Close collaboration with home school staff ensures that the skills focused on during placement are pertinent issues and required skills for the student when attending their setting.

Collaboration with parents regarding issues experienced at home or when participating in family or community activities make up the basis of community access. Home school staff are invited to visit students to see them 'in action' at Autism Queensland, and parents are scheduled for parent contact sessions each term. The philosophy behind such processes is to enhance the generalisation of skills between settings, to share ASD knowledge and strategies, and to gain regular feedback that programs and placements continue to meet student needs. Autism Queensland in recent years also introduced goal based home/school communication books to track daily progress towards IEP goals and ongoing programming needs.

Feedback from 2012 indicated that 100% parents felt that their child was happy, safe and well supported in the Autism Queensland school environment. Whilst getting such information from our students would be a challenge given they range in age from 6 to 16 years of age with varying cognitive abilities, parents prove a highly reliable reporter for such information as they attend parent contact sessions each term on different days and for different sessions so are able to observe for themselves their children within the overall Autism Queensland environment and with different staff.

Staffing:

| Workforce Composition | Teaching Staff | Non-teaching Staff | Indigenous Staff |
|-----------------------|----------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Headcounts | 20 | 64 | Nil |
| Full-time equivalents | 13.9 | 35.3 | Nil |

| Qualifications of Teachers | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Highest level of attainment | Number of classroom teachers & school leaders |
| Doctorate | 0 |
| Masters | 2 |
| Bachelor Degree | 17 |
| Diploma | 1 |
| Certificate | 0 |

Professional Development:

Autism Queensland is committed to professional development and prioritises opportunities for all staff that will enhance the quality of services delivered by professionals and support staff within the organisation.

All staff within the school system participate in an annual performance review which identifies strengths and areas where performance can be enhanced through coaching and mentoring, professional development and access to training opportunities. Each school professional works with the Principal to identify their professional goals for the year during this process. The performance review process serves as the basis for identification of development needs and facilitates an individually tailored approach to professional development.

Teacher aides and ancillary staff such as bus drivers and bus escorts all participate in relevant professional development focussing on critical elements of their roles.

All staff who attend external professional development programs are required to share learning with their peers – either informally within the School teams or by means of a presentation at staff meetings. This promotes cross-disciplinary knowledge and understanding, ultimately improving the quality of service provided to students and their families.

Expenditure on and staff participation in professional development 2012:

The total funds expended on staff' professional development in 2012 was \$27, 000.

Some highlights on the AQ Schools professional development calendar included:

- Personal Leadership in Rapidly Changing Times
- Autism and Evidence Based Practice in Early Intervention and School
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Children and Adolescents with ASD
- AQ Symposium
- Embedding the Australian Curriculum
- Coaching Parents to enable Children's Participation
- SCERTS Workshop
- Sexuality & Relationships Education
- Think Feel Know mentoring program
- Marzano Institute's Art & Science of Teaching
- ISQ Literacy & Numeracy Coaching Academy
- Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support
- Bronze Medallion
- QELI Foundations of Coaching
- Direct National Interactive Whiteboard Training.

There was 100% involvement by teaching staff in professional development activities in 2012.

Student Performance:

Students attending AQ Schools do not participate in NAPLAN testing during their placement. However, students may participate at their 'home school'. It should be noted that while many students enrolled in the AQ Schools may also be exempt from NAPLAN testing, such decisions regarding exemption are determined by a student's 'home school' staff and their parents.

All students attending AQ Schools have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) with goals set across curriculum areas. IEPs are reviewed 6 monthly in collaboration with the AQ School Team, 'home school' staff and parents.

Student attendance - 2012

The average attendance rate for the whole school as a percentage in 2012 was 94%.

Vocational Educational Training qualification (VET)

Number of students awarded certificates under the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF).

| Certificate I | Certificate II | Certificate III or above |
|---------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| 8 | 0 | 0 |

Students successfully completed ICA10111 Certificate I in Information, Digital Media and Technology.

Parent, student and teacher satisfaction:

Feedback from parents in 2012 indicated that:

- 100% parents felt that their child was happy, safe and well supported in the AQ School environment.
- 95% feel the placement was meeting their major concerns
- 95% feel that the AQ School environment and resources adequately met their child's learning needs
- 95% feel they had been able to use the strategies and information provided by placement staff
- 95% feel happy with the communication and reporting process
- 84% feel that their child's participation and performance improved at their 'home school' as a result of group placement.

This question in regard to students' satisfaction with school proved too abstract for students with Autism, with responses given being influenced more by student's immediate emotions and needs, as opposed to their understanding of the long term benefit of their placement.

Feedback from staff in 2012 indicated that:

- 90% school workforce were satisfied with access to professional development opportunities that relate to school and systemic initiatives
- 72 % of staff members were satisfied with morale in the school.

How computers are used at AQ to assist learning:

At Autism Queensland we aim to be able to offer our students access to high quality ICT. Through this we know students with ASD can better communicate with others, be self-sufficient, achieve more at school, and be better placed for employment later in life. It has been well documented that children with ASD have an enhanced ability to learn complex computer skills easily due to their extreme focus and logical thinking. This can give our students the ability to succeed when they often have difficulty doing so.

It is important that we prepare the students at Autism Queensland for the digital learning environments of both the present and future through use of:

The internet:

- access learning materials to assist their individualised areas of interest
- be able to go online to use the internet to conduct research for school assignments
- communicate with students in other schools and countries.

One to one digital learning:

- students will be able to visit the computer room as a class unit and work on a range of one to one learning tasks that are individualised to their ability level e.g. reader rabbit, zoombinies, PowerPoint etc.
- engaging tasks that focus on communication and social skills.
- students will be able to continue to work and on and even enhance activities from their Education Queensland and private school placements.

Collaborative learning

- students can produce quality collaborative and co-operative results utilising current best practice, dynamic and stimulating technology e.g. digital photo presentations, digital video making, recording and broadcasting pod casts, garage band soundtracks, web page design etc.

The keys to raising student achievements in both social and academic skills are to provide students with a solid foundation and to motivate them to become lifelong learners.

Technology greatly assists students with Autism to accomplish this goal. It is highly engaging for students and stimulates their imaginations. Numerous research studies on the impact of technology on student learning and motivation have demonstrated this finding with remarkably similar results.

School progress towards its goals:

AQ Schools 2012 directions included:

- continued commitment to providing a safe and secure learning environment for all students
- providing evidence based transdisciplinary programs for students
- continued alignment of the AQ Schools Curriculum to the Australian Curriculum
- continue to develop capacity for new technologies to enhance learning outcomes for students with Autism
- introduce Transition Teachers to facilitate successful return of students to their fulltime home school environment.

2012 was another busy year for Sunnybank and Brighton Schools. The Schools renewed their service agreement with Education Queensland for the coming 3 years. This process is comprehensive and collaborative, and continues to confirm Education Queensland's commitment for ongoing partnership with Autism Queensland. The agreement highlighted a growing need for clear collaboration regarding implementation of Australian Curriculum across Autism Queensland and students 'home school' placements. The introduction of dedicated Transition Teachers has also been formalised in the new agreement, with a teacher per school being appointed to commence next year. This will see an extended transition process being initiated with follow up for concluding students remaining in place for 12 months post placement.

AQ Schools' Principals led the Cyclic Review process and committee across the year. Cyclic Review Committee members included Dr Andre Van Zyl, Chair (Director of Business St Paul's School), Trevor Beasley (Advisory Visiting Teacher ASD, Education Queensland), Gordon Dickson (Treasurer, Autism Queensland Board of Management), Carol Caton (Autism Queensland Chief Financial Officer), Alison Geale (Autism Queensland Manager Human Resources and Risk), Penny Beeston (Autism Queensland Chief Executive Officer), Marion Zavattaro (Senior Teacher, Sunnybank) and Kylie Deer (Senior Teacher, Brighton). The final report is yet to be approved by Autism Queensland's Board of Management. Following this, it will be submitted to the Board of Non-State School Accreditation in March 2013.

As with many schools, AQ Schools have this year introduced the released Australian Curriculum (AC) areas of English and Maths including changes to formats and processes of reports, Individual Education Plans and correspondence with schools. Early next year school staff will begin aligning with the AC curriculum area of Health and Physical Education once it is released. Support and training to staff around the AC and its integration into the AQ Schools' Curriculum has been facilitated by Senior Teachers Marion Zavattaro and Marla Muir.

A number of students across both Schools in groups S5, B3, B4 and B5 participated in Secret Agent Society (SAS), Solving the Mystery of Social Encounters, School-Based Research Trial run through the University of Queensland. Our 'in house' results from participation this year, found that students benefited particularly in the areas of body language, bullying, and anger and anxiety self identification. We hope to participate in future research opportunities around the SAS program.

2012 also saw the introduction of iPad technology into the Schools and classrooms. Both the students and staff have been engaged in the variety of specialist learning and autism specific Apps, and the inspiration for creativity and hands on learning these provide. Schools have been advised that in 2013 the Queensland Government is making available \$20,000 for the expansion of tablet technology into AQ Schools.

In addition, the AQ Schools' Leadership Team, including Principals, Leading Teachers Kylie Deer and Elissa Brinckman, Schools Social Worker Kathy Dimis, participated in the Think Feel Know mentoring program. This professional development opportunity has been funded through the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership funds allocated to support the professional development of Principals and School Leadership Teams provided by the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations.