



## Schools Annual Report 2013

### 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](mailto:Sunnybankschool@autismqld.com.au)

Brighton Campus  
136 North Road  
Brighton Qld 4017  
Ph: 07 3631 6300  
Fax: 07 3631 6388  
[Brighton@autismqld.com.au](mailto:Brighton@autismqld.com.au)

### Contacts:

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

### Website:

[www.autismqld.com.au](http://www.autismqld.com.au)

### Total enrolments for 2013:

Average student enrolment for 2013:

144 attended placement across the period of 2013 school year.

### Year levels offered:

Prep to Year 12.

### Co-educational or single sex:

Co-educational.

### Distinctive curriculum offerings:

Building upon the developments of the introduction of the Australian Curriculum (AC) areas of English and Maths, this year saw the inclusion of Health and Physical Education. In preparation for 2014, the school team explored the particular use of five of the seven AC general capabilities areas to assist students in achieving better curriculum outcomes across their split educational placements.

These areas were: Literacy, Numeracy, Information and communication technology capability, Critical and creative thinking, and Personal and social capability. The general capabilities encompass the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that, together with curriculum content in each learning area, will assist students to live and work successfully in the 21st century.

Literacy continues to be a curriculum priority within the AQ Schools. All students who began their placement in 2013 received an initial assessment of their literacy skills. Based on this information, and additional information gathered by the wider Autism Queensland multidisciplinary team, and/or external stakeholders, these results were used to design individualised literacy goals in all Individual Education Plans.

In addition, two Sunnybank-based senior teachers participated in ISQ's Literacy & Numeracy Coaching Academy. The funding provided for this significant professional development opportunity afforded attendance for these Senior Teachers at ongoing and high level face to face and online workshops; as well as release time to provide direct coaching to colleagues, analysis of literacy teaching processes, and the development of assessment and teaching resources to enhance the literacy practices of the school, and most importantly literacy outcomes for students. This has been an exciting and extremely beneficial project for the teachers involved and the wider school team.

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

- Social Skills
- Communication
- Sensory Information Processing
- Adaptive Behaviour
- Stress Management
- Daily Living Skills
- Community Access
- Play and Recreation Skills.
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This is achieved through:

- Modified academic curriculum
- Individualised programs tailored to the students' developmental needs and strengths
- Small group setting
- Multidisciplinary team including teachers, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists and social worker
- Inclusive programs that 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 Vision*

Autism Queensland will partner with children, adults and families impacted by Autism Spectrum Disorder to make positive difference in their lives through choice and opportunity

### *Our Mission*

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

### *Our Values*

- 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 caregivers, develop appropriate IEPs. 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 makes 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 2013 indicated that 100 percent of parents felt their child was happy, safe and well supported in the Autism Queensland school environment. Whilst obtaining such information from our students would be a challenge, given that they range in age from five to 18 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	23	72	Nil
Full-time equivalents	12.7	31.8	Nil

Qualifications of Teachers	
Highest level of attainment	Number of classroom teachers & school leaders
Doctorate	0
Masters	1
Bachelor Degree	21
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 professional and support staff within the organisation.

All staff within the school system participate in an annual performance review that 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 2013:

The total funds expended on staff professional development in 2013 was \$23,160.

Highlights on the AQ Schools professional development calendar included:

- Clinical conversations on ASD
- Asia Pacific Autism Conference
- Differentiating Instructional Practices
- Positive Practices in Behaviour Support
- Jolly Grammar
- Integrating I pads into your Classroom – Learning Support and Special Education
- Unpacking Attachment Disorder
- Teaching Traumatized Children
- Occupational Performance Coaching
- FPQ: Traffic Lights Master Class
- ISQ Literacy & Numeracy Coaching Academy
- Bronze Medallion
- Eduteach National Congress & Exhibition
- Mindfulness
- Team Teach.

There was 100% involvement by teaching staff in professional development activities in 2013.

## 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 IEP with goals set across curriculum areas. IEPs are reviewed six monthly in collaboration with the AQ School Team, 'home school' staff and parents.

AQ Schools use the *School Function Assessment* as an assessment tool to identify the strengths and limitations of students in relation to school-related functional tasks. Information gathered assists in identifying where intervention is needed so that IEP goals over a student's placement can focus on these areas.

Analysis of data for students who completed their placement in 2013 shows:

- Task-behaviour/completion improved between 10%-32%
- Functional communication improved between 13%-28%
- Memory and Understanding improved 12%-48%
- Behaviour regulation improved between 8%-20%
- Compliance with adult directives and school rules improved between 13%-35%
- Positive interactions improved between 7%-13%
- Following social conventions improved between 15%-24%
- Personal care awareness improved between 22%-25%.

The areas outlined above are in line with what has been identified as core *characteristics of Autism* and are imbedded in the school curriculum and its multidisciplinary approach.

In 2013, students also made great progress with 79 percent of Sunnybank and Brighton students achieving all of their literacy based goals and 21 percent achieving some of their goals. In addition, 72 students from both schools participated in the online Reading Eggs program, the results of which showed student scores that frequently equalled or outperformed the national average of up to 14 percent in some areas.

Literacy assessments conducted at the start and finish of placement (for all students attending 2 and 3 day per week placements) for the 38 students who concluded placement in 2013, also indicated that a number of students made very impressive gains, improving up to 20 reading levels during their placement. However, the vast majority of students showed some improvement in their reading levels with the average level of improvement across both schools, being an increase in approximately five reading levels.

#### Student attendance - 2013

The average attendance rate for the whole school as a percentage in 2013 was 91.4%.

#### Vocational Educational Training qualification (VET)

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

Certificate I	Certificate II	Certificate III or above
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Students successfully completed [ICA10111 Certificate I in Information, Digital Media and Technology](#).

#### Parent, student and teacher satisfaction:

Feedback from parents in 2013 indicated that:

- 100% parents felt their child was happy, safe and well supported in the AQ School environment.
- 90% felt the placement was meeting their major concerns
- 100% felt that the AQ School environment and resources adequately met their child's learning needs
- 95% felt they had been able to use the strategies and information provided by placement staff
- 95% felt happy with the communication and reporting process
- 90% felt that their child's participation and performance improved at their 'home school' as a result of group placement.

The 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 2013 indicated that:

- 92% school workforce were satisfied with access to professional development opportunities that relate to school and systemic initiatives
- 84% 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 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 we prepare 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 podcasts, garage band soundtracks, web page design etc.

The keys to raising student achievements in both social and academic skills is 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.

The Schools also received \$20,000 for the expansion of tablet technology. This initiative was announced by Liberal National Party (LNP) late in 2012 and welcomed by all staff. In conjunction with this funding, and further funds received through the Digital Education Revolution (DER) funding, the Schools were able to purchase one iPad per class, establish a class set per site, and purchase iPad docking stations.

In addition, the Sunnybank School was successful in receiving a Commonwealth Bank Staff Community Fund Community Grant for \$10,000, allowing in 2014, the purchase of additional class sets of iPads to accommodate larger enrolment numbers, in addition to upgrades to the multimedia room and other technology areas within the school.

## School progress towards its goals:

2013 highlights for AQ Schools included:

- Re-accreditation by the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board
- Further alignment of the Autism Queensland ASD specific curriculum to the Australian Curriculum
- Participation in Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) Literacy & Numeracy Coaching Academy
- Introduction of the Transition Teachers
- Substantial progress towards the development of ICT capacity
- Environmental Improvements to both campuses.

And, as always, the AQ Schools' mission continued to strive to provide:

- Continued commitment to providing a safe and secure learning environment for all
- Evidence based transdisciplinary programs.

The Schools' Cyclical Review Report was submitted to the Board of Non-State School Accreditation in March 2013. Areas examined and reported against included: Governance and Administration, Financial Viability, Philosophy and Aims, Educational Program, Students with a Disability, Flexible Arrangements, Workplace Health and Safety, Student Welfare, Staff Welfare and Development, Land and Buildings, Facilities and Materials, Improvement Processes.

In October 2013, Autism Queensland was informed that the Board of Non-State School Accreditation was satisfied the schools complied with The Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2001.

Building upon the developments of the introduction of the Australian Curriculum (AC) areas of English and Maths, this year saw the inclusion of Health and Physical Education. In preparation for 2014, the school team explored the particular use of five of the seven AC general capabilities areas to assist students in achieving better curriculum outcomes across their split educational placements.

This year saw the introduction of the Transition Teacher roles. Each AQ School has a highly experienced teacher in this role to provide ASD specific support for students who are beginning, waiting for, or concluding placement, as well as their families and educational settings.

Transition Teacher support and expertise is provided through telephone and email consultancy, consultative school visits, collaborative meetings with key stakeholders, resource and information sharing, links to other services, and home visits.

The first half of the year saw both Principals, Leading Teachers and the School's Social Worker participate in the 'Think, Feel, Know' coaching and mentoring program. Funding for this comprehensive program was provided through the Principal's Professional Development funding initiative. The program included group workshops, individual coaching sessions, and support for the mentoring of colleagues.

Finally, the most notable environmental improvements can be seen at Sunnybank. Thanks to the assistance of many volunteers and local businesses across the year, in collaboration with the care and vision of Autism Queensland's grounds and maintenance staff, the entrance to the Sunnybank site has been transformed from a natural wilderness to a beautifully manicured garden.