Schools Annual Report
2014

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 an accredited Independent School. 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 Hellawell Road
Sunnybank Hills Qld 4109
Ph: 07 3273 0000
Fax: 07 3273 0093
sunnybankschool@autismqld.com.au

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

Contacts:

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

Website:
www.autismqld.com.au

Total enrolments for 2014:

Average student enrolment for 2014:

150 attended part-time placements across the period of 2014 school year.

Year levels offered:

Prep to Year 12.

Co-educational or single sex:

Co-educational.

Distinctive curriculum offerings:

Autism Queensland's goal is to develop in all students the skills that will enable them to participate to their fullest extent in their home, school and local community. Autism Queensland's educational approach for school aged students is curriculum focused on the core characteristics of ASD, these being:
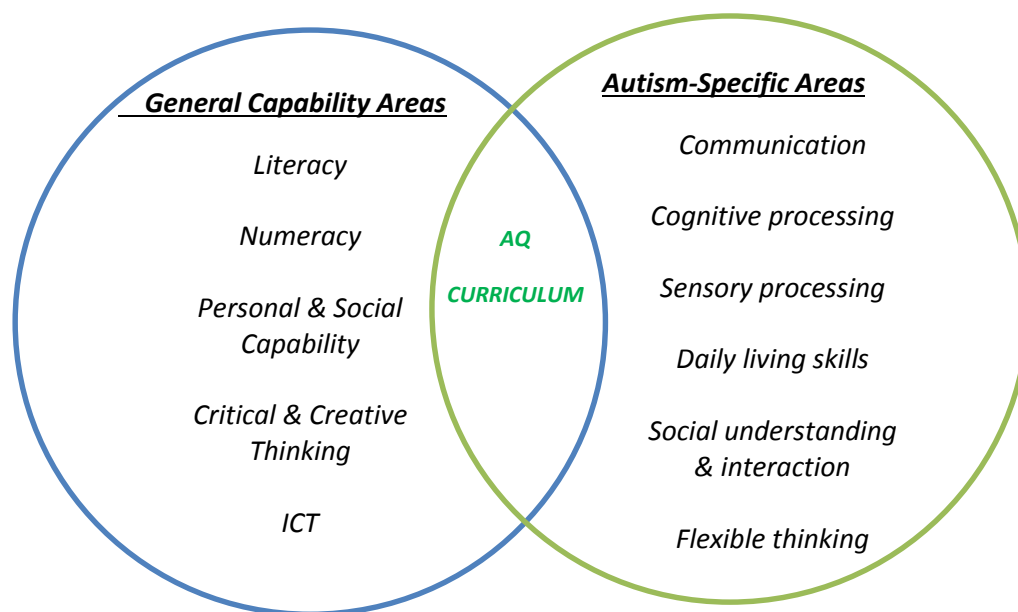
- Social Skills

- Communication

- Sensory Information Processing

- Adaptive Behaviour

- Stress Management

- Daily Living Skills

- Community Access

- Play and Recreation Skills

- Academics (school performance and skills for learning).

These developmental areas and skills are taught through their integration into current curriculum documentation. This is achieved through:

- **Individualised programs** tailored to the students' developmental needs and strengths delivered in a small group setting

- **Multidisciplinary team** approach including parents, home school staff, Autism Queensland teachers, speech and occupational therapists, psychologists, social workers; and other associated professionals

- Inclusive programs that support students' maintaining and improving their **participation** in their local school setting

- **Consultancy** support to students' home schools

- Structured learning and skill building based upon **positive behaviour support** techniques

- Focus on **functional life skills** development

- Environmental **modifications** and **supports**

- Emphasis on **generalisation** to home and other educational settings

- Supported **transition**

- Parent **education** and **training.**

Timetables for all Autism Queensland groups have an allocation of time for academic work, with activities and focus areas selected to match individual student needs. Autism Queensland's schools have targeted five General Capabilities curriculum areas (and six Autism-specific areas core to their programming (see below). Literacy goals included in student's individualised plans are based on results from a comprehensive literacy assessment assessed by all students across the course of a 12 month to two2 year placement.

General Capability Areas

Literacy

Numeracy

Personal & Social Capability

Critical & Creative Thinking

ICT

AQ CURRICULUM

Autism-Specific Areas

Communication

Cognitive processing

Sensory processing

Daily living skills

Social understanding & interaction

Flexible thinking

In implementing the above, Autism Queensland follows the "*Principles for Effective Education in ASD*" (Jordan, R; 2005). These are to:

1. Reduce stress

2. Harness the strengths and interests of students

3. Compensate for weaknesses

4. Develop independence

5. Increase social and emotional understanding

6. Improve communication

7. Facilitate flexibility.

PREP – YEAR 10 CURRICULUM

Autism Queensland's Autism-specific curriculum for students in **Prep - Year 10** is linked to the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities (ACARA; 2013) areas of:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Information & Communication Technology
- Personal & Social Capability
- Critical and Creative Thinking.

LITERACY –

ACARA (2013) states that literacy 'encompasses the knowledge and skills students need to access, understand, analyse and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions, present ideas and opinions, interact with others and participate in activities at school and in their lives beyond school'. This is an important element for all students including those with ASD – especially in the areas of communicating with others and being able to understand and express thoughts and emotions.

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA; 2008) recognises literacy as an essential skill for students in becoming successful learners and as a foundation for success in *all learning areas*. Success in any learning area depends on being able to use the significant, identifiable and distinctive literacy that is important for learning and representative of the content of that learning area (ACARA; 2013).

NUMERACY –

'Numeracy involves students in recognising and understanding the role of mathematics in the world and having the dispositions and capacities to use mathematical knowledge and skills purposefully' (ACARA; 2013). ACARA also states that when teachers are able to identify numeracy demands across curriculum areas and settings, students are able to transfer mathematical knowledge and skills to different contexts. As students with ASD may struggle with the concept of generalisation (being able to transfer the skill across situations and settings) the teaching of general capabilities through this mode is crucial.

The *Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA;2008) recognises that numeracy is an essential skill for students in becoming successful learners at school and in life beyond school, and in preparing them for their future roles as family, community and workforce members (ACARA; 2013).

🖥️ INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY –

Students are able to develop an ICT capability through learning to use ICT devices effectively as a way to access, create and communicate information/ideas, solve problems and as a way to work collaboratively in all learning areas at school and beyond ACARA; 2013).

In a digital age, students need to be aware of how to use ICT as a way to share, use, develop and communicate their knowledge (MCEETYA; 2008). Due to some students with ASD being limited in their ability to use verbal or written communication methods, the use of ICT has become an important avenue for these students to communicate.

⚙️ CRITICAL & CREATIVE THINKING –

Critical and creative thinking skills are fundamental to students becoming successful learners (MCEETYA; 2008). The teaching of sequential thinking skills allows students to develop understanding of what they can do when they encounter problems, unfamiliar information and new ideas (ACARA; 2013). Given many students with ASD display restrictive thinking and cognitive processes, this curriculum area is one important to the students at Autism Queensland.

👥 PERSONAL & SOCIAL CAPABILITY –

Personal and social capability has students learning to understand themselves/others and to manage their relationships and learning more effectively. This capability involves students in a range of practices including the recognition and regulation of emotions, understanding and building relationships, making responsible decisions and handling challenging situations constructively (ACARA; 2013).

Students with an ASD diagnosis may find understanding and controlling their emotions difficult and may also be unable to recognise/understand the emotions of others. It is important for students not only to build positive relationships, but to learn how to continue these positive relationships with others.

SENIOR SECONDARY CURRICULUM

Autism Queensland students who are at a learning level beyond the Foundation-Year 10 General Capabilities take advice from the Senior Secondary Curriculum document (ACARA; 2014) on the *representation of the general capabilities* section which covers General Capability curriculum links.

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 known also as Education and Therapy Centres has two campuses situated at Sunnybank Hills and Brighton.

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

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 ASD, and their families. Our approach is based on the needs of the individual child and focuses on goals identified in the student's individualised plan. 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).

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 individualised 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 individualised goals and ongoing programming needs.

Feedback from 2014 indicated that 93% 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 5 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.

Parents are involved in school life through various activities and initiatives such as:

- Parent Information Sessions
- Parent Contact Sessions
- Parent Support Groups
- Students' Individualised Plans, Parent-Staff meetings
- Volunteer Work/Fundraising
- Newsletter.

Staffing:

Workforce Composition	Teaching Staff	Non-teaching Staff	Indigenous Staff
Headcounts	20	77	1
Full-time equivalents	14.1	31.7	0.7

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

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 2014:

The total funds expended on staff professional development in 2014 was $23,160.

Some highlights on the AQ Schools professional development calendar included:

- The Inclusive Learning Technologies Conference
- Australian Curriculum
- Thought Leaders with Sir John Jones
- Self-Improving Schools project
- SAS (Secret Agent Society)
- Conflict Resolution Coaching
- Dan Beadle and Sue Larkey Workshop – ASD Specific Input
- Tony Atwood and Bronwyn Sutton – App guide to emotions and Autism
- Planning for Positive Outcomes " Preventing Challenging Behaviour and encouraging desired behaviours
- Masterclass – Child and Adolescents with ASD
- Linking Motor Skills and Language
- Sensory Processing measure vs Sensory Profile 2.

There was 100% involvement by teaching staff in professional development activities in 2014.

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 individualised plan with goals set across curriculum areas. These plans are reviewed 6 monthly in collaboration with the AQ School Team, 'home school' staff and parents.

This year students made great progress with 78 percent of Sunnybank and Brighton students achieving all of their literacy based goals and 22 percent achieving some of their goals. In addition our literacy teacher assessed the literacy skills of fifty-nine new students across the two schools and provided recommendations to their teachers on literacy skills areas to focus on. Many of these recommendations were incorporated into students' individualised plans. Final literacy assessments were conducted on 40 students who were concluding their placement and again, recommendations were made regarding the literacy needs of the students to be shared with their home school in the transition process. Comparison of initial assessment results with final assessment results indicates a lot of variability in student progress in reading. A number of students made very impressive gains, improving up to 20 reading levels during their placement. The vast majority of students showed some improvements in their reading levels with the average improvement across both schools being an increase in approximately four reading levels. The literacy teacher also worked one-to-one or in small groups with selected students to provide additional support to students in meeting their specific literacy goals.

Student attendance - 2014

The average attendance rate for the whole school as a percentage in 2014 was 92.3%.

Parent, student and teacher satisfaction:

Feedback from parents in 2014 indicated that:

- 93% parents feel their child was happy, safe and well supported in the AQ School environment.
- 100% feel the placement was meeting their major concerns
- 100% feel that the AQ School environment and resources adequately met their child's learning needs
- 88% feel they had been able to use the strategies and information provided by placement staff
- 90% feel happy with the communication and reporting process
- 81% 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 2014 indicated that:

- 94% school workforce were satisfied with access to professional development opportunities that relate to school and systemic initiatives
- 89% 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 spectrum disorder 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:

2014 highlights for AQ Schools included:

- Participation in Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) Self Improving Schools program
- Continued development of Autism Queensland's ASD specific curriculum alignment to the Australian Curriculum with a focus on General Capabilities
- Continued participation in Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) Literacy & Numeracy Coaching Academy
- Participation in Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) Staff Wellness project
- Further capacity building for Schools based ICT through ongoing staff commitment to school based fundraising activities and grant applications.

Of particular note this year was the AQ Schools participation in ISQ's Self-Improving Schools (SIS) program. This flagship ISQ program, researched through a significant literature review, identified that schools committed to continuous improvement direct their energy and resources towards seeking to make a difference to the lives of students by maximising their achievement and potential. They focus relentlessly on improving student performance and engage in ongoing self-assessment, evidence-informed practice and strategic planning.

While the domains for school improvement may vary depending on context and the unique characteristics of a particular school, the ISQ research identified common domains and features that consistently apply to 'great' schools. These domains are:

- Leadership and Management
- Teaching and Learning
- Community.

To establish the direction for this improvement process in our Schools, the AQ SIS committee which included teachers and therapists from both campuses:

- Used the ISQ Self-Improving Schools Matrix and the Plotting Tool to determine three focus areas for school improvement

- Identified how the focus areas fit with current school initiatives, the school's strategic plan and government compliance requirements
- Established the structure and phases of the improvement process.

As a result, the committee identified the following focus areas for 2014:

1. Shared values in practice
2. Collaborative decision making
3. Intentional teaching.

In working through the action plan for the identified areas, the AQ School Teams were energised to re-focus their activities, programs and commitment to Autism Queensland's values.