



School Annual Report 2019

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.

Autism Queensland Limited runs three Education and Therapy Centres that operate as an accredited independent special school: two in Brisbane at Brighton and Sunnybank Hills and a third campus at Edmonton in Cairns which opened in January 2019.

Most students attend Autism Queensland School part time, to provide the opportunity for supported, shared enrolment with each student's local, mainstream school. Limited full-time enrolments cater for students identified as benefitting from an intensive autism-specific educational program targeting areas that impact students' access to learning.

SCHOOL SECTOR

Independent

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TOTAL ENROLMENTS FOR 2019

A total of 163 students (equivalent to 93.6 full-time enrolments) attended the Autism Queensland School in 2019. This included 18 full-time enrolments at Sunnybank and 12 at Brighton campus and 133 students part-time (60 at Sunnybank campus, 64 at Brighton and 9 at Cairns). The average attendance rate in 2019 for the whole school was 90.93% (91.55% for Sunnybank; 89.97% for Brighton and 93.93% for Cairns).

YEAR LEVELS OFFERED

Autism Queensland School provides a range of enrolment options for students verified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) from Prep to Year 12 at the Brisbane campuses and Prep-Year 3 in Cairns.

CO-EDUCATIONAL OR SINGLE SEX

Co-educational

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDENT BODY

All students enrolled in the school have a diagnosis of autism and verified ASD, in accordance with the Queensland Department of Education's guidelines to support students with disability in independent schools.

Students present, in varying degrees, with persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts; and restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities. Their access to learning is impacted by differences or difficulties involving some, or all, of the following:

- Attending to tasks, information, people, interactions, objects, and items
- Interpreting and processing information, the intent of others, instructions and content and making connections between pieces of information
- Developing and implementing flexible thinking strategies to manage day to day and larger transitions or changes to routines, staff, content, processes and information
- Executive function tasks including retaining, organising, prioritising and utilising information for decision-making processes and communication
- Communicating with others, including sharing information and needs, initiating, and responding to others, using, and understanding non-verbal interactions
- Developing and maintaining reciprocal interactions and relationships necessary for learning and play
- Identifying, learning, and applying strategies to develop self-regulation skills necessary for day to day learning and engagement.

DISTINCTIVE CURRICULUM OFFERINGS

Autism Queensland is committed to ensuring our students have access to a high-quality curriculum suitable to their individual learning needs. Teachers use the Australian Curriculum to develop teaching and learning programs that consider students' strengths and interests, their age, and their individual learning needs. Consideration is given to students' communication, the social and emotional wellbeing of students, the physical environment and students' sensory processing needs, preference for consistent relationships and interactions and curriculum adjustments to content, delivery, and assessment.

Appropriate adjustments are provided to optimise our students' engagement and participation in education. Our school pedagogy outlines how we teach at Autism Queensland:

- Continuous assessment is used to determine curriculum and learning needs
- All students have a personalised learning plan that addresses barriers to learning
- All students have access to an individual weekly schedule outlining their learning arrangements and the resources to support this arrangement
- Student wellbeing, relationships and regulation needs are addressed through explicit teaching of elements of the Australian Curriculum
- Consultation and collaboration with key stakeholders including parents, the student, home school team and the Autism Queensland school team determine student needs and curriculum priorities in each school setting.

The School Program

For students in Years Prep-3 at Sunnybank and Brighton campuses, parents have a choice of either part-time or full-time enrolment. In Cairns, due to the smaller cohort of students, only two-day part time options are available. For Years Prep-12, Autism Queensland's Education Service Agreement with the Department of Education, under the Non-State Special Needs Organisations funding program, facilitates shared placement of students with ASD in a part-time school-based program at Autism Queensland with enrolment at their base or "home" mainstream school.

This partnership promotes an inclusive program for students specifically designed to:

- Enable students to maintain connection with their peer group and local school curriculum
- Enable students to practise identified skills for generalisation to a mainstream setting
- Continue social connection with their local community
- Provide opportunities for observation, data collection and sharing of expertise among key stakeholders.

Students are grouped according to age, ability and needs, with a maximum of six students per class. Each class is staffed by a teacher and at least one teacher aide with additional support from allied health professionals, featuring:

- An interdisciplinary team approach including parents, home school staff, Autism Queensland teachers, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists, and other associated professionals
- Regular goal-based communication with parents and carers
- Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs), tailored to address the impact of ASD on students' access to learning, developed in collaboration with the home school education support team and parents and carers
- Therapy support within the classroom and playground areas
- Explicit teaching of skills addressing the function of behaviours of concern
- Environmental modifications and supports
- Structured learning environments to maximise engagement and success for students with ASD
- Focus on functional life skill development including social problem solving and emotional regulation skills necessary for lifelong learning
- Emphasis on generalisation to home and other educational settings
- Parent support, advocacy, and education.

Class Placements

The decision for part or full-time enrolment is made on a case by case basis and is dependent on criteria which impact school attendance and/or access to (mainstream) school programs such as anxiety, social communication and behaviour. Consideration for inclusion in the program involves the collection and review of a variety of enrolment information including:

- A current diagnosis of ASD and/or verification for school-age students
- A school visit to the student's home school by Autism Queensland staff
- An enrolment interview with the student and his/her parents
- Consultation with relevant stakeholders
- Review of recent documents such as school reports, current personalised learning and individual positive behaviour support plans and recent therapy reports.

Students who function academically relatively well but are identified as potentially benefitting from Autism Queensland-specific programs, will be offered fewer days than those requiring greater support to access their school program. Other factors such as the payment of school fees may influence some parents' choice in the length of placement for their child.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES OFFERED

Stakeholder Engagement

Support is provided by Autism Queensland School staff for the students' whole team including parents and carers, home-school teachers and education support team staff, as well as other relevant external stakeholders. Autism Queensland teachers have additional non-contact time explicitly allocated for home school visits for those with dual enrolment, and consultative support for the students' education support teams. This provides the opportunity for staff to observe students in their mainstream setting to assist in providing realistic support to the education support team and opportunities for generalisation of strategies developed in the Autism-specific program.

Collaboration and Peer Support may include:

- Regular communication with, and support for, the home school education support team
- Termly outreach visits to the students' home school to view and collaborate
- Consultancy support to the students' home school education support team to introduce new strategies and adjustments
- Support for parents and carers
- Home school staff visits to Autism Queensland School to view and discuss programs, the environment and supports and adjustments implemented
- Leading PLP and individual behaviour support plan development and implementation
- Sharing of assessments and reports, including verification documents and information, PLP and individualised program documents.

Transition Planning and Support may include:

- Orientation visits and information for the family and student before the beginning of placement
- Enrolment data collection
- Regular meetings and ongoing communication for transitions both in and out of dual placement and for some, transition to high school.
- Provision of information regarding other possible services and supports
- Attendance at external stakeholder meetings as relevant.

SOCIAL CLIMATE

Inclusive education for students with ASD is a complex process requiring collaborative relationships and partnerships, responsive planning, and creative supports. Evidence-informed strategies and adjustments within our school consider the impact of autism on each student and address barriers to curriculum access to ensure:

- Our students can be successful and confident
- Adjustments consider safety, maximise success and are least restrictive
- Uniform strategies, language, resources and support are evident across our school.

A full range of professionals including teachers, occupational therapists, speech pathologists and teacher aides work collaboratively with parents and caregivers to develop appropriate individualised plans to meet the needs of students. Regular contact with home school staff, through school visits, emails and phone calls, ensures targeted skills remain relevant for the student during their enrolment at Autism Queensland. There is a strong emphasis on informed practice that meets the specific needs of students with a verification of ASD in every aspect of the school program.

Our Vision

A life of participation, opportunity and choice for people on the autism spectrum.

Our Mission

To provide support across the lifespan for people living with autism through responsive, evidence-informed practice and advocacy.

Our Values

- Excellence
- Innovation
- Equity
- Person-centred
- Consumer-driven

Key Drivers



**ENABLING
PARTICIPATION**



**CREATING
OPPORTUNITY**



**ENHANCING
CHOICE**

PARENT, TEACHER AND STUDENT SATISFACTION WITHIN THE SCHOOL

As part of Autism Queensland's data collection process, stakeholders were surveyed regarding the service provided by Autism Queensland to students, families and other schools during 2019. Survey data was collated for 106 students who had dual enrolment in the 2019 school year. The findings reflect significant improvement in student access to and participation in the Australian Curriculum. This is evident in the following findings.

Student engagement and achievement

- 83.1% of respondents reported that curriculum decision making was done in collaboration with the student's Home School team (55.7% agree; 27.4% strongly agree).
- 72.6% of respondents reported the Home School team provided information and input to support alignment of curriculum access for the student between both schools.
- It was reported by 80.2% of respondents that student's curriculum access levels at AQ differed from that of the Home School, it was done in collaboration with all stakeholders and acknowledged in the student's PLP (45.3% agree; 34.9 strongly agree).
- 97.1% of respondents reported that the AQ team regularly provided information and input to the Home School team to support the alignment of curriculum access for the student between both schools (46.2% agree; 50.9% strongly agree).
- 78.3% of students demonstrated progress in learning and retaining Australian Curriculum English concepts (55.7% agree; 22.6% strongly agree).
- It was reported that 80.2% of students demonstrated progress in learning and retaining Australian Curriculum Mathematics concepts (54.7% agree; 25.5% strongly agree).
- 91.5% of students demonstrated progress within the Australian Curriculum Personal and Social Capability, in the learning continuum and/or embedded within Australian Curriculum subjects or learning areas (67% agree; 24.5% strongly agree).
- 24.5% of respondents noted a reduction in special arrangements at the student's Home School to support access and participation as the AQ placement progressed, 30.2% reported that special arrangements at the Home School were maintained and did not change and 28.3% reported no special arrangements were in place or not required.
- It was reported that 82% of students improved their ability to transition between learning environments and tasks in an Autism Queensland setting (44.3% agree; 37.7% strongly agree). Support for students to develop increased and adaptive self-regulation skills may provide greater access to the Australian Curriculum through improved transition into classrooms after play times and from one learning task to another.
- 89.6% of AQ respondents observed students improved their ability to engage in learning tasks at Autism Queensland during 2019 (46.2% agree; 43.4% strongly agree).

Attendance

- 83% of students had regular attendance at Autism Queensland (with few or no absences), and 64.2% of students regularly attended their Home School.
- The attendance patterns of 7.5% of students improved in an Autism Queensland setting as the Autism Queensland placement progressed, with a total of 98.1% of students accessing full days at AQ.
- The attendance patterns of 13.2% of students were reported to have improved in their other school setting as the Autism Queensland placement progressed, with a total of 71.7% of students accessing full days at their home school.

- As noted, 98.1% of students attended full days when at Autism Queensland and only 71.7% of students attended full days in their other school setting. While no data is available to explain this significant difference, environmental adjustments and supports at AQ in addition to the Transport Assistance Scheme may be contributing factors to students attending AQ School for longer periods.

Transitioning students back to mainstream schooling

- Autism Queensland PLPs are reviewed every six months. In this process, all stakeholders discuss the student's current levels of support needs. Transition planning will occur for students who are transitioning:
 - From one Autism Queensland class to another (to increase or reduce the number of days a student attends AQ)
 - From a full time, Autism Queensland class to a dual enrolment with Autism Queensland and another school setting
 - From Autism Queensland School to a full-time placement in another school setting
- Autism Queensland placement needs, and associated transition planning was discussed with stakeholders including the student's family and/or representatives from the student's other school for 79.2% of students in 2019.
- It is important to note that **97.5%** of students attended full days when at Autism Queensland whereas only **66.4%** of students attended full days in their other school setting
- By the end of the 2018 school year only **one** Autism Queensland student was not attending full days in the Autism Queensland School setting
- **15.1%** of students increased their hours of attendance in their other school setting as their Autism Queensland enrolment progressed.

SCHOOL INCOME BROKEN DOWN BY FUNDING SOURCE

Autism Queensland School funding breakdown for both campuses can be viewed on the *Autism Queensland Education and Therapy Centre, Sunnybank Hills* page of the My School website: <https://myschool.edu.au/school/40402>

STAFFING

Staff Composition, Including Indigenous Staff

Total number of full-time school staff	26
Total number of part-time school staff	67
Total number teaching staff	26
Total number of non-teaching staff:	66
Total number of part-time teaching staff	12
Total number of full-time teaching staff	14
Total number of full-time non-teaching staff	11
Total number of part-time non-teaching staff	55
Total number of indigenous staff	2
Total number of school staff:	93

Qualifications of all Teachers

Qualification	Either detail the number or the percentage of classroom teachers and school leaders at the school who hold this qualification
Doctorate or higher	0
Masters	3
Bachelor's Degree	26
Diploma	7
Certificate	1

Proportion of teaching staff retained from the previous year

Number of permanent teaching staff at end of previous year	Number of these staff retained in the following year (the program year)	% retention rate
23	21	91.3%

Average staff attendance for the school, based on unplanned absences of sick and emergency leave periods of up to 5 days

Number of Staff	Number of School Days	Total Days Staff Absences	Average Staff Attendance Rate
93	189	991	94.36%

For permanent and temporary classroom teachers and school leaders the average staff attendance rate was 94.36% in 2019.

STAFF PARTICIPATION IN AND EXPENDITURE ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN 2019

The School is supported by teaching, therapy, transport and administrative staff of 60.9 full time equivalent, including a principal and three campus team leaders. All school staff including teachers, allied health professionals, teacher aides and ancillary staff such as bus drivers and bus aides participate in relevant professional development focusing on critical elements of their roles.

Staff participate in annual performance reviews to identify strengths and areas where performance can be enhanced through coaching and mentoring, professional development and access to training opportunities. The performance review process facilitates an individually tailored approach to professional development. 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.

Total Number of Teachers	Total expenditure on teacher PD (as recorded in Financial Questionnaire)	Average expenditure on PD per teacher
26	\$21,674	\$ 833
Total funds expended on teacher professional development in 2019		\$21,674
Proportion of the teaching staff involved in professional development activities during 2019		100%
<p>The major professional development initiatives were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior First Aid and CPR Training • Child Protection: Policy updates • Fire Safety Training • The impact of ASD on Learning • 21st Century Skills • Universal Supports • Supporting Literacy and Numeracy • Zones of Regulation • Restorative Practice and Special Needs • Managing Stress and Anxiety in Students with ASD • Team-Teach Refresher Course • Autism in Education Conference • AQ Policies and Procedures • Incident Reporting and Quality Assurance • Positive Behaviour Support • Behaviour Escalation Plans and Resources • ASD Learning Styles: Curriculum Decision Making & Planning • AASE National Conference • True Relationship Education • Nationally Consistent Collection of Data: Identifying Adjustments and Evidence • Sensory Processing in ASD and Emotional Regulation • Bus Staff Training: Incident and Management Plan, regular Transport Industry and Main Roads updates; AQ specific responsibilities updates 		

STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Part-time students attending the Autism Queensland School do not participate in NAPLAN testing during their attendance at Autism Queensland but may participate at their 'home school'. All fulltime Year 3 students enrolled in the Autism Queensland School in 2019 were exempt from NAPLAN testing, in consultation with each student's parents.

All students attending the School have a personalised plan with goals set across curriculum areas. These plans are reviewed six-monthly, in collaboration with the Autism Queensland School team, 'home school' staff and parents. Semester progress reports are sent to parents twice a year.

New Campus for Cairns

In January 2019, a new School campus in Far North Queensland for 12 students in Years P-3 opened at Autism Queensland's regional centre in Edmonton, Cairns, to address a growing demand by families for the provision of an autism-specific school within the region. This is in addition to specialist intervention already provided by Autism Queensland's clinical services and advisory school visits to local mainstream schools.

In June 2019, a comprehensive assessment visit by Non-State School Accreditation Board representatives deemed the school compliant in every aspect of its operations. Collaboration with local state and Catholic schools successfully applies the tested model of Autism Queensland's Brisbane campuses of shared enrolments with students' local mainstream schools. All students at the Cairns campus attend two days per week at Autism Queensland with the aim to increase the potential for successful transition to a mainstream setting full time. Feedback from families has been extremely positive and marked improvements demonstrated in student engagement and learning in a classroom environment confirm the ongoing need for the additional services of an autism-specific school for the region.

Prep Building Refurbishment

Phase 1 of a three-stage school refurbishment at the Sunnybank site including a new Prep classroom and adjoining courtyard, ablution facilities and storage areas was completed in June 2019. The new facilities provide an adjusted environment, based on autism research and offer opportunities to gather evidence of the impact of physical environmental adjustments on student learning outcomes for students with significant social communication, emotional regulation and sensory support needs. The State Government provided part of the funding under the Capital Assistance Agreement with the Independent Schools' Block Grant Authority (BGA).

Full-Time Senior Secondary Pilot

Preparations for a full-time program of the senior phase of learning at the Brighton campus began during the second half of the school year to implement an online learning management system and Work Skills program for senior students from the start of 2020. IT infrastructure audits and recruitment of staff were completed for the beginning of Term 4, 2019. Parents expressed interest in the pilot and information sessions were attended with mixed response. A class of up to six full time enrolments will be available to complement the existing part time places, to provide choice for students and families in preparation for transition beyond school.