



School Annual Report 2020

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.

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 2020

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 challenges 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 enrolment 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 autism 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
- 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 autism and verification of ASD 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 enrolment 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 is a complex process requiring collaborative relationships and partnerships, responsive planning, and creative supports. At Autism Queensland School, evidence-informed strategies and adjustments 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.

Our Mission

We partner with people on the autism spectrum, their families and communities to remove barriers and realise potential.

Our Values

- Integrity & Authenticity
- Diversity & Inclusion
- Strengths Focus
- Safety & Wellbeing
- Evidence-informed Practice

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 2020. Survey data was collated for 100 students who had dual enrolment in the 2020 school year:

Student engagement and achievement

- 25% of students had special arrangements in place at the student's other school to support access and participation during play times. 14% had special arrangements but these were reduced as the AQ School shared enrolment progressed.
- 81% of respondents agreed that as the AQ School shared enrolment progressed, the student improved their ability to transition well between learning environments and tasks in an AQ School setting (36% agreed, 45% strongly agreed).
- 81% of respondents agreed that as the AQ School shared enrolment progressed, the student improved their ability to engage in learning tasks at AQ School (34% agree, 47% strongly agreed).

Attendance

- While 81% of students had regular attendance at AQ School (with few or no absences), only 63% of students also had this attendance pattern in their other school setting.
- 92% of students accessed full days at AQ School and 67% of students accessed full days at their other school setting.
- The attendance patterns of 10% of students were reported to have improved in their other school setting as the AQ School placement progressed.

Transitioning students back to mainstream schooling

- 91% of respondents reported that AQ School discussed shared enrolment needs and associated transition planning with the student's family and/or their home school team during 2020.
- 69% of respondents reported that transition support for the home school team was provided by AQ during 2020. This varied from assistance with transition from AQ School to full time into mainstream, transitioning from primary to high school while still attending AQ School and also transitioning into a new mainstream class. Information provided had a clear focus on adjustments to the personalised learning plan and evidence-informed information for the student's team to proactively assist with the student's transition.
- 68% of respondents reported that transition support for the student was provided through the provision of information and transition activities for the student and their parent or carer. This included support for transition to AQ School and not just to mainstream.

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

The school is supported by teaching, therapy, transport and administrative staff. AQ School's interdisciplinary team for the Sunnybank, Brighton and Cairns campuses during 2020 comprised a total of 77.2 full time equivalent (FTE) staff: 26 teachers (20.3 FTE), 35 teacher aides (26.8 FTE), 5 speech pathologists (4 FTE), 5 occupational therapists (3.8 FTE), 2 wellbeing facilitators (2 FTE) and 8 administration staff (7.2 FTE) including the principal and heads of campus for Sunnybank and Brighton. A transport team of 18 AQ staff (13.1 FTE), deliver assisted transport for students attending the Sunnybank and Brighton campuses.

STAFF PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN 2020

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.

During 2020, teachers representing each campus participated in an ISQ funded "Middle Leaders Project", to develop and articulate a whole school data plan through individual projects. This was in alignment with AQ School's strategic plan, overseen by the teaching and learning coordinator (TLC), and coordinated by representatives from ISQ and Queensland Educational Leadership Institute (QELi).

Implementation of online learning management systems, Story Park and Moodle, were extended to enable combined learning for all students, both at home and school during the pandemic in 2020. Staff were assigned individual licenses and mentors assigned to less-experienced teachers to increase understanding and build confidence in the development and implementation of online lessons and interactive sessions for students and their families.

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.

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 Autism Queensland School in 2020 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.

2020 HIGHLIGHTS

- ***Independent School Improvement Review***

A comprehensive School Improvement Review was conducted for AQ School in early 2020. An independent team of external school leaders was engaged by the school leadership team to identify what we do well and provide evidence-informed recommendations for school improvement, in preparation of a new three-year strategic plan for the school. The process involved interviews with representatives from our school community, at each of AQ School's three campuses, and included staff, students and parents. Interviews were conducted on two consecutive days in March for all three campuses, mostly face to face but also by phone for participants in Cairns. It provided an opportunity for the AQ School community to share its experiences and invited fresh perspectives from well-informed reviewers to ultimately inform positive changes to our school operations well into the future.

- ***Primary General Learning Areas Refurbishment***

Phase 2 of a three-stage school refurbishment at the Sunnybank site including new junior primary classrooms with adjoining courtyards, a renovated school gym, kitchenette and storage was undertaken midway through 2020. The new layout has increased the available physical space for staff and students. As for Phase 1, the design and build have been informed by evidence of, and in response to, 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).

- ***Innovative School Operations During a Global Pandemic***

2020 presented novel challenges relating to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), and while most Queensland schools were inaccessible at times due to ministerial directives for online learning at home supported by parents, AQ School was able to remain open for all students due to their vulnerable status and the additional pressures for families. Personalised online learning was available to all AQ School families from the start of Term 2, and some parents opted for this, but at least half of the AQ School student population continued to physically attend classes throughout this time.

During COVID-19, AQ families, students and staff were supported to provide personalised learning for students in the following ways:

- Information regarding possible barriers to access at home was requested from families during Term 1 to allow the interdisciplinary team to plan accordingly.
- Therapy team members continued to identify and address barriers to access and engagement via regular check ins with class teams to identify students and families requiring targeted support.
- Curriculum planning was adjusted to ensure access for both face-to-face learning and learning at home.
- Student wellbeing facilitators worked closely with identified families requiring additional support to maintain engagement with school. Families were either supported to identify supports to assist with their child’s engagement with learning at home or supported to enable them to return safely to face to face learning on campus.
- Were introduced to all team members.

Curriculum compliance and online learning platforms were installed to ensure measures were in place to provide optimal support for AQ students and their families. Data systems were created for AQ School to track student attendance and teacher judgment of engagement while working from home. See Table 1 below for data pertaining to AQ School student engagement during the online learning program delivered in Weeks 1-5 of Term 2 2020.

Campus	Number of Days	Not Engaged	Emerging	Partially	Mostly	Fully
Brighton	279	11%	4%	26%	32%	28%
Cairns	29	7%	24%	17%	45%	7%
Sunnybank	169	9%	8%	22%	43%	17%
Overall Engagement for WHOLE School	477	9%	12%	22%	40%	17%

Table 1: AQ School student engagement during online learning at home during COVID-19

AQ School staff demonstrated extraordinary resilience and focus to maintain quality education at AQ during Queensland’s designated learning at home period, with simultaneous online and face-to-face learning at school. Strategies and recommendations were considered in consultation with AQ’s executive leadership team and daily updates from Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ). Student wellbeing and attendance, specific hygiene practices, bus team employment and staff health and wellbeing were significant factors to potentially impact school operations.