

School Annual Report 2023 (for 2022)

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 governs two Education and Therapy Centres in Brisbane at Brighton and Sunnybank Hills and a third at Edmonton in Cairns, which operate as an accredited independent special school (herein referred to as AQ School) and provide specialist educational support to children on the autism spectrum.

Approximately 65% of AQ School students share enrolment with their 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 2022

A total of 167 students (equivalent to 113.6 full-time enrolments) attended the AQ School in 2022 across 29 classes. This included 32 full-time enrolments at Sunnybank and 29 at Brighton campus and 106 students part-time (43 at Sunnybank campus, 52 at Brighton and 11 at Cairns).

YEAR LEVELS OFFERED

AQ 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 6 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 are verified autism spectrum disorder, in accordance with the Queensland Department of Education's guidelines to support students with disability in independent schools.

All students enrolled at AQ School have significant access and engagement barriers. School data provided for the 2022 Commonwealth Census, indicates that 98% of AQ School students were noted as requiring extensive adjustments to their learning program including modified curriculum and assessment, alternative pedagogies, interdisciplinary team support, and a fully adjusted learning environment which includes a high student to staff ratio that allows for frequent targeted and specialist support.

These highly personalised adjustments are supported by the AQ School interdisciplinary team to support student access to and engagement with learning and with others.

DISTINCTIVE CURRICULUM OFERINGS

AQ School is committed to ensuring students have access to a high-quality curriculum suited to their individual learning needs. Teachers plan, deliver, assess, and report on Australian Curriculum Learning Areas as appropriate for their class cohort. Consideration is given to 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure students are provided with opportunities to participate in education.

The AQ School interdisciplinary team is managed by the Principal, Heads of Campus, Therapy Coordinators and Teaching and Learning Coordinators to ensure teachers can adjust the curriculum to develop teaching and learning programs that consider students' strengths and interests, their age, and individual learning needs. The team includes teachers, teacher aides, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, wellbeing facilitators, and behaviour support facilitators.

AQ School pedagogical practices documented in the AQ schoolwide approach to teaching and learning include a commitment to:

- implementing the Australian Curriculum with adjustments.
- the provision of interdisciplinary team support.
- a collaborative approach to support optimum outcomes.
- a focus on student wellbeing and engagement.
- cultivating a strengths-based approach.
- the implementation of evidence informed practices; and
- opportunities to apply skills and strategies across learning environments.

School wide universal supports provide evidence informed adjustments to all students. AQ School universal supports include environmental, social and emotional, instructional, behavioural, and individual supports as outlined within AQ School Universal Supports Checklist. This support is provided by the therapy, wellbeing and behaviour support team via consultation, data collection, goal setting, the implementation of whole school adjustments, and resource development. Responsive interdisciplinary support provides additional targeted and specialist support to students in the classroom and playground as needed.

All students have a personalised learning plan that identifies and addresses barriers to learning as well as curriculum access levels and adjustments. Student wellbeing, relationships and regulation needs may be addressed through explicit teaching of elements of the Health and Physical Education Learning Area as well as Personal and Social Capabilities.

Students in the senior phase of learning (Years 10-12) at our Brighton and Sunnybank campuses access a full-time individualised program working towards a Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA). QCIA goals that support the development of independence and transition from school within five curriculum organisers are the focus of a portfolio of achievements finalised in students' final year of schooling. These five curriculum organisers are:

- Communication and technologies
- Community, citizenship and the environment
- Leisure and recreation
- Personal and living dimensions
- Vocational and transition activities.

Curriculum access for students accessing P-10 curriculum or the Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA) curriculum organisers is prioritised into *Must, Should*, and *Could* access to support personalised curriculum decision making. All AQ School students *Must* have access to the English,

Mathematics and Health and Physical Education Learning Areas (P-10 students) and individual QCIA curriculum goals (Years 11 and 12 only).

The School Program

The AQ School facilitates both full time and shared enrolment of autistic students. At the Sunnybank and Brighton campuses, parents have a choice of either part-time or full-time enrolment for select year levels up to Year 12. Cairns' offers select part time for Prep – Year 6 and full time Prep – Year 2.

For Prep-Year 10 students, Autism Queensland's Education Service Agreement with the Department of Education, under the Non-State Special Needs Organisations funding program, facilitates shared enrolment of autistic students in a part-time school-based program at AQ School with enrolment at their base or "home" mainstream school providing an inclusive program for students specifically designed to:

- Enable students to maintain connection with their local school peer group and educational program
- Enable students to develop and 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.

Class Placements

Continuous assessment is used to determine curriculum and learning needs of AQ School students. They are grouped according to age, curriculum, and personal support needs, with six students per class. Each class is staffed by a teacher and teacher aide, with additional support from the interdisciplinary team.

The decision for part or full-time enrolment is made on a case-by-case basis to ensure benefit to the student. Consideration for inclusion in the program involves the collection and review of a variety of personalised enrolment information including:

- A current diagnosis of autism and/or verification for school-age students in the ASD category of the Educational Adjustment Program
- The collation of current support and transition needs via consultation with relevant stakeholders
- An enrolment interview with the student and his/her parents or carers
- Review of recent documents including school reports, current personalised learning plans, individual positive behaviour support plans and recent therapy reports.

Enrolment and transition opportunities consider the student's capacity to engage with learning and with others and manage the transition or enrolment options available.

Stakeholder Engagement

Consultation and collaboration with all stakeholders are a key feature of AQ School's personalised educational program for students with complex learning and support needs. Support is provided by AQ 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 as appropriate. AQ School teachers of classes with duel enrolled students have additional non-contact time explicitly allocated for home school visits and consultative support for the students' home school education support teams. This provides the opportunity for staff to observe students in their mainstream setting to assist in providing responsive 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 AQ School to view and discuss programs, the learning environment, and supports and adjustments implemented.
- Leading PLP and other individual support plan development and implementation.
- Sharing of assessments and reports, including verification documents and information, PLPs and PLP reviews, Escalation Response Plans, Risk Assessments, and other individualised program documents.
- Support with continuous curriculum decision making process including the sharing of curriculum planning details and semester reports to families and home school teams.

Transition Planning and Support may include:

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



Feedback from an inclusion support teacher supporting a dual enrolled student to transition back to full time enrolment within their school noted visits to AQ School to observe and collaborate and the very clear lines of communication were highly beneficial to the student's home school educational team. *"I believe the teams collaborated well to support [the Student], particularly in social/emotional learning and in helping him settle into mainstream schooling. I believe that both environments benefited him immensely and I enjoyed working with AQ."*

SOCIAL CLIMATE

Inclusive education for students with autism is a complex process requiring collaborative relationships and partnerships, responsive planning, and creative supports to address personalised needs. 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.

AQ School places students at the centre of their education by supporting the explicit development of student voice and ensuring each student's educational program celebrates and supports their strengths and provides opportunities for personal and academic growth and outcomes.

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration provides the policy framework for the Australian Curriculum delivered within AQ School. The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration aligns with the AQ core values of:

- Integrity and Authenticity: We are genuine, honest and accountable for what we do.
- **Diversity and Inclusion**: We respect and celebrate all people and their right to participate and belong.
- **Strengths Focus:** We strive to support the development of every person's potential, recognising that a strengths focus enables growth and empowers decision-making and self-advocacy.
- **Safety and Wellbeing**: We provide and promote safe, respectful, caring and engaging people and environments that support positive development and relationships.
- **Evidence-informed Practice:** We use professional reasoning to bring together current high quality research evidence and the values, strengths and preferences of individuals and families to optimise outcomes.

Collaboration between the AQ School interdisciplinary team and the student, parents/carers and external stakeholders such as home school staff and therapists is utilised to develop appropriate individualised plans to meet the personalised needs of students. Regular consultation and collaboration through school visits, emails and phone calls and meetings ensures personalised goals are responsive to student needs during their AQ School enrolment. There is a strong emphasis on evidence informed educational practice that meets the specific needs of autistic students.

PARENT, TEACHER AND STUDENT SATISFACTION WITHIN THE SCHOOL

As part of AQ's data collection process, stakeholders were surveyed regarding the service provided by AQ School to students, families and other schools during 2022, as well as the impact of this service. Survey data was collated for 97 students who shared enrolment with a home school during the 2022 school year. The findings reflect significant satisfaction with the support provided by AQ School staff to support improved student access to and participation at school.

- 97% of respondents noted that the AQ School team regularly collaborated with the home school team relating to the student's personalised adjustments and progress. Often collaboration occurred on a weekly basis.
- All respondents agreed the AQ School team regularly collaborated with the student's family relating to the student's personalised adjustments and progress (e.g., PLP process, emails, phone calls, collaboration, meetings). 74% of respondents noted this to be daily and/or weekly collaboration.



A home school case manager noted dual placement and interdisciplinary input had a positive impact on the student's educational outcomes and provided the opportunity for ongoing professional interaction via visits and transition supports stating his value of the professional conversations, the visits to and from AQ School and the open communication. *"Establishing weekly emails giving an overview of what happened in each school (both curriculum and well-being/behaviour) made a great deal of difference to ensuring continuity of support for [the Student] across the two schools. As the year progressed, [the Student] became less anxious, more willing to try things that he found challenging, and was able to use self-regulation strategies more independently. It was wonderful to see his academic progress, as well as his sense of well-being improving."*

Feedback provided by a parent highlights the impact of AQ School enrolment on their child and family stating "Without AQ, [my child] would have continued to struggle in mainstream if we maintained the path we were on before AQ. AQ have built [my child's] resilience and coping, engaged him in learning and thereby enabled him to access the curriculum which he wasn't doing in a meaningful way prior. AQ have fostered routine and structure, helped [my child] with his emotional regulation and have generally taken the stress out of ensuring he gets an education. We were extremely lucky, and we couldn't be more grateful!"

AQ school is directly responsible for the improvements in my child, without them he would not be progressing as he is, the impacts of this improvement are positive on not only to him, but his family and other school. My son loves his days at AQ and looks forward to seeing his teachers. The teaching staff at AQ are all wonderful. All the teachers and aides make an effort to not only know each child but connect with them. My son is happy, calm, engaged, and learning so much, not just academically but socially and emotionally."

SCHOOL INCOME BROKEN DOWN BY FUNDING SOURCE

A breakdown of AQ School funding for all campuses can be viewed on the *Autism Queensland Education* and *Therapy Centre, Sunnybank Hills* page of the My School website: <u>Finances | My School</u>.

STAFFING

An interdisciplinary team approach is utilised to support the complex learning needs of AQ School students. The AQ School team includes special educators, therapy, behaviour support and wellbeing staff, teacher aides, administration staff, and other support staff within the IT, maintenance, finance, and human resource services. The 2022 AQ School team of 129 (full and part-time) staff included teachers, teacher aides, bus transport staff, and administrative staff, a principal, two heads of Campus in Brisbane and a senior teacher in Cairns.

Staff Composition, Including Indigenous Staff

Staff Composition	Number
Total number of teaching staff	33
Full-time equivalent teaching staff	26.6
Total number of non-teaching staff	96 (includes transport staff)
Full-time equivalent non-teaching staff	49.5 FTE (includes transport staff)
Total number of Indigenous staff	2
Total number of staff less transport staff	104
Total number of school staff:	129

Qualifications of all Teachers

Qualification	Number of classroom teachers and school leaders at the school who hold this qualification
Doctorate or higher	0
Masters	8
Bachelor's Degree	22
Diploma	3
Certificate	0

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
33	27	82%

STAFF PARTICIPATION IN AND EXPENDITURE ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN 2022

AQ School is supported by a teaching, therapy, administrative, teacher aide, and transport staff of 76.1 full time equivalent, including a principal and heads of campus within campuses. 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 and AQ School policies and procedures.

Staff also participate in annual professional development 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 a presentation at staff meetings. This promotes cross-disciplinary knowledge and understanding, ultimately improving the quality of service provided to students and their families.

Evidence-informed strategies and programs continued throughout 2022 through consultation with AQ Research and Development Team, and participation in the Client Safety and Wellbeing Working Group, the AQ Practice Excellence Panel, and Complex Case Forum. This provided access to an extensive team

of experts, including senior therapists, Education School and Therapy Team members, Professional Learning and Development Services, autistic individuals, and our affiliation with the Autism CRC research projects. Topics chosen for designated pupil free days and/or staff meetings are often presented by the various professionals from the AQ interdisciplinary team or from external organisations as appropriate.

Most notably, continued focus areas requested by AQ School staff for professional development during the 2022 school year were school community Wellbeing, Universal Supports within AQ School, Neuroaffirming Practices, Student Voice in goal setting and Co-Design Strategies, and Curriculum Updates including the Transition to Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum, The Science of Learning, and Differentiation within complex classes with multi-year level support needs.

Total N	lumber of Teachers	Total expendit (as recorded in			Average expenditure on PD per teacher	
Total funds expended on teacher sourced professional development in 2022. \$28,95					\$28,952	
Proportion of the teaching staff involved in professional development activities during 2022.					100%	
Major	professional development	initiatives were	as follows:			
٠	First Aid and CPR Training	5				
٠	Child Protection Training					
٠	Fire Safety Training					
٠	Trauma Informed Practices					
٠	Neuroaffirming Practices					
٠	AQ School Curriculum En	titlement and Pe	ersonalised Cu	rriculum Plannii	ng	
٠	Australian Curriculum As	sessment and Re	eporting			
٠	QCAA and ISQ curriculum	nupdates				
٠	Nationally Consistent Co	lection of Data:	Identifying Ad	justments and E	Evidence	
٠	Risk Assessment Processes					
٠	SMART Software use					
٠	Universal supports for AC	Q School student	ts			
٠	Team-Teach Refresher or	Foundation Co	urse			
٠	AQ Policies and Procedur	es				
٠	Incident Reporting and Quality Assurance					
٠	Managing complaints an	d feedback				
٠	Behaviour Escalation Plans and Resources					
٠	Animal Assisted Therapy					
٠	Bus Staff Training: Incident Management Plan and Processes; documentation needed; regular Department of Transport and Main Roads updates; AQ specific responsibilities including AQ Code of Conduct; child safe organisation principles and practices.					
٠	QELI Leadership for Depu	ity Principals				
٠	Learn to Play and Thrive					
٠	Whole School Zones of Regulation implementation					
٠	Use of Salesforce Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software.					
٠	Educator wellbeing and stress indicators.					
٠	Wesley Life-force Suicide	Prevention Trai	ining.			

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STUDENT PERFORMANCE

The AQ School aims to increase the confidence and skills of the student, and for the student's family and home school educational team. Student success is measured on an individual basis and may consider:

- Achievement against the Australian Curriculum achievement standards
- Student Engagement
- Achievement of personalised learning goals
- Continuous assessments
- Academic Semester Reports
- Standardised measures
- Stakeholder (student, parents, home school team) satisfactions
- School attendance
- On-going involvement of stakeholders
- Student progress reports.

All students attending AQ School have a personalised learning plan with goals set to support access to and engagement with learning. These plans are reviewed six-monthly, in collaboration with the AQ School interdisciplinary team, the student and family, and other stakeholders such as the home school team. Semester progress reports documenting achievement against the Australian Curriculum achievement standards and measures of student engagement are sent to parents and home school teams twice a year.

Student engagement and achievement:

During the 2022 Commonwealth Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD), Students with Disability, 98% of AQ School students were identified as having been provided with Extensive adjustments at school. Curriculum adjustments to content, delivery and assessment also consider communication support needs, the preference for consistent relationships and interactions, sensory preferences, and the social and emotional wellbeing of students.

Survey data was collated for 97 students during the 2022 school year regarding the adjustments provided, access and engagement supports, and consultation and collaboration.

- In addition to the provision of AQ Universal Supports within the fully adjusted AQ School learning environment, 90.1% of respondents identified that additional targeted arrangements were in place at the AQ School to support the student's access and participation in play / break times.
- 67% of respondents noted that special arrangements were required at the student's other school. 12 respondents either did not access the playground environment at all within their other school or were enrolled in a distance education program.
- 97.9% of respondents agreed that collaboration with the student's home school team and parents included behavioural supports.
- 87.% of respondents identified that as the shared enrolment with AQ School progressed, the student either maintained or improved his/her ability to engage in learning tasks at their home school (with appropriate educational adjustments).

- Part-time students attending the AQ School do not participate in NAPLAN testing during their attendance but may participate at their 'home school.' All fulltime Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students enrolled in the AQ School in 2022 were exempt from NAPLAN testing, in consultation with each student's parents.
- 27.8% of students were taught and assessed within elements of the English Learning Area with appropriate educational adjustments during the 2022 school year at year level; 72.2% of students accessed elements of the English Learning Area curriculum below year level.
- 37.1% of students were taught and assessed within elements of the Mathematics Learning Area with appropriate educational adjustments during the 2022 school year at year level;
 62.9% of students accessed elements of the Mathematics Learning Area curriculum below year level.
- 39.1% of students were taught and assessed within elements of the Health and Physical Education (HPE) Learning Area with appropriate educational adjustments during the 2022 school year at year level; 60.9% of students accessed elements of the HPE Learning Area curriculum below year level.
- Overall, students demonstrated progress retaining Australian Curriculum Learning Area concepts at the appropriate individual curriculum access level. (89% English, 94% Mathematics, 96% HPE) during the 2022 school year.
- **74%** of students demonstrated progress within the Australian Curriculum Personal and Social Capabilities during the 2022 school year.

"Our child has improved significantly during his time, his ability to self-regulate and participate in family activities has also improved. Without the improvements due to AQ school he would be floundering in the public school system with significant impacts to his family unit and relationships. AQ has helped my son build self-confidence and become less anxious. He is happier and more outgoing, more engaged in school work and has made good friends. He is supported and encouraged to be/do his best."

Attendance

65% of AQ School students attend part time and share enrolment with their local primary, secondary or distance education school.

The average attendance rate in 2022 for the whole school was 81.32% (83.6% for Sunnybank; 80% for Brighton and 80.37% for Cairns). 32% of students attended 90% or more of the time.

Wellbeing facilitators provide universal, targeted and specialist support to students, classes and families in the management of attendance and engagement. This may include the provision of universal capacity building information for families regarding the management of sleep disruptions/challenges that impact attendance and wellbeing as well as direct support for students and families when attendance at one or both schools is identified as disrupted and or at risk.

- 77% of respondents identified that there was regular attendance at the AQ School during the 2022 school year with 8 additional respondents identifying that a plan was in place to support attendance and/or attendance improved as the AQ placement progressed.
- Some respondents noted that students were only able to attend their home school when individual direct support was able to be provided to support safety and this impacted their attendance at their 'home school'.
- 37% of respondents identified that students' wellbeing needs such as school refusal and or anxiety was noted as impacting the student's attendance at one or both schools during the 2022 school year.

Transitioning students back to mainstream schooling

Transition supports included personalised goals and or activities that scaffolded or prepared the student for transition (both immediate and future).

- 99% of respondents identified the AQ School shared enrolment needs, and associated transition planning were discussed with the student's family and/or the home school team during 2022. This included noting upcoming transitions/changes and supports needed, confirming ongoing enrolment plans, future transition considerations were discussed within the PLP meeting/document, stakeholder meetings etc., and formal transition planning which include the sharing of information between all stakeholders to support transition as well as transition activities for the student and or family.
- 78.4% of respondents noted that the AQ School team provided transition support for the home school team by collaborating with planning and/or activities to support an increase in days enrolled at/ attendance at / engagement with tasks at the home school.
- 45% 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.

Year 12 school leavers

Six students finished Year 12 at the end of the 2022, achieving a QCIA portfolio. Information regarding NDIS services and support for school leavers was shared with students and families of Year 11 and 12 students. School leavers are currently accessing a combination of employment preparation/training, leisure and social activities with the support of their NDIS provides and families. Detailed school leaver cohort data has been withheld to ensure confidentiality within the small 2022 school leaver cohort.

2022 HIGHLIGHTS

During the 2022 school year, significant events included:

- AQ School successfully submitted their five yearly Non-State Schools Accreditation Board (NSSAB) compliance review.
- 2022 saw the highest enrolments recorded in the school's history across the three campuses.
- The Cairns campus received accreditation to enrol Year 5 students for the beginning of the 2022 school year, enabling enrolment and support for students Prep–Year 6 for the 2023 school year onwards. The campus also prepared to add an additional part time class at the beginning of the 2023 school year. A Head of Campus was also appointed to commence at the start of 2023.
- Six students exited Year 12 with a Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA) our largest cohort and the third year of offering the full-time senior program at both Brisbane campuses. Our Sunnybank and Brighton senior graduation and semi-formal events for students in Years 11 and 12 held in November were a highlight for students, their guests, parents, and staff.
- The two Brisbane campuses, in response to extensive requests, provided shared enrolled and full-time enrolment options to students in their early secondary years of school (Years 6-9) for the first time to support students who demonstrate significant challenges accessing and engaging with learning and with others within the high school learning environment.
- A roadmap to transition to Version 9 of the Australian Curriculum was developed by the school leadership team.

- AQ School introduced the new role of Behaviour Support Facilitator with the aim of delivering a proactive, strengths-based, multi-tiered system of universal, targeted and specialised behavioural supports within the school.
- Agreement with Sentral confirmed as the preferred school management system to be implemented in 2023 as part of AQ's organisation-wide digital transformation project. Sentral will support client data security and administration and reporting processes.