

2021 Annual Report

Aspect Hunter School



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Child safe statement

Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) is a child safe organisation committed to protecting the rights and interests of children and vulnerable people by providing them with a safe environment. This commitment extends to ensuring a culturally safe and inclusive environment that recognises and respects an individual's heritage, relationships and cultural practices.

Acknowledgment of Country

Aspect acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the many lands on which we work, live and learn. We pay our respect to their elders, past present and emerging.

Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) is the country's largest service provider for people on the autism spectrum. Our specialised, evidence informed school program is one of the largest in the world, with additional services that include information and advice, diagnostic assessments, behaviour support, parent and family support, and adult programs. We share evidence-informed autism practice and applied research nationwide.

Aspect offers one of the best quality autism-specific education programs in Australia. We have over 50 years of experience and provide dynamic autism-specific support in purpose-built classrooms. We utilise the strengths and interests of students as a gateway to learning through quality, tailored programs that focus on the individual learning needs of each child.

Aspect schools provide specialised evidence-informed programs for children aged 4 to 17 on the autism spectrum.

The primary focus of our schools is to equip students with skills to become as independent as possible and transition into more inclusive settings. This is achieved through the application of the Aspect Comprehensive Approach. At the centre of the approach is the Autism Initiatives' (UK) Five Point Star to support autism-specific person-centred planning and respectful and positive relationships between the educator and student. It includes Individual Planning; Family & Community Engagement; Learning & Participation; Positive Behaviour Support; Structured Supports; Transition & Inclusion; Specialist Collaboration; and Health & Wellbeing.



Aspect's Strategic Plan



Our purpose

Understanding, engaging & celebrating the strengths, interests and aspirations of people on the autism spectrum
- *a different brilliant®*

Our vision

The best opportunities for people on the autism spectrum.

Strategic Plan 2021 - 2023



Work in partnership with people on the autism spectrum

- Implement our Disability Access and Inclusion Plan
- Work in Partnership with People on the Autism Spectrum Charter
- Employ Autistic people across a range of roles



Deliver best practice, evidence informed services

- Research activities prioritised to focus on the Aspect Comprehensive Approach
- Continuous improvements to our autism-specific education
- A diverse and inclusive workforce



Extend Aspect's reach and enhance people capabilities

- Well trained staff with enhanced critical skills
- Customer-centric culture
- Strong and trusted brand identity



Investment in physical and digital infrastructure

- Capital Works Program for Aspect schools
- Innovative facilities co-designed with Autistic people
- Digital platforms that facilitate collaboration and communication

Our strategic support

Our people who are highly trained and value diversity and inclusion

Our systems and processes which are built to enable smarter work practices and foster collaboration

Our supporters who help to create a world where no one on the autism spectrum is left behind

By 2023



6% of roles at Aspect held by Autistic people



7,000 active participants and students receiving autism-specific education and supports

1,600 employees who are proud to be working for Aspect



Message from the principal

In presenting the 2021 annual report I would like to acknowledge the Wonnarua, Awabakal and Birpai people who are the traditional custodians of the lands on which our campuses are located.

In 2021 Aspect Hunter School enrolled 192 students across the Hunter, Newcastle and Port Macquarie areas from Kindergarten to Year 12. The school comprises an administrative base at Thornton which offers primary and high school enrolment and a range of satellite classes located at Tarro, Waratah West, Abermain, Cardiff, Muswellbrook and Port Macquarie. All satellite locations offer primary education except for our Port Macquarie high school site.

We had a further 24 students enrolled in our Distance Education program in 2021, from across New South Wales, with our offering extending from Year 3 to Year 10. The program is delivered online with direct teacher to student instruction and offline individual work. It also includes a 15-day residential program at our main campus in Thornton. The program, established in 2020, is exceeding our expectations with incredibly positive feedback received from all stakeholders.



Our school Learning Support Team, which includes Psychology, Speech Pathology, Occupational Therapy and family support, work across our classes to build the capacity of our teaching and learning teams to put whole class and individual supports in place to build engagement in learning.

The 2021 school year presented our school with ongoing challenges related to the pandemic. However, our staff team demonstrated such passion, commitment and resilience and worked with students to achieve positive personal and academic outcomes.

We look forward to resuming some of our more exciting school activities and events in 2022 with the further easing of restrictions.

Lara Cheney

Principal

Student outcomes in standardised national literacy and numeracy testing

Each student has an individual profile of characteristics that outlines strengths and interests, current levels of functioning and areas for development in the autism-specific areas of learning: social communication, social interaction, behaviours and sensory processing which are integrated into the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) mainstream curriculum - the Key Learning Areas (KLAs). The school uses a multi-disciplinary team approach, working collaboratively with families to develop the best possible outcomes for the students. The school provides information and training workshops to families to help them support their child.

Literacy and Numeracy Assessments

For NAPLAN results, please refer to My School website www.myschool.edu.au

The school administers literacy testing across the school each year to help inform practice and monitor progress. We assess sight words, phonemes, graphemes, spelling, reading accuracy, reading comprehension and verbal working memory.

Senior secondary outcomes

Record of School Achievement

The formal Record of School Achievement credential was awarded by NESA to six students.

Higher School Certificate

Aspect Hunter School enrolled its first year 12 students in 2021. Two students achieved their Higher School Certificate (Life Skills). One student completed a VET course in Design Fundamentals.

Teacher professional learning, accreditation and qualifications

The following professional learning activities were undertaken by staff throughout 2021:

Description of professional learning activity	No. of staff
Child Protection - responsibilities related to child protection based on legislation and Aspect policy and procedures	All
Disability Standards for Education (2005) - overview of the Standards and the legal obligations of all education providers	All
CPR training – skills to provide Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)	All
CPI Safety Intervention: trauma informed & person-centred training to prevent, de-escalate, & respond to crisis situations.	All
Aspect Professional Code of Conduct – face to face workshop and online module.	All
Supporting people on the autism spectrum using person-centred 5 Point Star (adapted from Autism Initiatives UK) framework	All
Positive Behaviour Support and Supporting Students with Complex Situations	All
Aspect Comprehensive Approach: Individual Planning	All
Literacy & Numeracy Progressions	All
Gallup Strengths Profiles Strengths Leadership Workshop	All
Childhood Mental Health Challenges	All
Peer Support for Positive Well-Being	All
Disability Standards For Education Disability Standards For Education	All
MultiLit: Making Up Lost Time in Literacy course	3
First Aid – knowledge and skills to help an ill or injured person until emergency help arrives	3

Teacher accreditation

Level of accreditation	Number of Teachers
Conditional	4
Provisional	6
Proficient Teacher	51
Highly Accomplished Teacher (voluntary accreditation)	3
Lead Teacher (voluntary accreditation)	0
Total number of teachers	64

Teacher qualifications

All teachers have teacher education qualifications from a higher education institution within Australia or as recognised within the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AEI-NOOSR) guidelines.

Workforce composition

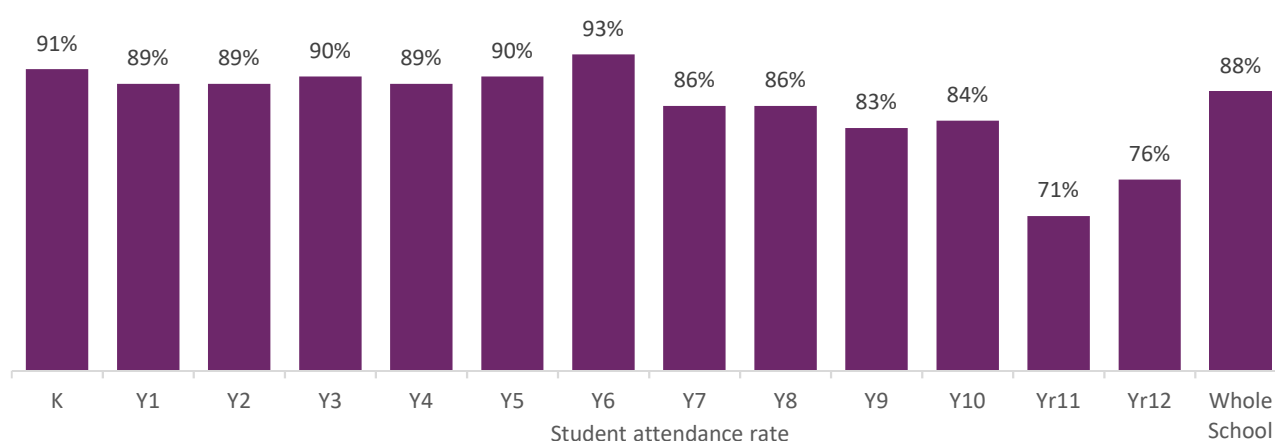
Composition of Aspect Hunter School staff is documented on the My School website www.myschool.edu.au

Five staff members are of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background.

Student attendance, retention rates and post-school destinations in secondary schools

Student attendance rates

Kinder	91%	Year 7	86%
Year 1	89%	Year 8	86%
Year 2	89%	Year 9	83%
Year 3	90%	Year 10	84%
Year 4	89%	Year 11	71%
Year 5	90%	Year 12	76%
Year 6	93%	Whole School	88%



Management of non-attendance

Aspect Education has policies and procedures in place to ensure compliance of Aspect schools with school attendance requirements for compulsory school-aged students as outlined by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA).

Unexplained absence will be followed up by the class teacher with the parent/guardian. Repeated unexplained absence or absence of concern may need to be reported to Family and Community Services.

Where unsatisfactory attendance is identified, a student attendance improvement plan is formulated in collaboration with the student and their parent/guardian. The plan is monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.

Retention of Year 10 to Year 12

In 2021 two students in year 10 left the school. One transitioned to another school to complete the Higher School Certificate and the other planned to enrol in TAFE. Two students completed year 12 with one transitioning to further studies at TAFE and the other transitioned to supported employment.

Enrolment policy

Aspect provides autism-specific educational services for eligible school-aged children on the autism spectrum, to prepare them for transition to environments that are not autism specific.

Aspect recognises that children on the autism spectrum have the right to access and equity of services regardless of their gender, race or ethnicity, religion or language.

An application is made for an Aspect school rather than a specific class. Our school's professional staff decide in consultation with the family which class is best suited to the educational needs of the student. Each school is responsible for managing its own application, intake and waiting lists process, which is managed by the school principal.

When vacancies arise in the school, the decision about how to fill them is made based on whether the type of vacancy available would be appropriate for the child. Factors taken into consideration include the type of vacancy available, the child's age, the length of time a child has been on the waiting list, the availability of alternative placements and the family situation.

Entry criteria

Aspect schools are funded in part by the Commonwealth and state governments, which have specific criteria for placement. To be eligible for placement in one of Aspect's schools, prospective students must satisfy the following criteria:

Citizenship and visa status – a child must:

- be an Australian citizen or permanent resident of Australia or holds an eligible visa (refer to guide to checking citizenship and visa status for enrolment).
- be aged between 4 and 17 years.

Diagnosis – a child must:

- in both NSW and South Australia, have a current diagnosis as being on the autism spectrum from a specialist medical practitioner, child psychiatrist or clinical psychologist with the necessary training and experience to be able to undertake a diagnostic assessment;
- in South Australia, a second report from a psychologist or speech pathologist that confirms the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder that is not more than two (2) years old; and
- in both NSW and South Australia, have a current standardised cognitive or developmental assessment (e.g. IQ testing, Griffiths, WISC-IV, WPPSI-111, Stanford Binet V) which is not more than two (2) years old.

Registration to school waitlist

Expression of interest in Aspect schools may be made in the following ways:

- direct enquiry to the Aspect school by telephone or email;
- telephone or email to Aspect Customer Service, who will direct the enquiry to the school;
- general enquiry via the Contact Us page on the Aspect website, which will be directed to the school.

The registration form can be obtained from the following processes:

- families who are interested in enrolling their child to an Aspect school are asked to attend a School Information Session. Aspect principals or their delegate are responsible for organising a school information session once per school term, in line with the School Information Session work instruction, for prospective parents or guardians who would like to enrol their child. This information session outlines the Aspect education program and the registration and enrolment process. The school registration form is obtained after attending this session.
- families who are unable to attend a School Information Session can obtain a registration form directly from an Aspect school. A School Enrolment Committee representative will provide them with information about the Aspect education program and the registration and enrolment process, before sending them the registration form.

A non-refundable processing fee is required for each application submitted.

Application to more than one Aspect School

When a family wants to place their child on the waitlist of more than one Aspect school, they first apply to their preferred Aspect school and indicate which other Aspect schools they will consider enrolment. The preferred Aspect school is responsible for processing the application, inform the other Aspect school/s to place the student on their school's active waitlist and share the application documents.

Aspect School Enrolment Committee

School principals are responsible for convening the Aspect School Enrolment Committee (comprised of school principal, psychologist and selected school coordinators) which meets once per school term, following the information session, to review registrations received. This committee determines if a child is eligible for placement in an Aspect school.

Eligible/Not Eligible for service

Citizenship and age criteria

If the citizenship or age criteria is not met, a school representative will inform the parents or guardians that their child is not eligible for enrolment due to citizenship or age criteria not being met. If the parents or guardians are not satisfied with the result, they can make a complaint to Aspect (refer to Aspect's Complaints Management procedure).

Diagnosis criteria

If the child has been deemed eligible by the Aspect School Enrolment Committee, the principal will inform the parents or guardians that, based on the diagnostic information provided, their child has been deemed eligible for the program (Letter – Confirmation of diagnosis) and their child's name has been placed on the school waitlist.

The principal is responsible for referring the application to the Aspect Eligibility Committee if the diagnosis needs clarification. Parents/ Carers will be informed, in writing (Letter – Application sent to full eligibility committee), that their case has been sent to the Committee for review. If further information is required by the Committee, the principal is responsible for writing to the parents requesting updated information (Letter – Request for updated Psychological reports).

Aspect Eligibility Committee

The National Director, Aspect Education is responsible for:

- convening the Aspect Eligibility Committee once per school term to review any registrations that require clarification, and
- reporting to Aspect principals the results of the Aspect Eligibility Committee, so that they can inform the parents of the outcomes.

The principal will inform the parents or guardians (Letter – Confirmation of diagnosis) that based on the diagnostic information provided their child has been deemed eligible for the program or not and, if confirmed, the child's name is placed on the school's waitlist.

Vacancy Management

If a vacancy arises, students on the waitlist who can potentially fill the vacancy will be considered. The principal or delegate interviews families whose child might fill the vacancy regarding accommodations/ adjustments for their child following the interview pro forma.

If a student being considered for enrolment is not an Australian citizen, the principal or their delegate must check that the visa is still valid and eligible for enrolment.

Following completion of the interview, the principal, or their delegate will complete the Risk Management Plan pro forma, to assist with decision making.

Following the interview process, the school will inform the family if a child has been offered a placement (Letter – Enrolment Contract/Acceptance of Offer) or (Letter – Placement to Satellite Class) or will be retained on the school's waitlist. Principals are responsible for forwarding parents the relevant enrolment package and liaising with them throughout the process.

Enrolment Package

When a family is offered a placement, in addition to the enrolment contract, they will be sent documents based on the enrolment acceptance checklist.

A family can decline an enrolment offer and inform Aspect school if they want to be placed in the school's active waitlist.

To secure enrolment, the family must pay a non-refundable enrolment fee as published in the Aspect School fees schedule (NSW or SA).

When a family informs the Aspect school of their decision to withdraw their child from enrolment before commencing, they must also inform the Aspect school if they wish to be placed in the school's active waitlist.

Other school policies

Summary of policy	Changes in 2021	Access to full text
<p>Student welfare The school seeks to provide a safe and supportive environment to support the mental, physical and emotional wellbeing of students through the following policies:</p> <p>Person Centred Approach and Recognition of Values – define and work towards achieving individual's goals and personal lifestyle choices with support and input from those who care about them</p> <p>Risk Management Framework – identifies risks and defines criteria for the assessment of consequence of those risks</p> <p>Duty of Care and Dignity of Risk - ensures that staff understand and implement the principles of Duty of Care and Dignity of Risk, recognising the rights of the people we support to make informed choices and take calculated risks. It is essential that each individual's dignity of risk is respected and supported in their decision-making processes. Aspect facilitates each student's meaningful choice and control to maximise their independence; and minimises the risk to the individual or others wherever possible.</p> <p>Safeguarding the People We Support - Aspect is committed to appropriately responding to and preventing incidents of abuse, injury, neglect and exploitation of the people we support, in both participation with Aspect, and as a partner of the broader community</p>	Nil	<p>The following policies can be accessed from Aspect's website https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/about-aspect/policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person-Centred Approach and Recognition of Valued Status • Risk Management Framework • Duty of Care and Dignity of Risk • Safeguarding the People We Support
<p>Pastoral Care and Bullying Prevention in Aspect Schools The Aspect Comprehensive Approach (ACA), including the use of the Five Point Star, drives aspect's guiding principles for pastoral care.</p> <p>Aspect is required and seeks to exercise due diligence in all of its duty of care responsibilities towards students, staff and the school community. Leaders of the school endorse activities and plan for the safety and maintenance of good mental and physical health and well-being of the students, staff and parents involved. Schools seek to accommodate and make provision for particular needs of individuals who require special arrangements to secure safety and avoid discomfort or threat to their health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Therefore, bullying or harassment is not tolerated in any form. All members of our community are committed to ensuring a safe and supportive environment which promotes personal growth and fosters positive self-esteem for all. Aspect Schools aim to maintain a setting in which everyone feels valued and respected and where individual differences are appreciated, understood and accepted and encourages the reporting of complaints and feedback.</p>	Nil	<p>The full text of the Pastoral Care and Bullying Prevention in Aspect Schools procedure can be accessed by request from the school principal.</p> <p>The following related policies can be accessed from Aspect's website https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/about-aspect/policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspect Comprehensive Approach (ACA) • Duty of Care and Dignity of Risk • Embracing Diversity • Person-Centred Approach and Recognition of Valued Status • Safeguarding the People We Support • Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback
<p>Discipline Aspect adopts a positive behaviour support (PBS) approach when working with children on the autism spectrum ranging from strategies for all students through to more intensive strategies for students who may exhibit more challenging behaviours as outlined in the Positive Behaviour Support policy.</p> <p>Aspect follows a PBS approach but when behaviours occur that put the safety of any stakeholder at risk, the school will be required to implement appropriate procedures to safeguard all stakeholders' safety. All staff have responsibilities in relation to implementing discipline in Aspect Schools.</p>	Nil	<p>The full text of the Discipline in Schools work instruction can be accessed by request from the school principal.</p> <p>The Aspect Positive Behaviour Support policy can be accessed from Aspect's website https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/about-aspect/policies</p>
<p>Complaints and grievances resolution Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) values complaints about the quality of its service and communications to support the continuous improvement of services and management.</p> <p>Aspect's complaints management process provides a transparent framework for promptly and sensitively addressing and resolving complaints and disputes that may arise from complaints having regard to procedural fairness, confidentiality and privacy.</p>	Nil	<p>The full text of the Complaints Management Process can be accessed by request from Aspect's website https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/feedback-and-complaints</p> <p>The Feedback and Complaints brochure can be downloaded from our website https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/uploads/documents/Governance/Aspect-Feedback-and-Complaints-Brochure.pdf</p>

School determined improvement areas

Area	Priorities	Achievements
Teaching and learning	Implement a new School Values Program across the school. Communicate the Values program to parents/carers so a common language and focus can be established across environments	Values have been established through consultation with the school community. Values are a common feature of teaching and learning programs, reward systems and school assemblies
Staff development	Develop strategies to effectively collaborate, plan and use evidence to evaluate teaching and learning programs	All teaching and learning programs were peer reviewed week 2 of each term. Assessment Rubrics were created for high school courses. Example programs were developed for each KLA/course from K-12
Student achievement	Support students in knowing their strengths, developing goals and monitoring their progress by contributing to the development of their 5 Point Stars and Individual Plans	All high school students contributed to the development of their 5 Point Star profiles. Students were involved in their transition planning for moving to other schools or to post school options
	Establish more opportunities to support the development of social and emotional skills and build student resilience	Two teachers participated in Secret Agent Society training. Embarked on the Westmead Feelings project for adolescents. Delivered and evaluated the trial of the PEERS program
Vocational Education	Train one teacher to be able to deliver TVET courses to students in Stage 5 and 6 in 2022	One teacher trained in Term 4 by AISNSW to deliver TVET courses

Initiatives promoting respect and responsibility

Aspect Hunter School wants all students to recognise that they are a valued part of the school community, with parents and staff providing care and support that promotes self-esteem, mutual respect and responsibility.

The school Student Representative Council (SRC) focuses on building student confidence and capacity for self-determination. Students represent the school, participate in events and most importantly raise understanding of autism.

Students have the opportunity to participate in cultural activities such as Harmony Day, National Reconciliation week and NAIDOC week.

Aspect's Purpose of "understanding, engaging & celebrating the strengths, interests & aspirations of people on the autism spectrum" and Aspect's Value of "we are passionate about people, about being positive and about what's possible" mirror the nine recommended values of the National Framework for Values in Education.

Aspect has a commitment to ensuring all team members know and embrace our core values to ensure they are reflected in interactions and relationships with stakeholders. Aspect recognises that in order to achieve this it is important to share information with staff and the community so that Aspect is known not only for the work that we do but also for the values we uphold.

Parent, student and teacher satisfaction

In 2021 a report was published on the experiences of key stakeholders with the first year of the Aspect Hunter Distance Education program. The full report can be found here

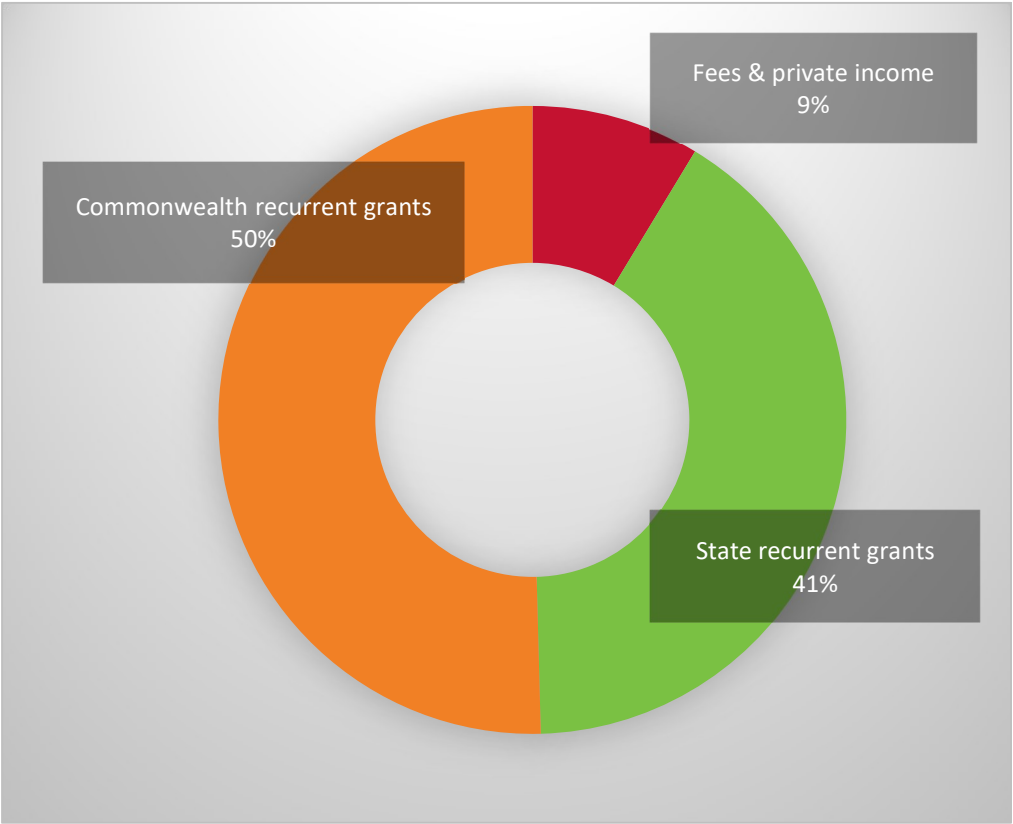
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/australasian-journal-of-special-and-inclusive-education/article/abs/benefits-and-challenges-of-a-hybrid-distance-education-program-for-autistic-schoolage-students-parent-student-and-teacher-perspectives/EC7AE73898DC72A5DAF90FEE415278E8>

Summary from the report:

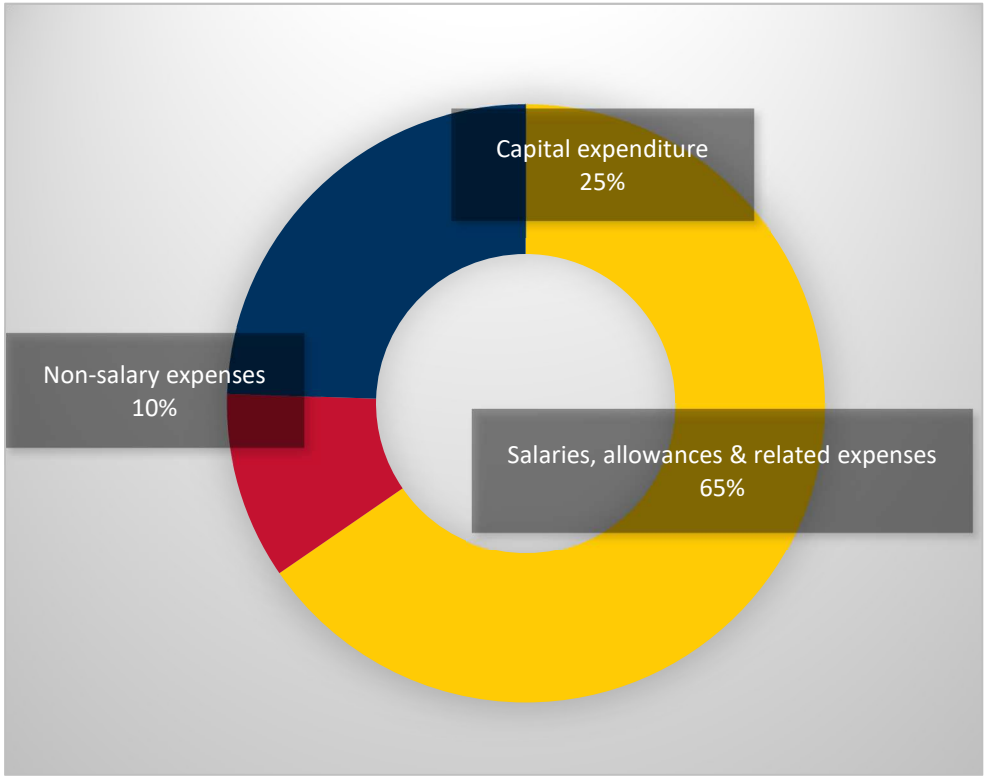
Feedback from parents, students and teaching staff participating in Aspect's first year of a novel distance education program has been positive. The individualised nature of the program and the flexibility this affords along with the support provided to parents, appear to be key features of the program's success. Most students participating in the program were reported to be more engaged and happier as a result and these benefits appeared to extend to the wider family with most parents reported feeling less stressed, despite the extra work that the role of onsite supervisor entailed. A number of suggestions for improvements to the program were made including more opportunities for social engagement, and more communication options between teachers and students and parents.

Financial information

Recurrent/capital income



Recurrent/capital expenditure





a different brilliant®

understanding, engaging & celebrating the
strengths, interests & aspirations
of people on the autism spectrum

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