

2020 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 schools 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 schools

provide specialised evidence-informed programs for children aged 4 to 17 on the autism spectrum, who require an autism specific program.

The primary focus of the schools is to equip students with the skills to become as independent as possible and enable them to 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 also focuses on the following elements: 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



Extend Aspect's reach and enhance people capabilities

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



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



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 2020 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 2020, Aspect Hunter School enrolled 180 students across the Hunter, Newcastle and Port Macquarie areas from Kindergarten to year 11. The school comprises an administrative base at Thornton which offers primary and high school enrolment and a range of satellites classes located at Tarro, Waratah West, Abermain, Cardiff, Muswellbrook and Port Macquarie. Our newest satellite class opened in Muswellbrook at the beginning of the 2020 school year at St James Primary School. All satellite locations offer primary education except for our Port Macquarie high school site.

The 2020 school year marked the opening of Aspect Hunter School Distance Education program for students on the autism spectrum in years 3 to 6 living in NSW. The program enrolled 12 students in 2020 and included a 15-day residential program at the main school site at Thornton.

The 2020 school year presented us with unprecedented challenges, professionally and personally. I look back on the year with pride in how our school responded to COVID-19 and navigated an alternate school model and at the same time provided support to one another, our students and families. In the midst of 2020 we also renewed our NESA registration and accreditation.

Given the year it was, we were pleasantly surprised to receive continued support from the broader community in the way of funding for school projects. The following projects were initiated:

- Coffee hut
- New playground equipment and gardens at our main school site
- Refurbishments for our Port High School satellite classes
- New technology and furniture for across the sites

In 2020 our school participated in the Perspectives: Your School in Focus survey involving staff, student and families sharing their experiences of our school. We were thrilled with our results, including an NPS score of 84.6 which demonstrated the strength of our school and identified focus areas for 2021.



Well done to our students who achieved many great things in 2020 and sincere thanks to our wonderfully capable and dedicated school team who bring passion and joy to their work each day.

Lara Cheney

Principal

Message from

the Student Representative Council

I have been a member of Aspect Hunter School Student Representative Council since it began in 2020.

As an SRC member I have been involved in many school activities like leading our fortnightly assembly, presenting SRC awards and encouraging students to get involved and have a go.

Being on the SRC means being responsible and helping others.

Tom Amy

Year 9 student

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 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

As NAPLAN assessments were cancelled in 2020 due to COVID-19, the most recent information relates to 2019 NAPLAN results which are available on My School 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, spelling, and verbal working memory.

In 2020, Aspect Hunter School initiated the MultiLit program which involved educators being involved in a professional learning program and in establishing programs to trial in term 4, before full implementation in 2021 for all primary classes.

Senior secondary outcomes

Record of School Achievement

The formal Record of School Achievement credential was awarded by NESA to eight Aspect Hunter School students.

Higher School Certificate

Aspect Hunter School did not have any year 12 enrolments in 2020.

Teacher professional learning, accreditation and qualifications

The following professional learning activities were undertaken by teachers throughout 2020:

Description of professional learning activity	No. of teachers participating
Child Protection - responsibilities related to child protection based on state/territory legislation, federal legislation and Aspect policy and procedures (Halloran Morrissey)	55
Positive Behaviour Support Update and Supporting Students with Complex Situations	55
Aspect Comprehensive Approach: Individual Planning	55
Designing Rubrics for Learning & Assessment K-6 Planning (AISNSW)	55
MultiLit: Making Up Lost Time in Literacy course	55
Disability Standards for Education - overview of the Disability Standards for Education (2005) and the legal obligations of all education providers	55
Management of Actual or Potential Aggression - a framework for decision making and problem solving to prevent, de-escalate, and safely respond to disruptive or assaultive verbal and physical behaviours	55
Aspect Professional Code of Conduct - face to face workshop and online module.	55

Teacher accreditation

Level of accreditation	Number of Teachers
Conditional	2
Provisional	9
Proficient Teacher	44
Highly Accomplished Teacher (voluntary accreditation)	0
Lead Teacher (voluntary accreditation)	0
Total number of teachers	55

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

There were five staff member who is of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island origin.

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

Student attendance rates

Kinder	80%	Year 7	82%
Year 1	81%	Year 8	74%
Year 2	81%	Year 9	85%
Year 3	80%	Year 10	61%
Year 4	83%	Year 11	51%
Year 5	76%	Year 12	-
Year 6	78%	Whole School	81%

Management of non-attendance

Aspect Education has a work instruction to ensure compliance of the Aspect schools with school attendance requirements for compulsory school-aged students as outlined by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) or the South Australia Education Board.

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

The 2020 school year was the first year Aspect Hunter School was registered to enrol year 11 and 12 students. In 2019, Aspect Hunter School had seven year 10 students in total. Two students continued with the school for year 11 in 2020, two students were successful in obtaining traineeships, one student transitioned to another school and two disenrolled to explore employment or community participation opportunities.

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 which is not more than twelve (12) months old 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-III, 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 2020	Access to full text
<p>Student welfare</p> <p>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>	<p>Nil</p>	<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</p> <p>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>	<p>New</p>	<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</p> <p>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>	<p>New</p>	<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</p> <p>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>	<p>Nil</p>	<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 priority areas for improvement

Area	Priorities	Achievements
Teaching and learning	Implement and review the new Stage 6 program.	Review completed and informed changes to the Stage 6 program in 2021.
	Evaluate the first year of the Aspect Hunter Distance Education to improve the delivery of the program.	Aspect Hunter Distance Education worked with Aspect's Research Centre for Autism Practice (ARCAP) to learn about the experiences of students, parents and teachers involved in the first year of the program.
	Improve the quality of the high school program by reviewing the scope and sequence, units of work, assessments and increasing opportunities for inclusion in work education and the broader community.	Aspect Hunter School sought advice from NESAs in reviewing and improving the quality of the high school program. The school is creating a bank of exemplar programs for teachers to use.
	Develop whole school values and include as part of the PDHPE curriculum an approach to teaching these and review implementation.	STAR whole school values established: we stay SAFE; we will TRY; we ACHIEVE and learn; we show RESPECT. Teaching program and resources developed to implement the program in 2021.
	Consult with the Aspect Think Tank on four areas of ACA practice.	Aspect Hunter Schools sought feedback from autistic adults from the Aspect Think Tank on the following projects: diagnosis disclosure, student representative council, sexual health and relationships education and supporting diversity.
Family Engagement	Be involved in Aspect's Inclusion Group to deliver culturally safe services and build relationships in a culturally responsive manner.	Aspect Hunter School were involved in meetings and activities associated with Aspect's Reconciliation Action Plan, Multicultural Engagement Plan and LGBTQIA+.
	Maintain family engagement and support during COVID-19.	Processes established for maintaining contact with parents/carers during COVID-19 when students were learning from home. Weekly parent lounges on Google classroom provided opportunities for families to connect with the school and other families.
Staff development	Work with the ACA Coordinator to implement changes to practice for Individual Planning and Positive Behaviour Support.	Professional learning provided in term 1 on both areas of practice.
	Complete training in MultiLit and establish programs and resources.	Two days training provided in term 3, programs and resource kits established in term 4.
	Develop leadership knowledge and capabilities.	Two school coordinators participated in the Aspect Education Leaders program.

Area	Priorities	Achievements
Facilities and Resources	Establish an Upper Hunter primary satellite class.	The Muswellbrook satellite class commenced in term 1.
	Build a coffee hut to house the school tuck shop, canteen and café.	Coffee hut completed in term 3 2020 but use of this facility was impacted by COVID-19.
	Complete improvements for Port Macquarie satellite sites.	New walls installed at Port Macquarie to create three separate classes and an office space.
Student achievement	Establish a Student Representative Council with students from each site and representative of students across the autism spectrum.	SRC established in term 2 2020 with regular opportunities for leadership and involvement in school decision making and events.
	Implement Secret Agents Society (SAS) with primary school students.	Four teachers trained in SAS and three classes involved in the program in 2020.
	Develop a trial program for MultiLit.	Four classes involved in a MultiLit trial in term 4 2020.
	Increase student involvement in individual planning and reflection on learning.	Students involved in completing their personal Five Point Star and IP meetings and students included a reflection on learning in student reports.

Initiatives promoting respect and responsibility

In 2020, the following school initiatives focused on promoting respect and responsibility across our school community:

- Our newly formed Student Representative Council (SRC), representing students across the autism spectrum, provided opportunities for students to lead, represent our school, get involved and be positive role models for the broader student group. The SRC awarded students at our school assembly for demonstrating our school values.
- The establishment of our school values; We stay SAFE, We ACHIEVE and LEARN, We will TRY and We show RESPECT, focused on explicitly teaching skills across the years with autism specific resources developed.
- A new Sexual Health and Relationship Education (SHRE) program was developed in 2020 to implement across all years in 2021. We have sought feedback from students, autistic adults, teachers and families to make sure the program responds to the needs of our school community.

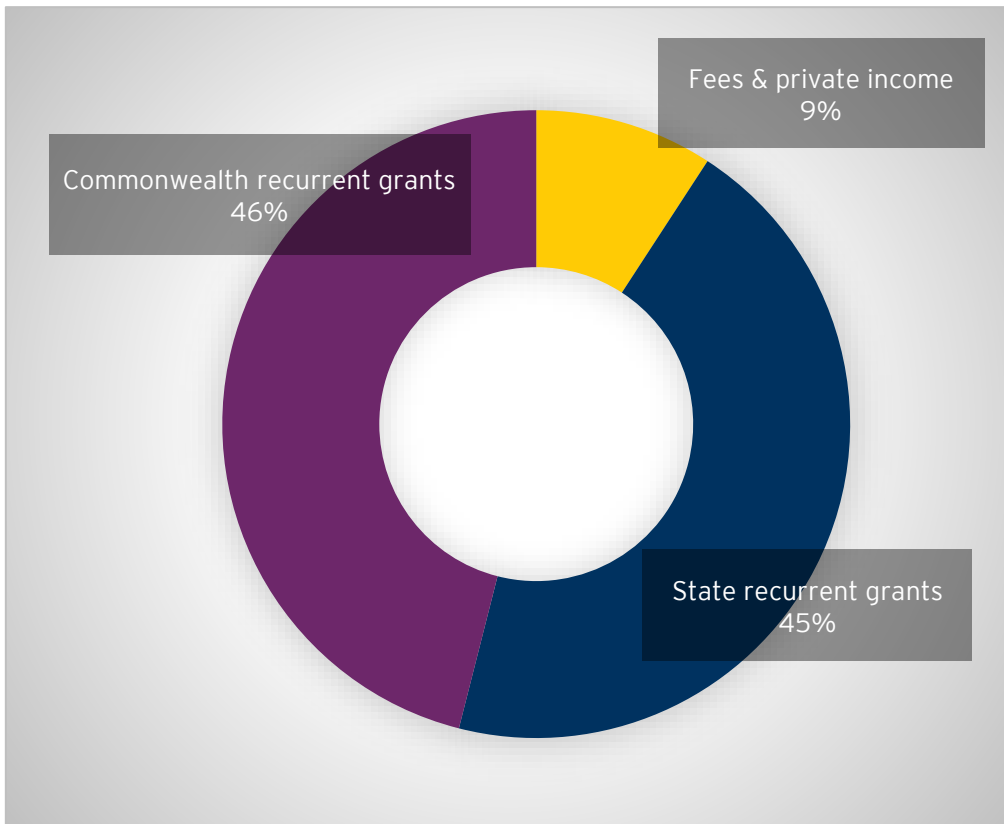
Parent, student and teacher satisfaction

In 2020, 157 individuals representing teachers and support staff, students and parents completed the Perspectives: Your School in Focus survey to provide information about experiences with our school. The results across the board were extremely positive with clear strengths in the following:

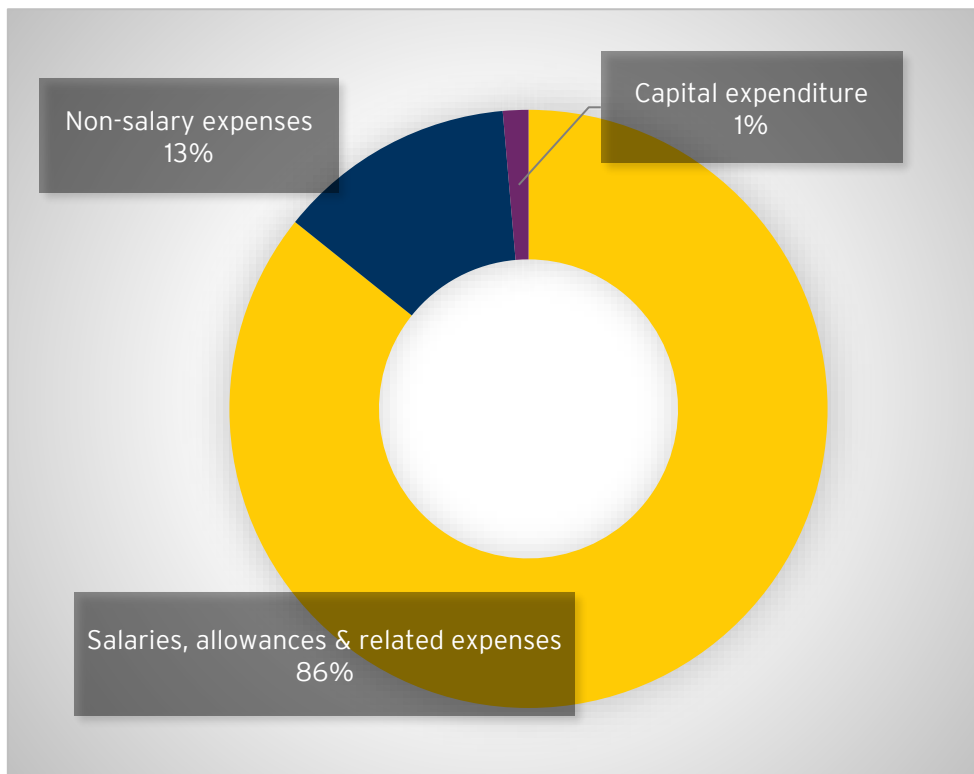
- Understanding of Aspect's vision, mission and values
- Designing learning to meet unique needs of individuals
- Steadfast focus on ensuring inclusive learning environments
- Strong community reputation

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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