



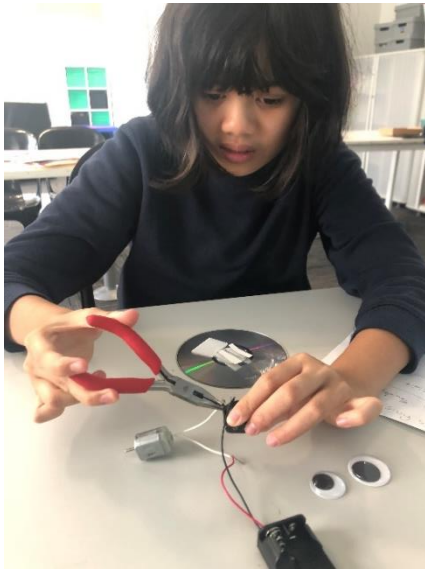
# Giant Steps Sydney Annual Report 2021 review



imagine · include · innovate

## Principal's Report

The school community came together as we navigated our way through another year of the pandemic. As we had done so in 2020, we recognised that it was not possible for our families to successfully replicate the supports required to facilitate their child's learning in the home environment. Given the vulnerability of our student population and the impact of having a child with autism at home for sustained periods, Giant Steps provided continuous service, remaining open. Giant Steps operated with high attendance rates (over 90 per cent) throughout the different levels of restrictions. The school implemented significant measures to ensure the wellbeing of both students and staff.



The transdisciplinary approach to education plays a significant role in the success of Giant Steps programs. Autism specific supports and strategies, including speech, music and occupational therapy support, are layered onto the curriculum within the classroom setting, to ensure our programs are engaging and motivating to our students so they are active learners. Individualisation of these supports



and outcomes allow for students to be at their edge of learning, while remaining part of the social context of the classroom. With most therapy moving to telehealth during the pandemic lockdowns, the integration of therapy in to the school program allowed Giant Steps to maintain face to face therapy services throughout the year.



This year the school said farewell to long term Principal Kerrie Nelson Nelson. Kerrie joined Giant Steps in May 2005. Kerrie was a wonderful role model to all involved at Giant Steps. She created opportunities for students and staff alike while always demonstrating what good practice looks like with an attitude that no student or situation was too difficult. Being awarded the the Independent School Principal of the in 2020 was a very well-deserved award for Kerrie who has shown incredible leadership at Giant Steps. The current acting Principal Andrew Frakes will step into the role in 2022.



**Mr Andrew Frakes**  
*Acting Principal 2021*



**Ms Claire Allen**  
*Director of Finances & Administration*

## Secondary School

In 2021, the Secondary program consisted of 44 students split across ten different classes, in two buildings, the Quad, and Clocktower. The spaces provides an environment that fosters social engagement between students of different classes when accessing common areas during recreational and mealtimes, and enabled the secondary program to maintain its functionality when having to separate from much of the rest of the school during periods of increased concern regarding COVID-19.

The focus of the program consisted of Outdoor Education (hiking), the 2021 academic programs, process and experiential tasks, and student engagement support. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, our ability to access our community activities were greatly diminished, however students were able to continue to access Outdoor Education during the Sydney lockdown period.

Other highlights of the program included lessons focused around a new integrated Literacy program focusing on texts including to develop

2021 continued to present challenges for Giant Steps as the school, our students and families and the community more broadly continued to navigate the challenges of COVID-19 and a global pandemic. In order to maintain the wellbeing and safety of staff and students and with many restrictions in place, teams were required to review the delivery of programs across the primary school in order to create engaging and meaningful content for all students across all key learning areas, whilst, maintaining a safe learning environment at all times. Term 3, saw a lockdown period across the school and it was during this time that the continued dedication and commitment of our Primary team was demonstrated as staff (many of whom where in isolation themselves) continued to look for innovative ways to deliver content and supports to students and their families while at home during the lockdown period. The school was able to establish a drop box to enable families to access learning materials from home and maintain engagement with the curriculum.

In 2021, the primary school consisted of eight classes across lower and upper primary, with a total of 48 students across the program. We

concepts of family and community, the Technology unit of work Household Materials, The Human Body for Science, Greek in Languages, and concepts around money and fractions in mathematics.

Students transitioning out of school in 2021 focused on investigating a variety of post-school options, developing independent, vocational, and self-management skills that will serve them well after leaving school despite the difficulties in access these programs due to Covid-19 restrictions. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, all but one of our annual camps were cancelled, as were many of our annual excursions.



**Ms Claire Cherrington**  
*Secondary – Director*

## K-6 Program

welcomed two new families into the primary program throughout the year.

Whilst navigating COVID-19 we provided a range of diverse learning programs across all Key Learning Areas in line with NSW curriculum frameworks and the National Education Standards Authority (NESA).

In Literacy, we continued to deliver the '4 Blocks' model, focusing on the four key areas of 'self-selected reading', 'shared storybook reading', 'working with words' and 'writing'. Focused instruction via our smaller weekly literacy groups continued throughout semester 1 in order to provide targeted instruction to students based on their 'edge of learning'. In semester 2, these targeted groups were put on hold as we limited movement of students as part of our COVID-19 risk management. Across the year, during 'shared reading' we explored the units of work, 'Monsters' and 'Stories about Friendship'. Our 'Stories about Friendship' unit presented some lovely opportunities to explore key concepts related to building connections with peers including helping each other, characteristics of friendship and common interests and differences with our peers. Such a



wonderful opportunity to support our students to deepen their connections with each other!

In Numeracy, we supported students to explore a range of mathematical concepts through varied and dynamic learning experiences. Our 'Morning Meeting' program supported students to explore initial concepts around time, routines & schedules and our 'Healthy Eating & Cooking Program' supported students to learn about volume and capacity. Additionally, through our 'Topics' units of work we explored concepts including money, whole number and multiplication & division.

In History, Science & Geography we delved into units of work based on the themes of 'Transport' and 'Weather & Seasons'. In the 'Weather and Seasons' unit students had an opportunity to explore different weather and seasonal patterns by looking at their differing features and characteristics. They helped to identify appropriate clothing items needed for different temperatures as well as what additional items may be required e.g. sunscreen and a towel for the beach or an umbrella or raincoat for inclement weather.

Creative and Performing Arts continued to be a strong area within the primary program, and we feel privileged to have such a wonderful creative arts team, who, in partnership with our teachers and educators supported students to explore the themes of 'Disco' and "Medieval Music'. As part of the 'Disco' unit of work, students were able to set up the library space with lights, music, and disco artworks to host their very own disco! It was a hit!

In PDHPE, health and safety restrictions limited both our onsite and offsite movements. This meant we were less able to access community settings such as gymnastics and swimming as part of our

PDHPE programs. We were fortunate to be able to continue with 'Outdoor Education' programs which predominantly focused on access to bushwalking and other outdoor settings.

Whilst we were unable to have families onsite for much of the year, meaning, we were not able to conduct some of our usual family celebrations, we were able to include a number of novel and special events across the year. Some these highlights included our Halloween celebrations which saw students dress up, create their own 'trick or treat' bags and move through the school to 'Trick or Treat' and celebrate with their peers. Our Term 1 camp to Shoalhaven Heads was also a wonderful opportunity for some of our upper primary students to experience a school camp. Some highlights from the camp included visits to Shoalhaven Zoo, Wollongong Discovery Centre, the Kiama Blowhole and 'Flip Out'.

As the year drew to a close, we supported seven of our students to prepare for the transition from primary school into the secondary school program as well as supporting one student to successfully transition into a support class at the local mainstream school and one student to move overseas with family.



**Ms Jenny Loughnan and Ms Rachael Bowen**  
*Directors of Junior Program*

## Occupational Therapy

At Giant Steps, our Occupational Therapists work within the schools transdisciplinary model. This model allows the team to work alongside teachers, speech therapists and music therapists collaboratively, assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum and therapy programs for our students.

Occupational Therapists at Giant Steps implement their knowledge and skills through demonstration or consultation within each class team, as well as taking a holistic approach working alongside parents to implement individualised strategies. This includes developing and using specific assessments (e.g. activities of daily living, sensory processing, handwriting and fine motor assessments) to assess occupational performance, develop goals and implement programs and strategies to improve skills for participation, engagement and self-regulation for our students. These goals are then kept as an ongoing assessment tool (e.g. goal attainment scale, anecdotal observations, outcome measures) to track progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and strategies to ensure continuous progression towards outcomes.

2021 brought on a lot of changes and challenges within the school due to COVID-19. Programs were altered and modified in order to keep all students and staff members safe. This meant that primary, secondary and clocktower teams were separated into pods to ensure no cross over of staff members and students occurred. Transport and taxi pickups were rearranged, community-based activities were cancelled and regular meetings via teams were a daily occurrence in order to stay in touch across the Occupational Therapy Team in order to best support our students across the school. These meetings ensured information related to the programs were shared amongst the team to enable other team members to complete and/or take over the program within the pods. Regular contact was also made with parents to best support changes at home, and communication was very open regarding the forewarning of changes that were occurring within the school.

With the school operating in pods, the OT room was available to only one section of the school, limiting opportunities to implement gross motor movement and sensory stimulation. Lower Primary and Secondary made their own obstacle courses in different sections of the school campus in order to keep classes going with exercise and gross motor opportunities due to the restrictions to outdoor education, swimming, gymnastics and trampolining. Programs were altered to offer theoretical role play lessons within a classroom in order to provide an opportunity to learn. These included COVID safe greetings, protective behaviours, tuckshop, cooking, as well as learning how to wear a mask. The primary team collaborated with parents in order to send home

resources that provided structured sensory input, as well as movement and fine motor activities within the home. The secondary team also collaborated with speech therapists to develop online class lessons to offer parents at home, integrating movement breaks, fine motor skills and literacy.

In 2021 the focus of the Occupational Therapy team was targeted at the wellbeing of the students and parents during the changing restrictions due COVID-19. This was achieved through environment modifications, addressing the emotional and sensory needs of each individual student and adapting the programs to encourage participation in meaningful activities during lockdown.

This year we farewelled Daniel Snow after a decade of service at Giant Steps and Penny Noble from the Giant Steps OT team after 5 years of service.



**Cassie Roberts-Smillie**  
*Director of Occupational Therapy-Primary*



**Cheryl Toth**  
*Director of Occupational Therapy-Secondary*

## Music Therapy

In 2021, the Music Therapy team engaged in both internal and external professional development, looked to increase collaboration between the campuses, and delivered a flexible and inclusive program to all students.

### Delivery of Program

Despite significant changes to program in light of COVID management, the music program still continued to find ways to celebrate and hold small events. As part of the Disco unit of work, the Library space was beautifully decorated with disco lights, props and music to provide an authentic 'disco' experience for all classes. The medieval music unit of work saw classes building cardboard box castles, dressing up and telling stories for each other in small performances.

For families in isolation at home, the music therapy team trialled a series of online music Zoom sessions, which were very successful. It gave the opportunity to think more broadly about flexible formats for music, and enabling access in times of need.

### Professional Development

With the opening of the Autism Hub Training Centre, local music therapy business Sound Expression approached Giant Steps for training on collaboration between disciplines. Our long-term transdisciplinary practice placed us well to develop a tailored program for their staff team which was well received. Mentoring continued for new members of the music therapy team, with side-by-side coaching in sessions being the most effective method of learning. Planning commenced for Autism Hub courses in 2022 for music therapists and music professionals working in schools.

### Collaboration

The relationship between Sydney and Melbourne campuses continued to grow in 2021, with supervision provided to music therapists across the states. With the increased levels of communication online, sharing platforms for music and dance resources were set up, and new materials were co-created between the two schools to meet a range of student needs.

Two new music therapists were hired for the Melbourne school – Dewi Pearce and Daming Tan, bringing a range of prior experience and knowledge to Giant Steps with them.

### Engagement with the Profession

Lene Jeffrey continues to provide casual lecturing to Western Sydney University's Music Therapy Masters course, and is currently studying for a PhD. At the beginning of the year,

the Australian Music Therapy Association (AMTA) established its Culture and Diversity Advisory Group, and Bronte Arns was invited to be a part of this initiative. This role will help inform diversity initiatives moving forward with Giant Steps as well.



**Ms Bronte Arns**

*Music Therapy Director*

## Speech Therapy

### Individualised Expressive Communication

A continued focus on the implementation of individualised expressive communication systems has continued for each student at Giant Steps. Several frameworks are used to support the assessment and evaluation of expressive communication supports and systems, including The Participation Model (Beukelman & Mirenda) and the WHO ICF framework. Understanding how individuals with autism process information and learn language, in addition to considerations around their sensory profile, needs, wants, visual literacy, interests/motivation etc are also reflected in the planning process. This is a collaborative process as we seek information and input from the child's family and each child's class team. A focus this year has been to develop a further understanding of the cognitive theories related to autism of theory of mind, central coherence and executive functioning and how this impacts a student's ability to express themselves.

### Professional Learning

The speech therapy team was fortunate to engage in online learning to enhance our knowledge and skills of the communication app 'Proloquo2go' that many of the students use to augment their expressive communication. The online webinars extended the therapists knowledge of using the application to recount events, engage in story retell, support early literacy learners and to send phrases as messages or an email to parents and friends. The number of communication apps are ever increasing, and their features are vast and varied. The team was able to engage with a number of these apps using Giant Steps devices to ensure families receive current and suitable recommendations regarding technology and their child's communication.

To extend the team's knowledge of literacy and how to best support our students, the team participated in the course 'Emergent Literacy and Autism: Assessment to Intervention' endorsed by Speech Pathology Australia. The importance of shared storybook reading strategies to engage a child in a book by asking predictive and inferential questions was highlighted as a precursor to early literacy development.

The Autism Hub continued to offer the online course 'Supporting Expressive Communication

for Autism' followed by a virtual workshop. An enlightening opportunity to share Giant Steps approach to expressive communication whilst learning from other professionals including speech pathologists, teachers, support staff and childcare educators.

### Literacy Program

In the primary program, the 4 Blocks Literacy Model continued to expand with staff creating targeted lessons to creatively teach literacy to students. Literacy groups allowed the opportunity for all staff – teachers, speech therapists, occupational therapists, music therapists and educators – to implement the transdisciplinary model and facilitate engaging lessons to smaller groups of students twice a week.

The secondary literacy program was introduced with a focus on initial assessment to obtain valuable information of the literacy skills and gaps for each individual student. The skills assessed include phonological awareness (segmenting and blending, initial sound identification), letter-sound knowledge, spelling, reading decodable and sight words and reading comprehension.

### Refining Assessment Tools

At the beginning of 2021, the speech therapy team's focus was to obtain more information regarding students eating and mealtime skills and needs in collaboration with the occupational therapy team. It was important for the school to capture major risk factors during mealtimes (e.g. choking, difficulties managing specific food and drink), food allergies or intolerances, and food aversions in order to provide safe management of risk factors, avoid reactions to food, and provide opportunities for our students to explore and accept a variety of new food and drink options into their diets. The parent body completed a questionnaire highlighting difficulties or modifications to diet that occurs at home. Those students with areas of concerns were assessed via observation during school mealtimes and recommendations or alerts were documented within the student's individual profiles or highlighted in the mealtime environment.

A new tool for documenting each student's unique expressive communication profile was introduced in 2021. The assessment structure mirrors the Participation Model to highlight the



Giant Steps approach and the intricate decision-making process and numerous considerations that are completed prior to implementing Alternative and Augmentative Communication strategies. The assessment analyses communication preferences, previous strategies/systems, visual literacy skills, comprehension and considers barriers to communication including emotional regulation, sensory processing, motivation, engagement, and cognitive models. The team is optimistic that this assessment tool will be invaluable in supporting families and external providers to reach greater levels of understanding and collaboration to achieve goals.

### COVID-19 impact

In term three and four, therapy provision was significantly disrupted with the implementation of 'pods' to reduce the likelihood of close contacts and a subsequent school-wide shutdown. The speech therapy team welcomed new members of the team during this unprecedented time and their dedication to persevere with the changes are appreciated. Despite reduced capacity to directly observe students, implement strategies and assess goals, the team worked hard to ensure communication and collaboration was occurring via phone calls, team meetings and emails for all students who were receiving a reduced amount of speech therapy support.

The speech therapy team continued to offer practical support through developing and sharing several resources including forewarnings and 'social stories' explaining the changes to what was and was not available particularly during the school-wide isolation period in August. The families were able to see first-hand the power of autism friendly visual supports to assist their child to understand the considerable number of changes that occurred during this time.



**Katherine Halter**  
*Acting Director of Speech Therapy*

### The Rob Llewellyn-Jones Clinical Centre

In 2021 we held 21 clinic days, seeing 60 students from K-6, Secondary and Adult Services over 198 appointments. This included a clinic running during the schools lockdown period, and considerable additional contact with both the visiting developmental paediatrician and psychiatrist to help support students and families through that difficult time. Additional clinic days were also added to the schedule at both the middle and end of the year due to high demand. Outside of the schools lockdown period, the clinic continued to bring the doctors onsite even during the pandemic, with doctors observing students with social distances in place. Parents attended meetings remotely for portions of the year, particularly in Terms 3 and 4, with video links and phone conferencing being widely used.

The clinic team is made of the visiting doctors, myself and Andrew Frakes, Acting Principal. Dr Richard Webster, paediatric neurologist at Sydney Children's Hospital Westmead, continued to collaborate with the team, consulting in person in Term 1 and remotely in Term 4. This continues to be a highly valuable resource to our families.

The key benefits to the onsite clinic continue to be:

- Students not needing to leave school to access hospitals, doctors surgeries or clinics
- Shorter wait times for an initial appointment
- Longer appointment times available, regular follow ups available
- Collaborative care from a highly experienced medical and psychiatric team
- Decreased student and family stress

The ongoing presence of the clinic at Giant Steps continues to facilitate dialogue about mental health for both families and staff, and the need to consider it as an essential component to our students' wellbeing, particular in such uncertain and unpredictable times.

### Stepping Stones Triple P

Stepping Stones ran in an online format in 2021, allowing families from the K-6 program to join Rachael Bowen and myself remotely. This year six families attended the program for nine weeks, learning about creating positive interactions, autism specific strategies for understanding, communicating and planning, strategies for managing misbehaviour, how to plan for community access and new experiences. Feedback from the parents who attended was very positive and highlighted the



practicality of the strategies. The online nature may have made attendance more accessible for some families, but did limit the general sharing of strategies and experience that is often a hallmark of this program.

**Ms Helen Appleton**  
*Director of Student, Family and  
Psychological Services*



## Contextual Information about the School

Giant Steps Sydney is a school for children with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, located at Gladesville. Information regarding the history and context of the school can be found at:

Website:

[www.giantsteps.net.au](http://www.giantsteps.net.au)

MySchool:

<http://www.myschool.edu.au/SchoolProfile/Index/64404/GiantStepsSydney/43740/2014>

The Autism Hub:

<https://www.theautismhub.net.au/>

## Student Performance in National and State Wide Tests and Examinations

### Higher School Certificate

No students were eligible for the HSC in 2021.

### RoSA

In 2021 no RoSA credentials were issued to students in this reporting period.

### Literacy & Numeracy Assessments

In 2021 no students participated in the state-wide or national testing. All students had an Individual Plan with a particular focus on the communication outcomes (Support Document – Communication NESAs). The school uses a range of assessment procedures some administered directly by teaching staff others administered by Speech and Occupational Therapy staff at school in order to ascertain an assessment *for learning* and at regular intervals assessment *of learning*. The goals for the IP are developed using a collaborative team approach including teachers, therapist and parents. The goals are then interpreted and matched with outcomes within the English syllabus documents as well as the Communication Support document. Specific indicators are developed to match the skill level of the child and these are regularly reported against. In all curriculum areas this collaborative process applies.

## Senior Secondary Outcomes

No students undertook a VET course in 2021.

Due to COVID-19 concerns, no external work experience was undertaken.

Internal work opportunities included:

- Office & Administration Jobs
- Store Replenishment
- Recycling
- Cleaning
- Library Book Cataloguing

## Details of all Teaching Staff

Level of Accreditation	Number
Conditional	1
Provisional	3
Proficient	20

## Workforce Composition

In 2021 staffing was stable across all areas – teachers, educators, therapists, and administration staff including both full-time and part-time staff. The staffing ratio across the 3 programs reflected the differences in the model of program delivery. The transdisciplinary model of staff working and planning together continues to gain strength. Collaborative efforts are the key to success. Teachers, therapists and educators work alongside each other, learning to combine their skills to produce programs that target student's individual needs across a range of contexts and student groupings.

TOTAL STAFF NUMBERS		
	No. of Staff	FTE
Principal	1	1
Teachers	24	20.4
Therapists:	21	17.6
Educators / Teachers Aides	43	39
Administration	12	9.4
<b>Total Staff</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>87.4</b>

## Staff Retention Rates

Teachers	<b>83%</b>
Therapists	<b>81%</b>
Educators (Teacher Aides)	<b>84%</b>
Administration	<b>91%</b>

Average Retention Rate – **84%**

There was some staff movement due to Long Service Leave, Maternity /Paternity Leave and these were supported by casual staff.

## Professional Learning

In 2021 Giant Steps staff were involved in **2754.75**

**hours** of professional development across the year. The number of courses attended throughout 2021 totalled **45** across the following areas:

- Safe & Supportive Schools
- Human Resources
- Autism & Related Courses
- Curriculum
- IT
- Student Engagement
- Other including research projects

Average Professional Learning Hours Per Staff Member – 31.5 Hours Per Annum. The Professional Development program strengthens the skill level of the staff and subsequently the level of staff satisfaction. This program also contributes to the high retention rate of staff including teachers, therapists, educators and administrative support.

## Student Attendance and Retention Rates in Secondary School

Student Population	
K-6	48
Secondary	44

In 2021 the school enrolled 92 students aged 4-18 years of age. Retention of students in a special school setting is not an overarching goal and as a school we seek to transition students to other beneficial school placements in support of their learning. In 2021 the following transitions occurred:

- 1 student integrated to other another school in NSW
- 1 student transitioned to school overseas
- 8 students to post school programs

The retention rate for secondary aged students has showed a 100% retention rate over the last ten years as students with high support needs are unlikely at this stage in their schooling to move to another educational setting and are very likely to remain at the same school throughout high school.

Retention rates for the K-6 do not adequately reflect the movement of students who integrate into other educational settings as part of their transition plan. A retention rate in this instance does not reflect the movement of students out of the school. In K-6 Giant Steps actively supports students to move to other educational settings. This decision is always made within the context of an Individual Planning Process involving key personnel, parents and caregivers. Retention rates are not a useful measure in that they do not reflect the integration/inclusion focus of the school program.

The school, due to the small number of students does not report attendance rates against grades as there may only be one student per grade. The average attendance rate is reported on a per year basis for the school.

The attendance rate is very stable and high across the year with an average attendance rate of 93.8%

## Managing Non Attendance

The school implements policy and procedures for the management of student nonattendance with parents on an ongoing basis through the Daily Diary. The school follows up where written explanation of absence is not received from the parents. Absences are monitored and parent meetings are held to resolve the non-attendance. Mandatory reporting procedures apply where absences are extended or the student may be at risk.

## Post School Destinations

Provision of support services for young people with high support needs continues to be a challenge. Giant Steps continues to be a leader in the field with the establishment of the Adult Autism Services Giant Steps (AASGS) in 2008, and as we progress, the staff are considering more flexible options and programs to meet the changing needs of young adults.

Eight students transitioned to post school programs at the end of 2021 funded through the NDIS. All students took up a part time placement at AASGS and were supported in their transition to other services that made up a five day per week program for each of the students in 2021.

## Enrolment Policies and Characteristics of the Student Body

In 2021 the school enrolled 92 students aged 4-18 years of age. The student population come from a very wide and diverse background and includes students with a language background other than



English. The school population is drawn from the greater Sydney metropolitan area.

The demand for enrolment at Giant Steps continues to increase with the majority of applications coming from families wanting an educational service that includes autism friendly teaching strategies combined with therapy services delivered within a curriculum framework.

The school population breakdown is as follows:

Student Population	
<b>K-6</b>	48
<b>Secondary</b>	44
<b>Total Males</b>	61
<b>Total Females</b>	31
<b>Student Total</b>	92

## School Enrolment Policy

Giant Steps Australia is a comprehensive co-educational K-12 special school providing an education for students who have a primary diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. The School operates and is registered through the NSW Education Standards Authority. All applications will be processed in order of receipt and consideration will be given to the applicant's support for the ethos of the school, diagnosis, siblings already attending the school and other criteria determined by the school from time to time.

Once enrolled, families are expected to support the school's ethos and comply with the school rules to maintain the enrolment.

Enrolment Policy can be found as appendix 1

## Enrolment Procedures

- All applications should be processed within the school's enrolment policy.
- Consider each applicant's supporting statement / interview responses regarding their ability and willingness to support the school's ethos.

- Consider each applicant's educational needs. To do this, the school will need to gather information and consult with the parents/family and other relevant persons.
- Identify any strategies which need to be put into place to accommodate the applicant before a decision regarding the enrolment is made.
- Inform the applicant of the outcome.

## School Policies

All Policies, Guidelines and Procedures are available in full text on My School (intranet), Operational Handbook and by request. All Policies, Procedures and Guidelines are reviewed on a three year cycle.

The Workplace Health and safety Committee also review policies and procedures in the WHS area and provide training for staff.

- Code of Conduct
- Communication Bill of Rights
- Child Protection
- Code of Ethics
- Enrolment Process
- Mandatory Reporting
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Premises and Buildings
- Reportable Conduct
- Student Attendance
- Student Behaviour Support
- Student Welfare
- Use of Email and Electronic Facilities
- Safe and Supportive Environment
- Attendance
- Assessment

## School Guidelines

- Alcohol
- Anaphylaxis
- Anti-discrimination
- Anti-harassment
- Asthma
- Workplace Attire
- Communication Protocol
- Copyright
- Electrical Safety
- First Aid
- Hazardous Materials
- Injuries to Staff
- Injuries to Students
- Toileting
- Injury Management Plan
- Lead Safe

- Playground Supervision
- Privacy
- Return to Work Coordinator
- Return to Work Program
- Smoking
- Staff Mobile Phones
- Student Reports
- Student Sickness
- Sun Protection
- Sunscreen
- Unwanted Visitors
- Visitors
- Volunteers
- Extreme Heat Guidelines

## School Procedures

- Administering Medication
- Buildings and Grounds
- Complaints and Grievances
- Early Pick-up of Students
- Education & Financial Reporting
- Emergency Management Plan
- Employment Screening
- Excursions
- Individual Plans
- Late Arrival of Students
- Lead Safe
- Medical Treatment for Students
- WHS Maintenance Work
- Reporting Procedures
- Returns to BOS
- School Operation
- Student Files
- Assisted School Drivers
- Assisted School Transport (taxi) Waiting Area

## Policies

Policies for:

- Student welfare
- Discipline
- Reporting complaints and resolving grievances

### A. Policies for Student Welfare

The school seeks to provide a safe and supportive environment which:

- minimises risk of harm and ensures students feel secure
- supports the physical, social, academic and emotional development of students
- provides student welfare policies and programs that develop a sense of self-worth and foster personal development

To ensure that all aspects of the school's mission for providing for a student's welfare are implemented, policies and procedures were in place and revised during 2014 (see list above).

### B. Policies for Student Discipline

Students are required to abide by the school's rules and to follow the directions of teachers and other people with authority delegated by the school. Students with ASD find it difficult to follow rules that may have little personal meaning; however they are part of keeping students safe. Students will be supported through environmental modifications, visual supports and teaching and learning programmes to follow those rules related to health, safety and welfare for both staff and students. The support level of students is constantly monitored. As behaviour is seen as having a communicative function for students with Autism, the onus is on staff to ensure that the appropriate environmental supports as well as communication interventions are in place to support the students as they learn new replacement behaviours.

Corporal punishment or any aversive practice is not permitted under any circumstances.

All disciplinary action that may result in any sanction against the student provides processes based on procedural fairness. Such processes would also include an advocate to act on behalf of the child or family.

The full text of the school's discipline policy and associated procedures is provided to all members of the school community through:

- The Operational Handbook
- The Parent Information booklet
- On My School

All discipline policies are viewed within the context of

the student's disability with a strong focus on assisting student's to develop a range of behaviours that will increase their level of participation in all settings and enhance opportunities not only in school but in other community settings.

### **C. Policies for Complaints and Grievances Resolution**

The school's policy for dealing with complaints and grievances includes processes for raising and responding to matters of concern identified by parents and/or students. These processes incorporate, as appropriate, principles of procedural fairness. The full text of the school's policy and processes for complaints and grievances resolution is provided in the Operational Handbook. An appropriate outline of the policy and processes is also provided in the Parent Information Booklet.



### **School Improvement Plan**

**1. Continue the development of the ASD training unit.(Autism Hub).**

Outcome

The face to face delivery of courses continued to be disrupted by the COVID-19 restrictions. A new online learning platform was utilised to adapt courses for remote learning with a strong focus on internal professional development. Outreach projects with local schools continued.

**2. Renovation of bathrooms across school to promote student independence in increase facilities.**

Outcome

Successful grant application to begin bathrooms renovation project. Architects engaged. Build to start in 2022.

**3. Undergo strategic review of IT across the organisation.**

Outcome

New IT services structure in place.

**4.Continue research partnerships with Universities**

Outcome

Director of Student and Psychological Services Helen Appleton is nearing completion of her PhD.

### **Priorities for 2022**

1. Restart programs limited by COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 and 2021.
2. Renovation of bathrooms across school to promote student independence and increase facilities.
3. Continue research partnerships with Universities.
4. Review Programing, Assessment and reporting processes.

### **Initiatives Prompting Respect and Responsibility**

Giant Steps works in partnership with a number of schools through community participation, work



experience and integration to support the development of skills, knowledge, and positive attitudes in relation to students with disabilities.

For Giant Steps students there is a program to teach and develop social foundation skills for all our students across a range of environments. These programs are developed and implemented at a class, individual and whole school level.

The school has been very active developing networks with other educational providers and runs a range of workshops to support the inclusion of students with autism as well as training courses for teachers and school personnel. Giant Steps staff works across agencies to develop partnerships in order to increase the opportunities for our student body.

For students at Giant Steps respect and responsibility is promoted and actively taught as students learn to function within the context of a group. Even the most simple of examples, such as waiting for your turn or not pushing into a line, understanding that you may need to be aware of oncoming pedestrian traffic and adjust your walking line. In each and every activity throughout the school there is a focus on students understanding the perspective of another and for children with autism this is a core deficit. In all teaching programs respect and responsibility is actively taught so that our students are able to successfully participate in the full range of community activities.

In 2021, due to COVID-19 restrictions Giant Steps was unable to host students on Community Service or Work Experience programs from local schools. We expect that next year we will be able to welcome schools such as St Ignatius College, St Joseph's College, and St Alysious back on to school grounds. In previous years we have had around 75 students worked alongside staff for a few hours up to a week supporting the work of the school. Giant Steps students also attend holiday camps set up by schools in particular St Ignatius and Moriah College. These holiday programs are wonderful opportunities for students with autism to experience a camp activity. The liaison with schools and other community organisations continues.

## Curriculum

Throughout 2021 the school staff worked as a team developing, refining and reflecting on how to create learning opportunities that were meaningful and sustainable, integrating both educational and therapy goals for all students across all contexts including school, home and other environments. The curriculum is inclusive of all students in NSW and challenges the school staff to continually find meaningful, authentic teaching and learning experiences that engage, enliven and challenge our students. Learning should be fun and full of delight and joy as children experience the world through school. At Giant Steps we seek to find those opportunities for our students, to open up options and

incorporate individual outcomes in all teaching activities.

Staff are constantly seeking to find new ways to teach and to support student learning, they are to be congratulated.

Throughout 2021 teachers and therapists worked on planning and programming to meet the individual needs of students within classes. Teachers and therapists plan units of work that engage students, are motivating, functional and lead to greater levels of independence and participation in community life.

## Family Supports

The school also developed a range of support programs for parents including outreach programs, diagnostic and assessment centre, Triple P parent training, fathers and mothers groups also run as well as siblings group.

## Summary

COVID-19 continued to cause great disruption across society in 2021. In this tumultuous year the staff, families and Giant Steps community pulled together to ensure the students of Giant Steps continued to receive a quality education. Despite the disruption across the year the staff worked incredibly hard demonstrating flexibility and creativity to ensure that programs were not only maintained but improved.



**Mr Andrew Frakes**  
*Acting Principal 2021*

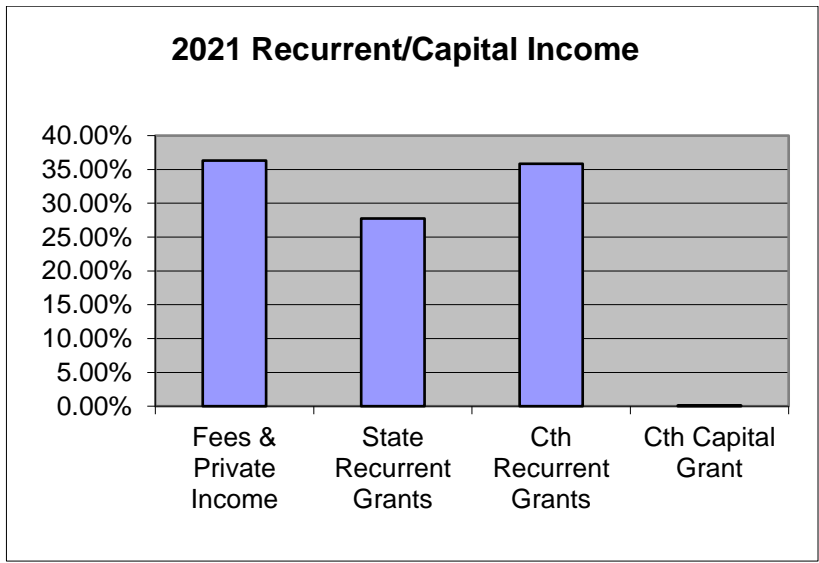
**Summary Financial Information**

**Financial Information**

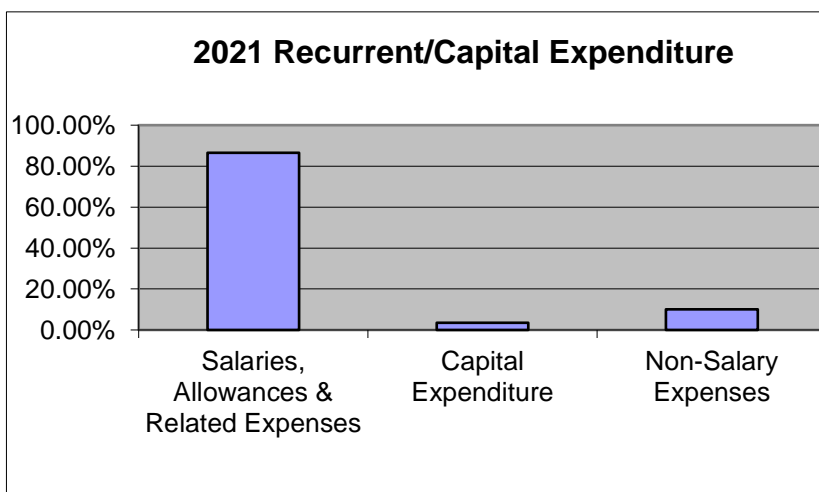
Giant Steps Australia is a registered Charity and a Public Benevolent Institution. Each year Giant Steps has a full financial audit conducted by

Pricewaterhouse Coopers. Giant Steps does not charge fees and in 2021 received 36.3% of revenue from donations, fundraising appeals and support from community organisations and companies. Fundraising was lower in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**(a) Graphic one: recurrent/capital income represented by column chart**  
**Please note: Giant Steps does not charge School fees**



**(b) Graphic two: recurrent/capital expenditure represented by column chart**



## Appendix 1: Student Enrolment Policy

### About Giant Steps Australia School Program

#### History

Giant Steps Australia opened on 16 July 1995. It was started by a group of parents who had children with autism. These parents discovered the program, which originally began operating in Montreal, Canada in 1981. Wanting something better for their children's future, they managed to locate suitable premises at Gladesville, find staff and have them trained by Giant Steps Montreal as well as obtain government funding to cover part of the costs and raise the balance required by approaching corporate donors and organizing fundraising events.

Giant Steps Australia runs a school with a transdisciplinary model integrating teaching and learning and therapy for students with autism. Giant Steps Australia is a K - 12 School Program.

#### What are the Special Features of the Giant Steps Program?

- A transdisciplinary approach where speech, occupational and music therapists are on site working with special education staff in a collaborative team developing individual plans specific to each child's needs and abilities within the NSW Education Standard Authority curriculum framework.
- Integration of students into local schools and communities as an integral part of the School Program.
- Giant Steps Australia uses a child and family centred approach that aims to encourage the children to achieve their maximum potential.
- Programs at Giant Steps Australia may vary from time to time.

#### How is Giant Steps Australia Funded?

As an independent school Giant Steps Australia receives both State and Commonwealth funding which contributes approximately 45% to the total running costs. Giant Steps Australia is also a registered charity (Reg No DGR 32778) and all parents are actively involved in supporting the school.

Donations to Giant Steps Australia are tax deductible.

Giant Steps Australia does not charge fees in the School Program.

#### What Other Services does Giant Steps Australia Offer?

Giant Steps Australia gives extensive training to the staff in integration schools and also runs frequent workshop training sessions for other people in the Education industry working with Autism, through the Autism Training Hub.

Giant Steps Australia also has an Adult Services Program, where graduating students can move onto post-school.

#### Giant Steps Australia's Vision Statement

"Giant Steps Australia will continue to be recognized as a centre of excellence for the creation, implementation and dissemination of innovative and effective programs and services for individuals with Autism and their families."

#### Giant Steps Australia's Mission Statement

"Giant Steps Australia seeks to develop intensive therapeutic and educational programs to ensure that each individual has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Giant Steps Australia also seeks to provide support to families, improve understanding of autism in the wider community and to develop best practice amongst carers and professionals".

#### Giant Steps Australia's Core Values

- Maintain a culture of best practice service to individuals with autism.
- Remain open to the acceptance of new ideas and approaches, seeking continuous improvement in all that we do
- Recognise the skills of our staff, encouraging commitment and dedication from a team of quality people.
- Strengthen professional relationships within and outside of Giant Steps Australia.
- Adopt collaborative approaches to challenges.
- Promote constructive reciprocal involvement within the community.
- Pursue growth opportunities consistent with our core undertakings whilst maintaining prudent financial and risk management.
- Celebrate our achievements.



## Giant Steps Australia Enrolment Process

### Eligibility Process

Our school is funded in part by the NSW Department of Education and Training which has very specific criteria for placement. A completed Application Form, with supporting documentation, must be lodged by parents or legal guardians. Students are placed on the Eligibility List based on the following:

- A medical diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder
- A psychological diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder
- May have an associated development delay
- Is aged between 3 and 18 years
- All applicants will receive acknowledgement upon receipt of an Application Form.

### Admissions

A vacancy may arise when:

- a student moves from one program to the next program because of his or her age
- a student leaves Giant Steps
- a student graduates (is integrating independently at his or her local school)
- additional places become available due to the availability of additional resources

### Offer of Placement

When a vacancy arises the following will be considered:

- where the class vacancy exists
- age of student
- time on the Eligibility List

Offer of a place is subject to an interview of parents/guardians and child. The Admissions Committee will meet to determine Offer of Enrolment. Students are selected for intake based on the following criteria:

- The assessment process will account for compatibility in relation to the intake group and will consider characteristics related to the developmental age as well as social and behavioural repertoire.
- Parent support and commitment in the program, both school-based and home-based. That is, parents demonstrate past and present commitment to their child's overall developmental needs including education, socialisation, communication, behavioural / emotional and general well-being.
- Parents demonstrate a willingness to become actively involved in and initiate fundraising activities

and parent committee work or be willing to support the program in other ways.

## Conditions of Entry

### Parent Commitment

Parents are required to have an interview with a Board member prior to admission to gain an understanding of Giant Steps' expectations regarding the participation and commitment required by parents.

### Parent Contributions

Giant Steps Australia is a registered charity (DGR No. 32778) and all donations are tax deductible. Government funding does not fully meet the costs of running the school. The remaining funds are raised through donations and fundraising events. All parents are expected to contribute towards the substantial fundraising effort required to secure the successful on-going operation of the school.

### Medical Treatment

If a student needs urgent hospital or medical treatment of any nature and the school is unable to contact the parent or guardian after making reasonable efforts you authorize the school to give authority for such treatment. You indemnify the school, its employees and agents in respect of all costs and expenses arising directly or indirectly out of such treatment.

### Change of Details

It is the responsibility of the parents to advise the school of any change of address and contact numbers.

### Student Absences

The school needs to be contacted if your child is going to be absent from school for any reason. Parents must send in a Sickness/Absenteeism note each time the child is absent, or partially absent, from school.

### Exclusion from Giant Steps Australia

- If the Principal, or any person deputing for the Principal, considers that a student's behaviour is of such a serious nature that there is substantial risk to other students or staff, the Principal or Deputy may exclude the student permanently or temporarily at their absolute discretion.
- If the Giant Steps Australia Board or the Principal believes that a mutually beneficial relationship of trust and cooperation between a parent and school

has broken down to the extent that it adversely impacts on that relationship, then the Giant Steps Australia Board or the Principal may require the parent to remove the child from the school.

### **Withdrawal from Giant Steps Australia**

The school requires one term's notice if a student's enrolment is to be withdrawn.

### **Enrolment**

Students are offered a place in the K-6 or Secondary programs. Parents of current students need to apply in writing to the Principal if they would like to move to the next program. See criteria for offer of placement.

### **Uniforms**

We encourage students to wear the school uniform.

### **Amendment of Terms and Conditions**

The Board may alter these conditions of entry at any time by notifying parents in writing. Alterations will apply from the date of the notice.