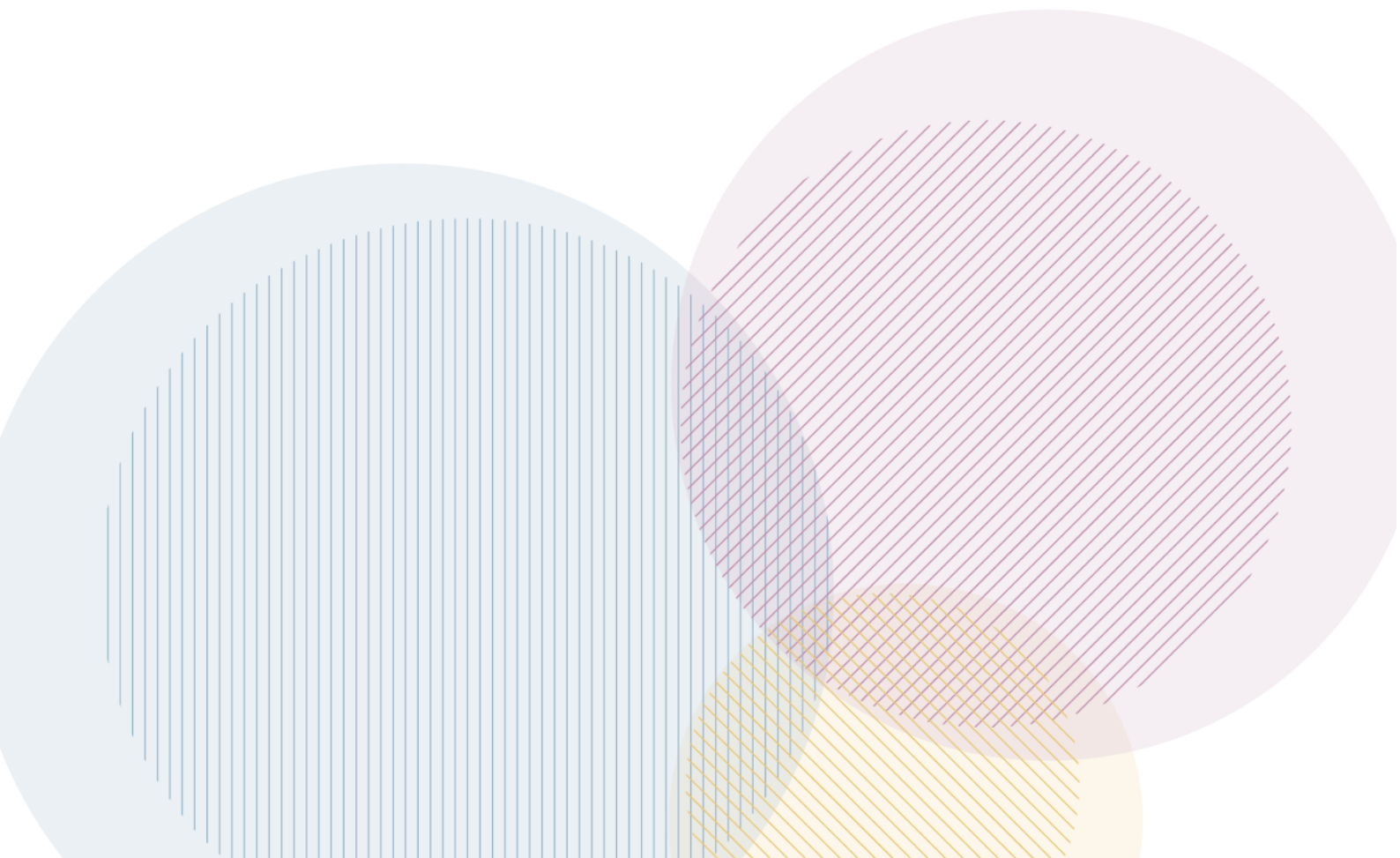


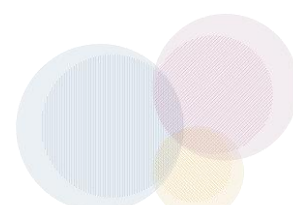
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Annual Report 2022



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About our school

Giant Steps Melbourne (GSM), located in Kew, is a school for children with a diagnosis of Autism. It opened in February 2016, initially supporting 11 students. In 2022 the school had 38 students enrolled aged between 5 and 18 years old. The school is registered as a Specialist Co-Educational School.

GSM's program is designed and delivered by teachers and therapists working collaboratively within a transdisciplinary model to develop the students' engagement and social connectivity, as well as skills and knowledge. GSM was established due to the overwhelming demand for the education and therapy program established in our sister school, Giant Steps Sydney (GSS).

The Sydney school, located in Gladesville and established in 1995, has grown and now offers a range of additional services to best support students, their families and the wider community.

Further information regarding the history and context of both schools can be found at www.giantsteps.net.au

For further information visit the Autism Hub: <https://giantsteps.net.au/the-autism-hub/>

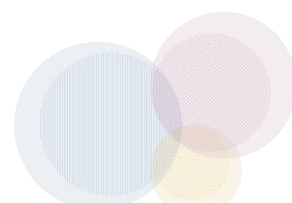
Our Mission

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

Giant Steps aims to provide support to families, to improve understanding of autism in the wider community and to develop best practice among carers and professionals. Our vision is to continue to be recognised as a centre of excellence for the creation, implementation and dissemination of innovative and effective programs and services for children with autism and their families.

The core values of Giant Steps

- 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 Giant Steps
- 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.
- Committed to the health, welfare and safety of each and every student. Giant Steps has zero tolerance of child abuse.
- Together we can build brighter futures for children with autism and their families.



A Message from the School Principal

2022 was a year of positivity, connection, and engagement as we moved past the restrictions of the global pandemic, put lockdowns behind us, introduced rapid antigen testing and air purifiers, and began to re-establish and bolster existing programs whilst laying the foundations for future directions.

Re-connection was a strong focus with the return of key fundraising events that brought people together and raised funds for the organisation. The Social, Trivia Night, Giant Steps Breakfast and Giant Dinner made a return, and new events such as the Scarecrow Festival were established.

Implementation of Victoria's Child Safe Standards prompted a review of policies and procedures against the mandatory requirements to protect children and young people from harm and abuse.

Changes were made to strengthen the Child Safe Standards that commenced in Victoria in January 2016.

Eleven Standards replaced the current seven, providing greater clarity and practical advice which included requirements to involve families and communities in organisations' efforts to keep children and young people safe; provide greater focus on safety for Aboriginal children and young people as well as managing the risk of child abuse in online environments.

Challenges with recruitment of staff to support growth and movement reflected the national picture, resulting in prolonged unfilled vacancies.

Despite the impact of the pandemic, the Giant Steps team continued to build on its culture, vision and values and strive towards practice excellence, innovation, collaboration, transdisciplinary practice, inclusion, growth and celebration.

Being part of the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC) trial allowed us to develop, deliver and adjust the program whilst providing feedback to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority to ensure the Senior Secondary pathway met the diverse learning needs of our students.

Partnerships with local primary and secondary schools created enriching experiences for our students whilst also broadening views of disability, inclusion, diversity and autism through social awareness programs, community action projects, shared lessons and celebration days.

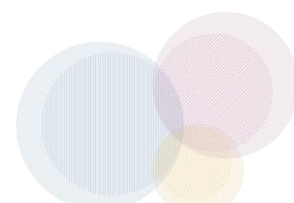
Staff engaged in professional learning to promote the health, safety and well-being of the community through First Aid, CPR, Anaphylaxis and epilepsy and the Crisis Prevention Institute's Safety Intervention training.

A strategic day held in Term 4 brought together the Directors and Leadership Team to reflect and celebrate growth and achievement. The direction of the development of the organisation was also highlighted, focussing on knowledge and understanding, funding and infrastructure, leadership and governance, workforce empowerment, and maintenance of regulatory standards.

As always, we are grateful for the ongoing commitment of our Melbourne School Board who work tirelessly to support the school to deliver the best program whilst supporting the expansion of the organisation in Melbourne to meet increasing demands for enrolment.

Thank you also to our families for their sustained efforts and creativity as they raise much needed funds to bridge the funding gap in what continues to be a challenging climate.

Finally, a special mention to the Melbourne team. It is an absolute pleasure to work with a strong, energetic, passionate and dedicated team of professionals. Their care, support and



shared aspirations has not only impacted the growth of each student, collectively, they inspire shared responsibility, creativity and resilience in each other, which adds to the Giant Steps spirit.

The year ended with a graduation, celebrating the achievements of our 2022 graduating student who transitioned to the Giant Steps Melbourne Adult Autism program.

Davina Bate
Principal

The Rob Llewellyn-Jones Clinical Centre

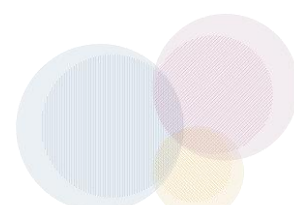
In 2022, the Rob Llewellyn-Jones Clinical Centre continued to operate in Melbourne. Across the year, 6 onsite clinics were held, with families also accessing phone consults during Sydney clinic days for a total of 35 appointments for 12 students. The clinic operates onsite at Giant Steps Melbourne, with our visiting psychiatrist and key Sydney staff working collaboratively to see students within the school environment which could be the classroom, playground, out on walks or wherever their timetable has taken them.

The clinic team includes Sydney consultant psychiatrist Dr Peter Wurth and Dr Helen Appleton, along with Melbourne school principal Davina Bate and classroom teachers and/or therapists as appropriate to the student. Clinic appointments can also include collaboration with wider medical supports and to date has included GPs, paediatricians and neurologists as appropriate and available.

The key benefits to the onsite clinic are:

- Students not needing to leave school to access hospitals, doctor's surgeries or clinics
- Shorter wait times for an initial appointment
- Longer appointment times available with regular follow ups available
- Collaborative care from a highly experienced psychiatric team
- Input from home and school with high levels of data monitoring to assist with decision making
- Decreased student and family stress

The presence of the clinic at Giant Steps continues to facilitate dialogue about mental health by both families and staff, and the need to consider it as an essential component to our students' wellbeing. The clinic and how we support our students' complex needs continues to be a key discussion point with staff, families and external agencies who visit the site.



Transdisciplinary Approach

Our team of teachers and therapists (Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy and Music Therapy) draw on their expertise to provide an innovative and individualised education and therapy program for each student. These programs are based on the Victorian Curriculum and incorporate all of the key learning areas.

Each member of our transdisciplinary team plays an integral part in the design, implementation and assessment of the programs. This collaborative approach allows us to deliver rich learning programs within a supportive teaching environment. These programs aim to support student engagement and develop their skills. Our collaborative approach also allows us to differentiate the program to best support the individual social, physical and emotional needs of each student.

Working closely with the families is also fundamental to the Giant Steps model. It ensures we tailor the individualised program to address the priorities of the family, work together as we support the students in their different contexts and respond to the changing needs of the students as they arise.

Primary Program

The 2022 Primary Program consisted of twenty-four students across four classes. The class programs incorporated a selection of units of work delivering the Victorian Curriculum Learning Areas.

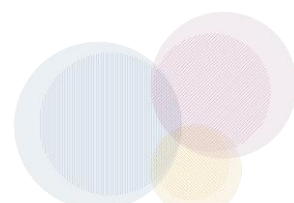
The literacy unit of work was split into 4 target areas:

1. Working with words – Developing phonemic awareness built upon the initial LIT reading program.
2. Self-Selected Reading – Reading for leisure, engaging students with texts based on their interests, developing a love for reading.
3. Shared Reading – Targeting drama, features of texts, comprehension skills and functional commenting. In semester one students explored a range of folk and fairy tales in the 'Once upon a time' unit, and in semester two focused on stories by Alison Lester.
4. Writing – Integrated across all units of work.

Mathematics was split into 3 target areas:

1. Morning Meeting – exploring calendars, schedules and time.
2. Money and Financial Matters – developing knowledge of money and how to use it.
3. Topics – explicit teaching of the Victorian curriculum strands.

Core Giant Steps units such as Cooking (Design and Technologies), Becoming Me, Games and Sports, Activities of Daily Living (HPE) remained consistent with previous years, enabling students to build upon and consolidate prior learnings. Additional themed units of work for the year included Building and Construction (History and Geography), Me and My Body (Digital technologies and Science), Celebrations (Music and Dance) and Countries (Media and Visual Arts). These teaching and learning activities offered opportunities for students to enhance and generalise skills within new and motivating topic areas. Critical and Creating Thinking and Personal and Social Capabilities goals were delivered across all program areas.



The Outdoor Education program continued to be an integral part of our work at Giant Steps with a real focus on independence, leadership, regulation, and community skills. Students explored local areas along the Yarra River as well as venturing further into bushland to explore nature and achieve a greater impact on their regulation across the week.

The transdisciplinary model of therapy continued to be integrated with programs in the Primary school, ensuring all students benefited from consistent exposure to these therapies both inside and outside the classroom.

A highlight of the year for all students was the 'Day Camps'. Some students spent a day hiking in Gresswell Forest and enjoyed a BBQ, while others spent a day in the city where they visited Metro Tunnels HQ. All students enjoyed a trip to the Mornington Peninsula where they visited the mazes at Enchanted adventure and had a great time at PARC, a swim centre and playground in Frankston.

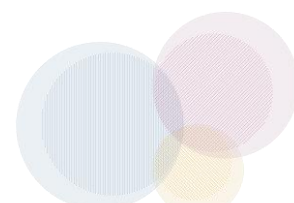
Secondary Program

In 2022, the Secondary Program consisted of twelve students across two classes. Students were between 12-16 years of age with a range of abilities and needs. The Secondary Program was designed to best support the students as they progress through an important stage of development, the transition from teenager to young adult. The program also prepares students for the VPC program and then Adult Services and life beyond GSM.

The secondary students studied Mathematics, English, The Arts, Science, Humanities, Technologies through themed units of work such as 'Secret Garden' and 'Dreaming and Contemporary Aboriginal Story' in Literacy, Money and Topics in Numeracy and 'Mini Beasts' and 'The Dreaming and Contemporary Aboriginal stories' in Humanities, 'Celebrations' and 'My Country' in Music, and 'Countries' in The Arts. Students also engaged in Health and Physical Education where they got the opportunity to go hiking at Gresswell Forest, and Currawong Bush Park, in addition to engaging in a weekly swimming program at Collingwood Leisure Centre, and Basketball at Boroondara Sports Complex. Many of the secondary students enjoyed exploring Chinese language and food in their Cooking and Languages lessons. The students also undertook learning in the cross-curriculum capabilities of Personal and Social, Ethical, and Intercultural Capabilities, and Critical and Creative Thinking.

Some of the secondary students were once again invited to Xavier College, where they enjoyed watching the final dress rehearsal of the Beauty and the Beast musical.

At the end of the year, the senior students along with the rest of the school attended an end of year excursion to Bounce in Glen Iris. The students and staff had a wonderful time.



Senior Secondary Pathway (VPC)

In 2022, the Senior Secondary Pathway at Giant Steps consisted of two students. The students were aged 16 and 17 with a range of skills that supported their participation in the program. No students undertook a VET course. One student graduated at the end of the year.

In late 2021, Giant Steps Melbourne made a request to the Victorian Curriculum Accreditation Authority (VCAA) to be included in the trial of the new Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC) which was due to replace the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) Foundation in 2023. GSM created model curricula for the Numeracy Strand of the VPC for VCAA. Other curricula were also developed for the remaining strands as part of the trial, though these were not shared. GSM staff contributed to many discussions over the course of the year, helping to shape the curriculum to ensure it was accessible for all students. At the end of the year, GSM advocated strongly for the addition of a Senior Secondary Award that acknowledged the efforts of the students who completed the hours required of the course, though were unable to achieve all of the learning goals.

It was important for GSM to be involved in this curriculum trial to ensure the curriculum is accessible whilst creating meaning and purpose for the GSM student cohort. Additionally, it was important to adopt this curriculum to provide a suitable transition for the graduating student.

Both students engaged in the VPC studied the breadth of the curriculum covering all learning areas including Literacy, Numeracy, Work-Related Skills and Personal Development Skills. Many of these learning areas were covered in integrated units such as Let's Party, Maths Matters, Pop Up Stall and Influencing Audiences. Through these units, students were provided opportunities to broaden their world and explore new connections to people and places in the local community. Both students participated in work experience at Jigsaw, with the graduating student securing a job there at the end of the year. Students also strengthened connections with Kew Neighbourhood Learning Centre and Buoy Pizza. The students diversified the Glow for Giant Steps social enterprise, which now includes making and selling soaps.

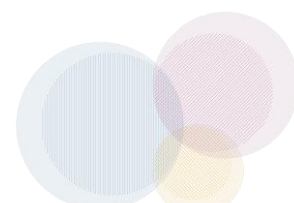
A particular highlight was the Gym program at Anytime Fitness in Kew. The students were motivated and engaged in weekly gym sessions, resulting in a successful community access experience for both of them. The students were always friendly in greeting the familiar staff and learned to apply their turn-taking and routine-following skills to settings outside the classroom.

Occupational Therapy

In the past year, the Occupational Therapy (OT) team at Giant Steps has expanded to include four full-time Occupational Therapists. The primary focus of our Occupational Therapy program has been on promoting engagement and independence within the classroom and the local community.

Throughout the year, Occupational Therapy Assessments were conducted to gain objective insights into our students' strengths and areas for development. The internal Giant Steps assessments completed included: Activities of Daily Living, Sensory Processing, Community Access, and Motor Assessments.

The information derived from these assessments has been instrumental in formulating individualised Goal Attainment Scale (GAS) goals. OTs created three individualised goals for each student. Together with all members of the transdisciplinary team, a diverse range of creative strategies have been



implemented to foster students' growth and support their progress towards goals. Where relevant, OT GAS goals aligned with students' NDIS goals too.

Our regular offsite activities and excursions, that had stopped for the interim during COVID-19, have resumed this year. The offsite activities included gymnastics, swimming, exploring our local community and going on bushwalks. These excursions provided students with valuable opportunities to participate in the community with their peers, practice road safety, become familiar with visual forewarnings as well as support their emotional regulation.

This year we also facilitated a successful onsite visit from the Dental Foundation Team. Many of our students participated in the program. The dentist supported our students through initial assessments, fluoride treatments and cleaning treatments.

Melbourne Occupational Therapists have been in regular contact with the broader OT community, including the team at Giant Steps Sydney, where we have shared resources, discussed case studies and explored professional development opportunities. Further networking is underway, with recent collaboration with Victorian Specialist Education Schools to discuss students from an Occupational Therapy perspective using frameworks including the Person, Environment, Occupation model.

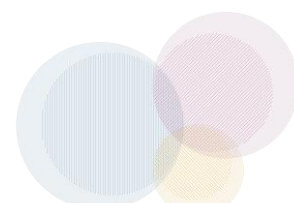
Speech Therapy

Speech Therapy has continued to be integrated across both the school and adult services in 2022. It has been wonderful to continue to provide a level of provision across services, ensuring communication strategies, supports and goals continue to be targeted in a very integrated and meaningful way, regardless of age.

The communication needs of students has continued to be supported in an individualised way. The functional comprehension needs of individual students is assessed in collaboration with teachers. This information helps to inform how we can adjust and differentiate assessment and teaching strategies to better support access to the curriculum as well as support a young person's participation across the school day.

Speech Therapists have had the opportunity to further engage in some professional development to enhance their knowledge of approaches to Augmentative and Alternative Communication. Given the diverse and complex communication needs that our Giant Steps students experience, it is fundamental that expressive communication supports are individualised for each student to promote engagement with and use of their system. Giant Steps adopts an individualised approach to AAC assessment and intervention, implementing a best practice framework, the participation model, to guide thinking and decision making. We encourage a range of people around the child to be involved in this process of assessment and/or review of expressive communication including the family, class team and any relevant external providers or therapists. This process continues to roll out across students and adult participants, with systems being reviewed on an ongoing basis.

As a Speech Therapy team, we have also acknowledged how important it is to continue to build community connections and relationships this year, so we are able to share our model of practice and positively influence the work speech therapists are doing outside of Giant Steps. Lucie Dorse was invited to share her experiences as a school-based speech pathologist with students studying Speech Pathology as a member of a career panel.



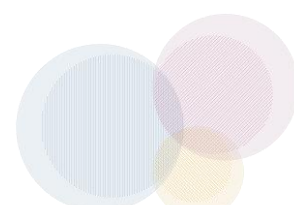
This year our Speech Therapy team has grown with the addition of Debra Lee. We continue to be able to draw on the depth of experience in the Sydney Speech Therapy team who have been able to share their skills, knowledge and support professional development through ongoing supervision and mentoring.

Music Therapy

In 2022, the Music Therapy team focused on strengthening the dialogue between Melbourne and Sydney, as well as providing opportunities to learn about the diversity of our school community through innovative units of work. Music Therapists delivered music and dance programs in the classroom, and in the playground alongside class teams of all disciplines. Programs align with The Arts curriculum content, but also focus on increasing student engagement and diversifying student interests. At the core of the Music Therapy program lie the foundational skills of orienting towards others, joint attention, adjusting to coordinate with others, turn taking, imitation and emotional regulation. The aim of having these skills as the focus is for students to develop enjoyable, trusting relationships with both adults and peers at school.

Across semester 1 and 2, the music therapy program focused on the themes of Celebrations and My Country. The Celebrations unit of work highlighted annual events from around the globe, such as Lunar New Year, Mother's Day and Carnivale. The My Country unit saw music therapists talking with families, gathering information about their cultural background and traditions. These formed the basis of lessons for students, featuring songs, dances and instruments from family backgrounds and the chance to share these with their classmates.

Connections between the schools grew through regular collaboration between the Melbourne and Sydney Music Therapy teams. This was accomplished through weekly supervision, cross-campus team discussions and visits by staff across sites. As a result, we are looking into taking tertiary music therapy students on placement from the University of Melbourne in 2023. By strengthening this relationship, both schools have benefitted through the sharing of program resources, professional development and increasing the range of creative approaches to learning and engagement.



Workforce composition

There was some movement in staff due to the ability to travel after prolonged periods of restrictions. As a response to the national teacher workforce shortage, Permission to Teach (PTT) was rolled out for final year student teachers as a short-term solution for teacher vacancies. In 2022 we employed 2 teachers with PTT status, 1 of whom moved on at the end of the year to progress his career.

TOTAL STAFF NUMBERS		
	No. of Staff	FTE
Principal	1	1.0
Teachers	9	8.20
Therapists	10	8.40
Educators / Teachers' Aides	22	18.0
Administration	2	1.60
Total Staff	44	37.2

Staff Retention Rates

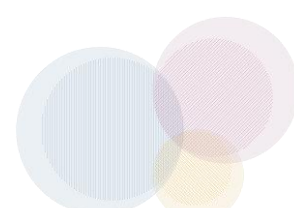
Teachers	77%
Therapists	71%
Educators	58%
Administration	0%

Of the 44 staff that were employed at the beginning of the year, 12 resigned. 5 educators moved interstate or internationally to continue their career.

There was some movement in our teaching and therapy team to support career progression and wellbeing.

This accounts for an average staff retention rate of 75%.

No staff identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.



Student Attendance & Management of Non-Attendance, Secondary Retention

Student Population	
Primary	20
Secondary	18

In 2022 the school enrolled 38 students aged 5-18 years of age. Retention of students in a special school is not an overarching goal.

Decisions to transition students into other educational settings are always made within the context of the individual planning process involving parents and caregivers, and key personnel.

Retention rates are not useful as a measure as they do not reflect the inclusive focus of the school program.

Due to the small numbers of students, the school does not report attendance rates against grades as there may only be one student per grade. The average attendance rate is very stable and high across the year with an average of 92%. Most students have 3 days or less absence in a year, usually due to illness, complex behaviour of challenges with transport to and from school.

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

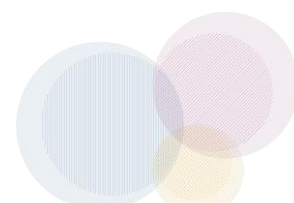
Senior Secondary Outcomes

There were two students in the senior secondary school studying the Victorian Pathways Certificate.

Enrolment policies and characteristics of the student body

The student population of 38 was from a wide and diverse background and includes students with a language background other than English. The school population is drawn from the greater Melbourne metropolitan area.

Demand for enrolment at Giant Steps continued to increase, with the majority of applications coming from families seeking an educational service that includes autism friendly teaching strategies combined with therapy services delivered within the curriculum framework.



The school population breakdown was as follows:

Student Population	
Primary	20
Secondary	18
Total Males	32
Total Females	6
Student Total	38

A ratio of 1 female to 4 males is the usual ratio for persons with autism spectrum disorder.

There were no students who identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Student performance in national and statewide tests and examinations

Victorian Certificate of Education

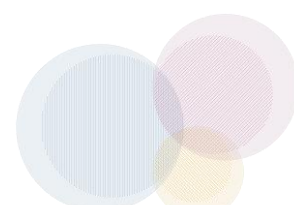
No students were eligible for the VCE.

Literacy & Numeracy Assessments

In 2022 students were exempt from NAPLAN. All students had an Individual Plan with a focus on key curriculum areas, communication, regulation, engagement and participation.

The school uses a range of assessment procedures some administered directly by teaching staff and others administered by Speech and Occupational Therapy staff focussing on assessment for learning and at regular intervals assessment of learning.

The goals for the Individual Program are developed using a collaborative team approach including teachers, therapists 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 are regularly reported against. In all curriculum areas this collaborative process applies.



Summary Financial information

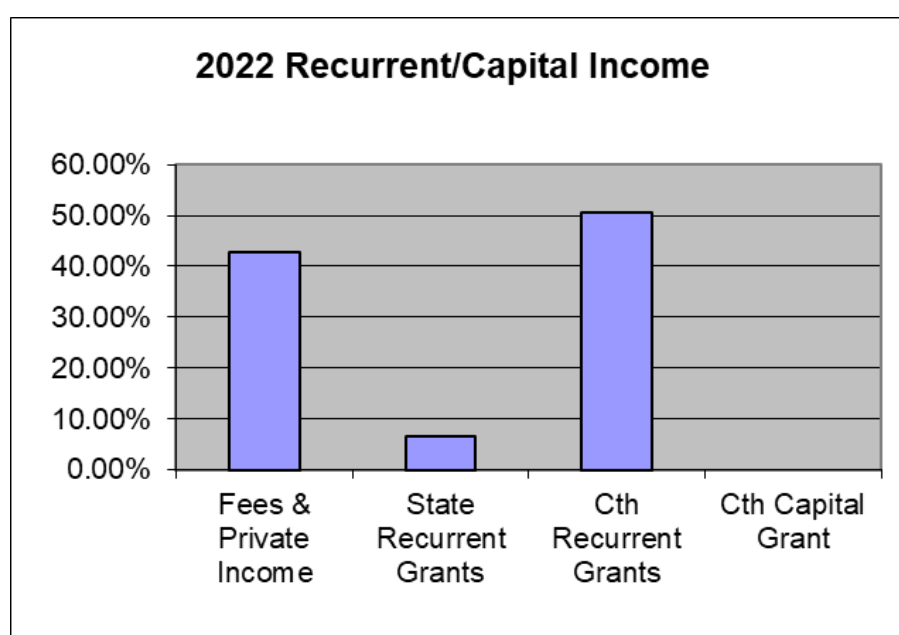
Giant Steps Melbourne is a registered Charity and a Public Benevolent Institution. Each year Giant Steps has a full financial audit conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Giant Steps does not charge fees and in 2022 received 34% of revenue from donations, fundraising appeals and support from community organisations and companies.

Summary financial information

(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

