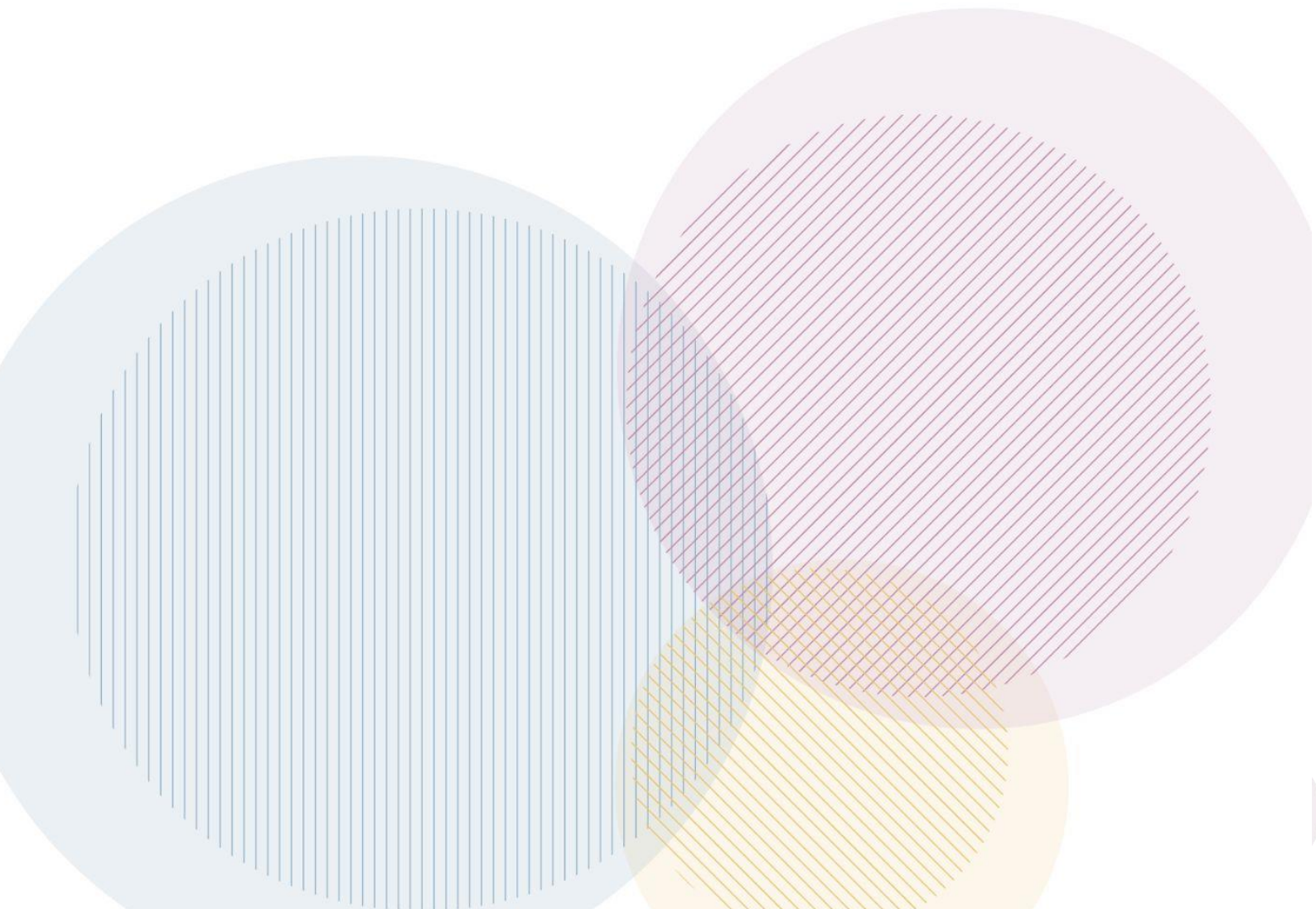


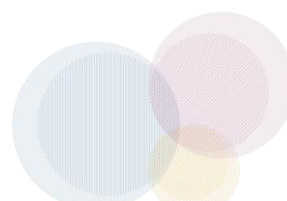
imagine | include | innovate



Annual Report 2023



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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 2023 the school had 37 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/>

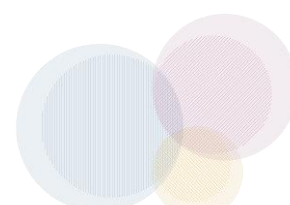
Our Mission

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

In 2023, our overarching strategic priorities guided our efforts to build on our strong reputation for excellence, deliver services driven by innovation and practice excellence, and improve outcomes for students and participants. We aimed to create a well-resourced organisation that is responsive to the changing needs of families, with a particular focus on safety and sustainability of our organisation.

Priority 1: A Strong Reputation for Excellence

We hosted visits from 12 staff members from other independent schools through ISV, provided outreach to other schools to support individuals on our eligibility list, and facilitated professional learning visits from teachers, therapists, and support staff from other schools. The increasing number of enquiries and enrolment applications attests to our growing reputation.

Priority 2: A Service that Drives Innovation, Practice Excellence, and Improved Outcomes for Students and Participants

Our culture has been a focal point, highlighted by a whole-school professional learning with Tracey Ezard. We developed Culture Keys, identified as Innovation, Nurturing, Collaboration, Adaptability, and Enthusiasm, to underpin our approach, whilst engaging in a whole-school program to foster a thriving culture of trust, collaboration, and learning.

The leadership team explored the concept of Ferocious Warmth, balancing the head and heart of leadership which began to strengthen team dynamics and individual contributions, which will continue to shape our professional learning priorities.

As part of our ongoing commitment to Autism best practice we established a consistent approach to set up students and participants for success, encapsulated in the SPECTRAM framework, creating the conditions for optimal engagement, participation and growth.

Curriculum development saw significant enhancements in Health and Physical Education, including an expanded range of activities including basketball, URBNSURF, and a structured swimming program. A review of the health component and Becoming Me program, led to collaborations with SECCA and an enhanced program that includes meaningful, accessible and age-appropriate resources.

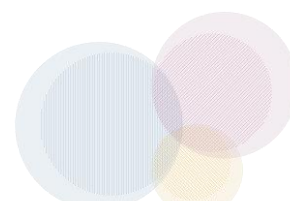
Outdoor education progressed with a new camp model for students, successful camps for 36 students, and the establishment of an Adventure Club for weekly hikes to support health, wellbeing, emotional regulation and engagement.

Wellbeing improvements included the creation of a Behaviour Support Practitioner role and formalised tiered supports for students and families.

We refined our assessment and reporting processes, introduced Compass as our school assessment, reporting and recording system.

Priority 3: A Well-Resourced Organisation Responsive to the Changing Needs of Families

We supported families with Holiday Programs, providing 250 days of HP and 498 hours of support work, and continued to support students and their families with forewarnings, preparation, and supports at specialist appointments and through challenging times.



Priority 4: A Safe and Sustainable Organisation

At a time of increased recruitment and retention challenges, emphasis was placed on empowering the workforce which involved establishing a leadership structure creating opportunities for individual growth, shared responsibilities and enhanced accountabilities. A full complement of therapists ensured efficient and effective trans-disciplinary practice. Salaries were adjusted to remain competitive with enhancements to the Giant Steps Competency Framework, providing further skill development opportunities and recognising staff expertise.

7 members of staff showcased their expertise by completing accreditation with the competency framework, reflecting our commitment to recognising staff growth and maintaining high-quality education standards.

We celebrated the achievements and successful transition of one Year 12 student from school to Autism Adult Services and a Year 6 student to a new secondary school, demonstrating our commitment to supporting individual growth and development.

Community engagement saw the introduction of a new event in our fundraising calendar: the Stairclimb, which raised a staggering \$202,670.19. Additionally, the Friends of Giant Steps group was established, led by a very special group of grandparents. They have banded together to engage and support each other, while providing much-needed assistance to the school. Their efforts include attending to jobs at the school, willingly helping on excursions, and doing everything they can to strengthen community engagement and fundraising events.

Full implementation of the Child Safety Standards ensured high standards in child safety and wellbeing are embedded into practice.

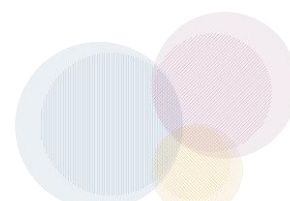
As always, we are immensely grateful for the dedication of our Melbourne School Board. Their tireless efforts support our school in delivering the best programs while facilitating the organisation's expansion in Melbourne to meet the rising demand for enrolment.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to our families for their sustained efforts and creativity in raising much-needed funds to bridge the funding gap, allowing the continued delivery of our high-quality service.

Lastly, a special mention goes to the Melbourne team. It is an absolute pleasure to work with such a strong, energetic, passionate, and dedicated group of professionals. Their care, support, and shared aspirations not only foster the growth of each student but also inspire shared responsibility, creativity, and resilience among one another, embodying the true spirit of Giant Steps.

In summary, 2023 was a year of significant progress and achievements, guided by our strategic priorities. We remain dedicated to excellence, innovation, and responsiveness to the needs of our community, ensuring a safe and sustainable organisation for the future.

Davina Bate
Principal



The Rob Llewellyn-Jones Clinical Centre

In 2023, the Rob Llewellyn-Jones Clinical Centre ran for its fifth year at Giant Steps Melbourne. Across the year, 8 onsite clinics were held (2 per term), with families also accessing phone consults during Sydney clinic days for a total of 60 appointments for 15 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:

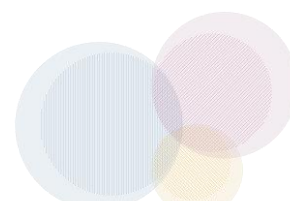
- Dr Peter Wurth, Sydney consultant psychiatrist
- Dr Helen Appleton, National Director of Student and Psychological Services,
- Davina Bate, school Principal
- Deli Winthrope, behaviour support practitioner

Classroom teachers and/or therapists also attend appointments with families. 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 understand our students' behaviour and 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 2023 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.

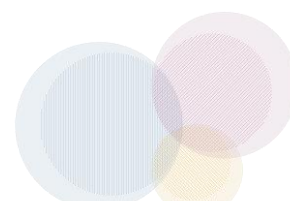
The literacy unit of work was split into 4 target areas:

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 My School (History and Geography), Magical Potions (Digital technologies and Science), Music & TV and Electronica (Music and Dance) and Food (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 variety of exciting camps and outdoor adventures. All students joined in for our whole school camp at Illuka Campground in the Mornington Peninsula. There, everyone enjoyed canoeing, hiking, and bushcraft activities. The inaugural Primary School Graduation was celebrated in December. Four students transitioned to our Secondary Program and one student successfully transitioned to a local specialist secondary school, it was a memorable event. Some primary students participated in the first Giant Steps surf program, collaborating with URBNSURF.

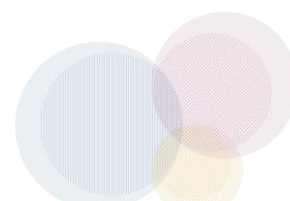
Secondary Program

In 2023, the Secondary Program consisted of eight 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 'Wizard of Oz' and 'Travel' in Literacy; Money and Topics in Numeracy and 'Mini Beasts' and 'Medieval Europe' in Humanities, 'Electronica' and 'Music & TV in Music, and 'Food' in The Arts. Students also engaged in Health and Physical Education where they got the opportunity to go hiking at Gresswell Forest, 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 Spanish 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.

A huge highlight of the program in 2023 was the commencement of Adventure Club which saw students participate in weekly hikes to Sherbrooke Falls in the Dandenong Ranges. The program saw a range of students complete a series of hikes which then supported their regulation across the week. Students progressed well over the course of the year, moving from short hikes to increasing distances along challenging pathways.

2023 also saw refinements as we worked with Adult Autism Services to further develop procedures to support student transitions in Year 12.



Senior Secondary Pathway (VPC)

In 2023, the Senior Secondary Pathway at Giant Steps consisted of seven students across two classes. The students were aged 16 to 18 with a range of skills that participated in the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC).

The VPC continued to be delivered in the Senior Secondary Pathway with staff continuing to advocate for the addition of a Senior Secondary Award which acknowledges the efforts of the students who completed the hours required of the course, though were unable to achieve all of the learning goals within the timeframe.

All 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 through integrated units such as Let's Party, Maths Matters, Farm to Table and Influencing Audiences. The VPC students also collaborated with Community Group, Friends of Giant Steps, to prepare cards for the pop-up stall at the Giant Steps Breakfast. Through these units, students were provided opportunities to broaden their world and explore new connections to people and places in the local community. Students participated in work experience programs at Buoy Pizza and Bialik College allowing them to utilise newly acquired skills in the workplace. Students also strengthened connections with Kew Neighbourhood Learning Centre and Buoy Pizza. The students created the Cards for Giant Steps social enterprise to sit alongside the existing Glow enterprise.

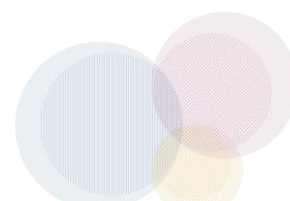
Occupational Therapy

Occupational Therapy continues to be an essential component of both school and adult services at Giant Steps. We have refined our therapeutic support across these settings by focusing on skill development and fostering independence, both onsite and within the community.

Our Occupational Therapy approach at Giant Steps remains person-centred, individualised and strengths based. We have also explored the multifaceted role of an Occupational Therapist at Giant Steps to enhance staff understanding. Key focus areas include emotional regulation, sensory support and engagement. Some of our OTs have also undergone specialised training in transportation safety, to ensure we have the most appropriate equipment and supports in place for students travelling in vehicles.

This year we spent significant time supporting students in self-care activities, such as hair cutting. This involved helping students tolerate the sound of scissors and the process of having their hair cut. We also collaborated with an external dentist from the Australian Dental Foundation allowing our students to practice sitting in a dental chair and opening their mouths.

Our Occupational Therapy team has also expanded with the addition of a new OT. We look forward to continuing our efforts to provide support for our students and their individual needs.



Speech Therapy

Speech Therapy has continued to be integrated across both the school and adult services in 2023. It has been wonderful to continue to provide a level of provision across services, ensuring students and participants have access to comprehension and communication supports and strategies, throughout their lives, allowing for increased autonomy, participation and engagement.

The communication needs of students have continued to be supported in an individualised way by identifying their support needs, interests, existing preferences, potential barriers and opportunities for each individual. This information allows each Speech Therapist to design, alter or adapt and implement individualised supports that address each child's specific needs and fosters ownership of their multi-modal communication system. 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.

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.

This year, Speech Therapists have also been involved in assessing student mealtimes, ensuring that students are safely accessing mealtimes and strategies and supports that actively promote safe mealtimes are in place across the Giant Steps settings.

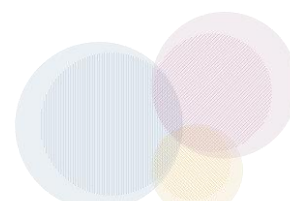
This year we were very fortunate to welcome two new Speech Therapists to our Speech Therapy team who have quickly found their feet to support students and the class teams to best address their individual communication needs. We introduced a Speech Therapist leader who joined us from Giant Steps Sydney mid-way through the year.

This growth of the team allowed for more opportunities throughout the year to support the school and adult services teams to understand the role of speech therapy and develop their skills and strategies to use with students and participants every day. The Speech Therapy team also delivered information sessions to parents and families around expressive communication, as well as the role of the speech therapist in different programs in the transdisciplinary model.

The team also engaged in professional development to learn further about supporting gestalt language learners and considerations when designing, introducing and supporting communication supports.

Music Therapy

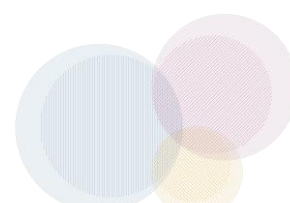
In 2023, the Music Therapy team continued to integrate music across programs with a focus on social engagement, learning and wellbeing. In May, we welcomed a new Music Therapist, expanding the team to three. We continued to develop the music program based on the semester's focus and worked on strengthening connections between Sydney and Melbourne and within the Melbourne community.



This year, the Music Therapy program centred around the themes of 'Movies and TV' and 'Electronica.' Students explored popular music from Disney movies, children's TV shows, and film soundtracks. In Semester 2, the focus shifted to 'Electronica,' where students learned about both electric and non-electric instruments, creating music using Makey Makey and other interactive music devices. Additionally, Music Therapists developed a weekly music play program every Wednesday in Semester 2, focusing on engaging students through music during play lessons. This program included the use of musical instruments, songs, and props to provide a shared, play-based leisure experience.

Throughout the year, the Music Therapy team continued to build connections with the community, including partnerships with the Melbourne Recital Centre, Xavier College, and Our Ladies of the Pine Primary School. Our students enjoyed inclusive performances of a Gu Zheng performance, The Aladdin, and the Disney Extravaganza. These experiences were made possible through the support and invitations from our community partners, allowing our students to enjoy live music and theatre productions.

The Music Therapy team remained committed to professional development and collaboration. They delivered a workshop on music and the Recreation and Play Assessment (RAPA) for Giant Steps staff and attended a 'Music Therapy in Schools' full-day workshop run by Dr Meg Steele and Dr Kat McFerran-Skewes, making connections with music therapists working in other Victoria special school settings. We maintained close connections between the Sydney and Melbourne Music Therapy teams through cross-campus music therapy meetings, weekly supervision sessions, and visits by staff across sites. This collaboration invited innovation to our practice and new, creative ways to engage with our students.



Workforce composition

During the past year, our team faced several changes in staffing. Two educators explored alternative career options, and two Melbourne Storm educators moved interstate. Additionally, two speech therapists sought opportunities in different settings, and one teacher transferred to another school to reduce working hours. In response to the national teacher workforce shortage, PTT continued to serve as an alternative authority for final-year student teachers, enabling the recruitment of one new teacher to our team. Furthermore, one educator completed Occupational Therapy studies and successfully gained an OT role at the school.

| TOTAL STAFF NUMBERS | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| | No. of Staff | FTE |
| Principal | 1 | 1 |
| Teachers | 10 | 9 |
| Therapists | 11 | 9.2 |
| Educators / Teachers' Aides | 20 | 16.4 |
| Administration | 1 | 1 |
| Total Staff | 43 | 36.6 |

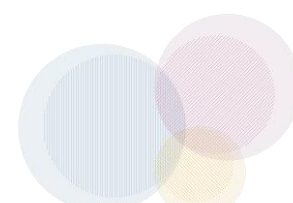
Staff Retention Rates

| | |
|----------------|--------|
| Teachers | 90% |
| Therapists | 77.78% |
| Educators | 68.75% |
| Administration | 100% |

Of the 43 staff that were employed at the beginning of the year, 8 resigned, with some movement across our teaching and therapy team to support career progression and wellbeing.

This accounts for an average staff retention rate of 84.13%.

No staff identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.



Student Attendance & Management of Non-Attendance, Secondary Retention

| Student Population | |
|--------------------|----|
| Primary | 18 |
| Secondary | 20 |

In 2023 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 or 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.

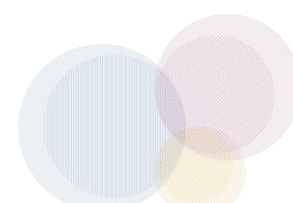
Senior Secondary Outcomes

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 specific teaching strategies combined with therapy services delivered within the curriculum framework.



The school population breakdown was as follows:

| Student Population | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Primary | 18 |
| Secondary | 20 |
| 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.

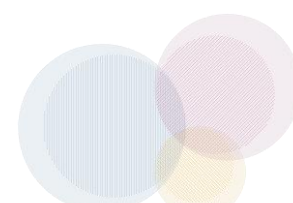
Student performance in national and statewide tests and examinations

Victorian Certificate of Education

No students were eligible for the VCE.

Literacy & Numeracy Assessments

In 2023, students were exempt from NAPLAN, and all had Individual Plans focusing on key curriculum areas, communication, regulation, engagement, and participation. The school employed a range of assessment procedures, some administered directly by teaching staff and others by speech and occupational therapy staff, emphasising both assessment for learning and regular intervals of assessment of learning. Goals for the Individual Program were developed using a collaborative team approach, including teachers, therapists, and parents. These goals were aligned with outcomes in the Victorian curriculum and the communication support document. Specific indicators were created to match each child's skill level and were regularly reported against. This collaborative process was applied across all curriculum areas.



Summary Financial information

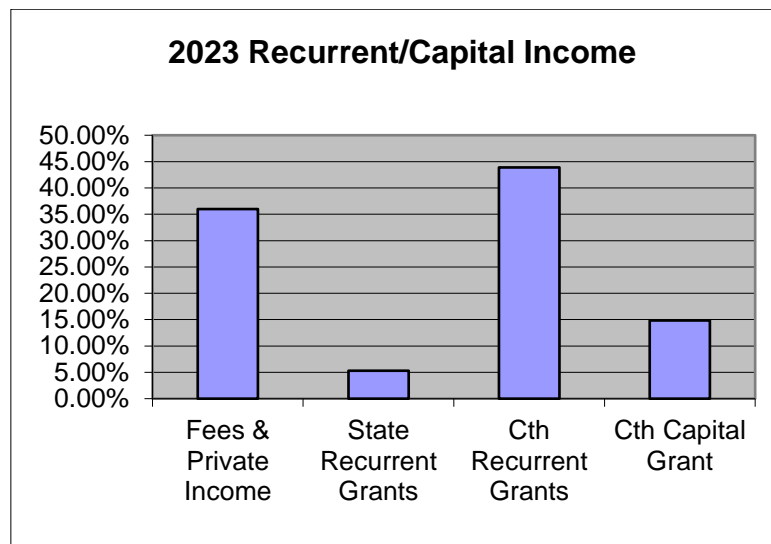
Giant Steps Melbourne is a registered Charity and a Public Benevolent Institution. Each year Giant Steps has a full financial audit conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Giant Steps does not charge fees and in 2023 received 36% 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

