



GIANT STEPS

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

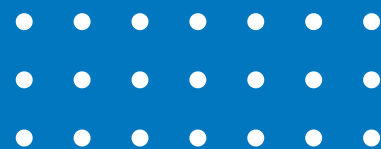


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About Giant Steps

Giant Steps established a school for children with autism (ASD) in Sydney in 1995. Now recognised as a leading education centre, the organisation has expanded its school provision to include a range of integral services to meet the needs of our students and families.

Our trans-disciplinary team supports students from Kindergarten through to Year 12.

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 New South Wales Curriculum and incorporate all of the key learning areas.

Each member of our trans-disciplinary team play an integral part in the design, implementation and the 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.

Giant Steps is a school that aims to provide a rich and meaningful education to children and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. All students, from K-12, access the Australian Curriculum and are offered the wide array of subjects and experiences that their mainstream peers access. Autism specific supports and strategies, including therapy support, are layered onto the curriculum within the classroom setting, to ensure our programs are engaging and motivating to our students to enable them to be active learners. Individualisation of these supports and outcomes also allow for students to be at their edge of learning, while still remaining part of the social context of the classroom. Giant Steps does not follow a single delivery model, but instead takes a humanistic and flexible approach to teaching students, aiming for the maximum development and independence that our students can achieve.

Giant Steps aims to build a community around our families, who often become isolated when a child is diagnosed with ASD. We work closely with families to understand how our students function across the whole 24 hours of their day, as all this information affects their ability to learn. We encourage connections with our local community and opportunities for our students to interact with and experience a variety of environments and people. We also provide evidence based and best practice training to other agencies and community groups to develop opportunities for our students in the wider community.



Principal's Report



Andrew Frakes
Principal

It is with great pride and gratitude that I reflect on the achievements of our school community over the past year. At the heart of our success is the unwavering dedication of our staff, who continue to go to extraordinary lengths to individualise learning and create inclusive opportunities for every student. Their commitment ensures that our students not only thrive in school but also engage meaningfully with the broader community, building confidence and connections.

To further support excellence in teaching, we introduced a formalised mentoring program for all new teachers. Each new teacher was paired with an experienced educator who provided consistent guidance throughout the year. This initiative has strengthened collaborative practices, enhanced classroom management, and deepened our collective understanding of how best to support autistic students. It reflects our strong culture of continuous improvement and professional growth.

Professional development remains a cornerstone of our practice, and a highlight of 2024 was the Leadership Team's attendance at the International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) Conference in Melbourne. This global event brought together leading researchers and practitioners to share the latest scientific advancements in autism. Of particular interest was the work of Dr. Matthew Siegel, whose research into the clinical needs of youth with profound autism affirmed the importance of our practices.

Our reputation continues to grow through the high-quality training we offer and our expanding partnerships in research. These collaborations not only enhance our own practices but contribute meaningfully to the wider field of autism education, positioning our school as a leader in innovative, evidence-based approaches.





We also remain deeply committed to supporting families. This year, we launched a bespoke training series titled Supporting Families to Understand Autism, designed specifically for families new to our community. This five-week program offered practical strategies and personalised guidance to help parents and carers support their children at home and in the community. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from participating families affirmed the value of this initiative, and we look forward to continuing to empower families with knowledge, confidence, and connection.

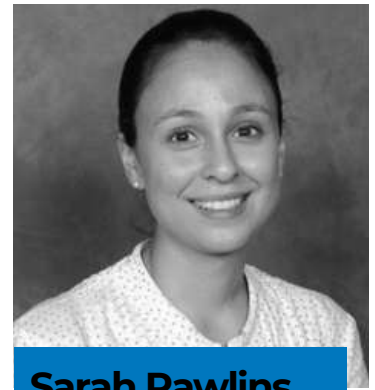
We continue to strengthen and seek new opportunities through community partnerships. In 2024, our long-standing relationship with St Joseph's Hunters Hill (Joeys) expanded through two exciting new initiatives. In addition to the much-loved 'Joeys Day'—where Year 10 students host a day of fun and inclusive activities for our students and families—a weekly community service program was introduced in Term 3. Each week, Year 10 Joeys students visited Giant Steps to engage in classroom activities and build meaningful relationships, culminating in shared experiences such as weekly touch footy games. Additionally, Year 12 Joeys students studying for their Certificate III in Fitness hosted our students for gym sessions, simulating personal training experiences and helping prepare them for post-school fitness programs. These initiatives, supported by staff from both schools, have fostered deeper connections and are expected to continue in 2025.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the incredible efforts of our families, whose dedication to fundraising has been nothing short of inspiring. Their tireless work ensures that our services not only continue but thrive, allowing us to provide the exceptional support our students deserve. From organising events to rallying community support, our families are the backbone of our school's success.

Primary



Caitlin Millauro
Co-Director, Primary



Sarah Rawlins
Co-Director, Primary

In 2024, the primary school consisted of ten classes across lower and upper primary with a total of 53 students across the program. At the beginning of the year, we welcomed 8 new families to Giant Steps, 7 of these families commenced in our Early Years program and 1 family joined the Upper Primary program. The team thoroughly enjoyed supporting the new students and families with their transition into the Early Years and Upper Primary programs and the Giant Steps community, more broadly.

In Literacy, we implemented the Units of Work 'Pirates and 'Aussie Authors. Through these Units of Work, students were encouraged to think imaginatively, drawing links between real and pretend, exploring vocabulary specific to topics and responding to texts in a variety of ways including following procedures, sequencing, and creating their own text.

Following the implementation of the new K-2 Mathematics syllabus in 2023, 2024 allowed the teaching team to deepen and consolidate their knowledge of the delivery of the updated curriculum framework. Students continued to delve into various mathematical concepts through our core units, 'Morning Meeting' and 'Cooking and Healthy Eating.' Our 'Topics' unit provided numerous opportunities for students to interact with fundamental mathematical ideas, including representing whole number, combining and separating quantities, geometric measure (length) and 3D spatial structure.

In History, Science and Geography our 'Wonders of the World' and 'Oceans' Units of Work offered engaging hands-on opportunities to actively involve students in their learning. In these Units of Work, students were able to explore both man-made and natural formations through sensory experiences, construction activities, the integration of ICT and offsite experiences including a visit to the 'Lite Brite – Wonder of the World' immersive sensory experience at Luna Park.

Within the Creative Arts students embarked on an exciting journey through the vibrant 'Pop around the World' and 'African Continent' Units of Work. The Creative Arts units across the year had a strong focus on supporting students to further develop social abilities and relationships including concepts such as social orienting, joint attention, imitation and joint action, adjusting behaviour to coordinate with others, turn-taking, sharing emotion and regulating to the group. The Creative Arts units presented a wonderful and unique opportunity for students to broaden their musical and artistic interests, explore and appreciate diverse cultures and to connect with their communities through artistic expression.



Offsite experiences within the community continued to be a strong focus of the PDHPE curriculum. Classes accessed a number of activities within the local and broader community including swimming, nippers, gymnastics, rock climbing, access to public transport, local cafes and shops. A particular highlight for a few classes was the partnership with RDA (Riding for the Disabled Association) in Ryde. This enabled students to partake in horse riding lessons weekly for a semester and many families attended the open day and have continued to access this service outside of school. These community-based experiences allow students to practically apply skills and knowledge learned within the school environment and deepen their connections within the community.

There were several internal incursions to support students' engagement within the program. We hosted companies such as Apple and Lego, where professionals in these areas facilitated workshops to engage students with new technologies. We also hosted a group of students from Goal College who ran weekly sports clinics with the students. It was a wonderful opportunity to maintain connections with local education institutions while participating in physical activity overall benefiting student health.

We celebrated many whole school events including, Mother's Day with an afternoon tea, Father's Day with a BBQ breakfast and sports morning as well as our grandparents for high tea and to spend time within the classroom. We also celebrated Halloween, Book Week, NAIDOC week and Joey's Day. In 2024 Joey's Day was a notable highlight. Taking on a different format to previous years, students from St Joseph's College visited Giant Steps weekly to engage in play lessons and classroom experiences with the students for Term 3 to develop relationships and connections with the students before all Primary students visited St Joseph's College for a special day with their buddies that included a sausage, face painting, sensory play, jumping castle, slide, pony rides and exploring the sensory art and craft station in Term 4.



Secondary



Naomi Signo
Co-Director, Secondary



Michelle Jones
Co-Director, Secondary

In 2024 the Secondary program supported 57 students, shared across 2 spaces. Six classes within the Quad space and four classes in the Clocktower building. A middle school program was again offered, giving twelve students across two classes opportunity to begin engaging with the secondary curriculum. Flexible groupings between the two middle school classes supported collaboration between teachers and therapists and opportunity to teach to their strengths. Students experienced different groupings for literacy, cooking, languages, geography and outdoor education. Student movement across the common areas of both the quad and clocktower buildings for recreation and mealtimes fostered social interaction with a wider group of students.

The Secondary program implements the Life Skills outcomes and content of the NSW curriculum. Subjects taught are Literacy, Numeracy, Science, Technology, History, Geography, Languages, Personal Development & Health (PDHPE) and Creative Arts. Students in their final years of schooling also participate in the Work and the Community Unit of Work. For students transitioning out of school in 2024 this provides opportunity to investigate various post-school options, develop independence, vocational skills, and ways to self-manage that will broaden opportunities in their post school life.

The outdoor education program integrates PDHPE and geography content, supporting students to engage in a range of activities which included hiking, sailing, surfing, skiing and fishing. Swimming was a large focus with classes accessing indoor and outdoor swimming pools and netted harbour beaches. Middle school students participated in a supported nippers program at Clovelly beach which enabled students to develop and hone fundamental water safety skills.





All classes were given the chance to attend a two-night, three day camp during the year. Students attended camps at two familiar office of sport camp sites, Milson Island and Point Wolstoncroft. Teen Ranch at Cobbitty was a new camp experience which provided opportunity for students to participate in horse grooming and riding as well as a giant swing and rock climbing. Middle school students experienced their first camp at Shoalhaven heads, accessing Shoalhaven zoo, Science Space, the Botanical gardens and movies. A group of eight students travelled to the snow for a four day ski camp – the largest contingent of skiers to date. Staying at NRMA holiday park cabins in Jindabyne, the group travelled to Smiggin Holes for two days of adaptive skiing, including the use of tethers. This was the first time several of the students had experienced snow and provided opportunity to build life-long recreational skills that they can engage in with their families.

Highlights of the year include performances and celebrations enabling students to come together for shared experiences both on and off the school site. Students were invited to attend a dress rehearsal performance at Riverside Girls high, of the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. As part of our accessible arts program, students engaged with the Australian Ballet Education and Outreach and, the Sydney Opera House access program, participating in a workshop and performance of 'Wonderland' in the Utzon Room of the Sydney Opera House. Students also enjoyed a spectacular performance of 'Daughter of the Inner Stars' with live music by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra paired with a big screen animation of the story. NAIDOC week included engagement with indigenous authors and collaborative artworks representing the theme 'Keep the Fire Burning', culminating in the Walangari Karntawarra and Diram Dance and Didgeridoo performers giving our students a wonderful experience of song, dance and learning.

Three new interactive white boards were installed into secondary classrooms, one in the clocktower building and two in the quad.



Occupational Therapy



Cheryl Toth

Director of Occupational Therapy - Primary



Cassie Roberts

Director of Occupational Therapy - Primary

In 2024, the Occupational Therapy team welcomed both new and familiar faces back to Giant Steps. Emily Flanagan and Sophie LoRusso joined the team, and we were pleased to welcome back Samantha Ramjahn. Each of them has been a valuable addition, contributing to the continued growth and development of the therapy team. This year, we also farewell Nicola Furtman after five years of dedicated service. We thank Nicola for her significant contributions and wish her all the best in her future endeavours.

Throughout the year, the OT team has remained committed to ongoing learning, engaging in a wide range of professional development opportunities, including both internal training initiatives and external courses to strengthen and expand their skills.

Delivery of Program

In 2024, the Haircutting Program continued to support students across the school by providing access to haircuts each term. It has been wonderful to see students build confidence and increase their tolerance in a supported environment. Our community collaborations have also expanded, most notably through a new partnership with Sydney FC. This football program has focused on developing gross motor and hand-eye coordination skills and has provided students and adult participants with access to a sporting experience they may not have otherwise encountered. Thanks to the dedication of Jake and Ben, students have developed a genuine love for football—particularly for Sydney FC—and have regularly attended games. This partnership has not only engaged our students but also created opportunities for families to participate in socially inclusive, age-appropriate activities on weekends. The sessions have been thoroughly enjoyed by all, and we look forward to continuing this valuable partnership into 2025.

Professional Development

This year, four of our Occupational Therapists participated in the Middle Leaders program, which involved designing and implementing quality improvement initiatives to enhance the school's therapy services. Our OTs also attended the national OT Conference in Cairns, where they engaged in professional learning, networked with peers, and explored current evidence-based practices. In addition, a team member had the opportunity to attend the INSAR 2024 Annual Meeting in Melbourne, further deepening their understanding of autism research and its application to school-based practice. These experiences have contributed to a richer, more informed approach to therapy within our school setting.



Redefining Assessment tools

A key focus in 2024 was the development of a functional cognition assessment tool. A dedicated working group, comprising from a range of disciplines, collaborated to design a framework that explores each student's functional cognition through everyday tasks in both classroom and community settings. This framework informed the creation of an assessment tool designed to evaluate key cognitive domains: attending, assessing, planning, and doing. The tool not only supports the identification of each student's cognitive strengths and challenges but also guides the development of tailored strategies to support their learning and participation. This assessment will be implemented across the student cohort in 2025, supporting how we understand functional cognition at Giant Steps.

Student Placements

Throughout 2024, the Occupational Therapy team had the opportunity to mentor and supervise a range of students from both Boston University (BOS) and Australian Catholic University (ACU). Giant Steps has continued to foster a strong relationship with Boston University, providing their students with valuable hands-on experience in a unique and supportive learning environment. We also welcomed many students from ACU, across various stages of their Occupational Therapy degrees—from first-year observation placements to final-year clinical placements. Giant Steps offers these students a rich and immersive setting in which to apply their academic learning to real-world practice, particularly within the context of autism and complex support needs. In turn, this has allowed our OT team to further develop their mentoring and supervision skills, while also passing on knowledge, strategies, and professional values to the next generation of occupational therapists.

Music Therapy



Bronte Arns

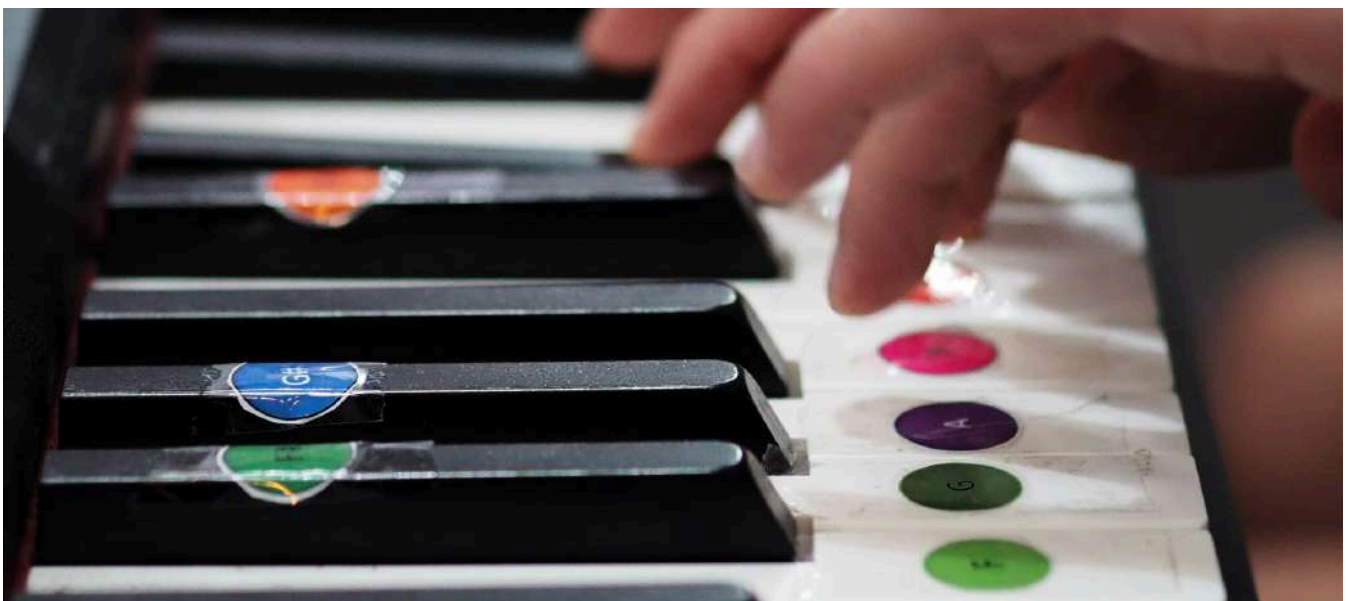
Director of Music Therapy

Practice

In 2024, the team of seven music therapists continued to collaborate in transdisciplinary teams to support learning, regulation and engagement in all aspects of school life. Music therapy programs combined the focus on learning and wellbeing with two topics. In semester 1, students learned about Pop Music from different continents around the world through playing instruments, dancing, singing and listening. In semester 2, this shifted to the music of the African continent, including drumming circles and explorations of African instruments with a range of different textures and sounds. Music therapists provided practicum placements for music therapy students from Western Sydney University, training future music therapists in evidence-based autism supports. Finally, the year wrapped up with two music therapists, Edwin Chian and Louise Blanch, completing their accreditation for Proficient Therapist.

Professional Learning

This year, music therapists provided professional learning programs both within the school and to external providers. The day course 'Engaging Autism' for music therapists working with neurodiverse populations was held both in Sydney, and for the first time, in Melbourne as well. A bespoke course on executive functioning, sensory needs and communication supports was also delivered by Bronte Arns to the staff of Noro, one of the largest music therapy providers in Western Sydney. In 2024 the annual Australian Music Therapy Conference was attended by the music therapy team. This event facilitated networking opportunities for the team, and the chance to learn about innovative practices in other special education settings. At this event, Lene Jeffrey and Bronte Arns presented a paper titled - Creative approaches for complex needs: Drawing on diverse skills in transdisciplinary teams for autistic students. In this, they shared a series of case studies detailing the collaborative processes that make for successful transdisciplinary teams and positive outcomes for students.



Program Highlights

Music therapists collaborated within teams to provide opportunities for engagement both within the school and in the community. Classes from across the school attended an accessible performance of 'Wonderland' by the Australian Ballet at the Sydney Opera House, followed by a dance workshop to extend the experience into movement-based skills. A second excursion saw a few classes accessing the Concert Hall for the first time to watch a world premiere performance of 'Daughter of the Inner Stars' with the Sydney Symphony accompanying a large screen animation film. Each time we access performances like this, it provides the chance to discuss with venue staff how we continually fine-tune the supports for our students in these events.

Under the guidance of Edwin Chian, the band 'Deathwall' launched this year, with students bringing their individual music skills together to cooperate with their bandmates and share the style of music they love with the school community. End of year concerts were enthusiastically attended, and a fan base is fast emerging. Secondary student Tahlee Chan was invited to perform on the grand piano at Ryde Library, which was very well received. Book Week was brought to life with a collaboration between music therapists and the school librarian Jo McPherson, presenting sung books in the outdoors. This was a fine example of making books and literacy more accessible through song and movement. To end the year, the Sydney Gypsies were invited to share their music with students. The band is made up of volunteers from our neighbours, the SES. Their light, jazz music gave a relaxed atmosphere and valuable learning experience as the year drew to a close.



Speech Therapy



Katherine Halter
Director of Speech Therapy

In 2024, the speech therapy team focused on refining and expanding speech therapy practice, participating in meaningful mentoring and reflective practice, and sharing information and resources with families and other external providers. The team also thought critically about the transition from speech pathology theory and research to our established approaches and practice at Giant Steps.

Refining and Expanding Practice

In 2024, all students' comprehension of verbal instructions and verbal questions was assessed. This takes place biennially and assessments are conducted in functional environments including the classroom, playground or during community access. There are a multitude of factors that can influence one's comprehension including the number of pieces of information, physical environment, routine, sensory related impacts, competing motivators, and complexity of language. To adequately assess their understanding of verbal language, regular supports and strategies are temporarily removed to assess their edge of learning. These assessments are invaluable as comprehension is the foundation for developing meaningful expressive (both verbal and non-verbal) communication and informs many of the teaching strategies implemented such as how worksheets are presented and how much information is delivered at one time. As a result, the assessment is completed by the whole team (teachers, educators, occupational therapists and speech therapists). All staff members were upskilled in how to conduct assessments through a whole school professional learning session using video examples and hands on learning activities.

To provide further opportunities for students to share interactions and engage in activities with a range of peers, the speech therapy team developed the Friendship Circles program. The program focuses on learning skills around connecting and sharing information with others. This was a weekly program where a small group of students came together, ate together, chatted together and played together. It promoted social communication such as greeting (e.g. hi, hello, etc) asking and answering questions (e.g. what is your favourite colour?) as well as social interaction skills such as turn-taking, waiting and shared attention. The activities changed each week and included bracelet making, lego, board games and painting. Each activity was selected to promote sharing, completing the same task and being around less familiar peers and staff member. The team witnessed students grow in their confidence in interacting with others and increased willingness to explore new activities and share their experience.

Professional Learning

In 2024, the speech therapy team welcomed 5 new team members with a range of previous experience and expertise. To ensure continuity and sustainability of our practice at Giant Steps, these team members engaged in an extensive induction program consisting of weekly formal supervision sessions, side by side mentoring and multiple training sessions to learn the foundations and essential frameworks of Giant Steps.

As 2024 saw a consolidation of both Giant Steps internal and external professional learning series, some members of the speech therapy team participated in a course about refining presentation skills and preparing engaging and meaningful presentations run by Rob Rossano. Key takeaways included having hands on practical components and keeping to three key main points or takeaways so participants can recall and implement what was discussed.

These skills were implemented in external training sessions through the Autism Training Hub where members of the speech therapy team contributed to presentations to teachers, support workers, other speech therapists and early intervention workers that work in primary schools, special education schools and daycares. The presenters value the opportunity to share knowledge with the external community and to also think critically about how the strategies used at Giant Steps can be practically transferred into other settings.

A group of senior speech therapists participated in Leading from the Middle program run by the AIS over 5 days across the year. Giant Steps value middle leaders and strive to develop leadership qualities to continue to maintain collaborative working relationships within teams. The participants learnt about how to manage difficult conversations, establish personal aims and values, how to implement change and used these skills to implement a change project within the school community.

Relationships with Universities

Giant Steps welcomed 3 Speech Pathology students from the University of Technology – Sydney (UTS) for a placement experience. Giant Steps offers a unique setting for university students to deepen their knowledge about autism and multimodal communication in a school-based (whole group) setting. University students learn key professional skills including collaboration, learning skills from other disciplines particularly occupational therapists and being flexible when critically thinking about evidence-based practice. The Clinical Educators also enhance their skills in delivering feedback and having clear and efficient communication channels. The team looks forward to welcoming more university students in the future.



Student Welfare and Family Support

The Rob Llewellyn-Jones Clinical Centre



Dr Helen Appleton
Director of Student and Psychological Services

In 2024 we held 19 clinic days, seeing 77 students from K-6, Secondary and Adult Services over 200 appointments. The clinic team is comprised of the visiting doctors, Dr Yvette Vella (developmental paediatrician) and Dr Peter Wurth (psychiatrist), myself and Andrew Frakes, Principal. Dr Richard Webster, paediatric neurologist at Sydney Children's Hospital Westmead and Dr Chong Wong from Westmead hospital, continue to support the high incidence rate of epilepsy within our cohort. Ongoing collaboration with allied health and medical specialists ensures we can best support our students and consider their broader health and wellbeing. The onsite clinic continues to be a highly valuable resource to our students and their 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 (generally 4-6 weeks)
- Longer appointment times available with more regular follow ups if needed
- 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 and its impact on our students for both families and staff, and the need to consider it as an essential component to our students' engagement and wellbeing.





Siblings Group

The Sibling Support Program at Giant Steps continued to be offered in 2024, run by Family Support Coordinator Sarah Robertshaw. Two groups were run on Saturdays across the year Junior Siblings for 4-7 year olds and Senior for +7years old. Activities both onsite and offsite were completed, including Scavenger Hunts, cooking, bowling, art projects and archery. Also included in the sessions was group discussions around emotions and individual experiences, with activities inspired by the SibsWorks program from Siblings Australia.

NDIS

The National Disability Insurance Scheme continues to play a meaningful, productive and essential role in the lives of the students at Giant Steps. Support has been given to families as they navigate the review process, including change of circumstance reviews due to individual/family changes and at key transition points, such as between K-6 and Secondary, and in particular around planning for graduation and moving into post school programming. Supports can include helping to prepare documentation for reviews, attending meetings or providing additional documentation outlining support needs and/of family capacity.



Professional learning

This year we offered over 35 courses to ensure that each staff member had opportunities to consolidate, update or develop new skills to maintain and improve the operation of the school, and in turn provide the best support for all of our students.

Some of the specific courses staff engaged in included:

- Autism Essentials Series
- Tips and Tricks
- Managing Risk Offsite
- IT Induction
- Mental Health Clinic & Student Engagement Support
- Functional Comprehension Assessments
- Expressive communication
- Supporting toilet training
- Literacy
- Play Theory & Behaviour
- Communication Case Study
- Recreation and Play Assessment
- Epilepsy Essentials
- Midazolam
- Senior First Aid
- CPR
- Bronze Medallion
- Leading from the Middle
- Adaptive Leadership
- Women in Leadership
- Leading Evidence Informed Practice
- Courageously Navigating Hard Conversations
- Reportable Conduct
- Child Protection – Mandatory Reporting and Reportable conduct
- Safety Intervention Workforce
- Neuro-affirming practice and goal-setting
- Literacy Collaboration
- Understanding functional cognition through Perceive, Recall, Plan & Perform System (PRPP)
- Online Cyber Bullying
- Initial Lit (Tier 1 Literacy Intervention Program)
- Reframing Autism Conference on Inclusive Practice
- Australian Inclusive Schooling Conference
- Anxiety and Autism
- Successful Supervision
- NDIS Process and Compliance
- Triple P Stepping Stones Facilitator Training
- SibWorks Facilitator Training
- Work, Health and Safety in Schools
- Reframing Autism: Autism Essentials Online Course and Workshop

The school's professional development program promotes ongoing learning, reflective practice and innovation, and demonstrates our commitment to the ongoing professional development of all staff. In addition to driving quality into program, access to high quality, relevant professional development for staff is a supportive strategy for staff retention.

In addition to professional development for existing staff, a systematic and comprehensive staff induction program for all new staff joining the organisation has been implemented this year. This induction supports staff across a range of roles (including teachers, therapists and educators) to understand the philosophy and ethos, expectations, their role, transdisciplinary practice and skills required to be an effective staff member in the organisation. As new staff settle into the organisation, they attend Autism Essential training, which covers core topics such as sensory processing differences, anxiety, routines and transitions, communication and music and engagement. For teachers and therapists, their induction into the school also includes a designated mentor who provides a level of ongoing feedback, guidance and support.

Research and Community Partnerships

The school has continued to foster a number of research partnerships as we advocate for the inclusion of young autistic people with complex support needs into research, policy and practice.

This year, we have continued as a community partner in the Autism CRC funded project led by the Autism Centre of Excellence at Griffith University on developing a quality-of-life intervention that is directly informed by those with lived experience and their families. This project has included understanding what 'living your best life' looks like for those young people with autism, intellectual disability and complex support needs so that appropriate supports can be developed.

We have also continued to support research into understanding and sharing how best to assess, support and teach literacy to autistic children who are non or minimally speaking through an ongoing partnerships with Griffith University and Massey University. The school has also been involved in a research project looking at the functions of echolalia in students with complex communication needs through play-based language samples, alongside Griffith University.

Giant Steps was a partner in the development of inclusive education training for Indonesian teachers led by the University of Western Sydney.





Staff

Workforce Composition

In 2024 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.

Staff retention rate for 2024 was 96%.

	Number of staff	FTE
Principal	1	1
Teachers	30	25.8
Therapists	29	24
Educators/ Teachers Aides	49	44.6
Administration	10	6.6
Total Staff	119	102

Teacher Accreditation

Details of Teaching Staff	Number
Conditional	3
Provisional	6
Proficient	21

Staff Satisfaction

Staff satisfaction was assessed through an online school improvement survey conducted in 2024. The results indicated high levels of satisfaction across many aspects of employment. The insights gained from this survey are instrumental in guiding ongoing improvements and ensuring that Giant Steps remains a supportive and fulfilling workplace for all staff.



Students

Characteristics of Student Body

In 2024 the school enrolled 110 (106FTE) 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

K-6	63
Secondary	47
Total Males	80
Total Females	30
Student Total	110

Student Attendance and Retention Rates

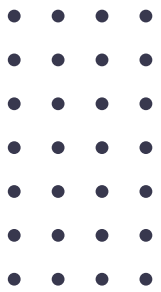
Retention of students in a special school setting is not an overarching goal and as a school we seek to transition students to other beneficial school placements in support of their learning. In 2024, 6 students transitioned to post school options and one primary aged student moved interstate.

There has been a 100% retention rate over the last ten years for secondary students, 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 K-6 do not adequately reflect the movement of students who integrate into other educational settings as part of their transition plan. In the Primary years 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.

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 attendance rate of 93%.

Student Satisfaction

Measuring student satisfaction at Giant Steps requires a tailored approach that reflects the unique communication and support needs of our students. Traditional school improvement surveys are not appropriate tools for capturing the experiences of the majority of our student cohort. Instead, we rely on parent and carer feedback as a meaningful and reliable indicator of student wellbeing and engagement. This approach allows us to better understand the impact of our programs and make informed decisions that support each student’s growth and happiness.



Families

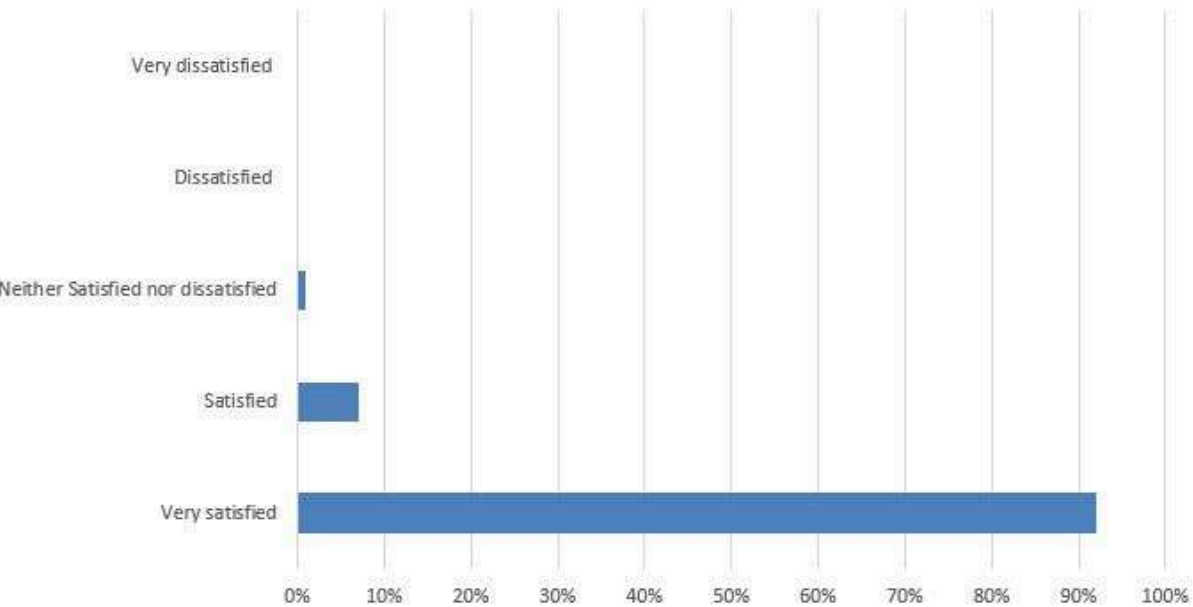
Fundraising Efforts

Giant Steps acknowledges our families and friends for their unwavering support and dedication to the community. In 2024 the Giant Steps community hosted, supported and participated in over 25 fundraising events, in addition to making and facilitating financial donations to our school all of which helped fundraise \$4 million! The tireless efforts of all have not only raised crucial funds to support our programs, but the sense of community is deeply enriched by the remarkable commitment of all our school families.

Parent Satisfaction

Giant Steps conducted a parent satisfaction survey. The results were overwhelmingly positive, with high levels of satisfaction of the school program.

Considering everything, how would you rate your satisfaction with Giant Steps at present?



Policies

The following policies are available on the Giant Steps website.

Child Protection Policy

<https://www.giantsteps.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Child-Protection-Policy-1.pdf>

Anti-Bullying Policy

<https://www.giantsteps.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Policy-Anti-Bullying-1.pdf>

Complaints Policy

<https://www.giantsteps.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Complaints-Handling-Policy-and-Procedures.pdf>

Enrolment Policy

<https://www.giantsteps.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Enrolment-Policy.pdf>

Student Behaviour Support

<https://www.giantsteps.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Guidelines-Student-Behaviour-Support.pdf>

Discipline Policy

<https://www.giantsteps.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Student-Positive-Behaviour-Support-Discipline-Policy-1.pdf>



Summary Financial Information

Claire Allen
Director of Finance
and Administration



2024 Recurrent/Capital Income

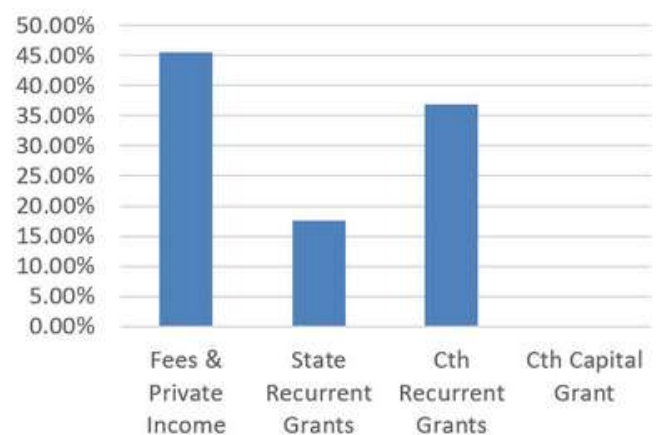
Fees & Private Income - 45.54%

State Recurrent Grants - 17.59%

Cth Recurrent Grants - 36.87%

Cth Capital Grant - 0.00%

2024 Recurrent/Capital Income



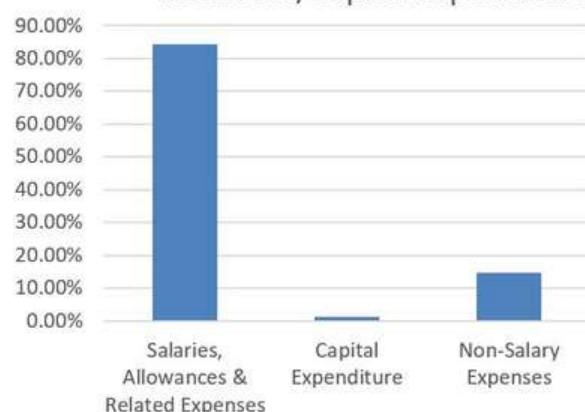
2024 Recurrent/Capital Expenditure

Salaries, Allowances & Related Expenses - 84.19%

Capital Expenditure - 1.18%

Non-salary expenses - 14.63%

2024 Recurrent/Capital Expenditure





Contact Us



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Thank You

