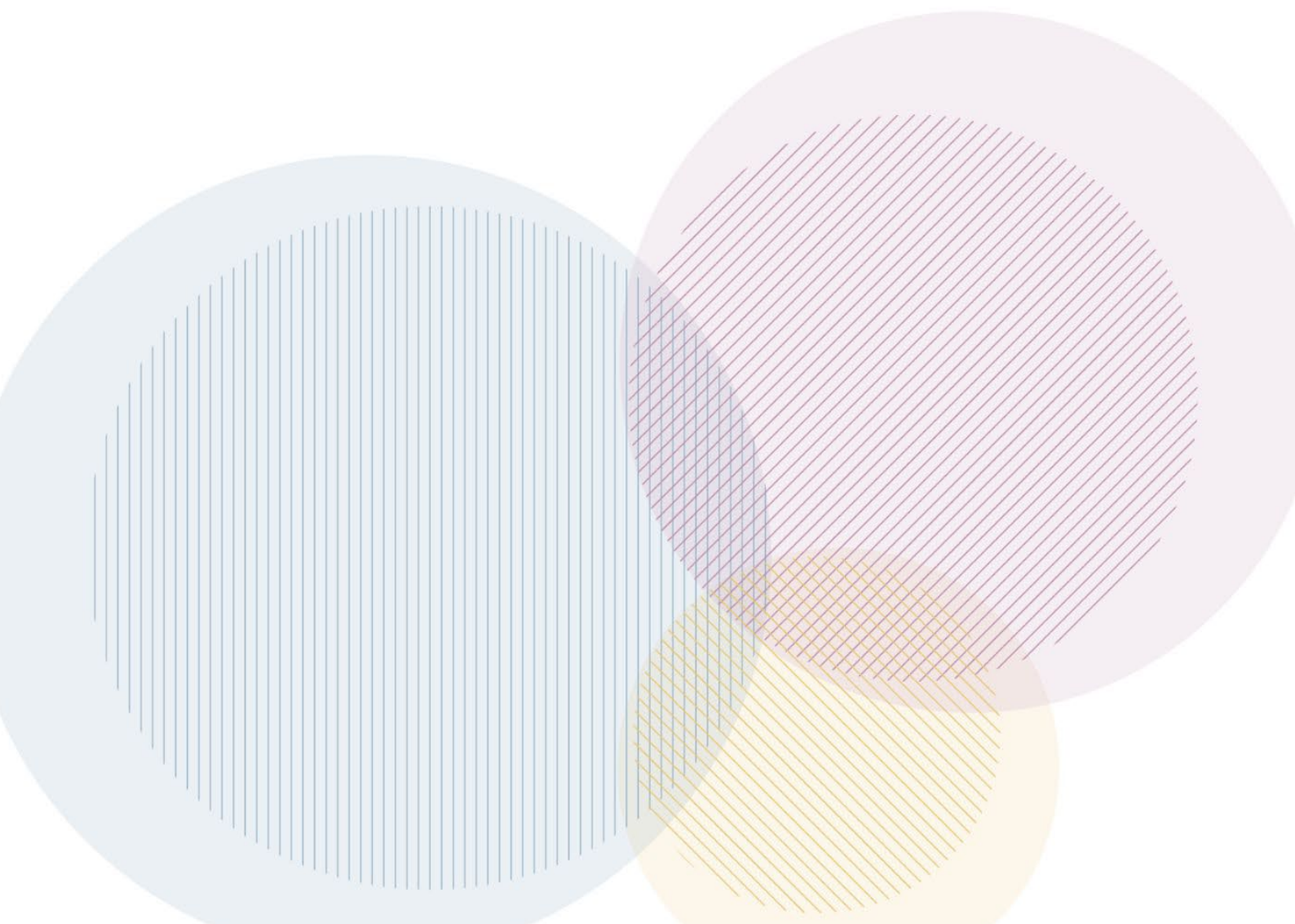


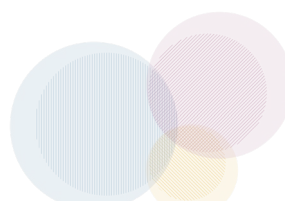
imagine | include | innovate



Annual Report 2024



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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 2024 the school had 40 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/>

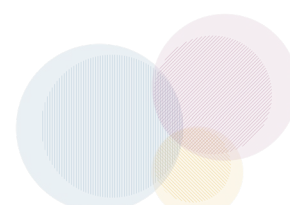
Our Mission

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 innovative 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 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

As we reflect on the year 2024, we are reminded of the extraordinary resilience, creativity, and commitment that define our community. This year began with a continued focus on our strategic priorities and marked the exciting commencement of our long-anticipated building project. Once initiated, the project progressed at an incredible pace, transforming our environment and challenging us to adapt in ways that showcased the strength and agility of our team.

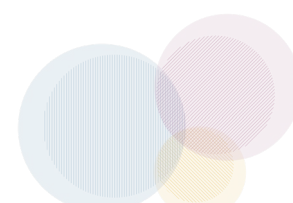
In Term 1, we faced significant environmental changes, including the loss of a staircase, two learning spaces, and half of our playground. These disruptions required our staff to be remarkably resourceful and flexible. At times, the noise and dust were overwhelming, and we leaned on our construction team for occasional reprieves. Yet, as the building began to take shape, it sparked curiosity and motivation among students and staff alike. Despite the challenges and compromises, our community coped exceptionally well. Special recognition goes to our staff, whose unwavering support of students and creative incorporation of off-site opportunities ensured continuity and engagement.

While we adjusted some priorities, our commitment to high-quality teaching and learning remained steadfast. We prioritised curriculum development in Health and Physical Education, Outdoor Education, Dance, and staff professional learning before turning our attention to expanding enrolments and teacher recruitment. These efforts aligned with our strategic priorities: building a strong reputation for excellence, driving innovation and improved outcomes, ensuring responsiveness to family needs, and maintaining a safe and sustainable organisation.

Curriculum development flourished in several areas. Our progressive camp program was implemented to gradually build students' independence and confidence in settings away from home. The introduction of a night under canvas offered opportunities for resilience, teamwork, and a love of nature. The Becoming Me program was expanded to include comprehensive Health, Physical, and Sexual Education, empowering students with knowledge and choice. The Adventure Club was launched to encourage regular outdoor exploration, physical activity, and environmental stewardship. Our Athletics Carnival was a resounding success, with enthusiastic participation from families and students, celebrating athleticism, sportsmanship, and teamwork.

In Performing Arts, our Dance curriculum saw exciting growth. A trial research project with Monash University concluded in Term 2, offering valuable insights into the benefits of dance for our students. Following its success, the program expanded in Term 3, reaching more students and participants. We secured a sustainable venue at Boroondara Sports Centre, enhancing accessibility and quality. Engagement soared as students embraced music, rhythm, and movement, practicing essential social skills and finding joy in creative expression. The holistic benefits of dance, physical, emotional, and social, have enriched our educational experience and strengthened peer and staff relationships.

Staff professional learning was a highlight of the year. Three teachers and therapists progressed through our accreditation framework, a leader completed a Masters of Education in Inclusion and Diversity at La Trobe University, and a teacher gained full registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching. Additional achievements included a Bronze Medallion lifesaving award and Behaviour Support Practitioner training for two educators, enhancing our capacity to support complex behaviours and expand Health and Physical Education programs.

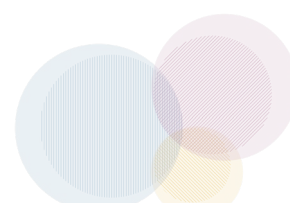


As the year drew to a close, we supported the transition of two students to secondary school, a student to another secondary school setting and celebrated the achievements of our three graduating students as they prepared to move into Adult Autism Services. Despite site restrictions, we maintained community engagement and partnerships wherever possible.

We remain deeply grateful to our families for entrusting us with their children and for their tireless efforts in fundraising to bridge the funding gap. Their support enables us to continue delivering a high-quality service. I also extend heartfelt thanks to our Board members for their unwavering guidance, expertise, and dedication throughout the year.

In summary, 2024 was a year of transformation, resilience, and creativity. We adapted and flexed to ensure our students remained engaged amidst environmental change. This would not have been possible without the passion and investment of the Giant Steps Melbourne team. Their energy, determination, and adaptability were the driving force behind our success. Together, we navigated the building project with excitement, hope, and anticipation for the possibilities our new spaces will bring.

Davina Bate
Principal



The Rob Llewellyn-Jones Clinical Centre

In 2024, the Rob Llewellyn-Jones Clinical Centre operated onsite at Giant Steps Melbourne. Across the year, 8 clinics were held (2 per term), with families also accessing phone consults during Sydney clinic days for a total of 60 appointments for 20 students, including 6 students for initial appointments. The clinic operates onsite at Giant Steps Melbourne, with our visiting psychiatrist and school 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:

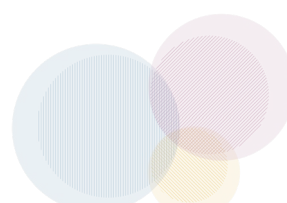
- Dr Peter Wurth, Sydney consultant psychiatrist
- Dr Helen Appleton, National Director of Student and Psychological Services
- Davina Bate, school Principal
- Deli Winthrop, Engagement and Wellbeing Lead

Classroom teachers and/or therapists 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 ongoing monitoring via data, observations and video to assist with decision making
- Decreased student and family stress around appointments and care plans

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 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

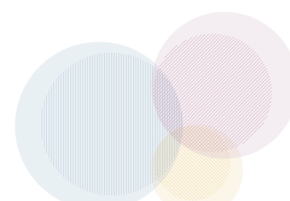
In 2024, the Primary Program at Giant Steps supported 16 students across three classes. Each class delivered a rich and engaging curriculum aligned with the Victorian Curriculum Learning Areas, tailored to meet the diverse needs and abilities of students.

The Literacy program focused on four key areas. Students developed phonemic awareness through targeted word work, building on the InitialLIT reading program. Self-selected reading encouraged students to explore texts aligned with their interests, fostering a love of reading. Shared reading sessions supported comprehension, drama, and functional commenting skills. Students explored folk and fairy tales in the *Pirates* unit during Semester One and delving into the imaginative works of Roald Dahl in Semester Two. Writing was integrated throughout all units, supporting both functional and creative expression.

Mathematics instruction was similarly structured to support practical and conceptual understanding. Students explored time, calendars, and daily routines during morning meetings, developed financial literacy through activities focused on money and its uses, and engaged in explicit teaching of curriculum-aligned mathematical concepts.

Core Giant Steps units such as *Cooking* (Design and Technologies), *Becoming Me*, *Games and Sports*, and *Activities of Daily Living* (Health and Physical Education) remained central to the program. These units allowed students to consolidate prior learning while building new skills. Themed units throughout the year included *Wonders of the World* (History), *Oceans* (Digital Technologies and Science), *Pop Around the World* and *African Music* (Music and Dance), and *Animals* (Media and Visual Arts). These engaging topics provided meaningful opportunities for students to generalise their learning in new and motivating contexts.

Cross-curricular capabilities—including Critical and Creative Thinking, and Personal and Social Capabilities—were embedded across all learning areas, supporting holistic development.



The transdisciplinary model of therapy continued to be a cornerstone of the Primary Program, ensuring students received consistent and meaningful therapeutic support both within and beyond the classroom.

A highlight of the year was the introduction of the *AllPlay Dance Program*, which saw many students attending weekly sessions at the Rain and Lucky dance studio. These sessions encouraged movement, rhythm, and creativity, with students exploring animal-inspired dance styles and taking turns to perform individual routines. Additionally, students attended *Relaxed Performances* at the Melbourne Recital Centre, offering inclusive and enriching experiences in the performing arts.

All Primary students also participated in the *Giant Steps Tuckshop*, operated by the Friends of Giant Steps. This initiative formed a valuable part of the Numeracy program, providing real-world learning experiences in money handling and shopping, and preparing students for greater independence in the community.

Secondary Program

In 2024, the Secondary Program at Giant Steps supported 14 students across three classes, aged between 12 and 16 years. With a wide range of abilities and learning needs, the program was thoughtfully designed to support students through a critical stage of development—transitioning from adolescence to young adulthood. It also served as a preparatory phase for the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC), Adult Services, and life beyond Giant Steps Melbourne.

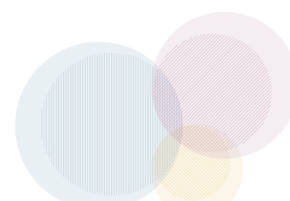
Students engaged in a broad curriculum that included Mathematics, English, The Arts, Science, Humanities, and Technologies. These subjects were delivered through engaging thematic units such as *Friends and Family* and *Lewis Carroll* in Literacy; *Money* and *Topics* in Numeracy; *Who Do You Think You Are* and *Captain Planet* in Humanities; *African Music* and *Rock and Roll* in Music; and *Animals* in The Arts. Health and Physical Education were also key components, with students participating in hiking excursions at Gresswell Forest, weekly swimming sessions at Collingwood Leisure Centre, and basketball at Ford Park.

Cultural exploration was encouraged through Cooking and Languages, where students enjoyed learning about German language and cuisine. The curriculum also incorporated cross-curricular capabilities, including Personal and Social, Ethical, and Intercultural Capabilities, as well as Critical and Creative Thinking.

A standout experience in 2024 was the collaboration with URBNSurf, where students participated in weekly surfing sessions during Terms 3 and 4. These sessions fostered confidence, physical engagement, and strong relationships with instructors—all while having a great deal of fun.

Throughout the year, students also worked on creating handmade products for an end-of-year Art and Craft stall. This initiative sparked enthusiasm and entrepreneurial spirit, as students were motivated by the opportunity to earn money and share their creations with families and the wider community.

The 2024 camp was a memorable milestone for many students, with several experiencing their first overnight “camp out” in tents. They embraced the challenge of cooking over a stove and braving the cold, gaining a deeper appreciation for the outdoors.



Another highlight was the African Drumming Incursion, led by the charismatic Brian Abrahams and Leon Stenning. This joyful and energetic experience brought students together through rhythm and music, leaving a lasting impression on all involved.

In addition, the program continued to evolve through ongoing collaboration with Adult Autism Services, focusing on refining transition procedures to better support students as they approach Year 12 and prepare for the next stage of their journey.

Senior Secondary Pathway (VPC)

In 2024, the Foundation Secondary Pathway at Giant Steps supported eight students across two classes, aged between 16 and 18 years. These students engaged in the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC), bringing with them a diverse range of skills and learning needs.

The VPC continued to be delivered within the Senior Secondary Pathway, with staff actively advocating for the introduction of a Foundation Secondary Award. This proposed award would formally recognise the commitment and achievements of students who completed the required course hours but were unable to meet all learning outcomes within the designated timeframe.

All students participated in a comprehensive curriculum encompassing Literacy, Numeracy, Work-Related Skills, and Personal Development Skills. These areas were explored through integrated and engaging units such as *Let's Party*, *Maths Matters*, *Hospitality*, and *Presentation Time*. Students also collaborated with the Community Group, Friends of Giant Steps, enriching their learning through real-world connections.

A highlight of the year was the partnership with Training by Karina and the team at AAS, where students undertook Hospitality lessons. This culminated in a special event where students hosted their parents and invited guests at the Yarra Café, showcasing their skills and confidence.

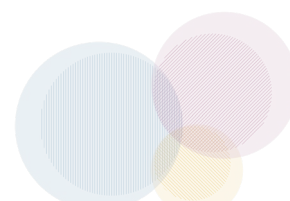
Work experience opportunities were also a key feature of the program. Students contributed meaningfully at Rylands Retirement Village in Kew and participated in the Dog Walking program. These experiences allowed students to build practical skills and deepen their engagement with the local community.

Further community connections were fostered through partnerships with the Kew Neighbourhood Learning Centre and Buoy Pizza. In addition, students launched a new social enterprise, *Cards for Giant Steps*, complementing the existing *Glow* enterprise and providing valuable entrepreneurial experience.

Occupational Therapy

In 2024, Occupational Therapists at Giant Steps continued to define their role within the classroom while supporting staff across the school to understand our shared focus. A key priority has been supporting students' emotional regulation and engagement in learning.

Our work has remained grounded in person-centred and strengths-based practice. We have collaborated closely with families to establish goals that are both meaningful and functional for each student.



A major focus this year has been on embedding structure around these goals to ensure they are consistently targeted, even when the therapist is not present. Occupational Therapists have worked alongside the transdisciplinary team to establish clear routines and structures that build predictability and increase opportunities for skill development. This approach has also supported staff to promote students' independence in functional tasks by gradually reducing the level of adult support. Key goal areas have included students building skills and confidence in meal preparation, dressing, managing personal belongings, and accessing the community.

The classroom environment plays a significant role in supporting our students' success. Over the year, Occupational Therapists have facilitated ongoing dialogue with class teams to ensure the physical environment meets students' sensory, learning, and functional needs. Considerations to support optimal engagement have included trialling alternative seating options, embedding movement breaks, and adjusting visual and auditory input. These strategies reflect the environmental focus of the Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) model, ensuring the best possible alignment between the student, the task, and the environment in which it occurs.

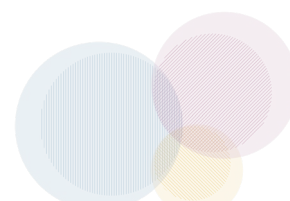
Speech Therapy

In 2024, Speech Therapy has continued to be provided across both the school and adult service settings. While one of our therapists moved on to pursue alternative opportunities, we were fortunate to gain a speech therapist who moved from the Sydney school and was keen to remain in the organisation. This helped to minimise any disruption to service provision and continue to maintain connections and consistency between the two schools. Additionally, while our team leader was on maternity leave for the majority of the year, the team were supported by our National Director of Speech Therapy based in the Sydney school.

The focus of therapy provision continued to be on providing individualised supports and strategies to support and extend students and participants communication needs and skills. Additionally, their role encompasses assessing, supporting and monitoring mealtime needs to ensure safety while eating. Speech therapists continued to focus on this work within the transdisciplinary team, sharing goals, supports and knowledge with members of their teams to ensure that students and participants communication and safety is supported even while therapists are not present.

Across the school and adult program, comprehension is supported by a consistent range of supports and strategies that are used by all staff. Throughout 2024 our speech therapists helped to ensure that these supports were in place and provided education to newer team members about their function. Therapists also continued to assess students individual comprehension needs, and in collaboration with the class team identified the adaptations required to individualise supports and ensure that all students could understand their routines and roles within the day, and better access the curriculum and key learning. Similarly, within the adult program, speech therapists helped support workers extend their knowledge and skills in supporting participants comprehension, and how to adapt and use more individualised supports.

Our speech therapists also continued to assess and understand our young people's individual expressive communication strengths and needs, and support development of their multimodal communication skills. This is completed through a collaborative assessment process involving the young persons school supports, family and external therapy providers to understand their needs, preferences, potential barriers and communicative opportunities. A focus on understanding cognitive models and



characteristics of autistic brains and the impacts of these on communication is a key consideration during these assessments. Additionally, this is a continual, changing process as our students and participants communication skills and needs fluctuate throughout their lives.

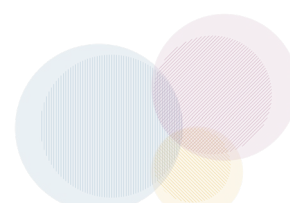
Music Therapy

In 2024, the Music Therapy team continued to integrate music across programs, focusing on social engagement, learning, and well-being. We welcomed a new music therapist to our team and further developed the music program based on each semester's themes, strengthening connections between Sydney and Melbourne and deepening ties within the Melbourne community.

This year, the Music Therapy program centred around the themes of Pop Around the World and The African Continent. In Semester 1, students explored pop music from different cultures and had the opportunity to share songs from their own cultural backgrounds and experiences. In Semester 2, the focus shifted to The African Continent, where students delved into traditional African music and instruments such as the djembe and kalimba. We also introduced contemporary African artists and Afropop to expand interests and hosted an African drummer for an incursion to share their expertise in African drumming and music.

Throughout the year, the Music Therapy team continued to build and maintain community connections, including partnerships with the Melbourne Recital Centre and Camberwell Girls Grammar School. Our students enjoyed inclusive performances such as Stiletto Sisters and The Little Mermaid. These enriching experiences were made possible through the collaboration and support of our community partners, giving students the opportunity to enjoy live music and theatre productions.

The Music Therapy team remained committed to professional development and collaboration. They delivered a music therapy-focused learning session for all staff and conducted a workshop on music and the Recreation and Play Assessment (RAPA) for new Giant Steps staff. The Music Therapists also led a well-attended external professional course on creating autism-friendly music supports through the Autism Hub. Close connections between the Sydney and Melbourne Music Therapy teams were maintained through cross-campus meetings, fortnightly supervision sessions, and staff visits between sites. This ongoing collaboration built innovation in our practice and led to new, creative ways to engage with students.



Workforce composition

Over the past year, our team experienced several staffing transitions. Five educators pursued alternative career paths, while two Melbourne Storm educators relocated interstate. Additionally, one speech therapist sought a role in a different setting, a music therapist moved interstate, and one teacher transferred to a school closer to home. In response to the national teacher workforce shortage, PTT continued its role as an alternative authority for final-year student teachers, facilitating the recruitment of a new teacher to our team. We also welcomed a speech therapist from our Sydney team, further strengthening our service capacity.

| TOTAL STAFF NUMBERS | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| | No. of Staff | FTE |
| Principal | 1 | 1 |
| Teachers | 10 | 9.4 |
| Therapists | 12 | 10.2 |
| Educators / Teachers' Aides | 18 | 14.8 |
| Administration | 3 | 2.2 |
| Total Staff | 44 | 37.6 |

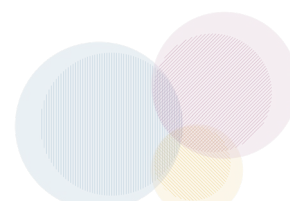
Staff Retention Rates

| | |
|----------------|------|
| Teachers | 90% |
| Therapists | 83% |
| Educators | 67% |
| Administration | 100% |

In summary, of the 43 staff that were employed at the beginning of the year, 10 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 85%.

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



Student Attendance & Management of Non-Attendance, Secondary Retention

| Student Population | |
|--------------------|----|
| Primary | 17 |
| Secondary | 23 |

In 2024 the school enrolled 40 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.

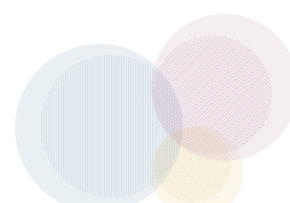
Senior Secondary Outcomes

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 40 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 | 17 |
| Secondary | 23 |
| Total Males | 33 |
| Total Females | 7 |
| Student Total | 40 |

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.

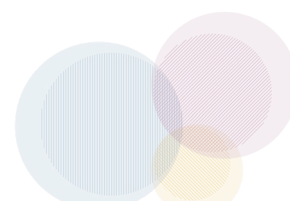
Student performance in national and statewide tests and examinations

Victorian Certificate of Education

No students were eligible for the VCE.

Literacy & Numeracy Assessments

In 2024, 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

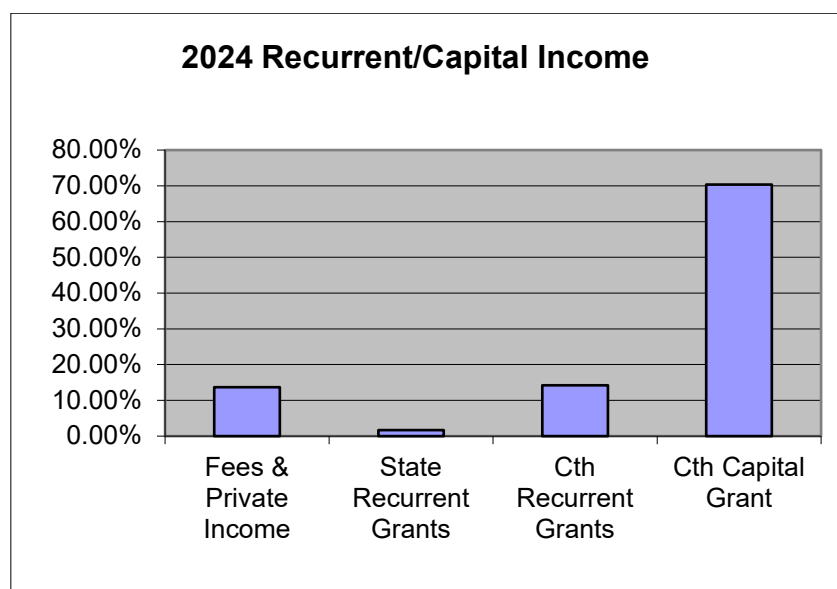
Giant Steps Melbourne is a registered Charity and a Public Benevolent Institution. Each year Giant Steps has a full financial audit conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Giant Steps does not charge fees and in 2024 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

