

Annual Report 2025

Giant Steps



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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.

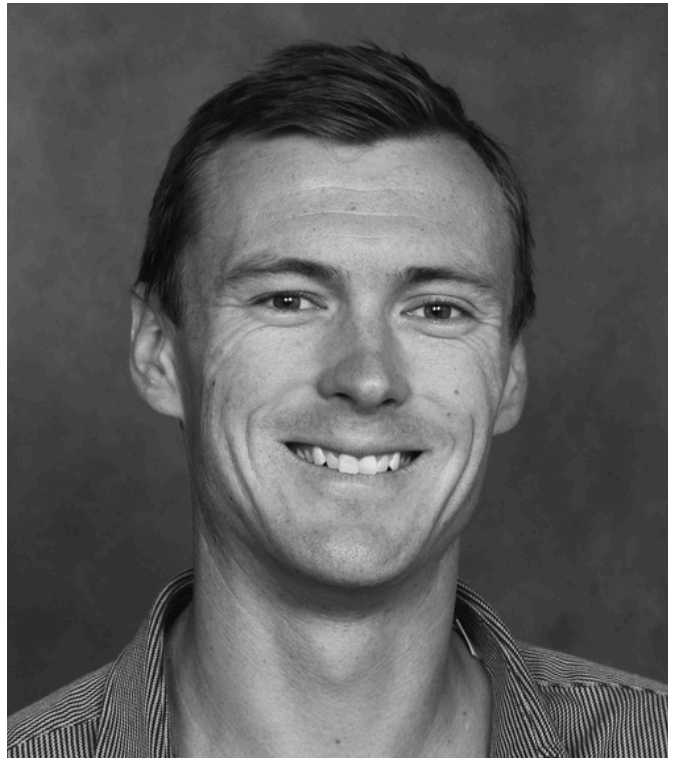
Giant Steps is a school that aims to provide a rich and meaningful education to children and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. All students, from K-12, access the Australian Curriculum and are offered the wide array of subjects and experiences that their mainstream peers access. Autism specific 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.

Principals Report

Andrew Frakes

PRINCIPAL



It is with great pride and gratitude that I reflect on another significant year for the Giant Steps community. In 2025, our school continued to provide rich, individualised and meaningful learning opportunities for students across both Primary and Secondary programs, supported by the expertise, care and commitment of our transdisciplinary teams. Across the year, students engaged in carefully designed curriculum experiences, therapeutic supports, community access programs and whole-school celebrations that strengthened their learning, confidence, independence and connection to others.

Our Primary and Secondary programs remained focused on delivering high-quality, autism-specific education within the NSW Curriculum framework. In Primary, students participated in engaging units across Literacy, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography and Creative Arts, with the launch of Playsteps further extending early support to young children and families entering the Giant Steps community. In Secondary, students continued to access Life Skills outcomes across key learning areas, with a strong emphasis on independence, vocational development, post-school pathways and meaningful participation in the wider community.

Community access and real-world learning were once again central to the student experience. Students participated in a wide range of offsite activities, including swimming, nippers, gymnastics, public transport practice, local café and shop visits, surfing, outdoor education, camps and adaptive skiing. These experiences are far more than excursions; they provide opportunities for students to practise skills in authentic settings, build confidence, develop recreational interests and strengthen their sense of belonging within the broader community.

The therapy teams continued to make an outstanding contribution to the quality and breadth of our programs. Occupational Therapy expanded students' access to inclusive sporting and community opportunities while refining assessment practices through the Giant Steps Functional Cognitive Assessment. Music Therapy strengthened students' communication, emotional regulation, creativity and social participation through curriculum aligned programming, performances, excursions and professional contributions to the wider field. Speech Therapy continued to refine and expand communication supports, with a strong focus on collaborative practice, mentoring, research partnerships and the translation of evidence into meaningful practice at Giant Steps.



Supporting families remained a central priority. The Rob Llewellyn-Jones Clinical Centre continued to provide highly valued onsite medical and psychiatric support, reducing barriers for students and families while strengthening collaboration between school, allied health and medical professionals. The Sibling Support Program and ongoing NDIS support also continued to play an important role in assisting families as they navigate the broader needs and life circumstances of their children. Our bespoke training series, Supporting Families to Understand Autism, was again an important way of helping families build knowledge, confidence and connection as part of the Giant Steps community.

Professional learning remained a cornerstone of our practice in 2025. This ongoing commitment to professional development strengthens our shared practice, supports staff retention and ensures that students continue to benefit from current, evidence-informed approaches. The continued development of our induction and mentoring processes has also supported new staff to understand the philosophy, expectations and transdisciplinary practices that underpin Giant Steps.

Giant Steps also continued to contribute to research, advocacy and professional knowledge beyond the school. Partnerships with universities and professional organisations supported work in areas such as quality of life for autistic young people with complex support needs, literacy assessment for minimally speaking autistic children, disability practice guidelines, multimodal mental health support and the broader evidence base for music therapy and transdisciplinary practice. These contributions reflect our ongoing commitment not only to improving practice within our own school, but also to contributing to the wider understanding and inclusion of autistic people with complex support needs.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of our staff, families, volunteers, supporters and wider community. Our families continue to show remarkable commitment through their support, advocacy and fundraising efforts, while our staff bring expertise, creativity, compassion and professionalism to their work every day. Together, we continue to build a community in which students are known, supported, challenged and celebrated, and for that I am sincerely grateful.

Primary



Kaitlin Hunter

CO-DIRECTOR PRIMARY



Sarah Rawlins

CO-DIRECTOR PRIMARY

In 2025, the Primary School comprised eleven classes across both Lower and Upper Primary. At the start of the year, we were delighted to welcome ten new families to Giant Steps — nine joining the Early Years program and one joining Upper Primary. The team took great pleasure in supporting these students and families as they transitioned into the programs and became part of the broader Giant Steps community.

Students engaged in Literacy Units of Work, including Beary Tales, and a Julia Donaldson author study, where they explored imaginative thinking, topic-specific vocabulary, and a range of text responses such as sequencing, following procedures, and creating texts. Across these units, students investigated descriptive language by identifying features like colour, size, texture, habitat, and body parts, interacted with both fiction and non-fiction texts through dramatisation and role play, and recognised that written words carry meaning.

In Mathematics, with the new K–2 syllabus now fully embedded, students continued to explore a wide range of mathematical ideas through our core units, Morning Meeting and Cooking and Healthy Eating. Across the year, the Topics unit offered rich opportunities for students to engage with foundational concepts, including forming groups, Two-Dimensional Spatial Structure and Non-Spatial Measure (Mass). These experiences supported students to build early mathematical understanding in meaningful, hands on contexts.

In Science and History and Geography, students engaged in learning through our Space and Transport Units of Work. In Science, the Space unit supported students to develop their working scientifically and design and production skills as they explored planets, forces, and the features of Earth. Students investigated land, sky and water, identified seasonal changes, and observed how objects move. In History and Geography, the Transport unit enabled students to examine the features and functions of different transport vehicles and classify them according to whether they travel on land, in water, or in the air. Students followed procedures to design and construct their own transport models using a range of materials and explored transport through the ages.

Within Creative Arts, students participated in the Meet the Orchestra and Island Paradise Units of Work, engaging in music, dance and visual arts experiences that supported both creative expression and the development of social competencies such as social orienting, joint attention, imitation, turn-taking and group regulation. Through Meet the Orchestra, students explored a range of orchestral instruments and roles, taking part in singing, instrument play, movement, improvisation and listening activities to broaden their interest in orchestral music

Offsite learning continued to be a significant component of the PDHPE curriculum, with classes participating in a wide range of community-based activities such as swimming, nippers, gymnastics, public transport practice, and visits to local cafés and shops. A highlight for several classes was the partnership with the Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) in Ryde, where students across a number of primary classes attended weekly horse-riding lessons. These community experiences enable students to apply skills learned at school in real world contexts while strengthening their confidence, independence and connection to their local community.

Throughout the year, Year 10 students from St Aloysius joined the Primary program each Thursday, participating in 20-week blocks that allowed meaningful relationships to develop over time. Their consistent presence fostered trust and familiarity, while their enthusiasm for creating engaging play experiences encouraged students to explore new leisure activities such as basketball and scootering. These shared experiences supported the development of confidence, social engagement and lasting connections for our primary students.

During Term 4, students from St Joseph's College visited the program weekly in preparation for the annual "Joey's Day" celebrations. This time in classrooms enabled the boys to build rapport with our students while developing effective communication strategies, play skills and a deeper understanding of how to support meaningful engagement.

Throughout the year, the Primary School enjoyed a wide range of whole-school celebrations that strengthened our sense of community. Families joined us for special events, including Mother's Day afternoon tea, a Father's Day BBQ breakfast and sports morning, and a Grandparents' Day high tea with classroom visits. We also marked key cultural and school events such as Halloween, Book Week, NAIDOC Week and Joey's Day. Our bespoke training series, 'Supporting Families to Understand Autism' supported families in their first year at Giant Steps to deepen their understanding of Autism and how to support their child and had strong attendance. As we look ahead to how this program will continue to evolve in 2026, we hope to extend the series to include opportunities for grandparents of Giant Steps students, offering dedicated sessions designed to strengthen their understanding of autism and deepen their connection to the school community.

With a continued commitment to high-quality teaching and ongoing school improvement, staff engaged with the NESA curriculum reform, preparing for the early adoption of the new Science and Technology, Human Society and its Environment (HSIE) and Creative Arts K-6 syllabuses. Teachers participated in a range of professional learning, including Planning and Programming with the Science and Technology K-6 Syllabus, Planning and Programming with the New HSIE K-6 Syllabus, Navigating the New PDHPE K-6 Syllabus, Assessment and Reporting in Mathematics K-6, and Planning and Programming with the New Creative Arts K-6 Syllabus: Music. This collective work strengthened curriculum knowledge, enhanced planning and programming processes, and ensured staff were well equipped to implement the new syllabus frameworks with confidence and consistency.

Finally, 2025 saw the launch of Playsteps, a weekly supported playgroup for children aged 2-4 years who have an autism diagnosis or are on a diagnostic pathway. Facilitated by a transdisciplinary team of teachers, educators and therapists, the program provides early access to high-quality developmental support while fostering meaningful connections between families and focuses on building children's independence, engagement in group routines, early social skills and confidence separating from caregivers for short periods. Families are supported to understand their child's individual needs, connect with one another and learn practical strategies to promote communication, participation and regulation at home.



Secondary



Naomi Signo

CO-DIRECTOR SECONDARY



Michelle Jones

CO-DIRECTOR SECONDARY

In 2025, the Secondary Program supported students across two learning environments: seven classes located within the Quad and two classes based in the Clocktower building. This included a Middle School class provided five students opportunity to begin engaging with the secondary curriculum and develop skills to support their future transition into the Secondary Program.

Students' movement between the common areas of both the Quad and Clocktower buildings during recreation and mealtimes fostered social interaction and meaningful connections across the secondary school community.

The Secondary Program follows the NSW Curriculum Life Skills outcomes and content areas, including Literacy, Numeracy, Science, Technology, History, Geography, Languages, Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE), and Creative Arts. Students in their final years of schooling also participated in the Work and the Community unit of work. This enabled the ten students transitioning from school in 2025 to explore a range of post-school pathways while further developing independence, vocational skills, and self-management strategies to broaden future opportunities.

PDHPE and Geography outcomes were integrated into the Outdoor Education program, providing students with opportunities to participate in a range of activities including bushwalking, swimming, gymnastics, tennis, and cricket. A group of students attended URBNSURF at Sydney Olympic Park, where they learned a recreational summer activity that can be enjoyed with family. Middle School students also participated in a supported Nippers program at Clovelly Beach, where they developed and strengthened essential water safety skills.

All classes were offered the opportunity to attend a two-night, three-day camp during the year. A total of seven camps were conducted in 2025, each supported by a 1:1 student-to-staff ratio. Camp locations included Point Wolstoncroft, Milson Island through the NSW Office of Sport, and Shoalhaven Heads. In addition, four students participated in a four-day ski camp in the Snowy Mountains. Students stayed in cabins at the NRMA Holiday Park in Jindabyne and travelled to Smiggin Holes for two days of adaptive skiing, including the use of tethers. For several students, this was their first experience of snow and provided a valuable opportunity to develop lifelong recreational skills that can be shared with their families.



Students were also invited to attend a special performance of *The Little Mermaid* at Riverside Girls High School. At the conclusion of the show, students had the opportunity to join performers on stage to sing and dance, creating a memorable and inclusive experience.

The Secondary Program continued its valued partnership with St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill. In preparation for the annual Joeys Day in Term 4, where students are invited to the college for a day of activities, swimming, and a barbecue, Year 9 students from St Joseph's visited weekly in small groups throughout Term 3. These visits provided opportunities to support classroom activities and participate in collaborative playground games, fostering positive social connections between students from both schools.

Secondary classes also hosted shadow visits for teachers from Matraville Sports High School as part of a professional learning experience through the Training Hub. Teachers spent half a day observing a range of classes, providing them with the opportunity to see teaching practices, strategies, and approaches in action while engaging in professional dialogue with staff.

Students participated in several school-wide celebration days throughout the year. Harmony Day encouraged students and staff to wear orange and celebrate cultural diversity by sharing traditional foods. As the weather cooled, the school marked the end of Term 2 with a Pyjama Day celebration. Giant Steps also hosted its inaugural Colour Fun Day, organised in collaboration with parents and volunteers. The event was a tremendous success, and planning is already underway for the next Colour Fun day.

A weekly lunchtime Drama Club commenced in Term 2, bringing together students from across classes to engage in imaginative scenarios while practising communication and social skills in a relaxed and enjoyable environment. Staff professional learning remained a priority throughout the year. The introduction of weekly Teacher Connect meetings supported collaboration, program development, and lesson planning. These facilitated sessions provided teachers with opportunities to share expertise, strengthen professional practice, and further develop a strong sense of teamwork across the Secondary Program.

Occupational Therapy



Cassie Roberts-Smillie

Director of Occupational Therapy-
Primary



Cheryl Toth

Director of Occupational Therapy-
Secondary

Occupational Therapy Team

In 2025, the Occupational Therapy team wished Cassie good luck and all the best, as she commenced her maternity leave in Term 3. Throughout the year, the team continued to demonstrate a strong commitment to innovation, evidence based practice, and improving meaningful outcomes for students.

Delivery of Program

A key focus throughout 2025 was increasing students' participation in community access opportunities to promote independence, participation, social engagement, and gross motor skill development. This included access to a diverse range of offsite experiences, continuing the successful relationship with URBNSURF and Manly Surf School to provide students with opportunities to build confidence in the water. Students were able to develop surfing skills such as paddling, balancing, and standing on a surfboard, alongside improving coordination and strength. The team also continued its partnership with the Sydney FC Foundation football program, which remained a highlight for many students throughout the year. In addition, the introduction of the Sydney Swans Learn to Play program further broadened students' access to inclusive sporting opportunities. It has been wonderful to see students build confidence, develop new skills, and actively participate in these supported programs. The enthusiasm and enjoyment demonstrated throughout each session has been fantastic to see, and we look forward to continuing these programs into 2026.

Professional Development

Several members of the Occupational Therapy team attended the Occupational Therapy Australia National Conference in Adelaide, providing valuable opportunities to engage with current evidence, emerging research, and innovative clinical practice. Knowledge gained from the conference has supported ongoing professional development, strengthened clinical reasoning, and informed service delivery across the team. The team also continued to deliver internal Autism Essentials training across the school, supporting shared knowledge and consistent practice. In addition, the team provided external professional development through the Autism Hub, delivering training on sensory processing to educators and allied health professionals. This provides ongoing opportunities for professional learning, reflection, and collaboration to further strengthen practice and improve outcomes for students.

Refining Assessment Tools

A significant focus for the Occupational Therapy team in 2025 was refining assessment practices through the introduction of the Giant Steps Functional Cognitive Assessment. This framework strengthened clinical reasoning by evaluating the cognitive skills required for everyday functioning across four key domains (attend, assess, plan and do). The assessment also considers broader cognitive processes, including executive functioning, central coherence, theory of mind, and information processing. By identifying each student's strengths and support needs across these domains, therapists were able to develop more targeted, functional strategies and support collaborative goal setting. Looking ahead, the team will continue to build on this work by developing individual cognitive profiles to further inform assessment, strategy planning, and transdisciplinary practice across the school.

Student Placement

Throughout 2025, the Occupational Therapy team supervised students from Boston University (BOS), Australian Catholic University (ACU), and the University of Sydney (USYD). Students gained valuable experiences within an autism specific educational setting, developing skills in assessment, intervention, transdisciplinary collaboration, and holistic practice. The team remains committed to supporting the development of future occupational therapists through education, reflective practice and mentorship.



Music Therapy



Bronte Arns

Director of Music Therapy

Programming

In 2025, the Music Therapy program focused on enhancing students' communication, social interaction, and emotional regulation. Programming also shifted to align with the new NSW Primary Curriculum and the Life Skills Years 7–10 Music Syllabus, integrating revised curriculum content with functional therapeutic outcomes for all students. Regular music therapy provision was reintroduced for Adult Autism Services, with Vanessa Lucas delivering weekly sessions that promoted social cohesion and group engagement.

The year's learning was structured around two key units: R&B and Hip Hop in Semester 1 and Meet the Orchestra in Semester 2. These were enriched by incursions and offsite arts access experiences.

A range of creative initiatives supported inclusive and cross-curricular learning. Additionally, music resources were developed for occasions such as NAIDOC Week to promote cultural inclusion and broaden student interests; and Book Week, where students participated in a live musical story time to target both music and literacy goals.

Highlights of the 2025 program included:

- The Australian Ballet incursion delivered onsite, with small groups participating in the workshop component, and a first-time live-streamed performance to classrooms.
- An onsite concert by Craig Calhoun and the Brothers of Soul, complementing the R&B and Hip-Hop unit.
- Excursion to a production of Peter and the Wolf at the Sydney Opera House as part of the Meet the Orchestra unit
- An in-house orchestral performance by students from Wenona School as part of the Meet the Orchestra unit.
- Attendance at the annual Riverside High School's accessible production of The Little Mermaid.



Sharing Knowledge

The Music Therapy team continued to contribute to professional learning in the wider professional community. Edwin Chian presented a case study on project-based learning with the Secondary band, Deathwall, at the Australian Music Therapy Association Conference and to staff at Giant Steps.

The team established a collaboration with the Music in Me teacher mentoring program, a national initiative founded by the late Richard Gill, aimed at building the capacity of generalist teachers to deliver effective classroom music programs. As part of this partnership, a workshop titled Supporting Musical Engagement for Neurodiverse Learners was presented at the Music in Me Summit, followed by a webinar, The Well-Regulated Music Classroom. These initiatives have led to ongoing collaboration with Woodville Alliance and other participating schools. The team also worked in partnership with Sound Expression, a local music therapy clinic, providing consultation for their inclusive concert and supporting Giant Steps/Sound Expression students by attending the event. The team also shared resources widely with other practitioners, supporting improved access to quality music therapy programs, and maintained strong collaboration between the Sydney and Melbourne sites.

Professional contributions included:

- Delivery of the Autism Hub course Creating Resources for Music Therapy Programs in Sydney and Melbourne.
- Publication by Bronte Arns of the Oxford Handbook chapter Music Therapists as Team Collaborators in Special Schools, highlighting research and case studies from transdisciplinary practice at Giant Steps.
- Support for the practicum placement of three Western Sydney University music therapy students.
- Contribution of evidence and case examples to inform submissions regarding NDIS pricing and the efficacy of music therapy.

Reflective Practice

Ongoing professional learning remained a priority for the Music Therapy team in 2025. Staff participated in a range of internal and external development opportunities to strengthen practice and remain informed by current research. Edwin Chian attended the AIS Music Conference, focusing on the use of music technology and artificial intelligence in music education. Lene Jeffrey completed her accreditation as Experienced Therapist, with an inquiry project exploring the integration of students' special interests and objects into music programs, and their impact on social referencing.

A key highlight was the attendance at a course run by Professor Katrina Skewes-McFerran from the University of Melbourne, focusing on receptive methods and informed song selection. This training deepened the team's understanding of how music choices can support a range of functional student goals. The team also engaged in regular professional dialogue through monthly meetings, covering topics such as Neurologic Music Therapy, ADHD, improvisation techniques, and cognitive considerations in program design.

Speech Therapy



Rachael Bowen

Deputy Principal

In 2025, 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 broadening impact. The team also thought critically about the transition from speech pathology theory and research to our established approaches and practice at Giant Steps.

Our Team and Services

We welcomed two new speech pathologists to our team in 2025, Selina and Ciara, which allowed for further expansion of speech therapy services into Adult Autism Services. The ability to provide integrated services across the organisation is an exciting opportunity, providing therapists with opportunities to apply their skills, knowledge and clinical reasoning in an agile way. The opportunity to understand the unique context of post school services, as well as develop and deliver supports for our adult participants alongside their support workers, has also supported the refinement of services and transition supports for graduating students.

Collaborative Practice

This year, speech therapists have continued to explore different ways that we can develop and deliver communication supports within the program to further enhance and deepen our impact. Speech Therapists have continued to collaborate with teachers on the language and literacy aspects of programming – particularly within the English key learning area. There has been a continued focus on imbedding concrete communication supports for individual students, and how these can enhance independence and autonomy for the individual. Speech Therapists has also continued to work collaboratively with parents and external providers to ensure that the communication needs of students are considered across contexts, and that communication supports and AAC systems address these needs in an individualised way.

Professional Learning

In 2025, therapists engaged in ongoing supervision and professional development as a mechanism to continue to promote self-reflection, the development of skills and provide therapists with autonomy and agency in their own professional learning. Mentoring and supervision is responsive to individual professional needs but occurs at least once a term with a formal opportunity for review and reflection once a semester. Professional development activities that speech therapists engaged in included: unpacking the thinking and learning preferences of autistic individuals with particular focus on how this might influence access to or strategies that support comprehension and expressive communication including the use of AAC; interoception and monotropism; gestalt language processing and more.

Grants and Research

At the end of 2025, Rachael Bowen – alongside Griffith University speech pathologist and researcher, Marleen Westerveld - were awarded the Speech Pathology Australia 2025 Practitioner Researcher Partnership Grant. The grant application centred on the need for a professional learning package for teachers and speech pathologists as a way to support the assessment of minimally speaking children with autism literacy skills. A small working group of teachers and speech therapists from Giant Steps will be involved in this project, which will formally commence in 2026, and we look forward to reporting on its progress next year.

In 2025, the feasibility and acceptability trial of Bloom – a co-developed parent training program to support the wellbeing of autistic children, which Giant Steps was a community partner for - was finalised. The team, including researchers from Griffith University and La Trobe University, continue to work together to see if future funding might be available for a randomised control trial of this program.

Impact Beyond Giant Steps

Across 2025, Giant Steps was involved in the working group to develop Speech Pathology Australia's (SPA) Working with People with Disability Position Statement (new) and the revision of the SPA AAC Practice Guidelines. These documents are due to be finalised in 2026.

With Dr. Helen Appleton and Dr. Yvette Vella, Rachael attended the Autism Europe Conference in Ireland and the European Association for Mental Health and Intellectual Disability Congress in Belgium, to present four papers as part of a symposium on multimodal mental health support for individuals with intellectual disability and autism.



Student Welfare and Family Support



Helen Appleton

Director of Student and Psychological Services

The Rob Llewellyn-Jones Clinical Centre

In 2025 we held 27 clinic days, seeing 86 students from K-6, Secondary and Adult Services over 219 appointments. The clinic team is comprised of the visiting doctors, Dr Yvette Vella (developmental paediatrician) and Dr Peter Wurth (psychiatrist) and myself. 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 are:

- 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 2025, 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 especially 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 for students and their families.

Professional Learning



This year we offered over 30 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
- Expressive communication
- Supporting toilet training
- Literacy
- Epilepsy Essentials
- Midazolam
- Senior First Aid
- CPR
- Bronze Medallion
- Reportable Conduct
- Child Protection – Mandatory Reporting and Reportable conduct
- Safety Intervention Workforce
- Australian Inclusive Schooling Conference
- Anxiety and Autism
- NDIS Process and Compliance
- Work, Health and Safety in Schools
- Understanding the Autistic Brain
- Planning and Programming with the New K-6 Syllabus
- Wenn Lawson PD – Interoception and Monotropic thinking
- Cognition – Information processing differences in autistic individuals

- AIS Teacher Leadership
- Multidisciplinary Mental Health Support for Individuals with Intellectual Disability and Autism
- Occupational Therapy Australia Conference
- Australian Music Therapy Association (AMTA) National conference
- Neurodivergence Wellbeing Conference
- European Association of Mental Health and Intellectual Disability Congress
- Autism Europe Conference 2025

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 continued 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. The feasibility and acceptability phase of this project is now complete, with several papers co-authored and published. Future funding options for a randomised control trial of this intervention are currently being explored.

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, with the school successfully partnering with Griffith University to secure a Speech Pathology Australia Research Grant, late in 2025.



Staff

Workforce Composition

In 2025 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 2025 was 90%.

	Number of staff	FTE
Principal	1	1
Teachers	32	29
Therapists	30	24.8
Educators/ Teachers Aides	48	42
Administration	12	11
Total Staff	123	107.8

Teacher Accreditation

Details of Teaching Staff

	Number
Conditional	2
Provisional	4
Proficient	26

Staff Satisfaction

Staff satisfaction was assessed through an online school improvement survey conducted in 2025. 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 2025 the school enrolled 113 (109 FTE) 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.

Characteristics of Student Body

K-6	61
Secondary	52
Total Males	87
Total Females	26
Student Total	113

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 2025, 10 students transitioned to post school options.

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 92.67%.

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



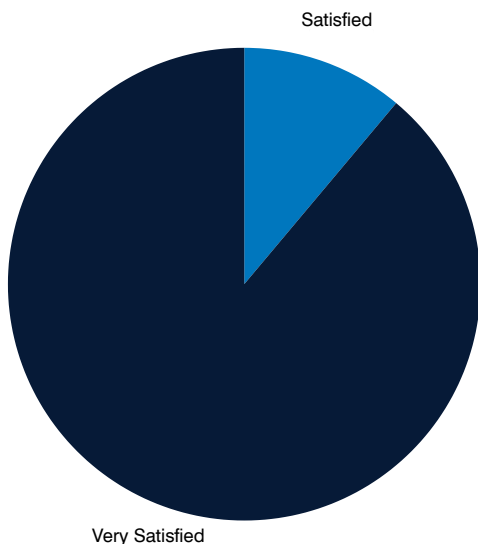
Fundraising Efforts

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

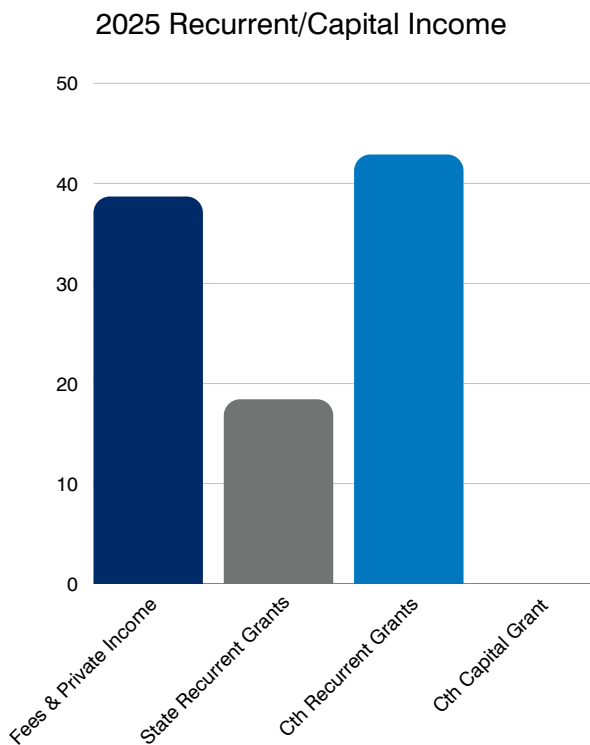


Claire Allen

Director of Finance and Administration

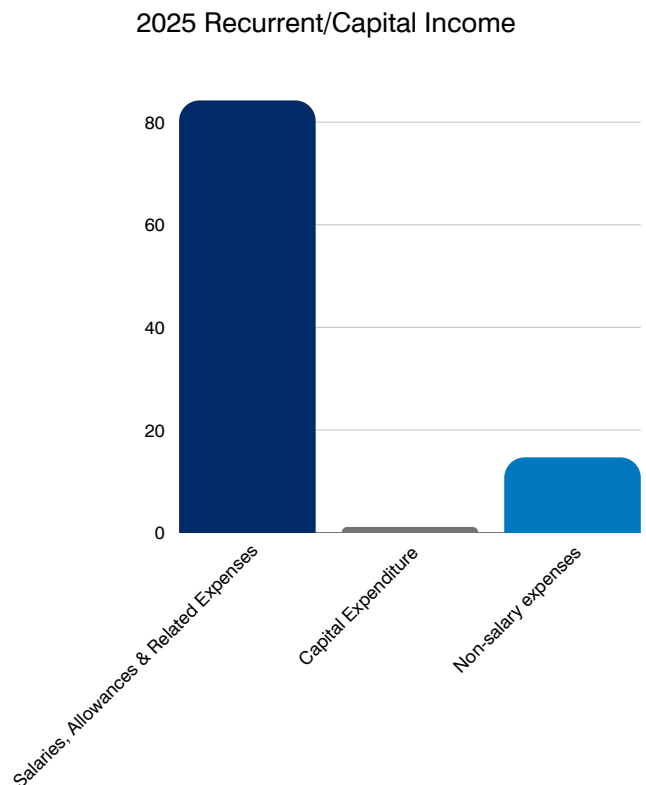
2025 Recurrent/Capital Income

Fees & Private Income - 38.69%
State Recurrent Grants - 18.43%
Cth Recurrent Grants - 42.89%
Cth Capital Grant - 0.00%



2024 Recurrent/Capital Expenditure

Salaries, Allowances & Related Expenses - 84.24%
Capital Expenditure - 1.10%
Non-salary expenses - 14.66%



Contact Us



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