

2009 School Annual Report

Autism Queensland Education & Therapy Centres

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Principal's foreword

Introduction

Autism Queensland has two Education and Therapy Centres, one on the Northside of Brisbane in Brighton, and the other on the Southside in Sunnybank Hills. Both Centres are accredited Independent Schools and provide a range of group placement options for children aged between Grade 1 to Year 12 diagnosed with Autism.

Students attend group placement for a period of 12 months to 2 years and in a part-time capacity for either 1, 2 or 3 days per week whilst continuing to attend their local school.

Students are grouped according to age, ability and needs, with a maximum enrolment of 6 students per group. Each group is staffed by a Group Teacher and Teacher Aide. Speech Pathology and Occupational Therapy is provided to 2 and 3 day placements. Social work and Psychology support is available as needed.

One day placements are intensive targeted programs which focus on specific areas of need including social skills, self management, organisational skills and assignment and/or homework skills.

All school programs are tailored to suit individual student needs to enhance participation, learning and educational outcomes in a student's local school setting. Our inclusive approach is underpinned by regular collaboration and communication with parents, local school staff, and other related professionals.

The part-time format is specifically designed to:

- enable students to maintain connection with their peer group and their local school curriculum
- enable students to practice and develop skills for generalisation
- continue social connection with their local community
- opportunity for observation, data collection and sharing of expertise among key stakeholders

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School progress towards its goals in 2009

The School's social worker is researching the challenge of restricted access to mainstream education for students with Autism, as part of a PhD at the University of Queensland. The aim of the study will be to investigate the perspectives of adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their parents regarding their exclusion from mainstream school settings and the implications this may have for their long term health and well being.

Advocacy continued to be a priority and area of strength for teachers and group therapists, with results from data collected by staff indicating that at least 80% of hours dedicated to outreach support from the schools being centred on the provision of expert advice on the ASD related needs and issues affecting students, their families and mainstream Teachers. The school based psychologist and social worker further develops this area of expertise to improve case management for students and or families where needed.

Throughout 2009, the Schools continued their working relationships with local and overseas tertiary institutions. The schools hosted Occupational Therapy and Psychology students from the University of Queensland, four students through the QUT Service Learning Program, two international students through the Bachelor Programme in Social Education from the VIA University College in Denmark, two work experience students, one from St Thomas More College and the other San Sisto College .

Until 2008, both Schools were accredited to provide programs for students in grades 1 to 12. During 2009 an application was submitted to the Non State School Accreditation Board for the provision of prep age programs. This application was successful, therefore allowing the Schools from 2010, to offer programs to students from 4.5 years.

Both schools will be using the Building Education Revolution (BER) funding for additional special needs classrooms and related facilities to provide much needed space for specialised programs. The works have commenced at each site and are expected to be finalised by July 2010.

Schools continue close collaboration with student's alternative educational placements, known as 'home schools'. Annual feedback surveys are provided to all 'home schools' and parents for the cohort of students enrolled and encourage honest anonymous feedback. Every year these results provide an invaluable source of information and ideas for further improvements, strengthening of relationships, and opportunities to provide more effective and targeted services.

Future outlook

AQ Schools 2010 directions include:

- commitment to providing a safe and secure learning environment for all students
- providing evidence based transdisciplinary programs for students
- commitment in currency for professional development
- continuous improvement in service delivery
- commitment to tertiary placements
- transparent communication with all stakeholders
- Building the Educational Revolution (BER) buildings completed and functional
- partnering with UQ for Autism specific research

Our school at a glance

Autism Queensland Education & Therapy Centres

School Profile

Coeducational or single sex: Coeducational

Year levels offered: Prep – Year 12

Total student enrolment for AQ Schools:

Total Enrolment	Girls	Boys
130	19	111

The AQ Schools cater for students aged between Grades 1-12, and have a teaching, therapy, support and administrative staff, with a Principal located at each campus. Students are enrolled in multiage classes according to age, Autism specific needs and abilities. The Principals are members of the Senior Management Team at Autism Queensland and represent the needs of AQ's School communities in this forum.

To access group placement students must be:

- Diagnosed with Autism / Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)/ Aspergers Syndrome / Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) by a medical specialist such as a Paediatrician, Child Psychiatrist or Neurologist.
- An Autism Queensland registered client.
- Aged between Grade 1 to 12.
- Verified by an approved Educational Authority.
- Attending an alternative educational program or setting (e.g. state school, independent school, Distance Education etc).
- Able to maintain placement in a small group setting.

The multidisciplinary School team includes teachers, teacher aides, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, social worker and psychologist.

It is important to note that all students who are enrolled at an AQ School are enrolled on a part-time basis meaning that they are also enrolled in a State, Catholic or Independent School.

All classes at AQ Schools have a maximum group size of 6 students.

School Disciplinary Absences

Disciplinary Absences	Count of Incidents
Short Suspensions - 1 to 5 days	Nil
Long Suspensions - 6 to 20 days	Nil
Exclusions	Nil
Cancellations of Enrolment	Nil

Our school at a glance

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Curriculum offerings

AQ delivers an autism specific curriculum linked to the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) Key Learning Areas (KLAs) of English, Mathematics, Health and Physical Education (HPE), Studies of Society & Environment (SOSE) and Information Communication Technology (ICT).

AQ's comprehensive educational approach for school aged students is a curriculum focused on the core characteristics of Autism, these being:

- Social Skills
- Communication
- Sensory Information Processing
- Adaptive Behaviour
- Stress Management
- Daily Living Skills
- Community Access
- Play and Recreation Skills

This is achieved through:

- Modified academic curriculum
- Individualised programs tailored to the student's developmental needs and strengths
- Small group setting
- Multidisciplinary team including Teachers, Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Psychologists and Social Worker
- Inclusive programs which support students maintaining and improving participation in their local school setting
- Collaboration and consultancy with key stakeholders
- Structured learning and skill building based upon positive behaviour support techniques
- Focus on functional life skills
- Environmental modifications and supports
- Emphasis on generalisation
- Supported transition
- Parent education and training

The role of the AQ schools is to assist students to develop strategies to overcome, minimise or manage the deficits associated with their Autism so that they can experience success as learners and complete their formal education.

How Information and Communication Technologies are used to assist learning

At AQ we aim to be able to offer our students access to high quality ICT. Through this we know students with ASD can better communicate with others, be self sufficient, achieve more at school, and be better placed for employment later in life. It has been well documented that children with ASD have an enhanced ability to learn complex computer skills easily due to their extreme focus and logical thinking. This can give our students the ability to succeed when they often have difficulty doing so.

It is important that we prepare the students at Autism Queensland for the digital learning environments of both the present and future through use of:

The internet:

- access learning materials to assist their individualised areas of interest
- be able to go online to use the internet to conduct research for school assignments
- communicate with students in other schools and countries

Our school at a glance

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One to one digital learning:

- students will be able to visit the computer room as a class unit and work on a range of one to one learning tasks that are individualised to their ability level e.g. reader rabbit, zoombinies, PowerPoint etc.
- engaging tasks that focus on communication and social skills.
- students will be able to continue to work and on and even enhance activities from their Education Queensland and private school placements

Collaborative learning

- students can produce quality collaborative and co-operative results utilising current best practice, dynamic and stimulating technology e.g. digital photo presentations, digital video making, recording and broadcasting pod casts, garage band soundtracks, web page design etc.

The keys to raising student achievements in both social and academic skills are to provide students with a solid foundation and to motivate them to become lifelong learners.

Technology greatly assists students with autism to accomplish this goal. It is highly engaging for students and stimulates their imaginations. Numerous research studies on the impact of technology on student learning and motivation have demonstrated this finding with remarkably similar results.

Social climate

AQ's philosophy and approach which permeates all aspects of service delivery, especially within the School's, is based on the following:

Our Vision

A life of choice and opportunity for people living with Autism.

Our Mission

To be a highly effective facilitator of quality outcomes that significantly enhance the lives of people with Autism.

Our Values

We value:

- The integrity of the person with ASD
- The diversity, talents and contributions of people with ASD
- The rights and confidentiality of clients
- Excellence in Service Delivery
- Open communication and transparent practice
- Collaborative professional and collegiate workplace relationships
- The talent, resourcefulness and commitment of families, carers, staff, volunteers and members
- Continuous improvement in all our activities

Our school at a glance

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Our Drivers



Autism Queensland's educational approach is based on the organisation's commitment to individuals with Autism, and their families. Our approach is based on the needs of the individual child and the needs identified in the student's IEP. AQ's model of services is comprehensive and does not follow any single recognised educational approach or methodology. Many of the single-strand philosophical notions (eg. discrete trial instruction or facilitated communication) have many valuable strategies but are not appropriate or sufficient for every individual.

An eclectic or comprehensive approach allows teachers and therapists to use elements of several effective approaches in a way that meets the needs of each child. "There is consensus among well respected scholars in the field of Autism that there is no empirical basis for recommending one approach or endorsing a single program as being superior for all individuals with ASD" (Dunlop & Fox, 2002; Heflin & Simpson 1998a).

The goal we have for all students enrolled in a group placement at the AQ's Schools is to develop in all students the skills that will enable them to participate to the fullest extent in their home school and local community. In providing this, AQ follows the "Principles for Effective Education in ASD" (Jordan, R; 2005).

These are to:

- reduce stress
- harness the strengths and interests of students
- compensate for weaknesses
- develop independence
- increase social and emotional understanding
- improve communication
- facilitate flexibility

Parent, student and teacher satisfaction with the school

The intense nature of the working relationship with AQ staff and their student's families and their associated communities provides ongoing and open opportunity for informal feedback. Parents are welcomed and encouraged at all times to offer feedback and suggestions, with IEP meetings usually (but not limited) providing a natural environment for such discussion. This feedback over the last few years has provided invaluable insight to the needs and aspirations of the ETC's community but especially established the basis for changes made to improved placement options and programming.

Annual feedback surveys to both parents and home school staff across ETC's continue to indicate that AQ performs well in its endeavours to match its programs and curriculum to the needs of its students.

2009 feedback results indicated:

- over 96% of parents felt that placement had met their child's major concerns
- over 96% of parents reported that they had been able to successfully use the strategies and information provided by AQ staff

Our school at a glance

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- over 95.8% of parents reported that communication, social skills and stress management were the priority ASD specific curriculum areas for their child's placement in the previous 12 month period
- over 84% of home school staff reported that a student's performance and participation had improved at their educational setting as a result of placement
- over 98% of home school staff indicated they would recommend placement for another student in the future

Performance measure	Result 2009
Percentage of parents/caregivers satisfied that their child is getting a good education at school	96%
Percentage of students satisfied that they are getting a good education at school	see comment below
Percentage of parents/caregivers satisfied with their child's school	98%
Percentage of school workforce satisfied with access to professional development opportunities that relate to school and systemic initiatives	73%
Percentage of staff members satisfied with morale in the school	85%

This question proved too abstract for students with Autism, with responses given being more influenced by student's immediate emotions and needs, as opposed to their understanding of the long term benefit of their placement.

Involving parents in their child's education.

AQ is committed to working within its school campuses in a highly collaborative model. A full range of professionals - teachers, occupational therapists, psychologists, speech pathologists, social workers, teacher aides, parents and other professionals and care givers develop appropriate Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Because of this wide involvement with goal setting and strategies, our programs are owned by the whole school and all elements of the student's human network.

This approach ensures generalisation of knowledge to other settings such as home, local school setting, and the community. Close collaboration with home school staff ensures that the skills focused on during placement are pertinent issues and required skills for the student when attending their setting.

Collaboration with parents regarding issues experienced at home or when participating in family or community activities make up the basis of community access. Home school staff are invited to visit students to see them 'in action' at AQ, and parents are scheduled for parent contact sessions each term. The philosophy behind such processes is to enhance the generalisation of skills between settings, to share ASD knowledge and strategies, and to gain regular feedback that programs and placements continue to meet student needs. AQ in recent years also introduced goal based home/school communication books to track daily progress towards IEP goals and ongoing programming needs.

Feedback from 2009 indicated that 98% parents and 98.2% of home-school teachers felt that their child/student was happy, safe and well supported in the AQ school environment. Whilst getting such information from our students would be a challenge given they range in age from 6 to 16 years of age with varying cognitive abilities, parents prove a highly reliable reporter for such information as they attend parent contact sessions each term on different days and for different sessions so are able to observe for themselves their children within the overall AQ environment and with different staff.

Our staff profile

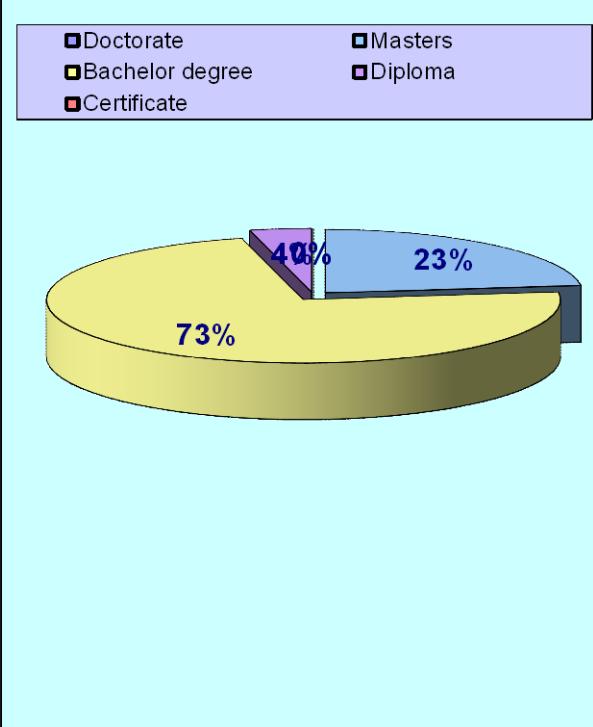
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Staff composition, including Indigenous Staff

Workforce Composition	Teaching Staff	Non-teaching Staff	Indigenous Staff
Headcounts	17	67	Nil
Full-time equivalents	14.1	27.1	Nil

Qualifications of all teachers and therapists.

Highest level of attainment	Number of classroom teachers and school leaders at the school
Doctorate	0
Masters	6
Bachelor degree	19
Diploma	1
Certificate	0



Our staff profile

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Expenditure on and teacher participation in professional development.

The total funds expended on teacher professional development in 2009 were \$30,500.

2009 saw the continuation of discipline specific mentoring groups within the schools and across the wider organisation. This professional learning program supports a formal process for delivering evidence based practice in our school programs and practices. Under this framework staff conduct research and engage with Autism Queensland's research and development projects. To compliment this, families are also made aware of external research opportunities, with information regularly disseminated in coordination with Autism Queensland's Principal Research and Development Officer, Dr Jill Ashburner.

Professional development highlights included:

- Research Approaches to Teaching
- Dealing with Challenging Behaviour
- Literacy Programs – reading, spelling, writing, phonological awareness
- Abuse & Neglect
- Move to Learn
- Education & Managing Boys Seminar
- Sexuality Issues for young children and teenagers
- Australasia Pacific Autism Conference
- Speech Pathology Australia National Conference
- PECS basic training workshop
- Working with Parents
- Effective Behaviour for Learning
- Music Therapy & Autism

The involvement of the teaching staff in professional development activities during 2009 was 100 %.

Performance of our students

Key student outcomes

Students attending AQ Schools do not participate in NAPLAN testing during their placement. However students may participate in NAPLAN testing at their 'home' school. However many AQ enrolled students may also be exempt from NAPLAN testing, such decisions regarding exemption are determined by a student's Home School staff and parents.

All students attending AQ Schools have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) with goals set across curriculum areas. IEPs are reviewed 6 monthly in collaboration with the AQ School Team, Home School staff and parents.

Attendance

Student attendance - 2009

The average attendance rate for the whole school as a percentage in 2009 was 94.5%.