

A photograph of two young boys climbing a blue rope net structure outdoors. The boy on the left is wearing an orange shirt and dark shorts, while the boy on the right is wearing a dark t-shirt and camouflage shorts. They are both reaching up with their hands on the ropes. The background shows green trees and a clear sky. The image is used as a background for the school's annual report cover.

WARRAH
SPECIALIST SCHOOL

Annual Report

2023

Education with a difference



“We must recognise that every day of life has a special value, that it is not without purpose. We need to learn that each new day and each new year offers continual revelation”.

Dr Rudolf Steiner

Acknowledgement Of Country

Warrah stands on the ancestral lands of the Dharug people and we acknowledge that on this land they teach their families their beliefs, knowledge and culture. Just as the Dharug people nurture their community with love and support, similarly at Warrah we are committed to partnering with our community. With deep respect and gratitude, we pledge to continue this tradition by providing compassionate care and support to all who choose us as their partners on their journey.



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Chair's Report

On behalf of the board, welcome to our 2023 Annual Report. As always there is much to highlight.

Starting with a mundane but important look at the finances, our school once again managed to (almost!) break even. This is an admirable achievement for a school of our size when we consider that we lack the advantage of scale enjoyed by many of our peers. For very small schools, funding concerns are unfortunately always on the agenda but we continue to work hard to ensure that these concerns do not detract from our core goal of providing a unique and high-quality learning environment for our students.

Testimony to the demand for our unique offering, our school continues to run at capacity. Whilst it is great to have this endorsement from our student families, it also pushes the limits of our infrastructure. Our staff continue to impress with the innovative ways they manage to utilise every square inch of space available to them. The way in which they incorporate the outdoor focus and natural environment into the curriculum is both a feature and a necessity!

The opportunity to leverage the broader Warrah campus into the students' learning experience also adds significantly to the richness of the Warrah educational offering. Having students on the farm, visiting the shop, busy in the bakery or just generally enjoying the broader space helps add to the sense of community that makes Warrah a very special place for so many. It is also something that sets us apart and is an important factor for parents when choosing our school for their child.

The important word here is choice. Parents choose our school because they believe it is the best educational option for their child. It is with some irony that this year we received some startling recommendations from a Disability Royal Commission that completely failed to capture the nuanced needs of so many in our own community. I am of course referring to the recommendation that the government 'phase out' specialist schools such as ours by 2051.

Naturally we understand the inclusion argument. Indeed, you are unlikely to find a cohort of people who are more receptive and supportive of greater inclusion than the families and advocates of those living with a disability. However, to assume that 'shoe-horning' everyone into a one size fits all environment to satisfy a utopian idealistic goal and in doing so compromising the quality of a child's education is a frightening prospect. As a school we frequently hear from parents whose children have failed to thrive despite their and their school's best efforts to accommodate their needs, only for them to then flourish in an environment such as ours. Every child is different, and every parent deserves the right to choose what is right for their own child.

Earlier this year and as part of our efforts to ensure our parents and students voices are not missing from this important discussion we invited Laurie Leigh, Chief Executive Officer of NDS and Debbie Jagers, NDS State Manager – NSW to Warrah. This provided an opportunity for parents to meet and share their own insights into the critical role played by schools such as ours. This is one example of the advocacy role that, whilst we wish was not necessary, we will continue to conduct in the future. The more people who hear these stories the more confident we can be that the best outcomes will be achieved. It is simply too important not to.

Soapbox and negatives aside, we do have a great deal to celebrate and be proud of. Under the stewardship of our wonderful principal Anna Wetzel and adeptly supported by our CEO Delia Gray and her executive team we continue to evolve and progress. By continuing in our own highly differentiated approach, being true to our principles and being bold enough to share our achievements I feel confident that our school's future remains bright.

Thank you to all our staff, students, families and volunteers for their on-going support and congratulations on another great year.

Steve Malin
Chair

Principal's Update



Our strategic plan for future growth and development has guided our path this year. We have taken significant steps with a focus on partnerships, staff training, community inclusion, and the development of our Steiner based outdoor curriculum.

Potential and Inclusion

Seeing and nurturing potential lies at the core of our philosophy, and this year we have ventured beyond perceived limitations to create new opportunities for our students. We were proud to take our high school students on their very first overnight camp. It was an exciting adventure for students and staff alike, and one we intend to continue.

We expanded our community outings program, including visits to Warrah's onsite Waaia Café, which gently reduces barriers to inclusion, empowering our students to have the life skills to navigate new experiences.

Partnerships

We welcome regular community service visits from students of local and Steiner schools. Such visits provide our students the opportunity to build connections and friendships in a safe and supportive environment. Our guests have also made wonderful contributions toward our gardens and school grounds.

Therapies

In addition to our music and equine therapies, we were excited to reintroduce Eurythmy Therapy. Eurythmy Therapy is a transformative movement therapy that can have significant impact on attention span, concentration, motor skills and social behaviour. Throughout the year we witnessed several positive individual outcomes from this practice.

Volunteers

We maintain our valuable partnership with Freunde Waldorf. Each year, we welcome a new group of international young adults who live and volunteer at Warrah for 12 months. This offers a rich cultural exchange for our school and provides valuable work and life experience to the volunteers, who maximise their time in Australia by exploring the country during holidays and weekends.

Staffing

Our staff are our biggest asset, and we are so pleased to announce that Warrah Society received Xref's 2023 Best Workplace Award. We are extremely proud that in a recent Xref employee survey, our school staff reported wellbeing levels at 13% higher than the Independent Schools Benchmark. Read more about these wonderful results in the following pages.

We are pleased to welcome Assistant Principal Dawn Grant-Skiba to our leadership team. Dawn brings extensive expertise from leadership roles in specialist schools catering to students with high and complex needs. Her dedication to supporting both students and teachers aligns perfectly with our school's values. Dawn will join us in January 2024.

Community

Community holds immense significance for us, and we spare no effort in creating opportunities for family involvement, including festivals and events which are consistently very well attended. I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all parents and carers for your support, open communication, and generosity throughout the past year.

Anna Wetzel
Principal



School Profile

Warrah Specialist School provides *Education with a Difference* for Kindergarten to Year 12 students with moderate to severe intellectual disability and complex learning needs. We follow Rudolf Steiner's pedagogical philosophies and provide a unique and creative outdoor curriculum. Situated on an extensive bushland site, which includes a biodynamic farm, organic farm shop, and artisan bakery. Our school provides a natural and idyllic environment where students thrive.

We offer high-quality, personalised education with a focus on Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), which ensure learning is optimised and tailored for each student.

Students participate in a life skills curriculum at all ages, however when students enter senior school, there is an increased life skills focus, which includes workplace training, work experience and preparation for a life beyond school. Key Learning Areas, including literacy, numeracy, science, and physical development are integrated with traditional arts, weaving, woodwork, music, life skills, cooking, and farming.



Our Vision

To serve the needs and aspirations of people with intellectual disability through innovative education and supports that are engaging, connected and intentional.

Our Mission

Inspired by Steiner principles, we nurture self-determination, creativity and contribution.

Curriculum Approach

We are the only Steiner-based specialist school in Australia. We are proud of our innovative outdoor curriculum, which is guided by Steiner Education principles, and we are committed to delivering a holistic and comprehensive educational experience.

Students are empowered with the essential tools and skills for a thriving future beyond school. Our students are grouped based on activity and capability to ensure tailored learning experiences. Independent Learning Plans (ILPs) are crucial to each student's development, providing optimised and personalised education to help them reach their full potential through meaningful and purposeful activities.

Our curriculum focuses on individual growth and life skill acquisition. Through our integrated learning program, students gain a deeper connection to and appreciation for the natural world while engaging in meaningful activities.

***“Even the wisest can learn
incalculably much from children.”***

Dr Rudolf Steiner

Students develop their sense of place within the landscape and their community. Activities such as weaving, nature craft, bushwalking, gardening, and farming are integral to our curriculum, complementing literacy and numeracy. We believe that the context of learning – how and where children learn – is as important as the content itself.

Senior students participate in an extensive transition program that includes work experience, workplace training, and life skills. This program equips them with the knowledge and experience needed for a successful and fulfilling life beyond their school years.

We celebrate each child's unique qualities and contributions to our school community. We acknowledge that everyone has a valuable role to play in society and a meaningful path in their personal development.





Characteristics of the Student Body

Our students travel from various areas of Sydney and represent a wide range of backgrounds and cultures. To be eligible for enrolment at Warrah Specialist School, students must have an intellectual disability as their primary diagnosis. This is determined by a full-scale IQ score of approximately three to four standard deviations below the mean on an approved individual intelligence test. In addition to intellectual disability, our school also caters for students with various accompanying diagnoses.

Representative list of accompanying diagnoses supported



ADD/ADHD	Microcephaly
Angelman's Syndrome	Oculomotor Apraxia
Autism Spectrum Disorder, levels 1-3	Oppositional Defiant Disorder
Disruptive Mood Dysregulation	Physical Disability
Dissociative Amnesia	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
Down Syndrome	Reactive Attachment Disorder
Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder	Receptive and Expressive Language Delay
Gaucher Disease	Sensory Modulation Disorder
Genetic Chromosome Disorder	Sensory Processing Disorder
Hypomania	Speech Apraxia
Language Disorder	Subglottic Stenosis



Student Outcomes on Standardised Testing

Warrah Specialist School students did not participate in the Standardised National Literacy and Numeracy Testing. As a registered School of a Kind we do not offer the Record of School Achievement (RoSA) or the Higher School Certificate (HSC). Students graduating in Year 12 receive a Certificate of Achievement. External assessments were not taken by any student.

Student Attendance and Retention Rates

In 2023, a total of 30 students were enrolled at Warrah Specialist School, ranging from Kindergarten to Year 12. Among these students, there were 10 females and 20 males.

Given our focus on meeting the unique needs of our students, it is important to note that some students may require more intensive medical treatments and therapies. As a result, occasional absences may occur at a higher rate. Our dedicated staff work closely with students and their families to provide the necessary support and ensure the best possible educational experience.



Attendance Rate

Year Group	Number of Students	Attendance Percentage
K	1	75%
1	4	84%
2	4	80%
3	0	0%
4	0	0%
5	2	87%
6	1	88%
7	4	81%
8	1	94%
9	3	90%
10	5	85%
11	2	91.3%
12	3	61%*
Total average		83%

**One student (who represents 33% of our Year 12 class group) was granted extended leave for intensive therapies.*

Management of Student Non-Attendance

To ensure effective management of student attendance, the school has implemented specific policies and procedures. Parents verify absences by emailing the school office by 10am on the day of absence. Absences are uploaded to the student's file.

If any student is absent and the school has not been informed by 10am, the school will contact the parents via phone, text or email to notify them. Any unverified absence will be reported on the student's file.

Where parents repeatedly fail to notify the school of absences, the school executive will request a meeting with the parents to discuss the matter. Mandatory reporting procedures apply where absences are extended, or the student may be at risk of significant harm through school absence.

If extended leave of 5 days or more is required for therapies or family matters, an application must be sent by parents/carers to the Principal for approval.

Retention Rate

We are very pleased to report a 100% retention rate for Years 10 to 12 in 2023.

100% of Year 10 2022 cohort proceeded to Year 11 in 2023.

100% of Year 11 2022 cohort proceeded the Year 12 in 2023.

Post-School Destination

In 2023, we were proud to celebrate our one graduate, marking a significant milestone in his educational journey. We are extremely proud of this student who was a consistent and positive role model for his younger peers. He developed many skills while at Warrah, including being an apprentice baker and a very skilled weaver. He developed excellent reading skills and was a leader amongst his peer group. We wish him the very best in his future endeavours.



Parent Satisfaction

Given that many of our students are non-verbal, we place a strong emphasis on parent feedback to gauge satisfaction and ensure we are meeting the needs of our students. Clear and consistent communication with parents is crucial to this process. We regularly receive positive feedback from parents, highlighting several key aspects of our school:

Serene, Natural Environment: Parents note the calming influence our natural surroundings have on students, enhancing their ability to self-regulate.

Dedicated and Caring Teachers: Our teachers are frequently praised for their commitment and the extra care they provide to each student.

Inclusive Festivals and Events: The opportunity for parents to participate in festivals and events is highly valued. These celebrations are integral to the Steiner approach and foster a sense of community and involvement.

By maintaining open lines of communication and actively seeking parent input, we ensure that we continue to provide a nurturing and supportive environment for all students.

The following heartfelt testimonials from our parent community beautifully capture their satisfaction and experiences at Warrah Specialist School.

“We just love how Warrah has really helped our son discover his full potential! The amazing things he gets to experience on a daily basis and the opportunities he has, to not only build his confidence within and out in the community is heart-warming. The staff are beautiful and want all students to thrive just as much as their own family do. The care factor is phenomenal. Words can't describe how wonderful Warrah is for our child and our family.”

Primary school parent



“Finding Warrah School was a blessing for us, it is a little gem that not many people know about and I was lucky enough that my therapist had a child going to the school which is how we found out about it. I have loved this school, its teachers and methods since my child started in 2021. The life skills that the children learn are a great preparation for their future as adults and all the staff work closely with the kids and are always finding ways to help the kids grow and learn. I have learnt a lot of great techniques from the teachers to assist with my son's growth and feel very lucky to have such great support.”

High school parent

Student Satisfaction

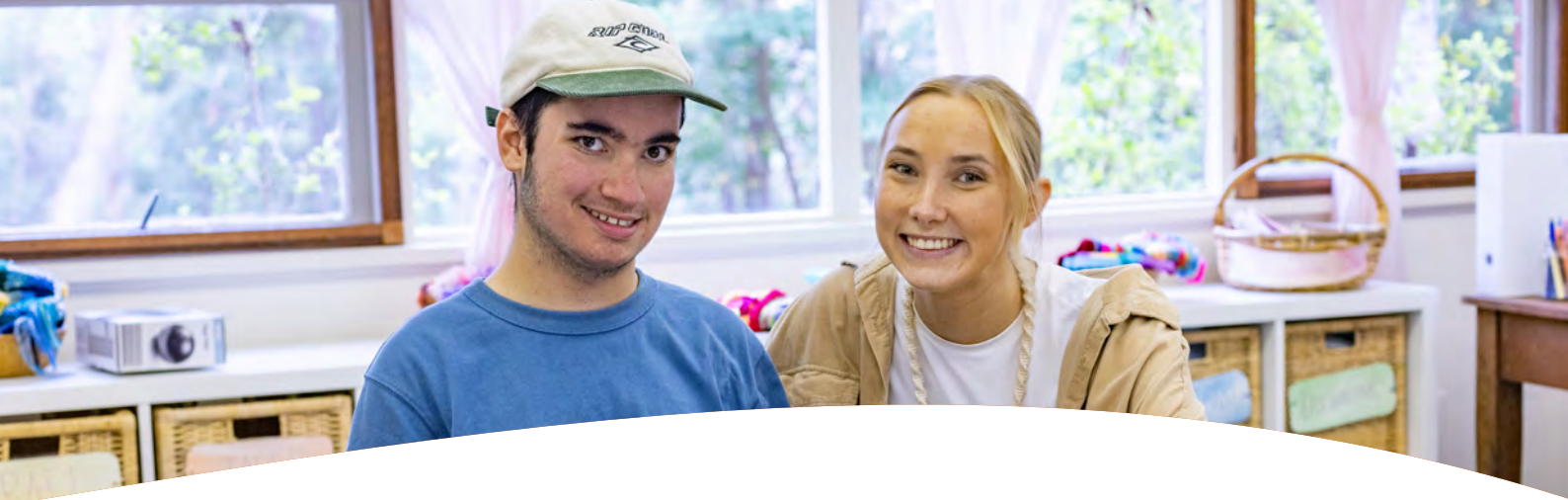
The enthusiasm and delight our students display when they arrive at school and engage with their teachers and peers each morning are strong indicators of their satisfaction. Our morning circle provides a special moment for students to connect and express gratitude through uplifting songs and verses.

Assessing student satisfaction at our school comes with unique challenges, especially for our non-verbal students who cannot communicate in conventional ways. Nonetheless, we've developed alternative methods to understand their happiness.

Throughout the day, our dedicated staff closely observe students' moods and emotional signals, enabling us to adjust the day's activities to meet their individual needs and ensure a rewarding experience. Our teaching staff take great pride in their ability to keenly observe our students, and it brings us immense joy to witness their social and emotional growth.

In addition to our observations, we rely on feedback from parents to gauge student satisfaction. It is the greatest compliment to hear from parents that their children are calmer at home and eager to come to school.





Staff Satisfaction

We are thrilled to announce that Warrah Society was awarded the prestigious **Xref 2023 Best Workplace Award**. This recognition celebrates organisations that have demonstrated exceptional levels of employee engagement, satisfaction, and effective management practices.

At Warrah Specialist School, we value our staff and are committed to maintaining an environment where new ideas are welcomed, and staff feel supported, valued, and engaged. This positive and collaborative approach has resulted in consistently high engagement and wellbeing results, as well as a 50% higher retention rate in 2023.

In 2023 we partnered with Xref, an external independent agency, to undertake a survey to measure employment engagement, wellbeing, and progress. The survey had over 90% response rate from school staff, with most respondents reporting high levels of engagement, positive wellbeing and progress at work.

Highly Engaged Staff

87% reported high engagement. We prioritise a supportive workplace culture, where staff feel valued and motivated to make a positive difference in the lives of our students. This result is 4% above the independent schools benchmark.

Positive Wellbeing at Work

We understand the importance of supporting our staff's emotional wellness and stress management, especially in a challenging and demanding work environment. We are pleased to report that 78% reported positive wellbeing, which is a 6% improvement from 2022, and is 13% above the independent schools benchmark.

Continual Progress

81% of survey respondents reported satisfaction with the school's progress, and our ability to deliver progressive and positive outcomes. We create an environment where new ideas are welcomed and encouraged.

“Our staff wellbeing levels were 13% higher than the Independent Schools Benchmark in 2023.”



Workforce Composition and Teaching Qualifications

Workforce Composition and Teaching Qualifications

The school's staff members are highly dedicated and dynamic. Throughout 2023, significant progress was made in establishing strong partnerships between the school, families, and other stakeholders. The school collaborates with allied health professionals including speech pathologists, occupational therapists, and behaviour support specialists.

All teaching staff work with NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) to ensure accreditation and proficiency requirements are met with the Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW) appointed as Warrah's supervising body for these matters.

One member of staff reports to be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, and several staff are from varied ethnic backgrounds. Our school supports the principles of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) in the recruitment of staff.

School Staff 2023

The School's administration team comprises the Principal, Deputy Principal and Administration Support. The academic structure consists of five mixed-age classes spanning from Kindergarten to Year 12, with six to eight students in each class. Each class is assigned a teacher along with two teaching assistants. Our average staff to student ratio is 1:2.

Further information available at <https://www.myschool.edu.au/school/43916>

Staff Role	Number of Staff	FTE
Teaching staff	5	4.4
Non-teaching staff	18	10.9

Teacher Accreditation

Staff Role	Number of Teachers
Conditional	0
Provisional	0
Proficient	5
Highly Accomplished Teacher (Voluntary Accreditation)	0
Lead Teacher (Voluntary Accreditation)	0
Total number of teachers	5

The above table shows an overview of teaching staff, including relief staff, responsible for delivering the curriculum as described by Parts 1, 3, 7 and 8 of the Education Act 1990.

Teacher Qualifications

Category	Number of Teachers
Teachers who have teaching qualifications from a higher education institution within Australia or as recognised within the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AEI-NOOSR) guidelines,	5
Teachers who have qualifications as a graduate from a higher education institution within Australia or one recognised within the AEI-NOOSR guidelines but lack formal teacher education qualifications,	0
Leadership and support roles who have relevant tertiary qualifications.	2

Professional Learning and Development

Teaching Support and Professional Development

Our staff actively engage in a variety of professional development initiatives. The following is a summary of Professional Development Programs that were completed during 2023.

2023 Professional Development Opportunities

Professional Learning Activity	No of staff participating
CPR Training	14
Diabetes in Schools	4
Challenging Behaviour AIS NSW	20
Using a Communication Device, Aska	20
MEA Interpretation, AIS NSW	2
Principal Induction Training	1
Administration of Medication at School	17
Web Writing Course, Sydney University	1
Wet Painting and Storytelling at the Rudolf Steiner College	4
Preparing for a Random Inspection in 2023	2
An Overview of Steiner Education by Andrew Hill	20
AISNSW Employment Relations Symposium - Navigating Workers Compensation in Schools	1
Artisan day – Steiner arts and crafts	20
Safety Intervention AIS NSW	20
An Introduction to Steiner Education and Anthroposophy in the World Today by Andrew Hill	6
Insights into the Pedagogy and Teaching Methodology	7
LawSense School Policy Writing Workshop	1
AIS: Effective Schools Service Information Webinar	1
Steiner Spring Seminar	1
Warrah Specialist School tailored Professional Development - 2 Days	20
Introduction to Restorative Practices in Steiner Schools with Dr Shelley Davidow	3





2023 School Determined Improvement Targets: Results

Priorities for 2023	Achievements
Growth and Development	
Develop a strategic plan for future growth and development.	Achieved
Teaching and Learning	
Continued refinement of the Outdoor Curriculum.	Achieved
Enhance teachers' performance and foster professional development by implementing a comprehensive range of learning opportunities specifically tailored to teaching students with disabilities.	Achieved
Community	
Expand the range of therapies offered to meet the needs of students while aligning with Steiner principles.	Achieved
Environment	
Develop a designated sensory room.	In progress





2024 School Determined Improvement Targets

Proposed Targets for 2024

Growth and Development

Develop a strategic plan for future growth and development.

Teaching and Learning

Develop a peer mentoring/coaching program to enhance quality in teaching as well as culture.

Professional development opportunities tailored to Teacher Assistants.

Develop a network for teachers to encourage peer collaboration.

Community Integration

Develop a transition plan for our senior students focusing on community integration through work experience, life skills and workplace training.

Connecting with local indigenous leaders.

Community of Practice

Organise a Learning Support Conference at Warrah, inviting Steiner Learning Support Teachers from across Australia. The aim is to showcase the impactful work being done at Warrah while also raising awareness of Warrah's presence among educators nationwide.

Environment

Build a pergola for our Primary School classroom so that it can be used as an outdoor classroom.

Complete sensory room.





Respect and Responsibility

Building a Supportive Community

Warrah Specialist School values the active participation of parents and staff in fostering a supportive and respectful school community where everyone is valued. Our school is guided by Rudolf Steiner's pedagogy, which form the foundation of our ethos and informs our approach to education.

Prioritising Student Wellbeing, Learning, and Safety

We promote a safe and inclusive environment, positive relationships, and optimal learning experiences. To ensure a holistic approach to student development, we prioritise student wellbeing, learning, and safety. We have implemented various practices and resources that promote a safe and inclusive environment, positive relationships and optimal learning experiences.

Ensuring a Safe and Inclusive Environment

Each student's Independent Learning Plan contains an individualised wellbeing support document. This document outlines personalised strategies to keep students positively engaged. We are dedicated to maintaining a safe environment, adhering to child protection requirements, and providing ongoing support to our students and staff.

Individualised Wellbeing Support

Daily debriefing sessions allow us to address operational matters, while also providing opportunities for staff to discuss individual student and staff wellbeing concerns.

An anonymous suggestion box is available to all staff, with suggestions discussed at weekly meetings. An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available free of charge to all Warrah Specialist School staff.

By prioritising the values of community, student wellbeing, and a safe learning environment, Warrah Specialist School strives to create a nurturing and enriching experience for all members of our school community.

School Policies

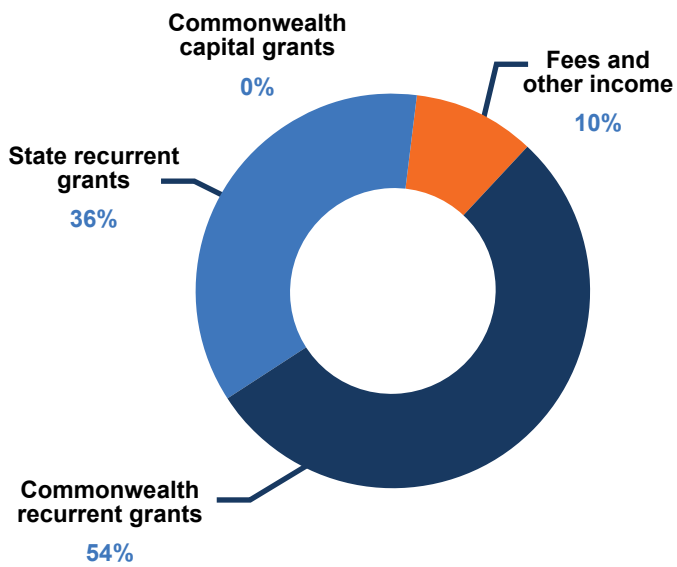
The following school policies are publicly available on our [school website](#):

- [Enrolment Policy](#)
- [Child Protection Policy](#)
- [Anti-Bullying Policy](#)
- [Discipline Policy](#)
- [Complaints Policy](#)

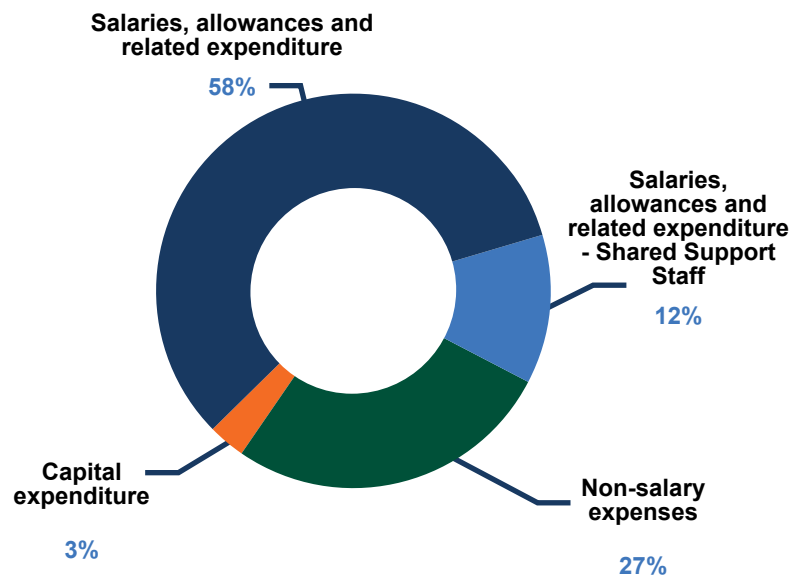


Summary of Financial Information

Recurrent/capital income
31 December 2023



Recurrent/capital expenditure
31 December 2023



WARRAH
SPECIALIST SCHOOL

Education with a difference

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