

2022 Annual Report to the School Community



School Name: Bendigo Special Developmental School (5298)

About Our School

School context

The Bendigo Special Developmental School provides education programs for school aged students 5 to 18 with a moderate to severe intellectual disability. Our students reside in the Bendigo Region encompassing Kyneton, Wedderburn, Heathcote, and Huntly. The current enrolment is 152 students. In the 2022 May State Budget, the school received \$8.874 million to upgrade and modernise the school, including the building of permanent facilities.

DET and VCAA curriculum guidelines are followed at the school, with all students being taught seven subjects (the school is exempt from teaching languages) and two of the four capabilities of the Victorian Curriculum. The Victorian Teaching and Learning Model is used to design and implement an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) for each student, coupled with a communication passport, which identifies a student's preferred communication system and skills. Staff work in Professional Learning Communities to collaboratively plan and moderate student learning and achievement.

Classrooms include portables and fixed buildings and are equipped with a range of augmentative and alternative communication (ACC) aids and modified furniture that support access to learning. The school has a hydrotherapy pool and a student kitchen. Six specialist subjects are taught, which comprises Health and Physical Education, including a standalone swimming program, STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Arts Mathematics), the Dramatic Arts and Music, Humanities, Digital Technologies and Rights, Resilience and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) incorporating School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) expectations. These programs are supported by a range of adapted bicycles, coupled with a specialised equipment and utilise a multi-purpose room to enrich programs. The grounds comprise a secure and in places, stimulating outdoor environment, with challenging play equipment and shade port sun protection make for engaging outdoor play spaces. The school has been officially gifted the name 'Manya' meeting 'Meeting Site' by the elders of the tradition landowners, the Dja Dja Wurrung, for the outdoor space located at the north end of the school.

Communication and creating a shared meaning between staff and parents is a priority. Student Support Group meetings are held each term and support the preparation and review of the Individual Education Plan. Parent and caregiver dialogue is supported by fortnightly newsletters, a Facebook page, and daily communication through either an app called SeeSaw or a student diary. An active parent and carer group called Parent 2 Parent meet fortnightly and learning programs are augmented to maximise access and engagement by the school's Family Support Teacher and Physiotherapist who are both employed 0.6 and full time Occupational Therapist, Speech Therapist and Mental Health Practitioner. The school has a Behaviour Coach who is a Certified Behaviour Analyst and whose role, in conjunction with the Leading Teacher of Curriculum is central to facilitating access and inclusion to learning.

A small number of students are dual enrolled in mainstream schools for varying time fractions. Cooperative planning and programming between both educational settings and continual review and support of student progress are essential elements of the success and extension of these programs.

As a recognised resource for special education in many areas of evidence-based practice, the school provides an information, consultancy and professional development base for external teachers, parents, tertiary students, and other people involved in the disability field. This is evidenced by the Learning Specialist Inclusion Outreach Coach (IOC), who works with surrounding mainstream schools in the support of students with disability. This is part of the Disability Inclusion Reform agenda, which the school has been at the forefront of implementing as part of the year one rollout across DET.

This school is committed to respecting the dignity of the individual and being "a place of excellence in education that creates inclusive communities and success for all".

Progress towards strategic goals, student outcomes and student engagement

Learning

Bendigo Special Developmental School was the recipient of a SchoolsPlus grant that funded a year long coach towards a project goal in mathematics plus the purchase of resources and professional learning. The project goal was "To improve teacher capacity in delivering a whole school approach to delivering and assessing developmentally appropriate mathematical curriculum to improve individual student skill attainment". The vehicle for the professional learning aspect of this focus was through teachers working in Professional Learning Communities throughout the year. The whole-school inquiry process used evidence-based practice

and research as guided by the Leading Mathematics instructional leader course through the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership.

The professional learning, focused on the following:

- Term 1: How to prepare students to be 'Ready to Learn' to maximise psychological arousal to facilitate access to learning
- Term 2: Using data to inform responsive teaching. At the completion of this PLC inquiry, all teachers participated in a whole-school number and algebra-moderated assessment task. Teachers shared a video sample from their class and then used discussion, their increased Victorian Curriculum knowledge and cited evidence to agree on a skill attainment level.
- Terms 3 & 4: Ready to Learn/Responsive Teaching/Mathematics and Numeracy/Number and Algebra. Pulling practice and research together to design point of need mathematics lessons for individual students.

These inquiry cycles evidenced the culmination of the teachers' professional learning in conjunction with their knowledge of their students to plan, teach and assess mathematical concepts at their individual point of need. To this end, 75% of students with comparable data demonstrated skill acquisition growth on their ABLES Mathematics assessment, with a total of 7 students showing no progress, yet no regression, and 14 students demonstrating a regression in skills. This regression figure can be attributed to three factors:

1. A small number of students who have degenerative conditions.
2. Increased teacher content knowledge has resulted in a more rigorous and accurate assessment process.
3. A number of students who demonstrated skill regression had a correlating high level of absence.

A significant aspect of the project was the bi-monthly assessment of progress against a transformation rubric, that outlines baseline, developing, consolidating and accomplished success criteria. Bendigo SDS made progress in all areas of the rubric, with the following key elements demonstrated.

- An adaptive learning culture has been developed with the establishment of Teaching and Learning (PLC) leaders.
- School leaders and staff have created a shared vision for practice change.
- Middle leaders are feeling an authorising environment to lead the professional conversations and inquiry.
- Whilst we cannot say it is yet true for every student, some students have demonstrated being aspirational about the future and understand that their learning has a wider purpose and application for their adult life.
- There has been a shift in parent/carer expectations with significant emphasis on what students are going to learn and how this learning can be transferred to the home and community environment.
- The internal processes of targeted interventions within the school are becoming more streamlined and formalised with the systems around multi-tier interventions growing the professional trust in staff
- And finally, there is a shared accountability between leadership and middle leaders, who are advocates for practice change, and teachers and ES staff are clearly articulating that practice change is continuous, important and makes a positive difference to student outcomes.

Wellbeing

Bendigo Special Developmental School experienced three separate 'waves' of illness, both COVID and other illnesses which have an impact on all aspects of wellbeing for students and staff, and the wider school community. This therefore became a priority that underpinned all strategic and operational decisions, and required a wellbeing lens throughout the introduction of all processes, procedures and priorities identified for the 2022 schooling year. Many requests from families were made during the year for support with:

- NDIS plan reviews
- Assistance sourcing NDIS services
- Wellbeing support through connection to mental health services such as the Centre for Non Violence, the Multi-Cultural Support Centre and Headspace
- Wellbeing support through connection with DFFS via Orange Door
- Emergency aid for food and clothing supplied from School Breakfast Club, Food Bank, the One Box Program and State Schools Relief

The school was able to respond promptly to families through the school Family Support Teacher and Mental Health Practitioner and their ability to connect families to many services. The Outside Of School Hours Care Demonstration Project also provided respite relief for families as, on recommendations from teachers, students were provided with a placement at OHSC. The efforts of staff to make and maintain contact and support with families, particularly those "at risk" was highlighted positively and has been attributed to the increase in engagement from some students who previously had a low attendance rate, and several who had been home schooled for school refusing for many years. Additionally all staff undertook the updated Community Understanding and Safety Training (CUST) in order to work towards increasing our understanding of Koorie culture, history, and experience to ensure a strong foundation for culturally inclusive practices.

Many measures were implemented and encouraged to support staff and provide assurance to the wider school community of a COVID safe learning and work place. In line and in addition to the DET School Operations Guide these included:

- Coronavirus information and proactive health advice including risk assessments for transmission and visuals to support hygiene and social distancing in the school and home environments. (Additional support was provided with augmented versions including visual supports and language differences (translation via Karen support staff worker).
- Providing information relating to vaccinations, specifically providing the contact details for the Disability Liaison Officer at Bendigo Health and hosting a Vaccination Pop Up Clinic onsite
- First Aid Risk Assessment / Isolation procedures (including visuals)
- Safe Work Procedures for
 - Blood and Body Fluids / Cross Contamination
 - Procedures with daily completion checklists and guidance to put on Personal Protective Equipment
 - Physical Distancing Guidelines for Schools with visual posters and fact sheets around the school environment
 - Online training modules regarding OHS
 - Risk assessments to accompany essential deliveries of goods sourced through the school that were to be delivered via the school bus with school staff.
 - Mental Health and Wellbeing resources (webinars / online gym) available through the Department were highlighted with to staff and specific professional learning was undertaken with through iPar entitled Strong4Life Workforce Training, as part of a pilot DET initiative.

Members of the Leadership team and the Family Support Teacher regularly met with DET SSS Psychologist to discuss, plan and implement wellbeing supports for students and staff, and the full implementation of the Mental Health Practitioner significantly increased the school's capacity to respond to individual student mental health needs, plan and deliver mental health awareness and strategy lessons and experiences and raise and normalise the active discussion of mental health impacts and support strategies at an individual, group and whole school level for staff and students alike.

Engagement

Throughout 2022, the student well-being and attendance policy was reviewed and implemented with extended fidelity. This led to an interrogation of entered absence coding on the department's database system, to reduce the level of parent choice/school-approved absences. In some cases, although extreme, this led to school refusal patterns, in the majority, however, it saw 2022 have a higher rate of student absences than in 2021. Additionally, there was an increase in incidences of behaviours of concern recorded.

We can hypothesise that the school did not hit the student engagement data targets comprising both attendance and behaviours of concern due to the interruptions in school attendance, routines and structures. With respect to the behaviours of concern data, there are a small number of students that influence the majority of deviations from the expected behaviours. This cohort of students are typically complex learners with equally complex care team structures, which change the overall school data set, yet the school is structured and resources as such, to limit the impact of these behaviours of concern on the wider student population. It should also be noted that there were 19 more students in 2022 than in 2021, which does not allow a like for like comparison on a cohort level. (It is or this reason that our data sets focus on the individual child). Additionally, throughout 2022, there was a high level of staff and student absences. This resulted in the uncertainty of being able to predict and provide continuity and the presence of familiar adults within the students' learning environments. Within a Special Developmental School, relationships, predictable routines and structures are critical to allow students to engage within the learning programs.

Having noted that, 81% of students have demonstrated an increased attainment against both their ABLES Personal and Social Capability: Self Emotion assessment and ABLES Personal and Social Capability: Social assessment. Strategic planning for the 2023 school year utilised these data sets to guide the classroom allocation, staffing and concrete resources, with a view to identifying multi-disciplinary targeted learning and engagement strategies for individual students.

Other highlights from the school year

Whilst Bendigo SDS, like all organisations within the community continued to be impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic in a variety of ways, not least waves of illness and staff shortages, there were still many highlights that were able to take place. For the first time since 2018, the school was able to host its Bi-annual Debutante Ball on 17th June 2022, where 18 young debutantes took centre stage at the "Dancing Under the Stars" themed night. The staging of the event was the culmination of months of practice and hours and hours of preparation from students, staff and parents and carers alike, and has been a long time highlight of a student's schooling career for many families. This night was a great example of the "inclusion as a Practice" with all of our students in their final two years supported to have a successful evening. Other opportunities came for our senior students with the

Inaugural Specialist School's Rural Youth Ambassadors (RYA) run by the Country Education Partnership (CEP) organisation. Two of our student leaders met with students from other special schools and were supported to undertake a range of conversations focused on rural and remote life and learning, utilising a solution focused approach to address the challenges they identified. The students met and presented to the Minister of Education (Natalie Hutchins) on the solutions they had collectively developed with their mainstream peers.

Students, parents and carers alike also had the pleasure of meeting the former Minister of Education (James Merlino) when he came to the school to accept a 4000 strong signature petition calling for an upgrade to our facilities. The school community were rewarded for their incredible advocacy with the announcement of a Major Capital Works project, to begin the complete redevelopment of the school.

Of course, the greatest highlights of the year were the individual student achievements, vast and varied, and the ability of our incredible staff to create such a positive and successful educational experience for all.

Financial performance

Bendigo Special Developmental School was in receipt of Equity funding that was utilised to support the employment of the Family Support Teacher and a Koori Liaison Officer to targeted curriculum delivery and development in learning programs and to lead improvement in the teaching and learning capacity of teachers. The school continued to access "Advance" funding, which was used to resource Carer Education Pathway programs, albeit in a limited capacity due to the impact of staffing shortages and some restrictions on excursions and work experience in line with the DET COVID Operational Guidelines. Planning for the Outdoor Sports Hub Upgrade through the 20-21 Minor Capital Works Fund, overseen by the Victorian School Building Authority continued, although the timeline for completion of this significantly impacted and it remains incomplete at the conclusion of the 2022 schooling year. At this stage, the funds associated with this capital works program are to be incorporated into the Major Capital Works upgrade for the school.

A modest surplus was recorded despite the school being in deficit for the majority of the year, limiting cash flow and financial strategic planning due to the implementation of the Disability Inclusion Profile funding model in place of the Program for Students with Disabilities. This achieved surplus was a testament to the dedication and expertise of the Leading Teacher of Wellbeing and the upskilling off staff in the documentation of adjustments made for individual students to access all aspects of learning. The cost of replacement staff to ensure adequate staffing levels to maintain student and staff safety whilst continuing the teaching and learning focus proved more challenging and costly than in the two previous years of the pandemic and was the major contributor to the school budget.

For more detailed information regarding our school please visit our website at
www.bendigods.vic.edu.au