

# About Our School

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## School context

### School Context

Our vision is to empower students to reach their personal best. Our core values are learning, respect, responsibility and resilience. We are student centred, we respect ourselves and each other, and understand that our attitudes and behaviours have an impact on the people around us. We are responsible and we take care of our school and the property of others. We are resilient and persistent even when things are difficult.

At Vermont South Special School (VSSS) we are intent on engaging students in their learning through providing highly qualified teaching staff, proactive leadership and a safe and inclusive environment. It is our mission to provide students with the best possible foundation in life through a well-rounded education. Our school's strategic goals are to maximise student learning growth and to maximise student wellbeing.

VSSS is located in Vermont South in the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, in an attractive residential area that is in close proximity to a variety of community facilities. The school is a primary specialist setting for students with an intellectual disability (Full Scale Intelligence Quotient of between 50 - 70), aged between 5 - 12. Many students also exhibit other diagnosed disabilities and medical conditions, with 46% of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Students come from seven local government areas and are transported to school by bus. In 2023, 148 students were enrolled, with 2.7% of students identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and 22% coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Our Student Family Occupation and Education Index (SFOE) was 0.3867.

The school has 61 staff members: 2 Principal Class, 27 teachers (Full Time Equivalent 24.8) and 32 Education Support Staff (FTE 25.4). The school is divided into four sections: Foundation, Juniors, Middles and Seniors. Class sizes are small, ranging from 6 - 7 students in Foundation to 12 - 13 students in Seniors. Qualified Special Education teachers, together with teacher assistants ensure that students' individual needs are catered for. Students are further supported by specialist subjects; Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Physical Education and the Healthy Kitchen Program. Two occupational therapists, a physiotherapist, 2 speech pathologists, a nurse and 2 re-engagement officers also support students' additional needs.

We have a holistic approach with high expectations for all students. We maintain a positive, inclusive, respectful and safe learning environment through the implementation of School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) which builds a positive culture and promotes academic and social success for our students. Our daily assemblies promote a sense of school pride as we celebrate students' efforts and achievements.

Our pedagogical model is based on the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model and Explicit Instruction, where students are guided through the learning process, moving from teacher centred whole group delivery to student centred collaboration, and independent practice. Lessons include clear learning intentions, explicit modelling, supported practice and specific feedback. This model allows for targeted teaching that caters for individual needs, and supports our focus on the acquisition of early literacy and numeracy skills and improved student outcomes. Teachers work collaboratively to analyse student and cohort data, developing Individual Education Plans for each student, and units of work based on the Victorian Curriculum. The use of digital technology, concrete materials and visuals support student learning. Science, camps, excursions, bike education and specialist subjects provide opportunities for students to generalise their skills and develop personal and social capability. Every opportunity is taken to foster a love of learning, and to support and challenge students to put in a maximum effort.

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## Progress towards strategic goals, student outcomes and student engagement

### Learning

A highlight in 2023 was the school review which occurred in term 1. The review took place over three weeks and confirmed the school's self-assessment as a high performing school. In addition, the panel found that the school had a very positive culture, clarity of purpose, clear communication, and a high level of collaboration, consistency, and cohesion. The school also received

excellent feedback in the 2023 parent and staff opinion surveys, with a positive parent endorsement for 'School Connection and progression' of 95% compared with the state average for special schools of 87%. In the staff opinion survey, the school's overall positive endorsement for 'School Climate' was 92% compared to the state average for special schools of 68%.

As a Specialist School setting, all our students are on the Program for Students with a Disability (PSD) and have an Individual Education Plan. During 2023, 95% of students achieved their Personal and Social Capability goals, 99% achieved their English goals, 99% achieved their mathematics goals and 92% achieved their specialist subject goals. It is pleasing to report that the school has met the targets set in the 2023-2026 School Strategic Plan for learning growth. Teacher judgements indicated that 78% of students moved one or more progression points in Reading and Viewing and 60% of students moved one or more progression points in Writing and Speaking and Listening. In mathematics, teacher judgments indicated that 86% of students moved one or more progression points in Number & Algebra, 83% in Measurement & Geometry and 67% in Statistics and Probability. As a school, we continue to strengthen school capabilities to deliver consistent practice that promotes the learning growth of all students, strengthen Professional Learning Communities to support teachers to continuously improve their teacher practice, and strengthen authentic student voice and agency in their learning.

## Wellbeing

In 2023, the school achieved the Gold level School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) implementation status for the second year in a row which is a very significant achievement. The SWPBS framework together with our Personal and Social Capability curriculum, have fostered an environment that is supportive, and together they enhance students' participation and engagement. This is reflected in the Attitudes to School Survey with a 95% positive response for students' 'sense of connectedness' and a 92% positive response for 'student voice and agency'. 100% of our students felt connected to school. Student wellbeing and engagement continued to be further supported through "Student of the Week" awards and the receipt of tickets for following the school expectations (Be Safe, Be Responsible, Be Respectful, Be a Learner). Weekly draws for a milkshake reward, receiving a wristband for earning 50 tickets for a school expectation, and whole school rewards combined to promote prosocial and positive learning behaviour. The "Stop, Walk, Talk" anti-bullying program continued to be taught throughout the school, and supported students to have agency in stopping a problem and in asking for help should the problem continue. The school Breakfast Club continued to be very popular with students and parents, with approximately 40 students registered. The partnership with Foodbank and a supermarket enabled the school to support many families with groceries and bread.

The student attitude to school survey indicated:

Sense of Inclusion – 97% in 2023

Managing Bullying - 97% in 2023

The Parent Opinion Survey indicated:

Promoting Positive Behaviour – 100% in 2023

Celebrating achievement in all areas – 100% in 2023

Teachers are enthusiastic and positive about teaching – 100% 2023

## Engagement

Student engagement and participation in learning in 2023 was once again challenged due to student absences related to sickness, and the requirement to not attend school if a student had Covid-like symptoms. In 2023, the average number of absence days per student fell from 28 days to 23 days. The percentage of students with 20 days or more absence was 38% compared to similar schools who had 54%. Throughout 2023, the Wellbeing Team engaged with families and/or Student Support Services to address individual student needs, and to reengage students with low or extended absences.

Student Support Group meetings were held three times through the year focusing on developing an Individual Education Plan for each student, communicating progress, and addressing each student's specific needs. In addition, workshops were held for parents focusing on managing behaviours in the home, writing, and exploring intellectual disability.

Throughout 2023, the school held numerous events including Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day open mornings, Book Week activities, an Athletics Carnival, and Harmony Day which celebrated diversity and inclusion. The introduction of "Go Green Day" and "Nude Food Awards" provided an opportunity for students to focus on sustainability. The school concert, "Under Construction – the case of the missing toolkit" was an absolute highlight, with wonderful performances from students across the school. The theme reflected the ongoing construction work where the state government's grant of \$10.108 million was being used to build new state of the art learning spaces.

Camps and weekly excursions such as the innovative 'JumpStart Gymnastics Program' provided opportunities for students to generalise their learning and build confidence. Transitions for new students in and out of the school were supported by our liaison officer.

Indeed, these all combined to build a sense of connectedness, engagement and create stronger partnerships between families and the school.

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## Financial performance

The school delivered a healthy surplus in 2023 due to strong financial management and an increase in enrolments. There was a significant increase in the operating revenue resulting from an increase in the student resource package and Government Provided Department of Education and Training (DET) Grants. The school employed an additional teacher, Education Support staff and Occupational Therapist. Tutors were employed to support students in literacy and mathematics and equity funding of \$34,172 was partly used to support a re-engagement officer. Grant money continued to be used to support the School Holiday Program and additional money was spent to purchase equipment for the new building.

The \$10.108 million building upgrade and modernisation continued throughout 2023 with renovations taking place in the administration building as well as numerous landscaping projects. The majority of construction was completed by the end of 2023, ready for students to use in 2024. The school has continued to maintain other facilities to a high standard during this time.

VSSS does not charge school fees, but voluntary parent contributions continued to support a range of programs.

All funds received from the Department, or raised by the school, have been expended or committed to subsequent years to support the achievement of educational outcomes and other operational needs of the school; consistent with Department policies and the priority initiatives identified by the School Council.