

2022 Annual Report

Cascade Environmental Education Centre



5731

Introduction

The Annual Report for 2022 is provided to the community of Cascade Environmental Education Centre as an account of the school's operations and achievements throughout the year.

It provides a detailed account of the progress the school has made to provide high quality educational opportunities for all students, as set out in the Strategic Improvement Plan. It outlines the findings from self-assessment that reflect the impact of key school strategies for improved learning and the benefit to all students from the expenditure of resources, including equity funding.

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Message from the principal

2022 was a year where the programs and opportunities offered by Cascade EEC returned to previous levels.



Working with students on the Nambucca River monitoring microplastics.

School vision

Cascade Environmental Education Centre (EEC) acknowledges the traditional custodians of Australia and will always keep First Nations Peoples' relationship with the land at the centre of our programs. Cascade EEC aims to provide relevant and influential educational experiences and opportunities that will engage and motivate all students and teachers to become the best they can be in our context. Every student that participates in a Cascade program has the opportunity to achieve their personal best through engaged, active learning in a safe, respectful, collaborative and supportive environment.

Every student and teacher that participates in our programs is excited to do so, safe when participating, is interested in the activity and what will result from it, engaged in a practical and hands on way, is able to utilise applicable resources and technology, becomes inspired and sees the linkages to these experiences, their life and their local community.

School context

Cascade EEC is surrounded by a World Heritage listed, 250 million year old rain forest on the Dorrigo Plateau. Cascade is one of 25 Environmental and Zoo Education Centres (EZEC) in NSW.

Cascade EEC is a local school, a regional and state wide resource that supports and partners with schools to meet their curriculum requirements. With these partners we utilise environmental education, sustainability education, outdoor learning and creating a sense of wonder for our natural world. This development of hands on and real learning strengthens every individuals ability to grow and develop.

As part of a collaborative team of EECs, schools, government and non-government organisations, Cascade provides a variety of experiences that are founded in the curriculum at a number of locations within NSW. Whilst we have local networks and communities of schools, we provide support to any public school in NSW. The Centre continues to support schools in their implementation of the curriculum, Departmental sustainability goals and aspirations, the Environmental Education Policy and to provide essential natural and sustainability based experiences both inside and outside of the classroom.

We aim to provide quality experiences that enhance student engagement and learning outcomes and to empower students and their communities to become well informed, confident, practical, educated and empowered environmental citizens.

It is the privilege of Cascade EEC to be in a position to work with a large variety of schools and other organisations across NSW. Over the coming four years we will be focusing on delivering programs that are curriculum-relevant and meet the needs of teachers and students. These programs will be developed in consultation with schools in order to meet their situational needs.

Cascade EEC Teachers will be given the opportunity to grow and develop within their profession through attending a variety of curriculum and sustainability education focused learning opportunities and to collaborate with their environmental education peers.

Self-assessment and school achievement

This section of the annual report outlines the findings from self-assessment using the School Excellence Framework, school achievements and the next steps to be pursued.

This year, our school undertook self-assessment using the School Excellence Framework. The Framework is a statement of what is valued as excellence for NSW public schools, both now and into the future. The Framework supports public schools throughout NSW in the pursuit of excellence by providing a clear description of high quality practice across the three domains of Learning, Teaching and Leading.

Each year, we assess our practice against the Framework to inform our Strategic Improvement Plan and annual report.

Our self-assessment process will assist the school to refine our Strategic Improvement Plan, leading to further improvements in the delivery of education to our students.

For more information about the School Excellence Framework: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/school-excellence-and-accountability>

Self-assessment using the School Excellence Framework

Elements	2022 School Assessment
LEARNING: Learning Culture	Delivering
LEARNING: Wellbeing	Sustaining and Growing
LEARNING: Curriculum	Sustaining and Growing
LEARNING: Assessment	Delivering
LEARNING: Reporting	Working towards Delivering
LEARNING: Student performance measures	Working towards Delivering
TEACHING: Effective classroom practice	Sustaining and Growing
TEACHING: Data skills and use	Delivering
TEACHING: Professional standards	Sustaining and Growing
TEACHING: Learning and development	Excelling
LEADING: Educational leadership	Sustaining and Growing
LEADING: School planning, implementation and reporting	Sustaining and Growing
LEADING: School resources	Sustaining and Growing
LEADING: Management practices and processes	Sustaining and Growing

Cascade benefited from the External Validation conducted in 2021. The EV combined with negotiated priorities with our client schools has enabled us to consider our priority areas for the next 5 year cycle.

We will continue to provide rich and relevant learning experiences that are founded in the curriculum and aim to support students and teachers on their educational journeys.

Strategic Direction 1: Excellence in Learning and Teaching

Purpose

To facilitate quality learning, through meaningful, culturally and contextually relevant environmental and sustainability education experiences.

To develop students' and teachers' knowledge and skills, through a planned and systematic approach to staff Professional Development.

To empower program participants and teachers to become capable of positively influencing their future.

Initiatives

This year our school implemented the following initiatives to support the realisation of the four year Strategic Improvement Plan and the achievement of system-negotiated and school-determined targets.

- Excellence in learning and teaching
- Teacher Professional Development

Resources allocated to this strategic direction

Location: \$647.00

Per capita: \$2,000.00

Professional learning: \$3,000.10

Summary of progress

What did we do?

As the school year progressed each term became busier. This culminated in term 4 being our most productive term since the beginning of covid. During this term alone, Cascade staff developed programs in consultation with a variety of schools and other Environmental Education Centres (EEC's) and provided programs for nearly 450 students over 1100 student days during term 4. The programs conducted included 21 camp days, 8 day trips, 5 water-wise days, 9 PD days and 9 other programs and initiatives.

These collaborations resulted in high quality programs and experiences for students including:

- A senior geography program resource was developed and trialed. Cascade EEC in partnership with Observatory Hill EEC (OHEEC) and Field of Mars EEC (FOMECC) developed a senior geography study entitled "Ecosystems at risk - a study of the temperate rainforest at Cascade".
- A new pilot program targeting water use in schools funded by the Department of Planning and Environment,
- A new pilot program targeting waste management in schools funded by the Environmental Protection Authority,
- The Waterwise Program was conducted in 26 schools and preschools for 3348 students.
- Cascade staff conducted initial training and implementation in supporting staff peers, conducting training and planning lesson observations with our team of casuals.

Have we seen a difference?

The major difference we saw was a rise in schools requesting fieldwork programs with Cascade. Covid has reinforced the absolute necessity for students to utilise the outdoors during their learning journey. The evaluations conducted during these programs indicated Cascade EEC continues to develop and deliver high quality, relevant educational programs and support to schools. Based on our work from 2022 we enhanced our evaluation system we developed electronic based evaluation systems. These systems have proven useful in some ways (recording and utilising data) but less useful in others (percentage of surveys completed drops markedly if people are given the option to complete online). We have continued to monitor the best methods of collecting and utilising data.

What did we do well?

Cascade was responsive to school requests and able to create and or adapt programs and learning experiences for schools as a result.

Cascade staff traveled to many locations to support NSW students on their learning journeys. Generally, Cascade was able to meet and in many cases exceed our goals in regards to delivering authentic learning and teaching experiences and providing high quality professional development.

Through collaborations with schools our lessons and programs were systematically designed and adjusted as needs arose.

Implications for this learning?

As a result of our previous work we planned to develop programs in waste education in primary and secondary settings, stage 4 science and geography programs in plant biology, animal inter-relationships, water and catchment studies, and Aboriginal education programs.

We will support Cascade teachers to embed evaluative practice by routinely reviewing student "work" and ensuring all students have a clear understanding of how to or how they have improved.

Leadership and teaching capabilities continued to be developed through deep collaboration with EZEC (Environmental and Zoo Education Centres) and other peers, and by supporting staff on their professional journey. This will be mapped through staff PDP's (Professional Development Plans). These plans proved a challenge in 2022 due to high levels of staff movement in Casuals.

Teachers attended a range of education and environmental education-based professional development conducted by our partners. Especially relevant were the opportunities to team teach with EEC peers.

Programs were evaluated via qualitative and quantitative means and student learning goals were better able to be achieved through consultation with our partner schools.

Have we seen a difference?

The main difference we have seen is an increase in the number of requests for support from schools in getting students to learn in the environment.

As a result of working in partnership with other EEC's within the EZEC we have supported each other's operations and developed our skill base, gained insights into alternative methods of delivering learning experiences and increased our knowledge of curriculum and the programs and activities we can conduct to support student learning.

Progress towards achieving improvement measures

The annual progress measures indicate the expected annual level of achievement for each improvement measure, aligned to the initiatives, in the Strategic Improvement Plan. Schools evaluate their achievement against annual progress measures to determine progress and inform future planning.

Annual progress measure	Progress towards achievement
<p>Programs at Cascade are reflective of the syllabus requirements of our partner schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cascade staff develop programs through consultation with visiting teachers and collaboration with Environmental and Zoo Education Centre Colleagues. • A senior Geography Program and resources are developed. • Programs are reviewed and evaluated through team discussions, peer reviews and participating teacher evaluations. 	<p>Cascade staff continued to share teaching experiences with a variety of EZEC staff to grow as educators, to develop skills in creation and delivery of curriculum based learning experiences and to better meet the needs of students.</p> <p>The Cascade staff discussed program implementation and improvements throughout the year in both formal, small and larger group settings. The staff at the Centre are becoming more empowered and confident in delivering programs to support student learning.</p>
<p>Teachers are provided with a range of professional development activities in the curriculum and the area of sustainability education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cascade support each other through peer conducted PD sessions. • Cascade staff support each others growth through targeted and supportive lesson observations. • Cascade staff develop skills in creating meaningful evaluations of 	<p>Cascade staff conducted formal and informal professional development (PD) as a team. This included mandatory and selected relevant PD. Staff participated in and delivered workshops on early childhood water education and orienteering at the annual EZEC conference in Sydney, working with Peers in a variety of locations in NSW and with the Cascade team.</p> <p>Cascade staff taught as teams in a variety of programs, then provided feedback to each other. This feedback was utilised to improve staff skills and educational experiences.</p> <p>Cascade revisited our current evaluations and incorporated ideas from</p>

school programs,

various PD sessions to empower staff to continue to grow and develop into specialist environmental education teachers.

Partner schools were provided evaluations to gain insights into meeting their needs regarding the implementation of the syllabus. The gathering and analysis of data continues to be a journey, especially regarding honing the delivery and collection methods of the evaluations.

Strategic Direction 2: Innovative Collaboration

Purpose

To be innovative in our modes of collaboration in achieving our goals.

To be reactive and agile in the pursuit of excellent learning and teaching opportunities that arise.

Develop and improve teaching and learning spaces at Cascade.

Initiatives

This year our school implemented the following initiatives to support the realisation of the four year Strategic Improvement Plan and the achievement of system-negotiated and school-determined targets.

- Collaboration with the community
- Mountains to the Sea
- Improved Assets and administration practices leading to program enhancement

Resources allocated to this strategic direction

Professional learning: \$1,101.57

Per capita: \$5,580.39

Summary of progress

Community collaboration is a major part of what Cascade does. The strength of our programs lies in our partnerships. Often these partners know what they want to develop but lack some key "ingredients" to develop them. 2022 has proved a great year to renew partnerships and educational alliances to further the identity and education, especially in the area of Aboriginal Education and with Aboriginal community members.

What did we do?

During 2022 Cascade staff focused on developing deep and respectful relationships with our local Aboriginal Elders and community members. These collaborations resulted in high quality programs and experiences for students including:

- Applied for and was successful in gaining a Sustainable Schools Grant (SSG) to consult with local indigenous people in a pre-school, primary school and high school to develop a seasonal calendar.
- Cascade staff also assisted in the development and delivery of the Mountains / Valleys / Sea Program on three occasions during the year, in partnership with the Nambucca Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG).
- Conducted a pd / programming / relational meeting with local Gumbaynggirr elders Uncle Gary Williams, Uncle Martin Bellangary, Uncle Michael Jarret.
- Began building relationships with the Dorrigo and Coffs Harbour Local Aboriginal Lands Councils (LALC).
- Negotiated with Uncle Michael Jarret to present a "science and spirit" presentation at the annual Environmental and Zoo Education Centre (EZEC) conference in 2023.
- Participated with Bowraville CS in a "Gumbaynggirr cultural" visioning project that is ongoing.
- Cascade self funded air-conditioning in the communal facilities learning space, re-carpeted the demountable, built new playground / education equipment, had e-learning devices installed and had the driveway resurfaced after flood damage.

What did we do well?

Cascade was responsive to school requests and able to create and or adapt programs and learning experiences for schools as a result.

Cascade staff traveled to collaborate with Gamilaroi elders in Coonabarrabran and surrounding areas to trial and assist in the delivery of Aboriginal Education programs. Schools in this area included Coonabarrabran PS, Gwabegar PS, Tambar Springs PS, Pilliga PS, Mullaley PS.

Cascade continued to liaise with the Asset Management Unit (AMU) to ensure tasks didn't fall through the cracks and projects were completed in a timely and professional manner in order to enhance the programs we offer.

Have we seen a difference?

Differences we have seen at Cascade is an opening of channels with our local community. Cascade is being approached more regularly by both schools to assist in programming and local Aboriginal community members to develop programs

and continue to walk together on this long and rewarding journey.

Cascade staff have benefited from these interactions and the amount of indigenous language that we include in programs is slowly growing. Acknowledging country and other important protocols that celebrate Aboriginal Culture are an integral part of our programs. The incorporation of the wisdom and relationships with the land that we have been teaching about is being reflected in and woven into the learning experiences that we facilitate.

We have seen a growing and deepening relationship with our local community to the benefit of all parties, but importantly to the students for whom we are developing programs.

Students have been reporting increased comfort levels in adverse weather conditions, when compared to previous experiences utilising the dormitories. Cascade staff have been utilising the new equipment to enhance our leadership programs.

Implications for this learning?

Whilst we have a long path to walk regarding the outcomes of our programs we have made significant in-roads and progress. This is a long term pursuit that will never really be complete, as is the nature of culture and education.

Teachers attended a range of education and environmental education-based professional development conducted by our partners. Especially relevant were the opportunities to team teach with EEC peers.

Programs were evaluated via qualitative and quantitative means and student learning goals were better able to be achieved through consultation with our partner schools.

As the facilities at Cascade improve we are finding that we are attracting more schools who would normally attend the "big ticket" resource rich locations on the North and Mid-North Coast (MNC).

Progress towards achieving improvement measures

The annual progress measures indicate the expected annual level of achievement for each improvement measure, aligned to the initiatives, in the Strategic Improvement Plan. Schools evaluate their achievement against annual progress measures to determine progress and inform future planning.

Annual progress measure	Progress towards achievement
<p>Cascade participates in the Mountains to the Sea Program providing Aboriginal students the opportunity to better relate to and feel proud of their culture whilst furthering their education as a senior student.</p>	<p>Cascade was a regular contributor to this program in 2022, with Cascade staff contributing in teaching and administrative forms. The program is proving a successful addition to the opportunities to schools in the Mid-Coast Valleys network and we look forward to the program growing in 2023.</p>
<p>Assets at Cascade are continually improved and developed to ensure that all program participants have a great learning experience in a combination of safe, comfortable and appropriate facilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Play area improved and integrated into programs, • Air conditioners are paid for by Cascade. • Mobile Learning Devices (MLD) are installed. Staff have PD in use of MLD's. 	<p>Cascade staff have been utilising the new areas including the new playground for programs, especially the climbing wall. This has proven a popular enhancement to our leadership suite of experiences.</p> <p>Students and teachers are reporting increased levels of satisfaction with the facilities.</p>
<p>Cascade partners with Warrumbungles EEC to deliver programs to remote schools in the Western Region.</p> <p>Cascade staff present workshops at the annual EZEC conference.</p>	<p>Cascade delivered programs in the Warrumbungle, Tamworth and Armidale regions to support school initiatives.</p> <p>Cascade staff presented at the annual EZEC conference including water education in pre-school and orienteering for stage 2, 3, 4 students.</p> <p>Cascade staff presented to a secondary science PD day at Coffs Harbour regarding what we can do to support science students. We have seen a rise in secondary science and also geography program requests as a result.</p>

Strategic Direction 3: No Target in this area

Purpose

No Target in this area

Initiatives

This year our school implemented the following initiatives to support the realisation of the four year Strategic Improvement Plan and the achievement of system-negotiated and school-determined targets.

- No Target in this area
- No Target in This area

Resources allocated to this strategic direction

Summary of progress

No targets in this area.

Progress towards achieving improvement measures

The annual progress measures indicate the expected annual level of achievement for each improvement measure, aligned to the initiatives, in the Strategic Improvement Plan. Schools evaluate their achievement against annual progress measures to determine progress and inform future planning.

Annual progress measure	Progress towards achievement
No Target in This area	No targets in this area
No Target in This area	No targets in this area.

Attendance

NSW student attendance data in 2020 is not comparable to previous years due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The NSW Government encouraged students to learn from home, where possible, for a seven week period from 24 March to 22 May 2020. During this period, schools monitored engagement with learning to determine whether students were marked present. This changed the attendance measure. There was also some evidence of varied marking practices as schools adjusted to the learning from home period, with some schools recording higher attendance rates while others recording markedly lower rates.

Attendance figures from 2021 were calculated differently to align with the third edition of ACARA's National Standards for Student Attendance Data and Reporting. Changes include treating partial absences over 120 minutes as a half day absence (instead of their actual value, calculated as a proportion of a nominal 6-hour day) and covers all weeks during Semester 1. Prior to 2021, the final week of Term 2 was excluded.

Furthermore, the department implemented an automated attendance feed (AAF) system in Semester 1 2021. AAF transfers data automatically from third-party attendance management systems to the department's centralised data warehouse every night. The AAF significantly improved data quality in 2021, which has affected data comparability with previous years.

Although there were no state-wide or regional lockdowns in NSW during Semester 1 2021, COVID-19 continued to affect student attendance. Analysis of attendance codes showed a change in the structure of absence reasons in 2021.

Although there were no state-wide or regional lockdowns in NSW during Semester 1 2022, student attendance was impacted by a range of factors:

- Families evacuating and relocating due to NSW floods
- Sick students staying at home until a negative COVID-19 test was returned
- Household members testing positive to COVID-19
- The easing of COVID-19 border controls at the beginning of 2022 which allowed families to travel inter-state and overseas.

Management of non-attendance

Attendance at school has a big impact on longer term outcomes for children and young people. When a child is not at school they miss important opportunities to learn, build friendships and develop their skills through play. Regular attendance at school is a shared responsibility between schools and parents. By working together we can have a positive effect on supporting our children and young people to regularly attend school.

Our teachers promote and monitor regular attendance at school and all our schools have effective measures in place to record attendance and follow up student absences promptly. They are guided by the School Attendance policy which details the management of non-attendance.

Workforce information

Workforce composition

Position	FTE*
Principal(s)	1
School Administration and Support Staff	1.03

*Full Time Equivalent

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce composition

The department actively supports the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees through the use of identified positions, and scholarship opportunities to become a teacher and by providing a culturally safe workplace. As of 2022, 4.6% of the department's overall workforce identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school workforce composition

Staff type	Benchmark ¹	2022 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representation ²
School Support	3.00%	4.10%
Teachers	3.00%	3.30%

Note 1: The NSW Public Sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2019-2025 takes a career pathway approach in that it sets an ambitious target of 3% Aboriginal employment at each non-executive grade of the public sector by 2025.

Note 2: Representation of diversity groups are calculated as the estimated number of staff in each group divided by the total number of staff. These statistics have been weighted to estimate the representation of diversity groups in the workforce, where diversity survey response rates were less than 100 per cent. The total number of staff is based on a headcount of permanent and temporary employees.

Teacher qualifications

All casual, temporary and permanent teachers in NSW public schools must hold a NSW Department of Education approval to teach. Teachers with approval to teach must be accredited with the NSW Education Standards Authority, and hold a recognised teaching degree. All NSW teachers must hold a valid NSW Working With Children Check clearance.

Professional learning and teacher accreditation

Professional learning is core to enabling staff to improve their practice. Professional learning includes five student-free School Development Days and induction programs for staff new to our school and/or system. These days are used to improve the capacity of teaching and non-teaching staff in line with school and departmental priorities.

Financial information

Financial summary

The information provided in the financial summary includes reporting from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022. The Principal is responsible for the financial management of the school and ensuring all school funds are managed in line with department policy requirements.

	2022 Actual (\$)
Opening Balance	184,537
Revenue	510,382
Appropriation	359,587
Grants and contributions	66,145
Investment income	2,910
Other revenue	81,739
Expenses	-415,336
Employee related	-341,017
Operating expenses	-74,319
Surplus / deficit for the year	95,046
Closing Balance	279,582

Figures presented in this report may be subject to rounding so may not reconcile exactly with the bottom line totals, which are calculated without any rounding.

Financial summary - Equity loadings

The equity loading data is the main component of the 'Appropriation' line item of the financial summary above.

	2022 SBAR Adjustments (\$)
Targeted Total	0
Equity Total	0
Equity - Aboriginal	0
Equity - Socio-economic	0
Equity - Language	0
Equity - Disability	0
Base Total	305,215
Base - Per Capita	7,580
Base - Location	647
Base - Other	296,988
Other Total	5,928
Grand Total	311,143

Figures presented in this report may be subject to rounding so may not reconcile exactly with the bottom line totals, which are calculated without any rounding.

Parent/caregiver, student, teacher satisfaction

Teachers are constantly being provided with the opportunity to complete evaluations for our programs. Cascade programs consistently rate in the very high and satisfied percentiles. The areas that received very high ratings included the program content and the way the programs were conducted, Cascade staff and the catering. Areas that were identified as having potential for improvement included teacher facilities, student dormitories and the need for more time to explore concepts more deeply.

At times we also conduct observations whilst delivering programs and utilise the observations and pictures to demonstrate the engagement and satisfaction of students in our programs. This is an especially important method of gaining a sense of student satisfaction. By monitoring and observing student participation, energy and enthusiasm and engagement in an activity we can gain great insights into student satisfaction. The attached photo is of the "Mountains to the Valleys. to the Sea" program conducted during 2021 and is ongoing. The photo pictures a student with one of his mentors and the focus and engagement they had during the program.



Policy requirements

Aboriginal Education Policy

The responsibility for enacting the Aboriginal Education Policy rests with all departmental staff. The policy should underpin and inform planning, teaching practice and approaches to educational leadership in all educational settings.

Evidence of effective implementation of the policy included:

- Establishing, building and strengthening relationships with the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Aboriginal people and communities.
- Providing, in partnership with Aboriginal people and communities, education which promotes quality teaching, is engaging, and is culturally appropriate and relevant.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will match or better the outcomes of the broader student population.
- Implementation of Personalised Learning Pathways for all Aboriginal students in a school culture of high expectations.

Anti-Racism Policy

All teachers are responsible for addressing incidents of racism and supporting students to develop an understanding of racism and discrimination and the impact these may have on individuals and the broader community. The Principal is responsible for examining school practices and procedures to ensure they are consistent with the policy. The school has an Anti-Racism Contact Officer who is trained to respond to concerns in relation to racism.

Multicultural Education Policy

Teachers are responsible for addressing the specific learning and wellbeing needs of students from culturally diverse backgrounds through their teaching and learning programs. The Principal is responsible for ensuring that school policies, programs and practices respond to the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of the school community, and provide opportunities that enable all students to achieve equitable education and social outcomes.