

2023 Annual Report

Cascade Environmental Education Centre



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Introduction

The Annual Report for 2023 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.

School contact details

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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	2023 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 growth and performance	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 EEC completes the School Self Evaluation Survey annually.

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

Per capita

Location

Summary of progress

Cascade has expended its total allocation of funding in the professional development (PD) area. The skills, experiences and collaborative opportunities provided during these PD experiences provide rigor, expertise and structure to the programs that we develop as a staff.

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
Programs at Cascade are reflective of the syllabus requirements of our partner schools. Cascade staff develop programs through consultation with visiting teachers and in collaboration with Environmental and Zoo Education Centre Colleagues. Programs are reviewed and evaluated through team discussions, peer reviews and participating teacher evaluations.	Through partnerships with schools and within the EZEC, programs have been developed, trialed and enhanced to provide the best possible experiences to students.
Teachers are provided with a range of professional development activities in the curriculum and the area of sustainability education. The experiences are utilised to improve our "business" at Cascade. To achieve this Cascade staff will conduct, attend and provide workshops at the 2023 state EZEC conference, conduct programs and collaborate colleagues at the Sustainability Outreach, Increase Cascades digital maturity by participating in weekly Rural Access Gap PD.	Professional development at Cascade has resulted in an increase in competency and confidence of staff at Cascade to develop and deliver high quality, meaningful and relevant programs.

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

Resources allocated to this strategic direction

Professional learning

Per capita

Summary of progress

2023 has been a productive year and a year of rebuilding in our partnerships with the Aboriginal community. Since the passing of Uncle Mark Flanders we found ourselves in an unfamiliar space. We have endeavored to re-connect and reinvigorate our ability to partner with the local community to deliver high quality programs and partnerships.

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
Collaboration with a variety of partners strengthens and enhances the programs conducted by Cascade EEC. Partners include AECG, and Aboriginal groups to develop and deliver student focused programs for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. This will be achieved by attending community workshops.	Cascade collaborated with Uncle RJ from Macksville Public School to work on a connecting to country program for students. Staff attended a community workshop to plan for better Aboriginal Education in the area. Cascade staff completed the 8 ways training module with Aunty Deb Elliot.
Partnerships are a major contributing factor to Cascades programs. Cascade staff attend meetings, workshops and initiatives in order to grow and enhance partnerships and collaboration. As a result trust and collaborative opportunities these programs grow, resulting in better learning experiences for students as expressed in observations and evaluations. Cascade staff attend the 8 ways training module to develop teaching through culture perspectives.	Cascade EEC has become a member of the Nambucca Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG). The Centre collaborated with Uncle Myklo, Aunty Fred, Uncle Cecil, Uncle Martin, Dorrigo Aboriginal Land Council, Nambucca AECG and a range of local schools to provide programs and support to Mid Noth Coast Students.
Cascade staff partner with the EZEC community to host the NSW EEC state conference for 2023. The conference results in improved skill level and	Cascade EEC Conducted the NSW EZEC state conference in 2023. The conference provided great professional development opportunities and collaboration with a range of partner agencies. About 130 people attended.

knowledge of teachers in developing and delivering programs.

Attendance

NSW student attendance data in 2020 is not comparable to other 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.

While there were no lockdowns or learning from home periods in Semester 1 2023, there was still a high prevalence of sick attendance codes as students were encouraged to stay home if they were even slightly unwell. Advice for families were still in place, recommending students and staff to stay home when sick and only returning to school when they were symptom free. (See <https://education.nsw.gov.au/schooling/covid-19/advice-for-families> for advice).

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 2023, 2.5% 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	2023 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representation ²
School Support	3.00%	3.60%
Teachers	3.00%	3.40%

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 2023 to 31 December 2023. The Principal is responsible for the financial management of the school and ensuring all school funds are managed in line with department policy requirements.

	2023 Actual (\$)
Opening Balance	279,582.38
Revenue	580,379.46
Appropriation	335,026.37
Grants and contributions	80,929.73
Investment income	9,869.86
Other revenue	154,553.50
Expenses	-566,721.22
Employee related	-456,398.17
Operating expenses	-110,323.05
Surplus / deficit for the year	13,658.24
Closing Balance	293,240.62

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.

	2023 SBAR Adjustments (\$)
Targeted Total	0
Equity Total	0
Equity - Aboriginal	0
Equity - Socio-economic	0
Equity - Language	0
Equity - Disability	0
Base Total	312,217
Base - Per Capita	7,808
Base - Location	647
Base - Other	303,763
Other Total	6,481
Grand Total	318,699

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

Cascade routinely conducts evaluations to gain information on how to best meet the needs of students and teachers partnering with us and participating in our programs.

The following were the average responses to the questions with 5 being the highest rating.

- The program provided a stimulating learning environment, and a variety of experiences, to enhance student's engagement with the environment - 4.7
- The program was strongly linked to the curriculum and supported and strengthened classroom learning outcomes - 4.4
- The program enhanced student's knowledge about the environment, and skills in interpreting the environment - 4.8
- The program promoted positive environmental values and attitudes in the students and contributed to students self awareness and capacity to act in a positive way - 4.7
- The staff were knowledgeable about the topics being taught, and interacted well with the students - 4.8
- Booking, planning and communication procedures, prior to undertaking my program, helped me with program preparation - 4.7

Some comments on the staff

- Dealt well/ patient with group of lads with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
- Knowledgeable and patient. Supportive of adults and students. Relevance and fun interactions in a calm manner. Great .
- The care shown by all staff towards our staff and students was wonderful. Our "tricky" students were catered for beautifully!

Some areas for improvement

- Group sizes need to be smaller in the rain forest - split groups to do each area, take ten and swap. More formal exploration work on transect/quadrats for senior students to emphasis the ecological sampling process. The teachers were very helpful. Made an effort to learn some names. Were encouraging to some reluctant students.
- Wifi Internet! We need better access to WiFi. Some brands of device will not connect.
- All children are challenged by being away from home. Perhaps at the start, mid-point and end of the three day session, a short time dedicated to discussing our feelings, and how to build resilience could be good. Otherwise really impressed with all the experiences! Thank you :-)

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.