

Cire Community School

Annual Report 2020



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community school

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Philosophy

Cire Community School provides an educational environment that is framed in the emerging understandings of childhood development, including the impacts of childhood trauma on student learning. We believe that all young people should be able to positively engage in their education regardless of their life circumstances and any barriers to learning.

Education should not just focus on academic attributes but on the whole person, providing active support for their social and emotional development while supporting the development of knowledge and skills needed for a rapidly changing world.

Mission Statement

Cire Community School strives to provide a learning environment where:

- Students can create and experience success in their learning, personal and social development.
- Students can engage in structured and positive community activities to foster their sense of connection as a valued and active member of society.
- Students are supported to develop the academic and social skills to successfully transition from childhood to young adulthood and beyond.
- Individual learning needs can be met in a supportive and flexible manner.
- The highest standards of applied learning are delivered.
- Success is not just measured in academic terms but in the development of resilience and maturity.

Acknowledgement of Country

Cire Community School would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people, the traditional owners of the land upon which we work.

We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging for they hold the memories the traditions, the culture and the hopes of Aboriginal Australia.



Message from our CEO



Gus Seremetis (CEO)

Amidst an extremely challenging year in 2020 due to the impact of the COVID pandemic, Cire Services was steadfast in achieving goals set out in our Strategic Plan 2019-2021 including the fostering of positive pathways for young people which is now even more important than ever.

The year presented us with a pandemic none of us saw coming. COVID turned our lives upside down and required us, almost immediately, to work with our students in a totally unfamiliar way. Cire Community School, together with our other core operations remained in a firm position and we continued to deliver high quality services to our learners and clients. This was driven by our determination to offer every individual the opportunity to learn and live their lives as independently as possible.

Cire Services is one of the largest not-for-profit organisations in the Yarra Ranges and proudly unique to the region. Operating across multiple sites, our core operations comprise Cire Community School, Cire Training, Cire Children's Services and Cire Community Hubs.

Our extensive reach provides our students with a range of unique opportunities to further enhance their learning and connection with community.

Reflecting on such an unprecedented year, I am enormously proud of the way so many of our students adapted to our new COVID environment, and continue to do so. They have demonstrated great courage and maturity whilst also managing their own personal challenges. Despite the ongoing uncertainties, our students achieved excellent results attaining their VCAL certificates. See our 2020 Student Learning Report (page 8) for more details.

I would like to take this opportunity to also congratulate and pay tribute to all staff at our Community School campuses at Yarra Junction and Mount Evelyn and those who provide support services. They have each been instrumental in overcoming the exceptional challenges of COVID including switching between face-to-face and online delivery and providing many forms of extra support to our students.

Teaching staff worked around the clock to upskill in online platforms and related technology to confidently deliver very creative online, and on-campus, learning opportunities. They quickly became adept and presented engaging Google classroom tasks on a huge range of topics for all areas of learning. Some students found that online was the best way for them to learn.

Staff joined online Professional Learning teams where new outlines for Individual Learning Plans for students were discussed.

Our wellbeing teams engaged daily with students' remote learning to ensure they were in contact with others, and moving, within the permitted distances outside of their own homes. We saw increased resilience in staff and students and strengthened connections as each supported the other when things became hard. See our 2020 Wellbeing report for more details (page 10).

A special mention to our bus drivers who continued to go above and beyond to support our students by providing accessible transport to school. They did an amazing job in 2020, also delivering packs of learning materials and resources to those who were schooling from home but without internet.

A highlight of the year was the much anticipated completion of our new hospitality training centre at Cire's Yarra Junction campus. The state-of-the-art facility featuring a commercial kitchen was certainly something for students to look forward to when they returned to campus after the first lockdown. The centre provides students with a learning environment they would not have access to otherwise, and potential pathways into careers and employment available locally as well as much further afield.

The facility has also been a real bonus for students undertaking one of their compulsory VCAL strands, Professional Development Skills (PDS), part of which requires students to identify and service a need in the community. The students organised to cater for some functions organised by community groups who would benefit from the extra support. Unfortunately these events were cancelled/postponed due to COVID restrictions but, undeterred, students pivoted to all-school lunches when they couldn't go out into the community. The lunches became a popular weekly gathering providing students with a healthy meal in the company of others. For some it is their only nutritious intake for the day and for many it is a welcome change from TV dinners.

Further, students now have the opportunity to run a social enterprise in the form of school canteen twice a week, where students gain real life work-related skills.

Midyear we celebrated all we had achieved, despite the lockdowns and challenges, with an exhibition by our PDS Photography class. The event also featured performances by our music class and food prepared by students studying hospitality. We were able to share everyone's

achievements and still maintain our required 1.5m social distance.

Another highlight was the publication of the school's first student-produced year book. Well done to all involved.

The year ended on a very positive note for our Community School with some major developments which align directly with our vision for the school under our current Strategic Plan:

- We received Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) approval to open a third campus in Berwick for years 7 to 12 in 2021. Our school will be the first of its kind in the City of Casey where the community has welcomed us with open arms because of the huge need for our trauma-informed model. We are greatly looking forward to partnering with the community and key stakeholders in Casey to further enhance what we currently do in Yarra Ranges.
- We received VRQA approval to introduce years 5 and 6 at our Yarra Junction campus, commencing 2021. There is an identified need in the region for a positive alternative for upper primary school students at-risk of disengaging from their schooling. We want to minimise the risk as early as possible and keep them engaged in their education and learning, and support them to work towards future pathways with optimism.

At an organisation-wide level, I am extremely proud that Cire's other core operations also rose to the challenges of 2020 and set new benchmarks in delivery of service and achievements.

In another end-of-year coup, Cire welcomed the announcement of a \$2m government grant to build a new Early Years Learning Hub in Yarra Junction. It will be adjacent to the site where our Children's Services is currently co-located with our school. This is such a great opportunity to support the community in additional areas

such as maternal and child health, allied health, parenting and adult education programs. It will also provide much needed additional space for our students. The Hub is on track to open early 2023.

During COVID, Cire Children's Services provided a much needed program in particular to support those in need and didn't flinch at the thought that they may have been the only group providing face-to-face services, whilst most people couldn't travel further than 5 kms.

Cire Training switched from face-to-face to online and remote learning almost overnight with staffing staying in touch with every student, especially those who consider Cire to be their "second home" and where they catch up with their friends. Our First Impressions Clothing Exchange program which supports women back into the workforce, launched online shopping and even Zoom pamper classes to boost morale of women, some of whom were doing it tougher than ever.

Cire Community Hubs at Yarra Junction and Chirnside Park also adapted to the unknown almost instantaneously so that all of our stakeholders, particularly our learners and clients, were supported. It was so rewarding to see how our staff connected with seniors especially and assisted them with technology to stay in touch with each other.

Thanks to the Corporate Services team for supporting our staff in transitioning to remote working and also for supporting our essential services to continue operating onsite and virtually.

A special mention to Yarra Ranges Council who continued to support us and has gone above and beyond throughout the pandemic to assist us and ensure we were able to deliver our services.

The synergy between all of our services continues to strengthen and by working cohesively, we are able to expand on what we do. Our Executive Leadership Team works tirelessly to ensure we provide a seamless service. Thank you to our Board and in particular our Chair Julian Carle who supported us through 2020.

In closing, and looking forward to 2021, a huge congratulations to Peri Dix, our new Executive Manager Education overseeing the Community School, and a warm welcome to Tom Witenden who is our Berwick Campus Principal.

My deepest thanks to everyone, both within Cire and beyond, who play such an integral role in supporting our work and vision, and assist us to help build stronger, more resilient communities. The services and support we provide are needed more than ever and without you, Cire would not be in the strong position it is in today.

Stay safe and well as we all move forward together.



Gus Seremetis
(CEO)

“We believe we can bring greater depth to our Wellbeing Program in 2021 for the benefit of our young people as they move forward.”



Student Learning

COVID had an enormous impact on our learning environment in 2020, requiring even greater flexibility and adaptability in our approaches to engage and support our young people.

During most lockdown phases, restrictions still allowed many of our vulnerable students to attend onsite with a limited number of teachers and learning assistants. Meanwhile, offsite learning involved Google classrooms which our enthusiastic teaching staff set up and populated with an expansive array of learning tasks for student to access. Each student was contacted via phone daily and engaged in both a wellbeing and learning discussion. Many students found the online learning more accessible for them, whilst others were keen to resume face-to-face classes as soon as possible. We all rose to the challenges presented by COVID and continued our teaching and learning journey.

Cire Community School's emphasis on individualised learning allows each student to develop their skills using areas of interest as a focus. Our middle year students, years 7 to 9, work within the Victorian Curriculum with teachers creating learning tasks designed to develop skills, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Students then choose elective options ranging through cooking, art, Minecraft, gardening and bike maintenance. This enables them to develop hands-on skills in a rich learning space.

In 2020 many students were exempt from NAPLAN assessments by their parents or carers. Two year 7 students and four year 9 student attempted some parts of the testing. It was an enormous challenge for those who struggle with anxiety and other challenges to complete the testing process. Our students often come from a background of school refusal, disengagement and academic challenges and the overall result for NAPLAN in 2020 reflected the journey back into schooling for our students.

VCAL students were disappointed that COVID put a halt to structured workplace learning in 2020. Placements for many VET courses were also interrupted. Nevertheless our year 10, 11 and 12s worked hard to obtain their core skills in literacy and numeracy whilst developing work-related skills and personal interest goals. Despite the challenges, our students achieved great results with 10 successfully completing their Intermediate VCAL certificates and 9 attaining their Senior certificate.

A number of Cire students require extra support to enable them to experience success at school. Teachers record the adjustments which are made as per the Disability Discrimination Act and the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) and this enables us to receive funding to provide the support needed. In 2020, 67 students received supplementary adjustment, 66 received substantial adjustments and 30 received extensive adjustments.



Students creating recipes for Vasili's Garden to Kitchen Magazine.

Distributed throughout Australia and New Zealand.



Wellbeing Report

Cire Community School continues to be a place of safety, healing and support for many of our young people and their families. The year held many challenges and changes, and tested the way we do community.

Despite the difficult year, we pulled together as a whole community and with the strong bonds within our wellbeing team providing a solid foundation.

Cire's wellbeing team, and students, benefit greatly from much expertise and goodwill. Our wellbeing specialists share diverse skill sets - a mix of counselling, youth work, social work, art therapy, outdoor therapy and family therapy skills - used to support the student's therapeutic goals.

Michele Hughes joined the Mount Evelyn team in 2020 and competently navigated through numerous new processes and challenges that COVID presented. Michele has extensive experience, particularly in the family therapy space. She really appreciates our aim to connect strongly with students and work productively

with our young people. She has been a huge asset to the team. Imogen Rose departed from the Mount Evelyn team at the end of 2020 to further her studies. She had strong empathetic skills and helped our young people achieve their goals. At Yarra Junction, Kylie Gregory joined the team at the beginning of the year, bringing with her a range of skills and experiences that she has also used in the teaching space.

Planning for 2020 was incredibly difficult. Our team worked hard developing a plan to support our students with some campus-wide goals, however these were put on hold as we had to focus on other needs arising from COVID. Instead of our larger festivals, external support groups and other therapeutic interventions, we had to focus on what could be achieved under the ever-changing landscape of restrictions. We developed support letters for our students



and families to assist them in accessing online resources including a list of recommended applications. We spent a great deal of time following up students and families we knew were struggling, and advocating on their behalf due to less external support being available. During lockdown periods, our team focused on encouraging our most vulnerable students to attend onsite so that we could check in and support them individually. It was always so encouraging to see young people rise above the challenges they faced.

We continued working with services such as Inspiro, Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS), Anglicare, Eastern Health (CYHMS), Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault (ECASA) and Strong Minds. Our students benefit from service providers visiting the school, from referrals to providers and from the strong partnerships between our staff and their network of external support agencies and organisations.

Unfortunately due to COVID, external agencies were unable to promote upstream education and supports that would normally be featured at our wellbeing festivals. This impacted our young people and made it much harder to promote key areas of wellbeing.

Despite the impact of COVID on our planning and strategic work, the overall focus on growth towards healing has continued. An overarching culture of unconditional positive regard, dignity and safety - built on a foundation of trauma-informed staff and practices, small class sizes, consistency and the prioritisation of healthy, positive relationships - continued to be key to learning and growth, and student success in 2020. These factors, woven together, create a sense of community, family and stability, making school the safest place for many of our students.

Buoyed by our advances in 2020, we believe we can bring even greater depth to our Wellbeing Program in 2021 for the benefit of our young people as they move forward.

Stephen Duke

Stephen Duke
Campus Wellbeing Leader, Mt Evelyn

Attendance

At the August 2020 Census date, Cire Community School had 211 students enrolled across years 7 to 12 at our Yarra Junction and Mount Evelyn campuses, an increase of 41% compared with 2019.

Regular attendance can be a challenge for many of our young people given the range and complexities of their individual circumstances and difficulties which have been even further exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic.

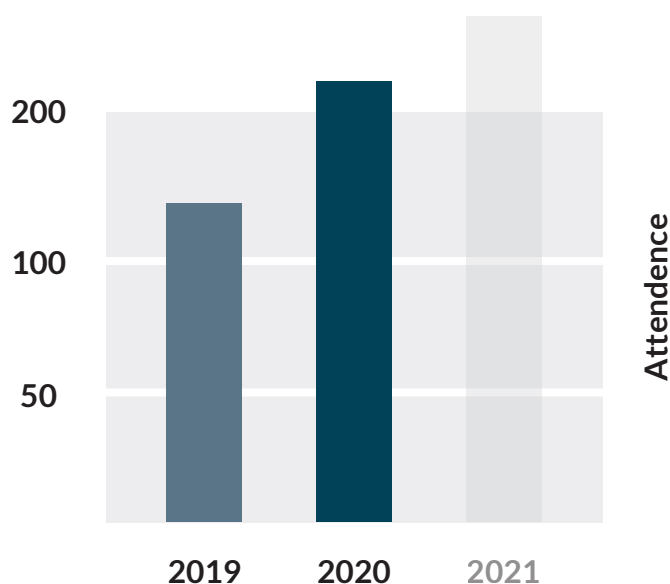
Many of our students are already severely disengaged from education when they enrol at Cire. In some cases they have not been in any formal education setting for many months, or even years.

At Cire we provide daily support to help keep our students engaged and at school. Teaching staff, together with campus administrative staff monitor attendance and maintain regular contact with students and families in a variety of ways. Wellbeing staff assist where absences are high and where wellbeing concerns impact attendance and engagement. Regular calls and SMS text messages are used to communicate absences daily to families, and teachers follow up on unexplained absences. Some of these approaches, as well as additional supports and connection, were critical in 2020 when most students engaged in their learning from home for much of the year.

Fortunately our attendance levels continued to improve in 2020 despite the unprecedented challenges presented by the pandemic including the need for remote learning at times due to lockdowns and restrictions. Many students found working from home beneficial,

while those who were deemed at-risk or whose parents were essential workers, were permitted to attend on site, engaging in smaller group tasks.

Of significance is that the overall year 7 attendance rate was almost 90%. The overall figure for year 10 and above was 76% and incorporates many students who recommenced school after months without attending any educational setting. Years 10, 11 and 12 also include significant numbers of young people living independently or in unstable circumstances.



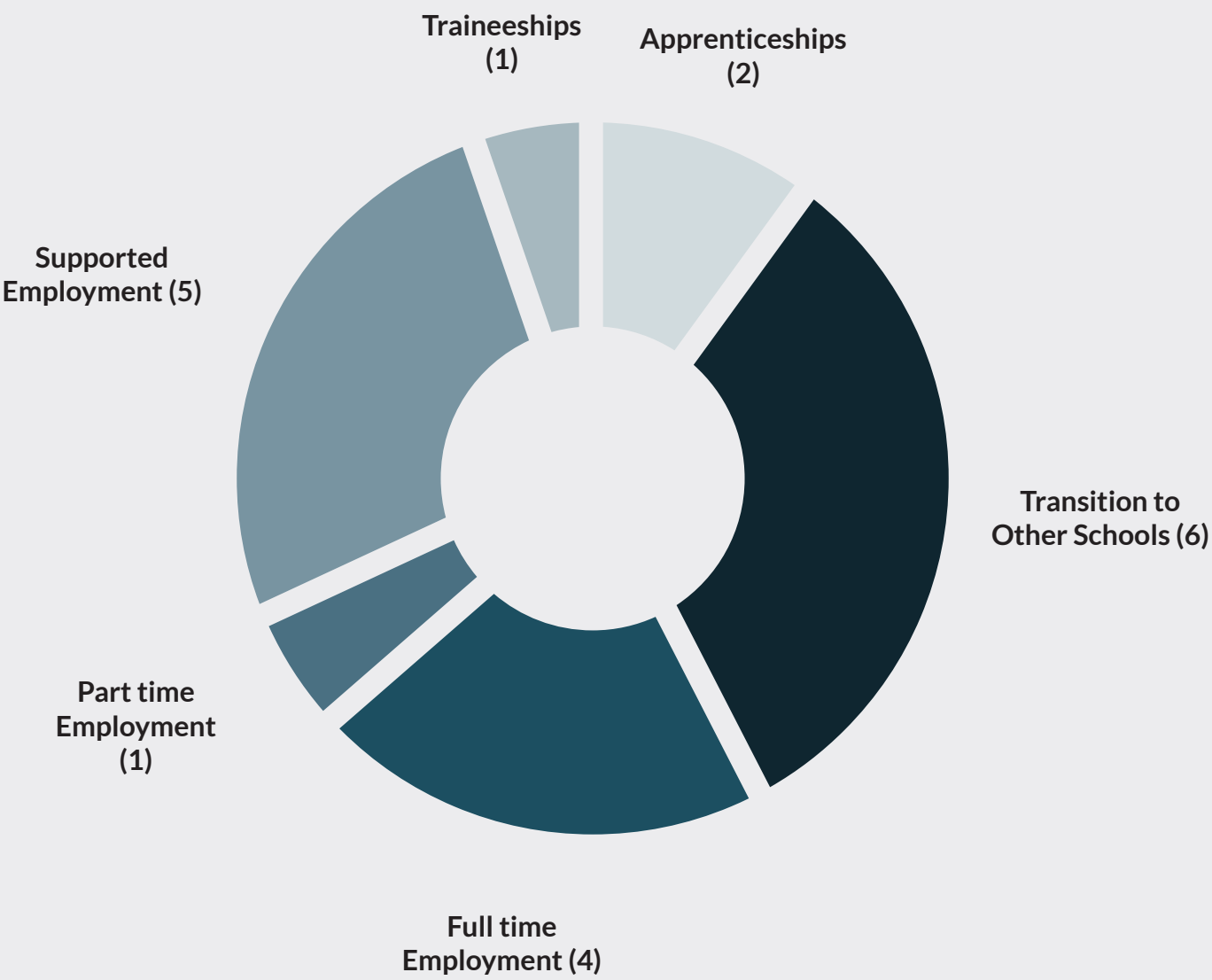
It is important to note that the small number of students with very low attendance across all year levels impacts the overall figure. In reality, the majority of students attend above the rates indicated.

Further, our VCAL students work through the three levels of VCAL at their own pace and progress from Foundation to Intermediate to Senior levels when they have met the outcomes in the previous level. This supports students who are re-engaging with education to re-establish a culture of attendance and learning and to overcome what are often significant gaps and disruptions in their previous learning.

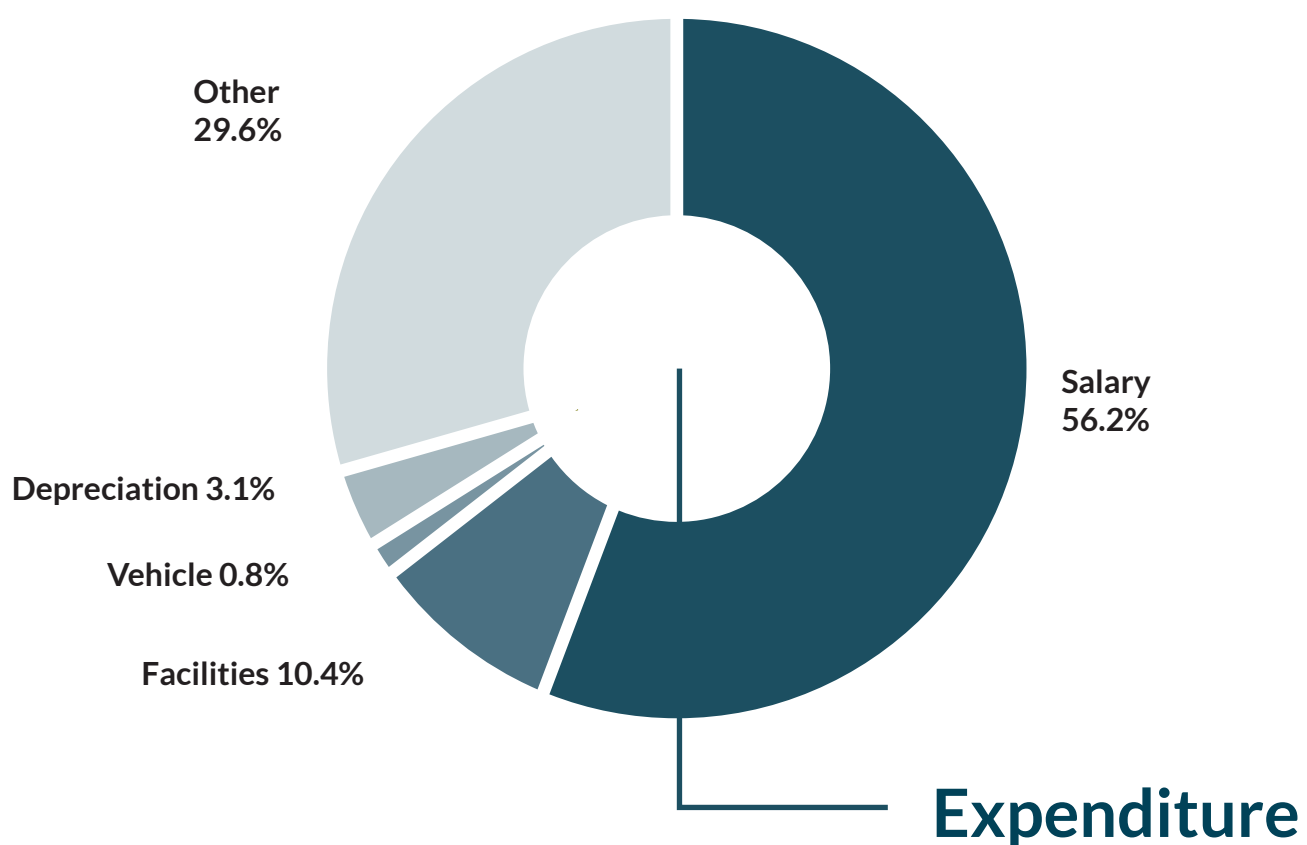
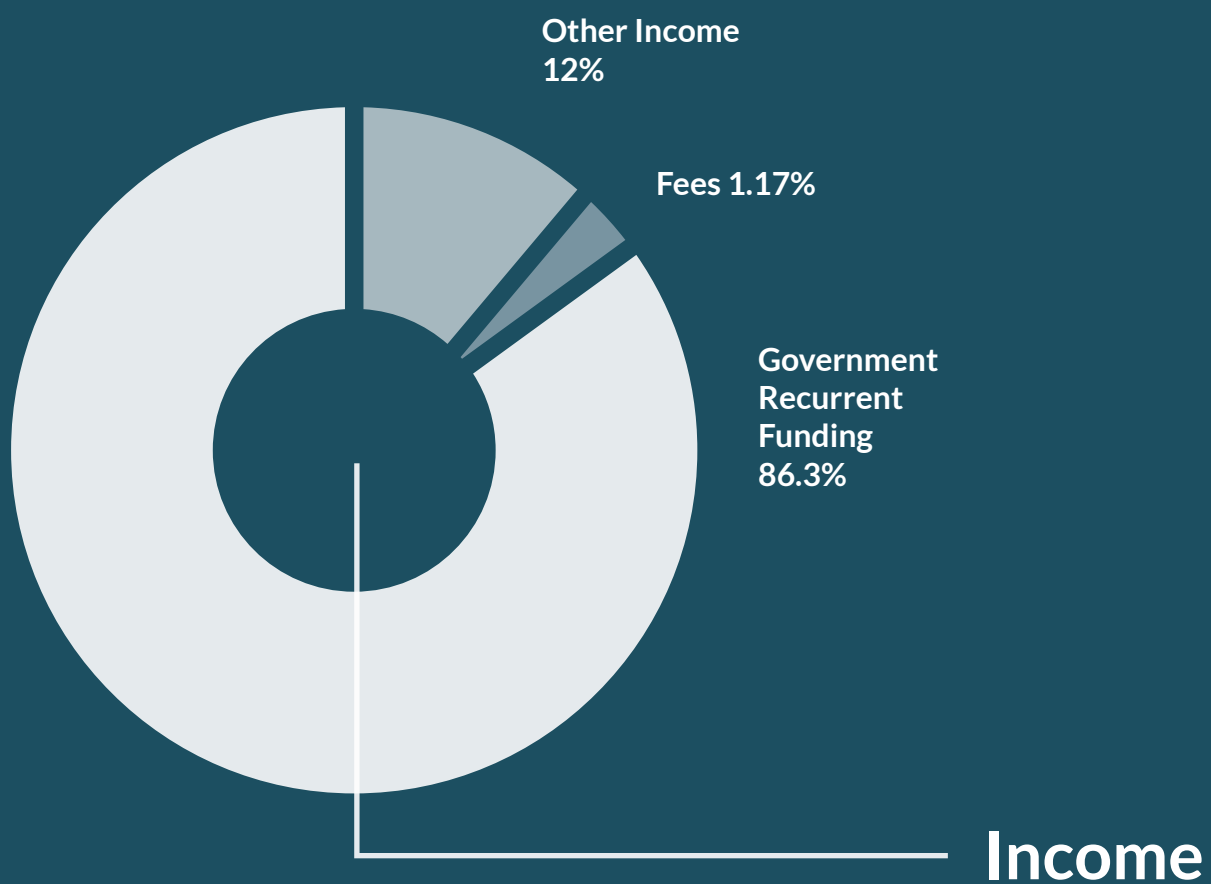
Enrolments	
Mount Evelyn	Yarra Junction
117	98

Attendance in %		
Year Level	Attendance	Campus
7	80%	Yarra Junction
8	76%	Yarra Junction
9	75%	Yarra Junction
10	63%	Yarra Junction
11	96%	Yarra Junction
7	95%	Mt Evelyn
8	85%	Mt Evelyn
9	71%	Mt Evelyn
10	74%	Mt Evelyn
11	71%	Mt Evelyn
12	77%	Mt Evelyn

Student Destinations



Financials



Staff Development

Staff continued to further build on their professional development throughout the year, both face-to-face when COVID restrictions allowed and also online.

Early in 2020 several staff attended a Victorian Applied Learning Association professional development opportunity to build upon their knowledge of VCAL. This was particularly beneficial to staff new to teaching VCAL enabling them to meet with others and participate in several VCAL3 focused workshops.

Across the year there were several Victorian Institute of Teaching online sessions including

supporting our graduate teachers to progress to full registration, as well as face-to-face sessions for the mentoring teachers.

Independent Schools Victoria moved to online learning and staff attended sessions in developing a whole school model of behaviour management as well as executive network sessions for principals.

Our professional learning teams worked together each fortnight to redraft and create new individual learning plans and begin the process of individualised learning for students.

All staff participated in first aid, CPR and anaphylaxis training,





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