

MUSEC School



Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC School)

2023 Annual Report

ABN 90 952 801 237

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MUSEC SCHOOL Management Committee

Professor Chris Dixon (Chair)	Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts
Professor Deborah Youdell	Dean of Education
Dr Neil Durrant	Executive Director, Faculty of Arts
Ms Kerrie Nelson	School Principal
Mrs Anne Murdoch	Business Manager
Ms Rosie Green	Parent Observer



Prof. Dixon



Prof. Youdell



Dr Durrant

Executive Dean Report, Faculty of Arts

MUSEC School operates as part of the Macquarie School of Education within the Faculty of Arts. The MUSEC School Management Committee consists of Professor Chris Dixon, Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts, Professor Deborah Youdell, Dean of Education, Dr Neil Durrant, Executive Director Faculty of Arts, Mrs Rosie Green, MUSEC School Parent Observer, Ms Kerrie Nelson, Principal and Mrs Anne Murdoch, Business Manager.

I would like to extend my thanks to the Committee members who have worked to support the operation and direction of the school, working with the Executive of the School to continually improve the quality of the program and the expertise of the staff.

Dr Sally Howell has tendered her resignation after 17 years of service as the School Principal. Dr Howell will be missed by the staff, parents and particularly the students. The committee wishes Dr Howell all the best in her retirement and thanks Dr Howell for her service to the school. Dr Howell will remain in Term 1,2023 to transition the new principal to the school.



Kerrie Nelson

Principal's Report

In March 2023 I was delighted to accept the position of Principal, Macquarie University Special Education Centre.

The school is affectionately known as MUSEC and it has a long history as an exceptional school for students with disabilities, with a focus on English / Math's programs and research-based pedagogy.

In previous years the building housed a school as well as Academic staff involved in research. Change is a constant and as the academic staff moved to other accommodation, the school now has space to re-imagine itself, to create a greater number of teacher and learning spaces utilizing the whole building. What an exciting opportunity awaits the school community.

The highlights of 2023 included the number of transitions, as students moved to the next beneficial setting, these occurred in the K-2 cohort, (20%). Students also graduated and transitioned to a range of high schools, and it is pleasing to note that they are all doing well as they move into the adolescent phase of their life.

I have been impressed by the quality and dedication of the staff at MUSEC. Many teachers and therapists are long-standing, holding the history of the school and are committed to its growth and development particularly as we strive to continually improve our teaching and learning program.

I extend my thanks to Dr Sally Howell, who led the school over the last 17 years and wish her the best in her retirement.

There is always work to do and we must never stop in our quest to ensure and realize opportunities are available for student with additional needs. We must work in partnership with schools and community, share knowledge and expertise and play our part so that all students have access to an education that is beneficial to the individual student at a time when they require additional support.

Primary Report

2023 there were 4 classes, two (2) in Lower Primary Kindergarten to Year 2 and two (2) in Upper primary Year 3 to Year 6.

All classes consist of a range of ages and students working over one (1) or two (2) stages. Programs are differentiated to suit the individual and delivered in small groups, individually or as a whole class.

Lower Primary 1

At the end of 2023, Primary 1 consisted of 10 students, ranging from Kindergarten to Year 2. Morning and middle sessions in Primary 1 consisted of explicit numeracy and literacy instruction in small groups. All other key learning areas were addressed within integrated units across the school year in whole class groups. For example, in Term 1 Science, Primary 1 learned about their bodies and their emotions. In learning about what bodies need to grow, students practised creating healthy eating plates to determine what constituted as a healthy food or a “sometimes food”. This unit complemented Primary 1’s weekly ‘Crunch and Sip’ program for Personal Development and Health, which encouraged students to share and try different fruits and vegetables.

In exploring other key learning areas, such as Creative Arts, Primary 1 participated in an African Drum Beat Incursion in Term 2. Students listened and danced to African music, and experimented with different cultural instruments, such as the Djembe drums.

Primary 1 afternoon PE sessions occurred twice a week throughout the school year. In Terms 3 and 4, Primary 1 practised balancing, climbing and jumping in the gymnastics hall at the Macquarie University Sport and Aquatic Centre. In Term 4, Primary 1 also played T-Ball on Wednesday afternoons, allowing students to practise their gross motor skills, sportsmanship, and ability to work as a team.

Transitioning to school was a focus for Term 4; 40% of the class moved to a mainstream setting. Schools were selected by parents and MUSEC supported school visits to the classroom so that host schools could gather information on the level of adjustment for students. Staff supported students to visit host schools supported by social stories and staff.

Lower Primary 2

The focus on English and Math was a constant throughout the year with children working in small group rotations so that we could maximise teaching time and support student engagement across the year.

Primary 2 had eight (8) students in Semester 1 and nine (9) in Semester 2.

In PD/H/PE our focus was

- Term 1 and Term 3 was on Games and Sports.
- Term 2 and Term 4 our focus was Gymnastics.
- Each Wednesday, short games, and sports focus (20 minutes).

In Term 1 we had History, learning about 'Then and Now'. The students learnt about how things have changed including people, objects, and places. In Science the students studied the weather. In this unit which continued to Term 2, we learned about different types of weather and the clothing needed for each.

In Term 2 the focus was on Keeping Safe for Personal Development and Health. This unit covered people, places, actions, and things that were safe and unsafe.

In Term 3 our Geography focus, 'Our School', was on learning to read maps and learn about the similarities and differences between our school and other schools.

In Term 4 we had an integrated unit for Science and Geography, 'Habitats'. In this unit we learned about different habitats and the animals that live in them. The students looked at the essential needs of living things.

Primary 2 enjoyed the excursions, incursions, and events that occurred over the school year. The MUSEC students enjoyed Book Week, Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day and the End of year concert. The students enjoy seeing their parents at these events. The students enjoyed attending the Reconciliation Day events and watching the Brolga Dance, visiting the Gymnastics Hall, and the new Junior Science Academy on the University campus.

Upper Primary 3

Primary 3 began the year as a class of six (6) male students ranging in age between nine (9) and 12 years. In Term 2 a new student was welcomed who was enrolled between the P3 and P4 classes to best support his academic and social needs. The Primary 3 class had a speech pathologist work in the room one day per week, a sport teacher two afternoons per week and an art teacher one afternoon per week. Primary 3 students share a similar profile in that all students have a diagnosis of both Autism and intellectual delay, with pronounced difficulties in receptive and expressive language and communication. This year, two students graduated from Year 6 to move to High School special school setting.

Students in Primary 3 all require extensive adjustment in all Key Learning Areas (KLAs) to facilitate their learning. This means that delivery of academic content is in 1:1 or 1:2 groupings. Students sit with a peer to complete lessons and are always actively supervised by a member of staff. On the playground, students need support to engage in play activities either independently, parallel or co-operatively. Students actively seek sensory stimulating sensations, movement and activities and the installation of a new trampoline as well as the introduction of a therapy balls program has helped to meet these needs. Further to this, an Occupational Therapist begun working with students in Term 4 to help build sensory profiles of students to help support student regulation and engagement.

The focus in 2023 has been in English and Math. In English, the colourful semantics program has been adopted to support student's comprehension of texts including pictures and simple decodable readers. Shared reading activities have focused around teaching the concepts and meaning behind 'wh' questions. The MiniLit Program has also been used to teach students the phonic code to help students decoding ability. In writing, the students have also been taught to use a proforma that uses the colourful semantics icons to write recounts about their weekends and to answer questions about texts.

In Math, the focus has been on building students' functional numeracy. Application of computation skills to calculators, the use of money to purchase items and the understanding of key time concepts have been addressed. Students have continued to learn conceptual meanings behind skills such as

addition and subtraction as well as, for some students, multiplication, and division.

In KLAs, students have enjoyed practical lessons such as gardening and cooking. Students have planted a variety of vegetables and herbs including snow peas, carrots and basil. In cooking, students have practised a variety of food prep skills including toasting, spreading and cutting. These lessons also provide opportunities for social interactions, commenting, questioning and choice. Students always enjoy sport activities including learning gross motor skills such as kicking, catching, throwing and batting. Gymnastics in the University Gymnasium saw students tumbling, rolling and balancing on specialist equipment. In Art, students have enjoyed practising fine motor skills such as cutting, gluing, drawing and painting and have created multi-modal pieces throughout the year. Students have also been exposed to a variety of music genres through movement and dance lessons, as well as learning to use instruments such as drums, triangles, clapping sticks, and other percussion instruments.

Primary 4

This year Primary 4 had 10 students ranging from Years 3 to 6. The Year 3 student coped well with the higher demands and this gave parents confidence to proceed with a move to mainstream. The student sat several of the NAPLAN tests which helped to inform this decision. The student has since successfully completed a transition programme to his local school and will commence there in 2024. The one (1) Year 4 student came to MUSEC from a mainstream setting, has settled in well and is starting to make steady academic gains. The six (6) Year 5 students were continuing MUSEC students. Four (4) of these students sat NAPLAN tests in subjects their parents deemed would not be too stressful for their child. One (1) of the Year 5 students has accepted a place at an independent special school for Year 6 and will continue into the secondary school. The two (2) Year 6 students have accepted places in the special units at Danebank College and PLC Sydney.

A highlight of the year has been our engagement in activities around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. Our class was able to meet staff from Walanga Maru who organised three (3) separate dance events, two (2) in the classroom and one (1) with a dance troop from Redfern. Mrs Jackson and Ms Schneider attended Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW) courses on teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in Art and Science & Geography respectively. We displayed the AITSIS map in the classroom and each time we read the class a resource or watched an interview online, we researched the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person's Country and linked them on the map to their Country. The class presented a story for Book Week which included many words in Darug Language. They even taught the audience a few of these words as part of the performance. At the End of Year Concert and Graduation Primary 4 sang the National Anthem in Darug Language.

Speech Therapy Team



In 2023, the Speech Therapy team focussed on expanding and enhancing opportunities for:

Multimodal Communication

To compliment and advance the communication programs within each class, the Speech Pathologists provided information and training to increase the use of multimodal communication strategies within the school

environment. This involved presenting workshops during staff meetings and at the parent information evening in Term 4. Class teams were provided with a comprehensive range of classroom resources and materials to support student language comprehension, engagement, and independence throughout the day.

Visual supports and communication devices were used widely, with staff engaging in training opportunities to further develop the strategies and skills necessary to support multimodal communication effectively.

Professional Collaboration

There were many opportunities for professional collaboration and mentoring this year.

In Semester 1, MUSEC School, in partnership with Macquarie University Department of Linguistics, took part in a qualitative study focusing on Classroom and Playground Interactions for Children with Complex Communication Needs.

In Semester 2, Alice Berry provided clinical supervision to two Master of Language and Speech Pathology students during their final placement. Alice also engaged in mentoring and networking opportunities with Speech Pathologists from Giant Steps and Skyward Speech Pathology to continue developing her knowledge and skills relating to multimodal communication.

Professional Learning

In Term 1 prep week, the Speech Pathology team presented a training workshop to staff on Colourful Semantics and LAMP (AAC Communication system). In Term 3, Alice and three (3) teachers from different class teams attended an Introduction to Colourful Semantics workshop presented by Alison Bryan, UK Speech Pathologist. This assisted us to build on the Colourful Semantics components that have been incorporated within learning programs across the school.

During Term 3 prep week, MUSEC staff attended a professional learning day hosted by Rachel Bowen, Speech Pathologist and Dr Helen Appleton, Psychologist on the topic of Unpacking the Cognitive Profile of Complex Learners. This was a wonderful opportunity to visit the Giant Steps Autism Training Centre and delve more deeply into the learning profiles of children presenting with autism, ASD, and anxiety.

Family Engagement

Throughout the year we have welcomed opportunities to meet with all our families to discuss their children's skills and abilities as well as set goals and priorities for the year. Parents provided us with invaluable insights regarding their child's unique learning profiles as well as their special interests.

This year, the Speech Therapy team engaged with new families prior to the start of the school year to share information, begin building strong relationships and provide visual supports to ensure smooth transitions for each child. We have been able to offer times to catch up individually with parents to discuss communication programs, progress and offer support as required.

We continued to liaise regularly with external therapists to share information regarding children's communication development and goals. This professional collaboration created an important connection between therapists and class teams to develop and maintain consistency with learning priorities, goals, and support. It also provided crucial insights into children's engagement and learning across multiple environments. Professional networking was another welcome outcome.

Book Week

MUSEC held its annual book week parade in 2023 and it was a great success. Both students and staff really enjoyed the parade dressing up in their favourite book character. The Team are looking forward to the 2024 parade.

Visual Arts Report



In 2023, the students in early stage 1 and stage 1 learn about colours and how artists express their emotions through primary and secondary colours. P3 students drew and painted their faces that showed different emotions (happy, sad, and angry). (VAES1.1)



P1 students learnt to cut and paste simple shapes (circle, squares, rectangles, triangles) to make images of things in their environment such as buildings and houses. (VAES1.1)



Students in P2 experimented with different media to create patterns that represent the four seasons by drawing leaf printing and water colour painting. (VAES 1.2, VAS 1.2)



Inspired by Aboriginal desert art, the students at different stages designed and drew symbols with lines and simple geometric shapes (VAS 1.2, VAS 1.3). They used the symbols to make patterns for their Father's Day card and apron as gifts.





Using the skills of drawing, painting, cutting and painting, P2 students created a diorama box of three different habitats (ocean, forest, desert) and the animals living in them. (VAS 1.1) P4 students also created images of the sea world. (VAS 2.1)



Connecting with the Geometry unit, Students in P4 learnt to draw 3 D objects: sphere, cylinder, and cube. They created the three-dimensional effect by shading. Each student also created a still life painting inspired by Paul Cezanne using the skills of 3D drawing. (VAS 2.1, 2.2, 2.3)



Lastly, integrated with the science unit of Solar System, P4 student painted the patterns and images of the sun and the planets. (VAS2.1, VAS2.2) Their art works were used to create a music video for the dance performance at the graduation concert.

Sport Report

MUSEC School sport this year has been a big year of getting healthy, active and energised while learning many skills and playing modified games. The students have been warming up with our Active Outdoor Gymnastics weekly Sessions & Ball Sports Skills. Students participated in BlowFly Cricket in Term3 and it was another successful PE activity.

This year has seen the greatest change in our schools structure where we increased our student numbers to better meet the diverse needs of our students. The method we use for physical education is making any activity accessible and inclusive with hands on learning. We also find a way to allow all the student to enjoy sport who may find participating in a team sports environment difficult. This is done by sharing time between one on one and small groups sporting activities.

Focus across KLA's have included hand-eye, foot-eye as well as intangibles: learning the skills, playing as a team, being a good sport with friends, improving confidence and just having an outlet to help enjoy life more through sport.



Contextual Information about the School

Website:

[Macquarie University Special Education Centre | MUSEC School \(mq.edu.au\)](http://mq.edu.au)

NAPLAN

In 2023 we had 5 participants in the NAPLAN, one in Y3, 4 in Y5. The participating students sat a number of tests in subjects that parents, in consultation with staff would not find too stressful.

The results for both students fell either in the 'Needs Additional Support' or 'Developing' categories. Students were quite anxious and needed some support to remain engaged and/or in the test room. In non-test conditions many of the questions would have been able to be answered with some additional explanation or rewording.

Curriculum

Throughout 2023 teachers and the therapy teams worked on planning and programming to meet the individual needs of students within classes. Teachers and therapists plan work that will engage, motivate, and lead to greater levels of independence and participation in the community. Curriculum based assessments are undertaken in the areas of literacy and numeracy for the purposes of formative evaluation to guide decision making. The principals of positive teaching are practised.

In MUSEC School a major focus is on literacy and numeracy learning for students in Kindergarten to Year 6. The school day is devoted to these two (2) Key Learning Areas and use time in other Key Learning Areas eg. Science, Creative Arts and Human Society and Its Environment, to broaden the student's learning experiences and to provide opportunity for generalisation of literacy and numeracy skills. Significant emphasis is also placed on developing independent work habits and appropriate social skills to facilitate effective inclusion in the next most beneficial setting for the student, for instance, a mainstream education setting when such inclusion is the goal for a student. Students are taught in small groups and/or one to one, receiving intensive, individualised literacy and numeracy programs. Other Key Learning Areas are taught in larger groups. In this way students participate in classroom arrangements similar to what would be experienced in a range of school settings.

The staff at MUSEC are encouraged to find new ways to teach and to support student learning.



In 2023 the school enrolled 36 students aged 05– 12 years of age.

Details of all Teaching Staff

Accreditation level NESA	Conditionally accredited	Provisionally accredited	Proficient
	1	2	9

Staff Retention Rates / Workforce Competition

Teachers	92%
Therapists	100%
Teacher Assistants	100%
Administration	100%

Average staff retention across MUSEC School – (98%)

Professional Learning

In 2023, MUSEC staff were involved in the following Professional Learning

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander perspectives in Art, Science and Geography
- Colourful Semantics
- Conference Presentations – SPELD
- NESA Accreditation – mentoring support for staff.

All staff participated in extensive training across the year in a variety of focus areas including:

- Child Protection – Reportable Conduct and Mandatory Reporting obligations
- First Aid training – Two (2) day training
- Executive Functioning, Central Coherence and Communication – full day workshop
- NCCD evidence and mapping – full day workshop
- MAPPA training – full day workshop.

Total Staff Numbers

	No. of Staff	FTE
Principal	1	1
Teachers	9	8.2
Teacher Assistants	4	3.8
Therapists	3	2.6
Administration	2	1
Total Staff	19	17.6

Retention of Students in Special School Setting

It is anticipated that students will transition to and from MUSEC school so the retention rate is not applicable, Student will transition to mainstream school/special schools and will transition to MUSEC from support classes/mainstream schools and Specialist schools.

Transitions occur throughout the year.

In 2023 the following transitions occurred:

- Five (5) students to mainstream schools
- Four (4) students to other specialist schools – 1 K-6, 3 High School
- Two (2) students to support unit in High school.

Managing Non-Attendance

The school manages non-attendance through a range of strategies, and these are detailed in the Attendance Policy. These range from discussions with parents, through to follow-up correspondence and reporting through to DoE. Non-Attendance at MUSEC has not been problematic with the majority of absent days due to illness such as Covid, RSV and Influenza. Some students have complex medical issues that will mean, from time to time they are absent from school. The school supports students with additional homework if required.

Post School Destinations – Student Transition

Post school for students in Year 6 is a transition to High School and the destinations range from Specialist schools, mainstream classes, and support units in mainstream classes.

Enrolment Policies and Characteristic of the Student Body

In 2023 MUSEC school enrolled 36 students aged 5 to 12 years of age. The student population comes from very diverse backgrounds.

The school population breakdown is as follows:

Student Population	
K-6	36
Total Females	9
Total Males	27
Student Total	36

Ratio of female to male – 1:3.

Average Attendance rate for students 93.5%.

Across 2023 there were several Covid outbreaks as well as RSV, Influenza and a range of childhood illness. Most of the absenteeism occurred due to illness. Several students have complex medical conditions that impacted their attendance.

School Enrolment Procedure

History

MUSEC School has been providing educational programs for over 25 years. MUSEC School is a focal point for special education teachers training and research and development in the most effective ways of teaching children with special education needs.

When it comes to education, we believe that ascribing labels to children's problems, or attaching a 'disability' category to the child's characteristics, serves very little purpose in determining his or her instructional needs. At Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC), we are not interested in labels or categories, just in children as individuals. We believe that **all** children can learn when they are supported and nurtured, where they have a sense of belonging and are relaxed, happy learners. We adopt a truly child centred approach to learning, designing and implementing individualised educational programs for each child. We start at the point where the child's skills are not well established and move on when we are confident that the child has mastered the skills and concepts taught. In this way, we try to make sure that no gaps in learning occur.

Features of the school program include:

- Intensive, individualised small group and 1:1 instruction in literacy and numeracy by specialist teachers;
- Instructional principles based on research.
- Close monitoring of student progress.
- Program adjustment based on progress ensuring a truly individualised program.
- Parent education in helping the student at home.
- Transition to the student's next educational setting.
- Collaborative efforts between teachers and therapists.

MUSEC School has two major functions. Firstly, it serves the community as a research-based, on-site special school for children with disabilities. This allows students at the University and persons from outside to observe exemplary special education practice. Secondly it operates as a professional experience site for students from a range of faculties in Macquarie University. This allows students to directly benefit from involvement in the school and to have firsthand experience working with the children as part of their course requirements. materials.

Process

In order to be eligible to attend MUSEC School, student must have a diagnosis of one or more of the following;

- A language disability
- A mild to moderate intellectual disability
- Autism.

Parents seeking enrolment for their child must:

- Check the eligibility criteria.
- The school will arrange a meeting with the Principal and school tour conducted.
- An application form is completed and submitted to the School Principal. All applications for a place at MUSEC School are considered as vacancies arise, and during Term 3 for vacancies the following school year.
- Afterward, if appropriate, there will be a formal offer of a place made.
- To accept an offer, the relevant disability documentations are submitted and one term's fees as a deposit.

School Policies

[Macquarie University Special Education Centre | MUSEC School \(mq.edu.au\)](http://mq.edu.au)

Reference to Macquarie University Policy Central.

MUSEC School Procedures:

- Anti-bullying
- Child Protection
- Complaints handling.

School Improvement Plan

In 2023 the school reviewed the current accommodation with the support of the Macquarie University Property Unit to plan for the refurbishment and up-grade of school facilities.

- The outcome of this process was the development of a master Plan for the school.

Other smaller projects included:

- purchase of 2 Spring free Trampolines
- employ a Full-time Occupational Therapist
- employ a FTE.6 Speech Therapist
- Refurbish a space for the additional classroom and move the current staffroom
- Establish a staff workroom with large laminator machine to aid in resource production
- Move IT services to cloud based solution and decommission servers
- Purchase a 12-seater bus to support community-based learning.

Priorities for 2024

- Replace the roof across the building.
- Incorporate out-dated observation room into Kinder classroom.
- Replace 3 Interwrite boards.
- Purchase a student management System after due diligence working alongside MQ IT Department.
- Establish an additional class in 2024.
- Apply for BGA grant to support major works in 2025.
- Parent training in communication strategies.
- Re-furbish courtyard in Kinder classroom.
- Employ a Teacher /Behavioural Specialist.
- Focus on team collaboration for professional Learning.
- Support 2 staff HAT accreditation.
- Apply for Disability access grant for additional accessible bathroom in the school.
- Installation of elevator to create accessible staffroom area.

Initiatives Prompting respect and Responsibility

For students at MUSEC respect and responsibility is promoted and actively taught as students learn to function within the context of a group. In all teaching programs respect and responsibility is actively taught so that our students can participate in classroom and community activities. Social skills and classroom skills are embedded in students' IEPs. Specific classroom and playground activities social interaction activities form part of daily programs.

School Satisfaction

The parent satisfaction survey was distributed in December 2023 to all parents. The return rate was low however the overall satisfaction rate from parents was high. Comments included.

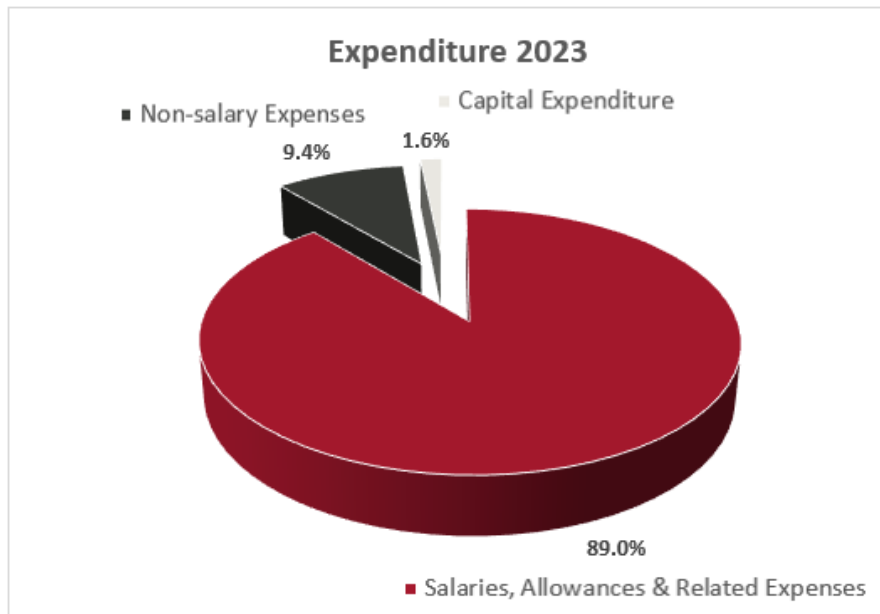
- “My child has benefited from small class sizes and the well -trained special education teachers.”
- “MUSEC has done a great job, and my child is moving to high school, and we are very proud parents.”
- “I would love to see a High School at MUSEC – I worry about my child being lost in a bigger high school without the support.”
- “The program is great, and I would love to see more creative arts – music, dance, drama as my child loves these areas.”



Summary Financial Information

Expenditure breakdown

Salaries, Allowances & Related Expenses	89.0%
Non-salary Expenses	9.4%
Capital Expenditure	1.6%



Include 2023 Recurrent/Capital Income

Income breakdown

Commonwealth Recurrent Grants	50.0%
Fees & Private Income	26.9%
State Recurrent Grants	23.2%

