Hunter River Community School
Annual School Report 2013
School context

Hunter River Community School caters for students from Kindergarten to Year 12 and is currently located in East Maitland. A recent grant from the Commonwealth Building the Education Revolution program will see the school relocated to new facilities in Metford next year. Hunter River Community School is part of the Maitland area of schools and services five local government areas, including, Maitland, Cessnock, Port Stephens, Singleton and Dungog. The school is well known within the community and has a reputation for providing a dynamic educational environment for students with special needs in a safe, supportive and caring atmosphere.

Principal’s message

It gives me great pleasure to present our Annual School Report for 2013. I am sure you will join us all in celebrating yet another successful year of quality teaching and learning.

Each member of the school team continues to work hard in developing and fostering partnerships with families, carers and the wider community to ensure that each student receives a quality education. Each member of the school team, including school administrative staff, executive, teachers, School Learning Support Officers, school counsellors, therapists and visiting teachers have greatly contributed to the success of the school.

Throughout the year we have continued to work closely with local primary and high schools in developing networks to support curriculum access for those students with communication disorders. Thanks to the work of dedicated staff at Hunter River Community School many schools have implemented innovative communication programs aimed at providing enhanced access to curriculum outcomes.

This year was also the year that we said farewell to our East Maitland site. This site had served students and the community for the past twelve years, and there was some degree of sadness in leaving the area. Any regrets were soon set aside when we assumed responsibility for our new school in Metford on the 13th December. My thanks also go to regional staff, Public Works, and North Constructions for their dedicated support in providing, what we feel, is a leading light in school design for Public Schools.

I certify that the information in this report is the result of a rigorous school self-evaluation process and is a balanced and genuine account of the school’s achievements and areas for development.

Ian Hughes

Student information

It is a requirement that the reporting of information for all students be consistent with privacy and personal information policies.

Student enrolment profile

In 2013 Hunter River Community School had an enrolment of 56 students identified as having a moderate to severe intellectual disability. Approximately 85% of students are diagnosed as having a severe intellectual disability.

In addition many students presented with secondary disabilities including physical disability, sensory impairment, autism and conduct disorders.

Our enrolment profile results in a very complex and diverse population, consequently a broad
range of curriculum options, behaviour management programs and instructional strategies are required to maximise the engagement and learning outcomes for all students.

In terms of enrolment numbers, a trend of increasing enrolments persists. An imbalance of almost one girl to three boys remains evident.

**Student attendance profile**

There has been a gradual decline in the average daily attendance rate in the past two years. This decline is mainly due to an increased complexity of student health care needs in recent times. A number of students experienced major illness which required long hospital stays. Two students could only attend school on a part time basis due to ill health and long recuperation programs.

**Management of non-attendance**

Hunter River Community School regularly monitors the attendance of our students through the use of OASIS attendance data. Parents are reminded at the beginning of each year about the legal requirements of sending their children to school, and the fact that each absence must be explained by a parent or caregiver. Hunter River Community School also accepts telephone advice of absences. This information is recorded and kept as per departmental requirements.

The School Administration Officer follows up on any unexplained absences each week and requests an explanation of the absence from parents or carers. Due to the nature of our students, truancy is not a feature of non-attendance.

**Post-school destinations**

All five students leaving the school in 2013 were successfully transitioned to local Post School Option Programs. Three students selected Endeavour Industries as their post school provider and two students selected Mai-Wel.

**Year 12 students attaining HSC**

All five students who completed Year 12 were successful in gaining their Higher School Certificate – Life Skills.

**Workforce information**

It is a requirement that the reporting of information for all staff must be consistent with privacy and personal information policies.

All teaching staff meet the professional requirements for teaching in NSW public schools.

Hunter River Community School has a teaching allocation of 11.998 teachers supported by 9 full time School Learning Support Officers, a School...
Administration Manager, a part time School Administration Officer and a part time General Assistant.

Specialist support staff assisting students to meet their educational needs includes; a School Counsellor allocation of one day per week, Itinerant Support Teacher – Vision, one day per week and Itinerant Support Teacher – Hearing one day per week.

**Workforce composition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Principal(s)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal(s)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teachers</td>
<td>7.598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher of Emotional Disabilities</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher of Mild Intellectual Disabilities</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher of Reading Recovery</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Teacher Learning Assistance</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Librarian</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher of ESL</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Administrative &amp; Support Staff</td>
<td>10.926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23.124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Australian Education Regulation, 2013 requires schools to report on Aboriginal composition of their workforce.

On the basis of the information available to Hunter River Community School there were no Indigenous staff members employed on a full time basis in 2013.

**Teacher qualifications**

All teaching staff meet the professional requirements for teaching in NSW public schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>% of staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree or Diploma</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW Institute of Teachers Accreditation</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assistant Principal, Mandy Worton receiving her 30years Service to Public Education Award.

**Staff retention**

Hunter River Community School had a number of staff take long term leave in 2013. Three temporary classroom teacher appointments were actioned to replace staff on leave.

*Hunter River Community School Staff Signing Choir*
Financial summary

This summary covers funds for operating costs and does not involve expenditure areas such as permanent salaries, building and major maintenance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of financial summary</th>
<th>30/11/2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Balance brought forward</td>
<td>150181</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global funds</td>
<td>124053</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tied funds</td>
<td>103499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School &amp; community sources</td>
<td>78120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>5231</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust receipts</td>
<td>8484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canteen</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total income</strong></td>
<td>469568.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching &amp; learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key learning areas</td>
<td>8705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excursions</td>
<td>2303</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extracurricular dissections</td>
<td>7499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training &amp; development</td>
<td>2108</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tied funds</td>
<td>119277</td>
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<td>Casual relief teachers</td>
<td>49888</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administration &amp; office</td>
<td>43829</td>
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<tr>
<td>School-operated canteen</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>13950</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust accounts</td>
<td>8766</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capital programs</td>
<td>26495</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total expenditure</strong></td>
<td>318384.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balance carried forward</strong></td>
<td>151184.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A full copy of the school’s 2013 financial statement is tabled at the annual general meetings of the School Council and/or the parent body. Further details concerning the statement can be obtained by contacting the school.

School performance 2013

Hunter River Community School is committed to providing a comprehensive, quality learning experience to enable each student to reach their maximum potential.

We believe that:

- Education is a shared responsibility of the school, the students, the home and the broader school community.
- Self-esteem and personal growth are directly related to successful outcomes for students.

- Quality learning depends on quality teaching programs.
- The school nurtures a culture where all students are accepted and valued.

Students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 were, by parental request, exempt from participation in the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).

Academic achievements

Performance Scales or P-Scales are a mandatory tool used throughout the United Kingdom to assist in the assessment and reporting of performance standards for students with special education needs who are falling below the equivalent of Stage One outcomes in the NSW Board of Studies syllabus.

Hunter River Community School has been trialing the use of PScales to assist in assessing and monitoring growth in student performance levels. To date no such tool exists in NSW.

PScales are split into eight levels, with the first three levels (P1-P3) not being subject specific, but describing early learning and conceptual development. For example; may be passive or reactive when encountering learning experiences, beginning to show an awareness of activities and people, and responding consistently to learning experiences.

Further information regarding performance descriptors is available from the school.

Numeracy

There has been little reportable difference between student performances in Numeracy from 2012 to 2013. Five students moved from the conceptual development phase (P1-P3) and are now demonstrating early learning of number concepts.

![P-Scales Numeracy 2012 - 2013](chart.png)
Literacy

A focus on literacy skill acquisition in 2012 and 2013 has shown improvements for all students. Overall the school has more than half of its students demonstrating concrete early reading skills, with some students mastering reading at higher levels.

Overall the trial of the P-Scales to assess student growth and performance has been problematic. Inconsistency of interpreting data between teachers was highly evident which resulted in inconsistent results. A more rigorous assessment process is required, especially one that aligns to NSW syllabus documents. The school will examine aligning their assessment processes with the NSW Department of Education Literacy and Numeracy Continuum.

Other achievements

Reading Eggs

In 2013 Hunter River Community School trialed the implementation of the Reading Eggs program, a unique online world where children learn to read. It supports each child’s learning by offering individual, one-on-one lessons that allow children to progress at their own rate. Students can also login to their Reading Eggs account for use at home, providing opportunities for parents to take an active part in their child’s learning.

The initial trial started in September with 15 students enrolled in the program. The program will continue to expand in 2014.

Initial results show;

- students are enjoying the format of the reading program,
- an increased level of independence in completing activities for all students, and
- overwhelming support for the program from parents and carers.

Significant programs and initiatives

Aboriginal education

Aboriginal education is integrated into all Key Learning Areas (KLAs) and Connected Outcome Group (COGs) units of work at Hunter River Community School.

Aspects of Aboriginal culture were experienced across the school through a variety of interactive classroom activities this year. Students explored Aboriginal culture through their KLA units of work ‘Identity & Values’ and ‘Meeting Needs’ in which they looked at Aboriginal heritage and lifestyles in comparison to their own lives. Students completed artworks, listened to music, read stories and used the internet to develop and share their knowledge.

Multicultural education

Hunter River Community School promotes the values of acceptance and tolerance for a Multicultural Australia. Our Human, Society and its Environment (HSIE) curriculum and creative arts programs offer many opportunities to explore these values. Our school values individual difference where all staff endeavour to ensure students receive an education catering to their individual learning style and cultural identity.

Harmony day is an important day in the school calendar where we learn and understand how all Australians from diverse backgrounds equally belong to this nation and enrich it.
A very “harmonious” Adam and Cameron

Transitional Equity Funding
At the end of 2012 the program known as Priority School Funding Program was discontinued and the school received Transitional Equity Funding whilst being transitioned to a new funding arrangement for 2014.

Hunter River Community School received $14500 as a cash grant and a 0.1 (½ day per week) staffing allocation. This funding was used to support Literacy and student engagement initiatives throughout the school.

The use of PODD Book communication and technology were important components in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes.

National partnerships and significant Commonwealth initiatives

Every Student Every School – SSP’s as centres of expertise.

Special schools across the state were provided with an opportunity to participate in a two year National Partnership program through the Every School, Every Student initiative.

Special schools are well placed to build capacity in all NSW public schools with project funds used to establish a framework and network for effective learning and support to neighbouring schools in one of the following priority areas;

- Assistive technology as a vehicle for students to access curriculum,
- Case management and support of students with complex needs,
- The provision of supports and adjustments to learning to allow students with a communication delay to achieve curriculum outcomes,
- Supporting the transition needs of students with a disability, and
- Building learning support plans through collaborative partnerships.

Based on the success of our PODD Book communication program and successful iPad communication program it was decided that Hunter River Community School would provide support to neighbouring schools in these priority areas which would allow students with a communication delay or disability to successfully achieve curriculum outcomes. Funds were used to:

- Release key personnel from classroom duties to provide direct support to schools.
- Provide additional training to identified Hunter River Community School staff.
- Create a PODD Chat MAANG group.
- Provide short video presentations to demonstrate how PODD Books work.
- Host PODD making sessions to share knowledge.
- Provide practical support to community groups and post school service providers.
An investigation of our effectiveness with this project found that:

- 80% of our student population had an individualised PODD book available to them.
- School visits, both to Hunter River Community School and to other sites were a regular feature of our project.
- Information sharing sessions had occurred in 46 schools across the Hunter Central Coast region.
- The ongoing nature of the support provided to schools was seen as highly beneficial by staff.
- Formal training sessions with Gayle Porter and Harriett Korner of the Independent Living Centre had occurred for 25 participants comprising of speech therapists, teachers, parents, personnel from community organisations and volunteers.
- Parents were highly appreciative of the ongoing support they received from the two project officers.

This project has highlighted the varied expertise within both teaching and support staff at Hunter River Community School, along with the thirst for knowledge around supporting students with complex communication needs in a variety of educational settings.

Our commitment to “giving every student a voice” will continue beyond the project through;

- The continued use of social media sites such as MAANG to promote the use of PODD Books and iPads as a tool for communication.
- The continued hosting of “Network” meetings to promote and sustain the use of PODD Books and iPads for communication.

IOTAS Graduation Ceremony

IOTAS (IO Teachers and Students) began twenty three years ago when a group of special education teachers from isolated support classes came together to organize events for students in these classes. The first graduation ceremony was held in 1992 as a “fun day” at Newcastle Baths.

In 1995 a more formal ceremony was organised by Sharon Moffitt at Cardiff High School. The ceremony continued being hosted by different schools until, a decision was made in 2007 to hold the day at a larger, more professional venue, being Newcastle Panthers. This day is heavily sponsored by Coal and Allied.

This year saw 58 graduates from 20 schools stretching from Northlakes in the south to Singleton in the north being presented with their graduation certificate by Sue Bardon from the Active After School Sports program.

Our graduates, Cameron Howard, Billy Hawes, Adam Rusak, Adam Morrissey and Mikaila James were cheered on by the close to capacity 1500 audience.

Our graduates in rehearsal for their farewell performance.
Senior School Camp

In term three eight students and four staff members travelled to Myuna Bay Sport and Recreation Centre for the annual IOTAS Senior Camp. The camp was held over 3 days and two nights.

Approximately 30 students from eight schools across the Hunter Central Coast Region also participated in the camp.

The goal was to make the camp a valuable learning and social experience for participants in a unique bush land setting around Lake Macquarie.

Cabins were clean, comfortable, and accessible, with students responsible for keeping their rooms clean and tidy. Meals were eaten together in a “common room” with students required to follow a roster to clear tables and load dishwashers.

Activities provided many opportunities for students to meet old friends and socialise around activities including; the flying fox, putt-putt golf, fishing and canoeing. Staff reported that all students thoroughly enjoyed the camp experience and gained more independence and saw the results of good teamwork and cooperation.

No camp, of course would be complete without toasting marshmallows around the campfire.

School planning and evaluation 2012—2014

School evaluation processes

NSW public schools conduct evaluations to support the effective implementation of the school plan. The processes used include:

- regular monitoring of progress towards identified school targets;
- regular presentations for parents at P&C meetings, and;
- constant adjustments to school programs to ensure alignment with school plans and departmental policy.

School planning 2012—2014: progress in 2013

School priority 1 - Communication

To improve communication outcomes for all students.

Outcomes from 2012–2014

To improve communication outcomes across the school and surrounding support classes through;

- the continued development of PODD Book communication programs;
- identified staff supporting neighbouring schools; and
- developing links with Newcastle University Speech Pathology programs.

Evidence of progress towards outcomes in 2013:

- 80% of students achieved their communication goal stated in their Individual Learning Program (ILP).
- Outreach services provided to 45 schools and support units.
- 80% of students have an individualized PODD Communication book available for personal use.
- Development of a MANG networking site for PODD Book users.
- Presentation at 2012 AGOSCI National conference for augmentative communication users.

Strategies to achieve these outcomes in 2014

- Training of new staff in the use of PODD Book communication.
- Closer liaison with Newcastle University Speech Pathology students to engage as communication partners.
• Development of a PODD Book communication matrix for plotting achievement.
• Trail of “The Communication Matrix” as an assessment tool.

School priority 2 - Literacy
To improve school practices in the delivery of planned and explicit literacy programs to address the needs of all students.

Outcomes from 2012–2014
To increase the number of students achieving a one skill band increase in P-Scales –Literacy.

Evidence of progress towards outcomes in 2013:
• 30% of students actively participating in the “Reading Eggs program”.
• Low level, high interest literacy resources purchased for selected senior students.
• Selected students benchmarked using Waddington Reading Assessment tool.

Strategies to achieve these outcomes in 2014:
This area of the school plan needs to be revised due to the limited information available using the P-Scales assessment tool.
• Benchmark ALL students using the Literacy Continuum.
• Ensure all students have a literacy goal in their ILP.
• Introduce the Holroyd Mary Brooksbank School English K-12 Framework document for Planning, Assessing and reporting.

School priority 3
To improve school practices in the delivery of planned and explicit numeracy programs to meet the needs of all students.

Outcomes from 2012–2014
To increase the number of students achieving a one skill band increase in P-Scales Numeracy.

Evidence of progress towards outcomes in 2013:
• All students benchmarked using the Numeracy Continuum.

Strategies to achieve these outcomes in 2014:
• Investigation of the Mathletics web based mathematics program to support numeracy learning at school and at home.
• Tracking of student’s progress using a tracking tool based around aspects of the Numeracy Continuum.
• Provide professional development opportunities for teachers similar to that of the Count Me In Too program.
• Trial implementation of the new BOS Australian Curriculum in Mathematics ready for full implementation in 2015.

Professional learning
Ongoing and targeted professional learning enhances the work of teachers, school learning support officers and school administration officers.

An integral component of the teacher assessment program at Hunter River School involves staff negotiating a Professional Learning plan with their supervisor.

Professional learning included activities such as School Development Days, attendance at training events, working with other teachers, both within the school and at other schools and professional reading.

The school received a budget of $12103 for the development of teaching staff in targeted areas, this included funding for the K-10 Australian English Syllabus implementation.

Professional learning supported staff in working towards school improvement targets in the following areas;
• supporting students’ literacy and communication needs,
• PODD Book communication,
• implementation of the K-10 Board of Studies Life Skills curriculum,
- enhancing student engagement through the use of interactive technology,
- Reading Eggs literacy initiative
- student wellbeing initiatives, and
- opportunities to present at national conferences.

Parent/caregiver, student, and teacher satisfaction

In 2013, the school sought the opinions of parents, students and teachers about the school. Their responses are presented below.

![Teacher Satisfaction Chart](chart.png)

Generally the staff were positive about their experiences at the school and were happy to come to work each day. Staff thought that parents were very well supported and that quality relationships existed between staff and parents. Some themes that became evident amongst staff were the creation of a multi-staged class for students with physical disabilities and complex health care needs.

Staff were generally looking forward to the move to the new school site and hoped that integration opportunities would arise were appropriate. A small percentage of staff members thought that communication between the executive staff and general school staff has improved since 2012.

Parents were asked to respond to one question; “Would you recommend the school to others”? Fifty percent of parents responded, all of which indicated they would recommend the school.

General comments included;

The staff are friendly and the kids are always happy.

Absolutely all the staff do a great job, even though they are under staffed.

I think things will be even better in 2014 when the school moves to new premises in Metford.

Absolutely! I have never met a more caring, dedicated bunch of people.

It’s a great learning environment and the children are afforded so many opportunities.

Because it is a short time my son has been there, I have noticed a huge improvement.

The school provides a safe learning environment for my child. The staff are also responsive and supportive.

Program evaluations - TEACCH Box Instruction

Background

During 2013 the staff at Hunter River Community School was introduced to a pedagogy specifically designed to meet the needs of students with intellectual disability, autism, and communication impairment. Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) methodology is closely linked with behavior and cognitive therapies with an aim to build capacity and independence.

After initial training staff were provided with a small budget and a day of relief from class duties to develop TEACCH Box tasks aimed at developing literacy and numeracy skills across the range of abilities present in their class.

Staff then proceeded to implement the TEACCH Box tasks in the morning session on a daily basis.

![Darcy enjoying working alone with his TEACCH Box task](image.png)
Findings and conclusions

After completing a survey around this practice the following findings and conclusions were drawn:

- All staff found this method of pedagogy appropriate to the needs of students in their class.
- 77% of teachers implemented the approach consistently throughout the week.
- 80% of students are using this approach to learning on a daily basis.
- Students are completing three to five tasks per session.
- Some students are struggling working independently and are only completing one to two tasks per day.
- On average each class has twenty task boxes prepared covering a range of key learning areas.
- 45% of students are independently completing tasks boxes, meaning they can select the required task, complete the activity, and return the task box before selecting another.

Future directions

All staff expressed a commitment to continuing the approach in 2014 and expressed a desire to learn more about the program. Future directions will include:

- The provision of more formal training opportunities.
- Staff visits to other schools using this approach.
- Enhanced budget allocation to expand the variety of TEACCH Box tasks.

About this report

In preparing this report, the self-evaluation committee has gathered information from evaluations conducted during the year and analysed other information about the school’s practices and student learning outcomes. The self-evaluation committee and school planning committee have determined targets for the school’s future development.

Ian Hughes – Principal
Tracey Rapson – Assistant Principal
Amanda Worton – Assistant Principal
Alison Landers – Assistant Principal
Regina Murdoch – P&C President

School contact information

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School Code: 5687

Parents can find more information about Annual School Reports, how to interpret information in the report and have the opportunity to provide feedback about the report at:

Justin working hard at his TEACCH Box activities