

2024 Annual Report



THE
NATURE
SCHOOL

Vision

A world where nature and learning create a sustainable future.

& Mission

A community where children learn and shine through authentic experiences in nature to become engaged global citizens.

Values

Connect: we value connected learning opportunities, connecting with our community, and connection with nature.

Protect: we value childhood, protect the rights of children, and advocate for protection of the environment.

Respect: we value self respect, respect for others, and respect for the natural world.



THE
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1.1 Chair Report

I respectfully acknowledge the Birpai people as the traditional custodians of the land on which The Nature School was founded and where our community now lives, learns, and grows. This land always was and always will be Birpai land. On behalf of The Nature School Board of Directors, I extend my sincere respect to Birpai elders past, present, and emerging, and to all Aboriginal peoples who live, learn, and grow in the Port Macquarie region.

This past year marked the seventh year of The Nature School Primary and our second year offering Secondary education with Years 7 and 8.



During 2024, we acknowledged the departure of three dedicated directors from the Board: Mark Wilson, Scott Upston, and Chloe Tugnett. We extend our sincere gratitude to these individuals, and to all our directors, for their invaluable volunteer contributions of time, experience, and skills. Their commitment and dedication have been instrumental in the success of our progressive and innovative organisation, and we deeply appreciate the collective skills, experience, and insights they have provided. We were also pleased to welcome Jane LeGall as a new member of the Board this year, whose expertise further enhances our board's capabilities.

In terms of notable achievements this year, I would like to highlight the completion of several significant capital works projects: the construction of a new toilet block, an outdoor classroom, a roof for the Kindy Deck, and connecting walkways, as well as a new building for Year 8 students.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to our dedicated Executives. Business Manager, Karen Marlin, has expertly overseen the Early Years program and fulfilled the responsibilities of TNS Business Manager, skilfully managing the school's continuous growth and associated challenges. Head of School, Catherine Shaw, has not only nurtured the school since its inception but also successfully established TNS Secondary, this being its second year.

Both our Executives work tirelessly and with exceptional dedication to ensure the flourishing of The Nature School children and facilitators. The high calibre of staff who are passionate about being part of TNS is a testament to the positive culture that our Executives cultivate on a daily basis.

I am excited to see TNS continue to thrive as an organisation in 2025 and beyond, knowing that we have proven to have a dedicated Board, passionate and experienced staff, and inquisitive and resilient children and families. Together we can create a world where nature and learning create a sustainable future.

Nigel Tang

Board Chair



1.2 Head of School Report

"There will always be rocks in the road ahead of us. They will be stumbling blocks or stepping stones; it all depends on how you use them."

- Friedrich Nietzsche

As always, I begin this report by acknowledging that The Nature School stands on Birpai Country, and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Igneous. Sedimentary. Metamorphic.

2024 began with a focus on rocks. The staff tackled rock climbing together, and wrote intentions for the year on stones which sat in classrooms and offices as reminders. And then we set off on another year of adventures in learning, walking on red ochre and basalt.

Our adventures took us to a wide range of sites across the Port Macquarie region and beyond. Younger students explored local beaches, farms and lighthouses on Adventure Days while older students (in Years 7 AND 8) ventured to Field Studies and camp sites such as Swans Crossing, Hat Head, and Coffs Harbour. Four Secondary students were flown to Sydney to meet Jane Goodall at Taronga Zoo as part of her Roots and Shoots Australian Tour. The students got to share some of the projects our school has undertaken to support the local koala population, while also meeting a conservation hero. But most adventurous of all – seven lucky Secondary students flew to Lord Howe Island for a scientific expedition of epic proportions.



Funded partly thanks to the *Sponsorship Grants for Student Science Engagement and International Competitions*, partly by a generous donor, and partly by student fundraising efforts, this expedition came at **no** cost to families and set the tone for the many expeditions to come. Students had to apply for the opportunity to attend, outlining their personal scientific projects and also demonstrating how they had exemplified our School Rules. These students explored the island with the incomparable Ian Hutton, snorkelled with amazing species, visited the local school, and conquered Mt Gower, which was as physically demanding as it was mentally challenging in wet and muddy conditions. The impact of this expedition on the students (and staff) who attended will be felt for many years to come.

Across the whole school, our Primary and Secondary students participated in many community and environmental projects. These included Clean Up Australia Day, the Great Southern BioBlitz, National Schools Tree Day, and Bird Week. Students teamed up with Hastings Landcare volunteers to plant around 600 native plants for a shelter belt on a local property, providing crucial wildlife habitat for the years to come. We also launched a new initiative with Hastings Birdwatchers, creating the first Junior memberships exclusively for students at TNS. Quarterly outings on Saturday mornings provided an authentic intergenerational opportunity enjoyed by students and seniors, as they bonded over birds and shared binoculars. Some of the Senior Birders even joined us as judges for our Second Annual Bird Calling Competition, which was hugely supported by our Primary students.

In 2024 we increased our school wide sporting events, in response to parent requests. Our first Cross Country event was held on a neighbouring property and it was a joy to watch older students supporting and cheering on our younger competitors. As it was an Olympic year, we also held our first Bush Olympics, which put a TNS twist on a standard athletics carnival.

We continued to focus on the wellbeing of our students. We received a wellbeing grant which allowed us to run an Equine Wellbeing program for several identified Primary students. We also received funding to employ a Youth Wellbeing Officer one day per week.

Our School was again visited by a number of special guests and attracted media attention throughout the year. We delighted in gardening with Costa Georgiadis and watching him slide off the Kindy deck. We also welcomed young conservationist Spencer Hitchen who shared his photography journey and passion for Glossy Black Cockatoos.

As always, learning remains central. Our core focus is to create "a community where children learn and shine..." and our teaching staff are deeply committed to this. I am grateful for their dedication, creativity, and professional excellence. I am particularly indebted to Kellie Hall who stepped into the newly created position of Assistant Head of School, and in doing so eased my load. Kellie has shone in this demanding role and is an asset to our staff and students, as well as to me personally. Our Administration team again worked tirelessly in the office, led by our extraordinary Business Manager Karen Marlin. My thanks also to our Board of Directors who volunteer their time, skills and experience to diligently govern our School.

Over the course of the year, together as a community we overcame many obstacles, choosing to see them as stepping stones rather than stumbling blocks. One obstacle that we were not able to overcome was the Registration of our Early Years program. At the end of 2024 the Board made the difficult decision to pause this program. I know I speak on behalf of the entire organisation when I express my deep love and gratitude for the staff who have dedicated themselves to this program over the years. Our revitalised Playgroup will be a stepping stone in the Early Learning space, and we look forward to what will come next.

The rock I wrote on at the start of 2024 still sits on my desk, with the word “THRIVE” emblazoned across it. As I reflect on 2024, it seems a fitting word for the year that was, and an inspiring word for all the growth that is yet to come for The Nature School.

Catherine Shaw

Head of School



1.3 Contextual Information

The Nature School (TNS) is a progressive independent school with a focus on nature.

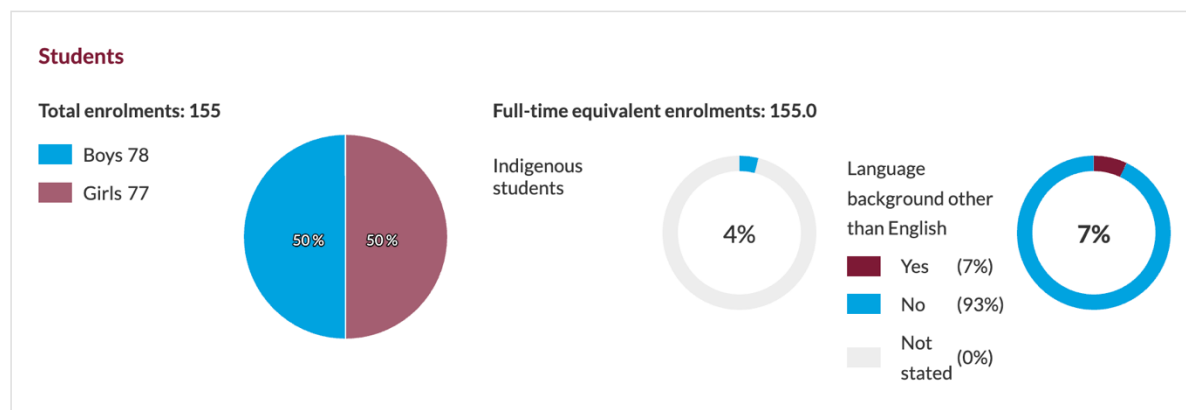
Learners at TNS are scientific thinkers, curious questioners, and articulate communicators, capable of affecting change now and in the future.

Based in beautiful Port Macquarie in regional NSW, TNS was established in 2018 firstly as a Primary School, catering for approximately 120 students across Kindergarten to Year 6 in single stream classes. In 2024 the adventure continued with our second year of Secondary growth, catering for students in Kindy to Year 8. The Nature School Secondary will grow year-on-year with our oldest cohort, reaching Year 10 in 2026. TNS is Registered and Accredited to ensure students are eligible for the Record of School Achievement (RoSA).

At TNS learning is regularly taken beyond the classroom. In the Primary years, teachers take students outside on a daily basis during all KLAs, as appropriate to the lesson. Primary Adventure Days are fortnightly offsite excursions into local natural habitats or the local community. Adventure Days are planned in conjunction with Integrated units of work and require a high degree of teacher planning and understanding of curriculum. In the Secondary years, teachers are encouraged to consider the most appropriate contexts for taking learning outdoors in each subject. Fortnightly Field Studies Days provide Year 7 and 8 students with an opportunity to apply skills and knowledge in natural environments. Year 9 students additionally head offsite for Outdoor Education and in conjunction with Electives.

At TNS Secondary, creativity, problem solving, independent thinking, communication and collaboration continue to be fostered. Building on the strengths of the Primary program, Secondary teachers extend the *Learning Naturally framework* to design a robust academic program. Fortnightly Field Studies trips to offsite locations are integral to the curriculum model, allowing students to take hands-on learning to new depths. TNS Secondary students explore opportunities for social enterprise and consider their role as global citizens.

1.3.1 Characteristics of the Student Body



1.3.2 Priority Areas for Improvement

Target	Comments	Achieved?
Registration of Year 8	Five year Registration granted Year 8	✓
Initial Registration of Year 9	Initial Registration granted for Y9 2025	✓
Increase enrolments	The school increased enrolments from 139 students to 155	✓
Employ further staff	Additional classroom teachers employed and Assistant Head of School appointed	✓
Teaching and learning: continued focus on implementation of new syllabus documents	Professional learning undertaken to familiarise and implement new syllabus as required by curriculum reform schedule	✓
Facilities and resources: build and fit out Secondary classrooms and Junior Library	Additional buildings completed for beginning of 2024. Further works to be completed during 2024 for 2025 school year.	✓
Facilities and resources: master planning	Plan in place for significant capital works – Senior Library, staff room, additional classrooms/breakout spaces	✓ and ongoing
Facilities and resources: master planning	Block Grant Authority application lodged for consideration for capital works in 2025	✓ and ongoing

1.3.3 Promoting Respect and Responsibility

Respect is a key value in our organisation and one of the three foundations underpinning everything we do at TNS (Respect – Safety – Learning). From Kindergarten our students are taught to respect themselves, others and the environment as outlined in the school rules. All members of our school community are expected to do the same. Students are also given a great deal of responsibility from a young age, as they move towards becoming “engaged global citizens” as outlined in our Mission statement. Year 6 students lead our quarterly Primary School Meetings, which include sharing big ideas, collecting maintenance reports, celebrating success and sharing gratitude; while our Secondary students run their own SM² (School Meetings Squared) where they raise agenda items, and Chair and document their own decisions.

Some examples of ways we promoted respect and responsibility across The Nature School in 2024 included:

- Adventure days and Field Studies trips to a wide range of community locations
- Secondary Greater Good Program
- Community produce swap
- Koala Smart Program
- Harmony Day
- National Schools Tree Day
- Cleanup Australia Day
- Aussie Backyard Bird Week
- National Recycling week
- Great Southern BioBlitz
- Connection with The Lost Plot Community Gardens
- Caring for our own kitchen gardens, worm farms, chickens, lizards, and bees
- Weekly Community Cleanup – school grounds
- Reconciliation Week Activities

- NAIDOC Week Activities
- Buddy Reading
- Gratitude circles
- Return & Earn
- School Working Bees
- National Day of Action Against Bullying & Violence
- Inspired Readers Festival
- World Ocean Day
- ANZAC Day
- Sorry Day
- Rotary Cardboard Boat Regatta
- Local PMHC Visit – Recycling, plastics & nocturnal animals
- National Simultaneous Storytime
- Rotary Photo Competition
- The Lost Plot Spring Fair
- Year 6 Travel Showcase – including local dignitaries
- Charles Sturt Christmas Night Market
- Annual Tree planting ceremony
- Hastings Junior Birdwatchers
- Girls in STEM
- Auslan Appreciation Day
- Bat Night
- Sustainability Program
- Talk Money – Literacy Financial Workshop
- Lord Howe Island Visit
- Ruins Guided Tour



2. OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

2.1 Student Outcomes in Standardised National Testing

Extract from TNS Assessment and Reporting Statement:

The purpose of assessment is to gather valid, reliable and useful information about student learning. At TNS we adopt an integrated approach to teaching, learning and assessment, and as such assessment is an ongoing and integral part of the teaching-learning cycle. Quality assessment tasks enable students to demonstrate what they know and can do while providing teachers with opportunities to gather evidence about student achievement in relation to syllabus outcomes.

At TNS we are committed to standards-referenced assessment that:

- *is based on syllabus outcomes*
- *enables students to demonstrate their learning in a range of task types*
- *is free from bias*
- *is inclusive of and accessible for all students, with appropriate differentiations or adjustments provided as necessary*
- *is part of an ongoing process where progress is monitored over time*
- *is respectful of each child and sensitive to their age and developmental stage*

A range of strategies may be used to assess student learning. The type of assessment activity and the means of gathering evidence will depend on outcomes, context, and students' learning needs. At TNS assessment strategies include:

- *teacher observations*
- *anecdotal records*
- *rubrics for rich assessment tasks*
- *checklists*

- *peer assessment*
- *self assessment*
- *learning portfolios (a growing collection of student work samples from throughout the semester)*
- *inquiry based research questions*
- *hands-on activities or practical demonstrations*
- *presentations*

A ‘test’ should only be used when evidence of student knowledge and understanding cannot be collected any other way. At TNS we prefer authentic assessment tasks and work samples collected in the context of the usual school day and not under ‘test conditions’. As such, we do not teach children how to perform in standardised tests or expect them to complete assessment tasks within strictly enforced time limits. While we fully cooperate with all legislative requirements regarding standardised tests, we are philosophically opposed to standardised testing and do not sacrifice valuable teaching time for practising past papers or teaching performance techniques.

* * *

In 2024, many Y3 parents and some Y5 and Y7 parents withdrew their children from NAPLAN testing on philosophical grounds. NAPLAN participation for 2024 at TNS was 58%, up from 43% in the previous year. It is difficult to draw accurate conclusions from the Y3 cohort in particular due to the low number of students participating. Participation levels increase as students move through School. Comparison data is not available, however results are tabled below:

	2023	2024			
Compare to	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Students with similar background	<input type="radio"/> All Australian students			
	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar	Numeracy
Year 3	354	401	341	346	380
Year 5	538	533	499	539	510
Year 7	578	560	552	568	529

The following is noted regarding students who completed NAPLAN testing at The Nature School in 2024:

- In **Reading**, both Y5 and Y7 scored above average when compared with students from a similar background and compared with all Australian students, however Y3 are slightly below the average
- Similarly in **Writing**, both Y5 and Y7 scored above average when compared with students from a similar background and compared with all Australian students, however Y3 are slightly below the average
- In **Spelling**, Y3 scored below average when compared with students from a similar background and compared with all Australian students. Y5 students scored equal to those from similar backgrounds, and above the national average. Y7 students outperformed against both categories
- In **Grammar**, both Y5 and Y7 scored above average when compared with students from a similar background and compared with all Australian students, however Y3 are below the average, consistent with the other literacy results above
- In **Numeracy**, both Y3 and Y7 scored slightly below their peers, while Y5 were above both similar schools and the national average



SECTION 3: STAFFING

3.1 Accreditation Status

Category	Number of Teachers – as at end of 2024
Conditional	1
Provisional	2
Proficient	15
<i>HALT (Highly Accomplished / Lead – voluntary)</i>	<i>0</i>
TOTAL	18



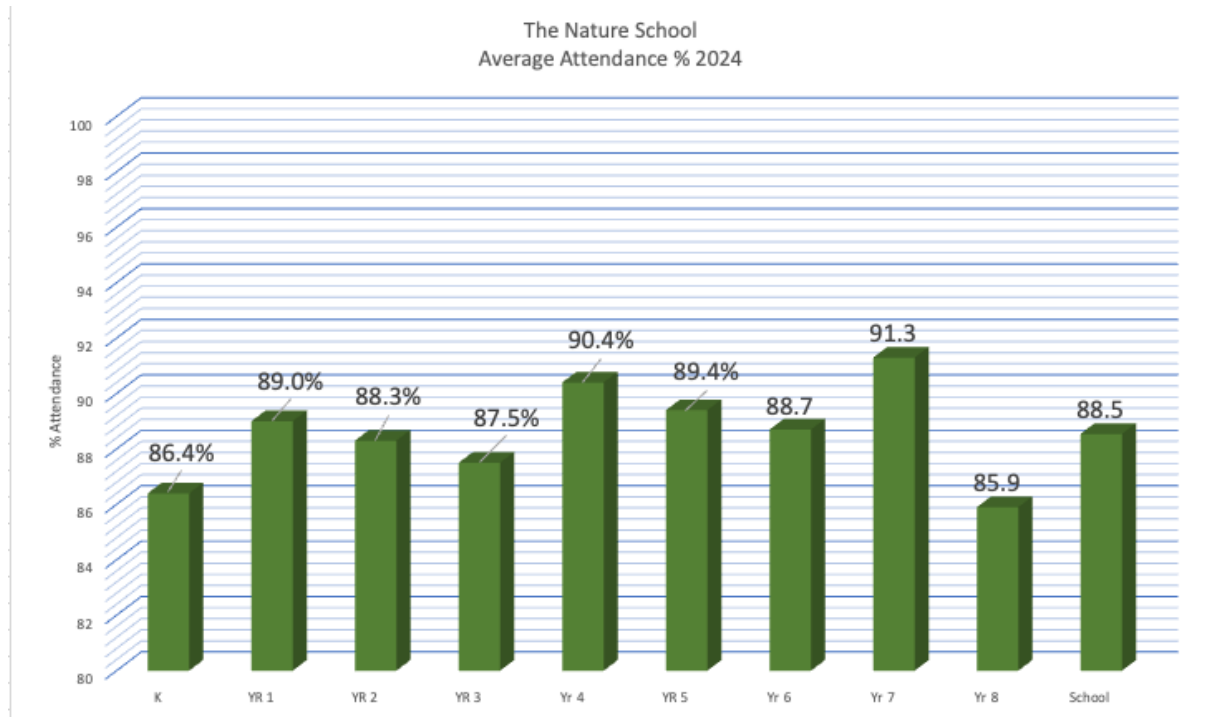
3.2 Workforce Composition

TNS School Staff – as at end of year 2024	
Teaching Staff	18
Full time equivalent teaching staff	13.4
Non-teaching staff	12
Full time equivalent non-teaching staff	9.1

**Currently 1 staff member (Non-teaching) identifies as Aboriginal.*

SECTION 4: ATTENDANCE

4.1 Student Attendance



In 2024, average attendance for the whole school was 88.5%. This is very similar to the previous years where overall attendance was at 88.5% and 88.1%. Pleasingly this year, all classes had attendance above 85%. In a post-Covid world, parents continue to keep children home when they exhibit cold and flu symptoms, affecting attendance rates.



4.2 Managing Non-Attendance

The school implements policies and procedures for the management of student non-attendance. A daily record of school attendance of each student is maintained throughout the term. Parents/guardians are asked to communicate directly with the class teacher/administration office if their child is not attending school for any reason. This is preferably done through email but can also be done either in person or by phone. Any unexplained absence is followed up with the parents/guardians, firstly, to ascertain the safety and wellbeing of the child and, secondly, to remind them of the necessity to communicate with the school.

Initially if there are concerns with poor attendance the Head of School will meet with the parents/guardians to identify and discuss strategies and possible support to address the attendance issue. If the problem continues, the Head of School may develop a School Attendance Improvement Plan for the student and their family or may need to work collaboratively with other government or non-government agencies including AISNSW to escalate or arrange for a Compulsory Attendance Conference. The parents/guardians will be informed that continued days of absence could result in a mandatory report being lodged. All meetings with the parents/guardians and student will be documented and kept in the student's file.



SECTION 5: POLICIES

The following TNS Policies are all available via the School's website:

<https://tns.nsw.edu.au/policies-and-reports.html>

Policy	TNS Reference and Policy Name
Child Protection policy	TNS-003 Child Protection Policy
Anti-bullying Policy	TNS-035 Bullying Prevention Policy (Students)
Discipline Policy	TNS-012 Behaviour Management & Discipline Policy
Complaints Policy	TNS-014 Grievance Resolution Policy
Enrolment Policy	TNS-022 Enrolment Policy

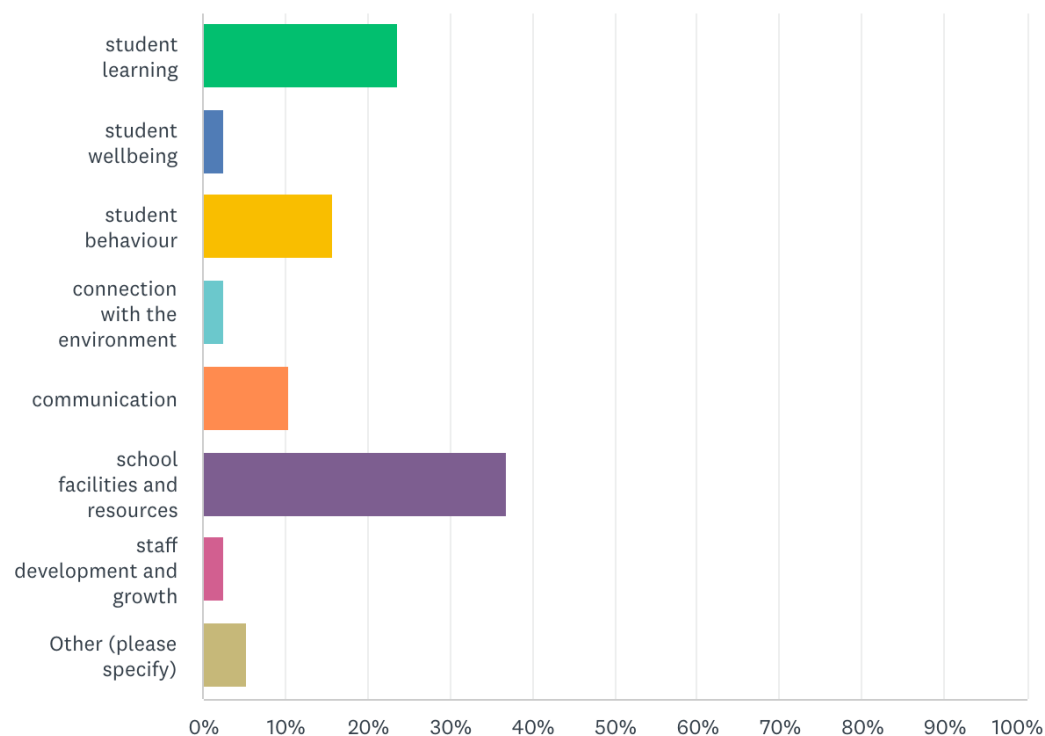


SECTION 6: STAKEHOLDER SATISFACTION

The annual survey provides an important avenue for families to give feedback on the school. Survey results highlight areas of strength, and opportunities for further growth. Our current parents continue to report high levels of satisfaction with the School overall, with 63% of parents reporting that the School 'meets expectations very well' and a further 25% reporting that it 'exceeds expectations'. 12% reported that it only meets their expectations 'fairly well' but 0% reported dissatisfaction.

As with previous years, parents were asked to evaluate how well the School supports their children's learning, wellbeing, and connection with nature. This year 58% of parents reported that TNS caters 'very well' for student learning, with another 30% stating that it caters 'extremely' well. No parents reported dissatisfaction with learning. 85% of parents report that the School supports student wellbeing 'extremely well' or 'very well' with only one parent reporting dissatisfaction. 72% of parents report that TNS caters for their child's connection with nature 'extremely well'.

When asked where TNS most needs to continue improving, consistent with previous years parents again identified facilities and resources as the priority growth area for the School (37%). The upcoming planned capital works will be well received. 24% of parents feel TNS should focus on improving student learning, which is up from 14% previously. 16% would like to see a continued focus on student behaviour, which is consistent with last year's survey.



In which area do you think TNS most needs to continue improving?

Again in 2024, the results of the staff survey revealed even greater emphasis on the priority area of facilities and resources (56%). Student Learning is identified as the second focus area, prioritised by 16% of staff. Overall, staff are proud to work at The Nature School as reflected in their comments below.

For the first time, this year we formally surveyed our Secondary Students for their feedback. When asked how happy they are with their own school, 30% think it's ok, 50% are happy with it most of the time, and 20% think it's awesome. 0% of TNS students reported that they don't like school... which is a remarkable statistic from teenagers. Interestingly, despite very high percentages from staff and parents regarding student wellbeing, 45% of students themselves only feel their wellbeing is catered for 'fairly well' while 38% feel it is catered for 'very well'. This reflects the fact that even with daily wellbeing sessions, a full time School Psychologist, and additional Youth Wellbeing Officer at TNS, student wellbeing remains an increasingly challenging area for schools to support.

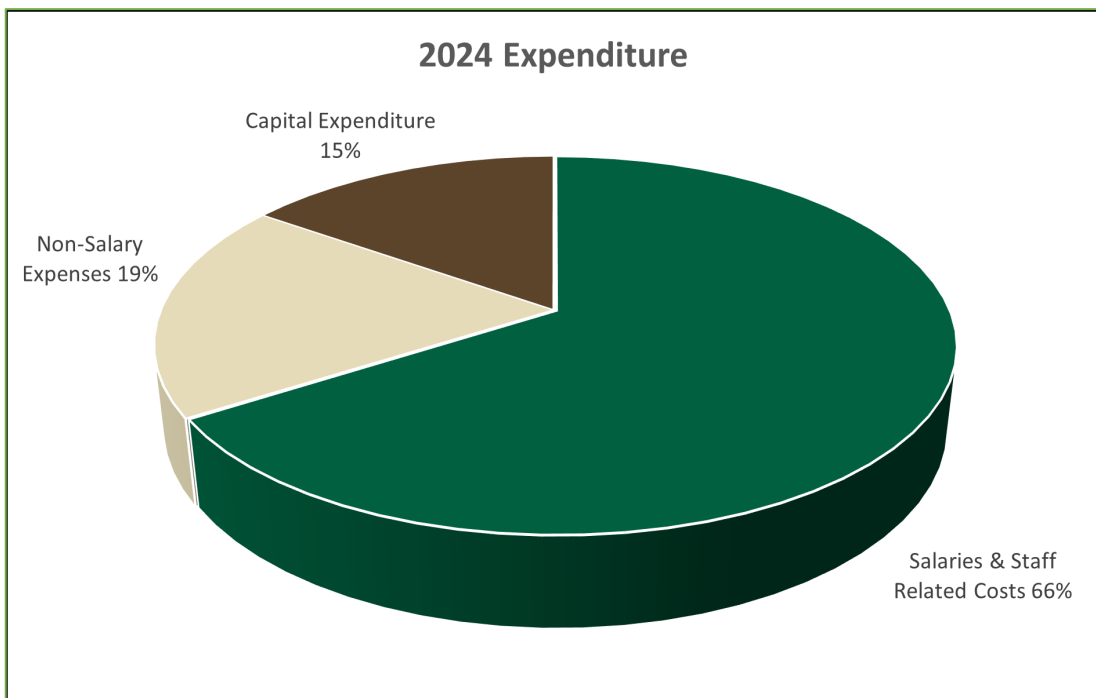
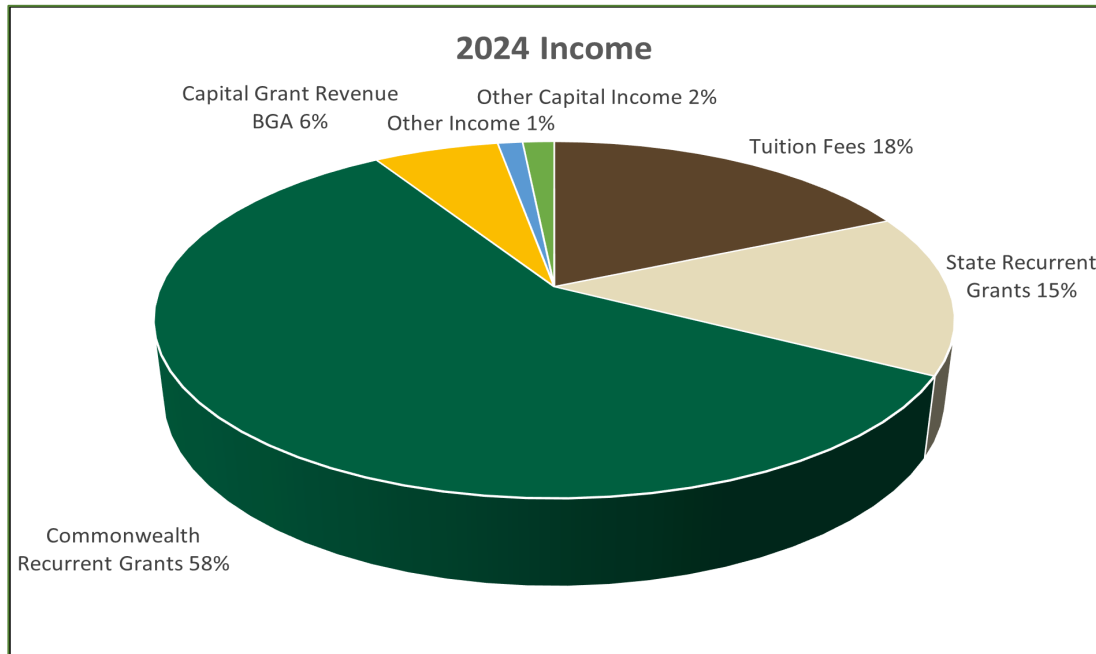
Survey Comments 2024	
Parents	Along with parenting choosing a Primary School is one of the most important choices that you will make for your child's future! It is the foundation of how the child will experience and navigate through their entire life. In spending a great deal of time researching what is really important in a child's growth and development in order to guide them towards a bright future where they feel whole we feel we have found a great fit The Nature School !!! So grateful we are to have our son in such a rich and nurturing environment
	TNS is a beautiful school. We feel part of a caring community united in improving the school experience for our children. Focusing on connection to nature to engage our children and support their wellbeing. We are incredibly grateful our children can attend TNS.
	TNS is an extension of our home. We share our love of learning with friends at school, our children are at peace around the fire with their teacher and we have built our community around families at school. TNS is the outdoors celebrated in learning and we love being part of that.

Students	The best thing about TNS is all the experiences we get and how we get treated like individuals. That we have small classes so we all become really close throughout the years! :)
	When I started at TNS one of the first things I noticed was how inclusive and supportive everyone is to each other.
	The best thing about TNS is that we get to go off site every two weeks to do things that get us out of our comfort zone.
	Our school is so different to other schools in a good way. We connect with nature and we all know each other.
	I love the connections we have with the teachers and staff, and the friendships we have formed as a class.

Staff	I'm proud to be part of our close-knit community. The genuine connections we build with students, families, and each other set us apart and it's something that's hard to find in larger schools. It's the strength of these relationships that makes TNS a special place to work.
	The wonderful experiences that I can share with people about what we are doing in and outside of class. People are usually surprised and fascinated with what we are doing! I feel proud talking to people about the students - and how resilient and grounded most of them are because of their nature based education. Working at TNS is different/interesting everyday unlike mainstream which feels very repetitive and robotic like.
	The learning is fun, student-led where possible, messy, curious, place-based and real. I very rarely have a student say "why are we doing this" or "when will I use this?".
	The way we offer the students an amazing way of learning, the support we give to families and the amazing Exec Team that constantly strive to make this the most fun and supportive place to work.
	To be a school which challenges the norms of education. Let's continue to rethink education, but ensure quality pedagogy.



SECTION 5: FINANCIAL INFORMATION





THE
NATURE
SCHOOL



Learn
&
shine

