



THE
NATURE
SCHOOL



2025 Annual Report

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.



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1.1 Chair Report

I would like to acknowledge the Birpai people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which The Nature School was founded and on which our community continues to live, learn, and grow. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who enrich our region and our nation.

As Chair of The Nature School Board, it is my privilege to reflect on another remarkable year of growth, achievement and vision becoming reality.

The year 2025 has been one of the most significant in the history of The Nature School. What began as a bold vision to provide children with an authentic, nature-connected education continues to flourish as we build a learning community where young people are empowered to connect, protect and respect the world around them.

This year marked our eighth year of Primary education and a major milestone for Secondary, as our inaugural secondary cohort progressed into Year 9 for the first time. Watching these students continue their educational journey through the secondary years is a powerful reminder of how far The Nature School has come and the confidence families continue to place in our unique educational model.

Strategic Growth and Infrastructure

One of the year's greatest achievements was securing a further \$1 million Building Grant Assistance (BGA) Grant for Stage 2 of the Library and Learning Centre project. Construction of the new Library and Learning Centre commenced during the year.

We also celebrated the completion of additional Secondary School learning spaces, funded through a previous government grant.



Additional capital improvements completed during 2025 included:

- Installation of a new 55kW solar system and battery storage solution.
- Replacement of the main building roof.
- Significant upgrades to the school's electrical infrastructure and power supply.
- Expansion of the school transport fleet, including new school buses.
- Establishment of dedicated servicing arrangements for the school's growing bus fleet.

Student Initiative and Community Culture

One of the highlights of the year was the construction of the school's Gaga Pit by students participating in the Year 9 and 10 Elective Program, demonstrating initiative, creativity, collaboration and ownership.

Strategic Planning and Future Growth

Throughout 2025, the Board undertook a comprehensive review of The Nature School's Strategic Plan and continues to explore opportunities to secure additional land that will support the long-term growth and sustainability of the school.

Governance and Board Development

During 2025 we welcomed Priscilla Bayly to the Board, bringing considerable financial expertise and strategic insight. We also welcomed Bruce Little, whose extensive career in education provides invaluable experience and wisdom.

Leadership Excellence

I would like to acknowledge and thank our Head of School, Catherine Shaw, whose vision, passion and unwavering commitment continue to shape the culture and direction of The Nature School. During 2025 Catherine continued to serve as the New South Wales Representative for Outdoor Education Australia (OEA) and as a Director on the Board of Outdoor Education NSW & ACT. She was also recognised as a Finalist in the 2025 Australian Education Awards for Non-Government Principal of the Year and a Finalist for Outstanding Business Leader in the 2025 Business Awards.

I would also like to acknowledge Karen Marlin, whose dedication, diligence and expertise continue to play a critical role in the success of The Nature School. Karen's expertise and persistence have been instrumental in securing and administering significant government grant funding that has enabled the school's continued capital growth and infrastructure development. During 2025 Karen continued to serve as a Board Member for the Association of School Business Administrators (ASBA) and Regional Convenor for ASBA Far North Coast.

Looking Forward

We continue to be guided by our values of Connect, Protect and Respect, and by a shared commitment to creating a future where learning and nature work together to inspire positive change.

Thank you to every student, family, facilitator, volunteer, supporter and staff member who contributes to the life of our school.

Nigel Tang

Board Chair



1.2 Head of School Report

"You have brains in your head, you have feet in your shoes, you can steer yourself any direction you choose..." - Dr Seuss

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.

Our inspiration for 2025 was the classic Dr Seuss book *Oh! The Places You'll Go!* - and didn't we go to some extraordinary places throughout the year. The year began for staff with an orienteering expedition across Port Macquarie, as teams raced to the finish line armed with compass and map. This launched another year of navigating adventures in learning at The Nature School.



We travelled to over 50 local destinations around the mid north coast, utilising the broader community as our extended classroom. We travelled to so many different beaches. TNS kids are definitely coastal kids. Diamond Head, Pilot Beach, Washhouse Bay, Lake Cathie, Lighthouse Beach, Little Bay, Shelly Beach, Town Beach, North Shore, Hat Head and more. We travelled to bushland destinations, including Innes Lake Nature Reserve, Swans Crossing, Bago and Old Bottlebut, Sea Acres, Crowdy Bay National Park, Dooragan, Middle Brother, Falls Forest Retreat and our local bushland. We explored local parks, gardens, farms, and community assets, including Mrs York's garden, The Lost Plot Community garden, Guulabaa, the Koala hospital, Cairncross Waste facility, Billabong Zoo, local universities and more. And on top of that at saltwater and freshwater locations we did swimming, snorkelling, surfing, rowing, dragon boating, sailing, and even cardboard boating. Oh, the places we've gone in 2025.

While we were out and about we contributed to many citizen science projects and environmental activities. These included Clean Up Australia Day, National Schools Tree Day, Bat Night at Charles Sturt University and Bird Week. We continued our relationship with the Hastings Birdwatchers, including quarterly junior field trips and our annual bird calling competition.

For the first time, TNS travelled to an overseas destination with our inaugural international expedition. What began as a lunchtime group to print a new hand for one of our students with a limb difference using the school's 3D printer, became an epic mission to share their journey on the global stage with other youth from around the world. Four Year 7 students, mentored by two Year 9 students, and led by 2 teachers jetted off to Tokyo, Japan. An epic fundraising effort involving a unicycle lapathon raised the funds to get them there at no expense to parents. We might be a small school, but our students have big opportunities. Oh, the places we go.

Of course, none of that could have happened without our amazing staff. In addition to being a Kindy teacher or a Maths teacher, all of our teachers are teachers of adventure. They submit countless risk assessments, offsite learning plans and approval forms. They drive buses, pack first aid kits and prepare resources for learning outdoors. Not only are they skilled professionals in the classroom, they are also skilled professionals beyond it. Supported by our TAs, they make a remarkable team. My deep thanks to our Assistant Head of School, Kellie Hall, for her steadfast commitment to sharing the leadership load, and to our growing team of Coordinators.

Behind the scenes, our admin team cover a diversity of roles and responsibilities that keep our school running. Led by our outstanding Business Manager, Karen Marlin, they serve our school community with diligence and great joy. My deep thanks also to our Board of Directors who voluntarily give their time, skills and experience to govern our School with wisdom and care.

The journey of our school continues, with the new year bringing our first cohort of Year 10 students, and our much anticipated library building. Who knows where our next exciting expedition will take us to in 2026?

Oh, the places we'll go.

Catherine Shaw

Head of School

1.3 Contextual Information

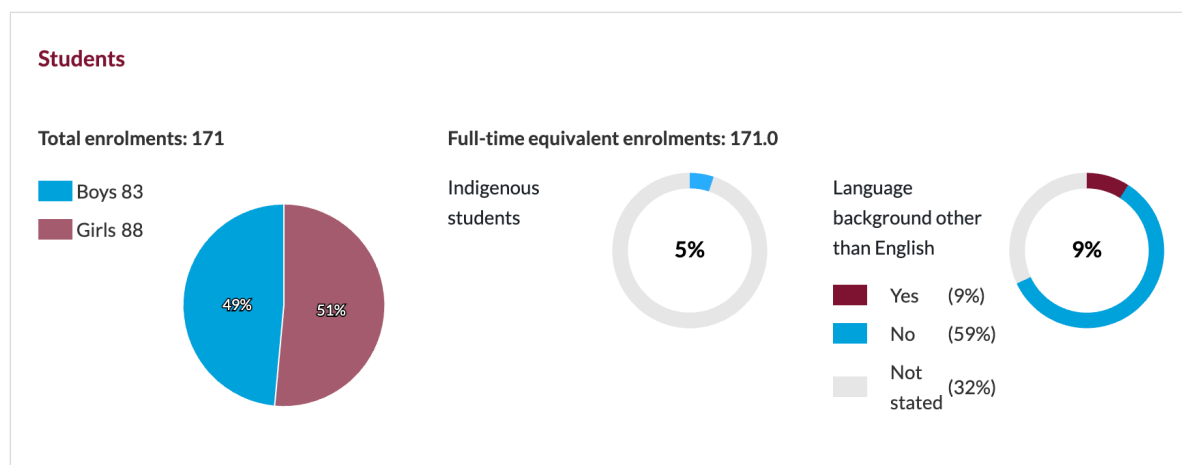
The Nature School (TNS) is a progressive independent school with a focus on nature. Learners at TNS are scientific thinkers, curious questioners, and articulate communicators, capable of affecting change now and in the future.

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 9	Five year Registration granted Year 9	✓
Initial Registration of Year 10	Initial Registration granted for Y10 2026	✓
Increase enrolments	The school increased enrolments from 155 students to 171	✓
Employ further staff	Additional classroom teachers employed and additional support staff	✓
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 additional Secondary classroom	Additional buildings completed for beginning of 2025. Further works to be completed during 2025 for 2026 school year.	✓
Facilities and resources: master planning	Block Grant Authority application approved for capital works in 2025 (Library, breakout rooms, staff room, amenities, 3 x Secondary classrooms)	✓ 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 2025 included:

- Weekly Community Cleanup – including caring for school grounds, kitchen gardens, worm farm, chickens, lizards, and quail
- Adventure days and Field Studies trips to a wide range of community locations
- Secondary Greater Good Program
- Community produce swap
- Local Council Visit (Primary) and Community Engagement Workshop (Secondary)
- Blue Minds Eco Workshop
- Photography Exhibition at Port Macquarie Hastings library
- Mid Coast Careers Expo
- Hastings Junior Birdwatchers
- Platter & Chatter Events for Secondary families on topics affecting teenagers
- National Science Week
- VIP Days
- Harmony Day

- National Schools Tree Day
- Cleanup Australia Day
- Birpai Women's Festival
- Year 2 Sustainability store
- Year 9 Science Microplastics project
- Aussie Backyard Bird Week
- National Recycling week
- The Lost Plot Community Gardens
- Reconciliation Week Activities
- NAIDOC Week Activities
- Buddy Reading
- Gratitude circles
- World Bee Day
- National Day of Action Against Bullying & Violence
- ANZAC Day
- Sorry Day
- Cairncross Waste Management Centre visit
- Year 6 Travel Showcase – including local dignitaries
- Annual Tree planting ceremony
- Auslan Appreciation Day
- Fire NSW Lithium Ion Battery Education Program
- Bat Night at Charles Sturt University
- Design for Change project to 3D print a hand for a fellow student, resulting in a trip to Japan!



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 2025, many parents withdrew their children from NAPLAN testing on philosophical grounds. NAPLAN participation for 2025 at TNS was 59%, similar to the previous year. No comparison data is available, however results are tabled below:

	2023	2024	2025		
				<<	>>
Compare to	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Students with similar background	<input type="radio"/>	All Australian students	
	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar	Numeracy
Year 3	470	393	440	456	409
Year 5	510	474	485	510	461
Year 7	603	567	531	566	567
Year 9	617	642	599	605	578

The following is noted regarding students who completed NAPLAN testing at The Nature School in 2025:

- In **Reading**, students across **Y3, 5, 7 and 9 scored above average** when compared with students from a similar background and compared with all Australian students
- In **Writing**, students in Y3 are slightly below average, Y5 are comparable to the average, while **Y7 and Y9 scored above average** when compared with students from a similar background and compared with all Australian students
- In **Spelling**, across all grades students scored **close to or slightly above** those from similar backgrounds, and the national average
- In **Grammar**, students across **Y3, 5, 7 and 9 scored above average** when compared with students from a similar background and compared with all Australian students
- In **Numeracy**, both Y3 and Y5 scored slightly below their peers. Y7 were slightly above both similar schools and the national average, while Y9 were above the national average but below their peers in similar schools.



SECTION 3: STAFFING

3.1 Accreditation Status

Category	Number of Teachers – as at end of 2025
Conditional	0
Provisional	3
Proficient	19
<i>HALT (Highly Accomplished / Lead – voluntary)</i>	0
TOTAL	22



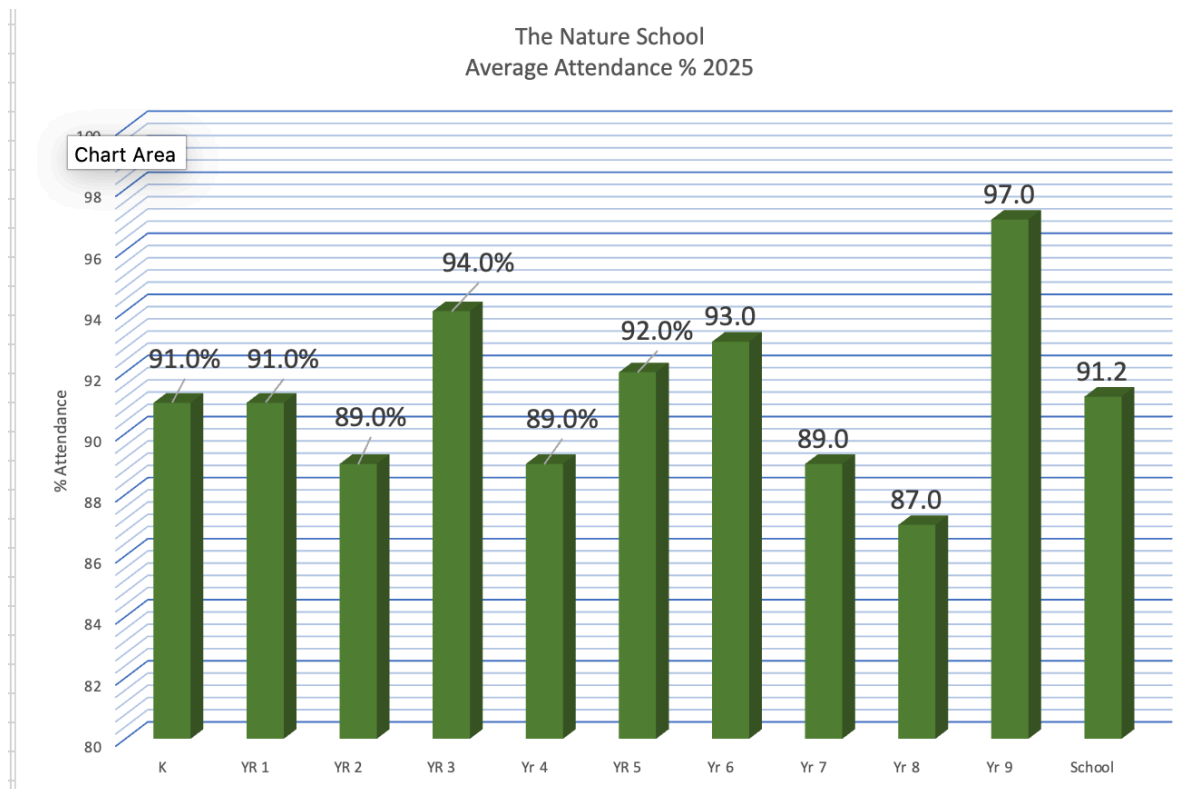
3.2 Workforce Composition

TNS School Staff – as at end of year 2025	
Teaching Staff	22
Full time equivalent teaching staff	14.6
Non-teaching staff	14
Full time equivalent non-teaching staff	11.2

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

SECTION 4: ATTENDANCE

4.1 Student Attendance



In 2025, average attendance for the whole school was 91.2%. This is a pleasing improvement on previous years where overall attendance was at 88.5% and 88.1%. Correspondingly this year, all classes had attendance above 87%. The high attendance rates for our oldest grade reflect the strength of this cohort behaviourally and their outstanding capacity for leadership.



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

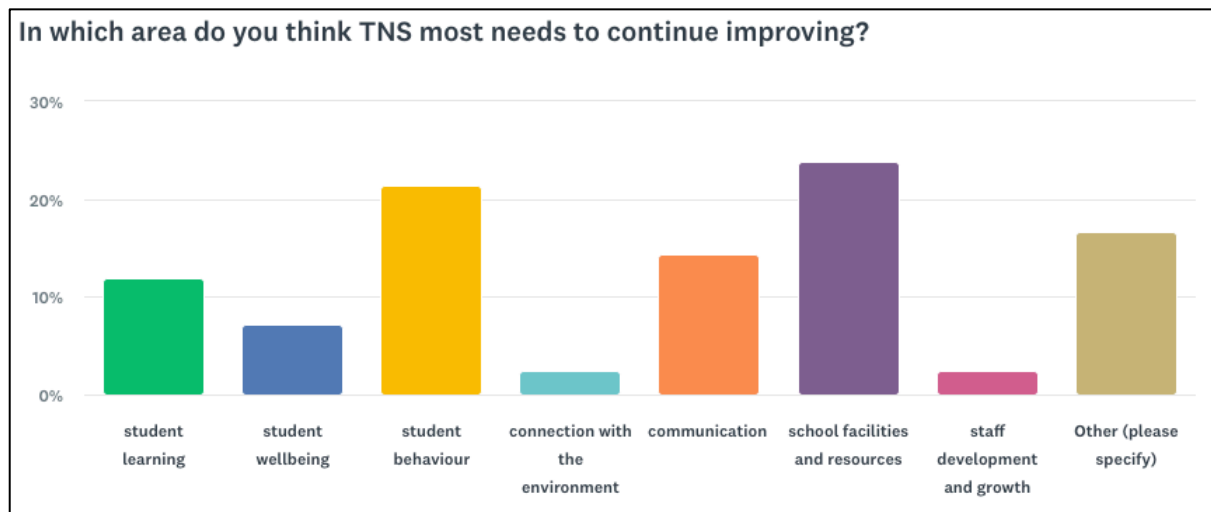


SECTION 6: STAKEHOLDER SATISFACTION

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 41% of parents reporting that the School 'exceeds expectations' while a further 43% report that it 'meets expectations very well.' 15% reported that it only meets their expectations 'fairly well' but again this year 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. When considering academics, 89% of parents report that we are catering for learning ‘extremely well’ or ‘very well’. Notably the ‘extremely well’ category hit 46% this year, up from 30% last survey. Again no parents reported dissatisfaction with learning. 82% of parents report that the School supports student wellbeing ‘extremely well’ or ‘very well’ with no parents reporting dissatisfaction. 94% of parents report that TNS caters for their child’s connection with nature ‘extremely well’ or ‘very 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 (24%), down from 37% last year. The upcoming capital works will provide a much needed boost to the current facilities. Only 12% parents feel student learning should be a priority area, which is a pleasing improvement from the previous survey (24%). However, 21% would like to see a focus on student behaviour (up from 14% previously).



Annual Parent Survey

Again in 2025, the results of the staff survey revealed even greater emphasis on the priority area of facilities and resources (43%). However, student behaviour is of greater concern to staff currently than student learning, which is a shift from the last survey. Overall, staff are proud to work at The Nature School as reflected in their comments below.

Students in Years 5-10 were formally surveyed for their feedback. When asked how happy they are with their own school, 26% think it's awesome and wouldn't want to go anywhere else, 55% are happy with it most of the time, and 18% think it's ok. Only 1 student reported that they don't like TNS. Of particular note is the statistic that the greatest improvement students would like to see is in the area of student behaviour, with 25% identifying this as the priority. This will be a significant focus in 2026.

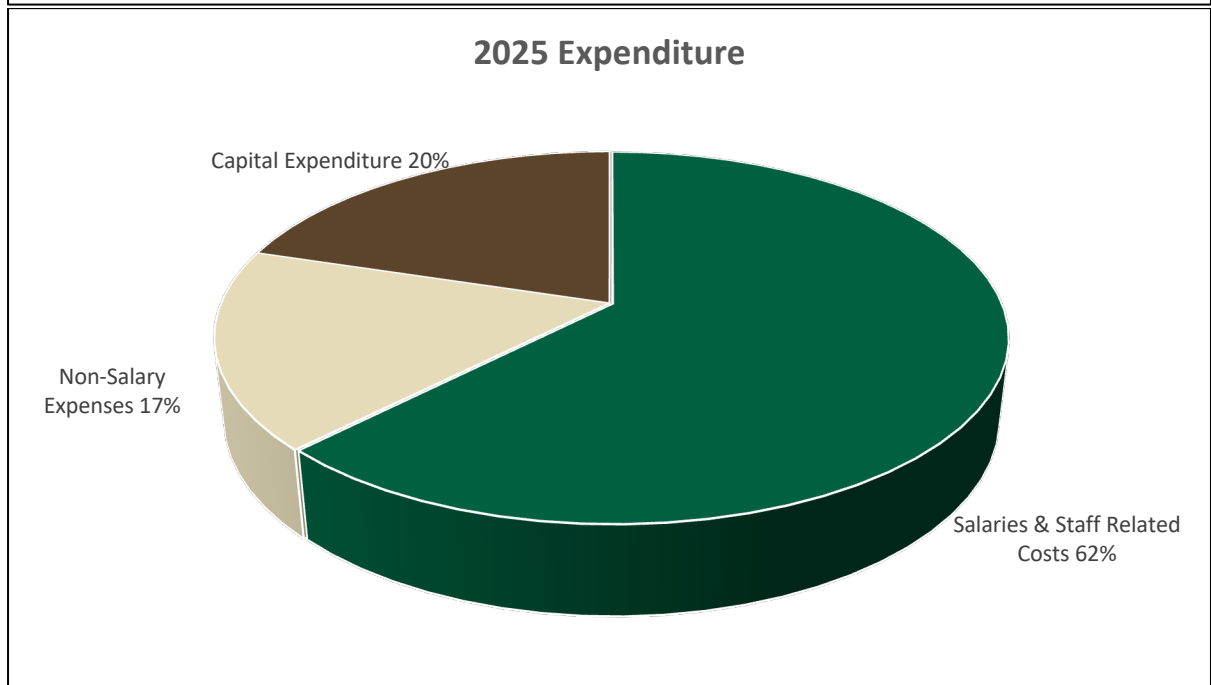
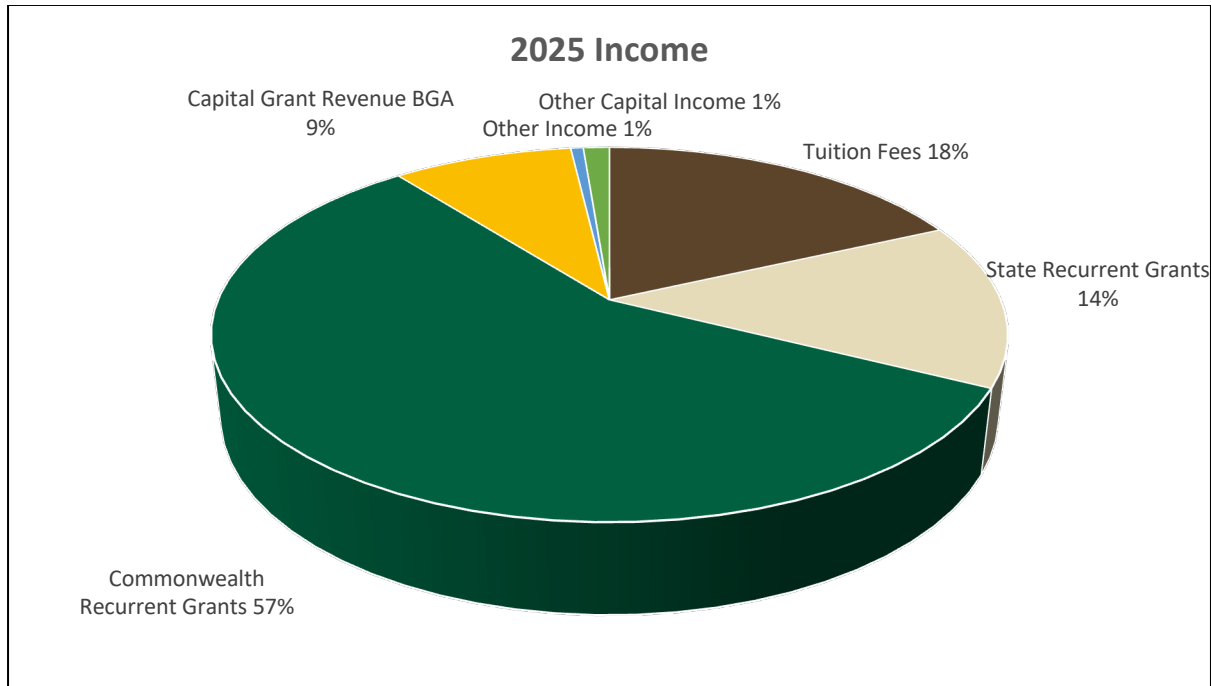
Survey Comments 2025	
Parents	I am proud to say that my child attends The Nature School. TNS provides my child with everything and more that they require to feel connected to a community, achieve a high level of education and engaged effectively in the world around them. I believe that TNS is giving my child the best start to life possible.
	My child moved to TNS for her secondary schooling from another school in the area. She has such a positive attitude towards school which is something that we have struggled with until now. She has become motivated and much more independent with her school work, completing assessments confidently. We are very proud of her and happy that we made the decision to go to TNSS
	We moved from Sydney so our child could attend Nature School, drawn by its philosophy and holistic approach to education. While it felt like a big leap of faith to put all our eggs in one basket, it has been one of the best decisions we've made. Our child is thriving, and the school has met and in many ways exceeded our expectations. We feel incredibly fortunate to have found a learning environment that nurtures not only academic growth but also confidence, curiosity, and wellbeing. Knowing our child has the opportunity to continue this journey through primary school, and hopefully into high school, gives us great confidence and gratitude for the future.
	Choosing TNS has been one of the best decisions we've made for our children. The school's focus on the whole child, rather than solely academic outcomes, has allowed them to grow in confidence, independence and a genuine love of learning. The hands-on, nature-based approach creates meaningful learning experiences, and the teachers truly know and value each child as an individual. TNS has fostered a strong sense of belonging for our family, and we are grateful to be part of such a supportive and connected community.

Students	The best thing about TNS to me is that we get to connect with nature and go on adventure days every 2 weeks. That is something that not many schools can do! I also love it that the students at TNS can use hammers and nails for playworks. I think that suggests that the teachers trust the students.
	Getting to experience different parts of nature, this is a small school so everyone knows each other. Every single teacher is really understanding and fun to be around.
	How the teacher cater to each students needs and take time to connect and get to know every student.
	The best thing about TNS is the student teacher connection and that we are all just people connecting through learning, not anyone being above each other.
	Teachers never say no to something without giving it thought, and care about the students and what they have to say

Staff	Working at TNS is something to be proud of because of the unique experiences it offers. Each day presents opportunities to learn through real-world experiences and thoughtful questioning, continually building and deepening personal and professional knowledge.
	Our ability to pick each other up as a staff. I notice this transfers across to the way our students behave as well. The general sense of care and support from staff and students is a huge strength here.
	I love being part of a place that feels like a community. I love going to different locations and hearing the feedback from the public and staff about how engaged, kind, respectful and curious our students are.
	I am proud to work at TNS because I feel that we are making genuine connections with nature throughout our learning and showing students the importance and benefits of these connections. Students are being given the space in their day to breathe, listen to nature, make meaningful insights and be curious.
	We offer the most wonderful way of learning and we genuinely care about our students. We have some amazing staff who are incredibly knowledgeable, believe in what we are doing and are totally invested.



SECTION 5: FINANCIAL INFORMATION





Learn & shine