



Montessori East
Primary & Pre School

Annual Report

2023

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Theme 1 - Context

Messages from Key School Bodies

From the Principal and Chair of the School Board

The 2023 year can be summarised as one of capturing renewed energy and vision for the future of Montessori East.

We have continued to implement the strategic plan for 2023-25 with input from our community including all staff, parents and the significant contribution of the Board has brought focus and a sense of purpose. The vision articulated in the plan is to *Focus on attracting and retaining committed Montessori East community members—children, their families and staff—by continuing to provide an authentic whole-child Montessori learning experience and supporting a uniquely connected community.*

The following strategic imperatives were identified as high-impact goals that will enable us to realise the stated vision.

- I. Understand and meet the evolving needs of the whole child in today’s dynamic environment.
- II. Improve retention across all cycles.
- III. Continue to make ME a rewarding, supportive and sought-after workplace.
- IV. Uphold a cohesive ME community with enhanced community engagement.

We are confident that our goals can be achieved thanks to the strong sense of team and shared values we have amongst the staff at Montessori East. We all share a passion for the Montessori philosophy, the success of our school and the all-important meaning in the work of guiding children in their growth.

Our philosophy at Montessori East is steeped in the importance of the contribution of every individual towards creating a nurturing, caring and friendly community atmosphere at Montessori East. Whilst we hope that after reading this report you have a clearer and broader picture of the life of the school, no report can fully capture the spirit of a school, so we encourage you to visit Montessori East and experience a learning environment like no other.

Yours sincerely



Kathryn Wyer
Principal



Sara Hofman
Chair

Contextual Information about the School & Student Body

About Montessori East

Montessori East is a non-denominational and co-educational primary and preschool for children aged 3–12 years plus a program for children under 3 with their parent/carer. Montessori East follows the educational methods and principles developed by Dr Maria Montessori.

We believe each child should have the opportunity to learn in a beautiful, creative, compassionate setting. Montessori East provides an environment with flexibility to explore, boundaries to work within, and the guidance of highly skilled teachers attuned to the unique abilities of every student.

The school is registered with the National Education Standards Authority (NESA) and approved as a centre-based preschool. Montessori East is a member of the Montessori Schools and Centres Australia (MSCA) and the NSW Association of Independent Schools (AIS).

Montessori East is an independent school and primarily funded through student fees and the support of the parent body and community.

Our Goal

We put the child at the heart of everything we do

At Montessori East, our goal is to prepare each child with the skills and attitudes they need to become life-long learners as they reach their individual potential. Our school is committed to providing a supportive environment where children can continue the natural process of their growth and development.

Our Values

A deep regard for the whole human being

Our values are enduring, shape the school's culture and reflect the Montessori philosophy that underpins all that we do. The values permeate our holistic approach to education.

RESPECT	We listen, speak and treat each other respectfully. We value trusting and authentic relationships to create a respectful school community.
COMMUNITY	We care about each other and value the strong partnerships between parents, teachers, children and beyond. We are inclusive so there is a sense of belonging for all.
SERVICE	We embrace opportunities to contribute, uplift and create meaningful impact for others, our community and the environment. Our actions, be they big or small, have an impact.
WELLBEING	Wellbeing and learning go hand in hand, so we respond to every facet of a child's evolving growth. We value the individuality and potential of each child.
EXCELLENCE	We encourage excellence, creating a culture where everyone can thrive.

Our People

We are fortunate to have a team of long standing and talented staff who share in our vision and values for the school. Our teachers are highly qualified with AMI (Association Montessori Internationale) and university degree qualifications. Our teachers and assistant teachers represent a wide range of cultural, educational, and experiential backgrounds, providing the students with a rich environment in which to learn.

In August 2022 Kathryn Wyer, was appointed Principal of the School. Kathryn has worked at ME for more than a decade holding various senior management roles prior to her appointment, including as Acting Principal. Kathryn is a highly effective and collaborative Principal, and the school is flourishing under her leadership. She partners with staff, parents and the Board and holds the ME values and Montessori pedagogy close to her heart in everything she does.

Our Students

Students are drawn from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, with 10.4% living in homes where English is not the primary language. Most live in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney. Financial assistance is provided to a small number of families through our Scholarship Fund and Fee Assistance programs.

Two students are identified with a significant “disability” and receive special assistance to access our learning program.



Our Families

Montessori East is very much a community school. It's a place where parents, children and the staff feel a part of a community network drawn together by a shared belief in the values of the school. There are plenty of formal and informal ways in which we connect with each other and parents in school life. We believe when a child joins the school this includes the whole family. Our Class Parents do an amazing job ensuring new families are welcomed and included. Examples include bush walks, coffee mornings, workshops and numerous play dates!

Every year we program a variety of **parent education events** that cover a range of topics from parenting support to curriculum understanding, Montessori philosophy and child development.

The school runs 'parent circles' where a teacher guides discussion on a topic that parents either need help with or are interested in. Other formats include 'short talks' of 45 minutes on weekday mornings, or longer evening sessions each term. Topics covered include various curriculum areas, child development, ideas for supporting children, project updates and learning at home.

Formal **Parent-Teacher** or **Child-Parent-Teacher** interviews are organised twice a year for all children. **Semester reports** are issued in June and December each year for children Year K to 6.

Open mornings provide for parents to spend time as their child's "invited guest" in a morning visit. Two-way communication between the school and home is encouraged by phone, email or by arranging a face-to-face meeting.

Services such as after school clubs and care are provided for the enjoyment of the children and convenience of parents.

ME Alumni

Maintaining connections with our families after they leave Montessori East has enriched our community by following the journeys of our students through high school and into adulthood. We frequently have students return to visit the school.

We are proud to have an alumna serving as a Foundation Board member. The bi-annual alumni newsletter and social media keep the community informed and connected with each other.

We've had many wonderful stories of people reconnecting with friends they made 20 years ago as preschoolers, and some are now returning to our 0-3 program as parents themselves.

It makes our project to expand the school even more urgent so that we can have enrolment places for this next generation of Montessori children.

Our Wider Community

Bondi is a busy urban location with a strong identity. We are conscious of being actively visible and a participant in the community, and our students frequently visit local businesses to research projects, or to purchase cooking or art supplies for examples.

This is a process in Montessori that we call 'going out', ie. the children go out into society, broadening the walls of the classroom. This is a different concept to an excursion, many of which also take place throughout the year. We also like to participate in various activities promoted by Waverley Council such as Clean Up Australia Day or Ride to School Day.

Beyond our immediate community, we support charities and other worthwhile causes, often initiated by the interests of the students. Some years ago, students initiated a fruit and vegetable co-op business (Green Grads) to raise money for an orphanage in Thailand. Now this program supports a Kempsey based Indigenous community, Dalaigur Preschool. The Year 6 graduates spent a week working with this community as part of our Journey of Service community programme (JOS).

The children also prepare meals for the homeless supporting our church neighbour's program at St

Patricks Catholic Church.

The Classrooms

The primary and preschool provides children with a fluid, responsive and relevant education. Children learn best when they feel secure and happy in their environment, without stress, and with independence. To achieve this, there are key differences in our classrooms and approach.

- Children are grouped in **multi-age** classes of three years with the same teachers for the duration of each three-year stage. The teacher gains a deep understanding of each child and their needs. This provides a very stable environment where balance across emotional, social and academic development can be achieved.
- The mixed age groups provide a **life-like social model**. The children lead by example and learn from each other. Mentoring is an enjoyable part of each child's classroom experience.
- Children are given many opportunities to make **choices** in their day and they are expected to show appropriate independence. They explore topics that interest them within the curriculum. This teaches them to be self-disciplined and self-directed with their schoolwork.
- **Teachers guide learning**. Lessons are given individually or in small groups and according to the progress of each child. To illustrate this, the classroom is like a collaborative workplace with people working on different things at the same time, and the teacher moving from group to group.
- The daily routine provides blocks of **uninterrupted work time** of two to three hours each, giving children the opportunity to spend time delving into subjects and promoting concentration skills.

Through the unique Montessori environment, the children receive a rich academic experience, and the program can be extended to meet the needs of each individual child.

Our Programs & Curriculum

We're proud to be a small school where everybody knows your name – more like a big extended family than traditional school.

Demand for enrolment places at the school outstrips capacity and hence our intention to expand the school.

The Montessori curriculum is recognised internationally and by the Australian government. It is approved as an alternative national curriculum framework by ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority).

The preschool is approved and accredited under the NSW Department of Education and Community, the regulatory body of ACECQA. The rich and comprehensive Montessori curriculum incorporates all outcomes from the National Education Standards Authority (NESA). We are recognised as a Registered Independent primary school by NESA.

0-3 program

Nearly 100 families have enrolled each term in this incredibly successful program, which combines an education program for parents and an environment for their children to learn and enjoy.

Enrolment Profile (as at December 2023)

Cycle 1 (3 – 6 years)	55
Cycle 2 (6 – 9 years)	43
Cycle 3 (9 – 12 years)	31
Total	129

Co-Curricular Activities

Our location in Bondi provides so many great opportunities for getting outdoors and extending learning outside the classroom. Our co-curricular activities and extra-curricular activities give the children exposure to a broad range of activities as well as the opportunity to get involved in community orientated activities.

Sports programs

The primary school children enjoy a different PE focus each term including ball sports at the local Margaret Whitlam Recreation Centre and swimming, beach volleyball and surfing in Term 4. Other activities include gymnastics, athletics, team sports, ball skills, snorkelling, aerobic exercises and dance.

Our preschool children have a weekly sports program delivered by a trained teacher from Playball.

Music

Music lessons are a part of the Montessori curriculum delivered by the classroom teachers and partners. This comprehensive curriculum has received more attention this year and will be the focus of further development.

After School Programs

After School Clubs provide opportunities for activities, such as drama, drawing, pottery, chess, sewing and sport; and the after-school care program provides an important service to the community between 3-6pm.

Journey of Service

Montessori East's Journey of Service project is an opportunity for students in their last year of primary school to make a significant and real connection to the world they have been learning about.

The Journey of Service project was established by Montessori East in 2013, recognising that pre-adolescent children naturally seek to understand their place in society and seek opportunities to contribute in real ways.

The children prepare for this journey during the year by learning how they can be of service to others. In 2021, we made a connection with the Dalaigur preschool in Kempsey through one of our alumni families. The children have been meeting with the elders and the children through zoom meetings.

In 2023, seven graduates were chaperoned by teachers to travel to Kempsey and work with the children and teachers in the preschool. They prepared their meals and enjoyed time together.

Theme 2 – Outcomes and Results

Student Outcomes in Standardised National Literacy & Numeracy

Performance in Statewide/ National Tests

NAPLAN Results

In 2023, the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was again run for students in Years 3 and 5 in all government and non-government schools. This program assesses the Literacy and Numeracy learning of students in all Australian schools.

It's important to note that the Montessori method provides individualised and self-directed learning programs and progress is measured in several ways, however standardised testing is not a significant form of assessment.

Montessori East uses NAPLAN results as one of many sources to inform teaching and learning. NAPLAN results are viewed to give us general insights on how our students perform on a national standardised test.

Our students in both year groups achieved strong results in all the areas assessed when compared to the rest of the state. It should be noted that in 2023, there were new NAPLAN Proficiency Standards introduced this year. Instead of the previous 10 band structure, student performance was reported in four levels of achievement. These new levels are: Exceeding, Strong, Developing and Needs Additional Support.

A comparison of ME performance with those for the state, have not been provided due to the small numbers of students in accordance with our Privacy Policy.

Theme 3 - Staffing

Teacher Professional Learning, Accreditation & Qualifications

Professional Learning

Our staff are outstanding educators, and we encourage them to undertake professional development courses in areas of interest to improve skills and widen knowledge.

Of significance in 2023, the School and Board supported staff to attend the International Montessori Congress in Bangkok – it was a significant investment and extremely worthwhile, having great benefit for the individual staff members and the team as a whole.

Professional learning was also provided to all staff via a wide range of courses, conferences and activities which covered a range of topics from assisting students with learning needs, pastoral care and leadership development. Some examples of courses attended in 2023 are listed below:

- Subject specific conferences, online courses and webinars
- Student wellbeing including 'Grow Your Mind'
- Child protection
- Students with disabilities
- Music workshop
- First-aid

- Sustainability Practices such as Composting and worm farming workshop
- Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives
- Conferences and courses related to Montessori pedagogy including professional development for classroom assistants.

Teacher Standards

As of December 2023, Montessori East employed 6 teachers who are responsible for delivering the curriculum. There are additional teachers serving as assistants who also hold qualifications but are not included in this total.

The following table provides a breakdown of the qualifications and experience of Montessori East teaching staff responsible for delivering the curriculum:

Level of qualification	Number of staff
a. Have teaching qualifications from a higher education institution within Australia or as recognised within the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition guidelines	6
b. Have qualifications as a graduate from a higher education institution within Australia or as recognised within the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition guidelines but lack formal teacher education qualifications	0
c. Do not have qualifications as described in a) or b) above but have relevant successful teaching experience or appropriate knowledge relevant to the teaching context	0
d. No qualifications or teaching experience	0

Montessori Qualifications

Most teachers hold the internationally recognised Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) teaching qualifications in addition to their university qualifications and NSW teacher accreditation. Four assistant teachers also hold this dual qualification.

Composition Of Staff

The teaching staff at Montessori East is composed of well-qualified Montessori teachers. In the Montessori classroom teachers and assistants work together to guide the children's learning. Our assistants who have the Montessori teacher training provide lesson presentations and work closely with the teachers assisting in delivering the curriculum.

Our academic staff of 30 teachers and assistant teachers are individuals from a wide range of educational and cultural backgrounds, including 12 cultural groups.

Staff Retention

We have a loyal and committed team of people and as a result, staff retention is high. Four teachers have completed more than 20 years' service and a further 12 have over 10-year service with the school.

Theme 4 - Attendance

Student Attendance & Management of Non-attendance

Student Attendance

In 2023 our overall yearly attendance rate across the school was 89%. (calculated on the student attendance collection data as of end Term 3). The yearly attendance rate for the school by year group was:

Year	% Attendance
K	89
1	91
2	90
3	88
4	88
5	90
6	85
Total	89

Non-Attendance procedures

Montessori East adheres to the requirements for recording attendance data as set by the NSW Minister of Education and ACARA's National Standards for Student Attendance Data Reporting.

Parents report planned absences to the school in advance. Classroom attendance roles are recorded online and an automatic text message from the school is sent to parents for any unexplained or unplanned absences. This process is an embedded practice and works well to keep track of the children's presence at school and safety of the children. The school's clear procedure for late and non-attendance is periodically featured in our weekly bulletin to remind parents of the importance of children being at school and on time.

Student Retention

Student retention rates are healthy and reflect general parent satisfaction with the education provided. The school is near capacity, and we have long waiting lists, particularly for the preschool program. Retention rates in 2023 for Years K to 6 was 91%.

Regular feedback from current parents and the families of children who complete Year 6 and move onto high school helps to ensure that we are meeting the academic and other development needs of the children. Generally, there is a high level of satisfaction expressed by parents with the education their children received at Montessori East. Our 2023 graduating class of students move to a variety of

secondary schools including Cranbrook, Glanaeon Steiner School, Reddam House, St Catherine's and Rose Bay Secondary College.

Theme 5 – School Policies

Enrolment Policy & Process

Enrolment & Other Policies

Montessori East School offers a three-year preschool Montessori program commencing at age 3 years. The preschool program including Year K progresses towards the primary program which is divided into 6-9 year and 9-12 year age group classes. Commencement in the primary level at age 6 years+ is equivalent to Year 1.

We also offer an Under 3 program for parents and children aged 0-3 years. The groups meet each week to learn about the child's growing and changing needs. Enrolments into the program are on a first come first served basis and are done online, however priority is given to current participants.

Montessori East is a non-denominational and co-educational school.

The school Enrolment Officer processes all enrolments for the primary and preschool in consultation with the Principal. Applications are processed in order of receipt, except for current siblings and transfers from other Montessori schools. Further considerations are given to the applicant's support for the ethos of the school, the applicant's desire to enrol in both pre-primary and primary, participation in our Nido and Toddler Programme, and other criteria such as the sex and age balance of the classrooms, alumni families, and children with additional needs. Children with additional needs are considered on an individual basis keeping in mind the standards of the *Disability Standards for Education Act 2005*.

The process of enrolment is outlined in the full Enrolment Policy which is contained within the school's Policy Manual. A copy of the Policy Manual is available by contacting the school. Montessori East regularly reviews its policies.

Once enrolled, students and parents are expected to support the school's ethos, comply with the school rules and pay fees regularly to remain enrolled.

Safe & Supportive Environment

At Montessori East, the aim is to nurture in children their natural love of learning and their desire to develop intellectually, emotionally, socially and spiritually. The school is committed to providing a nurturing and supportive environment where children can continue the natural process of their growth and development.

Policies for Student Welfare

To protect the welfare of the students, Montessori East has a series of comprehensive policies in relation to:

- Student Welfare
- Child Protection & Child Safe Standards
- Health and Safety
- Anti Bullying & Harassment

Policies are reviewed regularly and updated as required. All policies were updated in 2022/2023.

Student Discipline

Our goal is for students to develop self-discipline and an understanding that each individual carries a responsibility to their class community and the school, so that we have an environment where all feel safe and secure.

This is achieved through the Montessori philosophy and pedagogy, which includes the prepared environment, Montessori trained teachers and practicing an education approach supporting grace, courtesy and peace. Guidance on good behaviour is given to students by teachers and peers. Lessons are regularly given to establish an understanding of the virtues which form the foundation of a harmonious community.

Peer group activities also provide a practical application of self-discipline within group settings, a feature of our school that has seen very positive results and few behaviour issues. Students gain skills in self-discipline and conflict resolution. The three-year mixed age range in each class provides the opportunity for the older child to display leadership by setting good behaviour models which in turn encourages younger children to emulate the more mature behaviour of the older student.

The Discipline Policy is made available to parents each year through our Parent Handbook as well as on the website.

Policies for Complaints and Grievances Resolution

The school's current Complaints and Grievances policy, which is contained in the school's Policy Manual, provides set procedures for all community members to follow in the case of a grievance or complaint. The Grievance Policy is included in the parent handbook and on the school's website and illustrates the line of communication to follow in the event a parent has a question or grievance.

A link to the policies on Montessori East website:

<https://www.montessori.nsw.edu.au/policies-and-procedures>



Theme 6 – Stakeholder Satisfaction

School determined priority areas for improvement

Below is a summary of the *goals* established in the 2022-25 strategic plan. The plan is used to guide initiatives for the year and is created in collaboration with staff, the principal and board.

The key initiatives of the plan include commitments to;

- Campus improvements to playground spaces and entrance areas
- Supporting diverse learning needs for students and professional skill development for teachers
- Create community-based learning experiences for exploring innovative curriculum additions.
- Staff Development to further teaching and learning practices and to facilitate opportunities for staff to share in the broader professional community.
- Community engagement
- Support the KIN 0-3 program with a view to transitioning children from KIN to Cycle 1.
- Community engagement is a priority and continue to provide a range of opportunities for participation.

Initiatives Promoting Respect and Responsibility

Our Ethos states that ‘we believe that the adult (staff and parent) recognises and respects the dignity of the child’ and it is from this position of respect that the culture of the school stems.

The Montessori philosophy and pedagogy is founded on promoting respect and responsibility amongst students, staff and parents. Respect and responsibility are inherent in all daily activities whether they are classroom teaching and learning activities, staff interactions, student and parent interactions or expected student, staff and parent behaviours.

Activities that promote respect and responsibility include

- **Grace and Courtesy** lessons which model the intricacies of everyday community living, where we are required to work together, share, and care for self and others.
- **Values and Virtues Education** to build character by understanding and practicing our moral behaviours.
- **The Prepared Environment** of the Montessori classroom emphasises how we care for the space and environment around us.
- **Multi-age grouping and peer groups** emulate society and the home with younger and older children learning from and with each other.
- **The three-year age range** in each class promotes respect and responsibility. Older students
- **Events** such as Mother’s Day, Harmony Day and Reconciliation Week celebrate our culture, family and interconnectedness.

Student Leadership

At both the pre-primary and primary level students have significant involvement in the decision-making regarding their learning and classroom code of conduct. For example, at the primary level, children aged 6-12 years participate with teachers in making the class rules at the beginning of each year and are responsible for seeing that they are adhered to. Weekly class meetings enable students to raise issues for redress, air grievances and if necessary, rewrite a rule that is not working.

These meetings are conducted by the students themselves under teacher supervision. All Primary (6-12)

students are involved.

Students also have many opportunities to develop their understanding of the world and their ability to impact it in a positive way. The integrated Montessori curriculum and 'Great Lessons' show our interdependency and many children become impassioned by particular causes such as:

- Save the Reef Foundation
- Taronga Zoo Conservation
- WWF – Australia
- 'Say No to Plastic' campaign

A culture of service is fostered through the programs such as the Journey of Service program described on _where the Year 6 children raise money and provide service for the Dalaigur indigenous community of Kempsey NSW.

Parent, Teacher & Student Satisfaction

Our school has a relaxed, family atmosphere which we encourage so that parents, students and teachers feel that they can easily share their opinions and concerns. We foster a variety of different opportunities and avenues for our community to provide feedback to the school and to be involved.

This school is the hidden gem in Bondi that we believe gives our children the best start in life. The excellence and commitment of the teachers and staff and the small size of the classes and community means a personal experience for us and our children.

Parent satisfaction:

Parents were invited to provide feedback in 2023 via a formal survey. The results were extremely positive with parents reporting a high degree of satisfaction with the education and care provided to their children.



A Majority of ME Families feel...



like they are part of a like-minded group of parents and careers at Montessori East



connected to the broader whole-school Montessori East community



well-informed of school events and opportunities for community gatherings



proud to be a Montessori East parent



Student satisfaction:

Students at Montessori East enjoy many opportunities to be a part of the decision making in their classrooms and the school. Regular "Primary Parliament" meetings (involving students Year 1-6) provide a forum for students to discuss issues and seek solutions to problems that may arise from time to time. Students lead these meetings with minimal adult intervention. Some outcomes of these meetings have included playground activities, acquisition of animals, standards of cleanliness, fundraising for charities, gardening and dealing with conflicts. The principal attends all meetings.

Teacher Satisfaction:

Teachers have regular opportunities to provide feedback via staff meetings and annual review meetings with the principal. Senior staff are available to mentor teaching staff.

Indicators of community satisfaction:

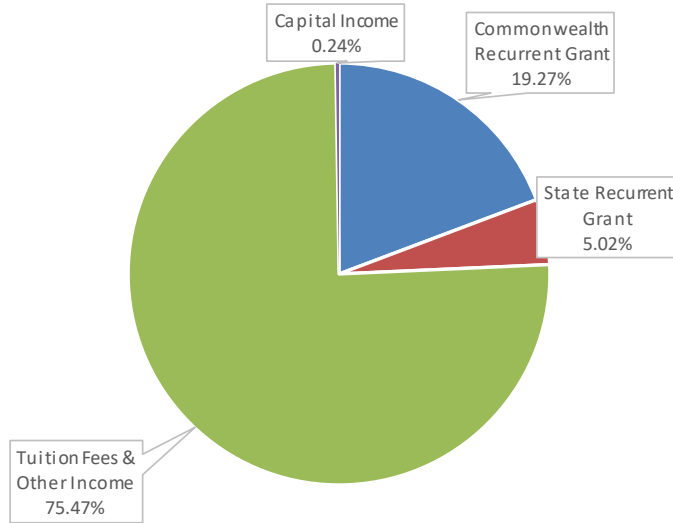
- Direct feedback
- Strong participation in Parent Education events.
- Parents regularly initiate events and or volunteer to assist
- Enrolment demand is very strong, with a healthy waitlist and significant interest from the community.

Theme 7 - Summary Financial Information

For the year ended 31 December 2023, Eastern Suburbs Montessori Association Limited generated total revenue of \$3,771,958 (excluding Capital Income of \$9,106) which after total expenditure of \$3,433,715 (excluding Capital Expenditure of \$9,106) resulted in a surplus of \$338,243. The financial year operates from 1 January to 31 December 2023 inclusive.

Summary Financial Information

<u>2023 Recurrent & Capital Income</u>	\$	%
Commonwealth Recurrent Grant	728,685	19.3%
State Recurrent Grant	189,661	5.0%
Tuition Fees & Other Income	2,853,612	75.5%
Capital Income	9,106	0.2%
Total	\$ 3,781,064	100%



<u>2023 Recurrent & Capital Expenditure</u>	\$	%
Staff Costs	2,637,016	76.6%
Operating, Admin & Other Costs	796,699	23.1%
Capital Expenditure	9,107	0.3%
Total	\$ 3,442,822	100%

