Western Autistic School

A specialist school dedicated to the education of students with Autism

Western Autistic School (WAS) is a specialist school dedicated to the education of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The school’s aim is to address the impairments specific to ASD in order to provide the education to which all Australian students are entitled. The word ‘spectrum’ describes the range of difficulties that people with ASD may experience and the degree to which they may be affected.

We recognise the individuality of each student as pre-eminent and propose to create a successful individual educational program for every student. It will come as no surprise then that WAS is a complex school organisation which offers a range of educational programs for students diagnosed with an ASD. WAS operates a short term intensive program for early years primary students over two campuses, Laverton and Niddrie, as well as offering limited places in specialist programs for upper primary and secondary students. WAS has over 300 students and 160 staff. Students are drawn from all corners of western Melbourne and, in the main, are transported to and from school by a fleet of contract buses. The school has grown continuously through its history and this growth has presented challenges to maintaining the quality and integrity of our programs. The school council and executive embrace the changing environment as an opportunity to re-examine both pedagogy and practice. We strongly believe that the ongoing renewal and refreshment of our mission and programs are the hallmark of our commitment to our students and the school community, and we recognise the critical need to keep abreast of evolving best practice in this rapidly evolving field of education.

At Western Autistic School we draw on research-based knowledge and expertise to develop programs and services which positively impact the education of as many students with an ASD as possible. The school has been recognised by the Department of Education as a Centre of Excellence in the Understanding and Education of Students with ASD. Our unique model incorporates best practice in the education of students with an ASD, enabling students to commence integration into mainstream or generic special schools with provision for ongoing support to staff and students. In this way, we intend to improve outcomes for students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in our community and address some of the challenges put to the wider system by the introduction of the Disability Education Standards, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and other policies supporting inclusion.

Western Autistic School established the Autism Teaching Institute (ATI), a Registered Training Organisation, that delivers training to mainstream teachers throughout Victoria. The Autism Teaching Institute (ATI) draws on cutting-edge research in ASD to deliver accredited teacher training courses at post-graduate level. The work of the ATI informs pedagogy within the school. Since its inception the ATI has trained over 400 teachers and 2000 teachers’ aides, averaging a 95% student and employer satisfaction rate for the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) evaluations for its post graduate courses, and has consistently achieved very high student satisfaction ratings for its DET funded Education Support staff training. The ATI was invited to apply for membership on the DET Professional Learning Provider Panel, and in 2016 the ATI Diploma course is a sponsored study through Catholic Education Melbourne.

The ATI also established the Practical Autism Research Centre (PRAC) in 2010 and has formed partnerships with several universities to conduct research. Western Autistic School also offers outreach support to staff and students in primary and secondary schools across the Western Region of Melbourne.

In 2011 WAS established a playgroup at the Laverton Campus in partnership with Play Connect. This playgroup is for children from 0-5 years with ASD, or ASD like symptoms, and their families.

Our educational philosophy

The foundation of our teaching is the child’s own interests and motivations, believing as we do that children will learn new skills and build self-esteem through developing their strengths. We emphasise the welfare, inclusion and happiness of each child.

The school program incorporates:
- Individual Learning Plans
- Student Support Groups
- An emphasis on foundation communication and social skills, and the skills for learning
- Preparation for transition to generic schools
- Specialised student behaviour management approach and program.