SOUTHSIDE
Montessori School

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

PUBLISHED: JUNE 2026

Principal's Message

2025 has been a year of both challenge and renewal for Southside Montessori School. I commenced as Principal at the beginning of Term 4, following a period of interim leadership. While this presented some disruption, I was encouraged by the strong foundations already present within the school community.

It was immediately evident that the school remains deeply grounded in Montessori principles. Students demonstrated independence, self-direction and a clear sense of responsibility for their learning, engaging purposefully with their environment and with one another. Staff showed a strong commitment to the child-centred approach that underpins authentic Montessori practice, and the School Board and parent community continued to provide active and valued support.

A significant milestone during the year was the Early Learning Commission's first Assessment and Rating of the Garden (3–6 year old) program. The results reflect the strength of practice within the environment and provide a clear foundation for ongoing refinement and growth.

During Term 4, initial focus was placed on strengthening leadership structures, supporting staff, and reinforcing consistency in Montessori practice across the school. Looking ahead, priorities include building greater visibility within the community, supporting sustainable enrolment growth, and continuing to strengthen a cohesive and connected Montessori learning environment.

Southside Montessori School is a community with a long-standing commitment to supporting the development of the whole child. I look forward to working collaboratively with staff, families and the Board as we build on these foundations and continue to provide an authentic and enriching Montessori education.

Iian Murray
Principal

School Context

Southside Montessori School is a small, independent, co-educational, non-denominational school located in Riverwood, in Sydney's south-west. The school provides an authentic Montessori education for children from birth through to the end of primary school.

The school's approach is grounded in the educational philosophy of Dr Maria Montessori, which recognises that children are naturally curious and capable learners who thrive in environments that support independence, responsibility and self-direction. Learning is guided through carefully prepared environments, where students engage in purposeful activity that reflects their developmental stage and individual interests.

Southside Montessori School delivers the Montessori National Curriculum in alignment with the Australian Curriculum and the requirements of the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). This integrated approach ensures that students meet mandated learning outcomes while benefiting from a holistic, child-centred model of education that supports academic, social and emotional development.

This report is prepared in accordance with NESA annual reporting requirements and therefore focuses primarily on the primary (K–6) component of the school.

The school offers three programs aligned to Montessori developmental stages:

- **Nido**: birth to 3 years
- **Garden**: 3 to 6 years (early childhood & Kindergarten)
- **Loft**: 6 to 12 years (Year 1 to Year 6)

At the time of the August 2025 census, there were 32 students enrolled in the primary years (K–6). The school serves a diverse community, with approximately ten languages other than English spoken in students' homes. The majority of students are Australian-born, with some families having relocated from overseas. A small number of students identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; this information is reported in accordance with privacy considerations.

As a small school, Southside Montessori places strong emphasis on community, continuity and relationships. The School Board comprises current parents, supporting a close connection between governance and the broader school community. Many families have more than one child enrolled, although the school is also seeing an increase in single-child families, reflecting broader demographic trends.

Teaching and learning are characterised by mixed-age classrooms, extended periods of uninterrupted work, and an emphasis on independence and collaboration. Students are encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their learning, develop problem-solving skills, and engage deeply with both individual and group work.

Key Highlights

Throughout 2025, students participated in a range of educational and community activities, including:

- The Loft Camp at Camp Yarramundi, providing opportunities for independence and outdoor learning
- Book Week celebrations, promoting literacy and engagement with literature
- A Nest nature walk involving families, supporting community connection and environmental awareness
- Mother's Day and Father's Day celebrations, strengthening family engagement
- Diwali celebrations, recognising the cultural diversity within the school community
- The end-of-year concert and graduation, celebrating student learning and achievement

At the end of 2025, three Year 6 students completed their primary education and transitioned to secondary schooling at Sydney Boys High School, Georges River College and East Hills Girls Technology High School.
During the year, there were also significant staffing developments within the Garden program, including the appointment of a new Educational Leader/Nominated Supervisor, as well as a Montessori-trained teacher and assistant. These changes have strengthened the early childhood program moving into 2026.

While there was a small decline in enrolments toward the end of the year, this was largely attributable to families relocating outside the area.

Student Outcomes

National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

In 2025, students in Years 3 and 5 at Southside Montessori School participated in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), which assesses student achievement in reading, writing, conventions of language (spelling, grammar and punctuation), and numeracy.

NAPLAN results provide a snapshot of student performance at a point in time and are considered alongside the school's broader approach to assessment. At Southside Montessori School, assessment practices are grounded in ongoing observation, individual learning progressions, and the holistic development of each child.

Due to the small number of students participating in NAPLAN assessments in 2025, school-level data is not published on the My School website. This is consistent with national reporting requirements, which require a minimum number of participants for publicly reported results to ensure statistical reliability and student privacy.

Based on internal analysis of NAPLAN results, student achievement in 2025 indicates:

- consistent development across literacy and numeracy domains
- achievement aligned with expected levels for stage of learning

Approach to Assessment

At Southside Montessori School, assessment reflects both Montessori principles and NESA requirements. While standardised assessments such as NAPLAN provide useful data points, they do not capture the full breadth of student learning.

In the Montessori context, assessment is:

- individualised, recognising that students progress at different rates
- developmentally informed, based on careful observation of each child
- holistic, incorporating academic, social and emotional development

Teachers use a range of tools to monitor and support student learning, including:

- observational records
- student work samples and portfolios
- formative assessments and teacher reflection
- collaborative planning and review

This approach enables teachers to respond to each student's needs and to support sustained progress over time.

Staffing

Workforce Composition

In 2025, Southside Montessori School employed a small and dedicated team of teaching and non-teaching staff who support the delivery of the Montessori educational program and the operation of the school.

The school's staffing profile is summarised below:

Staff Category	Head Count	Full-Time Equivalent (FTE)
Principal	1	1.0
Teaching Staff	4	4.0
Non-Teaching Staff	5	3.8
Total	**10**	**8.8**

Teaching staff include those responsible for delivering the educational program across both the primary (K–6) and early childhood settings, supported by administrative and operational staff.

As a small school community, staff work collaboratively across programs and contribute to multiple aspects of school life. This supports continuity of care and learning for students and reflects the integrated nature of Montessori practice.

Teacher Accreditation

All teaching staff at Southside Montessori School hold accreditation in accordance with the requirements of the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA).

The accreditation status of teachers at the end of 2025 is summarised below:

Level of Accreditation	Number of Teachers
Conditional	0
Provisional	3
Proficient	4
Highly Accomplished	0
Lead Teacher	0

Teachers engage in ongoing professional learning to maintain their accreditation and to strengthen their practice, including continued development in Montessori pedagogy aligned to the age groups they teach.

Teacher Qualifications

All teachers at Southside Montessori School hold recognised teaching qualifications in accordance with national requirements. In addition, staff have undertaken, or are undertaking, specialised Montessori training to support authentic implementation of the Montessori program.

The school is committed to ongoing professional learning, supporting staff to deepen their knowledge of both the NESA curriculum and Montessori philosophy, ensuring a cohesive and high-quality educational experience for students.

Workforce Diversity

Southside Montessori School is committed to fostering an inclusive and respectful workplace environment.
At the end of 2025, no staff members identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This information is reported in a manner consistent with privacy considerations.

The school continues to encourage applications from individuals of diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Attendance

Student Attendance Rates
Student attendance is recorded and monitored in accordance with NESA requirements and reported annually.

In 2025, attendance rates for each year level were as follows:

Year Level	Attendance Rate (%)
Year 1	90.83%
Year 2	90.00%
Year 3	87.50%
Year 4	72.92%
Year 5	97.92%
Year 6	87.50%
Whole School	**88.16%**

The overall attendance rate for the school in 2025 was 88.16%, based on data reported to ACARA.

Approximately 59.65% of students attended school at least 90% of the time, noting variation across year levels.

Given the small cohort size at the school, attendance data can vary more significantly between year levels than in larger schools. Nonetheless, attendance across most year groups remained consistent with expected levels, with a small number of students requiring additional support to maintain regular attendance.

Management of Non-Attendance

Southside Montessori School maintains a structured and proactive approach to managing student attendance, in accordance with legislative requirements under the Education Act 1990 (NSW) and NESA registration requirements.

Attendance is recorded daily using the school's electronic student management system, with classroom educators marking rolls each morning. Unexplained absences are followed up promptly through automated notifications and direct communication with parents/carers.

Parents/carers are responsible for providing explanations for absences. Where explanations are not received within a specified timeframe, absences are recorded as unexplained in accordance with required attendance codes.

The school closely monitors attendance data and identifies patterns of concern, including:

- frequent absences
- unexplained absences
- attendance below 90%

Where concerns arise, the school works collaboratively with families to implement appropriate support strategies. These may include:

- early communication with parents/carers
- individual meetings to understand underlying factors
- development of attendance support plans
- ongoing monitoring and review

Montessori Context of Attendance

At Southside Montessori School, regular attendance is considered essential to the integrity of the Montessori educational approach. The prepared environment relies on continuity, allowing students to engage in extended periods of focused work and to build independence through consistent participation.

Regular attendance supports:

- sustained concentration and deep engagement in learning
- continuity of individual learning progressions
- the development of independence and responsibility
- social development within the multi-age classroom community

Attendance is therefore understood not only as a compliance requirement, but as a key contributor to each child's overall development and learning experience.

Policies

Southside Montessori School maintains a comprehensive suite of policies and procedures to support the safe, ethical, and effective operation of the school. These policies are designed to meet legislative and regulatory requirements, guide professional practice, and ensure a consistent and transparent approach to school governance.

A strong emphasis is placed on child safety and wellbeing, with policies aligned to the NSW Child Safe Standards, NESA registration requirements, and relevant legislation. These policies ensure that all members of the school community—staff, volunteers, and families—understand their responsibilities in creating and maintaining a safe and supportive environment for children.

All policies are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure ongoing compliance and reflect current best practice.

The following policies and procedures are publicly available on the school website:

- Enrolment Policy and Procedures
- Child Protection Policy and Procedures
- Attendance Policy and Procedures
- Anti-bullying Policy and Procedures
- Discipline Policy and Procedures
- Complaints and Grievances Policy and Procedures
- Sun Protection Policy
- Whistleblower Policy
- Conflict of Interest Policy

These policies can be accessed via the following link:
https://www.southsidemontessori.edu.au/policies--procedures.html

Stakeholder Satisfaction

In 2025, Southside Montessori School continued to maintain strong and collaborative relationships with its community, including students, parents, and staff. While a formal stakeholder survey was not conducted during the year, feedback was gathered through ongoing engagement, including informal discussions, meetings, enrolment enquiries, and day-to-day interactions.

Parent Satisfaction

Feedback from parents indicates a continued appreciation for the school's commitment to Montessori education and its focus on the development of the whole child. Families value the individualised approach to learning, the strong relationships between staff and students, and the sense of community within the school.

During the year, there was growing recognition of the need to strengthen communication and consistency, particularly following a period of leadership transition. Parents responded positively to steps taken toward greater clarity, stability, and engagement in Term 4, with a shared interest in the continued development and visibility of the school.

Student Satisfaction

Student feedback, gathered through observation and interaction, indicates that students are generally engaged in their learning and demonstrate a sense of belonging within the school environment.

Students respond positively to opportunities for:

- self-directed learning
- collaborative work
- creative and hands-on activities

The Montessori environment supports student voice and independence, allowing learners to take increasing responsibility for their work and their role within the classroom community.

Staff Satisfaction

Staff at Southside Montessori School demonstrate a strong commitment to the school's values and to Montessori pedagogy. Informal feedback throughout the year reflects a shared dedication to supporting student learning and maintaining a positive classroom environment.

The period of leadership transition in 2025 highlighted the importance of clear communication, shared direction, and role clarity. With the appointment of a new Principal in Term 4, there has been an increasing focus on strengthening team cohesion, supporting staff, and establishing stable and sustainable practices moving into 2026.

Financials

Summary of Financial Information

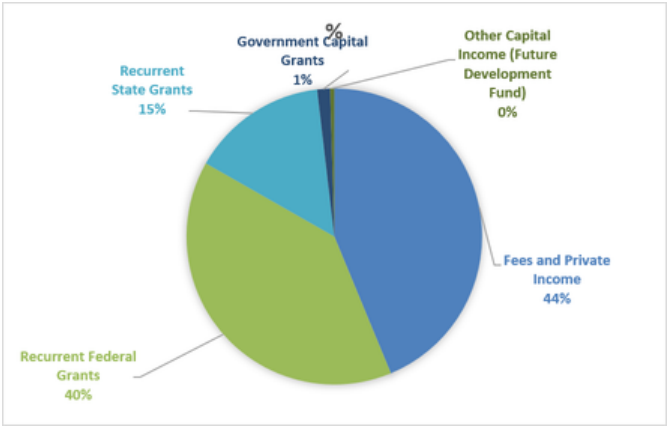
The following information summarises Southside Montessori School's recurrent and capital income and expenditure for the 2025 financial year. This information is drawn from the school's financial reporting processes and reflects the categories required under the Commonwealth Financial Questionnaire.

Income

In 2025, the main sources of school income were fees and private income, and recurrent government grants, which together accounted for the majority of total income.

- Fees and private income represented approximately 43.7% of total income
- Commonwealth recurrent grants represented approximately 39.5%
- State recurrent grants contributed approximately 14.9%
- A small proportion of income was derived from government capital grants and other capital income

These income sources support the ongoing delivery of the school's educational programs and operations.

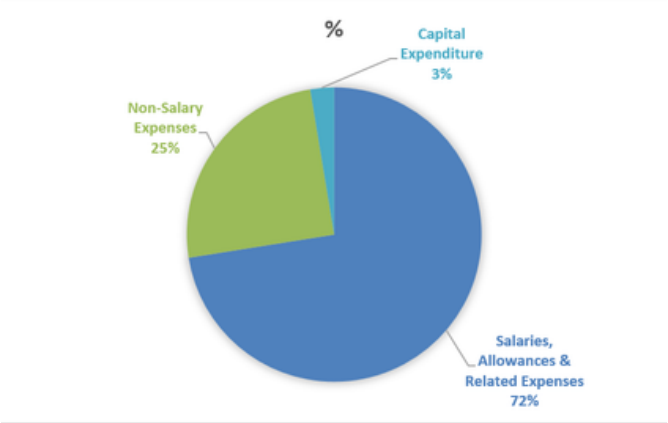


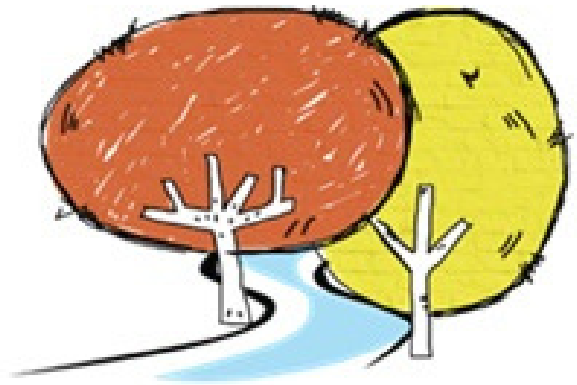
Expenditure

Expenditure in 2025 was primarily directed toward staffing, reflecting the school's focus on maintaining high-quality teaching and learning programs.

- Salaries, allowances and related expenses accounted for approximately 72.5% of total expenditure
- Non-salary expenses represented approximately 24.9%
- Capital expenditure accounted for approximately 2.6%

This distribution is consistent with the operation of a small school where staffing is the principal resource required to deliver educational outcomes.





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