



# A Novel Solution for Re-engaging Autistic Students in Education

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Aspect Hunter School - Distance Education

# During this presentation you will learn about.....

- Aspect's research on Home Education
- Establishment of the Aspect Hunter Distance Education program
- Profile of students and educational needs
- Enrolment and transition trends
- Experiences of key stakeholders
- Next steps

# Home Education Research 2017-18

- National study focused on families home schooling children on the autism spectrum (Bruck & Cheney, 2018) N = 67
- Education setting previously attended
  - *Mainstream 78%*
  - *Special Education Setting- Support unit or SSP 30%*
  - *Distance Education 8%*
- Majority of families were providing an education program independently
  - *69% not registered for distance education in their state/territory*
- Majority did not plan to transition their child back to school
  - *76% did not want their child to return to school*

# Home Education Research 2017-18

Reasons for choosing home education:

- Bullying
- Mental health/anxiety/self-harm
- Stress
- School/parent relationship breakdown
- Feelings that schools lacked knowledge of autism and positive behaviour support
  - Reduced school hours/days/ parents called to collect
- Need for individualised programs and person centred planning
- Availability of funding and face to face support
- Physical environment

# Home Education Research 2017-18 Outcomes

- Providing links to autism home school networks
- Supporting registration with relevant education authorities
- Work with education sectors to increase access for students on the spectrum to distance education programs
- **Developing autism specific distance education program**
- **Developing and linking families with relevant resources and supports**
- **Facilitating transitions back to school**

# Distance Education Program

- Flexible online education for students on the autism spectrum across NSW
- Aspect Comprehensive Approach
- Transition focused
- Individually tailored programs focused on students strengths, interests and aspirations



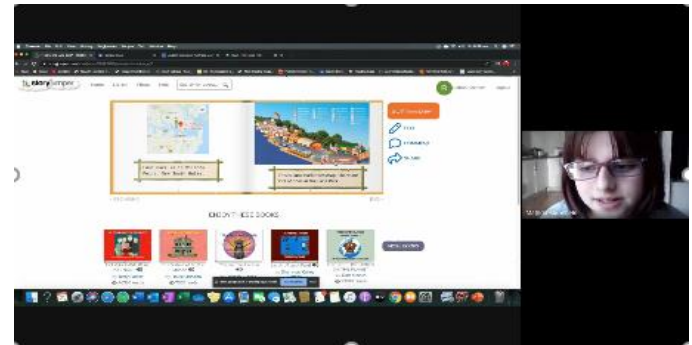
# 2020

- The Distance Education program commenced in Term 1, 2020
- Years 3- 6
- 6 students
- Online platforms and programs
- Timetabling - ongoing
- Structure and supports- embedding ACA



# Distance Education

- The program is delivered via the Google Classroom platform
- Online programs to facilitate learning
- Blend of online / offline work
- Individual and small group sessions
- Students are supported at home by on-site supervisor
- Small class sizes- Teacher and Teacher Aide assistance





# Residential program

- Residential program at Aspect Hunter School in Thornton, NSW
- 15 days onsite (Primary students) per year
- 16 days onsite (High school students) per year
- Regular school hours
- Hands on learning, social interactions and community outings
- Assessment





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# Program Growth

- 2021- Extended to Stage 4
- Mainstream and Life Skills courses
- 2022- Extended to Stage 5
- Work Education in partnership with the Greater Charitable Foundation
- Financial literacy program with the Greater Bank
- Residential review
- 2024- Extending to Stage 6 Life Skills

# Primary Cohort

## Co-occurring Conditions and Support Needs

- 100% of students enrolled have reported difficulties with emotional regulation
- 68% of students have a reported history of behaviours of concern which contributed to seeking an alternative to face to face placement
- 37% of students have a diagnosed mental health disorder including anxiety however, 56% of students have accommodations and adjustments in place to support anxiety.

# High School Cohort

## Co-occurring Conditions and Support Needs

- 76% of students have a diagnosed Anxiety Disorder
- 46% of students have a Mental Health diagnosis (in addition to/other than Anxiety)
- 46% of students have a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

# Orientation

- Entry dates Week 1 and Week 6 of each Term
- Individual initial session
- Tour Google Classroom
- Develop/ review Student Profile (5 point star)
- Development of individual transition schedule
- Identify transition supports
- Students do not attend Residential in their first term in the program

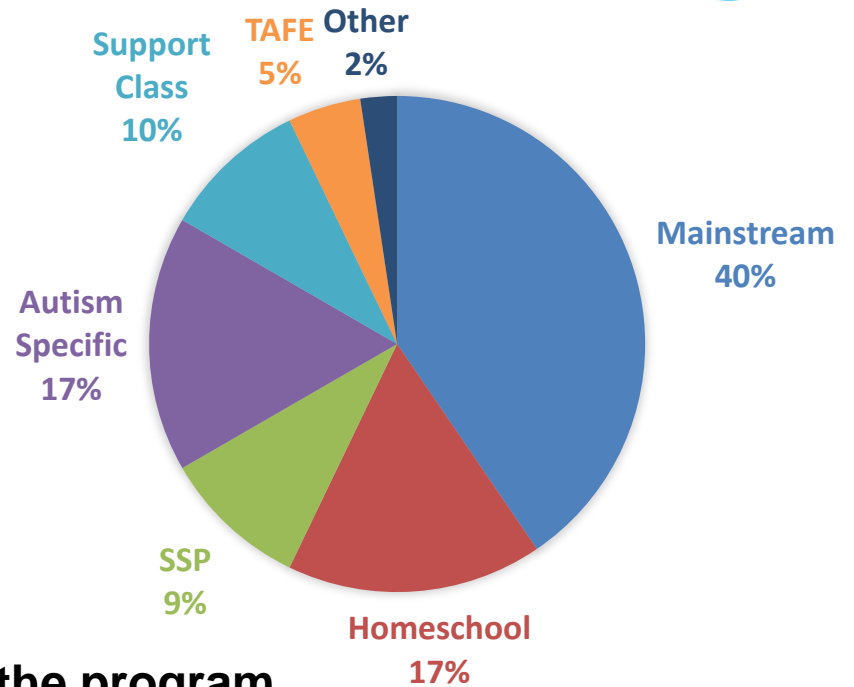


# Transition Support

- Regular transition planning review during IP meetings
- Transition meeting with receiving school
- Transition based Individual Goals
- Individual transition plans for students exiting program

# Transition Focus

- Current total student enrolments- 44
- High School 29
- Primary School 15



## To date

- **41 students have transitioned out of the program**



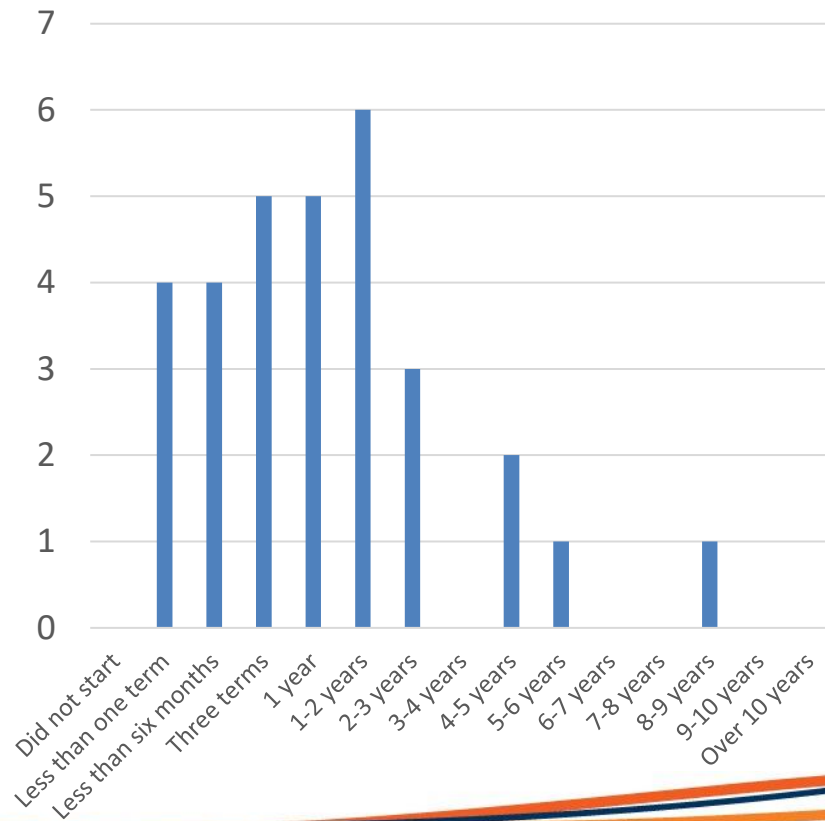
# Student Enrolment

## How long do students stay?

Average time is 1.62 years

- Average is 1.62 years
- 42% less than 1 year
- 45% 1 to 3 years
- 10% stay 3-7 years
- 3% 7 plus years\*

\* Transitioned from another Aspect School



# Learning Support

- Fortnightly LST meetings
- NDIS review support
- Regular check ins
- Psychology and social support
- Parent/ carer coffee mornings
- Connecting families with local services



# Complex Situation Review

- Collaborative wrap around support
- Close liaison by the school with all specialists / professionals working with the student
- Consultation with Aspect Hunter School Learning Support Team
- Close monitoring of data and reporting of progress
- The implementation of intensive behavioural interventions
- Referral to external therapy and support

# ARCAP Distance Education Research Study- Findings 2020

## Student engagement and learning

- Increased student engagement
- Academic progress mixed
- Independently learning mixed
- Perception that program more suited to particular “types” of students

*“So he’s been able to academically thrive ... last year, he wouldn’t go into the school library. He’s now reading whole novels.”*

## Mental health and emotional wellbeing

- Reduced anxiety for students
- Fewer behaviours of concern
- Mixed outcomes for parents

*“So because he’s had the time to be able to go to all those appointments and work on all those extra things, and not be exhausted, his emotional development has come a long way - you know, his mental health has improved.” (P1)*

## Opportunities for social interaction

- Positive relationships with other students
- More social opportunities needed

# ARCAP Distance Education Research Study- Findings 2020

## Overall, a positive experience

- Parents seeing benefits
- An improvement on prior schooling experiences

*“I knew it was going to be better than what we were doing, and it has been. It’s an improvement, definitely.”*

## Flexibility and an individualised program

- Working at their own pace and level
- Home environment conducive to learning
- Home-school communication assisting adaptation
- Presents some challenges for teachers

## Level of parental involvement

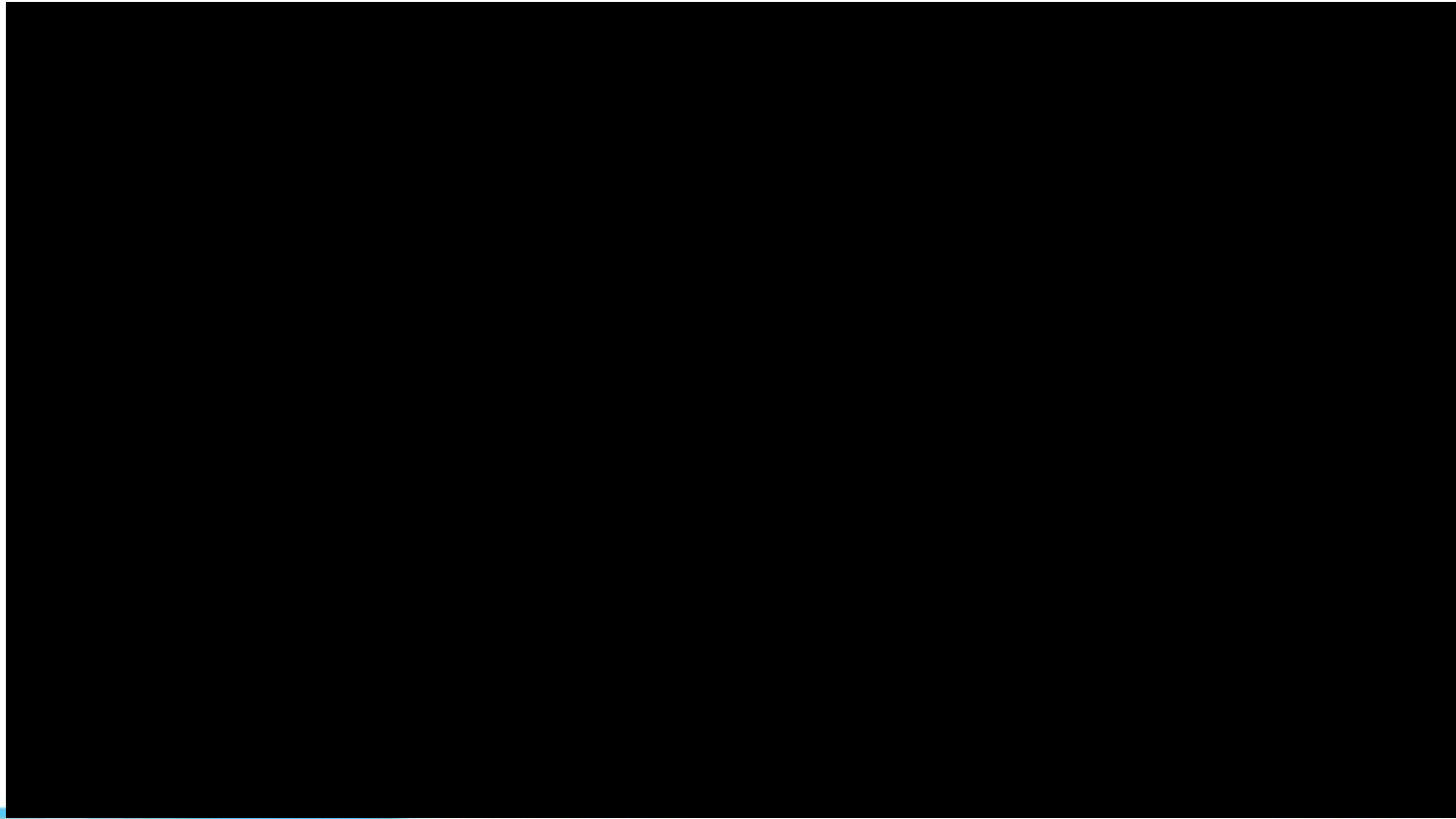
- Essential for students’ participation
- Hard work but less stress

*“It has been a really hard year. I’m not going to tell anyone it’s been easy. It has been hard - just as hard as it was last year but it’s rewarding and that’s the difference. It is hard work but when you see the benefits of where he’s come from in 12 months, you wouldn’t believe it.”*  
(P1)

# Future Focus

- All staff to complete Berry Street Training around Trauma informed practice
- Review current practice and embed Berry Street as required
- Prepare to deliver Stage 6
- Support Students transition to Post School Programs and employment

# A Student Perspective





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