The Essington School
AGM 2026
2025 Year in Review
Principal/CEO Report

History

For over 40-years, The Essington School has been an important part of the educational landscape of the Northern Territory. Founded in 1983 by a group of Darwin parents seeking a more structured early childhood education inspired by the Montessori philosophy, Essington began as a small, parent-run playgroup and preschool operating under the Darwin Montessori Society.

By 1990, the school had evolved into a parent-led independent primary school at its permanent Rapid Creek site. With the support of dedicated families and leaders, Essington continued to grow, gaining approval to offer secondary education in 1997 and extending to Year 12 in 2010.

Throughout its growth, The Essington School remained committed to being an inclusive, community-driven school focused on personalised learning, strong values, and educational excellence. In 1999, the school was formally incorporated as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, reinforcing its commitment to strong governance and long-term sustainability.

Today, following major facility upgrades, campus consolidation, and the opening of a revitalised Early Childhood Centre, The Essington School continues to build on its proud legacy. Guided by the Strategic Plan 2025–2030, the school remains focused on delivering high-quality, future focused and world-class education, preparing students to thrive in an ever-changing world, while remaining true to its founding values of community, respect, inclusiveness, and excellence.

Executive Team

In 2025 the Executive Team members were:

- Paul Nyhuis – Principal/CEO
- Luigi Manzione – Business Manager
- Hannah Zwitser – Head of Improvement & Innovation
- Hannah Zwitser – Head of Junior School (Sem 2 2025)
- Joan Judd – Head of Senior School
- Renee Schultz – Head of Junior School (Sem 1 2025)
- Jayne Lomas – Executive Officer
- Peter Kent - Director of Information, Communication and Learning Technologies

Governance

A strong partnership with the School Board underpinned effective governance this year, ensuring decisions were well-informed, transparent, and aligned to our strategic direction. The Board is comprised of at least five and no more than nine Directors; in 2025, nine Directors served. Directors met monthly during the school year, and the Annual General Meeting was held on 29 April 2025.

Executive Members of the Board

- Vicki Bridge (Chair) – appointed at 2025 AGM
- Nathan Reichstein (Vice Chair) – served as Chair until the 2025 AGM
- Carol Cain (Vice Chair)

Directors

- Maria Teo
- Ashley Perez
- Fredrick Law
- John McLaren
- Minh Tran
- Jocelyn Cull

Non-voting Members

- Paul Nyhuis (Principal/CEO)
- Luigi Manzione (Business Manager & Company Secretary)

Overview

In 2025, The Essington School continued to build on the foundational work undertaken in the previous year, with a clear focus on embedding the key elements required for sustained school and organisational improvement. Guided by our vision, mission, values and the Strategic Plan 2025–2030, the year was marked by a strengthened emphasis on leadership, organisational culture, school improvement and the consistent implementation of our strategic priorities.

Following the confirmation of our Vision, Mission, Values, Strategic Priorities, and Organisational Standards and Structure in 2024, 2025 focussed on bringing these elements to life across all areas of the school. This included a deliberate focus on clarity of roles and responsibilities, accountability, and ensuring alignment between our strategic direction and day-to-day operations.

2025 was also a year focused on strengthening the delivery of high-quality teaching and learning as we continue to develop and implement a whole school instructional model. A key priority was the systematic delivery of curriculum, supported by the consistent application of evidence-based teaching strategies.

Our Commitment

The Essington School remains committed to delivering a high-quality education grounded in high standards and respectful relationships. Guided by our Values and the Strategic Plan 2025–2030, we have continued to strengthen a culture that supports both achievement and wellbeing.

In partnership with our community, the school provides a comprehensive pathway from Preschool to Year 12. In 2025, there has been a continued focus on ensuring this pathway is cohesive and consistent, supporting each young person to progress with confidence, realise their potential, and contribute positively to life beyond the school.

Our Vision
A world-class school

Our Mission
The Essington School is committed to delivering a world class education built on a foundation of high standards and respectful relationships. We foster a culture of excellence, underpinned by our school values and a focus on achievement and wellbeing.

In partnership with our community, we provide a comprehensive pathway from Preschool to Year 12, ensuring our young people have every opportunity to reach their potential, and engage positively in the world beyond.

Our Values
- **Responsibility -** We take ownership and are accountable for our choices, words, and actions.
- **Respect -** We value our school, and the safety, health, and wellbeing of all.
- **Kindness -** We demonstrate care, compassion, and understanding towards others.
- **Inclusiveness -** We are accepting of our individual differences, and everyone belongs.
- **Excellence -** We uphold high expectations for ourselves and others, with a commitment to being 'world-class'.

This report outlines the key highlights, achievements, and areas of continued focus that have shaped our progress in 2025, reflecting our commitment to continuous improvement.

Governance and Compliance
In 2025, the school remained compliant with the *Education Act 1990* and all associated regulatory requirements. Governance practices continued to strengthen, supported by the use of a digital board portal to improve communication, access to information, and record-keeping.

The Board met regularly throughout the year, maintaining oversight of strategy, risk, and performance, and ensuring alignment with the school's long-term direction.

Enrolments and Attendance
Retention remained a key area of focus, particularly through Y9 to Y10, where our percentage of leavers in Y9 dropped to its lowest level across the last seven years at 15%. Building on the progress achieved in 2024, targeted efforts to strengthen curriculum continuity, enhance academic pathways, and support student confidence in the transition to Senior School have continued. These approaches contribute to a learning experience that is coherent, purposeful, and responsive to the needs of our students.

Enrolment interest throughout 2025 remained strong, with a consistent flow of enquiries and applications across all year levels, supporting both growth and stability within the school.

Enrolment Numbers
February 2024 Total Enrolments 798 and T-12 718
February 2025 Total Enrolments 852 and T-12 780

NAPLAN 2025

The following 2025 NAPLAN data provides an important snapshot of student achievement across the school and has been used to inform strategic improvement priorities, targeted intervention, and instructional planning to support continued student growth across all learning areas.

Year Level	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar	Numeracy		Key
Year 3	410	423	412	421	439		*Slightly above Aust. Mean*
Year 5	509	506	498	519	522		*Above Aust. Mean*
Year 7	576	576	567	572	595		*Well Above Aust. Mean*
Year 9	614	631	599	622	608		

- NAPLAN participation remained strong at 98%, exceeding the national participation rate of 95%, ensuring reliable and representative whole-school data.
- The school has used 2025 NAPLAN data to inform strategic planning, targeted intervention, and teaching priorities for 2026, with a particular focus on improving Junior School reading outcomes through the implementation of structured literacy approaches and explicit reading instruction.
- Stronger performance across Years 7–9, particularly in Writing, Grammar, and Numeracy, reflects the impact of increased curriculum alignment, evidence-informed teaching practices, and strengthened moderation and assessment processes across the school.

Strategic Plan 2025–2030

The Strategic Plan 2025–2030, finalised in 2024, provided a clear and stable foundation for the school's direction in 2025.

The four key drivers:

1. Educational Excellence
2. People, Performance, and Culture
3. Community and Partnerships
4. Governance, Operations, and Innovation

These drivers provide a cohesive framework to guide decision-making across all areas of the school. In 2025, there has been a deliberate focus on embedding these priorities through school-wide improvement measures, annual planning processes, and leadership accountability.

The strategic priorities are sequenced across the 5-year plan, considering organisational needs and capacity. Implementation occurs through annual school improvement plan and corporate improvement plans, with progress regularly reviewed to ensure consistency, alignment, and measurable impact.

The Strategic Plan 2025–2030 continues to serve as a practical guide for decision-making and improvement, supporting the school to strengthen its practices while remaining responsive to the needs of its students, staff, and wider community.

Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

In 2025, the school continued to strengthen its commitment to evidence-informed teaching, curriculum coherence, and data-informed improvement across both the Junior and Senior Schools. Significant progress was made in embedding consistent instructional practices, strengthening curriculum design and

assessment processes, and improving the collection and use of student achievement and wellbeing data to inform teaching, intervention, and strategic decision making.

Within the Junior School, a major focus was the implementation of a structured Literacy Block across Transition to Year 6, underpinned by the Science of Reading and explicit instruction. Staff engaged in targeted professional learning to strengthen consistency and capability in literacy instruction, resulting in the successful embedding of key instructional routines including Systematic Synthetic Phonics, Fluency Pairs, explicit vocabulary instruction, structured reading practices, and a consistent T–6 Writing Block supported by a shared Writing Marking Guide. Pre- and post-assessment processes were refined to better monitor student growth and inform intervention, moderation, and instructional planning. Collaborative planning and moderation practices further strengthened curriculum alignment and instructional consistency across year levels, contributing to improved teacher confidence and increasingly consistent student outcomes in literacy.

In the Senior School, significant work was undertaken to strengthen curriculum coherence, consistency, and impact across Years 7–12. Staff collaborated extensively to review and refine curriculum scope and sequencing, ensuring clearer progression of knowledge and skills across year levels and stronger continuity between subjects and phases of learning. Curriculum design, assessment structures, and reporting processes were also reviewed to strengthen alignment between curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Consistent instructional practices aligned to Rosenshine's Principles were further embedded across learning areas, supported through collaborative planning structures, subject-based review processes, moderation practices, and targeted professional learning. Additional priorities included improving timetabling structures, strengthening staff collaboration, and enhancing systems for monitoring student achievement, engagement, and wellbeing. This work contributed to greater consistency in curriculum delivery, strengthened professional collaboration, and a clearer shared understanding of effective teaching practice across the Senior School.

Across the whole school, continued investment in staff data literacy and digital systems significantly strengthened the school's capacity to use evidence to drive improvement. The strategic implementation of platforms such as Elastik and Microsoft Power BI enhanced the collection, analysis, and communication of student achievement and wellbeing data across multiple levels of the organisation. These systems enabled teachers and leaders to monitor growth more effectively, identify trends and priority cohorts, and make informed decisions regarding teaching, intervention, resourcing, and school improvement priorities. Collectively, this work strengthened accountability, improved consistency in instructional and assessment practice, and continued to build a culture of collaboration, precision, and continuous improvement across the school.

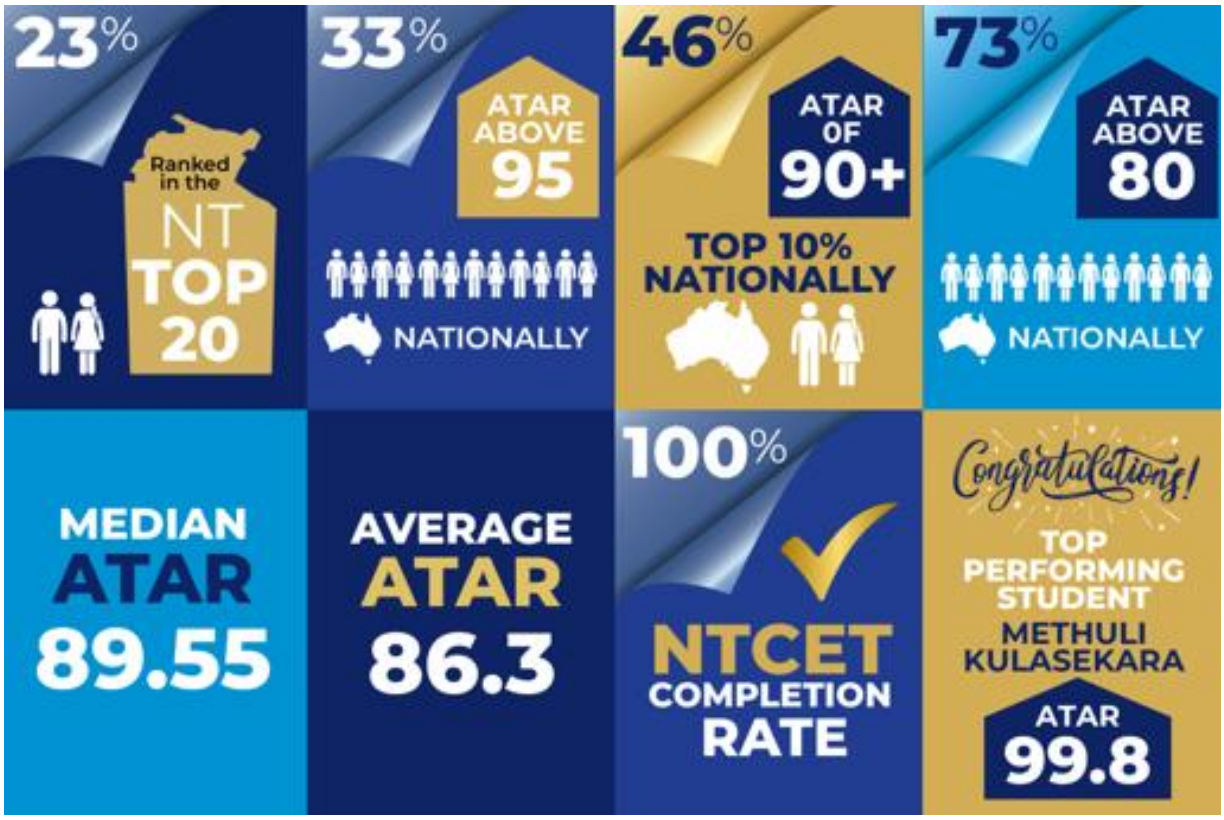
Student Achievement and Wellbeing

The school's academic outcomes in 2025 were a source of great pride, with 50 students successfully completing the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET). Among these, eleven students were recognised in the Top 20 across the Territory, including one student who achieved the highest overall result in the Northern Territory, and one as a Y11 student. These exceptional outcomes reflect the strength of our academic programs and the commitment of our students and staff.

High achievement was a defining feature of the cohort, with 33% of students attaining an ATAR above 95 and 46% achieving an ATAR of 90 or above, placing them in the top 10% nationally. The median ATAR of 89.55 and average ATAR of 86.3 demonstrate strong performance across the cohort.

Further to this, 73% of students achieved an ATAR above 80, with 23% ranked among the Top 20 in the Northern Territory. The highest-performing student achieved an ATAR of 99.8.

These results reflect a consistent focus on high expectations, quality teaching, and clear academic pathways, supported by the commitment of both students and staff.



The Essington School Wellbeing Framework was launched in 2025. It places student wellbeing at the heart of what we do and our school community.

Inspired by our core values of **Responsibility, Respect, Kindness, Inclusiveness, and Excellence**, the framework offers a whole-school approach to supporting and celebrating every child. The framework brings together our current proactive wellbeing programs, inclusive practices, conduct, and behaviour management supports to help our students flourish.

The Framework highlights 6 **Wellbeing Elements:**

1. **Elevating Health and Wellbeing** – Physical, mental, and emotional health.
2. **Enriching Connections and Relationships** – Empathy, trust, belonging.
3. **Empowering Identity, Character, and Voice** – Self-awareness and confidence.
4. **Enhancing Leadership and Growth** – Resilience and lifelong learning.
5. **Engaging and Connected Communities** – Inclusion and shared purpose.
6. **Exploring Pathways and Futures** – Purposeful lifelong pathways.

The framework aligns with *Be You* and the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework to provide coordinated, timely support for every student.

It highlights our Multi-Tiered System of Support, integrating wellbeing, learning, behaviour, and safety to ensure consistent, child-safe practices across the school. Underpinned by children's rights and aligned with key policy documents the framework prioritises student voice and supports all learners.

By fostering trust, inclusion, and safety, the framework strengthens the foundations that underpin Essington's world-class vision.

Leadership and Staffing

In 2025, the school implemented its refreshed leadership structure, strengthening leadership capability and organisational alignment across the school. Appointments reflected a deliberate and strategic approach, recognising and developing internal talent while also appointing experienced external leaders where appropriate. This has strengthened the school's capacity to progress key strategic priorities and build greater consistency in leadership practice across all areas of the organisation.

Organisational culture, staff wellbeing, professional growth, and leadership development remained significant priorities throughout the year. Professional Growth Plans continued to be embedded across the school, supported by structured performance and development conversations designed to strengthen individual capability, accountability, and team performance.

During 2025, the school also introduced the Aspiring Leaders Program, designed to identify and develop emerging leaders across teaching and operational areas. The program provided staff with opportunities for mentoring, coaching, professional learning, and involvement in whole-school improvement initiatives, helping to strengthen leadership capability, succession planning, and future leadership pathways across the organisation. Growing our own leaders remains a key priority, ensuring the school builds a strong, sustainable pipeline for the future.

PROPATH: Professional Pathways for Teachers & Staff HR Guide

The launch of PROPATH, 2025 introduced a structured framework to support professional growth, career development, and performance processes across the school. The framework consolidates key resources and processes relating to teacher career stages, probation and review procedures, classroom observation rubrics, registration pathways, HALT pathways, and professional growth planning.

A dedicated PROPATH hub was established through Essington Connect, providing staff with centralised access to resources, templates, links, and supporting materials.

Facilities

Campus improvements have continued throughout 2025, enhancing the safety, functionality, and overall presentation of the school. Key projects included the construction of covered walkways and the commencement of works for the new Junior School playground.

These works reflect a consistent commitment to maintaining high-quality environments that support student learning and wellbeing.

QECNT

A significant highlight late in 2025 was the review conducted by Quality Education and Care NT, the first since 2020. The Preschool and Long Day Care program received a rating of Exceeding National Quality Standard across all seven quality areas. This is an outstanding achievement, particularly for a new service operating on a new site for less than 2-years and affirms the quality of both the program and environment.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The ICT team continued to provide a high level of support for the school's teaching, learning, and administration. Key achievements included:

- Rolling out 90 new staff laptops, completing the upgrade of the school's computer fleet to Windows 11.
- Extending PA and emergency evacuation coverage across the main campus with 40 new speakers.
- Strengthening the school's cyber security by moving to the security-enhanced A5 Education licences.
- Establishing the new school-owned student laptop program in preparation for its launch at the start of 2026.

Marketing and Community Engagement

In 2025, The Essington School continued to advance a strategic and coordinated approach to marketing and community engagement, building on the strong foundations established in the previous year. Communications across digital platforms, publications, and in-person engagement were carefully integrated to ensure a clear, consistent articulation of the school's values, achievements, and educational offering. This approach was further strengthened through the development of a refreshed professional image bank, providing high-quality, contemporary photography to support brand consistency and future campaign delivery across all marketing channels.

Open Days remained a central component of the school's engagement strategy, with a total of 424 attendees across Preschool and the Main Campus. These events offered prospective family's valuable

Insight into the school environment and the opportunity to engage directly with staff and students. Ongoing promotion of student achievement and school activities continued to reinforce Essington's strong presence within the Darwin community.

Collectively, these initiatives have supported sustained enrolment interest and strengthened engagement across the school community. The Essington School remains committed to delivering a world-class education, underpinned by clear communication and a deliberate focus on building strong, enduring connections with students, families, alumni, and the wider community.

In 2025, the school also reignited its Alumni Program, strengthening connections with former students and laying the foundations for a stronger, more recognised alumni network that will support the school for years to come.

School Culture and Events

School life in 2025 included a range of events that supported learning, culture, and connection. Key events such as Science Week, Book Week, the Year 6 Canberra Tour, Graduations, and community gatherings such as Morning Teas, Father's Day and Mother's Day celebrations, Assemblies, Coffee catch-ups, Movie Under the Stars, Trivia Night, and BBQ's brought together students, staff, and families, providing opportunities to engage beyond the classroom and take pride in their learning.

The Arts and School Sport also form a significant part of the Essington community. Throughout the year, students participated in athletics and swimming carnivals, gala days, the Seabreeze Festival, the Year 6 Production and music performances across a range of community venues.

Staff recognition and collegial activities also continued to support a positive and professional culture across the school.

Conclusion

2025 has been a year of implementation and consolidation at The Essington School. Following the groundwork established in 2024, the focus has been on embedding key priorities, strengthening leadership practice, and improving consistency across the school. Enrolment growth has continued, supported by clearer structures and a sustained focus on teaching and learning.

A central priority has been the execution of 2025 Annual School Improvement Plan aligned to the Strategic Plan 2025–2030. This has involved setting clear expectations, strengthening accountability, and ensuring alignment between planning and day-to-day operations. Progress has been deliberate and measured, with a focus on building capability, maintaining consistency and delivering educational excellence.

The school remains grounded in its values, supported by committed staff and an engaged community. The focus is on continuing to lift standards and improve the quality and consistency of delivery. The progress made in 2025 provides confidence that the school is moving in the right direction.

I acknowledge the contribution of staff, students, and families throughout the year, including the commitment of our school leadership and Executive team.

I thank the Board for its governance and support, and acknowledge the Board Executive, Vicki Bridge, Nathan Reichstein, and Carol Cain for their contribution, with Vicki Bridge as Board Chair.

The focus remains on continued operational and strategic improvement in 2026.

Paul Nyhuis
Principal/CEO