

Cheshire School

bestchance

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Stepping Stones to Success

Cheshire School is a leading independent special assistance primary school, dedicated to supporting students with social, emotional, and complex behavioural presentations. The school's model of practice integrates trauma-informed care, neuro-affirming approaches, and evidence-based pedagogy to create a safe, inclusive, and empowering learning environment for all students.

A foundational element of our approach is the recognition that a strong, collaborative partnership between the school, families, and therapeutic services is critical to student success. Our team works closely with families to provide targeted, intervention-focused support. Through this evidence-informed model, students are supported to build the skills, confidence, and resilience needed to re-engage with learning and successfully transition back into mainstream educational settings.



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Acknowledgement of Country

Cheshire School acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians of the land. We also acknowledge in a special way the Wurundjeri and Bunurong Peoples of the Kulin Nation for it is on their land that we are proud and fortunate to live and learn as the Cheshire School community today.

As we share our knowledge and help our young people grow, we pay our respects to the Elders – past, present and emerging, as it is their knowledge and experiences that hold the key to the success of future generations.

As we live and learn together, may our journey remain forever committed to a spirit of respect, mutual understanding and reconciliation.



Contact Details

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Minimum Standards Attestation

I, *Kevin Browning*, attest that Cheshire School is compliant with:

- All of the requirements for the minimum standards and other requirements for the registration of schools as specified in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)* and the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic)*, except where the school has been granted an exemption from any of these requirements by the *Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA)*;
- Expenditure and commitment of funds being used solely to support educational outcomes and operational needs;
- Australian Government accountability requirements related to the 2025 school year under the *Australian Education Act 2013 (Cth)* and the *Australian Education Regulations 2013 (Cth)*; and
- The Child Safe Standards prescribed in Ministerial Order No.1359 – Child Safe Standards, Managing Risk of Child Abuse in School

June 2025

Statement from the Head of School

Why would the community of human minds be less diverse than, say, a rainforest? But it isn't. (Steve Silberman)



It is with great pride that I reflect on the 2025 school year at Cheshire School, a year characterised by growth, collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to supporting children with complex social, emotional, and behavioural needs. As a specialised interim setting, our purpose remains to provide a trauma-informed, neuro-affirming, and individualised educational experience that enables students to reconnect with learning and transition successfully to their next educational setting.

Celebrating Our Students

A defining measure of success at Cheshire School is the positive transition of students into their next stage of learning. In 2025, nine students successfully transitioned into a range of educational pathways aligned to their individual strengths, needs, and aspirations. These achievements reflect the resilience of our students, the dedication of our staff, and the strong partnerships we have built with families, allied health professionals, and receiving schools.

Throughout the year, students embraced a wide range of opportunities that enriched their educational experience and fostered confidence, connection, and personal growth.

Strengthening Our Practice

This year, Cheshire School further developed and articulated its Model of Service Delivery and Pedagogy, reinforcing our relationship-centred approach to education. Grounded in trauma-informed and neuro-affirming principles, the model places emotional safety, belonging, and regulation at the centre of learning while promoting strengths-based practice, personalised support, and transdisciplinary collaboration.

A significant investment in professional capability was also made through whole-school participation in the Berry Street Education Model professional learning. This training has strengthened staff understanding of trauma-informed practice and enhanced our collective ability to support students through predictable routines, co-regulation, and relationship-based approaches that foster engagement and resilience.

Learning Beyond the Classroom

A diverse range of incursions and excursions enriched the curriculum and created valuable opportunities for students to develop new skills and interests.

Highlights included:

Incursions

- PLANKS Workshop
- SECASA
- Soccer
- SEDA AFL Day
- Pilates
- SaintsPlay
- Downball
- Volleyball
- Taekwondo

Excursions

- Movie Excursion
- Swimming Program

These experiences supported students to build confidence, develop social connections, and engage in meaningful learning beyond the traditional classroom environment.

Our students also participated in important whole-school and national events, including National Simultaneous Storytime, Reconciliation Week, and Book Week. These celebrations provided opportunities to strengthen literacy, cultural understanding, creativity, and a sense of belonging within our school community.

Building Strong Partnerships

Family engagement remains central to the work of Cheshire School. Throughout the year, parents and carers were invited to connect through informal morning teas, providing opportunities to strengthen relationships and share experiences. Families also participated in a dedicated SECASA parent information session, supporting conversations around safety, wellbeing, and healthy relationships.

Our valued partnership with Monash University continued through the Participatory Community Practice (PCP) Program. Occupational Therapy students worked alongside our school community to develop evidence-informed initiatives that enhance participation, wellbeing, and outcomes for students and families, while also contributing to the education of future allied health professionals.

Cheshire School also continued to strengthen connections with the broader education and allied health sectors through school tours, presentations, and collaborative partnerships, helping to build greater understanding of our specialised model and the unique needs of the students we support.

Looking Ahead

As we reflect on another successful year, I am incredibly proud of what our school community has achieved together. Every milestone reached by our students represents the collective efforts of families, staff, allied health professionals, and community partners working toward a shared goal of helping every child experience success.

I extend my sincere thanks to our students for their courage, our families for their trust and partnership, our staff for their unwavering dedication, and our many collaborators who continue to strengthen the work we do.

Together, we remain committed to providing a responsive, evidence-informed educational environment where every child is supported to thrive, reconnect with learning, and move confidently toward their future.

Sincerely



Kevin Browning
Head of School

bestchance

bestchance Child and Family Care is an independent not-for-profit organisation that has been providing support to children and families since 1895 in the eastern metropolitan region of Victoria. *bestchance* adopts an innovative and holistic approach to provide flexible, comprehensive and integrated services, within available resources, based on identified needs.

Cheshire School is one of the programs run by *bestchance*, and focuses on delivering an intervention program that facilitates the future development and learning of children with social, emotional and behavioural challenges. Its service to students and families is an integral component of *bestchance* and complementary to the other key priorities of early years, family support, children's therapy services and training opportunities.

bestchance Philosophy

The early years are the building blocks for later life. We recognise that children develop in the context of their families and that this needs to be the starting point for service delivery.

We provide an integrated environment that combines the elements of care, learning and laughter within childcare, kindergarten, early childhood intervention, primary education, child and family support and volunteer programs.

This philosophy is reflected in the following goals of Cheshire School:

- Each child is provided with an individualised program that is based on their needs, interests and wants.
- Each child is provided with positive and consistent guidance that promotes their self-esteem and confidence.
- The School is a safe, caring environment free from hazards.
- Children with additional needs are fully included in all programs.
- Diversity is embraced and celebrated.
- Educators treat all children and families equally and fairly.
- Educators not only identify any additional needs or barriers that children and/or their families may be facing but assist them in seeking support from other programs within *bestchance* or in the community.
- Families are encouraged to participate in their child's program and experiences.
- Educators work as a team, knowing and respecting each other's skills and strengths in order to provide the best care for each other.
- Educators are affirmed and encouraged to pursue professional development and further qualifications in order to continually improve the quality of the programs offered to children in their care.

Cheshire School Mission

By using contemporary research, evidence-informed practice and our team's expertise, we strive to fulfil every student's potential in a physically and emotionally safe learning environment. Through our program, students are empowered in their learning and transition back to the mainstream school system with renewed confidence.

Cheshire School Vision

Our vision is to be the leading provider in the specialist educational setting. We aim to be a centre of excellence committed to evidence-informed best practice in teaching students with social, emotional and complex behavioural presentations, leveraging contemporary research to have a positive impact on families.

Our Aim: Why we exist?

To fulfil every student's potential so they can successfully transition back to a mainstream educational setting.

Our Values

We see the potential in every student.	- Each student has an Individual Education Plan with clear learning and behavioural goals. - We have high expectations for every student. After every session students reflect on their engagement and receive positive feedback and guidance for improvement. - A Student Support Plan is designed for each student. It details tailored strategies to ensure that they are able to engage in their learning. - Rigorous initial assessment of each student's needs begins with observations in their current setting.
We believe every student deserves to experience joy in their learning.	- We provide an engaging and innovative learning experience, based on the Victorian Curriculum. - Students participate in a range of extra-curricular activities that help them to self-regulate. - Regular excursions and incursions linked to the Victorian Curriculum take our students beyond the core academic curriculum and further encourage each student to make deeper links with their learning. - We have a high staff to student ratio and so learning is modelled, scaffolded and supported.
We invest in caring and trusting partnerships.	- Our thorough intake process ensures we are the right program for families. - Our focus is building strong rapport when a student first starts at our School. - Our enrolment process clearly sets out the expectations for parents and carers and how we can support them during their child's journey. - To ensure the success of every student, we insist on all stakeholders being involved throughout the student's time at our School. - We hold regular parent and carer opportunities for collaboration throughout the term (formal and informal) to strengthen the parent/school partnership and improve student outcomes.

School Overview

Cheshire School is a small independent specialist school committed to helping every student experience success, belonging and renewed confidence in themselves as learners. As an interim specialist assistance school, our purpose is to reimagine what school can feel like for students who have experienced significant challenges with engagement, participation and connection in previous educational settings.

Our work centres on creating a safe, relational and responsive learning environment where students can rebuild trust, strengthen their sense of identity and develop the social, emotional, behavioural and learning strategies they need to thrive. Through highly individualised support, we aim to equip students with the skills, confidence and self-understanding required to successfully transition back into a mainstream or other appropriate educational setting.

For many of our students and their families, Cheshire School provides an important opportunity to interrupt a cycle of disengagement, repeated difficulty and negative experiences of school. Too often, these experiences can contribute to feelings of isolation, misunderstanding and reduced confidence, both as a learner and as a young person. At Cheshire, we seek to change that story by creating opportunities for students to experience success, connection and genuine belonging.

Our staff are deeply committed to the students and families they serve. Our practice is informed by evidence, strengthened through collaboration and grounded in strong relationships. We make it a priority to know each student well - their strengths, interests, needs and aspirations - and to work in close partnership with families, recognising that trust, communication and shared understanding are central to positive outcomes.

Ultimately, our hope is that every student who comes through Cheshire School leaves with a stronger sense of who they are, what they are capable of and what is possible for their future. By providing a purposeful stepping stone between challenge and opportunity, we aim to give every student the best chance to reconnect with learning, build confidence and thrive in their next educational setting.

Democratic Principles

The programs and teaching at Cheshire School support and promote the principles and practice of Australian Democracy, including a commitment to:

- Elected government
- The rule of law
- Equal rights for all before the law
- Freedom of religion
- Freedom of speech and association
- The values of openness and tolerance



Learning and Teaching at Cheshire School - 2025

At Cheshire School, we provide an engaging and individualised learning experience that supports each student to re-engage with their education in a meaningful way. Guided by the Victorian Curriculum, our teaching and learning program enables rich, integrated learning opportunities across subject areas, designed to spark curiosity and build connections between ideas.

Our approach to teaching is grounded in evidence-based practice. Through explicit instruction, thoughtful scaffolding, and timely, targeted feedback, students are supported to make consistent progress. Small wins are celebrated, and over time, students begin to see themselves as capable, confident learners - developing the habits and mindsets that lay the foundation for long-term success.

Every student has an Individual Education Plan (IEP), developed in close collaboration with families. These plans, reviewed twice a year, identify clear, achievable learning goals tailored to each child's needs and strengths. As students grow in resilience, motivation, and self-belief, they also develop vital social and emotional skills that enable them to form positive relationships, work collaboratively, and prepare for a successful transition back to mainstream education.

Throughout the year, students participate in a wide range of enrichment activities including soccer, gymnastics, dance and movement, swimming, and music. Digital technologies are purposefully integrated across the curriculum to enhance learning, engagement, and creativity.

Small class sizes - capped at 9 students - ensure each child receives personalised support. Every class is led by a teacher and supported by two Education Support Officers, creating a high staff-to-student ratio that allows for deep, meaningful connections and responsive teaching.

At Cheshire School, relationships are at the core of everything we do. We work closely with parents and carers to foster strong partnerships that accelerate student growth and build trust. By nurturing each child's strengths, celebrating their progress, and empowering them to contribute meaningfully to their communities, Cheshire School provides a pathway for students to rediscover the joy of learning and the confidence to thrive.

Standardised Assessments

All eligible students in Years 3 and 5 are provided the opportunity to undertake the annual NAPLAN assessments as per their entitlement.

Student Progress

At Cheshire School, student progress is at the heart of our work. Every child has an Individual Education Plan (IEP), carefully developed to reflect their unique learning needs, strengths, and goals. These personalised plans outline targeted strategies, supports, and interventions designed to help each student experience success.

Collaboration is central to this process. Parents and carers, allied health professionals, and school staff work together to set priorities and co-design learning goals that are meaningful and achievable. Student Support Group (SSG) meetings are held in Terms 1 and 3 to formally review progress and refine each student's plan as needed.

Throughout the year, teachers continuously monitor student development using a combination of formative and summative assessment tools. These include classroom observations, analysis of student work, and standardised assessments that provide data on academic growth. This ongoing

cycle of assessment ensures we are responsive to each student's progress and can adjust teaching approaches accordingly.

Formal reports are issued twice yearly, providing families with clear, comprehensive insights into their child's achievements and growth. These reports highlight progress in relation to the Victorian Curriculum and the student's personalised learning goals.

Cheshire School is committed to ensuring families understand where their child is on their learning journey. Our reporting framework helps communicate:

- Each child's position on the learning continuum;
- Their progress in relation to expected achievement standards and individual goals;
- Areas for further growth, and the next steps in their learning journey.

By maintaining open communication and a shared commitment to progress, we ensure every student at Cheshire School is supported to thrive - academically, socially, and emotionally.

Student Attendance

The rate of attendance for the 2025 year as per the annual student attendance data was:

Prep	N/A
Year 1	47%
Year 2	65%
Year 3	61%
Year 4	74%
Year 5	84%
Year 6	84%

Cheshire School is committed to supporting regular school attendance, in line with the *Australian Education Act (2013)*, which requires school-aged children to attend full-time unless valid and reasonable circumstances apply.

We work in partnership with families to ensure all students attend school regularly and are supported in doing so. Consistent attendance plays a vital role in student wellbeing, learning, and progress.

Key Attendance Expectations:

- All enrolled students are expected to attend school every day, unless there are valid reasons for absence.
- Illness or other exceptional circumstances are considered reasonable grounds for absence.
- Parents and carers are responsible for ensuring their child attends school and for notifying the school promptly if they are unwell or unable to attend.
- Absences must be explained by a written note, email, or phone call to the school.
- Student attendance is recorded twice daily - morning and afternoon - by classroom teachers.
- Unexplained absences are followed up by our School Support Officer as soon as practicable on the same day.
- Student attendance records are maintained carefully and may be requested by relevant government departments or during enrolment audits.

We understand that attendance can be a complex issue for some families, particularly given the challenges our students may face. Our team works proactively to support families in navigating these challenges, ensuring that students feel safe, welcomed, and ready to learn each day.



TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS	
Doctorate	0%
Masters	20%
Graduate	0%
Graduate Certificate	40%
Bachelor Degree	40%

Advanced Diploma	0%
No Qualifications Listed	0%

STAFF COMPOSITION	
Head of School (Headcount)	1
Teaching Staff (Headcount)	5
Teaching Staff (FTE)	4.5
Non-Teaching Staff (Headcount)	6
Non-Teaching Staff (FTE)	5.29
Indigenous Teaching Staff (Headcount)	0

Staff Participation and Professional Development

At Cheshire School, we recognise that the quality of student outcomes is underpinned by the expertise, capability and wellbeing of our staff. In 2025, our team continued to demonstrate a strong commitment to professional growth through a range of learning opportunities aligned with the school's priorities of safety, inclusion, trauma-informed practice and evidence-based teaching.

Whole-school professional learning focused on strengthening our capacity to support students with complex social, emotional and behavioural needs. Staff participated in First Aid and CPR training, the Berry Street Education Model (4-day Foundation Course), Designing Sensory Spaces, mandatory child safety and reporting obligations, and ASCIA Anaphylaxis training. Targeted role-specific learning included Read Write Inc. (RWI) training, strategies to support learning and engagement in the classroom, psychological health and safety, and participation in the Victorian Special Assistance Schools Network.

This ongoing investment in professional learning reflects our belief that continuous improvement is essential to meeting the diverse needs of our students and families. By building staff knowledge, confidence and capability, we continue to foster a safe, responsive and high-quality learning environment where every student has the opportunity to thrive.

Child Safety

Cheshire School takes a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and is fully committed to ensuring that its strategies, policies, procedures and practices meet all Child Safety Standards as specified in Ministerial Order No. 1359 (2022).

Key Areas of Focus

Throughout the year, the School continued to strengthen its approach to child safety by:

- embedding sustainable child safety practices across all areas of school operations;
- ensuring students, families, staff, volunteers and contractors had access to appropriate information, guidance and support;
- strengthening an inclusive and child-centred culture of safety;
- monitoring the implementation of relevant child safety policies, procedures and practices; and
- promoting shared responsibility for safeguarding across the whole school community.

Key Achievements in 2025

Significant progress was made across a number of areas, including:

- staff actively contributing to the development and implementation of the School's Child Safety Strategy;
- reviewing and updating child safety policies and procedures to ensure alignment with current standards and principles;
- proactively implementing measures to maintain a safe, secure and protective environment for all students;
- embedding Child Safety as a standing agenda item at staff meetings to support ongoing discussion, reflection and accountability;
- maintaining regular communication with families through newsletters to reinforce the shared responsibility for child safety;
- maintaining and strengthening school-wide risk management processes, including the School Risk Register; and
- providing student safety education through a range of internal and external programs.

External workshops, including sessions facilitated by SECASA, supported students and families to build understanding of respectful relationships, personal boundaries, consent and protective behaviours.

Social and Emotional Learning

Cheshire School's daily whole-school Social and Emotional Learning program continued to play an important role in supporting student safety and wellbeing. Learning was informed by a range of evidence-based resources, including *My Wellbeing Journal*, *Moozoom*, *Bounce Back!* and the *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* program.

Key areas of learning included:

- understanding emotions and developing self-regulation strategies;
- building respectful, inclusive and safe relationships;
- recognising unsafe situations and knowing how to seek help;
- developing resilience, empathy and inclusion;
- understanding rights, responsibilities and ethical decision-making; and
- identifying trusted adults and developing personal networks of safety.

Building Staff Capability

Professional learning remained an important component of Cheshire School's child safety approach. Staff participated in learning focused on:

- legislative requirements under the Child Safe Standards;
- mandatory reporting obligations;
- responsibilities under the Reportable Conduct Scheme;
- maintaining a school-wide culture of zero tolerance for child abuse; and
- safeguarding considerations for children with disability.

Our Ongoing Commitment

Cheshire School remains committed to continuous improvement, transparency and shared accountability in all aspects of child safety. We will continue to work in partnership with students, families, staff and the broader school community to strengthen a culture in which every child feels safe, respected, heard and supported.

Zero Tolerance to Child Abuse

At Cheshire School, we maintain an uncompromising commitment to the safety, wellbeing and dignity of every child. We have zero tolerance for child abuse in any form and recognise that children with complex social, emotional and behavioural needs may experience increased vulnerability. For this reason, safeguarding, advocacy and student empowerment remain central to our work.

Listening to and Empowering Students

We recognise that children communicate in many different ways and that behaviour can often provide important information about a child's needs, experiences and sense of safety.

Our staff are committed to listening carefully, responding with curiosity and respect, and supporting students to communicate their views, preferences and concerns. Wherever possible, students are actively involved in decisions that affect their safety, wellbeing and participation at school.

Responding to Concerns

Cheshire School responds promptly, sensitively and appropriately to all concerns relating to child abuse or harm.

Any disclosure, allegation or concern is taken seriously, and students are provided with appropriate support throughout the response process. The School acts in accordance with all relevant legal, regulatory and professional obligations, with the safety and best interests of the child remaining the primary consideration.

Promoting Cultural Safety, Inclusion and Equity

Cheshire School is committed to creating a community in which diversity is respected, inclusion is actively promoted and every child has the right to feel safe, valued and able to participate.

We welcome students and families from diverse cultural, linguistic, religious and social backgrounds and are committed to:

- promoting the cultural safety, identity and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children;
- supporting the cultural safety, inclusion and expression of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;

- ensuring children with disability are respected, included and provided with equitable opportunities to participate fully in school life; and
- fostering a culture in which individual differences are recognised, valued and supported.

Partnering with Families

Our commitment to child safety extends to the families and carers who form an important part of the Cheshire School community.

Families are provided with clear and accessible information about the School's child safety practices, policies and expectations. We work in partnership with parents and carers to strengthen awareness, encourage open communication and support timely responses to any child safety concern.

Zero Tolerance for Discrimination

Cheshire School has zero tolerance for racism, gender-based discrimination, religious discrimination, disability discrimination or any other behaviour that undermines the dignity, safety or inclusion of another person.

Any concerns or incidents are taken seriously and addressed in accordance with the School's policies, values and commitment to a safe and respectful learning environment.

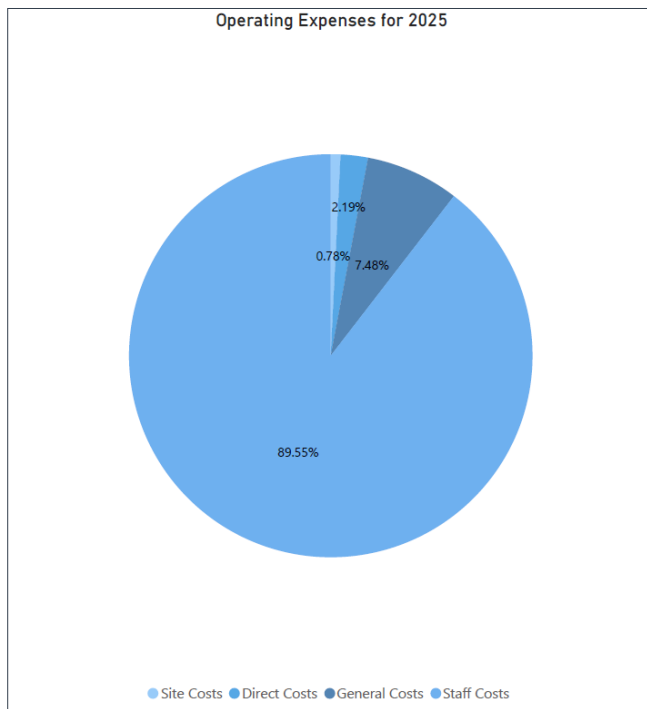
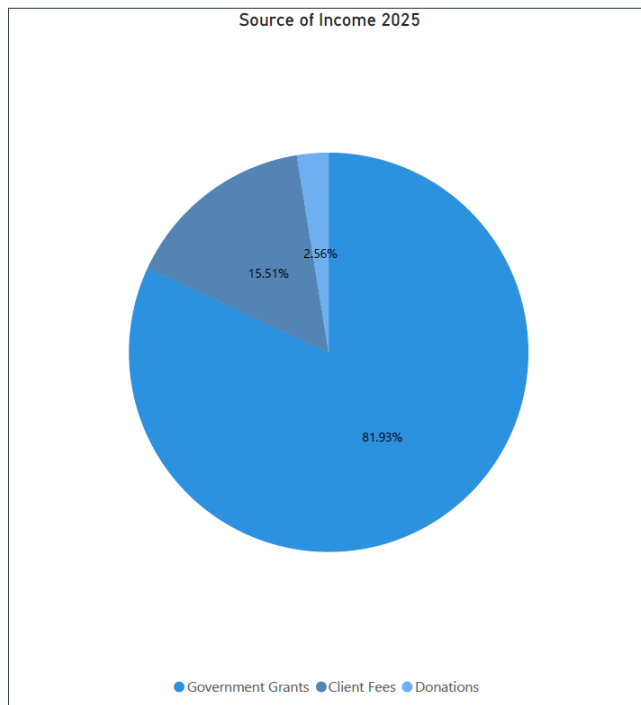
Shared Responsibility

Child safety is everyone's responsibility. Through strong relationships, clear expectations, inclusive practice and shared accountability, Cheshire School continues to build a community where every child is safe, heard, respected and supported to thrive.



Financial Operating Revenue and Expenses for Year Ending 2025

NOTE: The School's financial performance information has been provided to the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC) and will be available for the community to access from their website at www.acnc.gov.au.



Contact Information

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Company Information

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