

**The Joy of Discovery**

**THE JOSEPH VARGA SCHOOL**

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*ABN: 84 002 785 775*

**The Annual Report 2008**

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*for the year ended December 31, 2008*



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The information contained herein is designed to meet the school performance information specified in Schedule 2 of the Australian Government's Schools Assistance (Learning Together - Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Regulation 2005 and the educational and financial reporting requirements for the 2008 reporting year as laid out in Section 3.10 of the Registered and Accredited Individual Non-Government Schools (NSW) Manual.

**THE JOSEPH VARGA SCHOOL**

**THE ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED  
31 DECEMBER 2008**

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## A Message from the Chairperson of the School Board

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The Joseph Varga School, over the last year in particular, has forged closer alliance with State and Federal Education authorities, who have come to recognize its comprehensive and unique status, as well as the efficacy of the JVS Program.

The School Board recognizes that this achievement is due to the high standard of dedication and professionalism of both its core staff leaders and the teaching staff as a whole. The past year has seen the JVS make incredible impact, with achievements such as their Wilson's Promontory excursion and the School's participation in the Variety Club Bash. These activities were in addition to the usual JVS educational and extra-curricular program.

Once again, The JVS Board met on a regular basis throughout the past year, with all members from the 2007 year still serving in 2008. It was a privilege for all the Board to be involved in activities to support the JVS, given the depth of commitment of the active School "family".

The Board continues to forge closer liaison with The Principal Team and Staff of The School, and we hope to even further improve the quality of all resources within and available to the school.

John Feller  
**Chairman**

## Author's Notes

The Annual report is a requirement of the **NSW Board of Studies** and is posted on their Web site every year. As such the following must be evident in the Report. A message from the school's key body, enrolment policies of the school, a list of professional learning undertaken by teachers, a report on average teacher attendance and the proportion of teaching staff retained by the school. Also some description of some of the actions the school has undertaken to promote respect and responsibility. Furthermore, a brief statement highlighting relevant aspects of the school's context, programmes and/or policies should be outlined. Moreover, a level of community involvement in school activities, retention of student enrolments and resolution of issues should be commented on in the Report. Student performance in State wide tests, the School Certificate and Higher school certificate should also be outlined. Adherence to Child Protection procedures should be covered and an overall financial statement about the school's financial position should be detailed in this Report.

*The Principal Team* at The Joseph Varga school are *Suzi Feller* and *Paul McGrath*

A.G.Hall

## **1.0 Introduction**

The Joseph Varga School is registered as a Special, non-profit, non-government school for children from 5 to 18 years of age, with a particular interest in providing educational programmes for the Individual child. The school is organised so that children in need with learning disabilities, conduct disorders, and/or emotional disturbances can learn in a “Safe” and “Stimulating” environment. In many senses the philosophy of the school aims to guide individual development in the context of society through the recognisable stages of development towards perceptive understanding and responsible self-direction.

## **Enrolment**

### **2.1 Policies & Procedures**

The Joseph Varga School is an independent nondenominational School that specializes in working with students who have special needs.

These special needs include emotional, behavioral, intellectual, sensory, physical and/or multiple disabilities.

Students initially come to this co-educational School:

- on referral from other schools, intervention agencies, and/or doctors, psychologists, therapists; *and/or*
- after a recommendation by the parent/s or guardian of the child; *and/or*
- in response to press advertisements and media exposure.

The Principal Team of the School determine if a prospective student satisfies, and will continue to satisfy, the criteria for enrolment in the special education services of The Joseph Varga School (JVS).

Initially, assessment documentation supplied by specialists with relevant qualifications is evaluated thoroughly.

A face-to-face interview, observation, informal testing and dialogue with the parent/s and the child, are also all conducted.

Such steps help to determine if the child meets the criteria for placement at the School.

The insight of the parents (e.g. about the past history of the child; their values, priorities) and what the child wants from the School, are also important when considering the enrolment of the child.

The School thus makes an initial assessment of the child's strengths, interests and areas of weaknesses across psychological, physical, emotional and educational factors. If the student satisfies the special education service criteria and the School can meet the needs of the child, given the current School enrolment and resources, and all

parties are satisfied, the child is offered a place at The Joseph Varga School.

At the time of enrolment it is made explicit that the child's home is expected to support the ethos, policies, programmes, rules of the school, including regular attendance, as a prerequisite for continuing inclusion and enrolment.

## **2.2 Placement**

Before placing the child in a particular class, the Principal Team and Teachers consider what is in the best interest of the child in terms of:

- the chronological age of the child;
- the developmental profile of the child; and
- the suitability of a target teacher's programme to the child.

There are currently four mixed-grade or mixed-aged classes at the School, with one class catering for Grades K-6, one class catering for Grades 6-9, one class catering for Grades 7-10, and the final class catering for Grades 9-12.

Occasionally, it may be necessary to make adjustment to some of the criteria used for the class placement, due to the specific needs of the child.

At the time of this publication there are currently 38 students at the School and they are distributed across the four classes.

Continuing enrolment is subject to a student's adherence to School rules governing regular attendance, appropriate conduct, pastoral care, behaviour management, and the payment of School fees.

## **2.3 Student Population**

Students enrolled at The Joseph Varga School can be drawn from anywhere in the Sydney Metropolitan Area, since it is a Comprehensive School, with an Inclusion Policy not restricted to students professionally diagnosed in particular regions.

Students thus come from a wide range of backgrounds, with more boys than girls often enrolled.

'Out-of-area' students, as far a field as overseas and NSW country, with parent support, deliberately move to the city, in order to specifically attend the School.

The number of students enrolled at the JVS at any given time throughout the School year can vary significantly due to the nature of this unique population of students with special needs.

In accepting referrals from a range of different professionals and organizations, on an irregular basis, some children in crisis with severe emotional disturbances and behaviour disorders can be admitted immediately, as the need arises.

7.

Overall increases in enrolment are kept to a minimum, with the School's charter intent on deliberately keeping the School small, intimate and caring, as a family !

Such a priority ensures that The Joseph Varga School can use this 'homely' feeling in order to maximize the advantages of individualizing and personalizing instruction.

Each student is therefore made to feel welcome and valued, with the dignity of every individual respected in the School's highly Differentiated Curriculum.

Keeping in mind the School's status as a 'Public Benevolent Institution', a decision is made to, avoid where possible, declining a prospective enrolment on the basis of limited financial resources of parent/s.

In cases where the parent/s or guardians of a prospective student have been confirmed to have limited capacity to pay full tuition fees, a placement to such disadvantaged children with special needs may be still available.

Enrolments are primarily thus a direct function of the nature and number of referrals made to the School, some of which are made on an emergency or crisis basis, with other more formal enrolment guidelines also adopted in other cases.

The pattern of enrolments at the School is nonetheless gradually changing due to the School being able to now offer in NSW the School Certificate (2004) at Stage 5 and the Preliminary/Higher School Certificate (2005) at Stage 6.

This has seen and will continue to see an increase in the number of enrolments in Grades 8-12, while Primary School enrolment should be fairly stable.

As each year passes, there is an increased likelihood that more and more of the secondary students will be successfully integrated into mainstream settings, due to a reduction in the incidence of emotionally and socially inappropriate behaviours.

It should be stressed that the School population is atypical in that all students suffer from emotional, behavioural and/or learning disabilities and most have not been able to attend other schools throughout Sydney.

The Joseph Varga School, more particularly, is viewed as the final chance at schooling for children who have been unable to function in other mainstream School settings, or have been excluded from them.

There is thus a greater likelihood that more students at the School will be resident in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region of Sydney due to the proximity of their homes to the School location, with a variety of external services also involved in the ongoing management of enrolled students.

An important priority here is to eliminate risk amongst a cross-section of students with an array of developmental disabilities on the spectrum of enrolled children.

With this rationale in mind, classes are inter-related, with, where appropriate, a *flow* occurring between them according to individual need, and in accordance with a ceiling of about ten pupils in each class.

Students tend to *grow* into placement in a particular stream (e.g. in the High school, Regular, Adjusted, Functional may apply) according to his or her own Academic, Emotional and/or Life Skill profiles.

### **3.0 Student Welfare Policies**

A key reason a child is enrolled at The Joseph Varga School concerns the genuine care the School Staff has about the **welfare, safety and well being** of each child.

This *duty of care* and *advocacy role* includes voicing the rights of the child and involves equally assisting each child to become a contented, caring, whole human being able to function successfully in the community.

Such an objective underlies the School's Pupil Welfare policies, as well as the School's total Curriculum, including its pastoral role in terms of resolving problems.

In this holistic sense the School seeks to provide a personalized environment that:

- minimizes risk of harm and ensures individual students feel secure;
- supports students' physical, social, academic, spiritual, emotional growth;
- provides welfare that develops a sense of self-worth, dignity, development.

The School believes that child (and home) problems can be solved by the School and its teachers primarily being informed, caring, sensitive and supportive.

This intervention aims to be both positive and constructive, with moves made to eradicate any form of prejudice, discrimination, abuse by any child upon any other person.

All children are constantly made to feel wanted, and valued, as members of "one big, happy family".

The School's Pupil Welfare policies embrace:

- (i) Child Protection;
- (ii) Security;
- (iii) Codes of Conduct, Behavior Management and Discipline;
- (iv) Pastoral Care;
- (v) Personal Development;
- (vi) Communication;
- (vii) Complaints and Grievance Resolution.

The policies in these areas are being continuously refined to enhance their effectiveness.

Welfare policies are also addressed as components in the Functional Skills, Personal Development and Behavioral aspects of the School's Curriculum, with the full text of such Policies and Curriculum accessible, or obtainable, on request to the Bursar.

### 3.1 **Child Protection**

The most important priority in the ethos of the School is to provide a '**Safe** and **Supportive Environment**' for enrolled students, from Curriculum, Procedural and Legislative points of view.

Guidelines from the *NSW Ombudsman* and the *Commission for Children and Young People*, through such legislation as the '*Child Protection Legislation Amendment Act 2003*', have helped to shape the development of School policy and codes in this area.

Implicit in these standards is the mix between the School's mission statement, philosophy, status as a '*Public Benevolent Institution*' and its *Duty of Care*.

As such, the policy addresses areas that impinge on all kinds of material and psychological safety, embracing the likely impact of all kinds of Neglect and Abuse, including physical, emotional, verbal, financial, and so on.

In *advocating* and *following through* on such policy, both a Preventative and Response focus is incorporated into its ambit.

The definition of the policy's terms of reference, implicating such areas as 'allegation', 'reportable conduct', 'misconduct', 'procedural fairness' are subject to scrutiny, on an ongoing basis, by experts both within the school community, and independent of it.

The context for such considerations is always, however, predicated on the School's own Risk Assessments of all inputs that are carried out to the highest standards.

It is considered incumbent upon all teachers employed to firstly report children 'At Risk' of neglect, harm, abuse to the Delegated Authority, being The Principal Team, or 'Head of Agency' (HOC), or their Nominee, as specified legally.

The Principal Team then ascertains whether there is sufficient grounds to 'Notify' the NSW Department of Community Services and/or other Outside Agencies.

In order to guarantee the safety of children, it is important to state that Child Protection includes what occurs in the Home, as well as in the School, so that the appropriateness of parent and teacher or employee behaviours is caught in this net.

Employee conduct that is considered appropriate, in the process of managing and caring for children at The Joseph Varga School, is carefully defined.

10.

Such a decision ensures that all parties involved feel comfortable and secure with the relevant code of conduct.

There are also procedures in place to augment professional development in this respect, and, if necessary, to internally and externally investigate allegations of any nature of teacher conduct, according to established protocols, with explicit consequences.

In this respect, *Child Protection* issues arise as ‘Key Elements’ in the *Personal Development, Health and Physical Education* curriculum area, where they are treated as aspects of *Prevention*, with the goal, *Self-Help*.

This impacts on such themes as ‘recognizing abuse, power in relationships, protection strategies, the right to say ‘no’ and techniques of communicating.’

Informing interested parties that copies of all relevant policies are available for perusal further raises awareness of Child Protection in the home and in the community.

Such a decision ensures the policies remain demystified and transparent to all of the parties involved.

Any concerns about such issues can be clarified by contacting The Principal Team and/ or The Deputy Principal.

Contingency arrangements are in place too through the School’s own support network of specialists.

This further helps ensure policies continue to remain subject to scrutiny by keeping them current, relevant, alive, flexible, so as to accommodate children who display a diverse range of behaviours.

In 2008, *Child Protection* policies were amended, with fuller copies of them available on request to the Bursar.

Initiatives in 2008 included a closer examination of the definitions involved in the policies and procedures, particularly with respect to what constitutes 'at risk'.

### 3.2 Security

It is one thing for the School to provide a Safe learning environment; it is another thing to make sure that this learning environment is Secure for all students.

The implications of this statement entail that both students and teachers need to interact in a work-place environment that safely enables mutual support, respect and trust, so that the optimum well-being of all involved can prevail.

The School facilitates the security of this interaction by implementing certain measures that, in its professional judgment, will provide the confidence both students

and staff require.

These measures include:

- appropriate levels of supervision;
- security of buildings;
- procedures in case of fire;
- use of grounds and facilities;
- travel on School-related activities;

The detailed requirements and procedures involved in implementing these measures are regularly evaluated for their compliance with the School's protocols in these areas.

Clearly, in an area, such as Supervision, School staff will ensure All students are adequately cared for and supervised while undertaking both on-site and off-site activities.

Although the nature and amount of the supervision will vary according to the type of activity, the profile of the students, and the degree of safety, involved, teachers are expected to be perceptive and vigilant, as well as preemptive in their management.

Routines have also been clearly established in cases of fire with two fire drills per year for fire and other emergencies, as well as during travel, so students and staff can internalize the procedures involved.

In 2008, *Security* policies were amended and put in writing, with fuller copies of them available on request to the Bursar.

Initiatives in 2008 included a closer examination of supervision protocols whilst on sport, excursions and term camps.

### **3.3 Codes of Conduct, Behaviour Management and Discipline**

The School has in place a '*Code of Conduct*', incorporating specific rules and directives that regulate the rights and responsibilities of students and staff within The School Community.

These implicate the Management of Behaviour, and Discipline, as much as Serious Incidents.

#### *Behaviour Management*

Students are required to abide by the School's Rules and to follow the directions of teachers and other people with authority, delegated by the School.

The behavior of individuals in the classroom and in the school is managed in accordance with specific principles and outcomes.

These are continuously monitored through the Individual Education Programme for each child.

Maxims include:

- (a) Inappropriate behaviour is symptomatic of interrelated underlying factors.
- (b) Aberrant behaviour may well be a means of communication.
- (c) Maladaptive behaviour may be a response to underlying learning problems.
- (d) All behaviours have consequences that can be used to modify behaviours.
- (e) Therapies must try to be positive in nature and encourage self-management.

The school programme, put differently, is concerned with using personal social skills, including self-concept, self-esteem to help manage values, attitudes, and behaviours.

Such highly individualized programmes depend on the collection, analysis and use of data to help formulate suitable intervention techniques.

Obedying school rules, respecting others, and more serious issues such as bullying, abuse, also fall under the umbrella of such school's welfare policies.

The School engages a Behavioural Specialist, as Principal, to Coordinate and Implement its Policies and Procedures in this key area of functioning within the administration and teaching roles of the School.

Matters of student School leadership is also instigated and monitored as an integral component of this responsibility, with all students given the opportunity to directly participate in this system, equally!

In 2008, Behaviour Management policies were amended and improved, with fuller copies of them available on request to the Bursar.

### Discipline

The Joseph Varga School is committed to consistently and positively caring for whole individuals in need.

There is only ever a need for discipline, if this programme breaks down, or the level of stress that individuals exhibit, becomes overwhelming, undermining the School ethos.

The School, in essence, strives to provide a *stress-free*, family-oriented educational environment that avoids the need for discipline.

The ultimate goal becomes 'Self-Discipline' through self-control, self-regulation and the development of the skills required to self-manage and self-monitor.

13.

It is School policy, to reiterate, that the virtues of orderly conduct and polite manners are also at all times upheld.

Discipline problems can frequently be pre-empted, redirected or rectified before they occur within classrooms and the school generally, by a firm, sensitive, consistent approach.

This ensures disciplinary matters can be dealt with quickly and effectively in a positive and productive manner, as they may arise naturally in real-life situations, both within and outside the school.

In this mix, it is also not unusual for 'Negotiation' and 'Conflict-Resolution Techniques' to be implemented by the trained teachers and/or specialists, according to need.

Such School staff also work as active listeners and can be humorous to help diffuse volatile situations.

Where a student nevertheless consistently disregards rules, disobeys instructions, or otherwise engages in conduct which causes or may cause harm, discomfort, inconvenience, embarrassment to the School, staff members or other students; the student may be subject to disciplinary action.

The disciplinary procedures undertaken by the School will vary according to the seriousness of the alleged offence.

In relation to all matters to be investigated, and if necessary, disciplined, students will be informed of the nature of the allegation and given an opportunity to respond to the allegations.

This primarily involves 'The Right To be Heard', as an aspect of 'Procedural Fairness', yet does not necessarily involve 'The Right To Appeal' over all matters.

For more serious incidents, the parents are again informed of the procedural steps to be followed in dealing with the matter.

In dealing with a spectrum of inappropriate behaviours, consequences can vary *from* the deprivation of privileges (such as 'break or recess time') *to* being 'Conferenced' by a teacher panel, *to*, in more serious cases, the temporary 'Suspension' of students.

Neither 'Corporal punishment' nor 'Expulsion' are included in The School's 'Code of Conduct', with respect to penalties.

The nature of Penalties are determined and imposed using the Profiles and Prior Record of the student/s involved, on that scale from admonition, detention to suspension.

The School's Counselor, Behaviour Management Specialist and Expressive Therapist work together to best ascertain Disciplinary measures and their implementation.

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Following the introduction of the Child Protection Legislation Amendment Act 2003, certain forms of teacher behaviour are considered appropriate and inappropriate.

In this respect, in comforting, managing, disciplining, interacting, when it comes to managing children with special needs, certain classes of conduct, and trivial or negligible contact, are considered appropriate.

This caring contact is deemed integral to carrying out the curriculum of the School.

In 2008 no major changes were made to the school's discipline policies, though staff became even more familiar with subtler ways in which to redirect, manage and discipline inappropriate behaviours.

In addition, extra initiatives were implemented for Anti-Bullying, with students themselves able to report any such instances as part of a peer support program.

The full text of the School's discipline policies can be accessed, or obtained, on application to the Bursar of the School.

### **3.4 Pastoral Care**

Students are made aware of, and have access to, appropriate pastoral care Support Services, and access to, and use of, Counseling within the School.

This involves access to the full range of Specialist services within the School (e.g. emotional, behavioural, expressive, academic), as well as Therapeutic and/or Specialist services outside the school, including medical, speech pathology, occupational health, and so on.

Given the School is established for students with Special Needs, the Resources available are made particularly explicit to students, to ensure that they understand the comprehensive range of what is on offer, as the School does too with their parents.

An appropriate level of support is implemented in such a way that it does not unnecessarily disrupt the in-class education of the students involved.

Students requiring Health and/or Medical services, such as Emergency and regular Medication, are assisted to access these in an appropriately unobtrusive manner, with all such regimes systematically logged by delegated personnel.

The Bursar similarly maintains Critical Incident reports, and implements Sick Bay procedures which in 2008 were further refined to make them run more smoothly.

Individual class teachers administer their own Homework policies, bearing in mind the individualized needs of the students involved.

The full text of the School's pastoral care policies can be accessed, or obtained, on application to the Bursar of the School.

### 3.5 **Personal Development**

Up to now, Pupil Welfare has tended to stress the respect children have for each other and for teachers, the School and the community.

The emphasis is now on the respect individuals have for themselves as a prerequisite for learning to respect, relate to and care for others.

Such a focus concerns: (i) self-esteem, self-concepts, (ii) social skills, relationships, (iii) crisis care, and (iv) *transition* to mainstream schools, workplaces, leisure, living!

It is the interaction between these four areas that help to determine the extent of a child's overall personal development.

#### Self-esteem

The School is founded on the belief that children can and do learn if they feel positive and good about themselves; with good things coming to good people!

Much effort and time is assigned to fostering the self-esteem of individuals through various initiatives, ranging from small groups to the '*Special Person Of The Day*'!

If a child is confident about his/herself and one's persona, then the child is more able to develop suitable social skills and relationships.

#### Relationships

Due to the size of The Joseph Varga School, 'Interactions' are a very important aspect of the children's daily routine and life-skills education.

The ability to socialize with and relate to others, both inside and outside the School is, therefore, an integral part of the School philosophy.

The School actively encourages the development of friendships and relationships among children, with the quality of teacher/pupil relations exerting a powerful influence here.

It likewise shapes outcomes in such sensitive areas as 'bullying', 'stranger danger', 'sex education', 'discrimination'.

This focus on Personal Growth is of course not a separate area of the teaching programme; all subject areas incorporate factors of feeling and interacting in their teaching/learning processes.

The scope of the School's commitment to this area of welfare is evidenced by JVS relying on, for instance, the effectiveness of personal development camps, for every child each term, in order to help implement measurable outcomes for individuals.

These involve learning more about how to care about other children, adults, the community, the environment, in a very constructive, practical, useful, hands-on way!

In essence the camps enable students to 'Integrate' and apply what they have learnt and Internalized about their own welfare and that of others in purposeful ways!

As children develop control of particular social roles, skills and relationships, each child's repertoire is gradually increased, using a greater variety of everyday situations that may require more demanding or complex roles, skills, language, and so on.

For most of the children at The Joseph Varga School, the hallmark of personal development is thus *the transition* to mainstream options.

### Crisis care

Unfortunately, in the case of some of the children enrolled at The Joseph Varga School, this is not always possible, since individuals can be 'In Crisis' or desperately in need of *care!*

In its advocacy role, the JVS in its comprehensive programme may undertake to conduct additional counseling and arrange for the provision of meals, clothing and/or respite care, as support for children.

Underlying the strategy is a network of other professional services that can stabilize the overall ecology of the child's predicament, with a view towards neutralizing and extinguishing feelings of mistrust, alienation, loneliness, lack of love, insecurity!

As a baseline, children must feel good about themselves, feel cared about, with food in their stomachs, before they can reasonably be expected to learn or do anything!

With such essentials in place, alongside regular School attendance and ongoing care, the transition to mainstream education, employment and the community becomes more realistic.

### Transition

The School believes that this objective is attainable for all children at the School, even when distinct learning, emotional and/or behavioral difficulties are present.

As this stage, the School adopts certain procedures (e.g. visiting target schools, explicitly teaching to-be-used skills) in order to facilitate this transition.

Uppermost in the thoughts of the JVS is that its students will be able to function, survive and thrive in such settings, academically, behaviourally and emotionally!

Initiatives from 2006 up to and including 2008 included fine-tuning the interdisciplinary nature of the Curriculum addressed in the Personal Development Camp Programmes.

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The full text of the School's personal development policies can be accessed, or obtained, on application to the Bursar of the School.

### **3.6 Communication**

The School provides both formal and informal mechanisms to facilitate communication between those stakeholders with an interest in the student's education and wellbeing.

These may include communications between some or all of the following:

- student;
- parent or guardian or other significant family member/s of the student;
- teacher/s;
- counselor;
- The Principal Team, The Deputy Principal and The Board of Management;
- internal school and external specialists;
- representatives of appropriate government education, welfare, health departments;
- work-place stakeholders.

The School's policies in this area are continually being refined in order to enhance case management outcomes for the students involved.

Given that the School works in partnership with Sydney Distance Education High School (SDEHS), for instance, in some aspects of its Curriculum, The Joseph Varga School's (JVS) welfare policies are still in place for all students.

The integrity of the priority of Pupil Welfare, is, in other words, not compromised by whether the students participate 'at a distance', or on-/off-site, in any form of their teaching/learning!

All such outside personnel who work with students enrolled at the School are, furthermore, subject to the same *Child Protection Legislation Regulations*, as if they were working fulltime, at the School, on-site, with the students involved.

Therefore such students, be they studying *via* Distance Education, or participating in some other activity, off-site, will have equal access to all Welfare and Counseling Services, as any other student does!

In 2008, such policies remain unchanged, with the full text of the School's policies and procedures, including relations between SDEHS and JVS, accessible, or obtainable, on application to the Bursar of the School.

### **3.7 Complaints and Grievance Resolution**

There are policies in place so that matters of concern identified by parents, students, and/or community members can be raised with School authorities.

Such matters of concern are channeled through The Principal Team.

If a student, parent, teacher or employee of the School is, for instance, in any way dissatisfied with a specific aspect of the School's operation, he or she is encouraged to provide feedback, on a strictly confidential basis, to The Principal Team and The Deputy Principal

This information can be communicated in person, in writing, or electronically, with any complaint or grievance, in most circumstances, not to be provided through the agency of another person.

More general suggestions from parents about ways in which to improve the effectiveness of the School are also *channeled* through the Parent Committee.

The policy, as a general rule, includes a sequence of steps in its protocol.

After any complaint or grievance is tabled, The Principal Team will initiate a formal series of actions designed to quickly resolve the issue to mutual satisfaction.

A '*Negotiation*' strategy compatible with the rights and principles of '*Procedural Fairness*' is adopted in order to achieve this outcome.

In '*Being Heard*' and the '*Right To An Unbiased Decision*', those making the complaints need to feel and know that Equity and Justice prevail.

In situations, where an allegation is made against another person, the latter has the right to:

- \* know the basis of the allegation,
- \* know what information will be taken into account,
- \* know the process used to consider the matter,
- \* know how to respond to allegations, and
- \* know how to seek a review of the decision, if deemed necessary.

Such principles hinge on the contribution of impartial or unbiased evidence and decision-making related to the substance of the grievance, in terms of substantiating or justifying the complaint.

In order to expedite the matter, the procedure can involve:

- \* nominating an objective person to conduct the investigation without delay;
- \* ensuring that the person does not decide a case in which they have a conflict of interest;
- \* acting fairly and without bias;
- \* informing those involved of the substance, with as much detail as possible, of the allegation(s) or complaint(s) made against him or her;
- \* providing those involved with a reasonable opportunity to respond or put his/her case, either in writing or orally;
- \* genuinely considering the responses of all involved;

- \* making reasonable inquiries or investigations before providing any feedback to The Principal Team;
- \* considering all relevant available evidence, including evidence that supports the allegation as well as evidence that does not support the allegation;
- \* providing a preliminary view and the intended likely action to the person/s under investigation;
- \* informing the student, parent/s and significant others that the preliminary view can be commented upon or appealed to the school;
- \* allowing submissions from the complainant, student, parent/s and/or significant others before all such information about the above matter is conveyed to The Principal Team;
- \* The Principal Team, after objectively considering all such information, makes a final decision about the complaint or grievance, and the follow-up action to be implemented by the School.

If the person making the complaint, or the one, where appropriate, against whom the complaint is made, is not satisfied with The Principal Team's decision, he or she may directly appeal, in writing, to the Chairperson, of The Board of Management for The School, in order to try to reach a more satisfactory outcome.

The rationale behind the procedure rests on resolving the matter so all issues are aired.

In this procedure, the value of each specific complaint is confidentially respected.

In specific cases of grievance, involving say, a student's inappropriate behavior or attitude; in extraordinary circumstances, as mentioned elsewhere, a student may be 'Suspended' or 'Excluded' for a short period, after other strategies are employed.

The target student is nevertheless welcomed back after serving such a period, with a conditional contract usually in force for a designated period of time.

The school never 'Expels' a pupil from The Joseph Varga School.

In cases of Suspension and/or Exclusion, the elements of Procedural Fairness are again invoked, before The Principal Team, and/or The Board of Management, takes such a decision, after consultation with a panel of experts.

In 2008, there have been no changes to this Grievance and Complaint Resolutions Procedure.

The full text of School policies associated with complaints and grievance procedures, are accessible, or can be obtained, from the Bursar of the School.

### Summary

In summary, the School's Pupil Welfare Policies, work hand-in-hand with children's well-being and school academic/behavioral/transitional curriculum.

Ultimately, eclectic programmes of this nature will determine how successfully children will develop as contented, caring, whole human beings.

For such reasons, the full text of all relevant policies in the areas of, for example, *Child Protection, Security, Supervision, Codes of Conduct, Pastoral Care, Communication* and *Grievance*, are issued to all members of staff, as part of *The Staff Handbook*, with parent/s able to access such management policies.

As school and home work together, children will develop a better understanding of the self, so that these same children will in turn learn to respect, comprehend and even change the world, of which they are a part.

In this process, The Joseph Varga School believes that children learn from both teachers in the home and in the School, with dialogue between both settings vital!

#### **4.0 School Performance in Statewide Tests and Exams**

The Joseph Varga School has an unusual status as a School, being academically registered (K-12), and accredited, to offer the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate. We are now accredited and registered from 2009 to 2013 after successfully going through a full NSW Board of Studies inspection in 2008.

At the same time, the Minister for Education in New South Wales has designated JVS as a Special School for children with emotional and behavioural needs.

With respect to the academic performance of the School in National tests, the incongruity of the foregoing status can confound reporting.

This occurs because students can be exempt from such testing, since they attend a school for children with special needs.

Given the foregoing, and the small cell sizes involved, no tables are included in this report about School performance.

In 2008 students in years 5 -9 did the National Assessment program – Literacy and Numeracy tests, known as the Naplan test. Most of our students performed above the state bench mark.

Summary

In taking all of these results together, the small sample of School students performed reasonably well when compared with the cohort of students in the previous year 2007, and with students who attend Regular schools.

Such a finding reinforces the principle that Joseph Varga School students are in no way disadvantaged by attending what is often perceived to be a school for challenging and high-support need children.

Indeed, the curriculum of the School seems to function in a manner that enables it to individualize the educational, behavioural and transitional programmes of its pupils, so that they are more able to fulfil potential that they could not display elsewhere.

Senior High School Students

At the end of 2008, five(5) students successfully completed the Year 10 School Certificate, and its associated Mandatory Curriculum Requirements.

Two Joseph Varga School students were enrolled in the Year 11 Preliminary Higher School Certificate in 2008 and successfully completed the Life Skills certificate, in preparation for the Higher School Certificate.

Results achieved by the School Certificate students during 2008 were of a pleasing standard.

On balance, this group of students demonstrated that they could cope with the regular curriculum demands of the School Certificate

The competencies of these students is further borne out by their performance on the compulsory Tests administered, including English, Mathematics, Science, Australian Geography, History and Computing, with some students obtaining scores on these in Band 3 or above.

The Joseph Varga School is delighted that so many of the 2008 cohort of students have been able to succeed so well at the School Certificate, exceeding the number of JVS students who have managed to do this in the past.

Likewise, the school is delighted to acknowledge that its two Year 11 students in 2008 were able to cope with the adjusted curriculum. Our one year 12 student successfully completed the Life Skills course for year 12.

In the total cohort of students gaining the results and recognition they did, their achievements signal something else even more important, as these students move on to take up further study at Joseph Varga, or elsewhere, or employment.

It is clear that JVS students can be successfully reintegrated into mainstream settings, be they regular schools, TAFE programs, and/or work placements.

In so doing, the evidence strongly supports the school belief that challenging students, with the support of The Joseph Varga School, can and do make a successful Transition back into the community.

### Conclusions

When the overall performance of Joseph Varga School students is therefore considered in terms of Statewide and National Benchmarks, it is plain that the individualized programs of *continuous learning* at the School do indeed work!

The distinctive family-oriented ethos of the school would seem to work particularly well by creating meaningful opportunities for students who were once seriously '*at risk*' in the community.

It is beyond the scope of this report to detail how such Behavioural/Emotional growth works with Academic and Life skills, as reflected in specific outcomes in each of the Key Learning Areas of the School curriculum.

Suffice to say that students who were once 'at risk' academically and psychologically, are no longer 'at risk', with clear evidence of the Reduction in the Incidence of Socially and Emotionally Inappropriate Behaviours.

Remember, that it was such inappropriate attitudes, skills and behaviours that frequently caused the target students to be enrolled at JVS in the first place!

### **5.0 School Attendance, Retention Rates and Post School Destinations**

Being a Special School, the charter of The Joseph Varga School, with respect to school attendance and retention rates, works in a manner that could be different to one that may apply in a regular mainstream high school.

JVS attracts students who often already have professionally diagnosed emotional disturbances, psychiatric illness, behaviour disorders, among other multiple disabilities.

The nature of the specific problems presenting within the School population thus have a wide array.

Some problems maybe quickly resolved, as in the case of attitude towards attendance at school, where previously there might have been school phobia or truancy.

Other problems, on the other hand, may take a long time to resolve, whilst in some other cases, the problems are intractable!

#### School Attendance

Given the diverse nature and severity of these problems, the attendance rate at the school is quite astonishing. Approximately Ninety-Five Per Cent of students enrolled at the School in 2008, attended School on Average each School Day in 2008.

This rate of attendance is about the same as it was for 2007, indicating that both

the School curriculum and the School's enrolment policy are successfully working.

The school reinforces the importance of attending school on a regular basis at enrolment, to parents and children, regardless of the nature of the enrolled child's disabilities.

Accepting responsibility for school attendance, and to some extent, one's own independent learning, wherever appropriate, to put it simply, are regarded as key components of the child's personal contract with the school at enrolment.

### Retention Rates

In view of this spectrum, some students may, in the longer-term, be re-integrated into mainstream schools, in no less than two years.

The problems however expressed by other students may necessitate ongoing enrolment at the JVS, even, at times, for the remainder of their formal schooling.

### Rationale

Retention of students at The Joseph Varga School is not necessarily an indication of the success or failure of the School curriculum, but can rather be a product of the severity of the particular child's problems.

The duration of the enrolment can thus be interpreted as a product of a combination of pertinent factors.

These can and do include the diagnosis, prognosis and the Individualized Education Programme formulated by a team of doctors, parents, therapists and school staff.

The School plays a key coordination and monitoring role in this process because if a child is prematurely integrated back into an alternative (mainstream) setting, other difficulties can arise.

These can involve regression, loss of skills, and a diminishing self-esteem.

Part of the readiness for the mainstream will be the ability of the student to *let go* or *grow out* of the accepting, nurturing care environment provided by the JVS.

By doing so, the student will be able to *generalize* attitudes, understandings and skills, thereby being more prepared to embrace the mainstream.

A consideration of the data associated with the Actual and Apparent retention rates in secondary school sheds light on this interpretation.

Actual Rates

On Actual rates, in the year 2008, ten(10) school students left the school to take up placement in other schools, workplaces, institutions or at other places of learning.

The length of time these students remained enrolled at the School can be represented in the form of the following table.

<u>Time Enrolled</u>	<u>Number of JVS Students</u>
More than 4 years	2
3-4 years	0
2-3 years	4
1-2 years	4
Up to 1 year	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>

The picture to emerge suggests that when students are tracked for their enrolment periods at The Joseph Varga School, the environment does generally retain these students for reasonable periods, before being integrated into other settings.

On the whole, it would seem that if high-school students function in the environment for more than 6 months, there is a stronger likelihood that they will remain enrolled a lot longer.

Data associated with the periods of time Continuing Students in 2008 have been enrolled would seem to corroborate such a conclusion.

Apparent Rates

On Apparent rates of enrolment at the Primary and at the High school levels, in the years 2000-2008, according to Age, a table, applying at the Annual Census date, can be formulated.

	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08
11 years & less	10	9	7	4	7	10	13	15	14
12 years	5	2	4	3	5	5	3	4	3
13 years	4	6	1	5	6	5	5	5	7
14 years	7	4	14	2	4	5	8	4	3
15 years	5	3	3	13	2	4	5	7	2
16 years	3	5	2	2	8	3	2	3	3
17 years	1	2	3	2	1	6	2	1	4
18years & more	2	1	-	2	2	-	-	2	2

The cell numbers imply that the School has retained, on average, a similar total gross number of students, of around 35 students, regardless of whether old students leave and new students are enrolled.

The number of students, over this Nine-Year Period, in each cell is also to some extent relatively stable, with variations, occasionally, mainly due to an influx of referrals, or other factors.

With respect to the retention of high school students from Years 9 to Years 12, approximately covering the age groups of 15 years to 18 years+, it is frequently the case that students do not sustain their enrolment at The Joseph Varga School to complete the Higher School Certificate at the school.

However, most students (i.e. five(5) students who did so in 2008), did complete their School Certificates through the school, having begun their studies for this credential before Year 9.

### Post-School Destinations

Just why students do not continue their schooling to complete the Higher School Certificate through Joseph Varga is partly related to the fact that this credential through this school has only recently begun to be offered to students, as both a Regular and Life Skill credential.

Students are nevertheless 'catching on' to the idea, if expressions of interest from the 2009 cohort (i.e.5 students) in studying the Year 11 Preliminary Certificates, and the Year 12 Higher School Certificate through Joseph Varga, in 2009, is any guide.

For others in the 2008 cohort, a far more realistic post School Certificate option is to leave the School in order to change the environment for the final years of schooling by taking up Regular Preliminary and/ or HSC study elsewhere (2 students).

Alternatively, students can accept Full-Time Employment, TAFE training, and/or an Apprenticeship.

### Conclusions

In summary, the overall comparative attendance and retention numbers bear out the stable profile of The Joseph Varga School in the community.

Opportunities for growth are limited by the family-oriented ethos of the School, and by the size of its premises.

When all foregoing data is therefore combined, it is clear that the School has carried out its charter in terms of providing a balance between appropriately Retaining School students, and Integrating students, given the special needs of the individuals involved.

## **6.0 Teacher Qualifications and Standards**

At the end of 2008, five (5) qualified teachers working in the school environment are 'responsible for delivering the curriculum as described by the *Education Act 1990*'.

Each of these teachers has *formal teaching qualifications* as a graduate and has a **minimum** of four years' training at a *higher education institution within Australia, or as recognized within the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AEI-NOOSR) guidelines*.

In fact, one (1) of these teachers has an additional postgraduate and honors degree in a specialist area related to more than one Key Learning Area or Subject Area at the high School level. Another teacher has a Masters degree in Education.

There are nil (0) teachers who have '*qualifications as a graduate from a higher education institution within Australia, or one recognized within the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AEI-NOOSR) guidelines but lack formal teacher education qualifications*'.

There is also one (1) fulltime specialist working in the School environment, who has '*relevant successful teaching experience and appropriate knowledge relevant to the teaching context*'.

His role is to support the children's learning, especially in the area of Expressive Arts, as well as develop the acquisition of specific outcomes, in all areas of the curriculum, and augment the effectiveness of the teachers working in the school.

This area represents important priorities in the overall development and functioning of the holistic aspects of the children who are enrolled in the school, and seek to fulfill potential as appropriate, *lifelong, flexible*, self-disciplined learners!

## **7.0 Professional Learning**

All teaching staff undertake a range of professional development activities in order to

*continuously* improve their standard of teaching competence and effectiveness with respect to delivering the curriculum, incorporating Academic, Behavioral/Emotional and Transitional areas, as implied by the *Institute of Teachers Act 2004*.

Professional learning is defined as '*activities designed to develop the skills and understanding of personnel currently teaching in/and or leading schools to improve school performance/student outcomes and for which direct cost is incurred*'.

The School Executive Staff regularly participate in a number of seminars conducted by the *Association of Independent Schools*, covering a range of relevant areas

including curriculum, assessment, reporting and administration.

The School involves all Ten (10) School staff, including two (2) of the teacher's aides, in an intensive professional retreat program each year, for three days, to enhance classroom practice and psychotherapeutic intervention, including methodologies, resources, tests, organization and evaluation.

Other professional development activities undertaken by staff throughout 2008 include:

Pastoral care - assists teachers in pastoral care and specialist behavioral/emotional positions undertake their role including current issues in adolescent health and communication skills (3 staff participate);

Reporting - provides information on the Government's new reporting requirements for student reports (2 staff participate);

Visual Arts - assists teachers to use different means and media for self-expression (2 staff participate);

Science, Design & Technology - exposes teachers to the nature and role of innovation in the curriculum, and e.g. ways of manifesting and using sound (2 staff participate);

Pastoral Care - involves teachers in the NSW Anaphylaxis Training Program (6 staff participate).

*In 2008 two of our teachers received full professional registration with the NSW Institute of teachers.*

## **8.0 Teacher Attendance and Retention**

In 2008 the average daily staff attendance rate was 99%.

The proportion of staff retained from 2008 is approximately 100%.

Both of the above statistics indicate that The Joseph Varga School relies upon a teaching staff that is primarily very stable, and has been so for some time.

## **9.0 School-Determined Improvement Targets**

The School Achieved certain Priorities identified in different Areas of the School's 2008 Annual Report, including:

Teaching and Learning - In-house specialist services; Increased the intensity of their intervention so that the Behavioral and Expressive Curricula works more effectively in terms of Academic and Life-Skills Curricula;

Teaching Programmes: Revision of programmes including new Evaluation procedures;

Student Welfare - Child protection; Refined definitions, code, procedures, so staff are more informed about them, including their consequences for teaching/learning;

*Resources* - Revenue base; Increased rate of fee income for the School in order to help fund the purchase of more materials and facilities;

*Teaching & Learning/Public Exposure* - Arts programme; Formulated, implemented, installed and exhibited an arts programme at Circular Quay that enhances the students' self-esteem and sharing of their talents, so that the community could enjoy their works.

In the 2008 Annual Report, the Areas and Priorities identified for Improvement include:

*Teaching and Learning* - Improve numeracy intervention strategies and related learning outcomes across the school;

*Developing Curriculum:* Looking at innovative ways to present the curriculum.

*Student Welfare* - Fine-tune the cross-curricular nature of the term camp programs to augment their personal growth function, and build on the positive outcomes of peer group influences;

*Student Integration Programmes:* Examine and implement ways in which students can be more easily reintegrated into main stream settings.

### **10.0 Initiatives Promoting Respect and Responsibility**

The School places much importance on fostering mutual respect and a sense of personal, school and community responsibility through personal experience.

It does this primarily through a class and school-based programme in which students learn to care and share with a variety of living things, including other children, from different multi-cultural backgrounds, as well as animals and plants.

In learning to accept direct responsibility for their own actions with respect to their attitudes and actions towards other peers, as well as directly caring for the members of the school zoo, including reptiles, guinea pigs, rabbits, rooster, dog, and the school garden, they are better equipped and more able to assist others in the community.

In addition, students are actively encouraged and expected to participate in 'hands-on' school-based activities (e.g. cooking) to help others, as well as a Peer Support program to help develop skills for living.

Many of these initiatives are further consolidated through curriculum work (e.g. on stereotypes) that serves to reinforce the role of tolerance, respect and responsibility, in order to foster the growth of intention that leads to respectful actions.

It is the internalization of such caring attitudes that motivates students to, for instance, want to act, or support those who may be disadvantaged, or treated inappropriately, as intention is the key element to understanding and acting out accepting behaviors.

High-school students, as part of their Distance Education programs, also learn to come to this realization of respecting individuals, and the rights of others, as they mix with a diverse range of other students, as part of inter-school outings.

## **11.0 Parent, Student and Teacher Satisfaction**

The School encourages all members of its 'family' of parents, students and teachers to be actively involved in certain aspects of the School's life.

Parents, for instance, are encouraged to attend regular *Parent Committee* meetings, through which they are able to express their levels of satisfaction, as well as contribute recommendations that are in turn passed on to The Principal Team.

During 2008, the extent of parent involvement in such meetings is developing, especially given the new influx of parents over the last year.

Parent satisfaction, on the whole, is very positive, especially given parents' own first-hand knowledge of just how problematic their own child is, from both a behavioural and management point of view, notwithstanding academic learning issues.

Parent feedback, often solicited verbally, and in writing, by completing a questionnaire at least twice in 2008, could also at times question aspects of the Behavioural, Emotional and Academic curriculum, whilst seeking out specific advice about how to assist an individual child in the home.

One initiative in 2008 that has been particularly well received by students, parents and teachers, involves the Peer Support Program.

An unusual aspect of it encourages key students to report instances of inappropriate peer behaviors, to teachers, if they are viewed as disturbing, unsettling or leading to another child feeling unsafe in the school environment.

Issues of coping with difficult situations, resilience, effective communication, risk-taking and conflict resolution, are also addressed in the program.

All the parties involved have consistently reported a dramatic increase in the incidence of student supportive behaviours, since the initiative was introduced, matched by a corresponding decrease in behaviours that have been less supportive.

The finding that Student Attendance Rates are also at an all-time high would also seem to corroborate this trend.

With respect to teacher satisfaction in 2008, the team of staff seems to be content with the environment in and management of the School.

## 12.0 Financial Information

The Joseph Varga School is a Non-Profit Organization, being a Company Limited By Guarantee, Exempt from Income Tax and classified as a Gift Recipient by the ATO.

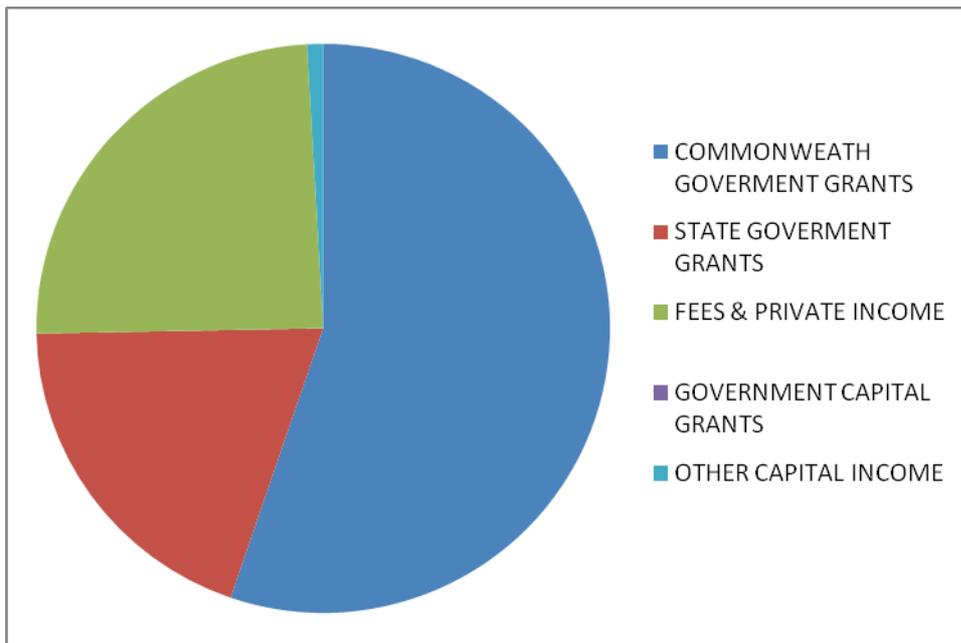
The financial information for 2008 indicates that The Joseph Varga School is solvent and has a strong, sound, solid net asset base, after Liabilities are offset against Assets.

### Revenue

The Total Operating Revenue of the School increased in 2008, compared with 2007, with more income received from Government Grants and Fees.

Donations and Fundraising, within Fees and Private Income, also increased in 2008.

**The major categories of Income for 2008 can be graphically summarized in the form of a pie graph.**



With respect to Revenue, it is noticeable that the School collects most of its income, as expected, from Commonwealth (51%) and State (22.8%) Government Grants.

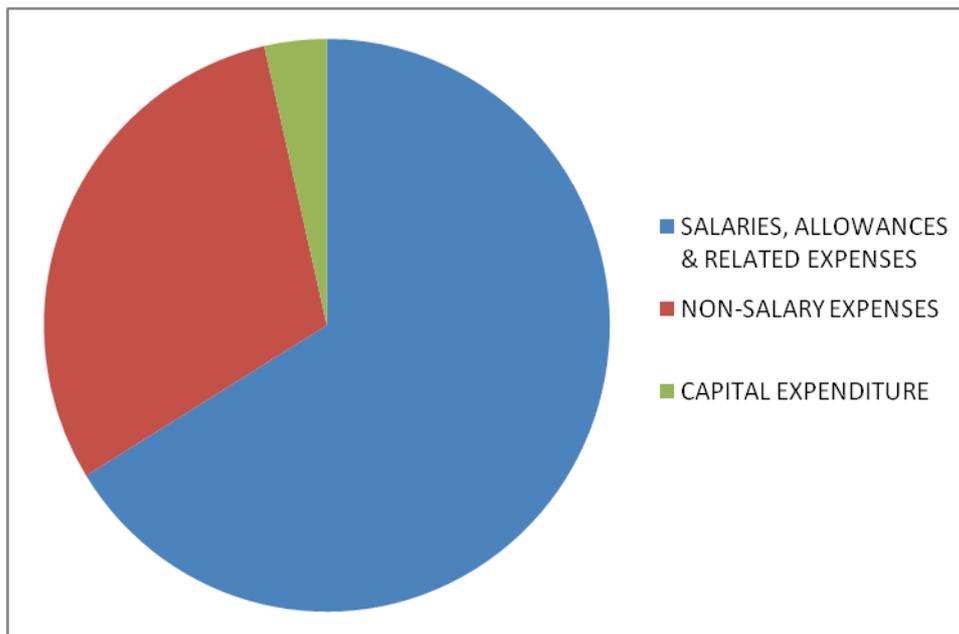
Student Tuition Fees are also higher in 2008, mainly due to the School making the collection of fees for all students a more important priority.

In 2008, the School hopes to build on these initiatives with the private sector to further increase its Operating Income by attracting corporate and private donors.

### Expenditure

The Total Operating Expenditure incurred by the school increased in 2008, with Salary Costs still being at high levels.

The major categories of Expenditure for 2008 can be summarized in a pie graph.



With respect to Expenditure, it is noticeable that the school incurs most of its costs, as expected, in relation to Salaries, Allowances and Related Expenses (67.8%).

Please note that these costs are partially funded by State and Commonwealth Recurrent Grants.

Teaching and Learning Expenses, along with Materials, Books and Administration (including Interest) costs, feature as key items in Non-Salary Expenses (31.5%).

The School purchased some new Capital resources in 2008, with a small allocation assigned to building maintenance.

### Balance

Overall, The Joseph Varga School produced a small operating profit, which is a

financial milestone for this small charitable organization.

Although there was an increase in Expenditure by the School in 2008, the corresponding increase in the total Revenue received by the school was greater and led to a small operating profit.

Given such good results, The Board of Management for The Joseph Varga School considers that its budget projections are sufficient to service any future shifts in the Income and/or Expenditure of the School.

### **13.0**     **Conclusions**

The educational and financial positions of The Joseph Varga School, in conclusion, complies with the professional standards and mandatory reporting requirements for all aspects of its performance.

In the view of The Directors of the School, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the school will be able to continue to function successfully as a Special School and ‘will be able to pay its debts as and when they become due and payable’.

The confidence of the Board about the School's future viability stems from the fact that the School continues to grow in terms of the success of its individual students, as well as from the ever-increasing referral rate by professionals to the School in 2008.

- This has helped to keep the demand for places at the School very high, and with it, certain economic benefits accrue at the School.

Even the challenge involved in accommodating the diversity of the students enrolled at the School, socio-economically and psychologically, does not deter the School from pursuing its goal to eliminate as much educational disadvantage as possible.

In the master plan of The Joseph Varga School, the Vision Statement calls for the School to constantly improve the quality of its service, rather than to increase its size.

As a result, those students in genuine need will be able to continue to experience and benefit from ‘*The Joy of Discovery*’; our school motto.