



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

University Department of Rural  
Health



# Primary School Speech Pathology Program

An innovative pilot project is underway at Mooroopna Park Primary School as part of a longer term early intervention strategy to address the high speech and language needs of students in the early years.

## Service Learning in Schools

The Going Rural Health team worked with staff at Mooroopna Park Primary School (MPPS) to develop Service Learning placements to address the needs of more than 40 identified school students with communication difficulties.

The school hosted two 4th year Speech Pathology (SP) students for 8 weeks in 2018. The students conducted speech and language assessment, conducted 1:1 therapy with students, ran a number of programs for small groups and helped to train the key teacher assistant supporting speech pathology programs.

Following the success of these placements, School Principal, Hayden Beaton, wanted to find a more ongoing solution for children to have access to speech pathology.

## Embedding speech pathology within the school

After successfully securing funding for a school based position, MPPS together with Going Rural Health have employed a full time speech pathologist working with staff and school students within a Response to Intervention framework. This involves working in the classroom with teachers to embed speech and language strategies and rich oral language opportunities into their everyday teaching.

The speech pathologist also runs therapy groups with children needing more support, as well as individual assessment and intervention. Baseline screening conducted this year, identified 19 out of 23 prep children needing further speech pathology input.

The new role supervises 4th year speech pathology students undertaking a Going Rural Health placement, continuing this successful program which provides additional resources and greater intervention and support for school students in developing critical foundational skills for literacy.

### Next steps?

It is known that early intervention can provide children with the support that they need to catch up to their peers and participate fully in their schooling and community and have lifelong benefits.

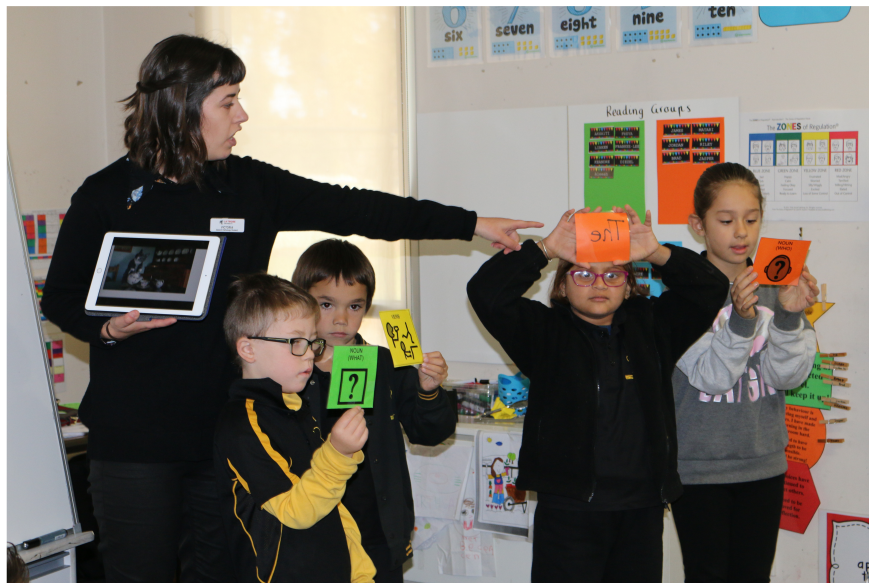
A similar program at Mahogany Rise Primary School has resulted in improved results in both AEDC and NAPLAN data.

The team working on the MPPS project are already seeing benefits for students and are hopeful for similar outcomes and the continuation of the program.

## Speech Pathologists in Schools

The involvement of speech pathologists in the education system varies from state to state, with some employed by the education department (e.g. Queensland, NT) and others who work for the Department of Health but provide services within schools. There are a host of benefits from speech pathologists working in schools; one major benefit is providing teachers and students with the critical foundational skills for literacy.

The Speech Pathology Australia Position Statement on Speech Pathology Services in Schools (2011, p. 5) states that: *'The benefits of speech pathologists working in schools to improve student outcomes have been extensively documented in the literature. Speech pathologists have been reported to add value to educational programs for students with special needs across the curriculum (James, Jeffries & Worley, 2008; Antoniazzi, Snow & Dickson-Swift, 2010). Speech pathology interventions have been shown to result in improvements in a child's speech and / or language (Boyle, McCartney, Forbes & O'Hare, 2007; James et al, 2008; Mecrow, 2010). Literacy and self esteem gains have also been reported from speech pathology intervention for school age children (James et al, 2008).'*



## What do students say about school placements?

*'I enjoyed being able to work closely with other health professionals and the opportunity to provide personalised care for each client. My teamwork skills have improved immensely as a result of this placement. I also now appreciate the importance of client advocacy and some of the associated advantages and challenges of a rural setting. Having placement in a rural setting has increased my desire to work in a rural setting once I graduate.'*

Speech Pathology student

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*'Having speech pathology students on placement at the school means that the speech pathology program can be even further reaching. This allows for more school students to be seen, and more frequent therapy sessions on a weekly basis targeting oral language and literacy development.'*

*The speech pathology students this term have also been assisting with implementing strategies to support reading and vocabulary during the morning reading time with the foundation class.*

*Gaining experience in providing support across all tiers of intervention will hopefully support the students' future employment prospects within an educational setting.'*

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