

Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes at Taree Christian School

Purpose

To improve the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, close some of the gaps in their abilities and bring them closer to their peers academically by providing intensive support that directly targeted those students who were under performing in literacy and numeracy. The approach was to identify students' abilities through assessment data and teacher direction and employ an aide to provide support to students in class and through withdrawal.

Target group

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from K - Year 6 who were identified as under-performing in literacy and/or numeracy (33 students in 2019 and 16 students in 2020).

Activities

The main focus was individual reading and small group reading sessions, as well as supporting students directly during Maths lessons. The Fitzroy reading program was utilised, using leveled texts and follow-up worksheets encompassing comprehension skills, phonics knowledge, writing and fluency in oral reading. In Maths the student support aide guided students through the main body of the lesson and assisted them individually through modified work. Eight students across four classes in Years 3-4 received literacy support for 10 periods per fortnight. One student in Year 2 received one period of support per fortnight. One student in Year 5/6 received five periods per fortnight for individual Maths and literacy support in class. Five students in Stage 2 Maths received individual or group support for three periods per fortnight.

Outcomes

While some students showed limited progress, others made great gains. Overall, there was a greater engagement in day to day learning, particularly amongst Stage 2 students who had extended periods of direct support. Some teachers commented that the targeted students exhibited improved focus and effort in class and increased willingness to complete work and attempt challenging tasks. There were more opportunities to engage with students' families and talk specifically about students' academic work. One unexpected aspect of the project was the encouragingly positive relationships the students developed with the aide. They built a rapport with each other and the students confidently went with her when withdrawn. The aide also developed a deep care for these children and often went above and beyond what she was required to do.

Learnings

We learned the importance of meeting regularly to keep the program operating and adjusted where necessary. We also learned that positive connections and relationships are vital to engagement. Keeping consistent data and track of what is being done/taught is important. Individual reading and discussion times are very helpful. Tips are to meet regularly as a team, focus on a couple of goals and invest in them, and use an evidence folder.

*"Thank you for this awesome update so proud of her doing good!"
(Parent communication with teacher regarding child's progress)*

"Time is the keyword. I have seen awesome progress in most of the children I have had consistent time with, despite this time some children are still showing great need." (Teacher's aide)

"What I am finding works well is being with the children in their classrooms. Working beside them to understand and work towards completing their classwork, in turn achieving in their day and taking pride in their work. I'm finding now that some of the children are wanting to share their classroom achievements with me. They will ask me to come into their room so they can show what they've achieved on their own, read me a piece of writing they are working on or show me how they've changed their monster on the class dojo because of the points they've earned." (Student support aide)