

## ‘The students love the routine’

Clifford Park Special School, Toowoomba, Australia, March 2025

Belinda Job is the Speech-Language Pathologist at Clifford Park Special School, a high school in Toowoomba for students who have an intellectual disability diagnosis. In addition, many have associated disorders such as autism, ADHD, physical, vision or hearing impairments, complex communication needs, speech disorders or epilepsy, or will have experienced trauma.



- 📌 School: **Clifford Park Special School**
- 📌 Location: **Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia**
- 📌 Pupils on roll: **200**
- 📌 Age range: **12-18**

### Why did you choose Sounds-Write and how did you implement it?

In 2023, our Department of Education released a Reading Position Statement outlining the importance of a systematic synthetic phonics approach in the teaching of reading. Gail Williams, our Principal, sought advice and information from what is currently the Language and Literacy Team within the Department about possible phonics programs that would meet criteria. Gail had attended the Sounds-Write training in 2022 and made the decision to implement this program within Clifford Park Special School because of the level of training that teachers received and because there were age-appropriate resources for our students.

From 2022 to 2024 small groups of teachers were sent to training. Class teachers reported that they found the training to be excellent, very thorough for general knowledge as well as implementing the program. We started implementing the program at the beginning of 2023 in classes where teachers had been trained. At the beginning of 2023, we provided some training to our teacher aides, who are heavily involved in student support in classrooms. We plan to continue to provide some training to them to increase their knowledge base and acknowledge the work they do with students in classrooms to support the class teacher. The school employs me an extra day per fortnight to work as the Phonics Lead within the school, and I work closely with the Principal in planning and continuing to upskill teachers and teacher aides.

‘We are implementing Sounds-Write with every student, so that every student has success and opportunities’ Gail Williams, Principal



SoundsWritePhonics



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## How do staff and students feel about the programme?

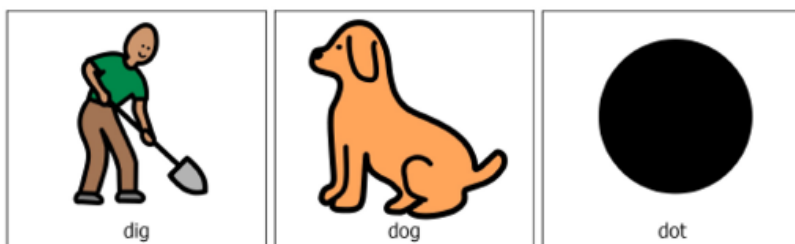
The students love the routine; it's fun and they feel a sense of achievement and success. And staff love the resources and, in particular, seeing much quicker progress than what had been seen with other teaching strategies. This includes improved spelling in writing tasks, students making connections and increased engagement in lessons. When working whole-class with older students who are at very different levels of literacy, teachers can adapt the materials as needed, group students who are working at similar levels, and can allow for students to have some choice in the way they work and respond to the lessons.

## How do you make Sounds-Write accessible for all your students?

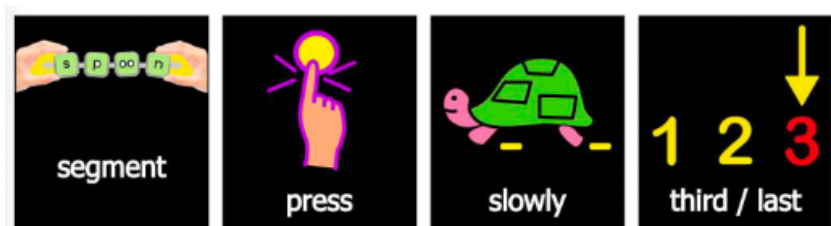
In working with students who have very severe needs or who might be non-verbal, it is difficult to know what they are capable of, so the school works on the principle of 'presuming competence', which means assuming that the student has the potential to develop their thinking, learning, and understanding.

The key to success is knowing how to adapt the activities to support the needs of all students, while at the same time maintaining fidelity to the Sounds-Write approach. Some of the adaptations that might be required to enable students to access and participate in the Sounds-Write sessions include:

- Use of high contrast letter cards.
- Posters for Skills and Conceptual Knowledge with Boardmaker visual symbols to increase understanding.
- Alternate assessment of blending and alphabet knowledge for students with speech/communication difficulties.
- Addition of Braille to cards and on blocks for students with a visual impairment.
- Aided Language Display boards that use visual symbols to explain what is happening and what they are going to work on in class.
- Use of haptics - a technology that transmits tactile information using sensations such as vibration, touch, and force feedback - on the back of a student who is blind to convey how many sounds are in the word.
- Addition of sound/letter choices to high-tech communication devices.



Alternate assessment materials for students with speech/communication difficulties



Aided Display Boards with visual symbols to facilitate understanding