

# 7 Nollamara Primary and Intensive English School, Perth, Australia

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## 1. Context

Nollamara Primary and Intensive English School (NPS) is situated seven kilometers north of the Perth Central Business District in Western Australia. Our Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage\*<sup>2</sup> (ICSEA) is 939<sup>3</sup> and the school caters for students from Kindergarten\* to Year 6. There are currently 309 students who are supported by 50 staff.

NPS was opened in 1956 and an Intensive English Center (IEC), supporting newly arrived humanitarian and refugee students, commenced in 2005. The school has a diverse population (see Figure 1), and there are more than 76% of students with a language background other than English at the school, with approximately 45 language groups. The larger groups include Arabic 13%, Dinka 7%, Karen 4.5%, and Burmese, Swahili, Vietnamese, and Kirundi which combined represent 10% of the cohort. Aboriginal students make up 8% of our school community.

There is a high transiency\* rate at NPS, approximately 51%. This is due to the students in the IEC returning to their local school after one to two years on

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2. An explanation for terms followed by an asterisk can be found in the glossary: <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2022.55.1367>

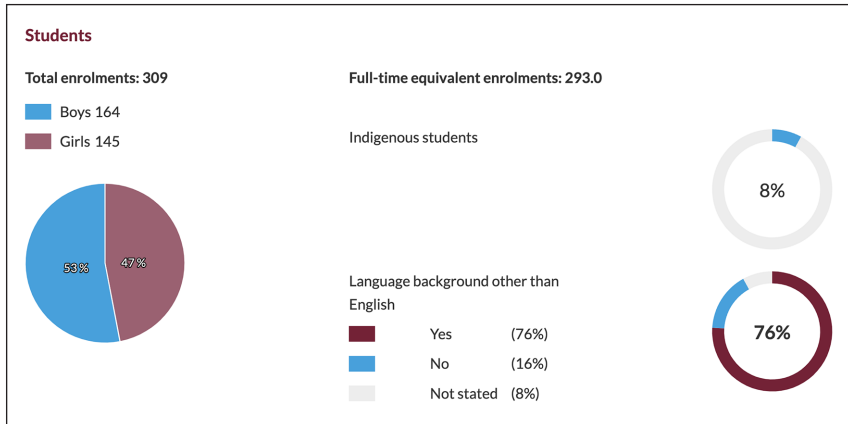
3. "ICSEA values are calculated on a scale which has a median of 1000 and a standard deviation of 100. ICSEA values typically range from approximately 500 (representing schools with extremely disadvantaged student backgrounds) to about 1300 (representing schools with extremely advantaged student backgrounds)" <https://www.myschool.edu.au/media/1820/guide-to-understanding-icsea-values.pdf>.

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specialist English language intervention. Many families are in temporary or rental accommodation, which impacts on student enrollment, too.

The school has a full-time chaplain, school psychologist (two and a half days a week), two Aboriginal Islander Education Officers (AIEO), and two multicultural liaison officers who support students and families as well as engage local agencies. The school also provides intervention with trauma counseling, speech therapists, and occupational therapists.

Figure 1. Demographic data<sup>4</sup>



Due to data indicating that the school needed improvement in the areas of literacy and numeracy, the school applied for and was successful in gaining a partnership with the Fogarty Foundation’s EDvance program. This is an initiative for school improvement that offers an integrated leadership, management, and support program, and was established to support schools in challenging communities by enhancing the capacity of school leaders to address the complex challenges in schools and to improve educational outcomes for students from challenging contexts at a state-wide level in Western Australia. The program focuses on building the capacity of school leadership teams to make informed evidence-

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4. Retrieved with permissions from My School at <https://www.myschool.edu.au/school/48470>

based decisions, strategically plan and aim to improve student engagement and outcomes across the curriculum<sup>5</sup>.

The first change implemented followed a whole school literacy audit which indicated a whole school approach was needed, as several different literacy programs were being used across the school. Building on the whole school literacy audit and extensive research for the most effective literacy program, Sounds-Write was selected.

One of the Fogarty partnerships was with Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation\* (DSF), which offers literacy and clinical services to children and adults with specific learning disabilities to realize their greatest potential. The school engaged their services to assist with the implementation of the chosen whole school literacy program, Sounds-Write, and monitor the validity of the program, and to provide students with the best opportunity to leave primary school with more competent skills and knowledge to access the high school curriculum.

## **2. Implementation**

On my arrival at the school in 2018, there were no identified programs to provide students with intervention. There were five different literacy programs being delivered at the school. Many of these were not evidence-based or consistent across the whole school.

Initially, I selected two highly competent education assistants for Sounds-Write training. After their training, I assisted them in developing an intervention program to support the learning needs of students at risk by delivering Sounds-Write one-to-one and in small groups up to four sessions a week. Funded and diagnosed students were the first priority and then those who were at academic risk of not being able to access the curriculum.

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5. <https://fogartyedvance.org.au/school-improvement-program>

In mid-2020, during the school holidays, all teachers completed the four-day Sounds-Write training course. In Western Australia we had been incredibly lucky at the time in not being affected by any COVID lockdowns and all our training was delivered face-to-face. A DSF trainer delivered the program at school and then was engaged to assist the school in ensuring that staff used the program with fidelity. Literacy coaches were appointed internally to support staff shoulder to shoulder in a coaching model. This approach was successful as staff were supported by colleagues in a non-threatening coaching context.

Meetings were conducted to explore the best programs and to ascertain staff 'buy-in'. In the 2020 July school holidays, leading into Semester 2, additional teachers were trained in the program. This also included key members of the school leadership team to enable them to have a greater understanding of the program. I had lessons, word lists photocopied and laminated, post notes, white boards, and markers, all ready for Day 1 of implementation.

Teachers from pre-primary\* (children turning five by June 30) to Year 6 were required to complete placement tests and then commenced lessons based on student data. For example, in the Year 3 class, after assessment, students were placed at the beginning of the Extended Code\*. After consultations with DSF trainers, and since the majority of students at NPS had significant gaps in Initial Code\* knowledge, the introduction of the program proceeded at a reduced pace. To reduce the pressure for staff of a complete change in their literacy programs, teachers were asked to complete just one Sounds-Write activity (which in Sounds-Write are known as 'lessons') a day during the first week, two lessons (or activities) a day in the second week and three in the third week. This removed any anxiety about implementing Sounds-Write and by the end of the first week, teachers were asking if they could deliver more than one lesson.

In 2021, teachers again reassessed their students and placed them accordingly at their Sounds-Write level. Several new students were receiving one-to-one Sounds-Write intervention to close the gaps at this time, also. By 2022, I anticipate the Year 3 cohort would be able to commence at Extended Code. It is worth remembering that students at NPS have significant gaps in their learning

due to their high levels of transiency and many come to NPS with patchy knowledge of the Initial Code.

Years 4 to 6 have now completed Extended Code and are working on polysyllabic and morphology lessons. However, staff continue to review phonics to address any gaps in their students' literacy understanding.

The IEC students are also taught the Sound-Write program. When students exit this program into the mainstream, accommodations need to be made as students are generally working at a lower level and pace due to them being at the early stages of acquiring standard Australian English.

In Kindergarten at NPS, teachers deliver the Heggerty Phonemic Awareness program. This program is a research-based curriculum of daily phonemic and phonological awareness lesson plans. In Semester 1 teachers at our school teach the PreLit program. PreLit is a systematic, skills-based early literacy program for Kindy\* students who will be commencing in pre-primary\* the following year. In Semester 2, 2021, Kindergarten\* teachers start the foundation Sounds-Write lessons to enable students to have an understanding of the program and some of its processes before commencing pre-primary. Once in pre-primary, Sounds-Write Units 1 and 2 are retaught. Many of our students are from language backgrounds other than English so need the initial exposure before recapping the initial Sounds-Write lessons. This enables any students who are new in pre-primary to receive the initial lessons. Any students who need extension are given more activities in Unit 1 and 2 to keep them motivated and learning. We will be interested to see how students exposed to Sounds-Write in Semester 2 2021 engage in pre-primary in 2022.

Sounds-Write is a scripted, explicit instruction program that follows a scope and sequence\*. This eliminates any teacher error that may otherwise creep into a program. Our school is an Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI) school. EDI is the delivery of strategically planned lessons that explicitly teach new concepts to mastery. As Sounds-Write has an explicit instruction delivery, it fits seamlessly into our school curriculum.

### 3. Evaluation

Evidence indicates that the students who are receiving Sounds-Write interventions are ‘closing the gap’ where previously they were several years behind their peers in reading levels.

For this case study we use data from NAPLAN\*<sup>6</sup> (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) results for Year 3 and Year 5 for a small cohort of students from 2019 to 2021 (Table 1). Since the school has an extremely high transiency, approximately 51%, our stable cohort from Year 3 to Year 5 are seven students for spelling and writing, and eight for reading.

Table 1. Progress in spelling, reading, and writing from Year 3 to Year 5 (NAPLAN data)

#### Spelling - NAPLAN 2019 Year 3 to NAPLAN 2021 Year 5 (seven students)

|                 | Year 3<br>2019 | Year 5<br>2021 | Progress | Value add | Effect size<br>growth |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Nollamara       | 397.67         | 523.29         | 126.0    | 40        | 2.40                  |
| Australian Mean | 419.00         | 504.50         | 85.50    |           |                       |

#### Reading - NAPLAN 2019 Year 3 to NAPLAN 2021 Year 5 (eight students)

|                 | Year 3<br>2019 | Year 5<br>2021 | Progress | Value add | Effect size<br>growth |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Nollamara       | 372.50         | 466.88         | 94.00    | 15        | 1.63                  |
| Australian Mean | 432.00         | 511.60         | 79.60    |           |                       |

#### Writing - NAPLAN 2019 Year 3 to NAPLAN 2021 Year 5 (seven students)

|                 | Year 3<br>2019 | Year 5<br>2021 | Progress | Value add | Effect size<br>growth |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Nollamara       | 372.50         | 469.29         | 62.00    | 5         | 2.49                  |
| Australian Mean | 423.00         | 480.00         | 57.00    |           |                       |

6. “The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is an annual national assessment for all students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9. All students in these year levels are expected to participate in tests in reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy” <https://www.nap.edu.au/naplan/faqs/naplan--general>.

Spelling shows an effect size growth of 2.4, and a staggering value add of 40. For reading, the effect size growth is also substantially above expectations at 1.63, with a value add of 15. For writing, the effect size growth is 2.49 and the value add is five. Considering that schools want to see an average growth of 0.8 and that a value add of five is considered good, these are impressive results.

We have noticed that our students are able to apply their word knowledge and write longer and more meaningful texts as they have confidence in their ability to spell and in turn write. Teachers are spending less time on spelling and moving into writing. Learning to write and reading to learn.

These data prove the benefit that Sounds-Write has had in the classroom as students at NPS are now proficiently able to spell, read, and write at a level that is comparable or better than the Australian mean.

## **4. Recommendations**

Being able to implement Sounds-Write as a whole school literacy program is immensely beneficial. The gains in literacy were seen very quickly and across all year levels.

The first step to maintaining fidelity to the Sounds-Write program was a structural change of timetables, ensuring that every class was delivering Sounds-Write at 9 a.m. every morning. Students were encouraged to arrive at school on time and lateness continues to be addressed as a whole school.

A Sounds-Write trainer, engaged from outside the school, was timetabled to work with teachers, and their observations, which were timetabled twice a term, were followed by a meeting with staff. This enabled staff to discuss their progress and refine their skills and knowledge in Sounds-Write with an external coach. The school provided extra release time for teachers so that this meeting did not occur in their 'duties other than teaching' time as well as 'buying in' the services of the DSF coach.

This semester, several Sounds-Write teacher experts have been identified and timetabled so teachers are able to engage with their peers, providing a non-threatening supportive coaching approach.

The introduction of new pedagogy is just the first step. To ensure staff are constantly upskilling themselves, they are attending a refresher course six months after their initial training.

Introducing new pedagogy has not been without its challenges, however, staff have been able to see in a very short time frame the improvement in students' literacy. This has resulted in a reduced teacher workload, as well as ensuring all students from Kindergarten to Year 6, including those in the IEC, are exposed to a consistent teaching approach.





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