

## Case Study

Embargoed to: 21 August 2011

### Four blocks improve childhood literacy rates

Speech Pathology Week 2011 '*Literacy for Life*' (21 – 27 August)

It is estimated that between 40 and 50 per cent of Australians graduate from school with low literacy levels, and for students with disabilities this percentage is much higher.

Willans Hill School in Wagga Wagga, a rural special school for 69 children with disability, has defied the statistics with a unique language-based literacy program – and hopes other schools will follow.

School Principal Chris Lennon teamed up with Melbourne based speech pathologist Jane Farrall to implement the Four Blocks approach to literacy to reach every student in every classroom at the school, with surprising results.

The method used four approaches to teach children to become better readers, writers and spellers – guided reading, writing, self-selected reading and working with words – to which Chris and the teaching staff at Willans Hill School dedicate a minimum of two hours each day.

“Students with disabilities often have major literacy difficulties, usually due to a combination of low teacher, parent and student expectations, limited time spent on literacy goals and poor literacy practice,” Ms Farrall said.

“Willans Hill is a typical rural special school. It has a wide range of students with different disabilities and many have complex communication needs, relying on symbols or text to communicate.”

“Chris was determined to produce better literacy outcomes for her students and after hearing about the Four Blocks program, took the big step of rolling it out school-wide.”

Since the program was implemented at the start of the year, the results have been astounding. The entire school community is excited about the progress of the students and the changes that they are witnessing.

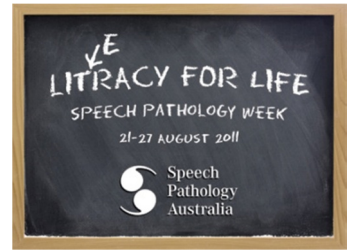
Much of this extends far beyond improved literacy skills and includes increased engagement in class and significant changes in communication and behaviour in many students. Stories about students' achievements echo through the school and students' writing is displayed proudly everywhere.

Students' literacy levels were assessed at the beginning of the program and will be reassessed at the end of the year, at which time both Chris and Jane are positive that the data will show that an entire school can make improvements in literacy with specialist speech pathologist input, good teaching, reasonable and positive expectations and the desire to learn.

Speech pathologists are an important part of educational teams, diagnosing and treating speech, language and communication disorders in children.

For more information about speech pathology and Speech Pathology Week, visit [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au).

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**To arrange an interview with speech pathologist Jane Farrall, please contact:**

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**About Speech Pathology Week 2011 ‘Literacy for Life’:**

Speech Pathology Week 2011 (21 – 27 August) celebrates the speech pathology profession and the important role speech pathologists play in acquiring and maintaining literacy skills.

**About Speech Pathology Australia**

Speech Pathology Australia is the national peak body for more than 4,500 members.

The Association supports and regulates the ethical, clinical and professional standards of its members. The Association also lobbies and advocates for people with communication and swallowing difficulties.