

# Speech therapy adds up

JAMES DOWLING

A DRASTIC shortage of speech therapists in Boroondara primary schools is forcing parents to pay thousands of dollars a year for private therapy.

A Boroondara Council-commissioned report found 48.4 per cent of schools urgently needed speech therapists, with government resources struggling to meet the demand.

Speech Pathology Australia figures show 7 to 10 per cent of school-age children have a language disorder that places them at greater risk of unsuccessful academic progress and behavioural issues.

The figures also show only 208 Victorian children receive language disorder funding.

Ashburton Primary School principal Phillip Webb said the school provided a basic therapy service.

“All government schools are funded to provide free speech therapy to students

— Department of Education spokeswoman Jennene Rogers

“But for ongoing or extensive therapy children would have to go to the private sector,” Mr Webb said.

“That’s what I’d be doing if I were a parent.”

Mr Webb said parents also needed to play a large part in their child’s treatment.

Speech therapy often includes exercises parents are encouraged to do with their child on a daily basis.

“For ongoing or extensive therapy, children would have to go to the private sector

— Ashburton Primary School principal Phillip Webb

The Boroondara Network of Schools, a body that represents the municipality’s 33 state schools, decides how departmental funding for support officers is split up among schools.

Support officers include speech therapists, counsellors and, in some cases, social workers.

Camberwell Primary School principal and network committee member Christine

Moore said the main priority for school speech therapists was assessments rather than ongoing therapy.

Ms Moore said resources were provided to schools and students on a needs basis.

“We do a lot of prioritising,” Ms Moore said.

Department of Education spokeswoman Jennene Rogers said the department provided funding for three speech therapists who carry out assessments, develop programs and provided ongoing therapy when needed.

“All government schools are funded to provide free speech therapy to students,” Ms Rogers said.

\* Have you or anyone you know struggled with access to speech therapy? Email [progress@leadernewspapers.com.au](mailto:progress@leadernewspapers.com.au)