


27th May 2021



'How SSP and the Reading Whisperer turned our school's literacy achievement around'

In 2018, we were presented with a significant problem of practice within our school. Our results in foundational literacy skill development were showing a steady decline. We were seeing increasing numbers of students failing to reach reading benchmarks and targets for their respective grade levels. This was also coupled with students showing below average spelling, writing and oral language achievements in the Foundation – Grade 2 years of schooling. What we knew was this, we had hard-working teachers and capable students, we were just not hitting the mark.

On the back of this data, we knew that we had to make a change in the way that foundational literacy instruction occurred within our school. We set about reviewing our current practices and searching for an approach that aligned our school's instructional model. After much searching, we came across Emma (The Reading Whisperer) and the Speech Sound Pics (SSP) program.

I spoke to other schools who had implemented the program and received nothing but positive feedback.

As a result of these discussions all junior staff participated in online training – due to our geographical isolation. The training was outstanding and provided us with the framework, language and methodology that we were searching for. Staff returned to classrooms fully committed to the implementation of the Speech Sound Pics program. This implementation included the prioritisation of SSP within our Annual Implementation Plans, Staff Performance and Development Plans and Professional Learning Plans.

The prioritisation of this initiative gave staff the time to engage in cycles of peer observation. Staff also collectively planned and assessed students' literacy skill development using the common language of the Speech Sound Pics.

Since the introduction of the Speech Sound Pics Code Mapping at Cardross Primary School I have witnessed firsthand the impact of this approach to literacy instruction. A common language around literacy skills is shared amongst staff, students and parents. The depth of understanding around literacy for staff and students has significantly increased. However, most importantly students feel empowered, they are in control of their literacy journey.

Students engage daily SSP routines from their first day of school, wiring their brains for early literacy skill acquisition. Traditional 'levelled' books are no longer part of students' early literacy development. Instead, the implementation of decodable books has allowed our students to wire their brains for reading quicker than ever before. Through SSP, students explore the code of the English language on a daily basis, in an engaging student-centred

manner. This includes developing phonemic skills, phonological awareness and orthographic mapping. No longer do students learn 'high frequency words' by sight, instead the phoneme / grapheme building blocks are deeply explored by students, allowing for a greater understanding of the code of English.

Early on, we could see that this approach was making teachers feel more confident in the planning, teaching, and assessment of reading, writing and spelling skills. We also saw that students were developing a greater love for literacy – because at last things just made sense! All of this was fantastic, but we needed the data to prove that what we were doing was having an impact on the development of our students. Since 2018, the literacy data of students in our junior grades has continued to move from strength to strength. We are now seeing data trends that are the best that we have had at our school in recent memory. We now have schools visit our teachers to find out what has been the secret to our success. It is no secret; it was a shift towards the synthetic phonics approach of Speech Sound Pics (SSP) Code Mapping.

The success of our school can be broken down in the following areas:

- Ongoing school-wide commitment amongst staff
- Prioritisation of the initiative by leadership
- An exceedingly huge amount of work by our students
- The professional expertise, guidance and feedback from Emma and the SSP team.

We have now embedded the practices of SSP across our school and our teachers often articulate that they could now never teach literacy in any other way. If in your literacy instruction is fragmented, students disengaged and results stagnant; SSP and Miss Emma may just be your answer. I know it was for us.

Kind Regards,



Principal