12 The Pavilion School, Melbourne, Australia

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1. Context

The Pavilion School is located in Melbourne, Australia. It is a specialist Flexible Learning Option (FLO) for students who have disengaged or been excluded from mainstream education. There are 235 secondary-aged school students enrolled across two campuses in Melbourne's northern suburbs. A considerable proportion of students at the Pavilion School face significant risk factors which impede their access to education. They are as follows: mental health challenges (60% of students); alcohol and other drug use (49%); school absenteeism (47%); family vulnerability (47%); and youth justice involvement (16%).

Other relevant demographics that make up our student population include the following: 25% receive funding as part of the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD); 24% identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; and 10% are in Out of Home Care.

The school uses a trauma-informed model that supports students' educational goals in tandem with their social development. Students are enrolled in class groups of fifteen to twenty and each group is assigned a dedicated classroom

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and staff 'triad' comprising a teacher, wellbeing worker, and education support worker, who collaborate to support students' learning and wellbeing. Students have a reduced timetable and access to a range of onsite services, including counseling, drug and alcohol support, the Doctors in Schools Program[5], occupational therapy, and speech pathology.

Classroom teachers provide instruction across the six strands of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and differentiate to support students to develop fundamental literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional learning skills. The teaching and learning model draws on evidence-based practices, emphasizing explicit direct instruction and with a focus on structured literacy teaching practices.

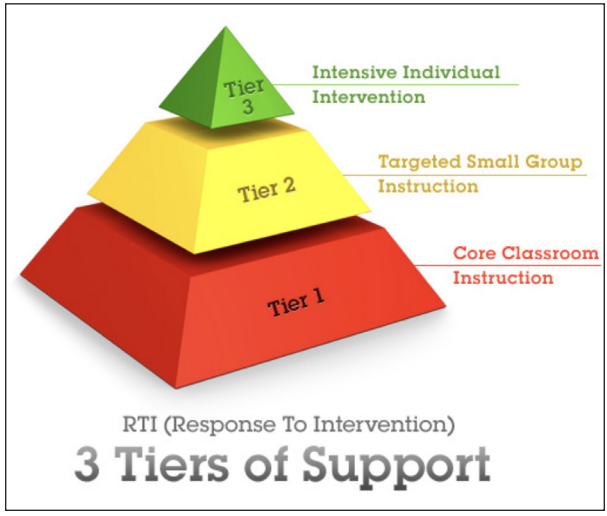
The Sounds-Write school phonics program was implemented at the start of 2021, with the aim of establishing a structured whole-school approach to providing phonics intervention. Interventions and additional support were previously provided to students largely at classroom level. The Response to Intervention (RTI) framework within a Multi-Tiered System of Support*[6] (MTSS), is a proactive structure for providing instruction and intervention across the school (see Figure 1). The integrated instruction model of MTSS uses collected data to assess student needs and provide them with interventions in appropriate tiers. It begins in the general classroom (Tier 1) and increases in intensity in subsequent tiers. The aim of implementing this program across the school was to effectively support students at Tier 3 level (intensive support delivered at a one-to-one level) using the RTI framework.

This case study will provide insights into the implementation and early-stage impacts of the Sounds-Write school phonics program, with a focus on providing recommendations for improvement and insights that will support other educators to establish effective whole-school intervention programs in flexible and alternative settings for vulnerable secondary students.

5. A Victorian state government initiative funding general practitioners to attend government schools, providing advice and healthcare to students most in need.

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

Figure 1. RTI[7]



2. Implementation

Over a period of 24 months (2018-2020), all teachers at the Pavilion School were trained in Sounds-Write to provide intensive one-to-one intervention, small group, and whole class spelling lessons, with additional support in assessment and therapy provided by two speech pathologists. As of 2021, all but two new teachers had been trained in Sounds-Write, six in person and three online.

Sounds-Write skills tests and code knowledge tests indicated that students across the school had significant gaps in the fundamental skills and knowledge required for reading and spelling. This is reflective of wider research: adolescents in FLO settings typically have weak oral language skills and poor reading comprehension (less than twelve years) when compared with their like age peers (Snow, Graham,

7. https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/classrooms/Pages/aproacheseppdiff.aspx#link1

McLean, & Serry, 2020[8]), as well as higher than typical levels of undiagnosed developmental language difficulties (Snow, McLean, & Frederico, 2020[9]).

In 2021, teachers began providing additional one-to-one intervention to students identified as high priority through the analysis of various sets of assessments. The Test of Word Reading Efficiency – Second Edition (TOWRE-2) was used as an initial standardized screening assessment. This encompasses two sub-tests: Sight-Word Efficiency and Phonemic Decoding Efficiency. Students identified as being below average for Phonemic Decoding Efficiency were then assessed using the Sounds-Write skills tests and code knowledge test. Testing was carried out by classroom teachers with the support of the team's instructional coach and the two school speech pathologists. Students were then selected for one-to-one intervention based on an analysis of highest need and highest attendance. This was especially necessary given the limited school resources and teacher time capacity to provide intervention outside classroom hours.

Students selected for intervention ranged in age from fourteen to eighteen and either required intervention starting at Initial Code* or the early stages of Extended Code*. Sounds-Write instruction for one-to-one intervention was delivered face-to-face except during COVID-19 lockdowns, which necessitated a move to online intervention using the Sounds-Write Smart Notebook tools.

TOWRE-2 and Sounds-Write data continues to be used at classroom level to provide small group and whole class instruction and will form part of the next phase of phonics intervention (see Recommendations for further details). The focus in the first year of implementation was to support frequent and consistent Tier 3 intervention in order to meet students at their most significant point of need. The evaluation data will focus on students who have been receiving intervention since the start of 2021.

8. Snow, P. C., Graham, L. J., Mclean, E. J., & Serry, T. A. (2020). The oral language and reading comprehension skills of adolescents in flexible learning programmes. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 22*(4), 425-434. https://doi.org/10.1080/17549507.2019.165234

9. Snow, P., McLean, E., & Frederico, M. (2020). The language, literacy and mental health profiles of adolescents in out-of-home care: an Australian sample. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 36*(3), 151-163. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659020940360

3. Evaluation

The data in Table 1 shows that for students receiving Tier 3 intervention, TOWRE-2 scaled scores have increased by an average of three scaled scores over a six-month period. For many students, the impact of complex contextual factors is important to consider – see details in the evaluation below.

Table 1. Scaled scores: the Sight-Word Efficiency and Phonemic Decoding Efficiency scaled scores are combined to create the Total Word Reading Efficiency scaled scores

Student	Intervention sessions attended (as of 5th August 2021)	Sub-test Sight-Word efficiency RD1 - Feb 21	Sub-test Phonemic Decoding Efficiency RD1	Total Word Reading Efficiency (TWRE) RD 1	Sub-test Sight-Word efficiency RD2 - July 21	Sub-test Phonemic Decoding Efficiency RD2	Total Word Reading Efficiency (TWRE) RD 2	Change in TOWRE Scores	Change in %ile rank
A	10	76	62	67	72	71	79	12	1
B	13	84	65	73	84	87	85	12	12
C	1	77	62	68	75	62	67	-1	0
D	14	73	63	66	68	63	64	-2	0
E	14	76	69	71	80	75	76	5	2
F	3	70	56	61	74	55	63	2	0.5
G	3	91	88	89	90	82	85	-4	-7
H	5	81	76	77	79	74	75	-2	-1
I	30	55	55	53	55	55	53	0	0
J	8	81	76	76	82	72	76	0	0
Average	10	76	67	69	76	70	72	3	1

Classification of Skills	Very Poor	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average
Scaled Score	<70	70-79	80-89	90-110	111-120

In analyzing the data in Table 1, some contextual factors must be considered, including the specific challenges facing the Pavilion School cohort and the disproportionately negative impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on many of our students and their families. Specifically, the following conclusions are drawn from comparing TOWRE-2 data from February and July/August 2021. Originally, the phonics team planned to reassess students using the Sounds Skills and Code Knowledge tests during this time, however due to the impact of the August lockdown, this was not achieved for all students. Where possible and relevant, Sounds-Write assessment data has been included to provide further detail into the analysis of student results. Further analysis after a longer period of implementation will be required to determine long-term, whole-school impact.

Of students who received intervention, their TOWRE-2 scaled scores have increased by an average of three scaled scores over a six-month period. This is promising, particularly given attendance challenges across our cohort, which means many students only attended an average of nine sessions overall. Further, TOWRE-2 measures students against aged norm averages. Students who do not score within the average bracket means their combined Sight-Word Efficiency and Phonemic Decoding Skills are significantly below their peers within the same age range. As a result, scaled scores can be impacted due to students moving up an age bracket in the second round of testing. Despite this, in some cases, students' scaled scores have increased. This scaled score provides a precise estimate of the extent to which the students' performance is different from the average of other students at the same age level. Particular attention should be paid to Students B, E, I, and J, who reflect the impact of various individual contextual factors on results.

Firstly, Student B has a diagnosed developmental language disorder. Despite these additional challenges, they showed significant growth by progressing from a TOWRE scaled score of 73 (poor range) to a TOWRE scaled score of 85 (below average), following a six-month period of one-to-one intervention. What is of particular significance is Student B's increase in Phonemic Decoding Efficiency, which progressed from a score of 65 (very poor) to 87 (below average).

Student B has attended intervention sessions inconsistently, receiving a total of thirteen sessions during this time. The results are extremely encouraging given that the work of Snow, McLean, and Frederico (2020) demonstrate that such language difficulties have a higher-than-normal prevalence among vulnerable cohorts such as that of the students at the Pavilion School.

During the second round of testing, Student E moved up an age bracket. Despite this, and inconsistent intervention sessions due to periods of remote learning, Student E still showed improvement in Phonemic Decoding Efficiency, progressing from 69 (very poor) to 75 (poor) in the TOWRE-2. We suspect that Student E's progress was enabled by their motivated attitude toward receiving intervention and their consistent attendance with normal classes. In addition, their willingness to consistently complete follow-up weekly tasks for each session allowed Student E to consolidate skills introduced during intervention sessions.

In the case of some students who have shown negative progress or no progress, several complex factors need to be considered. One interpretation of the results could be students engaging with intervention may still be consolidating their skills and have not yet transferred code knowledge to long-term memory. This is because they have not had enough exposure to new symbols and sounds to transfer them to their long-term memory for quick retrieval. This has also been impacted by COVID-19 lockdowns as students have been less able to use retrieval practice. Research indicates that for older students with severe reading difficulties, it is difficult for them to make extremely rapid progress in a short amount of time.

Student I attended 30 intervention sessions. However, they show no growth in their TOWRE-2 score between assessment rounds. This student has nevertheless progressed four units through the Sounds-Write program. They can now read sentences containing previously taught code accurately and fluently, including decoding some two-syllable words. Student I began intervention through the whole-school program at Unit 8 of Initial Code, and at the time of the second round of assessments had just completed Unit 11. As the TOWRE-2 assessment

moves rapidly from Initial Code to Extended Code words in the Phonemic Decoding Test, it does not reflect this progress. It does however become apparent when comparing their TOWRE-2 data with their Sounds-Write data (Table 2), which is more sensitive and thus highlights the progress they have made through the Sounds-Write units.

Table 2. Student I Sounds-Write assessment data

Round 1	Segmenting	7
	Blending	2
	Phoneme Manipulation	1
	Code Knowledge	13
Round 2	Segmenting	50
	Blending	5
	Phoneme Manipulation	6
	Code Knowledge	29

Student I increased across all four assessments, with an especially significant increase in their segmenting skills – suggesting a significantly increased phonemic awareness of language – and code knowledge (Table 2).

Table 3. Student J Sounds-Write data

Round 1	Segmenting	65
	Blending	10
	Phoneme Manipulation	4
	Code Knowledge	31
Round 2	Segmenting	66
	Blending	12
	Phoneme Manipulation	6
	Code Knowledge	39

Student J was measured against a higher age bracket during the second round of testing. Student J started on Unit 5 of Sounds-Write and they are now at Unit 11 of Initial Code, and their Sounds-Write data shows a slight increase in skills, and a moderate increase in code knowledge (Table 3). Similarly to Student I, the TOWRE-2 does not reveal the full story of their progress. TOWRE-2 includes many words containing sound-spelling correspondences from the Extended Code

that Student J has not learned yet. Additionally, J's general cognitive ability is within the 'very low' range of intellectual functioning (Full Scale Intelligence Quotient or FSIQ*: 72). These are significant barriers for Student J that are not captured within standardized forms of testing. J also has specific mental health challenges and occupies a caregiver role at home, which means they are unable to engage effectively with learning during remote learning periods.

4. Recommendations

We offer the following recommendations/considerations to fellow Sounds-Write educators and practitioners based on our experience of implementing this program thus far.

- Train all teaching staff in Sounds-Write. This develops the capacity of all teachers and ensures a consistent approach to teaching decoding and encoding skills across classes.

- Use online software such as MS OneNote to collate all program resources and lesson records. This assists with the effective sharing of resources, and consistency and efficiency when planning Sounds-Write lessons.

- Develop a universal lesson template for Initial and Extended Code lessons (see example in supplementary materials[10]). These provide a template for planning and recording Sounds-Write lessons, and have been especially supportive for teachers new to the program with less experience planning and delivering lessons.

- Carefully consider the selection process for students who will be receiving intervention. We selected students based on highest need and highest attendance. We have adjusted our program so that now each staff member involved is working with no more than two students, allowing

10. https://research-publishing.box.com/s/ehtsw5abpom351sd0ll05y9tb1ye2qj1

for more intense intervention. This is particularly important when working with students who have significant attendance challenges, as it provides greater opportunities for engagement.

- Ensure careful and detailed analysis of learning and assessment data. Analysis should consider the following factors while conducting intervention:

    - Complexity of students' needs – neurodevelopmental disorders, learning and/or language difficulties, mental health difficulties (childhood trauma, anxiety disorders etc.), and other comorbidities.

    - Implications and limitations of standardized assessments such as the TOWRE-2 – for example, reading words within a specified time limit.

    - A change in chronological age when completing the post assessment (as we are using the age-based normative table to obtain the scaled scores).

- Regular phonics team meetings to evaluate student progress and attendance. This has been crucial given the significant need for Tier 3 (intensive one-to-one) intervention in our student cohort. Student data is organized based on need and attendance. If students miss more than three sessions in a row without reasonable explanation, they are replaced with a student of next highest need until their attendance increases in consistency.

Additionally, we would ideally make the following adjustments in the next phase of implementing our phonics program.

- Train education support staff in Sounds-Write. This would not only mean we could provide more students with one-to-one intervention

but would further increase the capacity of our staff teams in providing specialized one-on-one support to students in class.

- Provide some teachers time release from other duties to support consistent and intensive intervention. Again, this would allow us to reach a greater number of students across our cohort, and assist in managing attendance challenges.

- Provide ongoing support to the teaching team to ensure Tier 1 and 2 intervention is being carried out consistently. Ongoing collaborative planning and modeling of lessons to teachers trained in Sounds-Write but not involved in one-to-one intervention sessions will support regular and targeted implementation of Sounds-Write at classroom level.

We would also again highlight the challenges of collecting student data during a pandemic – particularly with a vulnerable student cohort – and hope to consolidate our data collection and recording processes across the coming year.

Establishing a structured whole-school approach to providing phonics intervention in a year when the COVID-19 pandemic has had such an impact on schooling has presented additional challenges alongside those that typically arise in a FLO context. Our team has been able to establish a framework for assessment, referral, and tiered implementation of the Sounds-Write program that has already begun to see some incremental success for students. We anticipate that over time, we will see lastly impacts of the program on student outcomes, equipping them with fundamental literacy skills.

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