

Case Study

BELMAY PRIMARY SCHOOL, CLOVERDALE, WA

Where every student is capable of successful learning

At a glance

PROGRAMS ADOPTED: **InitialLit** (2019)
 MacqLit (2020)
 MiniLit Sage (2021)
 SpellEx (2023)

IMPACT:

- **Consistent increase in Year 3 NAPLAN scores since implementation**
- **Ranked 6th highest-performing school in state for Year 3 spelling in 2024**
- **Attendance increased by 7% across school**

The context

Belmay Primary School is a government school located on 7.5 hectares of bushland in metropolitan Perth, catering for more than 200 students from Kindergarten to Year 6.

Over the years, Belmay has built a reputation for providing high-quality education, and its above-average results in literacy and numeracy have made it a school of choice in the local community. However, this wasn't always the case.

When principal Sarah Durham arrived at the school in 2018, she found widespread uncertainty among the teaching staff about how to improve student achievement.

NAPLAN results had previously been dismissed as irrelevant, and the school's unique context, including a significant proportion of students from non-English speaking backgrounds and higher levels of socio-educational disadvantage than the state average, was sometimes used to rationalise poor outcomes.

As a result, enrolments were declining as families opted to transfer their children to other schools.

Why MultiLit?

According to Ms Durham, Belmay had previously made some changes in literacy education, allocating dedicated literacy blocks and trialling commercial reading programs.

While these steps were promising, progress was inconsistent.

A turning point was the opportunity for Belmay to join the three-year Fogarty EDvance School Improvement Program, which provided support for the development of a long-term strategic plan designed to improve student outcomes.

“The leadership team was determined to shift that narrative, so we embraced a new goal to improve student outcomes in NAPLAN by implementing an evidence-based, low-variation teaching model.”

– Sarah Durham
Belmay Primary School

Through the program, school leaders participated in extensive professional learning, deepening their understanding of how to lead whole-school change and implement high-quality, evidence-based instruction.

Ms Durham said the process cemented the need to develop a shared teaching vision that also challenged the previous way of thinking.

“We landed on ‘Every student is capable of successful learning’,” she said.

“Sure, our school context presented some challenges, with a significant proportion of students needing English language support, and a highly transient school population, but that was no excuse for having a culture of low expectations.

“The leadership team was determined to shift that narrative, so we embraced a new goal to improve student outcomes in NAPLAN by implementing an evidence-based, low-variation teaching model.”

Belmay adopted the MultiLit suite of literacy programs, starting with the rollout of InitialLit across the junior primary classrooms.

All students, including those with additional needs, participated in whole-class InitialLit lessons to develop essential reading skills, including phonemic awareness, decoding and comprehension.

For students who needed additional support, MiniLit Sage was introduced as a Tier 2 small group intervention program, while MacqLit was also included to support low-progress readers in Years 3–6.

This Response to Intervention (also known as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) framework ensured all needs were addressed and prevented students from falling behind in their literacy learning.

Average Year 3 NAPLAN reading scores have been on the rise since InitialLit was introduced.

▲ **7%**

increase between
2019 and 2022

▲ **12%**

increase between
2023 and 2024

It also ensured that students requiring additional intensive support were identified early.

In 2024, Belmay introduced MultiLit's SpellEx program to address spelling and other advanced literacy needs in the upper primary years.

"Reading, spelling and writing are intricately connected," said Ms Durham.

"We are keen to ensure our students develop really strong spelling skills, so they are well-equipped for the literacy demands of secondary school."

The impact

Belmay's leadership team has credited the implementation of InitialLit as the backbone of the school's literacy approach, which has enabled significant improvement in student achievement outcomes.

Average Year 3 NAPLAN reading scores have been on the rise since the program was introduced, increasing 7% between 2019 and 2022 and 12% between 2023 and 2024.

Spelling proficiency has also improved, with Belmay ranked the 6th highest-performing school in the state for Year 3 spelling in 2024.

There has also been an uptick in student attendance rates in the past few years, rising from 81% to almost 88% across the school.

"We do believe that the increased student achievement has boosted engagement," Ms Durham said.

"When students are supported in their learning and when they can see the learning progress they are making, school becomes a place they equate with success and feeling good about themselves.

"It's been quite a journey of change that has not only improved student outcomes but also strengthened staff capacity and morale, setting the foundation for ongoing success."

*– Sarah Durham
Belmay Primary School*

"It's hardly surprising that attendance goes up, which of course facilitates more opportunities to learn and feeds into a positive, ongoing cycle."

Key insights

Teachers have also been the beneficiaries of the school's new approach, receiving targeted support to strengthen their implementation of InitialLit, ensuring program fidelity and boosting confidence in their teaching practices.

Over time, the structured nature of InitialLit has also lessened the burden of lesson preparation.

According to Ms Durham, once the testing and student groups have been created, the program runs smoothly.

"The scripted lessons ensure consistency while allowing teachers to inject their personality into their teaching," she said.

"This also frees up teachers to focus on monitoring student understanding during lessons, enabling them to address misunderstandings on the spot and reinforce skills effectively.

"It's been quite a journey of change that has not only improved student outcomes but also strengthened staff capacity and morale, setting the foundation for ongoing success."