

Closing the Gap Case Study

KAURNA PLAINS SCHOOL, ADELAIDE, SA

Closing the literacy gap with an overhaul of practice

At a glance

PROGRAMS ADOPTED:	InitialLit (2021) MacqLit (2021) PreLit (2022) MiniLit Sage (2023) LanguageLift (2023)
SECTOR:	Government combined school
LOCATION:	Major city
ICSEA:	730
STUDENTS:	153
INDIGENOUS STUDENTS:	97%
EAL/D:	74%
IMPACT:	• Consistent improvements in the Phonics Screening Check • Gained the ability to provide targeted and effective intervention that has proven highly effective in improving student learning

The context

Kaurna Plains School is a unique and culturally vibrant learning community situated in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia.

With an enrolment of approximately 160 students from Reception to Year 12, of which 98% identify as Aboriginal, the school is committed to building strong connections with families, Elders and the wider community. Teachers and support staff are trauma-informed and provide tailored support to meet the needs of students.

"At Kaurna Plains, we strive to create a space where students feel valued and empowered, staying connected to their culture and identity," said Leayshia Gaston, the school's Deputy Principal.

"We work hard to create a culturally safe environment for students, with Kaurna language programs embedded across classes, and have a strong literacy intervention team with a focus on speech and language development to support students' broader English literacy skills."

Why MultiLit?

In 2020, Kaurna Plains School undertook a significant overhaul of its literacy practices, which involved a shift back to systematic synthetic phonics for early reading instruction.

Its initial contact with MultiLit occurred via the school's implementation of MiniLit Sage, an early intervention program for teaching reading skills to small groups of children struggling to progress.

The following year – while still navigating how to best embed phonics instruction across the early primary classrooms – Kaurna Plains was invited to join the Closing the Gap initiative.

Funded by the federal government and facilitated by MultiLit, the initiative provides reading and spelling programs for students in majority Indigenous schools as part of the education measures outlined in the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan.

While Indigenous students make similar progress at school to their non-Indigenous peers, they are more likely to start behind them — for a variety of complex reasons.

The multi-year initiative aims to have all students in participating schools reading at a minimum level within the average range for their age and year cohort.

Teachers from Kurna Plains received training in 2021 and MultiLit's InitialLit classroom program was rolled out across junior classes in 2022. Primary school students needing additional support took part in MiniLit Sage and LanguageLift small group interventions, while MultiLit's MacqLit intervention program supported secondary students with low literacy.

While the scripted nature of the program "initially caused some hesitation" among some teachers, concerns evaporated once they observed the "positive impact on students' learning," Ms Gaston said.

"We had been looking for an evidence-based program that would help us ensure all our students could get the best start when it came to developing essential English literacy skills crucial for school and life," she said.

"The structure, clarity and consistency provided by the MultiLit programs have allowed our staff to confidently support students in achieving significant literacy growth.

"The programs also aligned with our policy around ensuring consistent, predictable routines across the school and have helped to support a cohesive approach to literacy improvement."

The impact

Joining the Closing the Gap Initiative has transformed literacy teaching and learning at Kurna Plains School for the better.

The program has enabled closer tracking of students' progress, meaning educators can identify gaps earlier and target interventions to address them.

"We've seen consistent improvements in the Phonics Screening Check over recent years, maintaining strong results and ensuring a solid foundation for our students.

"Additionally, the targeted one-to-one tutoring opportunities provided through MultiLit have enabled us to support individual students requiring intensive intervention."

This also includes supporting students facing circumstances that would typically interfere with their learning.

"The impact has been both measurable and significant. We've seen consistent improvements in the Phonics Screening Check over recent years, maintaining strong results and ensuring a solid foundation for our students."

–Deputy Principal, Leayshia Gaston

"We currently have a Year 7 student on exclusion from school who is unable to read," Ms Gaston said.

"Yet, despite this, he has still been able to access intensive one-on-one literacy intervention, turning a challenging situation into an opportunity to help him develop the foundational skills needed to read and learn at school."

Key insights

Following teaching programs with fidelity hasn't prevented Kaurna Plains from being flexible as it strives to meet students' needs.

"Even within MultiLit's structured literacy program, there's room to adapt and ensure we provide more targeted and effective interventions for our students," Ms Gaston said.

"For example, we developed a bespoke literacy block for our Year 5/6 class, specifically designed to address gaps in reading fluency and comprehension.

"This tailored approach has proven highly effective."

Ms Gaston said collaboration with MultiLit had been a key factor in the program's success.

"We've learned so much over the past three years and this has not only strengthened our approach to teaching literacy but has reaffirmed our commitment to being responsive, collaborative and innovative in our efforts to close the education gap for our students," she said.

"Overall, this initiative has equipped our school with the tools, resources and support to ensure every student has the opportunity to grow and succeed."