

Case Study

ARETHUSA COLLEGE, QUEENSLAND

Effective reading intervention in a complex learning environment

At a glance

PROGRAMS ADOPTED: **MacqLit (2021)**
RTP (2019)

- IMPACT:
- **Over 200 students enrolled in MacqLit across multiple campuses**
 - **One Year 7 student went from reading four words correctly per minute to 17**
 - **A Year 8 student went from reading at a Year 5 level to a Year 9 or 10 level in over a year**

The context

Arethusa College is an accredited independent special assistance school with eight campuses across south-east Queensland that is doing school differently. The College specialises in supporting young people in Years 7 to 12 who, due to a range of complex and intersecting factors, require additional support not available in a mainstream education setting.

Many have had significant periods of absence from the classroom, which has impacted their learning.

Why MultiLit?

At Arethusa College, educators are committed to understanding the individual needs of students and adapting their teaching approaches accordingly. About 75 per cent of Year 10 students have been assessed as being two or more years below their expected literacy level, and it's not unusual for students to arrive in Year 7 with primary level reading skills, and some unable to write their own names.

Arethusa College's Principal of Inclusive Education, Stacey Power, said MultiLit's MacqLit program ticked all the boxes for a comprehensive intervention program backed by evidence, and which covered essential components necessary for effective reading instruction – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

Importantly, it could be used to accommodate the complex and highly individual needs of the school's young people.

While MacqLit is designed to be delivered in small groups, Arethusa has found – for most students – one-on-one delivery has worked best.

"My son wrote four or five lines and was so proud of himself that he asked his teacher to take a picture of his work to send to me at home. He was so excited and so proud of his achievements that he even sent his work to friends and family!"

*– Parent of a Year 7
Arethusa College student*

"Some of our young people have, and continue to experience, significant trauma in their lives, which can make being inside a classroom extremely challenging," said Ms Power.

"They're also well aware they are behind in their reading which can compound their anxiety in a group setting.

"Doing the program one-on-one outside of the classroom in a designated space has enabled them to build rapport and trust with their support teacher – there's no judgement and this has created an environment that is much more conducive to learning for our students."

The impact

Arethusa College piloted MacqLit between 2021 and 2023, and then rolled it out across its network of eight campuses in 2024. The College has reported phenomenal individual student progress and success.

One student in Year 7 went from reading just four words correctly per minute to 17 words per minute in two months.

"That might not sound like a lot, but it's a four-fold improvement," said the school's Literacy Intervention Co-ordinator, Kylie Hitz.

"We've had other students gain a year's worth of improvement in just one term and there have been others who have absolutely excelled: I'm thinking of one Year 8 student who, over a year, went from a Year 5 reading level to a Year 9 or 10 reading level.

"It goes to show that, with the right intervention, it's never too late to help students catch up."

The MacqLit program is playing an important role in achieving Arethusa College's goal that all students finish Year 12 having met the state curriculum authority's literacy and numeracy requirements.

“When I first started MacqLit, my teacher and I would sound out the words we were reading, but now I can read and even figure out what is going to happen in the story, which is exciting. The rest of my classes are now easier for me too.”

–Liam, Year 9 Arethusa College student

“In 2023, 86 per cent of Year 12 students met the standards – a testament to the determination of our incredible young people to succeed against all odds, supported by Arethusa’s equally dedicated teachers and staff,” Ms Hitz said.

Key insights

Learning to read has had benefits beyond the classroom.

Once-disengaged students have told their teachers that they now enjoy coming to classes as they are better able to follow the curriculum content.

Ms Hitz said families have also felt the impact of their children’s accomplishments.

“When our students start to realise that they can learn and do well at school, their confidence is the first thing that increases and so does their willingness to attend school,” she said.

“We have had students with primary carers who were unable to work due to the constraints of supporting a child who refused to attend school because of their low literacy levels.

“Suddenly that parent or carer is freed from that pressure – they can now go to work and bring income into the family, which is life-changing for everyone in that family unit.

“A positive cycle has been created.”

Arethusa College currently has more than 200 students enrolled in MacqLit across its campuses, and it expects this number to grow.