Annual Report 2015
The Unit – Rooms 19 and 20

In my second year as Coordinator of the Unit we have reflected on best practice, explored new pedagogies, accessed and utilised a number of grants in order to improve facilities and learning opportunities for our students. It is with pride and pleasure that I share our progress during 2015.

Jo Simpson, Coordinator

2015 – A Summary

We started the school year with 15 enrolments. We continued to accommodate an extra student who is enrolled in mainstream school who has accessed our learning environment for a number of years. In term 3 a change of staffing resulted in a new member to our teaching staff and this remained steady for the remainder of the year. In addition to each class having a full time SSO we applied and received funding for extra support hours which resulted in an additional two part-time School Service Officers. These positions were primarily to support students on a 1:1 basis but also provided more support generally in both classrooms.

Building on our Site Improvement Plan we continued to place an emphasis on developing a strong curriculum for our students, using research to improve practice, improving opportunities for communication and inclusion and school community involvement. Our Site Improvement Plan was presented to the Governing Council early in 2015.

A major development for the Unit was the implementation of the structured teaching program. Working in partnership with the DECD structured teaching advisor Swati Phatak we have successfully implemented this approach in both classrooms. All teaching staff and School Service Officers have attended training workshops and completed observations of structured teaching at Modbury Special School.

“There needs to be a lot more emphasis on what a child can do, instead of what he cannot do.”

Dr Temple Grandin

Highlights

Sporting Schools
Student receiving ten pin bowling coaching from Ten Pin SA coaches and visited AMF Cross Road to play a game.

Sports Day
All students took part in an inclusive sports day. The wheelchair race was a highlight and very competitive!

Outdoor Play
Moving the fencing to incorporate the early years playground has allowed our students to have access to a larger play area with equipment. This has enabled increased inclusion at playtimes as our students connect with nature and establish friendships with students from other classes in a safe environment.
The structured teaching approach has moved away from group teaching and encouraged students to develop their abilities to be independent learners. As a result of the successful implementation we have noticed an increase in the amount of work that students are undertaking during the day. Students are becoming more independent as they use their visual timetables to navigate around the classroom completing their personalised learning. Our environment is more predictable for students and this has resulted in a calmer place to learn.

Our open door policy has continued to encourage visits from classes, teachers, students, families and friends. We have strengthened our collaborative work with non government service providers such as Novita, Autism SA, Downs SA and Disability SA. Working alongside these professionals has established a team approach to supporting students which has resulted in increased positive outcomes. With the introduction of the NDIA resulting in many of our students having plans in place we experienced an increased number of professionals wishing to attend school to deliver therapy sessions. We are giving priorities to professionals who will work alongside us in the classroom as this emphasises our team approach to supporting students.

Positive psychology has continued to play an important part in our school days. “Celebrating the wins” and “not sweating the small stuff” are mantras that all staff use. Extensive work has been done with students to identify emotions and responses to emotions. Working with Downs SA we are using the Right to Know program to support our students in the area of emotional growth. The Right to Know program also supports students as they enter puberty. Students are showing increased levels of resilience, especially when developing new skills.

Growing our sensory garden

We were successful in our application to receive a Coles Landcare Grant to develop a sensory garden. Our play area at the back of the Unit was quite bare and unappealing apart from a lonely sandpit and swing. Now our garden area is brimming with plant life, new smells and sounds, attracting wildlife and is a pleasant place to work, eat lunch and relax.

A few words from our Governing Council Rep.

2015 has been a growth year for the Unit. More of a focus on structured teaching has lead to an improved routine, with an increase in learning opportunities promoting students development of independence, as well as creating a calmer, more settled environment with less problem behaviour. A focus on rigorous personalised learning is evident in rooms 19 and 20.

The NDIS roll-out began to impact the Unit during the year with an increase in collaboration opportunities with a range of organisations and private therapists. These connections have and will continue to assist teachers in supporting students’ needs.

The outdoor play area has been enlarged to include more playground equipment that is shared with mainstream students, creating a better opportunity for fun and inclusive play during recess and lunch.
The Unit has also continued to build on inclusion in the classroom with an increasing number of students joining mainstream classes and attendance of whole school events being embedded into classroom practice.

Some grants during the year have provided the students with fun experiences; Sporting Schools gave them a taste of ten pin bowling, Coles Landcare allowed the development of the garden area and a technology grant has assisted in supporting the non verbal students using digital technologies.

As a parent I feel that staff have put a lot of effort into establishing structures and routines that will continue to improve the Unit and enhance our children’s learning and development into the future.

Layla Norris, Governing Council Disability Unit Representative.

Our strategic plan – a pathway to flourishing

The strategic plan is split into three categories – communication and language, Australian Curriculum and community collaboration. In this section progress will be noted in relation to the goals identified in each area.

Communication and language

- A technology grant enabled the purchase of Big Point talking devices to support non-verbal students
- Collaboration with DECD speech pathologists, non government organisations and private therapists to support communication development for all students.
- Several staff trained in using a variety of AAC devices – Proloquo2go, Accent 1000 and Compass.

Australian Curriculum

- Implementation of a daily literacy and numeracy block in line with the mainstream school.
- Ongoing work with the University of Melbourne to trial the Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES) program. The program supports the teaching and learning of students with disabilities and additional needs by providing a suite of curriculum, advice on appropriate pedagogies, assessment and reporting resources that assist teachers in recognising and responding to the diverse learning needs of all students, and in assessing and reporting student learning, monitoring student progress and providing accurate intervention advice.
- Staff attended Regional support meetings focusing on Australian Curriculum in special options settings.
- All staff members attended a conference relating to structured teaching approaches for students with autism.
- All staff members participating in observations of classrooms implementing the structured teaching approach at Modbury Special School.
Student Achievement

The achievement of long term goals need to be celebrated. The dedication of staff and families to support students in a consistent and unfaltering manner is to be commended. The students below have made particular improvements and deserve recognition:

Daniel – improved physical developments in standing and moving around independently.

Sam – increased verbal language and developing a love of learning.

Jesika – increased independence and developing play skills and turn taking.

Kai Ren – developing a sense of identity and responding to verbal directions.

Bailey – confidently sharing his passion for art, animals and dinosaurs.

Teachers received coaching and mentoring by DECD Structured Teaching Project Officer.

DECD Project Officer completed observations of rooms 19 and 20 and providing feedback for improvement.

Staff have continued to visit Murray Bridge Special School to observe and discuss developmental approaches to curriculum.

All staff attended a joint PD day with Adelaide West Special School focusing on curriculum modifications for students diagnosed with Autism.

Coordinator joined South Australian Special Education Principals and Leaders Association as a member of the Executive Board.

Community Collaboration

Continued to build on relationships with Willow Close Kindergarten and Mount Barker High School to aid transition of students starting at and leaving Mount Barker Primary School.

All teaching staff attended regional networking meetings.

Increased number of students attending mainstream classes.

Attended several community events organised by the Ladies of the Variety.

Applied and received community grants to improve facilities for all students.

As a cohesive team we have continued to work towards improving outcomes for students across all areas of our Site Improvement Plan. Supporting students and their families remains at the centre of our work at the Unit and we look forward to developing this further in 2016.

“If they can’t learn the way we teach, then we must teach the way they learn.”

Dr Ivar Lovaas