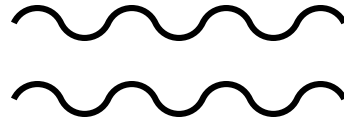


# Long term Implementation of Robust AAC in a Special Educational Setting

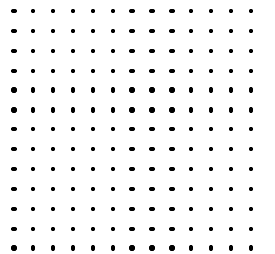
Brett Pearson, Emma  
Pearson, Helen Tainsh &  
Jane Farrall



# Bullimbal School



- A New South Wales Department of Education School for Specific Purposes, located in Tamworth.
- Most students at the school cannot rely on speech alone to be heard and understood. Approximately 85% of our students require Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) as part of their communication system.
- To be eligible for placement at Bullimbal School students will have a moderate or severe intellectual disability and/or additional diagnoses.



# The Beginning

Back to 2013  
(and prior)



# 2013



## Communication Accessible

- Began the journey of moving to being a communication accessible school
- Aim to provide expert support for students to learn and use robust AAC systems
- Communication Access means that “everyone can get their message across, no matter how they communicate.” (SCOPE, Australia).

## At Bullimbal

- Brett became principal late in 2013
- Intention to roll out Proloquo2Go and comprehensive literacy instruction school-wide
- PECS was the most common system in the school but was rarely used as students needed more language

## Barriers

- Most students in the school didn't own an AAC system
- Cost of supplying Proloquo2Go and iPads
- Many staff were using visual schedules and other visual supports for their own communication to students and perceived this as AAC
- Many staff saw compliance as a focus

Jane Farrall visited school to consult on comprehensive literacy instruction

Discussion centred around AAC and the whole of life impact of not having a robust communication system

Additionally, a lack of robust AAC impacted students' ability to participate in Literacy and other school activities

Executive team went to Melbourne for PODD training at CPEC

2014

Haylee Parfett began consulting with the school, implementing a range of Professional Learning and in-classroom support strategies.

Resourcing identified as critical to the ongoing success of implementing AAC across the school

The school's Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) contributed significantly to resourcing PODD construction including sample PODDs at all levels for student trials, and the construction of PODD straps

Individual PODD books made by classroom staff with some support

2015

PODD training conducted at least annually to minimise impact of staff turnover on implementation of AAC across all facets of the school day

With the increasing number of individual customised systems, the school had to utilise Executive staffing to meet this resourcing demand

It was at this point we began to see increasing evidence of changes in student engagement and participation, resulting from increased student autonomy

2016

Ongoing barriers faced at this time included resistance to change from some longer term staff and members of the school community.

The ongoing implementation of robust AAC was able to be sustained through the school Executive's strong belief in the right to a voice for every student, understanding of change management and knowledge of systems

Began work on developing a communication framework encompassing systems, processes to support consistent AAC assessment and implementation. Haylee Parfett was integral to this development

NDIS began being rolled out in Tamworth region

2017



# 2018

## Moving in the right direction

- New staff with different perceptions of student learning and participation helped build a positive belief in AAC (and literacy);
- Many of the new teachers were early career teachers
- Some of the new education support staff were also studying to be teachers.
- Implementation from previous years helped to fuel the shift as an increasing number of students became expressive.
- Communication Framework became a working document for all staff



## Other considerations

- ROCC was announced at ISAAC 2018. At this point ROCC became the primary tool to support communication assessment through our communication framework
- School continuing to work with Jane to support comprehensive literacy instruction



# 2019

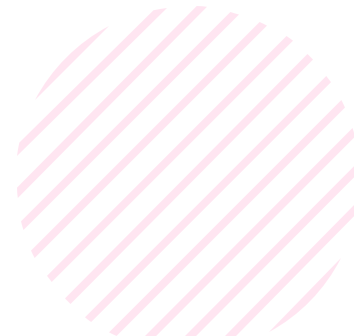


## ROCC

- All school staff undertook training in the administration of ROCC assessment tool
- Development of additional materials to support the use of ROCC, and incorporation into staff website
- Building data literacy skills became a strategic focus for all teaching staff.

## Scaffolding Supports

- School recognised the need to diversify its supports. Haylee Parfett continues to work with leadership building the Communication Framework, Helen Tainsh comes on board working in classroom and with the school community.
- Our first AAC Camp for families was conducted over a weekend with the help of Jane, Helen and OT



# 2020 & 2021




## Unprecedented times – COVID-19

- The school went into a remote learning model for extended periods requiring management and instruction to pivot significantly
- Daily learning for every student incorporated livestreamed and pre-recorded content from staff embedding AAC throughout all instruction
- During AAC awareness month the school remained in lockdown. “AAC is Magic” focus for all classes
- The school leadership team chose to continue with external consultants during this time in order to support the continuation of AAC and Literacy implementation.
- The focus was support engagement, participation and wellbeing throughout this period and ensure all efforts were made to minimise disruptions to students accessing their learning and use of AAC.



SETTING  
THE  
SCENE  
FOR  
REMOTE  
LEARNING





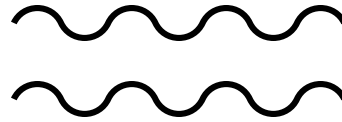
2022 -  
2025

Where we are  
now?

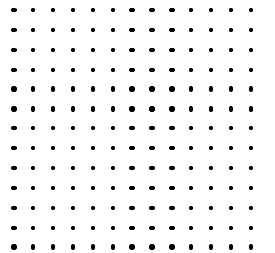
The following aspects have been identified  
as integral to the successful  
implementation of AAC across the school



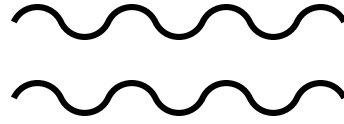
# System Availability



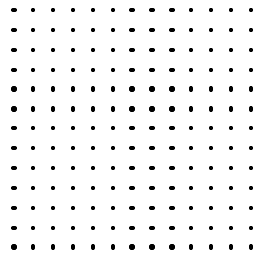
- Availability of systems via NDIS varies considerably and often dependent on level of experience of local speech pathologists in AAC
- School expectation for students to have their systems with them at all times – in school and in the community
- Ensuring all staff have AAC systems present at all times and in all locations throughout the school day.
- Comprehensive induction and support process for new staff to support the above expectation.
- To complement existing systems, the school has recently partnered with AssistiveWare as part of a pilot project to trial Proloquo across all classrooms.



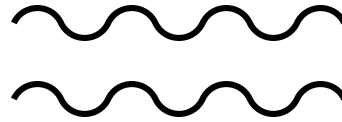
# Resourcing



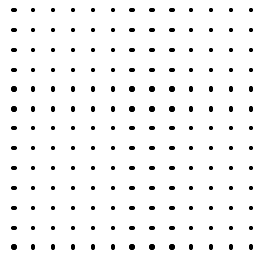
- The school has established an administrative support position, initially funded by our Department of Education to reduce teacher workload and administration burden.
- Position enables all AAC resources including PODD books, to be customised and made without adding to classroom team or executive workload. This has resulted in a robust AAC system being available for every student upon enrolment at the school.
- Also supporting ongoing resourcing and coordination of supports for Literacy programs, Sensory Processing, AAC (electronic and non-electronic), and NDIS therapy supports.
- This position is critical for the success of all these programs.



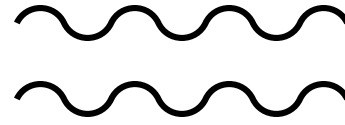
# Working with Consultants



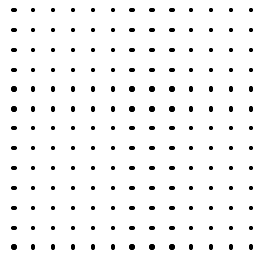
- Bullimbal has engaged AAC Consultants, a literacy consultant and consultants around student sensory processing needs.
- Each of these individuals have had a focus on supporting best practice. This has included:
  - Working in classrooms modelling what they are recommending.
  - Conducting professional learning sessions with staff
  - Supporting assessment and goal setting
  - Working with families and teams as requested
- As understanding in one area has increased e.g. knowledge of literacy and the language needed, this has driven improved practice across all areas.



# Communication Framework



- The development and ongoing refinement of a Communication Framework and associated website to support the implementation of AAC has been a key factor to success.
- The framework guides teachers and support staff in all aspects of implementing AAC in a school environment from assessment and goal setting through to exemplars of best practice in teaching



# ROCC Data

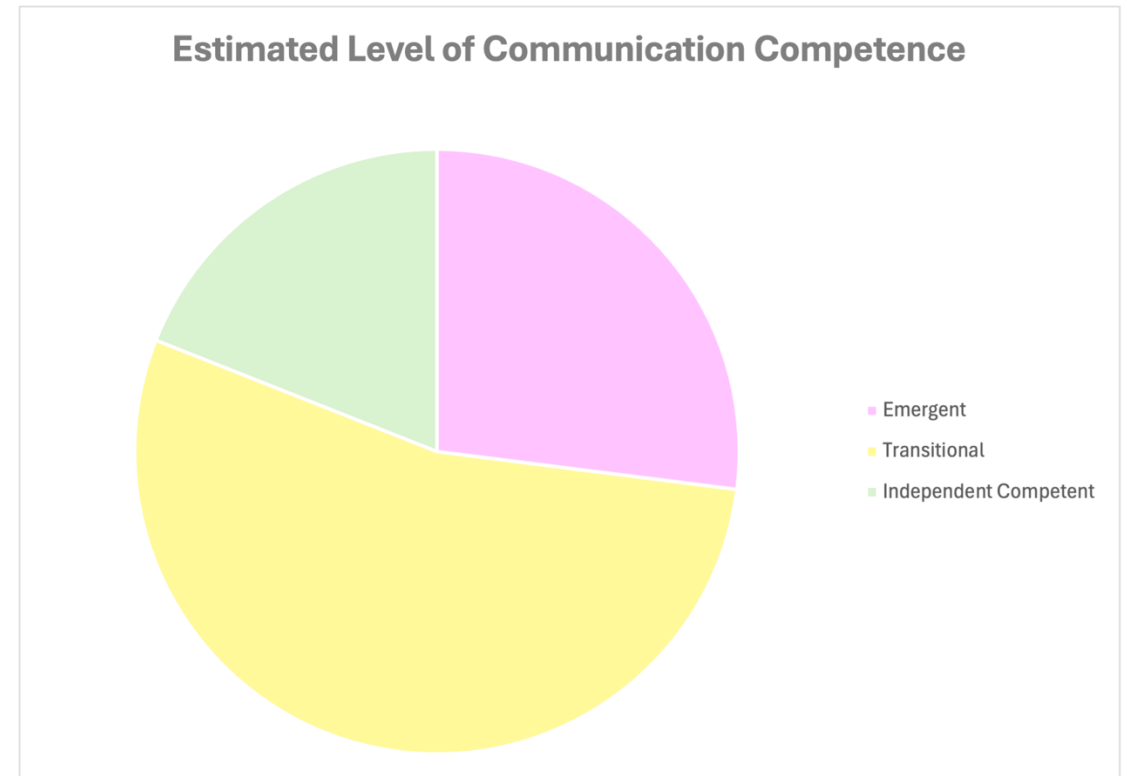
## Estimated level of Communication Competence



We now have 5 years of ROCC data for Bullimbal School.

We have data re each individual student, each classroom plus whole school data. This assists identify focus to support school with.

This helps all staff with a shared understanding of communication partner behavior and communication development.

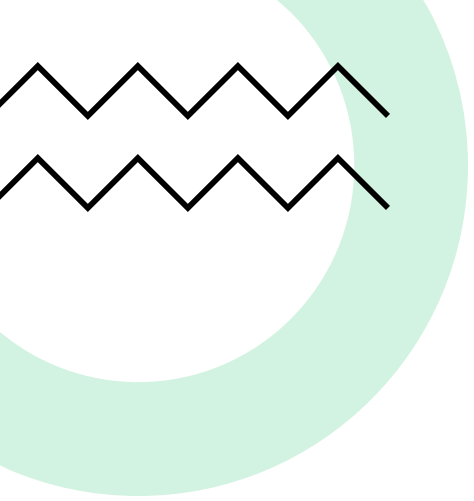




All of this is  
working  
towards  
building a  
sustainable  
model

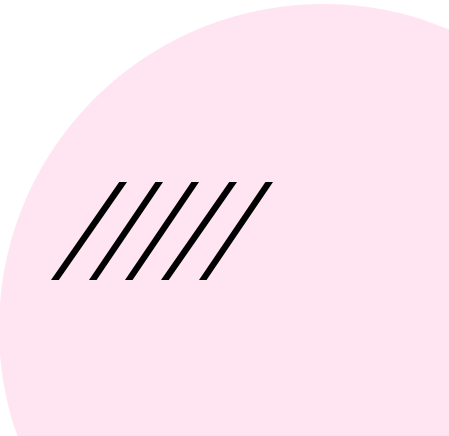


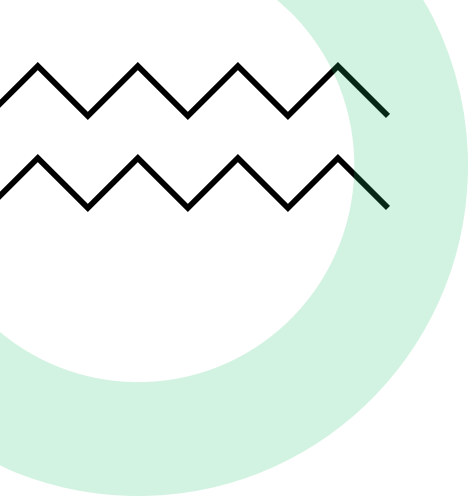




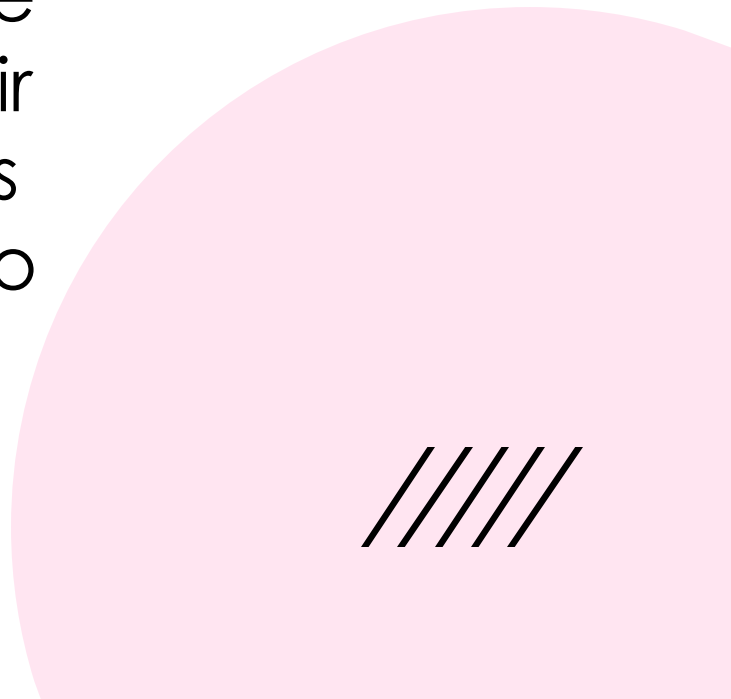
# Additional Factors

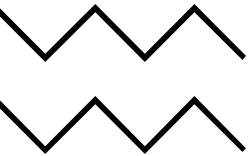
There have been many additional factors that have impacted the implementation of AAC in the school over this period. Of these, there are several that have had a significant impact, either positive or negative, and sometimes both.





One of the biggest factors is the strongly held belief of the school executive that all people have a right to communicate, their understanding that therefore the school needs to be communication accessible, and their knowledge that most of the students at the school need to have access to a robust AAC system.



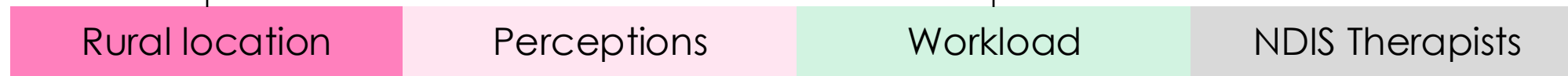


# Additional Factors



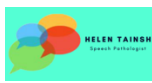
Over the time we are discussing the NSW Department of Education has had an increased focus on teacher workload. Due to the complex support needs of our students, all teaching and learning materials require significant customisation, resulting in increased workload. School has needed to be strategic in supporting around resources in all teaching and learning, including AAC.

Cost barrier for training and engaging consultants  
Resource barrier in terms of local expertise



Ongoing shifting of staff and parent perceptions of what students are capable of and the need for them to have a voice

Speech Pathologist's training in AAC is very varied. Staff at the school may have received more AAC training and have more practice experience implementing AAC than some Speech Pathologists working with students through NDIS. Additionally, some speech pathologists have a strong preference for one specific AAC system and many only recommend electronic systems.





Initially the school had a focus on providing electronic AAC systems during school hours, but this rapidly shifted with the recognition that all students need a non-electronic system so that they have a voice at all times. The school then made a decision to provide non-electronic systems for all students who need one. As the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has been rolled out this has continued as very few students are getting non-electronic systems via NDIS.

Staff experiences with AAC in previous settings have had an impact on success. These experiences have varied from none through to negative.

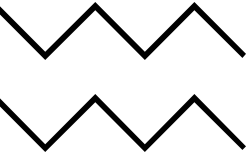
Ongoing AAC, literacy and sensory processing training, including formal staff training and established staff supporting new staff;



At this time, over 50% of the school are of First Nations origin and the school has worked hard to create links and supports with local First Nations groups. Students also have varied cultural backgrounds, experiences, and are from a range of socioeconomic statuses.

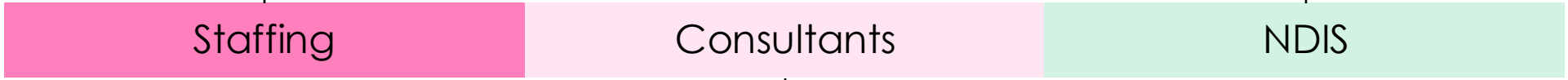
The recognition of the importance of comprehensive literacy instruction in supporting AAC implementation, and the understanding that this is a two-way interaction (Erickson & Koppenhaver, 2020);





Teacher turnover has been a factor throughout this journey as part of the shifting culture of the school. Further factors influencing staff retention include the regional setting of the school, COVID-19, and the nationwide teacher shortage. Each of these have presented different and varied challenges.

NDIS was rolled out in the Tamworth region in 2017. Some students still don't have an NDIS package, most do. Maintaining relationships with therapists employed under NDIS has required significant time. Striving to work with therapists on similar goals has also required significant input, and hasn't always been achieved.



Regular visits from consultants to the school around literacy, AAC, sensory processing and access; consultants meeting with families and teams as needed as well as school staff



# Outcomes

- Increased student autonomy
- Significant reduction in students' communicating through behaviours of concern
- Creation of a community of individuals who have become better communication partners, which has had a roll-on effect to the regional community
- Positive outcomes in literacy, as student receptive and expressive language has improved, resulting in improvements in both reading with comprehension and writing. We are also aware that comprehensive literacy instruction has supported the use of AAC and recognise the reciprocal nature of this outcome



- Staff retention across the school has improved as many staff recognise the value of the training provided, the resourcing supports available and the positive school culture and collaborative environment;
- Improvements in the school staff's ability to support other schools in the region with students who require AAC supports;
- Ongoing increases in demand for student placement at the school and increased requests for support of students who need AAC in other settings.



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