

# Primary Principals' Sabbatical Report - Term 2 2015

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## Sunnybrae Normal School



The focus of this sabbatical was *'to investigate how to best support and accelerate Year 1 students who are underachieving in literacy i.e. oral language, reading and writing, during their first year at school.'*

### Acknowledgements

I appreciate the opportunity that this sabbatical has given me to follow an inquiry that will enable us to refine and enhance our practice with the aim of improving outcomes for our Year 1 students.

Thanks to the Sunnybrae Board of Trustees for supporting and encouraging me to apply for this sabbatical and to our Senior Leadership team for taking up additional leadership activities during my absence and supporting me to review and reflect on our practice.

Thanks to the Sunnybrae parents/caregivers who completed the survey about transition. They have provided valuable feedback on their own experiences and have made suggestions that we can build on to improve and refine our transition procedures.

I am grateful to the following schools, their Principals, Senior Leadership teams and teachers of Year 1 students that were so welcoming and helpful when I visited; thank you for giving me some of your precious time and for sharing your knowledge, beliefs and resources related to literacy learning for Year 1 students: Hauraki Primary School, Target Road School, Pinehill School, Baverstock Oaks School, Upper Harbour Primary School, Coatesville School and Sunnybrae Normal School.

I very much appreciated the time that Dr Alison Davis, Director of Vision Education, gave me to talk about her beliefs and ideas around effective literacy programmes for Year 1 students.

I also acknowledge and thank the Ministry of Education and TeachNZ for providing this opportunity; it was a privilege to have this time to spend on an inquiry that aims to improve practice at Sunnybrae Normal School.

## **Purpose of the sabbatical**

The overall aim was to develop a deeper understanding of how to successfully transition 5 year olds into Sunnybrae Normal School and accelerate the learning of those students that we identify after one month at school as being at risk of underachieving in literacy. The outcomes of the study will be used to inform future teaching and learning practices at our school.

### **The following inquiry question was investigated:**

*What successful, innovative interventions and strategies can be used by teachers and parents/whānau to accelerate Year 1 students identified as being at risk of underachieving in literacy i.e. oral language, reading and writing, during their first year at school?*

## **Rationale and Background information**

### **Issues important to our school:**

We have been concerned at the lack of progress for some of our students in their first year at school. Having a block of time to review our practice and undertake research around how we can accelerate a student's learning in oral language, reading and writing, after their one-month check is completed, has been very beneficial. The sooner we can build a child's belief in him/herself as a learner and in his or her own ability to succeed at school the better. We know that working in partnership and building strong relationships between school and home contribute significantly to the success of students at school and we have always valued this. Hence, the additional focus questions - How can we improve our practices around transitioning? Is there something else we could be doing that would support our families/whānau?

### **Intended outcomes and benefits for Sunnybrae Normal School:**

- To meet the following need, as stated in our Strategic Plan – *To reduce any achievement disparity identified within our school, especially within literacy and numeracy. Our review cycle will drive the identification of need and subsequent action throughout the school.*
- To make further progress towards achieving our Strategic Plan Goal - 1.1 *To provide quality literacy programmes that enable students to communicate effectively through oral, written and visual language. Our aim is for students to achieve at or above the levels as indicated in the National Standards for reading and writing.*
- Year 1 literacy programmes will cater more effectively to the needs of underachieving students i.e. our priority learners.
- To make further progress towards achieving our Strategic Plan Goal 2.2 *To continue to focus on building strong partnerships with parents/caregivers and the wider school community through effective communication and reporting.*
- Transition procedures and initial assessments (i.e. one-month check) will be reviewed and an action plan will be developed based on the review recommendations to improve our practice.
- A webpage will be developed on the Sunnybrae Normal School website of ideas and links to online resources that will give parents/whānau easy access to support.
- The new learning that arises from the sabbatical study will inform next steps for the BoT, Senior Leadership team and teachers.

## Activities Undertaken

- The inquiry was based on an initial review of Sunnybrae Normal School's current practice by reflecting on Sunnybrae's Year 1 literacy programmes and discussing these with our Assistant Principal, who is also our Literacy Leader.
- Surveyed and interviewed colleagues, including literacy expert, teachers, Principals and Literacy/Junior team Leaders at other schools – *see Appendix 1 for school survey used to guide discussions.*
- Visited 6 other schools and analysed and reflected on the survey data and information collected.
- A Parent/Caregiver Survey was developed and distributed to the parents of the children starting at Sunnybrae Normal School in Terms 1 and 2, 2015, to gain an understanding of their perceptions around how well we transitioned their children and how we can work with them to support their child's learning - *see Appendix 2 for survey questions.*
- A webpage was developed on the Sunnybrae Normal School website with ideas and links to online resources that will give parents/whānau easy access to support - <http://www.sunnybrae.school.nz/parent-information>; this is a work in progress.
- Consultation with literacy leader – Dr Alison Davis, Director of Vision Education, who has led school-wide PLD and been a critical friend for us in the past.
- Professional readings related to literacy programmes, accelerating learning and transitioning – *see References listed below.*

## Findings

### The Literacy Leader Surveys

There were a lot of common threads coming through the surveys from each school. I have included the ideas from my discussions with Literacy Leaders and Principals that we will either continue to implement, or consider further, to enhance and strengthen our own practice. (NB: I have used the term 'parents' through this report meaning parent/caregiver/whānau member).

### What strategies are being used to prepare children, parents and whānau for the transition into primary school?

- Schools generally gave the impression that they were enrolling a family, not just the child and that building strong relationships with each family is a priority.
- All schools encourage pre-enrolled students to visit the school and their future class prior to them starting school. They are encouraged to come on average 2-3 times, with more visits as needed e.g. for CWSN. Parents can stay with their children or leave them (based on need). Some schools meet with the parents to explain how they can support their child to succeed at school while the child is visiting their new class.

- At some schools the children get a letter inviting them to their school visits. Specific mornings or afternoons are set for these visits e.g. from 9.30 am till 11.00 am. At this time the teacher runs a developmental programme, linked to the letter and poem of the week e.g. Dough, art activities etc.
- One school gives a transition booklet to each child; this includes their new teacher's photo, dates of visits and ideas to help children be ready for school. Children are placed into one of three classes prior to coming in for the visits.
- Transition meetings are held in all schools for special needs children with their parents, the Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers, the school Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and class teacher attending to share information and plan the transition; more pre-school visits are encouraged for these children as needed. Prior to this meeting the SENCO and/or class teacher at our school visit the child to observe them in their pre-school environment to see how they work and play. They also discuss with ECE staff any information they may have to share.
- Prospective parent meetings, or open days, are held once or twice a term at some schools where the Principal and Assistant Principal meet with parents and/or take parents on a tour of the Junior school sharing the school vision, values and aims of the Year 1 programme as they are observing. Parents are encouraged to talk to the Year 1 students about their learning. Schools contact contributing pre-schools with dates for these meetings through the year; some advertise them on their websites.
- At some schools morning or afternoon tea is supplied by parents from the PTA or Friends of the School to groups of new parents visiting, either prior to or after their child starts school, to welcome them to the school community from a parent perspective. This develops a sense of community and belonging. Parents also get to meet and make connections with other parents who have children at the same level.
- At some schools prospective parents and/or pre-schools are invited to bring their children to Junior School assemblies and production performances.
- In one school the teacher is released for a morning to visit local pre-schools once a term, to develop positive relationships with their teachers and students. The teacher connects with and talks to the children e.g. 'I have come to play at your place today ... and soon you can come to play at my place'. This teacher believed that 'it shouldn't be seen as a new beginning when children start school, rather building on from their pre-school experiences'. Portfolios from the pre-schools are shared and kept in the classroom for a couple of weeks, the teacher makes a positive comment on them before returning them to the parents. With an open door policy, siblings are invited in at the end of the day. School becomes a very familiar place to the younger preschoolers.
- Buddy systems operate in some of the schools as follows:
  - Children are allocated a transition buddy who is with the child in their new classroom on their last visit prior to starting. They go on tours of the school with their buddies helping and they take part in role-plays to prepare them for some school activities e.g. Where would they play? Who will they go to if they have a problem in the playground - the AP acts as the duty teacher. Where is the toilet, hall, library, office?
  - At one school with a pre-school on site they have a 'Big Buddy' programme where for the term before a child turns 5, they come up to the school once a week for a 90 minute block to visit the classroom they will be going into. The big buddies, who are Year 4 students, walk down with a staff member to collect these children; staff from the pre-school also accompany them on their

visit. The big buddies stay with their buddy for the whole time to support the teacher and preschooler with these visits. These big buddies are also rostered once a week to go and read at the pre-school. 'All children look forward to it as this provides an opportunity to grow leaders, as well as ensuring our preschool children have a friend they know when they start at our school'.

- Big buddies take part in feed and read sessions with new children (first 2 visits) and they join them to eat lunch on the 3rd visit. Feed and read occurs at 10.30 am - children bring fruit and/or vegetables to eat while the teacher reads them a story. Morning tea starts at 10.40 am.
- Year 6 buddy class come each week to read with the children; the buddies introduce new children at assemblies.

### How do you connect with the local pre-schools?

Schools interviewed have all made connections with their local pre-schools and ECE teachers, but often not in a planned way and to varying degrees. The barrier can be around establishing relationships with a large number of pre-schools feeding into a school.

- At two schools the teachers had sometimes been to pre-schools' night sessions, where they were invited to talk to prospective parents.
- One school made strong connections by inviting lead teachers and staff from the pre-schools into the Junior school where lead teachers then shared their programmes in action. A two-way sharing process worked well. This school provided their wall friezes for the pre-school to put on the wall so that children can make connections between their current setting and the new one.
- One school with a pre-school on site have built a particularly strong relationship with this pre-school. 'Each term our Senior Leadership team, reception class teachers and whānau leader meet with the Manager, Head teacher and Board members of the pre-school. At this meeting we provide feedback on the students that have recently enrolled in our school. The pre-school give us detailed information re any students soon to be coming to our school so we can select the right teacher and friends to be with. Our preschool alternate each Friday afternoon on attending our full school assembly and visiting our library. Our Big Buddies once again support them in this programme. This relationship is a strong one due to location; it would be great if a programme such as this could be established with all our feeder early childhood centres. On occasion, other pre-schools contact us to visit the school, particularly when they have students at their school coming to ours when they turn 5. Some send only the teachers, particularly the head teachers, to come and look around and take photos and get information about our school, other pre-schools have brought their students here to visit and look around the playground. We have also had the opportunities to attend parent meetings in other pre-schools and offer some information about how to help prepare their child at home to start school.'
- At our school contact can be made with the pre-school if/when required once a student starts school and further clarification is sort as to how this student presented at pre-school.

## What are the pre-requisites to ensure success and how are these being communicated to parents/whānau prior to children starting school and during their first year?

It is beneficial if children starting school can ...

- be independent and confident to try new things
  - be encouraged to talk a lot and express their feelings and ideas – good oral language skills are a priority
  - understand school behaviour expectations e.g. ability to sit still
  - climb, explore playground equipment, throw, catch, hit a ball - to develop gross motor skills
  - do activities involving cutting, gluing, drawing, using pegs, using tweezers - to develop fine motor skills
  - draw a picture of themselves
  - be read to every day
  - recognise and possibly write their name
  - know the difference between letters and numbers
  - have some alphabet knowledge – letters and sounds
  - read poems – for rhyme and rhythm
  - complete puzzles
  - use the correct pencil grip
  - do fun writing activities ...
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- Emergent and family literacy evenings can be held for parents to explain how they can support their children to strengthen their literacy skills, how schools teach children to read and what the comprehension strategy and surface goals mean.
  - New parent meetings are held every 5 weeks on a set day in one school. The Principal and AP run these together to go over key areas of learning for New Entrants – reading, writing and maths. A writing progressions chart is shared to show writing goals and sample of texts; ring cards with high-frequency words are shared and discussions are held about nurturing children with good diet, water, rest – appropriate lunches etc. A handout is distributed re how to help support learning at home.
  - The school with a Reception Class shared a goals and outcomes sheet that is given to parents so that they know the philosophy behind the class. Children are in the Reception Class for a minimum of 2 weeks and a maximum of 2 terms. Promotion out of the class is dependent on the development of the whole child i.e. not only their academic progress but also their general social and emotional well-being and readiness.
  - ‘Ready for school’ evenings are held at one school each term, where parents of pre-schoolers can come and meet the Senior Leadership team and teachers in the New Entrant classes. Parents have input into what information they would like from the evening, hence the needs of the community are met.
  - One teacher set up a *Smart Start for School* programme that parents could attend. This went over the skills children need to come to school with and was a practical session that allowed parents to really become involved.
  - At one school the Principal enrolls all children, meeting the parents and the child to ‘put a name to a face prior to them starting’.
  - At our school National Standards criteria are shared at parent meetings – home support sheets are given to parents at the February *Meet the Parents* evening.

## What assessments are used to establish starting points for writing, reading and oral language programmes? When are they done?

Assessments for all schools are completed somewhere within a child's first 6 weeks at school. Only limitation can be with English Language Learners or CWSN who do not have the language skills required for some of the assessments.

Range of assessments used	Number of schools
Record of Oral Language (some use JOST)	4
Concepts about Print	3
Switch onto Spelling or letters and sounds check	4
Letter ID (Marie Clay's or other)	5
How many words they can write?	5
How many high-frequency words can they read? - School based lists	7
Rhyming test – out of 15	1
Running Record (from Red level)	6
JAM assessment (Maths)	7
Social and Self Management checklist	2
Fine motor skills – self portrait, colouring within the lines, cutting	2
School Entry Assessment (SEA)	1
MoE Phonological & Phonemic Awareness tests – Gough Kastler Roper	1
ESOL assessments	2
Writing sample	1

## How are the results communicated to parents?

Meeting is held with parents after the testing – a take home pack of how they can help, including reading and writing goals, is given out.

Summary is recorded on a Beginning School Report, which includes ways to help at home. This is shared at a meeting held between the teacher and parents/whānau.

After the first few weeks – parents tell the teacher what they know about their child. Comprehensive home link books keep parents up to date with learning levels and expectations.

Summary sheets are written up after each assessment and a copy is kept in the student's profile with the assessment; another is placed in the student's portfolio. If a student is consistently showing low stanines in their assessments, parents are contacted and meet to go over the assessment, what it means and how parents can help at home. Parents are given examples of activities they can do at home. Reports also go home at the same time.

Some schools do not communicate anything formally at this stage, unless there are significant needs to be addressed.

Home school communication is on-going – there is an expectation for teachers to contact 3 parents a week – via email, phone, face-to-face at school – teachers track this. Home Communication books are used.

One school sends home a reception class report (includes a photo of the child). The 'Reception Report' is written under the Te Whāriki Strands - Well-being – Mana Atua; Belonging – Mana Whenua; Contribution – Mana Tangata; Communication – Mana Reo and Exploration – Mana Aotūroa strand. The report is based on assessments done as part of the 6-week check. Parents get this report earlier if the child transitions out of the reception class sooner. A meeting is held with the parent.

## What literacy programmes are being used in Year 1 classrooms?

Programmes are based on teacher pedagogy, knowledge and application of the guidelines in the Ministry of Education's handbook - *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1-4*, the *Literacy Learning Progressions* and *Reading/Writing Standards* guidelines.

Co-operative planning along with the use of learning progressions ensures consistency across one school. Teaching strategies and ideas for lifting achievement are shared at syndicate meetings. In this school the Duffy sheets are used to support teachers when planning – these came from Toni Cassrels.

Resources from Alison Davis, Gail Loane, Jill Eggleton, Sheena Cameron and Louise Dempsey are references for teachers.

Specific programmes being used are:

- Joy Allcock's - Switch Onto Spelling
- Barbara Brann's Magic Caterpillar for handwriting.
- Small groups for Oral Language support with 'Talk to Learn' until 5.5yrs then 'Quick 60'
- Jolly phonics - use the alphabet and their progression.
- Word Power (10 minutes of solid uninterrupted writing of words).
- iPad apps – Blobble Writer, Little Writer
- Literacy Skill builder activities
- Lots of letter/sound games and knowledge activities
- Letter, sound, blend of the week and later, digraphs
- Role plays for oral language development
- Sheena Cameron – *Teaching Reading Comprehension Strategies* – good visuals are provided with this programme. Modelling books are used for guided groups – teachers cut out the goals and put them in their teacher modelling books. There is a comprehension focus for 3 weeks – displayed in classrooms – in long-term plans; this is shared with parents.
- Writing goals – Louise Dempsey and Sheena Cameron's writing books are used. Children all have a goal sheet for writing in their goal folder; this folder includes their writing, reading and maths goals.
- Classroom programmes include learning through play in a directed way – i.e. with specific learning intentions stated.
- SOLO (Pam Hook) thinking is used to guide their discussions in groups/class.
- Focus for English Language Learners is on the development of Oral Language skills as a result of experiential learning activities.

Homework is similar across schools with a focus on practising reading - reading books, alphabet and high-frequency words (on ring), poetry books; guidelines are provided to parents.

Other strategies and motivational ideas to support and engage students in literacy that teachers shared were:

- Lower readers are invited to also read with the group above.
- Each child has a soft toy buddy in a bucket – the children read their instructional or independent reader to this soft toy each day.
- On Fun Fridays – after morning tea, children do some cooking; the recipe links to the letter of the week and is sent home with the poem of the week.



## How are students' literacy levels tracked in Year 1?

All schools were tracking students; systems varied between schools as follows:

- Children's progress is tracked through data being entered into SMS – eTap. Individuals have a graph that shows progress – teachers plot levels as assessments are done.
- Running Records, writing levels – samples Week 5 – use own rubric for marking and moderation of these; JAM – all entered into SMS – eTap.
- Use of a reading 'wall' – each child has a card that teachers complete that tracks their reading level. Children's cards are moved on the wall as they progress through the year levels. Syndicate team minutes are also used to track children who are at risk.
- Each teacher has a class reading graph where they plot student progress at the end of each term. On syndicate agenda/minutes we record students who have a low letter identification score i.e. letter and/or sounds; results are recorded on a table. This alerts the AP/Literacy Leader as to which children require additional support from the Year 1 teacher-aide and resourcing is given to support these students throughout the term. At the end of the term, teachers reassess these students and place their scores on the agenda/minutes document. The above process is also used with regard to the tracking of progress in reading and writing high-frequency words. If a student score is low on this - they are placed on the Steps to Literacy programme with a personalised list. In effect we track closely - reading levels, progress in learning letter names and sounds as well as progress in learning to read and write high-frequency words.
- All teachers plot their classes within a month at beginning of year – into 3x tiers.  
1<sup>st</sup> tier – students below expectation – will meet expectation with close monitoring and quality class programme.  
2<sup>nd</sup> tier – as above – need a supplementary programme of acceleration.  
3<sup>rd</sup> tier – well below expectation, have not met expectation after participating in supplementary programme.
- Individual and class wedge graphs are done each term for Year 1-3 to highlight underachievers (printed in Roll books). Data is also entered on SMS. Chat 'n Track strategy is used for teacher inquiry around Target Students. Chat 'n Track meetings are held every 3 weeks, between the teacher and their mentor (DP meets with the Y1/2 teachers). Brainstorm ideas together re how to accelerate students. Discussions are also held with team PLD meetings re what is being done to support and accelerate target students – share ideas that are recorded in team minutes. Reading Recovery teacher analyses this and chooses children for Reading Recovery.
- Every 5 weeks progress and achievement graphs are completed.
- On-going testing of letter-sound knowledge - twice a term – graph this through SMS – Edge (using wedge graph). Green level onwards – check once a term.
- A table is set up on a Google doc – teachers enter student names into table at the curriculum level/stage the child is at for reading, writing and maths - time at school is indicated.
- Reading for Year 1 and 2 – tracked through wedge graphs – weeks at school – using an excel spreadsheet.
- Look at progress June to June - across 2 classes.
- Visual graph of OTJ for mid-year and OTJ end of Year 1 is used for comparison of movement. Results also feed into consideration for Year 2 target students in Reading and Writing. Other factors taken into consideration when highlighting target students are level of home support and attendance.

## **At what point do you start an intervention programme for students identified as underachieving in literacy in Year 1?**

Responses from the 7 schools are listed below:

- As soon as we have concerns we provide teacher aide support; this is preceded by a parent interview to inform them of the need for additional support.
- After the 6-week checkpoint is completed – children are targeted to go into a phonics group – run by a teacher aide who is trained by the SENCO.
- An intervention could start after a term – 0.8 teacher time is used for group support in literacy and maths as needed; teachers recommend children to be in the groups.
- After 5 weeks children can be selected to have additional support from a literacy support teacher who works with a small group of 6 children assisting them with writing. Teacher-aide support is provided in each Year 1 class.
- Data from the SEA (school entry assessments) and 5.5 retest is compared. The students who have not progressed are highlighted and the best intervention programme will be actioned (i.e. Talk to Learn, working with a group with a teacher aide who is attached to a funded student, but also needs the literacy intervention).
- Usually after 20 weeks, or before depending on individual learning progress.
- Picked up as quickly as possible, even if not really ready, as the potential is there.

## **What successful interventions and strategies are being used to accelerate those students identified as priority learners for literacy support in Year 1?**

A mixture of teacher/teacher aide support is provided within the first year of school in a variety of ways as follows:

- Teachers are focusing on their target students within the classroom programme. They are supported by team members, through syndicate meeting discussions, to try different strategies with these students. In addition, a Literacy Support teacher works with small groups of up to 6 students, 5 days a week for 30 mins – 0.6 staffing is allocated for Year 1-3 targeted students. The focus is on motivating and supporting them to plan and write a story. Teacher modelling includes creating word banks; alphabet letter and sound knowledge is also targeted.
- Learning assistants (teacher aides) provide small group support (e.g. alphabet work, phonics, high-frequency words). Specific skills identified on the referral or running record are the key focus of each lesson. Target students have scored below stanine at one month at school assessment and below on 5.6 retest. Data from the SEA (school entry assessments) and 5.5 assessment is given to the learning support whānau leader each term who decides along with the classroom teacher which children should be picked up by Learning Support. Children attend three 45 minutes sessions per week in small group teaching settings.
- Teacher aide support is used in all Year 1 classes under the direction of the teacher. Activities include: Phonic junk boxes – talk about sounds; Jolly Phonics - sticky sentence building; lots of letter/sound games; letter, blend of week and digraph games and practising reading for reading mileage.
- Tracking sheets are used – 4-5 children are targeted in each class – teacher includes what the child can do and what their goal is – shared at syndicate meetings to gain ideas; these are added to the tracking sheets. Sheets are shared with the teacher aide so that they know the goals. Sometimes the teacher works with the tracking group, while the teacher aide supports others.

- Phonics and fine motor groups work with a teacher aide.
- PMP – gross motor – done with all Year 1 children – 3 times a week - run by teacher aide, teachers and parent helpers are involved – 30 min sessions.
- Assistant Principal (literacy leader) takes children most at need for remedial literacy in Y1 and 2. Lesson includes – sharing of Learning Intention, use of Meaning, Structure and Visual strategies - specifically modelled; practise reading with fluency. Self-monitoring skills are taught – 4 times a week for 30 mins.
- Literacy support groups are run by a trained Reading Recovery teacher – focus is on alphabet knowledge, rereading familiar books, letter identification, phonics activities, word study from previous day, teacher modeling, guided reading, letter formation practice.
- *Steps to Literacy* programme, run by a trained teacher aide working with a personalised high-frequency word list for each child.
- Phonological Awareness programmes – run by trained teacher aides.
- Speech Language Therapist follow-up activities with teacher aides.
- *Quick 60* programme is used from Year 1; some schools use this from Year 2.
- Teacher aides and Learning Assistants help in classrooms as needed.

### **Family/whānau support – what contact is made and what suggestions are given for them to support their children?**

Schools offering additional intervention programmes at Year 1 responded as follows:

- Special meetings are held with parents of students who are in intervention groups – these meetings are run by the intervention teacher.
- Interviews are held with the family/whānau on entry to the programme. A letter is sent and interview times are arranged through the office. If a parent hasn't made contact – office staff phone the family to organise a time. This process helps to ensure contact is made with as many families as possible; they are invited to come and observe the programme in action.
- AP/Literacy Support teacher talks to the teacher who lets the parents know about the intervention. AP meets with them casually and explains why they are coming to her for support. She shows them what she will cover and sends regular notes home during the intervention.
- Learning plans with Learning Intentions and Success Criteria for parents are sent home at the end of Term 1 to be discussed at Term 2 Week 3 conference. Inform if below, show wedge graph to share a sense of urgency. Relate this to National Standards expectation after 40 weeks. Show child's wedge graph, discuss home strategies e.g. read and write high-frequency words; read texts to and with them.
- Letters go home to parents once the support teacher has had conversations with them. Anniversary reports only go to parents of those students who are 'at' and 'above' until conversations have been held with a parent i.e. indicating their child is underachieving – it shouldn't be a surprise. AP's contact details are provided in the letter.
- Suggestions for supporting students are provided through a Welcome newsletter.
- Letter home explaining the programme. Information evenings are held to explain the programme to families. A child attending Learning Support will take a letter home explaining the reason for them attending and the commitment required from the family to support this work.
- There is an expectation that a home reading diary will be filled out showing nightly reading. It includes information for the parents about how to support the home reading. It also shows the strategies children are being taught to independently decode words, so that these can be reinforced at home.

## Ideas from Literacy Expert – Dr Alison Davis

### What is the best way to support 5 year olds who are underachieving in literacy in their first year at school?

Run a [developmental programme](#) in the afternoons with the following focus:  
- [planned oral language interactions](#) - include teacher aides, roam but be more explicit. Actively encourage the use of oral language as they 'play'. Promote reading of picture books and use of finger puppets.

[Dose and density](#) – consider how much? how often? Provide lower groups with an extra 1 or 2 reading lessons a week.

Instruction needs to have [5 mins of phonics, phonemic awareness](#) - sounds at beginning of every reading and writing lesson.

Consistent programme, links to spelling programme e.g. Joy Allcock, throughout the school.

In [follow-up activities](#) ...

Include handwriting for motor skills, say the letter and sound in pairs - hold up card b B - other one writes it.

'Find' activities e.g. find a word that starts with or ends in ? ... in their reading book. Sound/letter words – e.g. pick up a word that starts with a letter or with the 'b' sound. Share and compare with a partner e.g. 'this is what I have done, what have you done?' 'One thing I already know is ... a new thing I now know is' ... Use prompt cards for this.

[Keep coming back to the high-frequency words](#). Have laminated cards with these on and get the children to test each other on them.

Use photos of classroom with captions. E.g. 'I can see a desk' said Alison ...

Scan and email home – videos of the children, taken with iPads, having discussions; could also go on class blogs.

During [instruction time](#) ask questions that promote understanding of cue strategies ... M-meaning questions; S-structure questions; V-visual questions e.g. what is the first sound in kite? How many phonemes that sound like ... can you find?

Look at the picture and discuss what it shows.

Emphasise developing [knowledge and understanding of vocabulary](#); keep building on it each day.

[Develop oral fluency](#) with repeated reading, retelling a story, going on a picture walk. Children to video each other - have turns at being leader of the group.

Check out the [Ready to Read review](#). - link from Literacy Online site.

### Thoughts on transition and ideas for parent support leading up to starting school. When meeting with parents talk to them about ...

- Listening to lots of [poetry with rhyme and rhythm](#).
- Developmental activities – share the [Literacy Learning Progressions](#) with them.
- Encourage them to look at the pictures to support their reading.
- Understanding sounds, not just the alphabet ones, look at the ones that vary e.g. vowel afterwards to make soft and hard vowels.

- High-frequency words - what they can do to practice these and why they are important. Make laminated cards of high-frequency words, on a ring, for them to practise with at home.
- Home reading - reading material going home could be a mixture of total choice (i.e. child's choice), and/or familiar books they have read before and/or books at their instructional level.
- Emphasise the importance of parents [reading to](#) children.
- Handwriting – copying, using correct letter formations and pencil grip.
- The value of 'talk' in the supermarket.
- Encourage children to ask questions.
- Some TV is very good but be selective and choose what they are watching by using recordings of valuable programmes, not just what happens to be on.
- Promote the use of suitable Apps and websites.
- Promote the [value of reading for fun](#).
- Watching suitable DVDs e.g. musicals
- Involve children in dance, drama, physical team sports e.g. soccer etc. - not all activities need to have an academic focus.
- Provide a sharing time for parents where they can learn about local activities available.
- Invite a librarian in to speak to the parents about what they can offer, or have a parent session at the local library.

## Implications and next steps for Sunnybrae

It has been very beneficial to talk to literacy leaders and Principals in other schools about their practice and beliefs around supporting Year 1 students to achieve success with their literacy learning. This has confirmed much of our own practice and has also given me some new ideas to consider further.

Follow-up will include these actions:

- Review and strengthen our transition policy and procedures – consider the findings from ERO's recent report - *Continuity of Learning: transitions from early childhood services to schools - May 2015*
- Consider the feedback from parents who were surveyed about their transitioning experience at our own school.
- Build stronger relationships with our local pre-school teachers.
- Continue to add resources to the Parent Information page of our website. Keep reminding parents re what is available through the school newsletter.
- Develop a pre-school pack of information/resources to assist parents with ideas for how to prepare their children for school – from 4.5 years old. Invite parents of pre-enrolled students to come in to discuss this 6 months before they are due to start. Make this a two-way dialogue including ideas from parents re how we can best meet the needs of their children when they start school.
- Investigate the possibility of supplying a kete of resources for 4 year old children prior to starting – pens, pencils, scissors, readers, glue sticks, eraser, crayons (maybe we could get sponsorship to fund this?)
- Extend our buddy class system with more of a focus on supporting new students who are transitioning into our school.
- Invite prospective parents and their children to our assemblies.
- Appeal to the wider community and invite 'grannies' or other whānau members to come into school and listen to children read.

- Develop holiday reading contracts. Particularly for underachievers and over the longer summer break.
- Regularly survey parents re how new entrants are settling. This could be done at the one-month check and at parent conferences.
- Check that Year 1 teachers are familiar with Te Whariki, the ECE Curriculum document.
- Talk to teachers about whether there are enough opportunities for 'play and creativity' in our Y1 classes.
- Investigate use of the 'Quick 60' small group intervention programme – email [tracey@iversonpublishing.com](mailto:tracey@iversonpublishing.com).
- Share this study and the professional readings with our Literacy leader and Junior Syndicate teachers.

## Conclusions

There is a strong commitment in all schools visited to provide teachers and parents with the resources and support needed to ensure that all Year 1 students' literacy learning needs are met. In every school there was a sense of urgency and passion to ensure that students are achieving success with literacy, through effective classroom literacy programmes, along with early identification for intervention programmes that support literacy learning. The key messages for me to continue to reflect on as a result of this inquiry are included below.

- Transition is a process that starts before students arrive at school and continues through their first year. We need to develop strong relationships with pre-schools, prospective students and their parents/whānau through in-depth transition procedures. This sets children up for success when they start school. It is not just about the child being ready for the school, is the school ready for the child?
- On-going professional learning and development for teachers and teacher aides that targets effective literacy instruction is a priority.
- Time at school and syndicate team meetings should continue to be spent reflecting on and discussing the analysed assessment data for reading and writing i.e. teaching as inquiry model. Provide regular opportunities to share concerns and discuss successful strategies to accelerate learning with other teachers.
- Embed a philosophy across the school that the support of underachieving students is a shared responsibility i.e. the classroom teacher, team leaders, literacy leaders and senior leadership, including the Principal.
- Regularly track students' progress, for class and year level cohorts, and identify underachieving students early on for acceleration and support.
- Ensure that there is time for class teachers and intervention teachers to align their programmes as they work together to support underachieving students.
- Involving parents/whānau, informing them about interventions and providing them with ideas for supporting their child with literacy learning at home makes a difference. Inviting them to observe an intervention programme in action is helpful.
- Keep positive and build students' self-efficacy in literacy learning by celebrating what they can do when they start school and building on from there – make it fun and engaging for them!

## References

### Professional readings - related to transitioning, literacy programmes and accelerating learning.

#### ERO Publications

- *Accelerating the Progress of Priority Learners in Primary Schools – May 2013*
- *Raising Achievement in Primary Schools – June 2014*
- *Raising Achievement in Primary Schools – ALiM – ALL – June 2014*
- *Continuity of Learning: transitions from early childhood services to schools - May 2015*

Ministry website – links for parents – [Primary School](#)

Te Kete Ipurangi – TKI *Literacy Online* website - [Ready to Read in Literacy programmes](#)

MoE *Literacy Learning Progressions* - <http://www.literacyprogressions.tki.org.nz/>

MoE [National Standards exemplars for Reading and Writing](#) (at the end of one year at school)

MoE *Te Whāriki* – Early Childhood Curriculum

*Literature Review: Transition from Early Childhood Education to School* Report to the Ministry of Education - 2010 Sally Peters

*Crossing the Border – A community negotiates the transition from early childhood to primary school* - Carol Hartley, Pat Rogers, Jemma Smith, Sally Peters and Margaret Carr – NZCER Press 2012.

*Pictures: A Help or Hindrance when learning to read* – Dr Pamela Protheroe – article in Leadership & PD Education Review series 2015 – Vol 6 Issue 2

Getting it Right From the Start: *The Magic Caterpillar's Building Blocks to Literacy* – Barbara Brann 2011

*Then Let Me Play* – Stephanie Menzies - article in Leadership & PD Education Review series 2015 – Vol 6 Issue 1

*The Transition between ECE and School* – article by Jude Barback in PD Education Review series March 2014

*Classroom Phonological Awareness Instruction and Literacy Outcomes in the First Year of School* – Carson, Gillon and Boustead – in *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools* – Vol.44, P147-160, April 2013

## Appendix 1:

Literacy Leader/Teacher Survey

Date:

School:

Decile:

Literacy Leader and Teacher:

Additional Literacy Qualification?

### Background Information

The overall aim of the inquiry is to develop a deeper understanding of how to successfully transition 5 year olds into Sunnybrae Normal School and accelerate the learning of those students that are identified after one month at school as being at risk of underachieving in literacy. The outcomes of the study will be used to inform future teaching and learning practices at our school.

The following inquiry question will be investigated:

**What successful, innovative interventions and strategies can be used by teachers and parents/whānau to accelerate Year 1 students identified as being at risk of underachieving in literacy i.e. oral language, reading and writing, during their first year at school?**

Questions to consider:

- 1. What strategies are used to prepare children, parents and whānau for the transition into primary school? How do you connect with the local pre-schools? How successful is the process?**
- 2. What are the pre-requisites to ensure success and how are these communicated to parents/whānau prior to children starting school and during their first year?**
- 3. What assessments are used to establish starting points for writing, reading and oral language programmes? When are they done? How are the results communicated to parents?**

Assessments –	Used ✓
Record of Oral Language	
Concepts about Print	
Switch onto Spelling – letters and sounds	
Marie Clay's Letter ID	
How many words they can write?	
How many high frequency words can they read?	
Rhyming test – out of 15	
Running Record –	
JAM assessment (Maths)	
Social and Self Management checklist	
Other?	



4. What literacy programmes are being used in Year 1 classrooms?
5. How do you track the students in Year 1? E.g. visual graph of the cohort?
6. At what point do you start an intervention programme for students identified as underachieving in literacy in Year 1?
7. What successful interventions and strategies are being used to accelerate those students identified as priority learners for literacy support in Year 1?

Intervention(s) being used – what are the key elements of each lesson?	
Family/whānau support – what contact is made and what suggestions are given for them to support their children?	
Number in group/gender balance?	
How many times a week?	

Who takes it? E.g. Teacher/teacher aide Does this person have mentor support?	
Does the intervention teacher have special qualifications/training?	
What assessments are used before and after to measure progress? How is the data used?	
How long is the intervention?	
How is the intervention monitored?	
Is there liaison with the classroom teacher and how is this done?	
How are links between reading and writing made explicit?	
Are successful strategies from interventions then added into class programmes?	

General additional discussion points:

## Appendix 2:

### Transition to School Parent/Whānau/Caregivers' Survey 2015

'A positive move to school is good for a child's future. Starting school is an important time in a child's life. Rather than a one-off event, transition is a process where children settle into learning.' (ERO National report – Continuity of Learning 2015)

Our aim is to improve and strengthen our transition to school process for children and their parents/whānau/caregivers. Thank you for taking the time to give us your feedback.

**If you would prefer, you can complete this survey online by going to the following web address –**

<http://freeonlinesurveys.com/s/Tc1uq1ES>

1. How did you (parent/caregiver) find the process of transition into Sunnybrae Normal School? (Please circle your response)    **4 – Very Good, 3 – Good, 2 – Fair, 1 – Not Good**
2. How did your child find the process of transition into Sunnybrae Normal School?  
(Please circle your response)    **4 – Very Good, 3 – Good, 2 – Fair, 1 – Not Good**
3. What aspects of the transition worked well? How could the process be improved from your perspective? e.g. Written information? Meetings held at school? Time with other parents?
4. How could the process be improved from your child's perspective?  
e.g. Number of school visits for your child?
5. How well has your child settled into school so far?  
(Please circle your response)    **4 – Very Well, 3 – Well, 2 – Fair, 1 – Not Well**

See over ...

6. What other information could we now provide that would assist you to support your child's learning at home?

If you are happy to be contacted to talk about your answers please add your name, your child's name and the best contact number for us to use below:

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Child's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Room:** \_\_\_\_\_

Thanks again for your feedback. Please return your completed survey to the office by **Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> August.**

Kind regards

Jennie Stewart  
Principal