MultiLit

BELMAY PRIMARY SCHOOL, CLOVERDALE, WA

Making Up Lost Time in Literacy!
A primary school successfully embedding a MultiLit approach

At a glance

SECTOR: Government
                   primary school

LOCATION: Major city – Perth

ICSEA: 941

STUDENTS: 208

INDIGENOUS   16%
STUDENTS:

EAL/D: 39%

(Source: myschool.edu.au)

> The school's leadership and staff were determined to explore new strategies and programs to address challenges and make a meaningful impact on student learning outcomes. They felt that there was more to the picture and were open to other opportunities to enhance their learning, which would, in turn, help to improve their students' outcomes.

School context

Belmay Primary School, located in Cloverdale, Western Australia, is an inner-metropolitan Perth school catering to over 200 students from Kindergarten to Year 6. Established in 1952, the school serves a culturally rich and diverse community, including a significant number of families with languages other than English, various cultural and religious backgrounds, and a growing number of Aboriginal families. Over the years, Belmay Primary has built a strong reputation for providing high-quality education. It has become a school of choice where students achieve above-average results in literacy and numeracy compared to peers with similar backgrounds.

The school's improvement journey began nearly a decade ago, driven by a commitment to serving its community by delivering excellent education to every student. When Principal Sarah Durham arrived in 2018, she found the staff uncertain about how to improve student achievement. They lacked a clear and unified direction. There was a prevailing belief that the annual NAPLAN results did not apply to the school's context, often used to rationalise poor outcomes. This mindset had tangible consequences – declining student enrolments and families opting to transfer their children to other schools by Year 3.

At the time, Belmay Primary School had initiated changes in literacy education, allocating dedicated literacy blocks and trialling commercial phonics and reading programs. While these steps were promising, progress was inconsistent. When the focus shifted to improving numeracy, literacy practices began to decline and student outcomes suffered.

Staff observed that while students were improving in decoding text, reading comprehension lagged. This was particularly so among students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The next phase of the improvement journey

To advance their learning and leadership capacity, the core improvement team at Belmay Primary School joined the three-year Fogarty EDvance School Improvement Program from 2019–2021 (a WA-based, not-for-profit initiative by the Fogarty Foundation). This initiative supported the school in creating and enacting a long-term strategic plan with a central focus on improving student outcomes.

Through the program, school leaders participated in an extensive suite of professional learning, deepening their understanding of how to lead whole-school change and implement high-quality, evidence-based instruction. The school improvement team included teacher leaders who worked closely with the principal as key change agents. These teacher leaders played a dual role: collaborating on the design of the strategic plan and modelling change practices to their colleagues by operationalising the vision in their own teaching.

The first step in the journey was to develop a **shared vision**, working in partnership with families and the school community. The resulting vision aimed to:

> *"Provide students with the skills, knowledge, and experiences to become successful, caring, and productive members of society while demonstrating respect for others in all aspects of their lives."*

To align staff efforts with this vision, the leadership team worked with the staff to develop and articulate a compelling shared belief: *"Every student is capable of successful learning."*

This mindset shift was critical for staff engagement in the change journey and fostering their openness to the required pedagogical change to realise the students' potential.

A turning point: Learning from best practice

A key moment occurred in the first year of the EDvance Program, when the Belmay Primary School leaders visited Beeliar Primary School, a high-performing school excelling in evidence-based reading instruction, at the time led by Principal Louise O'Donovan. During the visit, the team observed:

- strong leadership from school principal, distributed to key roles across the school

- high levels of student engagement

- teachers employing frequent checks for understanding

- expert delivery of core literacy knowledge and lesson content.

Beeliar Primary's upward-trending student results underscored the potential impact of their approach. Inspired by these observations, the Belmay team sought to adapt their strategic direction and implement similar strategies within their unique school context.
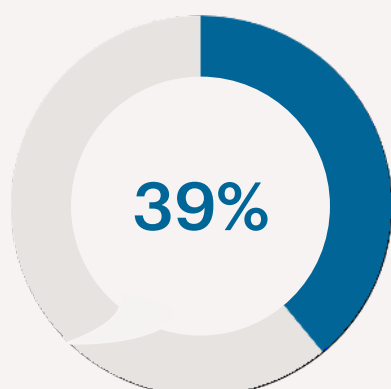
Addressing contextual challenges

Despite their resolve, the Belmay leadership team recognised several school-specific complexities that needed to be addressed as part of their strategic plan:
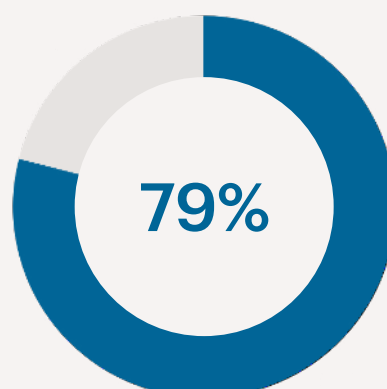
High student transiency rates

Up to 10 new students could join a single class within a school term.

Language diversity

39%

With 39% of students from non-English speaking backgrounds, there was a pressing need for strong role models of Standard Australian English to support oral language acquisition.

Low socio-economic context

79%

79% of students were from the lower half of the socio-educational advantage (SEA) distribution (Data: *myschool.edu.au*).

These challenges had previously contributed to the culture of low expectations, and the leadership team was determined to shift this narrative. They reviewed disaggregated student data, reflected on past literacy program trials, and incorporated lessons from their Beeliar Primary School visit. Through disciplined dialogue, they identified their **strategic aspiration** to work towards over the next three years:

> *"To improve student outcomes in NAPLAN to, at, or above like schools by implementing an evidence-based, low-variation teaching model."*

Implementing evidence-based literacy programs

To achieve this goal, the Belmay leadership team planned to adopt the **MultiLit suite of programs** to drive its primary literacy initiative. They began focusing on the junior primary classes, implementing **InitiaLit**, a high-quality Tier 1 program for whole-class instruction. Principal Sarah Durham emphasised the importance of a whole-school approach, ensuring that literacy skills were solidified early in primary school before extending further school improvement initiatives to middle and upper grades.

The school staff shared a collective commitment, to equip every student graduating from Belmay Primary School with the literacy skills essential for a successful transition to secondary education. This high-fidelity, evidence-based approach became the foundation of the school's transformation, driving improvements in student outcomes and reshaping the learning culture.

Key stages of literacy program implementation

1. Planning for change

The first stage focused on ensuring staff buy-in and building a shared understanding of the need for change. The principal and core team emphasised the persistent low student achievement levels as a call to action, aligning staff efforts with the school's shared vision. Key actions included:

- **Communicating 'why' change was needed**: Highlighting the importance of uniting to improve outcomes and supporting staff through the change process.

- **Empowering staff**: All staff, including education assistants, were recognised as critical contributors to teaching literacy. Education assistants were included in professional learning with teachers and supported to develop the expertise needed to teach essential literacy skills. This inclusion elevated their status and fostered a collaborative spirit.

- **Providing time and resources**: Teachers were given dedicated time to:

    – participate in InitiaLit professional learning

    – familiarise themselves with the program's resources and set up classrooms ready to commence instruction

    – practise adoption of scripted lessons with fidelity, including integrating their own personality with lesson delivery.

- **Reassuring staff**: Staff were encouraged to trust the evidence-based program, stay the course by following its scope and sequence, and utilise the embedded data-monitoring tools to track student progress. Staff were supported with coaching to ensure fidelity to the program and monitoring of student data for the dynamic grouping required for the targeted practice of specific literacy skills.

2. Implementing a staged approach to change

The implementation phase was systematic and data-driven, ensuring both structure and flexibility to meet student needs.

Key steps included:

- **Using assessment data**: Screening assessments revealed gaps in literacy learning for existing students across Pre-Primary (Foundation) to Year 3. Using InitiaLit as the 'backbone' it provided a firm structure to coordinate and manage students so that InitiaLit–Foundation, 1 and 2 programs were implemented to address these gaps, grouping students by literacy needs rather than strict year levels. This approach:

    – ensured targeted instruction for all students

    – improved student behaviour through appropriate grouping and engagement in learning.

- **Timetable structuring**: Developing a consistent timetable for junior primary classes provided the necessary structure for program implementation and student movement between literacy groups for Tier 1 and Tier 2 (intervention) programs (see page 14).

- **Establishing professional learning communities**: The Belmay Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs) were created.

    – Two TLCs were formed – one for early years and one for upper primary.

    – Meetings occurred three times per term. These TLCs focused on student data tracking, embedding InitiaLit practices and fostering collaborative teacher efficacy.

    – Meetings included relevant pre-readings and preparation time to ensure productive discussions.

    – Leaders from the core team actively participated in TLCs, modelling commitment and professional credibility.

- **Supporting teachers through instructional coaching:** To ensure the sustainable transfer of knowledge and skills into the classroom, an **instructional coaching model** was introduced. Key features included:

  - **Building confidence and fidelity:** Coaches worked alongside teachers to strengthen their implementation of InitiaLit and maintain program fidelity.

  - **Streamlining efforts:** With all program resources readily available, teachers could focuson adopting new instructional practices without the added burden of creating lesson plans and resource materials.

  - **Sustainability:** Ongoing coaching provided a supportive framework for lasting instructional changes, helping teachers refine their practice over time.

Critical success factors to leading change:

- **Collaborative culture:** Inclusion of all staff in professional learning and decision-making fostered a united and sustained effort toward literacy improvement.

- **Focus on evidence-based practices:** The emphasis on data-driven decision-making and proven strategies ensured that changes had a measurable impact.

- **Leadership engagement:** Visible and active participation by school leaders and teacher leaders (junior and senior) in program implementation reinforced the importance of the change and inspired staff commitment.

- **Structured support:** From professional learning in TLCs and instructional coaching, the school invested in staff and resources, so they were equipped with the tools and support needed to succeed.

Implementation structure

The school leadership team designed an implementation schedule that showed how, over time, they led a staged process for implementing a whole-school literacy approach. Their approach to program selection utilised Tier 1 whole-class instruction for all students, and also included opportunities, where necessary, for students to access Tier 2 small group intervention programs. The Response to Intervention or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support framework, ensured that all student needs were addressed, and students were not falling behind in their literacy learning.

- **Tier 1 (Whole-class instruction):**

  - All students, including those with additional needs, participate in whole-class **InitiaLit** lessons, which focus on phonemic awareness, decoding and comprehension. The program's scripted lessons ensure consistency across year levels.

  - **'Cross-setting'**: Each year, school leaders review student placement test data to ensure every child is put in the most appropriate InitiaLit class. Even after 5 years of implementing the program, some students are performing below age-related expectations. To support their learning, leaders ensure these students are suitably placed, allowing them to build essential literacy foundations for future success, including accessing small group intervention where appropriate.

- **Tier 2 (Small group intervention):**

  - Students identified through assessments as needing additional support are grouped for more focused intervention using the relevant MultiLit programs. These small groups ensure that students receive targeted instruction to address specific gaps in their literacy learning.

This systematic approach to introducing, implementing and sustaining InitiaLit has significantly contributed to the school's journey toward achieving its vision of improved student outcomes and building a culture of high expectations.

A staged approach to structuring whole-school literacy

The following schedule provides a clear view of how each year's literacy program builds on the previous one, using both whole-class and small group strategies to support all learners.

The staged nature of implementation also distributes the impact of upskilling and embedding new teaching practices across the staff involved and over time.

Table 1: Implementation schedule

Year	Literacy program	Target groups	Program focus	Key actions taken to implement each program
2019	**InitiaLit** Tier 1: Whole-class	Pre-Primary to Year 3	**Comprehensive reading and spelling program:** ✓ systematic synthetic phonics ✓ phonemic awareness ✓ fluency ✓ vocabulary ✓ comprehension Cross-setting ensures all early years' students have decoding skills before moving to SpellEx – Year 3	• Teachers and EAs completed InitiaLit **professional learning** and preparation activities during 2019 • InitiaLit **screening tool** used to identify student literacy levels to establish class groupings for literacy lessons • **Use of 'Cross-Setting'** to ensure Year 3 students (with gaps) are placed in a Year 2/3 composite class to access appropriate literacy group to catch up • Commenced with lesson delivery of **InitiaLit** F–2 with PP–2/3 students in 2019
2020	**PreLit** Tier 1: Whole-class	Pre-school (year prior to school)	**Introducing early literacy skills:** ✓ phonological awareness activities ✓ print awareness ✓ vocabulary and oral language development	• EAs and teachers completed **professional learning** and commenced program delivery in 2020 • Introduced **PreLit** in Pre-school classes for early intervention and exposure to pre-literacy skills and concepts for emerging readers
2021	**MiniLit Sage** Tier 2: Small group	Year 1–2	**Intervention to ensure development of decoding accuracy and fluency skills:** **Part A**: Teaches basic phonic code single grapheme–phoneme correspondence and common digraphs **Part B**: Teaches more useful digraphs, advanced code with focus on accuracy and fluency for text reading	• EAs completed **professional learning** to implement small group intervention • **Data collected** from 'Cross-Setting' for InitiaLit classes, highlights students at risk who then undertake the MiniLit Sage screener for further support • **MiniLit Sage withdrawal groups** implemented and conducted by EAs during InitiaLit small group/independent work sessions
	MacqLit Tier 2: Small group	Year 3–6	**Intervention to ensure strong reading and comprehension:** Decoding, fluency, and understanding text	• **MacqLit** introduced for lower progress readers in Years 3–6 needing targeted literacy intervention • **MacqLit withdrawal groups** implemented and conducted by EAs during Critical Reading sessions (see page 14)
2024/ 2025	**SpellEx** Tier 1: Whole-class	Year 3 2024 Year 4 2025	**Grow and consolidate a deeper understanding of English spelling to strengthen reading and writing across the curriculum:** ✓ phonological, orthographic and morphological knowledge	• **Use of 'Cross-Setting'** during early years with InitiaLit F–2, to ensure that by the time students reached the end of InitiaLit–2, they have well-consolidated reading and spelling skills • Teachers completed **professional learning** to deliver SpellEx with fidelity • Professional learning was completed at the end of the year, to be implemented at the start of Term 1 in the new school year, which allowed time for teacher planning and preparation

MultiLit

66% of InitiaLit–2 teachers surveyed reported fewer students struggling at the bottom of the class and requiring intervention.

In summary

2019
- The initial focus on **InitiaLit** for Pre-Primary (F) to Year 2 ensured a strong foundation in literacy for the early years' students. The Year 3 students at that time had not yet been exposed to structured literacy instruction so were screened and placed in a **Year 2/3 composite class** (or in other InitiaLit groups where appropriate) to help with catch up. Using InitiaLit supported them to fill learning gaps and enabled their progression for all students towards grade-appropriate content.

2020
- The addition of **PreLit** for early literacy preparation with the Pre-school students bolstered the literacy learning in the early years by laying a solid foundation prior to students commencing formal instruction with InitiaLit.

2021
- **MiniLit Sage** was introduced as a Tier 2 small group intervention to provide intensive support for students to develop decoding skills, and improved accuracy and fluency for text reading. Using the Response to Intervention model, this is the ideal scenario to prepare the students as they progress to the upper primary years and ensure they are ready for age-appropriate/grade-level content and full engagement in the next stage of their literacy journey.

- **MacqLit** was also included to support low-progress readers in Years 3–6. This ensured students requiring additional intensive support were identified early and provided with targeted intervention as they progressed through the school.

2024
- As students advance, **SpellEx** is being implemented as a Tier 1 approach to address spelling and other advanced literacy needs in upper primary (Years 3–6). Having strong spelling skills is important for reading and writing and will ensure that students are well-equipped for secondary school literacy demands.

3. The impact of the change journey

The Belmay leadership team unanimously credits the implementation of **InitiaLit** as the backbone to their literacy approach, which enabled significant improvement in student achievement outcomes as well as students' engagement with schooling.

Table 2: School attendance rate

	Whole-school average	Foundation	Year 1	Year 2
2022	81.3%	77%	78%	82%
2023	87.0%	88%	81%	85%
2024	87.6%	81%	89%	87%

Source: det.wa.edu.au_schools online
(https://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsonline/attendance_ov_yrlev.do?schoolID=5036&pageID=SP10)

NAPLAN – READING (2019–2022)

Legend:
- Year 3 school
- Year 3 WA public schools
- Year 5 school
- Year 5 WA public schools

X-axis: Year — 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022
Y-axis: Test score — 340 to 520
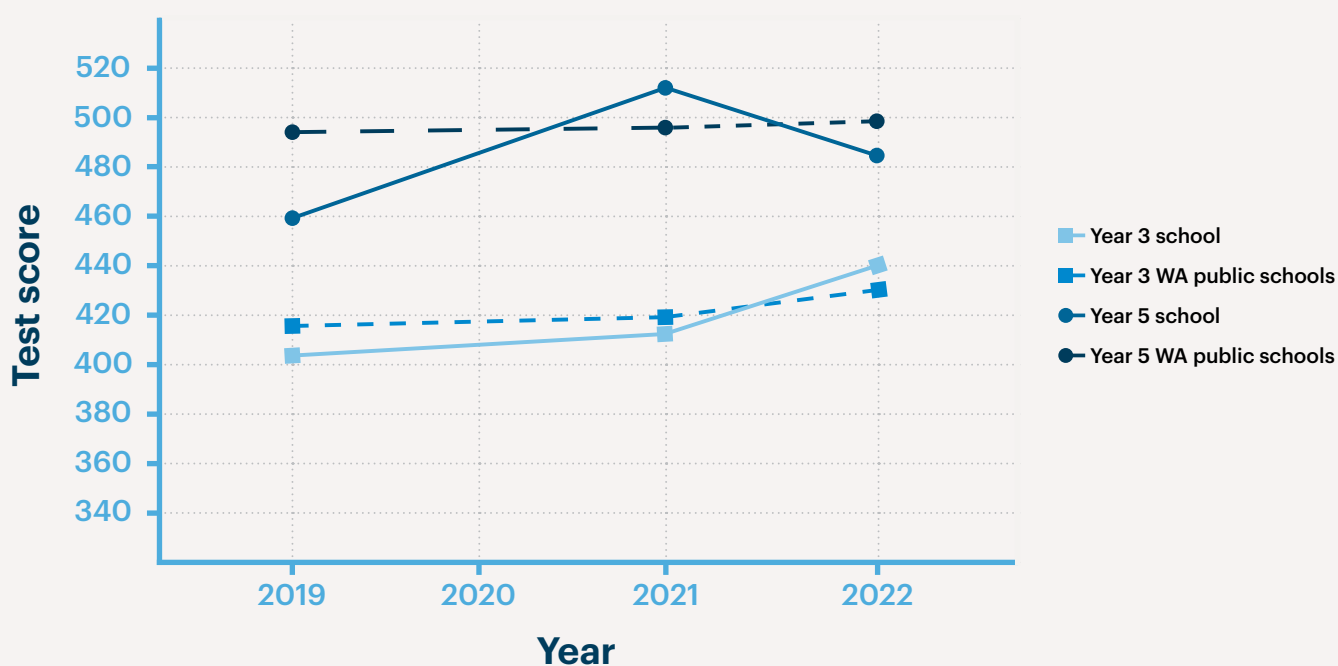
NAPLAN – READING (2023–2024)
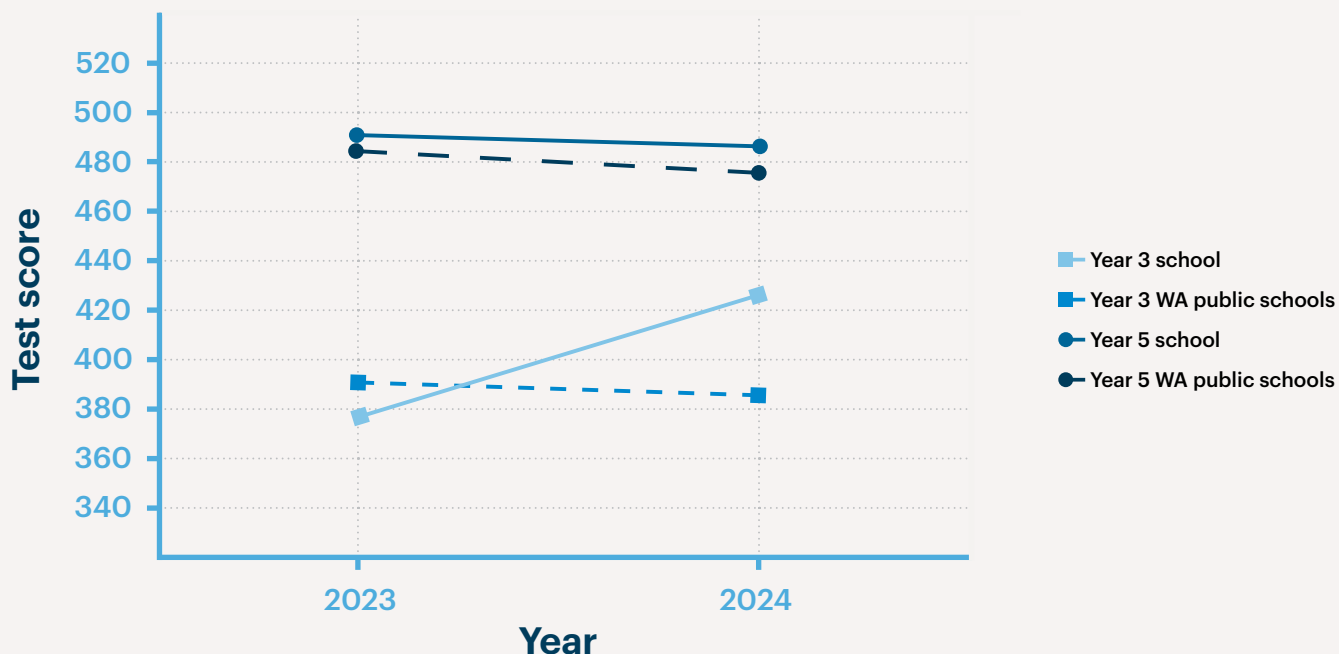
Please note – From 2023 NAPLAN testing moved from May to March and the NAPLAN scale was reset. NAPLAN achievement prior to 2023 can't be compared to results from 2023 onwards.

NAPLAN – SPELLING (2024): Proficiency levels

Year 3 – Belmay PS

16%

84%

Belmay PS

6th in WA for Year 3 Spelling achievement!
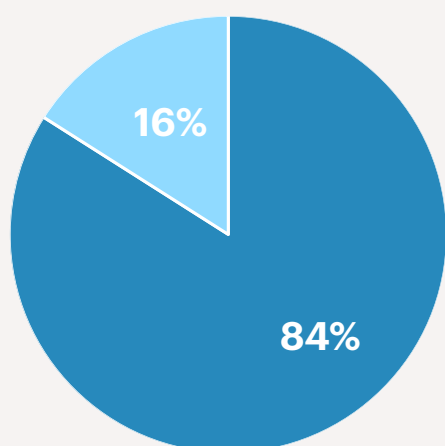
Year 3 – WA state average

13%

28%

57%

■ Strong/Exceeding ■ Developing ■ Needs Additional Support

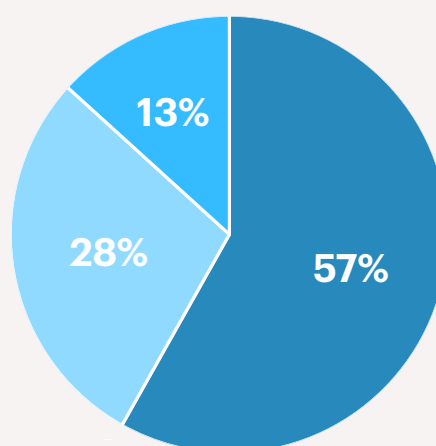The school leadership team have realised many other benefits for implementing evidence-based programs within a Response to Intervention framework and noted the types of strategic initiatives required to support successful implementation.

Key outcomes

1. **Improved staff practices and support**

   - **Professional learning and resource setup:** Initial efforts focused on staff completing professional learning, building their knowledge and setting up classroom resources. Time was allocated for teachers to consolidate their instructional practice, and education assistants were given time to watch classroom teachers model before implementing aspects of the program themselves.

   - **Workload management:** Regular check-ins helped manage the pace of implementation and address workload concerns. In the first year, extra time was given to teachers to ensure resources were organised and the program was implemented successfully.

   - **Instructional coaching:** Teachers received targeted support to strengthen their implementation of InitiaLit, ensuring program fidelity and boosting confidence in their teaching practices.

2. **Reduced teacher workload**

   - Over time, the structured nature of InitiaLit has lessened the burden of lesson preparation. Once the testing and student groups have been created, the program runs very smoothly. The scripted lessons ensured consistency while allowing teachers to inject their personality once they were familiar with the structure.

   - Teachers gained more capacity to focus on monitoring student understanding during lessons, enabling them to address misconceptions and reinforce skills effectively.

3. **Enhanced teacher self-efficacy**

   - Regular progress monitoring and cumulative review of student data showed measurable improvements, bolstering staff confidence.

   - Teachers were motivated by visible evidence of student progress, fostering a belief that impactful change was achievable, even where challenges previously seemed insurmountable.

4. **Alignment of literacy skills to grade levels**

   - Over 5 years, the school established a strong Response to Intervention (RTI) process. This included:

     – close tracking of students from enrolment through the full literacy program

     – regular assessments to identify low progress students early and provide tailored support.

5. **Normalised multi-age grouping**

   - Literacy blocks were reorganised based on student ability rather than grade level.

   - Movement between classrooms for literacy instruction became a routine process, de-stigmatising multi-age groupings.

   - This flexible grouping ensured students received targeted instruction aligned with their literacy needs.

6. **Streamlined process for new students**

   - A structured screening and grouping process for new student arrivals minimises disruption. Education assistants often support this process to help with teacher workload.

   - Students are assessed on entry to the school and placed in appropriate groups to address gaps in their literacy skills, helping them catch up more efficiently.

Sustained improvements

By embedding InitiaLit into their whole-school literacy approach, the school has:

- aligned the majority of students' literacy skills to their respective grade levels

- established robust systems for grouping students based on literacy assessment data

- normalised evidence-based practices, ensuring sustainable and effective literacy instruction.

This journey of change has not only improved student outcomes, but also strengthened staff capacity and morale, setting the foundation for ongoing success.

MultiLit

Building a whole-school approach to teaching literacy

Critical reading
Years 3–6

Whole–class instruction

Designed by the school, based on the Beeliar PS model

Writing
Years 3–6

School-designed program with further teaching of genre writing and cross-curriculum writing opportunities (i.e. science reports)

MacqLit
Years 3+

Tier 2 withdrawal during Critical Reading session

Small group intervention for students who fall in the bottom quartile of literacy skills

Spelling
2024 & 2025 SpellEx

Years 3–4

Tier 1

Whole-class instruction

InitiaLit F, 1 & 2
PP – Years 2–3

Tier 1

1. Whole-class explicit instruction for reading and spelling

2. Small group/independent practice
   - Differentiated activities to reinforce skills learned
   - 'Dynamic grouping' using progress monitoring data
   - Includes time to host small groups for Tier 2 intervention

3. Storybook lessons
   - Build oral language, vocabulary and reading comprehension

MultiLit Writing Program
Field & research trial

F–2

MiniLit Sage
Tier 2

Small group intervention for students who fall in the bottom 25% of literacy skills — withdrawal during small group/independent practice session

PreLit
Pre-school class

Tier 1

Whole-class exposure to pre-literacy concepts using storybooks