

The Role of the Speech Pathologist at Dawson Park.

Introduction

Hello, my name is Eva Cooper-Waldby, I am the Speech Pathologist who works at Dawson Park.

Background

I began working at Dawson Park in July 2019. At this time the management group at Dawson Park along with the psychologist had noticed that there was a gap in the services provided at the school. They attended a conference at which they heard a well-known Perth Speech Pathologist speak and following a discussion with their Board Chairperson, they decided to contract a speech pathologist to better meet the needs of the students. At this time, I was contracted for two days per week, this has since grown to three days. In the four years that I have been with the school, the services I provide or oversee have also grown and are now multifaceted including screening, individual assessment, diagnosing, referring and therapy.

My position at Dawson Park is a unique one as far as I am aware. Speech Pathologists are not routinely contracted to public primary schools in WA. They are sometimes employed to screen Kindy classes or attend to do parent or NDIS funded individual therapy sessions. In the public system wait times of up to a year are common and a limited number of sessions are offered, in the private system the wait time is less but the cost is often preventative (\$145/hour with a Medicare rebate of only a third of this cost and only for five sessions per year). For several reasons, the parents of students at Dawson Park Primary School cannot often afford private sessions and will often be unable to take up public sessions. Providing speech pathology services at the school enables these parents access to this service free of charge. The ethos of the school under the leadership of the School Board and the principal has been that all children deserve equal access to education to learn to read and write. Emerging research tells us that oral language and the preliteracy skills taught by a speech pathologist are a necessary precursor to literacy. Research also tells us that a timely referral and early intervention is key to success treatment.

The following are the services I provide or oversee at Dawson Park:

Pre-Kindy Screening via parent questionnaire at enrolment

To give teaching staff, psychologists and the speech pathologist prior warning, a Speech and Language screening questionnaire was developed and is given to all parents to complete at the time that they enrol their child. These are reviewed at the end of the year prior to the Kindy student's commencement and children of potential concern are flagged.

Overview of Intervention for Kindy at Dawson Park

In Term 1 all Kindy students are screened by the Dawson Park Speech Pathologist and Speech Students volunteers for oral language, speech sounds, fluency, voice and pragmatic/attention red flags. Reports are sent home to parents with recommendations and students are referred to the Child Development Service as required. In Term 2 to 4 those with oral language below the 16th percentile receive small group intervention with the Dawson Park Speech Pathologist.

Language Development Centre referrals are made based on the screening results also.

Overview of Intervention for Pre-Primary at Dawson Park

Students for Pre-primary intervention are selected following phonological awareness and letter sound mapping screening completed at the end of K and each term during PP. The Phonological Awareness screening is completed by Education Assistants and Speech Student volunteers who have been trained by me and myself. Small group intervention is undertaken by the Dawson Park Speech Pathologist targeting PA and letter sound mapping using the Heggerty Program and Sounds Write principles. Pre-primary Education Assistant's also target Phonological Awareness and letter sound mapping (both preliteracy skills) at individual and small group level.

In Term 2 the Pre-primary students who were flagged in the Kindy screening the year before and attended oral language intervention with the Speech Pathologist in Kindy, are rescreened. Reports are sent home with recommendations; referrals are made to Child Development Service as required and small group oral language intervention is undertaken at school in Pre-primary with the Speech Pathologist for those requiring it. Language Development Centre referrals are made based on the screening results also.

Overview of Intervention (1-6 years) at Dawson Park:

Students in year 1 to 6 are screened at the end of the year before (years 1-6). Tests used to screen are Motif Tests developed and tested by the University of Macquarie (spelling real word and non-word) (reading real word and non-word). These tests have been chosen as they are freely available and are regularly used and recommended by Dyslexia Speld Foundation and Fremantle Speech Pathology (leading literacy bodies in Perth). The students who are performing below the 16th percentile which is one standard deviation below the mean for their year group, are placed on the intervention list.

Intervention is based upon the Sounds Write Program which is a systematic synthetic phonics Program widely used in the UK and becoming more widely used Australia wide and is recommended by the Dyslexia Speld Foundation and Fremantle Speech Pathology Services. The lessons from Sounds Write have been adapted to fit the time available for intervention at Dawson Park. Each child is currently seen individually by an Education Assistant twice a week for 20 minutes each time. Education Assistants have been trained in the program by me. I oversee the program and the screening and meet frequently to discuss any student of concern.

Additional Intervention for year 6 and selected other students as required

In conjunction with the School Psychologist year 6 students who have been receiving Sound Write Intervention while at the school undertake testing to provide a formal diagnosis for Specific Learning Disorder (Reading or spelling) so that this diagnosis is provided prior to high school.

Allied Health Team

In additional to the above, I meet on a weekly basis with the other members of the allied health team as I have overlapping days with both the Chaplain and the Psychologist. We frequently discuss Students at Educational Risk and any new referrals we have been given. There is often an overlap between the students referred to the psychologist and those referred to me. Students with speech and oral language deficits often go on to develop social/emotional issues as well as literacy difficulties.



DAWSON PARK

Benefits to having a Speech Pathologist

The greatest benefit to having a speech pathologist at the school has been the ability to screen and pick up children with speech sound disorders, stuttering problems, voice quality concerns, social and pragmatic red flags, attention problems, hearing concerns, orthographic difficulties, preliteracy problems, literacy concerns and oral language deficits. As well as the ability to provide early intervention via therapy or refer these children to other professionals as needed. At Dawson Park we can do this while the child is at school and at no cost to the parents.

If there are any questions, please feel free to contact me at the following email address: