

*Apart from funding,
mainstreaming works
only if you have talented
teachers who can see the
red as well as the blue*

elsewhere. This is when it gets really difficult for a principal. You have students that are almost impossible to expel, due to strict protocols and fear of litigation, who make life unbearable for the other students and drive nice families away or prevent nice families from enrolling in the first place.

I have never bowed to parent pressure, but when they're right, they're right! Most parents I have dealt with have the belief that no student has a right to be in a mainstream classroom if their behaviour or special need impacts on the learning of the other children. This seems quite harsh, especially in the context of my career in Catholic schools where we are known for our treatment of the marginalised in society. Withdrawing students should be a last resort after all practical solutions have been exhausted or when the withdrawal can be shown to have a positive impact on the students, as is the case with Gold Class.

I don't know why special schools were phased out. I believe there is still a place for them. Some students have a real negative impact on the morale and climate of their classroom despite all the best efforts of the best staff at your disposal. Like the prep student I mentioned above, there needs to be a place for these children. Segregation is politically incorrect these days. We have to be all-inclusive and not exclusive. I wonder if the people who think this way have ever taught in a classroom. Unfortunately, many policy makers in education have no experience working at the coalface and spend their time living in the ideal rather than the real. **ET**



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Reading to children: strong sign of school success



Assoc Prof Susan Walker, from QUT's Faculty of Education says readers perform better all round

Readng to children daily before formal education starts is an important predictor of success in primary school after taking into account socioeconomic factors, language background and gender.

New Queensland University of Technology (QUT) research shows children who are engaged in reading for up to 20 minutes a day perform significantly better in literacy and numeracy in grades three and four.

Associate Professor Susan Walker, from QUT's Faculty of Education, recently presented her findings at the European Congress on Developmental Psychology in Bergen, Norway. She told the meeting that although people knew reading was important, they underestimated its impact.

"If a child is being read to on a regular basis and enjoys it, that is a strong predictor of language, literacy and maths outcomes at age eight and nine," Prof Walker said.

"Read to kids on a daily basis as early as possible. Start when they're babies."

Prof Walker analysed data of more than 3600 children from the Federal Government's biennial Longitudinal Study of Australian Children taken over six years with QUT Prof Donna Berthelsen.

The research examined the children's home learning environment, including the number of days and minutes parents spent reading books to their children, prior to starting school at age four.

The information was then compared to the children's academic outcomes at ages six and eight.

Prof Walker said after controlling for each child's socioeconomic position, language background, gender and whether they were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, reading was the most important factor for school success.

"Despite children coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds, for example, if they are read to on a daily basis, they are still performing better in language, literacy and maths four years later than children who weren't read to regularly," she said.

Children who were read to daily prior to formal schooling performed better at literacy and language tasks including: understanding and interpreting stories, reading age-appropriate books independently and composing stories.

In mathematics, these children performed better in areas such as understanding of place value, making reasonable estimates of quantities and used a variety of strategies to solve maths problems.

Reading also contributed to a child's school readiness skills such as organisation, working independently and paying attention in class, which was another predictor of school success.

"Research shows that children's success in the early years of school is fundamentally important because it has implications for future achievement in school and beyond," she said.