

The sign of a great teacher – meet BCE educator Jessica Neilson-Scott

When Jessica Neilson-Scott introduced Key Word Sign to her Year 1 classroom last year, she had one simple goal: to help every student connect, communicate, and belong.

Key Word Sign is a communication approach that uses signs alongside spoken language to support understanding, expression, and participation.

What Jessica didn't expect was that her Year 1 classroom initiative would soon become part of school life at St Mark's School, Inala, earning her the NGS Super Award for Excellence in Learning and Teaching in Primary School at the recent BCE Excellence Awards.

Jessica said she wanted to improve the connection with her students, understand their needs, and ensure everyone could fully participate in learning and classroom life.

"I knew there was one particular student who had so much to contribute, and I wanted to make sure there were no barriers, ensuring every opportunity to communicate his thoughts, participate in classroom activities, and build relationships with their classmates," she said.

"When I discovered Key Word Sign, I saw it as a way to create more opportunities for communication, not only between this one student and I, but between the students in my class and their peers as well."

St Mark's School Principal Allison Malouf said just like Saint Mary MacKillop, Jessica was known as someone who never sees a need without doing something about it.

"This mindset led her to explore Key Word Sign after identifying an opportunity to better support communication and learning for a student in her class," she said.

"Working alongside the Student Support Team, the student's family, and drawing on her familiarity with Auslan, Jessica researched Key Word Sign and undertook additional training.

"But rather than introducing it solely as a support strategy for one student, she made a deliberate decision to teach it to every child in her classroom."

Allison adds Jessica's leadership continues to drive the success of Key Word Sign across the school.

"Jessica's impact didn't stop at introducing Key Word Sign in her classroom alone," she said.

"She now works closely with staff to build their confidence using Key Word Sign and supports them to embed it into their own classroom practice.

"Jessica regularly introduces new signs at school assemblies, giving all students the opportunity to learn and use Key Word Sign. This consistent exposure has helped create a shared language across the school, reinforcing our commitment to inclusion and belonging.

"Because of Jessica's passion and leadership, Key Word Sign has become something the whole school community embraces. Students are using it in classrooms, in the playground and during whole-school events, creating more opportunities for connection, understanding, and participation for everyone."

An education to believe in starts with you

Jessica said teaching had always been about making a positive difference in the lives of young people.

"I became a teacher because I wanted to make a difference," she said.

"I love teaching and seeing the difference I make to these students.

"Whether it's helping a child achieve a learning goal, build confidence or feel a sense of belonging, those moments are what make teaching so rewarding.

"Knowing something that started in my own classroom is now helping students across our entire school build friendships, participate more confidently, and feel included, is something I'm really proud of."

For more information about Key Word Sign visit [Key Word Sign Australia](#).

Learn more about Jessica Neilson-Scott:

- Favourite game to play with your students? Math games with my students!
- Coffee order? I don't drink tea or coffee, but I love a hot chocolate.
- A teacher who inspired you? My teaching partner Ally Cummins inspires me every day. We have worked next door to each other for the last 6 years and she helped me really find my feet in teaching the early years. She is definitely an early years professional, and I have learnt so much from her.
- What's one thing that makes you smile every day? I love coming into my year one class and being greeted by their smiling faces.
- Hobbies outside of work? I love travelling in my caravan with my family travelling Australia. I have also recently got the international travel bug and enjoyed trips with my family to Vietnam and Japan.
- Why would you encourage others to become teachers? It is a very fulfilling and rewarding job where you are such an important part of young people's lives.

For more information about St Marks' School, Inala or to enrol [click here](#).

About Queensland World Teachers' Day

BCE media release



Queensland World Teachers' Day is a wonderful opportunity to recognise and applaud our teachers for the important role they play in our communities and for the positive impact they have on the lives of students. This year's Queensland theme is **teachers change lives**.

This year's BCE theme is a message directly from our students **'Thank you for believing in us,'** and throughout October, our school communities are invited to share messages of gratitude.

If you would like to thank a staff member at a BCE school, share your appreciation on your school's Gratitude Wall, take a photo and tag BCE on social media.

Thank a BCE staff member via your school's Gratitude Wall or share a message via our BCEnewsroom using **#ThanksBCEStaff** and **#WTDQLD**