independent
schools
tasmania

Lifting literacy

Lifting literacy

Stories of Leadership, Learning and Lasting Change




Teacher Guide

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Dedication

Independent Schools Tasmania (IST) is proud to present a collection of case studies from independent schools across our state that explore and explain how the Tasmanian Government's Lifting Literacy initiative has been thoughtfully and contextually implemented.

These stories celebrate the professionalism, commitment and courage of school leaders, teachers and teacher assistants who have embraced evidence-informed practice to strengthen literacy outcomes for the students in their care. Each school has responded in its own way, shaped by its unique context, community and learners, yet united by a shared commitment to ensuring every child develops the literacy knowledge and skills they need to flourish.

The schools featured in this booklet represent only a small sample of the outstanding work taking place across Tasmania's independent school sector. While we have not been able to capture every story, we hope these examples encourage schools to continue learning from one another, sharing what works, and celebrating the progress being made across our sector.

Improving literacy is complex work. It requires curiosity, collaboration, persistence and a willingness to continually refine practice in response to evidence. It is, as the saying reminds us, a marathon rather than a sprint—we go slow to go far.

To every educator contributing to this journey, thank you. Your work is changing lives. The impact of your commitment will extend well beyond the classroom, equipping young people with the literacy they need to participate fully in learning, in work, and in life.

Independent Schools Tasmania acknowledges and pays respect to the original and ongoing custodians of the land across Australia on which we work and live.

We acknowledge the continuing connection to land, seas, air and waterways and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation. We honour Elders, past, present and emerging.

Acknowledgement

Thank you all for your generosity, your professionalism and your shared commitment to ensuring every learner has the opportunity to flourish.

IST gratefully acknowledges the school leaders, teachers and education support staff who have generously shared their experiences, reflections and practice throughout this publication.

By opening your schools and telling your stories, you have contributed to a growing culture of professional learning, collaboration and continuous improvement across Tasmania's independent school sector. Your willingness to share both your successes and your learning is helping strengthen literacy teaching and, ultimately, improve outcomes for students across our state.

We also acknowledge the outstanding leadership of Sarah Woodcock-Davis and Suzie Keil, whose expertise, vision and unwavering commitment have shaped and led the Lifting Literacy initiative. Through their thoughtful design, professional leadership and deep belief in the potential of every educator and every learner, they have helped build the capability of schools across Tasmania and laid a strong foundation for lasting improvement.

Thank you all for your generosity, your professionalism and your shared commitment to ensuring every learner has the opportunity to flourish.

The Commitment

...a consistent expectation that every school, from Kindergarten to Year 12, provides high-quality, evidence-informed literacy instruction for every student.

In June 2023, the Tasmanian Government's Literacy Advisory Panel released its final report, setting an ambitious vision for Tasmania: 100 per cent functional literacy. The Tasmanian Government accepted all 23 priority recommendations, committing to a coordinated, statewide effort to improve literacy outcomes for every learner.

For schools, the most significant recommendation is the introduction of the Minimum Schooling Guarantee—a consistent expectation that every school, from Kindergarten to Year 12, provides high-quality, evidence-informed literacy instruction for every student.



IST has supported member schools through a three-year implementation plan that helps translate these expectations into practice. While every school has responded in ways that reflect its own context, community and learners, all share a commitment to strengthening literacy through evidence-informed teaching and continuous improvement.

The Minimum Schooling Guarantee is underpinned by four key expectations:

- Structured, systematic and explicit literacy instruction from Kindergarten to Year 10.
- A Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) that provides evidence-based intervention matched to student need.
- The purposeful use of assessment data to monitor progress, identify need and inform teaching and intervention.
- Rich literacy environments that promote reading, writing, speaking and learning across the school.

The Response



IST developed a three-year Literacy Implementation Plan (2024–2026) to support member schools in translating the Government's priorities into meaningful, sustainable practice.

IST welcomed the Tasmanian Government's Lifting Literacy initiative as a significant opportunity to strengthen literacy outcomes for students across our state. While the Minimum Schooling Guarantee established a clear and consistent expectation for every school, IST recognised that successful implementation would require thoughtful planning, sustained support and an approach that respected the diversity of independent schools.

In response, IST developed a three-year Literacy Implementation Plan (2024–2026) to support member schools in translating the Government's priorities into meaningful, sustainable practice. Rather than prescribing a single approach, the plan provided a shared evidence-informed framework that enabled each school to implement the Minimum Schooling Guarantee in ways that reflected its own context, community and learners.

Guided by a representative working group of literacy experts and school leaders, the plan focused on building long-term capability across the sector. It combined high-quality professional learning, leadership support, implementation guidance, collaborative learning networks and practical resources to help schools strengthen literacy instruction, embed Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), use assessment data to inform decision-making, and create rich literacy environments.

Importantly, the plan sought not simply to introduce new initiatives, but to build the knowledge, confidence and systems that would enable schools to sustain improvement well beyond the life of the project. Throughout the implementation process, IST remained committed to supporting evidence-informed practice while respecting the autonomy, diversity and educational philosophies that define Tasmania's independent schools.

The stories that follow demonstrate the impact of this collaborative approach. While every school's journey has been different, each reflects the same shared commitment—to ensure every student has access to high-quality literacy teaching and the opportunity to flourish.

The Journey

Perhaps the greatest achievement has been the culture that has emerged across our sector—a willingness to learn together, share practice and continually refine what we do.

Meaningful improvement is rarely straightforward, and Tasmania's Lifting Literacy journey has been no exception. IST and our member schools embraced this work knowing there was no single blueprint for success. Schools began from different starting points, with different contexts, different capabilities and different challenges. Our task was not simply to implement a government initiative, but to translate evidence into practice in ways that would make a lasting difference for students.

Along the way, we learned that sustainable improvement requires curiosity, courage and persistence. Some approaches worked immediately, while others required refinement. Schools trialled new practices, reflected on what the evidence was telling them, adapted their approaches and continued moving forward. Throughout this journey, IST remained committed to supporting schools with professional learning, practical resources, collaborative networks and opportunities to learn from one another.

The progress has been significant. Schools have strengthened literacy instruction, embedded more systematic approaches to teaching reading, adopted high-quality assessment and screening tools, and increasingly used student data to guide teaching and intervention. Secondary schools have also embraced literacy as a shared responsibility, strengthening subject-specific literacy and implementing Multi-Tiered Systems of Support to better meet the needs of every learner.



Perhaps the greatest achievement has been the culture that has emerged across our sector—a willingness to learn together, share practice and continually refine what we do. While the journey continues, these stories demonstrate what is possible when educators are united by a shared purpose: improving literacy outcomes so every young person has the opportunity to thrive.

Case Study 1

Leading the learning



Interviewee profile

School:
Northern Christian School

Location:
Bridgewater, Tasmania

Years taught:
K-6

Student population:
170

Principal:
Bethany Armstrong

At Northern Christian School, literacy improvement has been driven by a clear belief that the most important work of a principal is to lead teaching and learning. For Principal Bethany Armstrong, Tasmania's Lifting Literacy initiative became an opportunity to strengthen instructional leadership and create greater consistency in classroom practice for the benefit of every student.

Supported through professional learning with IST, Bethany and her leadership team began by examining the school's literacy data and critically reviewing existing practice. While intervention programs were already in place, the evidence revealed that teaching approaches varied considerably between classes and that too much emphasis had been placed on intervention rather than consistently strong Tier 1 instruction.

This prompted a deliberate shift towards a more consistent, evidence-informed approach to literacy instruction. Drawing on research into effective practice, including Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI) and the Science of Learning, the school aligned its approach to literacy teaching, creating greater consistency across classrooms while reducing cognitive load for both teachers and students. The school's commitment to consistency extended beyond literacy instruction, with clearly defined classroom routines and behavioural expectations helping

"My role as Principal is to lead the vision and mission of our school and provide educational leadership."





create calmer learning environments where students were better positioned to succeed.

Central to Bethany's leadership has been the purposeful use of student data. Progress is monitored continuously, with assessment informing teaching, intervention and school improvement decisions. Rather than relying on periodic reviews, data has become part of the everyday conversation, enabling staff to celebrate growth and respond quickly to student need. This disciplined approach has contributed to significant improvements in student achievement, with growth evident across all levels of student performance in Literacy.



Perhaps most importantly, Bethany has led from the front. She has invested in her own professional learning, remained deeply engaged with the instructional practices being implemented across the school, and modelled the expectation that leadership begins in the classroom. Regular classroom walkthroughs, ongoing coaching and a relentless focus on teaching quality have helped build a culture where continuous improvement is both expected and supported.

Northern Christian School's journey demonstrates the powerful influence of instructional leadership. By placing teaching practice, evidence and student learning at the centre of school improvement, Bethany and her team have created a culture where consistency, collaboration and high expectations are translating into stronger literacy outcomes for every learner.

"We are always looking at data. Celebrating student growth is a standing agenda item at our staff meetings because our teachers love sharing student success. These conversations also happen regularly through emails and everyday discussions."

Hear the full conversation through our Learning Landscape Podcast.

Case Study 2

Building support for every learner



Interviewee profile

Educator: Nicola Collins

Role: Middle School Teacher and Learning Leader

School:
The Friends' School

Location:
Hobart, Tasmania

Years taught:
Years 7–8 (Middle School)

Student population:
1,335

Principal:
Esther Hill

At The Friends' School, literacy improvement has not been driven by sweeping reform, but by a series of thoughtful, evidence-informed decisions that have steadily strengthened teaching practice and student learning.

For Nicola Collins, Middle School Teacher and Learning Leader, one of the most significant outcomes of Tasmania's Lifting Literacy initiative has been the opportunity to continue growing as an educator. Supported through IST's professional learning, Nicola and her colleagues have deepened their understanding of literacy instruction and embraced new approaches that better support students across the middle years.

Rather than seeking wholesale change, the school has adopted a deliberate approach—examining the evidence, trialling new practices, evaluating their impact and refining them over time. This culture of professional curiosity and continuous improvement has enabled teachers to confidently implement changes that are both practical and sustainable.

Central to this work has been the introduction of consistent literacy assessment and progress monitoring, enabling teachers to identify students requiring additional support and provide targeted intervention through a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). Regular use of DIBELS assessments ensures that intervention is responsive, with student progress reviewed frequently and support adjusted as learning improves.

"Success begets success. The more success the students have, they realise that the work they're putting in is worth it."



Professional learning has also strengthened classroom practice. Weekly collaborative planning provides opportunities for teachers to design lessons together, moderate student work, share resources and build a common understanding of effective literacy instruction. Explicit teaching of vocabulary, spelling, reading fluency and sentence construction now sits comfortably alongside the school's inquiry-based philosophy, demonstrating that evidence-informed instruction and rich, student-centred learning can complement one another.



The greatest measure of success has been the growing confidence of both students and teachers. As students experience greater success, their willingness to engage and persist with learning continues to grow. At the same time, teachers have developed greater confidence in using evidence to inform their practice and respond to the diverse literacy needs of every learner.

The Friends' School's journey demonstrates that lasting improvement is built through professional learning, collaborative leadership and a willingness to continually refine practice. With a shared commitment to every learner, as well as thoughtful support from IST, the school is strengthening literacy outcomes for every student within the educational philosophy that is unique to their context and community.

"I had students last year who were at benchmark by the middle of the year, but they kept participating in the intervention program so not to fall behind."

Hear the full conversation through our Learning Landscape Podcast.

Case Study 3

A literacy transformation



Interviewee profile

Educator: Lauren Makepeace

Role: Learning Support Coordinator

School: Tamar Valley Steiner School

Location: St Leonards, Tasmania

Years taught: K-6

Student population: 119

Principal: Carolyn Scott-Burgess

At Tamar Valley Steiner School, the implementation of Tasmania's Minimum Schooling Guarantee has been shaped by a commitment to honour both evidence-informed practice and the school's distinctive educational philosophy. For Learning Support Coordinator Lauren Makepeace, introducing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) was never about replacing what made the school unique—it was about strengthening the support available for every learner.

Supported through IST's professional learning, Lauren led the gradual introduction of MTSS by first building her own knowledge and credibility. She undertook specialist training in structured literacy and intervention, worked directly with students, and then used those experiences to support colleagues through modelling, coaching and collaborative professional learning. Rather than imposing change, she created opportunities for teachers to learn together and grow in confidence over time.

A significant part of this journey involved strengthening the school's use of assessment data. Consistent screening and progress monitoring now provide teachers with a clearer understanding of every student's learning needs, allowing intervention to be planned deliberately rather than relying solely on professional

"I have absolute respect and love the way that we teach. We are evolving to make it work in a way that respects the Steiner tradition and respects the teachers and their values."



judgement. Importantly, data conversations have been introduced in ways that encourage reflection and growth, helping teachers see assessment as a tool for improving learning rather than evaluating performance.

The introduction of MTSS has also brought greater consistency to literacy instruction. Evidence-informed programs and structured intervention have been thoughtfully integrated into the Steiner context, preserving the school's rich storytelling traditions, creative learning experiences and commitment to educating the whole child. Rather than seeing educational philosophy and explicit instruction as competing ideas, Tamar Valley Steiner School has demonstrated that they can work together with integrity.



Lauren's leadership reflects the power of thoughtful implementation. By building trust, developing teacher capability and introducing change at a pace that respected the school's culture, she has helped establish systems that ensure every student is known, monitored and supported. Her journey demonstrates that sustainable improvement is achieved not by changing who a school is, but by strengthening how it helps every learner succeed.

"Some teachers can see something one time and then they'll do it exactly like you've done it. Others might need three weeks and... that's okay. That's just the different learning styles that everybody has."

Hear the full conversation through our Learning Landscape Podcast.

Case Study 4

From theory to practice

For Luke Ingram, English and Humanities Teacher and High School Literacy Lead at OneSchool Global in Launceston, strengthening literacy instruction has been a journey from understanding the evidence to confidently putting it into practice.

Luke had already developed a strong theoretical understanding of structured literacy. The next step was translating that knowledge into the everyday routines of a secondary classroom. Through IST's Lifting Literacy professional learning, Luke developed practical strategies for implementing direct and explicit literacy instruction consistently and purposefully. The professional learning helped provide the bridge between understanding why particular approaches matter and knowing how to make them work for students.

One of the most significant changes has been Luke's approach to vocabulary. Rather than assuming students will acquire the language of a subject along the way, he now deliberately identifies and explicitly teaches the vocabulary students need to access learning. This has become a routine part of lessons rather than an occasional addition. Regular checks for understanding also allow Luke to identify students who require additional support and respond accordingly.

As his confidence has grown, Luke has continued to refine his practice, including a greater focus on morphology and the structures that help students understand unfamiliar





Interviewee profile

Educator: Luke Ingram

Role: English and Humanities Teacher / High School Literacy Lead

School:
One School Global, Launceston

Location:
Launceston, Tasmania

Years taught:
High School

Student population:
79

Principal:
Jeremy Dunham

"Where I want to go next is making sure that we cement this change as a whole school. Literacy is every teacher's job."



words. Assessment data is providing encouraging evidence of progress, particularly among students who had previously experienced difficulty with literacy.



The next stage is taking this learning beyond Luke's classroom. What began through explicit literacy instruction in English and Humanities is increasingly informing conversations about literacy across the curriculum. The goal is for effective vocabulary and literacy instruction to become embedded within every subject, recognising that every teacher has a role in giving students access to the language and knowledge of their discipline.

Luke's journey demonstrates that professional learning has its greatest impact when theory becomes sustained practice. Through deliberate implementation, reflection and continual refinement, he is not only strengthening his own teaching but helping build a shared approach to literacy that can benefit students across the entire school.

"I'm seeing progress among the students that were not necessarily achieving great scores. While we are still working on raising the ceiling, I feel like I've done a good job of lifting the floor."

Hear the full conversation through our Learning Landscape Podcast.

Case Study 5

Study tour rewards

At The Hutchins School, literacy improvement has been strengthened by a culture of continual learning. For Deputy Head of Junior School Emma Nuttall, one of the most valuable opportunities came through an IST study tour that brought together educators from across Tasmania to observe outstanding literacy practice in Victorian schools. Rather than seeking a blueprint to copy, the tour challenged participants to deepen their understanding of what effective literacy teaching looks like and how it could be thoughtfully adapted to their own school context.

Organised and supported by IST, the study tour combined classroom observations with rich professional dialogue, allowing educators to reflect together on what they had seen and why it was working. Just as valuable as the school visits themselves were the conversations that followed, where colleagues openly shared ideas, challenged assumptions and considered how evidence-informed practice might strengthen learning in their own schools.

Returning to The Hutchins School, Emma focused on building upon the strong literacy foundations already in place. Rather than introducing wholesale change, she worked with staff to refine existing practice, strengthen professional learning structures and sharpen the school's use of student data to inform teaching and planning. New approaches were carefully introduced where they aligned with





Interviewee profile

Educator: Emma Nuttall

Role: Deputy Head of the Junior School

School:
The Hutchins School

Location:
Hobart, Tasmania

Years taught:
Pre-Kindergarten to Year 12 (boys only)

Student population:
1,100

Principal:
Dr Rob McEwan

"We were already well on our way in the journey of lifting literacy, but we were seeking to embed and refine our practices."



the school's context, including a more structured spelling program in the middle primary years. As teachers observed positive outcomes for students, confidence in the approach continued to grow.

The experience also reinforced an important principle: successful improvement is built on understanding the thinking behind effective practice, not simply replicating what another school does. This has enabled The Hutchins School to remain true to its own culture while continuing to strengthen explicit literacy instruction alongside its long-standing commitment to developing engaged, capable readers.



Emma's leadership reflects the power of purposeful professional learning. By learning with others, thoughtfully adapting new ideas and supporting colleagues through change, she has helped strengthen literacy teaching across the school. Her journey demonstrates that some of the most significant improvements begin not with adopting new programs, but with developing a deeper understanding of effective practice and the confidence to implement it with integrity.

"The collective responsibility for literacy in schools was so evident on that tour. Staff were so generous with their time, their willingness and eagerness to share their own journeys and their understanding."

Hear the full conversation through our Learning Landscape Podcast.

Case Study 6

Staged approach to change



Interviewee profile

Educator: Andrew Nash

Role: Deputy Principal

School:
Calvin Christian School

Location:
Kingston, Tasmania

Years taught:
K-12

Student population:
876

Principal:
Scott Ambrose

Calvin Christian School had been using a largely successful and well-loved literacy program for over a decade. A review of the program showed a small cohort of students finding literacy difficult, which led to the school embarking on a process to find a new program to close the literacy gaps.

This was prior to the Tasmanian Government's Lifting Literacy mandate, so the school was well progressed on its Lifting Literacy journey, wanting to move to explicit and intentional instruction.

Andrew Nash, Deputy Principal at Calvin Christian School credits a staged approach to implementing change as the reason why a new approach was well received by staff and ultimately benefiting all students.

"Change is not an overnight thing. If you haven't got the buy-in from the staff, you won't be successful."

A working group was brought together to address important questions such as:

- What is working?
- What isn't working?
- What is best practice?
- What resources do we have to support the change?
- What support can we give our educators to deliver a new program?

Critical to the success of the program was setting up a trial in two year four classes, to compare what was the current program against a new program. The process and data collected in that trial was instrumental in getting everyone behind the change.





The existing program, Teaching Handwriting, Reading And Spelling Skills (THRASS) was taught in one class and direct instruction program The Spalding Method in another. Interestingly, while Spalding formed part of the testing and provided better results to THRASS, ultimately further assessments led the school to favour Multilit as the new direct instruction literacy program. This was partly due to the practicalities of training time required for implementation.

Prior to making a final decision, Andrew joined Principal Scott Ambrose on a study tour to examine other Tasmanian schools to test their thinking and findings around direct instruction literacy programs.



Six months of research was followed by three months of staff training before rollout, ensuring both teachers and teacher aides were skilled before implementation.

Having school leader participation in the working group, training sessions and trial lessons was critical to leading change effectively, reinforcing that leaders can't delegate understanding of "why" and "how" if they want to authentically support and sustain reform.

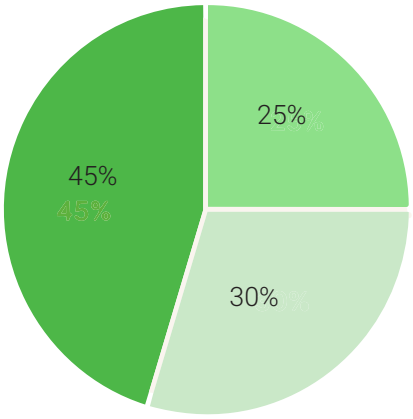
The program is now fully embedded from Prep to Year 6. Positive flow-on effects are being seen even into high school, as students now carry a consistent instructional language into Year 7 and beyond.

"The Tasmanian Government's Lifting Literacy mandate didn't strip away autonomy from Calvin. For us it validated an already-successful shift."

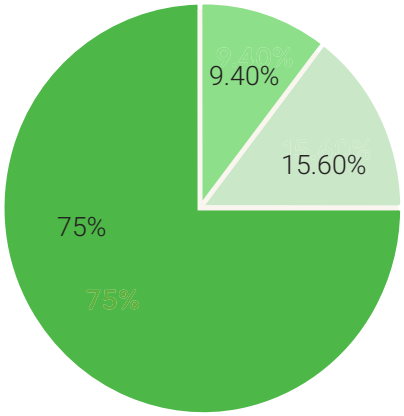
Hear the full conversation through our Learning Landscape Podcast.

A work in progress

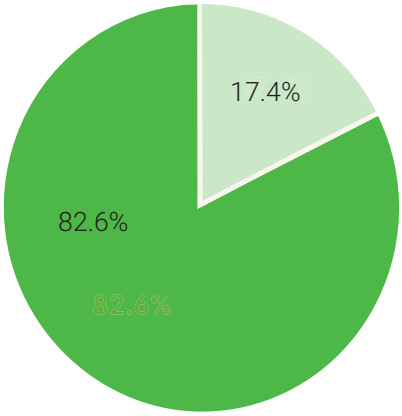
2023 Phonics Check Results



2024 Phonics Check Results



2025 Phonics Check Results



Legend:

- Fluent Decoder ·
- Developing Decoder ·
- Struggling Decoder

Since 2024, Independent Schools Tasmania has worked intentionally alongside educators in every independent school across the state, supporting the translation of Tasmania's Lifting Literacy commitment into meaningful school and classroom practice. Through workshops, webinars, school-based projects and professional learning with leading literacy and learning experts - including Professor Lorraine Hammond, Jessica Colleu Terradas, John Sweller, Marshall Roberts, Rosalie Martin and the Start Smart team - IST has strengthened educator knowledge and capability. Over 400 educators and leaders have participated in this suite of professional learning. Three interstate study tours have also enabled school and literacy leaders to see evidence-informed practice in action in lighthouse schools across Victoria and Western Australia.

Throughout this journey, IST has worked closely with Catholic Education Tasmania and the Department for Education, Children and Young People to strengthen alignment and shared learning across Tasmania's education sectors, while creating opportunities for independent schools to connect, share resources and learn from one another. Together, these efforts have helped build a stronger, more collaborative and increasingly evidence-informed approach to literacy improvement across Tasmania's independent school sector.

Now in the third year of implementation, this collective effort is translating into meaningful change across Tasmania's independent schools. Every independent school with a Kindergarten is using a Kindergarten Screening Tool, and all relevant schools are implementing the National Year 1 Phonics Check. Almost every school is progressing towards a structured, systematic and explicit approach to literacy instruction, including evidence-based, direct and explicit phonics teaching. The majority are also using DIBELS three times each year to identify students from Prep to Year 8 who may be at risk of reading difficulties, enabling schools to respond earlier and more intentionally to individual learning needs.

Sometimes, though, visual data tells the story best. The pie graphs to the left are from one Tasmanian independent school showing three years of Year 1 Phonics Check data—and the change that followed the introduction of a systematic approach to literacy instruction.

There is much to celebrate, but the work continues. The aspiration of 100 per cent functional literacy remains ambitious, essential and worth pursuing, and the progress captured in these pages gives us every reason to be optimistic about what can be achieved.

IST remains committed to working alongside our schools, the Tasmanian Government and our partners in education to strengthen professional capability, share effective practice and sustain improvement.

This booklet is not the conclusion of the story. It is a marker of how far we have come— and a reminder of the important work still ahead.



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