

Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES)

Queensland trial, 2019–21

Case study 2: regional primary school

This school is a primary school situated in far north Queensland. The school has a rich multicultural history reflected in the student cohort mainly comprising of Aboriginal students, Torres Strait Islander students, Cook Islander students and Pacific Islander students. Less than 10% of the student cohort have English as a first language.

The school has participated in the ABLES trial since its inception in 2019. The school saw the ABLES trial as an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of how to make adjustments for those students working at levels prior to Foundation who require intensive support. Initially, the ABLES assessments identified baseline data for five students who engaged in 10 weeks of intervention and informed the setting of appropriate Individual Curriculum Plan (ICP) goals and strategies guided by one Head of Special Education Services (HOSES) and one teacher.

During these initial stages, the ABLES reports provided a visual snapshot of a student's strengths and areas requiring support. The class report was used to track the individual student's progress and achievements within a whole-class context. Some students benefited more from the Personal and Social Capability assessments, while others were more suited to the assessments linked to learning area curriculum such as English, Reading and Writing. Previously, sharing student progression was very difficult with the existing tools available to the school. ABLES reports provided more information, allowing teachers to extrapolate the teaching strategies that were or were not successful for students. This was used to further develop personalised learning and implement pathways that ensured student growth and success. An example of this success was highlighted by the lead teacher:

... one particular student in reading and writing moved two whole bandwidths in the two-year period from a Foundation level to Levels 3 and 4. For most other students, considerable growth was measured from the beginning of the trial 2019 to 2021.

Throughout the school, the ABLES assessments and resources have been very positively received. Teachers at the school have found the ABLES suite of resources very helpful when planning curriculum access points because they identify students' strengths and their areas of need. Participation in the school has now increased to teachers from both the lower and upper primary year levels. Several other students have been involved to compare student abilities across and within grades, and during transitions from one year level to the next.

The ABLES assessments and resources have supported intentional teacher collaboration and productive conversations between cohort teachers. Teachers within the school have been able to compare the abilities demonstrated by students in different settings across the school.

Appropriate adjustment strategies, considering content, process, environment, and assessment, have been aligned with learning progressions and foregrounding: where to next? ABLES generates reports that provide a common document to speak to. Staff at the school have found this process very powerful, as conversations now have a shared understanding based on concrete data.

Teachers have found the ABLES reports accurately correlate with the results of the speech language pathologist's communication matrix for students. This has been particularly useful when

communicating with allied health professionals and visiting paediatricians. Teachers have found it very helpful to have something concrete (reports) to share which provides background information and accelerates processes if further investigation is required.

The ABLES assessments provide an overall visual snapshot of where students are placed on the learning continuum and this has been very parent friendly. ABLES has been particularly useful at parent-teacher interviews. The ABLES Learning Readiness Reports visually show parents that even if their child hasn't moved into the next year level, they can see there has been growth within the learning continuum of their targeted ability level. For many parents, this is important to share, without having to discuss complicated planning and assessment processes. The A to E reporting system does not always fully represent student's growth when on highly individualised plans, so it has been exciting and beneficial for parents to see.

For us, we're just at the very start of the journey but it's been a really positive start ... the students are always at the forefront.

The whole process of using the ABLES assessment and resources has validated teacher judgment and deepened knowledge about students through identifying abilities and specific points of need for those working on a highly individualised curriculum. In Queensland, all the available resources are from Prep through to Year 12. The ABLES assessments have helped fill the gap for students working at levels prior to Foundation.

Teachers found time to be the biggest factor to consider when first implementing the ABLES assessments. Professional development to support all teachers to complete the questions and further collaborate with all stakeholders involved in teaching the students is important to maximise the benefits of the ABLES assessment and resources in mainstream classes.

Overall, matching the best strategies with the needs of the student's abilities, and sharing and collaborating best practice with others involved in the student's learning across the different contexts within the school, has been a highlight of the ABLES trial. It has guided year level planning, mapping what the cohort are learning, and how teachers can align what individual students are focused on too — to pull apart the parts that they will be successful at and what steps teachers need to take to ensure a student's progress and meet with success.



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