

## **Innovative practice working with complex communication and vision impairment in the special school setting in Queensland**

Catriona Pine<sup>1</sup>

Sara King-Koi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Education

### **Short Abstract**

Catriona and Sara are Speech Language Pathologists based at Narbethong State Special School in Brisbane, a specialised state school (0-18 years) for blind or low vision students. This presentation will discuss their role as Speech Language Pathologists working in the school to support complex communicators, considerations for alternative and augmentative communication when working with students with a vision impairment, and strategies for school wide implementation. Catriona will also discuss her role supporting congenitally deafblind students across Queensland schools, including communication development pathways.

### **Long Abstract**

Catriona and Sara are Speech Language Pathologists based at Narbethong State Special School in Brisbane, a specialised state school (0-18 years) for blind or low vision students. This presentation will discuss their role as Speech Language Pathologists working in the school to support complex communicators, considerations for alternative and augmentative communication when working with students with a vision impairment, and strategies for school wide implementation. Catriona will also discuss her role supporting congenitally deafblind students across Queensland schools, including communication development pathways.

Catriona and Sara will provide clinical experience and case discussions around this unique population of students (blind/low vision with complex communication needs, congenitally deafblind students with complex communication needs). Embedding communication development strategies across school teams has been a collaborative journey with the school, building upon current evidence based clinical practice. Supporting an inclusive school environment is part of the Equity and Excellence priority for the Department of Education's strategic plan (Queensland), and supporting student access to communication and learning is fundamental.

Catriona and Sara have been a significant part of the school explicit improvement agenda around communication capability development, providing staff training, data gathering on student communication progress, resource provision and communication systems implementation - liaising with families and private providers.

Based on school data collection, there has been a significant positive shift in the capability of communication partners at the school, and students with blind and low vision/complex

communication needs are able to more readily access curriculum and learning. Catriona and Sara have also developed their personal clinical skills in problem solving, clinical decision making, and staff team collaboration.

Catriona and Sara are 'all in' to support students with vision impairment who have complex communication needs. They spend their days at school modelling communication, solving puzzles of practice, and waiting in anticipation of what will the students communicate next!