ST Albert’s Catholic School has implemented a new literacy program which has been described as a "model of its type" by director of Catholic Education Brenda Keenan. The program has connected a number of recognised programs including Jolly Phonics and Jolly Grammar to some new and innovative ones like School Start Buddy, a resource developed by St Albert’s literacy co-ordinator Sharona Edwards.

"This year we introduced the School Start Buddy as a way of strengthening students' foundational literacy skills; for example letter/sound knowledge, blending sounds to read and write words," she said. 

"This is a resource that is given to all parents to utilise at home. Students were very excited to receive their very own case. Year 1 student Campbell Vowles described his School Start Buddy as his 'toy homework' because it is so much fun!" 

School principal Brett Czechowski said School Start Buddy is part of a suite of tools the school now uses to provide a comprehensive and targeted approach to literacy.

"Smaller class sizes allow better staff resourcing in our daily 'literacy centres', where each class is broken into ability groups of about four or five students," Mr Czechowski said.

"Each group then works through a number of targeted activities on a rotational basis including Guided and Rainbow Reading, Study Ladder (an online programme linked to Literacy Planet), Reading Eggs and Literacy Skills."

"We want our kids to graduate with a confidence around their ability to interact and engage with the world post primary school, so it's important to me we get the balance right."

"It's important to us that we listen to each child read every day. There are strategies around listening to a child read and so we have up-skill support staff, parents and volunteers to assist with the overall implementation of our program."

"In addition, classes also buddy-up for spelling journals - where students are tested on the spelling of high frequency words - and peer reading."

"It's a whole-of-school approach and the results so far have been quite extraordinary."

Speech pathologist Emma Frankel-Vaughan, from Learning Keys in Adelaide, has taken a strong interest in the School Start Buddy. She now uses the teaching tool in her own practice and is in the process of marketing the product to other schools in Adelaide, such as her excite-ment. There is similar interest in Riverland schools, too. It would appear momentum is building.

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"Learning to spell is more than memorising a list of weekly spelling words," Mrs Edwards said.

"Some children are lucky in that they can see a word once and then remember the spelling forever, however, most students require a more comprehensive approach."

"Children need to explore and play with words so they can understand why words are spelt a certain way. For example many spelling rules rely on a good understanding of the long and short vowel sound."

Mr Czechowski said literacy is more than just spelling and recognising words. It's important our students learn why a word is spelt a certain way," he said. For example, a student might be asked to spell the word 'middle' in a weekly test but will then need to qualify why the word has a double consonant and not a single etc.

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"It might sound clichéd but we really don't want any child to be 'left behind' when it comes to literacy and numeracy at St Albert's. We want our kids to graduate with a confidence around their ability to interact and engage with the world post primary school, so it's important to me we get the balance right."

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