**Speech language pathology in Queensland state school**

**Announcer:** This is a Department of Education podcast proudly sponsored by Teachers Mutual Bank.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Today we celebrate our dedicated speech language pathologists. Speech pathologists have specialist knowledge in speech, language, literacy and communication. They play an important role in Queensland state schools, helping all students to achieve by assisting schools with identifying and addressing barriers to learning. Speech language pathologist, Jane Trevor, and head of student support services, Kellie Turnbull, both from Fernbrooke State School, join me to talk about the speech language pathologist job in our schools. Hi, Jane and Kellie. Thank you for joining me today.

**Kellie Turnbull:** Hi, Virginia.

**Jane Trevor:** Hi, Virginia. Thanks for having us.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: Jane, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

**Jane Trevor:** When I first graduated, my first job was for education in Barcaldine, which is a small shire, about 800 people out west near Longreach. So, I was based in Barcaldine, and I used to travel to all the surrounding schools, in Muttaburra, and Alpha and Aramac and Jericho. And then once a term we'd fly to Birdsville and Bedourie, in a small plane. So, it was quite exciting. So, that was my first introduction to working as a speech language pathologist in education.

And after that, I moved to London for eight years, where I continued to work in schools all across London. I continued my love for working in schools in London, and got some really good experience. And then I came back, moved back to Brisbane, where I started at Fernbrooke State School, and I've been there for the last six years.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What is it about speech pathology that appealed to you?

**Jane Trevor:** I've always loved talking, and I've loved listening to people, and I love hearing their stories. So, I've always loved communication from when I was a child. And I also loved singing and drama lessons when I was young. And as part of the singing, we did a lot of work on voice. And as part of the speech and drama, there was a lot of work on phonetics, which means the study of sounds. And I think that's where my love and interest in speech was really formed. So, when I finished school, speech pathology seems like the right choice for me.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Why did you choose to work as a speech language pathologist in state schools?

**Jane Trevor:** Well, my first job interview was for education, and I think at that time education was the main employee of speech language pathologists. And my mum and sister are both teachers, so I was familiar with that education space. And I also wanted to work with children, but in a more natural environment, as opposed to a medical, hospital, clinical setting.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: What does your current role entail?

**Jane Trevor:** I've been working with the school team at Fernbrooke State School for the past six years. And this has been my first role based in one school. So before this, I used to work in three to four different schools in a week. And I've really enjoyed being based at one school, and feeling like part of the team, and the Fernbrooke community. Because I think you can really get to know people, and work with parents and students more when you're in one place.

And I've worked with some students and families since they were in Prep. So, I'm finally seeing them go all the way through primary school. And it's been nice to have that relationship with them. At Fernbrooke State School, we work within the whole-school approach, and this means we work together in different ways to ensure that every student can achieve and experience learning success. My role is really varied, and involves working with teachers at the planning level and in the classroom. And I work a lot with Kellie and the inclusion teachers in small groups with targeted students. And some of my work is working one-on-one with some students.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** The theme for Speech Pathology Week is good communication, better communities. How does your work as a SLP benefit the school community, Jane?

**Jane Trevor:** At Fernbrooke State School I’m lucky in that I get to work with all the staff, students and families and we work in a whole-school approach. As part of my role, I do work with students with a variety of different needs. So, students who have speech and language disorders, students who have difficulties with literacy, students who have difficulties with hearing impairment or voice. So we work with a wide range of students with difficulties and our main goal is to help those students to access the curriculum. So, our goal is to help students to learn, and be successful learners in school.

We look at what barriers some students might face in the classroom and we work together as a school team to remove those barriers. For example, if we're teaching storytelling, some students might find it difficult to remember all the parts in the story. So, at the planning level, we include pictures to support students, to help them to remember. And these strategies will help all the students in the class, but for some, they're really needed. So, it's about removing barriers to learning, so that all children can be successful learners.

As a speech language pathologist. I also work at what we call a focus level, and that's with the inclusion team and the inclusion teachers. And that helps to give more support to identified students, who need extra support for some aspects of their learning. So, if they have a speech language disorder, we might focus on that in a small group setting. And then, we generalise that back into the classroom. So, focus work supports what students are also learning in the classroom. Working with teachers, and helping them to build their skills to support students is also a big part of my role. And I've also learned a lot from working with teachers.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Kellie, how does Jane's work support the Fernbrooke State School student and staff community?

**Kellie Turnbull:** Jane works very closely with our inclusion model. So, at Fernbrooke State School over the last 18 months, we've refined what our inclusion model looks like. We have an inclusion teacher aligned to each year level and also an inclusion teacher aid. So, the inclusion teachers are the first point of call for communication with the classroom teachers and the inclusion teacher will be the first person generally, who is flagged into there's a student that needs additional support. Jane's been integral in working with our inclusion team, and getting into classrooms and observing students, particularly in our Prep cohort. Jane spent a lot of time over the last 18 months, building capability of the inclusion team to facilitate support for students who have oral language deficits.

What we found is, our enrollment into Prep, a significant number of students do not have early childhood settings. So, they haven't been to daycare. They haven't been to pre-prep or anything like that. So, we have approximately 50% who have really delayed oral language. Jane has spent the last 18 months building capacity for the inclusion teacher to actually work in the focus group and building their capability.

We've had too many needs from too many students. So, we had to evolve. Jane has been amazing with, "Yep, what can I do? Let's get in and work with all the teachers".

Working with parents also is a big part of what Jane does. Jane works with our student support committee. So, the majority of our kids that come to that committee after they've been through a very stringent referral process, will come onto Jane's caseload anyway and a lot of that is working with the parents. Jane will develop at times a home program that the parents can actually facilitate at home. It's talking to pediatricians, it's talking to allied health professionals about students and about, this is the support we are giving them at Fernbrooke State School, how can we all work together to support the student and get them the help that they need?

**Jane Trevor:** And I think that's the main thing, is working together as a team and a community to support these students to achieve, and to be successful in their life and a lot of that comes down to communication, which is what we do as speech language pathologists, because if they can't communicate, it really hinders their life and their future. So, I think as a school, we work really hard to work together to give these children their best chance of being successful.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** And Jane, how has being an SLP in a school different to other settings?

**Jane Trevor:** A lot of people see the role of the speech language pathologist in the traditional sense of working with children, one-on-one, to really focus on their communication needs. And we still do that sometimes. But I think our role is changing in education, because our focus is on helping students to access the curriculum. So, access learning and be successful learners. So, our role in education is to work with the team, to help students achieve in learning by providing appropriate intervention and by modifying the teaching in class. So, helping teachers to support the students in the classroom.

So, we all work together and then as a school team, we decide the best way to deliver intervention, which may include working with teachers, teacher aids or a home program with a parent, or me working with the students one-on-one. So, I think in other settings like private practice or hospital, they work more on a medical model, which focuses more on the child's individual difficulties. Whereas I think in a school setting, our main aim is to support students to learn and access by removing barriers, like removing communication barriers and putting support in place. And our main work in education is to support students to be successful learners.

I think it's taking away that traditional role of what a speech language pathologist looks like. And I think working at Fernbrooke State School, it's been that opportunity for me to work with the leadership team as well. So, it's more at that higher level of enabling me to come to planning meetings, and to work with teachers, to look at how they're teaching students, and to put that speech pathology lens on it. So, to modify what they're doing to help students.

**Kellie Turnbull:** Well, it looks at the planning aspect and the strategies, that we can put in, I suppose they're called universal strategies, that a lot of our students need. And what you'll do for one, will benefit so many more. So, Jane's expertise about going into the planning meetings has been extremely beneficial.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Just following on from that, Kellie, is there anything about working with an SLP that was a surprise to you or may it be a surprise to our listener? I know you have covered some of that previously, but is there anything you'd like to add?

**Kellie Turnbull:** What does surprise other people is the scope of a speech language pathologist. When we look at what is receptive and expressive language, a lot of say parents, and this is where we want to develop understanding the community. They'll say, "Oh, my student can talk. So, there's nothing wrong with them". So, it's really working a lot with parents, and that's what Jane does really well. Working with a lot of parents, and just chipping away, and it's not going in and say, right, these are the concerns we've got, this is how we're going to fix it. It's building parents' understanding about what is receptive language, what's expressive language, what's pragmatic skills?

What's been a surprise with Jane is, giving her the scope to develop capacity in teachers, and how well that's actually worked, and teacher aids also. Because we can definitely see the benefits that our students are taking away from the broader support that we've been able to offer at our school.

It's evolving all the time with the support that we can give. And what I've found that over time in the education system, with speech language pathologists, their roles have changed. So, the impact Jane's had with working with teachers and building their capability at that whole class level, has been extremely beneficial.

**Jane Trevor:** That's something I'd taken away as well, is that I've really enjoyed working at that whole class level, because I'm not trained as a teacher. I'm trained as a speech language pathologist. But that's why we work really well together, because the teachers are that expert in classroom behavior management and curriculum. And then, I bring that speech and language pathology lens to it.

**Kellie Turnbull:** But you also bring the singing and the drama lens to it too.

**Jane Trevor:** I do.

**Kellie Turnbull:** That’s what my inclusion teachers have fed back to me. You watch Jane in her working with the Preps in their oral language program. It's all about that flamboyancy, I suppose. And the singing and the drama aspect has fed back really well into the classroom strategies that we're bringing in. So now, the inclusion teacher is taking a lot on that. So, she's singing to the kids and she's a bit more dramatic than what she normally is, because the kids love that way of learning.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** It's really interesting to see how important a role that speech pathologists do play in state schools. Thanks for your time. Jane and Kellie.

**Kellie Turnbull:** Thank you, Virginia. We've really enjoyed this. It's been fun.

**Jane Trevor:** Thanks for having us, Virginia.

**Announcer:** You have been listening to a Queensland Department of Education podcast.

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