

Harlie's Story (full transcript)

When my daughter, Harlie, was reaching Prep age, I began phoning the local schools for enrolment. I had to explain that Harlie suffered from cerebral palsy and was wheelchair bound, so she would require extra assistance. This includes one-on-one time in the classroom and access to all areas of the school. Sadly, the local schools I phoned were unwelcoming. They told me they could not install ramps or appropriate toileting facilities and that I should consider a special school as they would be equipped appropriately. I decided to try Ferny Grove State School before settling on a special school as I was sure a mainstream school is where Harlie belonged. I spoke to Stacey Day who assured me all of this was possible. I met Stacey at the school weeks later and she explained where they would install ramps and toileting facilities such as a change table for Harlie. Stacey told me what the Special Education Program involved and how it was tailored for each child's needs.



When Harlie began Prep at Ferny Grove State School in 2016 she was welcomed and immediately accepted by staff and her peers. As promised, ramps and toileting facilities were installed and ready to go. I was anxious about Harlie starting full time school, but, after the first week, I knew I had made the right choice. Harlie fit in right away in the school environment. Her Prep class spoke regularly about inclusion and even allowed Harlie's peers to try a wheelchair in the classroom to better understand the world from Harlie's point of view and the obstacles she faces. Because of

this, the children were more understanding of Harlie and were able to identify when Harlie might need assistance in and outside of the classroom.

The SEP staff were always open for suggestions should Harlie's needs change and were happy to work with Harlie's therapists within the school to keep consistency in her life. Goal setting was important in her first term at Ferny Grove which the SEP staff were keen to help achieve by implementing various activities and one-on-one time with Harlie. By the end of her first year at Ferny Grove, Harlie was able to recognise most letters of the alphabet and confidently write some letters in her name. I attribute this to the support of the school and their belief in Harlie.



During Semester 2 of Harlie's second year at Ferny Grove, she had 6 weeks away from school for spinal surgery in America. I was concerned this absence would impact negatively on Harlie's social and academic development. Fortunately, the school organised a video call with her class so Harlie could share her experience from the other side of the world in real time. This helped Harlie reconnect with

her peers. Upon our return, Harlie required many hours of physiotherapy each day, which caused major fatigue and she was not able to perform her best academically. I voiced my concerns to Stacey and, with the school's approval, Stacey organised for special education teacher Amanda Wooding to attend our home for 1 hour, 3 days per week so Harlie could have rest time but continue her learning. This was possibly the most productive time for Harlie as she was in the comfort of her own home and was able to spend the remainder of the day concentrating on physiotherapy and rest. These home visits continued for most of term 4.

While Harlie no longer requires home visits, she still takes time off two afternoons per week for rest. Her SEP case worker, Jessica Richards, worked with me to find the best balance for Harlie to have plenty of in-class time and at home rest, without it negatively impacting her learning. This has enabled Harlie to perform at her best in all areas of her life. This year she has made many new friends and was elected student councillor for her Year 2 class, enjoying her new responsibility and understanding the importance of her role. Harlie also joined the junior choir this year and the school was able to accommodate by moving the choir practice from a demountable building to the library where there is ramp access.



I believe mainstream schooling for Harlie was the right decision and Ferny Grove State School was the perfect choice. Harlie has achieved more than I ever dreamed because her school recognised her needs and opened up new opportunities for her to develop, not only academically, but socially. Harlie's future is bright and I believe Ferny Grove will continue to be a part of her success.

Jacqui Russell