

MEDIA RELEASE

Re-modelling special education

19 July 2012: A Melbourne school is a pioneer and international leader in the field of special needs education, according to a new book being launched this afternoon by Victoria's Minister for Education, the Hon Martin Dixon.

Published by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), *An Extraordinary School: Re-modelling special education* tells the story of Port Phillip Specialist School, an innovative school catering for children aged two to eighteen years with a wide range of severe disabilities.

The book's editor, award-winning foreign correspondent and mother of a child at the school, Sara James, explains the school's point of difference is its three-pronged approach to education. It uses:

- a full-service school model, in which a wide range of educational, medical, paramedical and mental health services operate collaboratively within the school;
- an integrated model of service delivery, in which teachers, art, music and drama therapists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, hydrotherapists, physiotherapists, social workers and psychologists collaborate to address the specific needs of each student, embedding therapy in all classroom activities, and;
- a visual and performing arts curriculum that uses dance, drama, music and the visual arts to teach literacy, numeracy and living skills.

"This model of education is unique to Port Phillip Specialist School, but it shouldn't be," Ms James said, speaking ahead of the launch.

"Port Phillip Specialist School sets a model of best practice that could and should be used in special schools across Australia and throughout the world. It also could be adapted for use in mainstream classrooms," she said.

Ms James said Port Phillip Specialist School is successful because the entire staff works closely with parents and carers to educate the whole child. State-of-the-art facilities include a \$2.3m performing arts centre, a 10-metre swimming and hydrotherapy pool, and a house where students practice independent living skills.

Port Phillip Specialist School sets high standards for their students but ensures all goals are realistic, attainable and measurable. The school teaches important skills that will improve students' quality of life, ability to learn and ability to be independent.

"The goal at Port Phillip Specialist School is to help children and their families not just to cope, but to thrive," Ms James said.

The book aims to change how the world approaches education for children with special needs and to show the value of the arts in the education of all children.

There are over 400 special schools in Australia, educating around 20 per cent of the 150 000 students with special educational needs or a disability who are enrolled in schools nationally. The other 80 per cent are enrolled in mainstream schools.

An Extraordinary School: Re-modelling special education (ACER Press, 2012) is being launched at Port Phillip Specialist School, Nott St, Port Melbourne, at 5.30pm on Thursday 19 July. Print copies can be purchased from the [ACER Online Shop](http://www.acer.edu.au/online-shop) or by contacting customer service on 1800 338 402 or via email on sales@acer.edu.au

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