

MACARTHUR

Parents 'coached' by therapists to help disruptive kids

South West Sydney schools trial new therapy program for disruptive schoolchildren.

Daniel Zautsen, Macarthur Chronicle Campbelltown

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 Dr. Georgie Fleming Psychologist observing students Saksham Bethany and Bianca with project manager Katerina Dolezalova at Ingleburn Public School. Picture: Matthew Vasilescu

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Ingleburn Public School is among several schools in south west Sydney trialling an innovative program designed to address emotional and disruptive behaviour issues in children.

Parent-Child Interaction Therapy is being rolled out across seven schools in the Macarthur and south west Sydney regions over the coming weeks.

The therapy program, which will begin on June 5, involves children between the ages of two and seven and their parents interacting in a room while a therapist watches on from behind a one way window and provides advice to the parent via a wireless ear piece.

The program aims to work with about 50 to 60 families per year.

UNSW psychologist Dr Georgie Fleming said children being put through the program were identified by parents and teachers.

“The way that we identify those children is by looking at those who screen at the highest level of severity in terms of their behaviour so these are things like noncompliance and aggression and being destructive,” she said.

“PCIT is what’s known as a parent management training program... instead of just working with the parent or the child we bring them in together and the therapist works to shift what the parent is doing with the child in terms of how they manage and respond to behaviours.

“The special thing about it is that we use observation and coaching in real time, so the therapist stands behind a one way window and can coach the parent to apply evidence based parenting skills as they’re actually interacting with their child.”

Dr Fleming said the therapy had been successful at UNSW’s Kensington clinic and researchers were hopeful success in local schools would eventually lead to it being expanded across other schools.

Ingelburn Public School Principal Graeme Green said the school was always open to finding new ways to help its students.

“I’ve worked in a number of schools and often the reaction to these children from other parents is that they want us to get them out of the classroom because they are disrupting other children” he said.



The therapist advises parents via a wireless earpiece. Picture: Matthew Vasilescu

“But what people have to realise is that it’s a form of communication, these children are trying to tell us something.”

Mr Green said many people in south west Sydney struggle to access services like PCIT because of socio-economic barriers and the tyranny of distance.

“We are in a lower socio-economic area and that brings with it a lot of challenges,” he said.

“It would be very hard for parents from here to travel to Kensington for this therapy and there may be concerns that it would carry a stigma.

“I’m delighted to bring the clinic into our school because I think it normalises it for people but most importantly gives them access to the service.”

Schools involved in the program include Ingleburn PS, Warwick Farm PS, Macquarie Fields PS, Sackville Street PS, Robert Townson PS, Campbelltown Preschool and St Andrews PS.