

Moana Primary School had done the hard work. Debunked practices were gone, staff were aligning, and the reading data was moving. By most measures, the school knew what it stood for. However, in one area, something wasn't landing. And Kelly Patch, Moana's principal, knew it.

Writing was being taught differently in every classroom. The research behind the reading-writing connection was known, but that knowledge was not translating into consistent classroom practice. The shift in reading had shown the teachers were capable and committed. The problem wasn't people. It was implementation.

### WHEN HIGH QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ISN'T ENOUGH

Moana had already invested seriously in professional learning. Jocelyn Seamer, a leading Australian school improvement and leadership advisor, puts it plainly: knowing the research is not the same as using it. Professional learning only matters if it shows up in classrooms, and if it's not happening consistently, it's not happening.

Kelly and literacy coach Jenny had already been drawing on Jocelyn's podcast (*The Structured Literacy Podcast*), workshops and *The Resource Room* to shape the initial shifts at Moana. What was missing was teacher understanding of how to craft instruction and a leadership team built to carry it forward. Bringing Jocelyn Seamer Education on as that partner felt like the logical next step. Kelly's instinct was a familiar one: an external voice might cut through what felt like diminishing impact from her own.

*“It can be difficult as a site leader to find professional development that actually develops you as a leader, so that you can develop your staff.*

*Jocelyn Seamer's work does that.”*

Kelly Patch, Principal, Moana Primary School

### WHAT IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT LOOKS LIKE

For Jocelyn Seamer Education (JSE), the measure of success is always the same: **will our work together lead to improved student outcomes and can the leadership team continue to drive improvement long after the partnership concludes?** At Moana Primary School, that meant Kelly and literacy coach Jenny developing a deeper understanding of the new practice than the teachers they were leading, and the capability to keep building on it themselves.

This outcome required deliberate design. Kelly worked closely with JSE to plan the implementation, including the decision to involve every member of the school community, support staff and teacher aides. The partnership opened with whole-staff professional learning on Cognitive Load Theory, giving every staff member a shared knowledge base and a clear understanding of their role in managing cognitive load for student learning.

From there, JSE coached teaching teams through the instructional design process directly, as Kelly and Jenny observed and took notes. Throughout the coaching days, leaders gradually took the lead in the process with JSE there to support. By the final session, JSE was prompting only when needed. The 'I do, we do, you do' structure was intentional.

Jocelyn Seamer, founder of JSE, recognises that one-off professional learning builds awareness at best. As such, JSE's partnerships focus on leadership teams who are ready for the journey of long-term school improvement. Through walking alongside leadership and meeting them at their point of need, implementation progresses at the right pace, and leaders get the support they need at each stage.

*“When you are delivering someone else's work, then a stage of building understanding is missed. But when you've had to put it together yourself, the ability to transfer the knowledge is much more effective.”*

Kelly Patch, Principal, Moana Primary School

Kelly applied this principle to her own leadership. Each term, year-level teams meet with Kelly and Jenny for a dedicated 90-minute planning session. Teachers arrive prepared, with current data, cohort knowledge, and a learning focus already in mind. They leave with a plan. To make it happen in school time, Kelly built a creative timetabling structure around the school's specialist teachers. This is not something done in personal time. It is something the school makes time for.

## WHAT CHANGES WHEN LEADERSHIP IS SUPPORTED

After working with Jocelyn, Kelly could predict where teachers would get stuck and had the knowledge to respond. When a teacher raised an objection or questioned a decision, she was confident in her evidence-informed response. When she wasn't, JSE was an email away.

That knowledge had direct consequences in classrooms. When the Year 5 and 6 team wanted to address weak conclusions by going back over the whole writing structure, Kelly pushed back. "Jocelyn showed us how to really zone in on what the cohort needs, and how to 'cut the fluff'," said Kelly. "If your kids can already write great intros and paragraphs, then the main focus should be the conclusion."

**"I realised I'm not driving this anymore, [the improvement] is being driven by teachers. Which is just wonderful."**

Kelly Patch, Principal, Moana Primary School

The unit was redesigned. Engagement lifted. Students who had checked out during writing tasks were working on something they finally felt they could master. Teachers began inviting leadership into classrooms to celebrate student progress. Kelly was no longer driving the change.

At the start of 2026, Kelly made a deliberate call: no new learning this year. "I promised our staff it would be a year to consolidate, to really fine-tune what we're doing and why."

That kind of disciplined restraint is rarer than it sounds in schools perpetually chasing the next initiative. It also happens to be precisely what the evidence recommends. AERO's guidance report *Leveraging Evidence for System Support (2026)* is unambiguous: one-off professional learning does not lead to sustained changes in teaching practice. What does is implementation support that builds internal capacity over time.

## WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT THAT STICKS

### **AERO, Leveraging Evidence for System Support (March, 2026)**

*One-one professional learning does not lead to sustained changes in teaching practice. What does is coaching, modelling, and implementation support that builds internal capacity — so improvement continues after the external provider leaves.*

### **Grattan Institute, Ending the Lesson Lottery (2022) and How to Implement a Whole-School Curriculum Approach (2023)**

*Shared planning, agreed instructional approaches, and structured leadership involvement are what make practice consistent across classrooms. Teachers with access to shared curriculum materials are significantly more likely to report consistent student learning across the school.*



**A FINAL MESSAGE FROM KELLY** One thing Kelly is direct about is leadership presence. Rather than observing from the edge, ensure you are present, planning alongside your team and doing the thinking with them.

"We didn't realise the importance of having leadership driving the process with the whole staff until we worked with Jocelyn," says Kelly. "If this work had involved only Jocelyn working with teachers, and not leadership, I don't think it would have been anywhere near as successful."

The improvement that followed wasn't luck. It was the result of a leadership team that had been deliberately developed to carry it, and a school organised to sustain it long after the consultant had left.