

**STAND  
OUT**

**SEPLA-CON 19**

Monday 22nd July – Rosehill Racecourse  
Tuesday 23rd July – Rydges Parramatta



## Supporting Students with Diverse Learning Needs at Cessnock Public School – A Trauma Informed Approach.

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### **Biography:**

Mathew Clarke (B.Teach / B.Arts (Primary) (UoN), M.Ed (Special Education) (USyd)) is the assistant primary of the support unit classes at Cessnock Public School. In a 15-year career in NSW public education, he has gained a wide range of experience in both mainstream and special education and has taught students K-12, having previously worked in learning assistance and classroom teacher roles at comprehensive primary and high school settings. He has extensive experience working with students with complex learning and emotional needs. He has a passion for student and staff wellbeing, positive school culture and trauma-informed practice, and has completed action research in the area of positive behaviour support.

Cessnock Public School has committed to using evidence-based teaching and learning frameworks to support the diverse learning needs of our students and community. Cessnock PS has twelve mainstream classes and a support unit comprised of a mild intellectual disability (IM), a moderate / severe intellectual disability (IO/IS), and an emotional disturbance (ED) class. Some of the frameworks employed to great effect at Cessnock PS include Zones of Regulation, neuro-sequential model for education, and dedicated mindfulness instruction.

Cessnock PS has embedded trauma informed practice, including strategies from the Berry Street Education Model (BSEM), into our teaching and learning programs by having strength-based classrooms which instil therapeutic principles and positive education. We ensure that our students develop a growth mindset and coping strategies for inside and outside of the classroom. We have a strong focus on the student's ability to better understand their emotions so that they can learn to have more control over them.

The Neurosequential Model in Education (NME) draws upon the NMT (a neurodevelopmentally-informed perspective on human development and functioning) to help educators understand student behaviour. At Cessnock PS, we use the NME assessment tool to assess the development of the student's brain and apply appropriate strategies to best suit their needs, using the 'bottom up' or 'top down' approach.

Cessnock PS has made a schoolwide commitment to the Zones of Regulation program, which is taught weekly in all mainstream and support classes across the school. The program is a curriculum geared toward helping students gain skills in consciously regulating their actions, which in turn leads to increased control and problem-solving abilities. It teaches students the emotional vocabulary required to label and process their emotions by teaching them to classify emotional responses as belonging to one of four 'zones'. Since committing to the Zones of Regulation program in 2016, Cessnock PS has seen a regular decrease in behaviour referrals on a term by term basis.

Students at Cessnock PS are availed of the opportunity to experience mindfulness and meditation classes on a weekly basis as part of the school's PDHPE program. The school employs a qualified practitioner to teach mindfulness techniques to all classes each week. These lessons are timetabled

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into class programs. Extra sessions are available for students identified as having additional emotional support needs in consultation with their families. Professional learning and mindfulness sessions are also provided to both teaching and non-teaching staff on a regular basis.