



# ST JOSEPH'S SCHOOL CREATES HEARING ENVIRONMENT



Left to right, Ashliegh Darragh, Paige Gardner, Sophie Muir, Miss Wendie Hildred, Chantelle Broshahan

**TEACHERS AND CHILDREN AT FEILDING'S ST JOSEPH'S PRIMARY SCHOOL** have no problems hearing each other after the installation of Easy Listener Soundfields in all their classrooms.

Principal Albert Dodunski runs a school that an ERO report describes as a "successful and supportive learning environment" where education programmes are targeted to the individual needs of each student." The report also says that "Staff identify barriers to student learning". One such barrier was the children's ability to hear the teacher. The teachers, principal and Board of Trustees at Feilding's St Joseph

school are very sensitive to the hearing needs of children, having been a magnet school for Deaf and Hearing Impaired children since Feilding's St Dominics School for Deaf closed in 1989. The staff at St Joseph's noticed that many other children had problems hearing in the classroom, due to colds and glue ear and they wanted to improve the learning environment.

Recent research shows that many New Zealand classrooms have poor acoustics and

## ST JOSEPH'S FEILDING

Location	Feilding, Manawatu
Type	Full Primary
Special features	Integrated Maori immersion class Deaf class
Teaching staff	10
Roll number	213
Number of classrooms	9
Ethnic composition	Maori 25% Pakeha 75%
Gender	Female 48% Male 52%



that the noise levels are hazardous for both children and teachers.<sup>1</sup> Children and teachers often have to compete to be heard against unacceptable levels of background noise. For many children their ability to learn is further affected by hearing problems, glue ear and frequent colds.

So Albert, the staff and the Board of Trustees decided to do something about this.

The first Easy Listener Soundfield was installed in 2000 in the Maori immersion class. "The teacher noticed a number of children had hearing problems due to glue ear and colds. As we have a Deaf class in our school we are very sensitive to hearing issues. One of the agencies suggested that a soundfield could help. The results were remarkable. There was a great improvement in their language and reading skills."

"One 6-year-old boy was so excited, he bounced up to me and said, 'I can hear the teacher.' This story has been repeated over and over again with other children as we installed further soundfields," says Albert.

"Installing soundfields in our classrooms has really made a difference to the way both teachers

and children interact. The teachers have found that they don't have to raise their voices to be heard and the children don't have to be right next to the teacher to hear. The teacher's voice can be heard clearly from all directions in the classroom. There is a more settled atmosphere in the classrooms and the teachers don't feel so stressed or tired by the end of the term."

All children benefit from soundfields, not only those with hearing impairment. The teachers also benefit too. In New Zealand, 35 percent of teachers claim that the level at which they need to speak strains their voices.<sup>1</sup> With soundfields, teachers are much less likely to suffer from vocal strain and stress.

St Joseph's Primary School is the first Manawatu school to have soundfields in every classroom. This factor is often mentioned when new parents contact the school about enrolments.

Albert says that the Board of Trustees and the staff of St Joseph's wanted to improve the hearing for the 213 children at their school and consider the installation of the soundfields "an investment in quality sound for quality learning."

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1 Oriole Wilson et al, Classroom Acoustics:  
A New Zealand Perspective, 2002

## HOW DOES AN EASY LISTENER SOUNDFIELD WORK?

The Easy Listener Soundfield is distributed by hearing company Oticon New Zealand and it works through ordinary FM radio signals. The teacher wears a Madonna-style head set microphone, that is easy to use and barely noticeable to the wearer. The teacher's voice signal is transmitted to four separate speakers in the classroom. Simply pushing the mute button allows the teacher to turn the system on and off depending on whether she is working with one child, a small group or the whole class. Very little maintenance is required and the transmitter is simply plugged in to a power socket to charge up each night.

The Soundfield systems are easy to use and the results speak for themselves. Anecdotal evidence from the 300 or more NZ classrooms with Easy Listener Soundfields installed, report improvements in children's oral language, literacy levels, classroom harmony and on-task behaviour, and a reduction in special education referrals and costs. What's more, all children benefit, not only those with hearing impairments.

