

## SEPLA-CON18



### **Managing Student Behaviour and Learning through Alpaca Handling: Effects on Anxiety Classroom Learning and Social Behaviour Among a Group of Students with Special Needs**

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Three behaviours regularly cited as concerns for parents and teachers are anxiety, lack of motivation and anti-social behaviour. These behaviours are often observed in students with special needs. In 2009/10 Gin Gin State High School developed the Gin Gin Alternative Pathway Programme (GGAP) designed to increase school engagement for boys in Years 8&9 identified as being at risk of disengagement from learning. The programme delivered measurable outcomes in improved school attendance, improved academic success and an increase in school based traineeships. The programme's success was recognised in State (Showcase) and National (NAB Schools First) competitions. In 2015 a Special Education Unit (SEU) was constructed at the school as a result of increased enrolment of students with special needs. The current Alpaca Handling Programme implemented in 2017 has drawn from the knowledge acquired through GGAP and included community partners involved in the GGAP programme. In this field case study eight Year 7 students were included in an alpaca handling programme for a two hour session each Friday during Semester Two, 2017. The group included six boys with ASD two being nonverbal and two with an intellectual disability, one boy with an intellectual disability and one girl with ASD. Anecdotal and behaviour records from year six for this group together with observations made by High School staff visiting the primary school indicated the presence of extremely negative social behaviour and lack of motivation for classroom learning.

Observations by SEU staff in Term 1, 2107 identified student anxiety in behaviour that included tantrums, verbal and physical outbursts and flight reactions. Alpaca handling sessions were developed and trialled each Friday morning under the direction of Alpaca stud owners. A field day conducted in Term 3 provided an opportunity for students to share their experience with parents, school administration and other students. The students demonstrated their handling skills. Each student presented their written personal stories. The quality of stories indicated a marked improvement in literacy. School behaviour records provided evidence for a decrease in negative behaviour. Parents suggested that students were generally less anxious and more positive about daily school attendance. The Alpaca Handling Programme is now established and includes a transition to high school element for incoming students to the SEU.

The presentation will include analysis of data, a description of programme operation (25mins), video interviews with stud owners (5mins), Alpaca Australia Education Information Kits and a short on site live training demonstration (25mins).