

Moving stories...

A very special school – Glenleighden

Bruce Grundy suggests that it's not unusual for parents to send their children away to school to get an education. But it is unusual when it's the parents who move so their children can get an education... particularly if it means selling up and relocating into a strange place hundreds or maybe thousands of kilometres away...

In Brisbane there is a very

special school, it's one that parents are happy to move house to be near. Pam and Murray sold their Melbourne home and made the move – more than a thousand kilometres.

Carolyne and Mick did the same, but in the opposite direction – from Cairns. For another family it was even further – three thousand kilometres – from Darwin. One mother made the move from Townsville; another sold up too and relocated from Toowoomba; a third drove the 240km round trip from Toowoomba every day for a year until her little boy could be transitioned to a local school. Elena and Marcello said goodbye to their home, their friends and families and shifted too... from Sydney.

Julie's husband couldn't just sell the family property in Moree in central western New South Wales, so Julie took her little girl and set off for Brisbane to find a place to rent. They commuted back to their home eight hours drive away during the holidays.

The same thing happened to Janice. Her husband couldn't move either so she left their home in Victoria and drove to Brisbane to find somewhere to live so her son could go to Glenleighden.

And so the stories go on. One little boy and his mum came from New Zealand; another family from Adelaide.

One grandad drives 1000kms a week to take his grandson to Glenleighden and has done so for years.

Then there was the father who lived with his son in Brisbane during the week and went back to his home and to the rest of his family at weekends.

Some parents formed a carpool and drove from the Gold Coast every day so their children could attend. The stories of extraordinary family dedication go on and on.

So what is it that sees so many



families make such amazing sacrifices so a child can go to this place?

Glenleighden is the only school of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere. It caters for children diagnosed with Primary Language Disorder. To be enrolled a child's speech language capacity has to be at just two per cent (or less) of that of his or her peers. They may have no other impairments. It's just that for some reason they did not learn to talk and express themselves or have developed only a limited capacity to do so.

Glenleighden's teachers and therapists are specialists in dealing with the issues these children face.

Imagine not being able to communicate your wants and wishes, fears and hopes, or anything else to your mum and dad, and brothers and sisters, and other kids. And how do you get an education? And what about a job one day?

Dealing with the problem is what Glenleighden does. They start with a special sign language, which is not an alternative to trying to speak, but a tool. It helps the children organise their thoughts and the demands of language. Apart from the teachers there are speech therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, a music therapist and a psychologist. Progress for some children can be quite rapid and they are transitioned to a mainstream school as soon as they are capable of making the move, but there is no cure. Early intervention is vital and success stories abound, much to the relief of anxious mums and dads. For others the road can be much longer.

In addition to the school, Glenleighden's parent body, the CHI.L.D. Association operates a clinic in Brisbane, an Outreach service throughout Queensland and an etherapy program via the internet for remote and isolated children.

Hardly surprising the school's enrolment book is full and there is a waiting list. More classrooms are in the pipeline and the school is continuing to grow. But so is the demand. Mitchell is on the waiting list. When there is a place, he will be moving from Central Queensland. Anyone interested in this unique school and its related services should access: www.glenleighden.org.au or www.letstalk.org.au

