

# Exercising young brains

## Arrowsmith technique helps students focus on problem learning skills



Casimir Catholic College students Joe Wilson, Siena Winne, Stephanie Schofield and Bea Townsend.

**EXCLUSIVE**

**BRUCE McDOUGALL**

THOUSANDS of children unable to read or tell the time due to severe learning problems are having their brains "rewired" by a groundbreaking program in schools.

The students, from primary age to Year 12, have average or above intelligence but because of a disconnect in their brain have been unable to learn the way other children do.

They are in a special category of kids who have extreme difficulty reading a book or the hands on a clock and lack common gross motor skills such as catching a ball, riding a bicycle or tying their shoelaces.

Catholic schools have become the first in Australia to implement the landmark Arrowsmith program, developed in Canada, which uses neuroscience to help kids learn how to learn.

The system uses repetitive cognitive exercises such as memorising complex symbols to greatly expand connections in a child's brain and unlock its potential.

For some exercises an eye patch is worn to help develop the area of the brain responsible for messy handwriting, misreading and errors.

Trials conducted with high school students at Casimir Catholic College in Marrickville in Sydney's inner west have produced such stunning results that the scheme is to be expanded to primary school children from early next year.

Sydney Diocese educators have identified at least 2000 children eligible for the unique program, which helps the student process, retain and retrieve information.

Siena Winne, 16, said she was improving on the program: "My spelling and writing were horrible. My maths and comprehension were terrible and I could not do assignments. Now I can read a 100-page book in two days."

Joe Wilson, 13, said he needed help understanding maths problems and could not read the time properly before starting Arrowsmith in April this year: "Now I am better at organisation. I can get my maths homework done and I find it easier to start my work. I can now read the time really well."

Australian families and teachers are travelling to Canada to train in the Arrowsmith program.

Teacher Joanne Byrne said the children involved in the pilot scheme had all made progress: "They are reading, comprehending and holding social conversations."