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**Media Release  
For Immediate Release**

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## **Technology promises a better deal for deaf students**

Hearing impaired students at La Salle College, Bankstown, experienced the benefits of Australia's first 'model classroom' designed to maximise their learning in a mainstream setting by using a mix of technologies including captions, launched at the school yesterday.

The model, unique in Australia, aims to set a benchmark in best practice for meeting the needs of hearing impaired students, combining captions, an Interactive White Board (IWB), a Soundfield amplification system and the student's own FM devices, supported by Media Access Australia's database of educational captioned resources, the Accessible Education Database.

An initiative of Media Access Australia (MAA), in collaboration with the Catholic Education Office, Sydney and La Salle College, with equipment gifted by Printacall, Electroboard and Clickview, this pilot, called the Classroom Access Project, is designed to address access to audiovisual (AV) support materials with their increasing use in mainstream school classrooms.

During Year 8 Italian and Religion lessons at the launch, teachers demonstrated how the IWB is used to display AV content with captions in addition to other visual content, driven by a computer and supported by downloadable captioned resources.

The teacher uses a microphone to transmit the sound directly to the students' hearing aids or cochlear implant, which provides the students – along with their classmates – with greater quality sound and clarity, ensuring they have full access to the entire lesson.

Mary Connor, an English and Italian Teacher at La Salle College, who has been using these technologies since the beginning of Term 1, said of one of the students who is hearing impaired, "It has built confidence in him. In year 7 he was really withdrawn, shy, and lacked confidence, while this year he has been much more engaged. In his Italian classes this year he participates much more, however when I have him in another class without the system he doesn't participate as much."

MAA's Education Manager, Anne McGrath, said students who are deaf or hearing impaired were often denied full access to education because of poor sound quality, insufficient visual information and a lack of captioning on AV materials. While some mainstream schools had implemented technological solutions, Ms McGrath said "a customised approach, specific to these students' needs, is required".

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The technologies used in the model also have benefits for teachers and other students - several teachers commented how amplification through the Soundfield system saved their voice, helping with classroom management, while captions and more use of visual resources have been shown to benefit literacy levels of many students, including ESL learners and visual learners.

While captions are an important component of the model classroom, Ms McGrath said that captioned audiovisual resources can sometimes be hard to find.

MAA is working on changing this with the development of their [Accessible Education Database](#), a database of captioned education resources for teachers that can be accessed from the model classroom.

MAA also works to increase the amount of captioned educational resources available through their administration of the [Captioning Grant](#) from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs of approximately \$133,000 per annum.

*Media Access Australia would like to thank Printacall, Electroboard and ClickView for their generous donations to the project.*

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### **About Media Access Australia**

Media Access Australia (MAA) is Australia's only independent not-for-profit media access organisation.

MAA works to improve access to audiovisual media, such as TV, cinema, DVDs and new media, by providing information about technological solutions that make audiovisual media accessible to people with disabilities. These solutions include audio description, captioning and mainstream new media technologies. MAA also supports improvements in media access in Australia towards international best practice by identifying mainstream technological solutions and cost-effective ways to promote and implement them.

To this end, MAA works collaboratively with consumer organisations, Government and industry in Australia and internationally.

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