

Auslan and Key Word Sign

In the context of Queensland special schools, Auslan and Key Word Sign (KWS) are both vital tools for supporting communication access and language development for students with a range of disabilities, including autism, intellectual disability, and speech and language impairments. Here's an explanation of each and how they differ, along with a visual resource and professional learning links. The Department of Education provides our school with advisory teachers and support personnel to enable staff to sign with fidelity.

What Is Auslan?

Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is the natural language of the Australian Deaf Community. It is a fully developed visual language with its own grammar, syntax, and structure, distinct from English. It is used by people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or non-verbal and who identify with Deaf culture or have a strong visual learning profile.

What Is Key Word Sign (KWS)?

Key Word Sign uses manual signs borrowed from Auslan, combined with spoken language, facial expressions, and natural gesture to support communication. It is not a full language but a communication support strategy.

In Special Schools:

Commonly used with students who have developmental delays, autism, or limited verbal skills.
Emphasises one-word-per-concept signing alongside speaking (e.g., saying and signing "toilet").
Aids comprehension, reduces frustration, and encourages communication initiation.
Often introduced by speech pathologists and used school-wide to support consistency.

Key Differences

Feature	Auslan	Key Word Sign
Type of system	Full visual language	Communication support strategy
Grammar	Auslan grammar	English word order
Used by	Deaf community, Auslan users	People with developmental delays
Spoken language	Not used	Always paired with speech

Why Use Signing in Special Schools?

Increases access to learning and social participation.
Supports expressive and receptive communication.
Builds vocabulary and language structures visually.
Helps students who are non-verbal, emerging communicators, or have processing difficulties.

Online Training and Support

Here are quality sources for learning Auslan and Key Word Sign, tailored to school staff in Australia:

Auslan Training and Resources

Deaf Connect – Learn Auslan
Nationally recognised courses (beginner to advanced).
Online and face-to-face options.
Auslan Sign bank – University of Sydney
Free dictionary with videos.
Includes signs for school-specific vocabulary.
The Auslan Shop
Visual resources, posters, flashcards, and readers.

Key Word Sign Australia

Key Word Sign Australia
Workshops, online learning, and manuals.
Resources designed for early childhood, schools, and adults.

Scope Australia - Communication Resource Centre
Provides training and tools for communication access in schools.

AUSLAN AND KEY WORD SIGN

Used for communication support in special schools

AUSLAN

- A natural language
- Full visual language with its own grammar
- Used by Deaf or non-verbal students



KEY WORD SIGN

- A communication support strategy
- Signs used with speech
- Used by students with developmental delays



IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS

- Increases access to learning
- Supports expressive and receptive communication
- Helps students who are non-verbal



KEY WORD SIGN

