Sarah Whyte

THE role of parents in their child's education and reading life is as crucial as that of teachers, educators say.

"The more the parent is involved with the school, the better the outcome for the child," the president of the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations, Helen Walton, says.

"If there are parents, uncles and aunts who donate their time to schools, particularly with reading in classrooms, there is that really great relationship between home and school," Walton says if parents are avid readers at home, their behaviour will encourage children to read.

"Providing reading material at home, whether it is a magazine or comics — whatever the reading material is — it gives them access," Walton says.

The principal at Burraneer Bay Public School in Sydney's south, Greg Fitzgerald, says the role between parental support and teachers is reciprocal.

For 10 years, parents and grandparents have volunteered their time to read with children who have learning difficulties.

"What we have been doing is an early intervention program," Fitzgerald says.

Children with lower literacy levels than their peers are identified in kindergarten and placed in the program in year 1.

"Each of the volunteers work with three children for 45 minutes each," Fitzgerald says. "There are currently 20 children in the program and 15 volunteers."

One volunteer, local resident Margaret Staples, donates her time once a week to read with three children.

"It gives you a lot of satisfaction to see them improving," the 80-year-old says. "They take the work home and have to do it with their parents."

Staples, who has four children and 14 grandchildren, has never had a relative attend the school but put her hand up for the program when they were asking for volunteers.

The school is heavily involved in the Premier's Reading Challenge, having completed it for the past 10 years. This year, 320 students — almost half the school's population — finished it.

Students who participate from years 3 to 9 must complete the challenge independently.