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For most six year olds, chatting with classmates is a routine part of the school day. For Hobart local Emma Watt, learning to talk casually with friends was a major milestone.

Emma was born with a hearing impairment and several complicated health issues, but is today making major gains in her development thanks to support from the NDIS.

“Emma failed her hearing tests at birth a number of times, and she also had sight issues. She was born without a thyroid gland. There were a number of different things happening at the same time,” Emma’s mum Jennifer said.

“We got her hearing tested at age two and there were no improvements, so at age three she had grommet surgery and at four we got her fitted with hearing aids.

“Because it was such a long time between the first diagnosis and getting the hearing aids, Emma’s speech was really delayed.”

Emma’s family, including older sister Abi, learned sign language to help teach Emma words such as ‘hungry’, ‘finished’, ‘please’ and ‘thank you’.

“We took Emma to a speech therapist who was able to teach her sign language – and then her speech just took off from there.”

While Emma previously received funding for speech therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy, life became a little easier when she was able to join the NDIS in 2017.

Now Emma receives additional funding for a Roger microphone, which her teacher wears and connects to the Bluetooth in Emma’s hearing aid so she can hear the teacher and her classmates clearly.

“Everything is now centralised, the support we get from our local NDIS partner has been fantastic, everything is in one central spot.

“The biggest difference for us is the integration between therapies and Emma’s support – her speech therapist is able to go into her school, work with her teacher’s aide and they can then work with her teacher, it’s all working really well.

“Since the NDIS we have noticed big changes in Emma’s speech – she is able to chat with her friends and classmates and it’s just phenomenal.

“It’s the product of support from the NDIS, us as parents and her teachers as well.”

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“The NDIS has been brilliant, and she’ll have that support for as long as she needs it, it will help her get ready for the adult world and her life ahead.

“While we will always be doing all we can to assist Emma to cope with her hearing loss, it is only one part of her as a person.

“Our hopes and expectations for Emma’s success in life are no different to those we have for her big sister Abi.”

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