Nothing’s too difficult

Jaimilee Armstrong-Duce has the kind of strength we should all aspire to. She is a high achiever who has never let life’s challenges stand in her way.

The 18-year-old is profoundly deaf. She had just turned 14 when she moved from her native Queensland to Melbourne, far from the support of family and friends, to study at Forest Hill College. It was a difficult move, but well worth the effort.

Last year, Jaimilee achieved a perfect score of 50 in her VCE Auslan studies and recently won a Premier’s VCE Award for outstanding academic achievement. “I wasn’t very happy with the impact it was having on my learning,” she says. “I had lots of people telling me about Forest Hill College and how good the school was for deaf students.”

“My family and I decided to give it a try to see if I could be happy living here and attending school. So I came down. For much of the time she was living on her own and doing all the housework and cooking — things many secondary students can take for granted. She is now boarding with her interpreter, which means shared housework and less pressure.

Forest Hill College has many educational interpreters and teachers fluent in Auslan who understand how deaf students learn. Jaimilee says this means deaf students are confident they are getting the information from class teachers in a way that will give them the best chance of success.

Forest Hill has soundfield, a sound system for schools that improves the learning environment for the entire class by improving sound quality for all students. Jaimilee advises other deaf students to make sure they have the best supports available, including qualified interpreters, notetakers and other equipment. Jaimilee says hearing students should feel open to communicating with the deaf.

“People get nervous and tend to avoid people who are deaf. But there are many ways you can open up a conversation such as gesture, messages on mobile phones, email and Skype.”

“Also be aware that sometimes deaf students may miss part of a conversation in class or the yard and what is being shown on media, so making sure you use captions and telling them what’s being discussed in a great way to make them feel included.”

Totally committed: Forest Hill College deaf facility co-ordinator Amanda Purcell with student Jaimilee Armstrong-Duce, who is profoundly deaf.