

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW
REPORT FOR COWANDILLA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in July 2015



**Government
of South Australia**

Department for Education
and Child Development

Review details

A priority for the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) is to improve the educational attainment and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

The purpose of the External School Review is to support schools to raise achievement, sustain high performance and to provide quality assurance to build and sustain public confidence in DECD schools.

The overarching review question is "How well does this school improve student achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity?"

This External School Review has evaluated:

- *the school's self-review processes and findings,*
- *the school's achievement data and progress over time,*
- *the outcomes of the meetings and interviews with representatives from the school, and*
- *parent and student views about the school.*

The External School Review included an analysis of the school's key policies and procedures.

The support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community is acknowledged.

This External School Review was conducted by Lyn Arnold, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Matt Saunders, Review Principal.

Policy compliance

The External School Review process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are implemented and adhered to.

The Principal of Cowandilla Primary School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies.

Implementation of the *DECD Student Attendance Policy* was checked specifically against a documented set of criteria. The school was found to be compliant with this policy, and has implemented comprehensive tracking and intervention processes. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 91.5%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Cowandilla Primary School is located 4kms west of the Adelaide CBD. In 2014, 377 students were enrolled Reception to Year 7, and numbers have been increasing steadily since 2010 when the enrolment was 289. The school is classified as Category 3 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage, and in 2014 had an ICSEA score of 1040.

Cowandilla Primary is a culturally and socially diverse school benefitting from a wide range of languages spoken and caters to approximately 40 different cultural groups. The school population includes 3% Aboriginal students, 7% Students with Disabilities, 67% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), and 36% of families eligible for School Card assistance. An Intensive English Language Centre was established at the school in 2005, which caters for 5 classes, which are fully integrated into the school. There is also a Children's Centre on site, which offers 'wrap-around' services for families with young children in the community and a pre-school that is operating at capacity.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in her third tenure at the school, a Deputy Principal, Children's Centre Director, an Assistant Principal responsible for the IELC, a School Counsellor, and a Learning Resources Coordinator.

Lines of inquiry

During the review process, the panel focused on three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

Student Learning: **How well are students achieving over time?**

Differentiated teaching: **To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?**

Improvement Agenda: **How well does the school facilitate various levels of self-review to address emergent, regular and strategic issues?**

How well are students achieving over time?

In 2014, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 56% of Year 3 students, 69% of Year 5 students and 73% of Year 7 students achieved the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). Between 2012 and 2014, the trend for Year 5 has been upwards from 47% in 2012 to 69% in 2014.

In relation to students who achieved in the NAPLAN higher proficiency bands, 31% were in Year 3, 31% were in Year 5 and 20% were in Year 7. This compares to an average of 18%, 15% and 26% for Years 3, 5 and 7 respectively over the previous five years, 2009 to 2013, indicating an upward trend in Year 3 and 5 results and a downward trend in Year 7 results.

For those students who achieved in the NAPLAN higher proficiency bands in reading, 7 of 10 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2014, and 4 of 8 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2014. This compares to an average of 4 students retained in the upper bands at both Years 3 to 5 and Years 3 to 7 between 2008 and 2013.

In 2014, numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 48% of Year 3 students, 69% of Year 5 students and 67% of Year 7 students achieved the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Of students who achieved in the NAPLAN higher bands for numeracy, 23% were in Year 3, 14% were in Year 5 and 27% were in Year 7. This compares to an average of 18%, 15% and 26% for Years 3, 5 and 7 respectively over the previous five years, 2009 to 2013. As the data shows, there has been a downward trend at Year 3 over time but the proportion of students at Year 5 and Year 7 is similar.

Examination of results for the retention of students who achieved in the NAPLAN higher proficiency bands in numeracy shows that 4 of 8 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2014 and 3 of 5 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2014. This compares to an average of 3 and 2 students retained in the upper bands for Years 3 to 5 and Years 3 to 7 respectively, between 2008 and 2013.

On the basis of discussions relating to the student achievement data and the complexity and mobility of the student population, the Review Panel explored two lines of inquiry. The first related to how the school monitors and responds to emerging and ongoing issues that impact on student learning. The second explored the extent to which differentiated teaching is utilised to meet the needs of their diverse learners.

To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

Through discussions with parents, students, leaders and teachers, the Review Panel found that teachers are committed, willing to engage in professional learning, and display a high level of professionalism. The school provides a safe and supportive environment based on positive relationships with students and parents. There is a high level of teacher collegiality complemented by support from the leadership group.

As the school has a high level of transience in student population, and children who have experienced trauma that can impact on learning and life outcomes, the Review Panel explored how the staff meet the needs of these children. Notably, the evidence showed that teachers support student transience and trauma through a range of orientation, transition, and familiarisation processes for students at all levels of the school, which helps develop trust and positive relationships. Students spoke of feeling welcomed and

accepted, particularly the new and recently-arrived students. Students also spoke of bullying not being tolerated and the parents spoken with corroborated this perspective. The culture of the school is positive; students have a sense of pride in their school, and are friendly and caring towards each other. They report a sense of fairness and equality and value this aspect highly. Parents also expressed an appreciation for the focus the school has on social learning and wellbeing, particularly in relation to the development of resilience. In addition, parents spoke of valuing the cultural diversity within the school community, as they believe it broadens their children's learning experiences.

With respect to differentiating teaching and learning programs, the teachers' reflections noted the challenges experienced in meeting the individual and diverse needs of learners in their classes. Teachers spoke of spending considerable time on building relationships, particularly as transience is high and students leave and enter the class group throughout a term. Teachers also generally acknowledge there is a strong emphasis on ensuring low achievers and at-risk students gain foundation skills with less focus on promoting lift in the mid-range to higher levels of achievement. This, in turn, is associated with some students at times experiencing little challenge in their learning. Such teacher reflections were supported by parent and student perceptions of the levels of intellectual challenge in their learning. Parents, for example, perceive a lack of challenge and extension that maximises their children's learning, and feel that when feedback is provided it doesn't offer insights into how their child can improve their work or grade. Similarly, student comments included: "work is usually middle zone, not too hard, not too easy"; "I'm good at a bit of maths but not all types, but I do find it all pretty easy"; "if you complete the easy stuff, you do harder and then even harder stuff...but I find the harder stuff even is easy".

There was evidence of teachers referring to the setting of learning goals, which could be further enhanced by making those more personalised for individual learners. The Panel acknowledges that a survey for engagement and intellectual challenge is scheduled in the Mathematics Site Improvement Plan. This presents an ideal opportunity for the staff to discuss how engagement and intellectual challenge will be described and measured and how this might apply at the individual student level.

There are various evidence-based, validated measures available that are developmentally and language-skill appropriate. The selection will depend on what the school really wants to know, and what will give teachers the best information to refine and improve their planning and assessment design. The school will need to determine if, for example, time on task, student satisfaction, attendance, interest, motivation, or willingness to tackle challenging maths problems are aspects for which data will be collected, or if there are other aspects of engagement that will provide information that better matches the school's focus for improvement.

Such discussions about what intellectual challenge and constructive student engagement looks like, sounds like, and feels like, and how that will be measured in specific and realistic terms, will serve two key purposes. It will help to focus practice and areas of capacity building for staff, as well as supporting effective and efficient data collection and analysis.

While the school has many good pedagogical practices in place, these could be further enhanced by promoting greater intellectual challenge for students through differentiation. In particular, the school could explore the role of individual student learning goals as opposed to unit of work or lesson goals, and how these can be negotiated with students to help them become empowered to achieve personal learning goals, assess individual learning progress and achievement, and engage in complex real-world learning within and across curriculum areas.

Direction 1

Increase the number of students reaching the SEA and achieving at the higher levels of proficiency by creating authentic opportunities for students to undertake increasingly complex real-world learning and intellectual challenge.

With respect to assessment and reporting, parents prefer interviews and personal interactions rather than written reports. There was also some concern raised around the A-E reporting and the nature of a C grade. Some spoke of how their child believes when they receive a C in their report, this means they are not doing well. It appears these students believe they are achieving above the standard in their day-to-day classroom work but as the report grade does not reflect this, it is leading to a belief in some students that higher grades are not achievable. Whether these students are above or at standard is beyond the scope of the

Review Panel to determine. The comments, however, suggest that open discussions with parents and students about what is required to achieve an A or B in assessment tasks will prove beneficial in addressing any perceptions that may hinder students' engagement and expectations of learning success.

Direction 2

Improve learning outcomes for all students by using the Standards in the Australian Curriculum to benchmark student achievement and negotiate learning design and assessment with students, and further promote transparency for what is required to achieve at or above standard.

How well does the school facilitate various levels of self-review to address emergent, regular and strategic issues?

The Review Panel examined the English SIP and the ICT SIP and considered these to be well embedded into practice across the school. The line of inquiry, therefore, focused on self-review processes in relation to the school's Mathematics SIP, which has been recently identified as a priority area for improvement.

In support of achieving the Mathematics SIP priorities, teachers in the school are working with an external consultant. In addition, six teachers are undertaking Natural Maths training, which other teachers have participated in previously.

How the school and individual teachers monitor, track, reflect on, and evaluate the impact and benefits of the planned strategies and resources was of particular interest to the Review Panel in the absence of valid measures to determine progress towards the targets and the effectiveness of the strategies outlined in the SIP. For example, the SIP outlines an unspecified increase in the percentage of students in the middle and upper improvements; an unspecified percentage of student reporting they are engaged and intellectually challenged; and aims for students involved in maths intervention reaching year level expectations with no specified measure for what this is at any particular year level.

These issues were explored with staff through individual and group reflections and conversations.

It was clear to the Review Panel from teacher comments that, individually, teachers take responsibility for planning and monitoring student progress in multiple ways. What became apparent, however, was that teachers are not clear on how success will be measured at the whole-school level and, therefore, how they can measure it at the year, class or individual student level to align with and evaluate the SIP priorities.

Direction 3

Set clear benchmarks for the expected increase or improvement in student learning growth and achievement at each year level in the School Improvement Plan to enable teachers to monitor progress at the year, class and individual levels against the improvement priorities.

From an evaluation and self-review perspective, it was also not clear to the panel or the staff how the effectiveness or success of the maths intervention will be measured over time. While baseline and post-intervention data is collated using Booker Maths assessment to ascertain immediate progress, there are no specific measures of how the impact and any associated improvements are maintained over time, or if students' numeration learning is transferred effectively to other aspects of mathematics. It was also evident from the records that students have been withdrawn from the intervention due to a lack of progress. While supporting discontinuation when an intervention fails to meet a student's learning needs, alternative programs or options that have the potential to meet the specific learning needs of such students, should be available or developed. Teachers will also benefit from understanding why the intervention did not work for particular students. Such information will assist them to identify appropriate interventions that meet an individual student's readiness for learning particular skills and capacities in a timely manner.

In support of this type of evaluation, the school should explore effective ways to investigate areas of mathematics learning that students are doing well in, and the areas where there may be gaps, such as data, geometric reasoning, number and computation, to enable teachers, individually and in groups, to review and analyse cohort results. It will also be useful for teachers to examine results either side of their current class year level to help identify patterns of learning or gaps that need to be addressed across the school, and ways students can be involved in discussions about their personal data and progress.

Direction 4

Establish opportunities for teachers to regularly engage in their learning teams, with the support of leadership, to monitor, assess and measure student progress, the impact of interventions, the value of learning approaches being implemented, and how their monitoring and measurement of student progress supports the school improvement priorities.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Cowandilla Primary School is tracking well in that effective leadership provides strategic direction, planning and targeted interventions.

The Principal will work with the Education Director to implement the following Directions:

1. Increase the number of students reaching the SEA and achieving at the higher levels of proficiency by creating authentic opportunities for students to undertake increasingly complex real-world learning and intellectual challenge.
2. Improve learning outcomes for all students by using the Standards in the Australian Curriculum to benchmark student achievement and negotiate learning design and assessment with students, and further promote transparency for what is required to achieve at or above standard.
3. Set clear benchmarks for the expected increase or improvement in student learning growth and achievement at each year level in the School Improvement Plan to enable teachers to monitor progress at the year, class and individual levels against the improvement priorities.
4. Establish opportunities for teachers to regularly engage in their learning teams, with the support of leadership, to monitor, assess and measure student progress, the impact of interventions, the value of learning approaches being implemented, and how their monitoring and measurement of student progress supports the school improvement priorities.

Based on the school's current performance, Cowandilla Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2019.

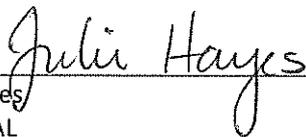


Tony Lunniss
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Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT

The school will provide an implementation plan to the Education Director and community within three months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's Annual Report.



Julie Hayes
PRINCIPAL
COWANDILLA PRIMARY SCHOOL



Governing Council Chairperson

Marcello Bronzin