EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR WALLAROO MINES PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in March 2015
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 Ann O’Callaghan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Judith Howie, 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 Wallaroo Mines Primary School has verified that the school is working towards being compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal advised that action is being taken to meet obligations to implement the identified policies on the checklist, indicating also which aspects of school policies are due for review in the current year. The Principal has indicated that the school’s Volunteer Policy will be reviewed this year to align with the DECD guidelines.

Implementation of the DECD Student Attendance policy was checked specifically against a documented set of criteria. The school has implemented comprehensive tracking and intervention processes, and was found to be compliant with this policy. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 91.7%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context
Wallaroo Mines Primary School is located in the town of Kadina on the Yorke Peninsula. There are 99 students enrolled in the school, allocated to one of five composite classes across the school. The school has an ICSEA score of 911, and is classified as Category 2 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 11 Aboriginal students and 8 Students with Disabilities. There are no students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) attending the school. In 2014, there was 30% transience within the school enrolment.

The leadership team consists of a Principal appointed in 2010, now in her second tenure, and a part-time School Counsellor.
Lines of inquiry
During the review process, the panel focused on three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

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How well are students achieving over time?

In 2014, as measured by NAPLAN, 63% of Year 3 students, 50% of Year 5 students and 57% of Year 7 students at Wallaroo Mines Primary School achieved the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) in reading. The percentages include four students in Year 3, four students in Year 5 and two students in Year 7 achieving results in the higher proficiency bands. Analysis of the historical average performance from 2008 to 2014 indicates that there is a notable improvement at Year 3.

In numeracy, the latest NAPLAN result compared to the historical average performance is indicating improvement at all year levels. In 2014, 75% of Year 3 students, 56% of Year 5 students and 71% of Year 7 students achieved the SEA as measured by NAPLAN. The percentages include five students in Year 3 and five students in Year 5 who achieved results in the higher two proficiency bands.

In the early years, reading results are measured by assessing students against the Running Record levels. In 2014, 20% of Year 1 students achieved the SEA of reading at Level 17 or above and 43.8% of Year 2 students achieved the SEA of Level 21 or above. Over the period from 2011 to 2014, an average of 31.8% of students in Year 1 and 45.5% of students in Year 2 achieved the SEA. The current data and the average over time, reflects the school’s concern that less than half of the Year 1 and Year 2 students are achieving the SEA in reading.

The Review Panel heard that the school’s regular monitoring and annual analysis of achievement data takes into account small cohort sizes, fluctuating enrolments, and the variance within each cohort over time due to student mobility.

The school is, therefore, rightly focused on understanding each individual student’s learning needs and growth in order to plan for their learning and monitor achievement levels against targets set from each student’s own starting point. This approach led the Review Panel to the following lines of inquiry.

How does the school make data-informed judgements about student learning?

Throughout the review, the Review Panel found evidence indicating that the school has developed and embedded a positive and focused approach to improvement and change, with improving student learning outcomes identified as the ‘main business’ of the school.

The current approach commenced in 2010, when the Principal and staff members undertook a necessary review of behaviour management processes, intervention strategies and teaching practices across the school. From the beginning of this self review process, the change agenda was driven by analysis of learner achievement data and other information, cohort by cohort and student by student. By the end of the year, teaching and learning priorities were identified which reflected the main learning needs of all the students. The 2011-2013 Site Improvement Plan (SIP) resulted in three priorities for change: literacy (vocabulary and comprehension), numeracy (automaticity of number facts and ability to deconstruct word problems), and wellbeing (safe and empowered students and staff).

Embedded values introduced in 2010, support the pre-conditions for learning at the school. These values underpin the way staff members work with one another, and the way staff members, students, and families interact with one another in the school community. The values of relationships, collaboration, trust, understanding, and communication frame the development of policies and procedures. These values are
evident in the school’s branding and practice. Students, who were interviewed by the Review Panel, identified the values without hesitation and were able to give examples of their meaning and application at school, and talk about ways they were acknowledged for embracing these values.

The most recent iteration of the SIP, builds on previous self review processes, maintains literacy and numeracy as priorities, and adds familiarisation and implementation of the Australian Curriculum. The SIP includes specific key strategies linked to percentage targets and improvement outcomes that have been identified to measure impact on student performance and school effectiveness.

Teachers interviewed by the Review Panel talked about their work at the school being integral to the implementation of the SIP and other such agreements, for example, the literacy and literacy expectations. Ongoing monitoring and review, of both student progress and site improvement, is planned into the staff meeting schedule on a three-weekly cycle, term-by-term. This meeting cycle, includes a learner achievement focus (progress, growth or areas of concern) undertaken in professional learning community teams (Reception to Year 3 and Years 4 to 7), a whole school focus about the review process or site improvement progress, and a staff training and development focus linked to one of the SIP priority areas.

In Term 4 each year, the Principal gathers and prepares sets of summative data for staff to analyse on a pupil-free day. Teaching and non-teaching staff, consider and triangulate the multiple data measures which include NAPLAN results and question analysis, Progressive Achievement Tests in reading and mathematics, Lexile levels, Running Records levels, and other growth results from a number of intervention and targeted teaching programs.

The process outcomes are shared with the Governing Council members, who reported they felt well informed about what was going on. They felt staff members used the annual Term 4 ‘data day’ process very well. The parents said they could discuss the directions, were listened to and felt they could raise any issues. The Governing Council is aware that parent survey response rates, are generally low and is keen to obtain more input in the future from parents about learning and the school.

The Principal also works with staff, throughout the year, to analyse and triangulate formative data along with the teachers’ professional judgement about individual needs of students. The judgements made, are used to form small teaching groups, monitor student growth against personal targets, and plan for a tiered approach to differentiation and learner intervention. Teachers reported that they are committed to "making data count", and that they regularly meet as professional learning communities (PLCs) to check assessment information and reallocate resources to support all students.

The Review Panel verified that teachers are embedding the use of achievement data as a reference point in their work. The school is well placed to focus the use of these processes, on raising the level of student achievement and growth across all learning areas of the Australian Curriculum.

Direction 1

Increase the proportion of students achieving higher grades in all learning areas of the Australian Curriculum by using the SEA and the A-E reporting guidelines to inform the design of assessment tasks.

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

One key strategy that teachers are accountable for implementing as part of the school’s learner intervention model is to develop a personal learning plan (PLP) with all students in consultation with parents. Each PLP is required to have a literacy, numeracy and wellbeing improvement goal. These plans were originally developed for students with individual learning plans, or who were identified as being at risk as a learner. However, in 2014, the teachers decided to create PLPs with all students, and in 2015, a whole school approach has been implemented to develop consistency in format and process.

At the time of the External School Review, teachers and students had just completed the process of meeting with parents, to develop and share the plans. With concerted lead up to the meetings, promotion in newsletters and through the school’s social media page, or direct invitation from the students, almost 100% of parents were able to attend the school to discuss their child’s learning. The parents, who were interviewed by the Review Panel, overwhelmingly supported the PLP process. They could identify a range of reasons for continuing the process, and found value in seeing their own child’s progress ‘so far this year’ against where
they should be. Parents reported that they found the learning goal conversations to have greater detail this year and that there were good similarities between classes.

The students, who met with the Review Panel, spoke with ownership and enthusiasm about the PLP process. Generally, the older students said they prepared their goals before the meeting, and then talked about the strategies and how the teacher and the parents could help them to achieve the goals. The students said they like goal setting and that the plans were a ‘good idea’ as they take their learning ‘up a level’. Some students said they and their parents now know the standards they were working towards.

At the staff meeting, teachers shared with the Review Panel the data sources they used to develop the PLPs with their students. Along with their own knowledge of the child, they had used various achievement results as the basis of decision making with the students. In some cases, the students set the goals themselves by building on previous experiences. Some teachers said that they would now be looking at ways to assist students, with success indicators to achieve the goals. All teachers reported that they found the PLP process to be very beneficial, and valued the early conversations with students about their learning strengths and areas for improvement. Touching base at the beginning of the year, with so many parents, was a great start for the students, and for the parents and staff members to connect with a learning focus.

The Review Panel found that this year’s PLP processes across the school have added a strong focus for engagement in learning for all students. With such momentum in place, the future can now include more frequent goal setting, targets and regular feedback for learning.

The inclusion of strategies for Reception to Year 7 students, on the use of success criteria to stretch them as learners to aspire and achieve, will be a key to gaining higher levels of achievement the school is seeking for all students.

Direction 2

Significantly raise the number of students demonstrating success at higher levels by implementing formative assessment strategies that empower students to make gains towards and beyond their learning goals and targets.

The Principal reported that she felt the high levels of collaboration and trust built over time among staff members had led to collective responsibility for supporting the range of needs of all students in the school. Progressively, teachers have participated in shared professional learning to ensure effective teaching in literacy, numeracy and wellbeing is developed and implemented with increasing consistency across the school. Teachers have been discussing their students’ needs, and are open to sharing and observing each other’s practices, and in swapping approaches to planning and programming.

Along with this support for all students, the school has documented a whole-school model for learner intervention. It is based on knowing and understanding, where each student is in their learning and what their needs are in relation to classroom and small group support. Diagnostic and standardised data is used to identify learning needs and select individuals for particular intervention programs. Teaching and non-teaching staff review the effectiveness of this intervention model each year, and a summary is included in the school’s Annual Report to the community.

In 2015, all teachers are required to focus on improving their use of ‘feedback for learning’ strategies, to provide a point in time support to each student and the class as a whole. As part of the staff training and development meeting cycle, the Principal has provided professional pre-reading and time for disciplined dialogue around the topic. The Review Panel heard from teachers that ‘feedback’ is also included in staff Performance and Development plans (PDP). These plans are prepared against the related Australian Professional Standard for Teachers (APST), and the relevant domain in the Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) framework. The PDP process, clearly states what is expected of each teacher, including meeting with the Principal to share progress towards professional goals.

The Principal has also developed a WMPS Program Rubric as a tool for use when providing teachers with professional feedback and information about what a quality program looks like against a proficiency continuum. The rubric provides a scaffold that guides teachers to deliberately plan for the varied needs of learners in their class. The range of ‘headings’ include: yearly overview, term overview, expected outcomes
from Australian Curriculum, learning tasks and activities, use of technology to create new content, and assessment for and of learning strategies.

The Review Panel heard from staff members, that these plans and guidelines encourage them to collaborate on the development of common approaches to meeting student learning needs. The school is well placed to now use these support processes to increase continuity for students from Reception to Year 7.

Direction 3
Further develop the rigor of professional learning and performance and development processes to ensure increased consistency of professional practice amongst staff and continuity in learning for students.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Wallaroo Mines Primary School is tracking well. Good performance was evident by effective leadership providing strategic direction and the conditions for a culture of improvement. Student achievement data is used to inform decisions and actions.

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

1. Increase the proportion of students achieving higher grades in all learning areas of the Australian Curriculum by using the SEA and the A - E reporting guidelines to inform the design of assessment tasks.
2. Significantly raise the number of students demonstrating success at higher levels by implementing formative assessment strategies that empower students to make gains towards and beyond their learning goals and targets.
3. Further develop the rigor of professional learning and performance and development processes to ensure increased consistency of professional practice amongst staff and continuity in learning for students.

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

Tony Lunness
A/DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
PRESCHOOL AND SCHOOL 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.

Donella Glazbrook
PRINCIPAL
WALLAROO MINES PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governor Council Chairperson