

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

Report for Blanchetown Primary School

Conducted in April 2017



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 framework underpinning the External School Review identifies the key levers for school improvement and has been shaped and informed by research.

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

This Report of the External School Review outlines aspects of the school's performance verified through the review process according to the framework. It does not document every aspect of the school's processes, programs and outcomes.

The support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community is acknowledged. While, not all review processes, artefacts and comments are documented, they all have been considered and contributed to the development and directions of this Report.

The External School Review Process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are adhered to and implemented. This information is provided in Appendix One of the report.

This External School Review was conducted by Julie Bishop, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Sue Andrew, Review Principal.

School context

Blanchetown Primary School caters for children from Reception to Year 7. It is situated 130kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment is 20 students. The school has an ICSEA score of 939, and is classified as Category 2 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 10% (2) students with disabilities and one family eligible for School Card assistance. The school enrolment has fluctuated over the past five years.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in his first tenure. There are no other leaders in the school.

Lines of Inquiry

In considering the data summary in the School Performance Overview (Appendix 2) and the Principal's presentation, the Review Panel explored the following Lines of Inquiry to evaluate the school's effectiveness towards raising student achievement and sustaining high performance. During the external review process, the panel focused on three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

Improvement Agenda: How effective is the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?

Effective Teaching: How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

Student Learning: How well are students achieving over time?

How effective is the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?

The Principal, in the third year of his tenure, has worked with staff, students and Governing Council to develop a success-oriented culture where all students are confident learners.

The Principal reported that the school's self-review process began with gathering evidence and analysing multiple datasets. At the beginning of 2015, as a whole site, school data was analysed. The analysis indicated that in 2014, on average, the students were increasing Running Records levels by 1.5 levels per term, and PAT-R data showed that 20% of the students scored above SEA standard growth. In the PAT-M test no student achieved in the top 25%.

To gather further evidence, the Principal interviewed each staff member to determine why results were not meeting DECD SEA standards. During the discussion it was reported that the students were 'average achievers'. The Principal stated that this challenged his belief that all students can be supported to continually improve.

Next steps included collaborative and inclusive processes to review the current Site Improvement Plan (SIP) and subsequently undertake the formation of a new SIP. The SIP included the development of a literacy block from Reception to Year 7. The literacy block was framed on research-based approaches, quality teaching, feedback and guided reading. Whole-school agreements were developed around consistent time, structures and teaching pedagogy. The Principal provided an example of one aspect of the agreement where all students are involved in a 20 minute guided or reciprocal reading session every day.

The SIP was endorsed by the Governing Council; the Principal stated that the Council was enthusiastic about the effect of the changes being implemented.

Teachers were provided with ongoing support through the professional coaching model. The Principal reported that this model provided a safe environment for staff to reflect and identify opportunities for improvement in their own teaching practice. A cycle of pre- and post-observations and conversations were an integral component of the ongoing support for staff in embedding effective pedagogical practice. Staff were also provided with opportunities to participate in Professional Learning that supported the SIP and their

Personal Development Plans.

The Principal reported that the self-review and implementation of the SIP were highly successful as evidenced by Running Records growth now averaging 4.75 levels per term, and 93% of students achieving DECD SEA in PAT-R, with 30% of these students achieving in the top 25%.

The 2017-2020 SIP includes the following four priorities: Wellbeing and Attendance, Literacy, Numeracy and Quality Teaching.

The school has developed a self-review schedule for 2017 that is framed around four of the key characteristics of the External School Review (ESR) framework, that is: Student Learning, Effective Teaching, Effective Leadership and School Community Partnerships. The self-review schedule is structured around a framework that includes the identification of key datasets and review dates, review leader and participants for each of the characteristics.

The Student Learning self-review processes include a data collection schedule that has been developed for all aspects of literacy including, but not limited to: word lists, oral language, Running Records, phonological awareness, Progressive Achievement Test Reading (PAT-R) and NAPLAN Reading. Numeracy data analysis occurs with NAPLAN and Progressive Achievement Test Mathematics (PAT-M) assessments.

The Effective Teaching aspect of the self-review schedule encompasses the following: school agreements in relation to the literacy block and maths, performance development plans, Principal and peer observations, student satisfaction survey, behaviour data and the attendance target.

Effective Leadership has a focus on the staff psychological survey and the review of policies, procedures and processes; the review participants for this aspect include the Governing Council and teaching staff.

The School Community Partnerships section has a focus on feedback from the Governing Council, the parent opinion survey and the Kids Matter Action plan.

There is a comprehensive assessment schedule and a genre map, both with the review date of November 2018. All aspects in the schedule have a review date allocated for review across the year.

There is clear and comprehensive evidence of thorough planning to ensure that all sectors of the school community not only have an understanding of self-review, but are also an integral and valued part of the school's self-review practices and processes. The Principal acknowledges the work of the Principal Consultant in supporting the school to develop effective self-review processes, which has resulted in self-review now being more structured and easier to undertake.

The school has provided opportunities for students to respond to opinion surveys and has also identified that a survey relating to student satisfaction is to be undertaken in 2017; next steps will be to strengthen student influence through the implementation of multiple opportunities for students to provide feedback about how they best learn.

Most students, when asked how they got help to improve when they were stuck in their learning, provided effort-based responses. During the ESR interviews the majority of students, when discussing the recent parent-teacher interviews indicated that they would like to have had the opportunity to participate in the interviews.

When students are involved in the learning process by seeking feedback about how they best learn, they are provided with the opportunity to become equal partners in their learning. Congruence in effective pedagogical practices, including the use of Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) tools, will support and strengthen student influence on their learning. Quality self-review can improve student outcomes and teacher performance. The school is well-placed to take the next steps in feedback for and about learning.

Recent research refers to three main types of review: *strategic*, characterised as long-term and focused on key goals related to the school's vision; *regular*, generally smaller, focused and ongoing, feeding into the strategic self-review; and *emergent*, which occurs in response to unplanned events or issues as they arise. These are one-off reviews, but generally fit with overall goals and link to other reviews.

The school is now in a position to undertake the next steps in further strengthening their self-review processes by embedding effective pedagogical practices and using multiple measures of data and evidence to inform feedback for effective learning and teaching.

The school, through the implementation of regular reviews, focused on student and teacher reflections

around feedback for and about learning, will strengthen the school's capacity and commitment to informing and strengthening improvement.

Direction 1

Strengthen the school's regular self-review processes by developing congruence in effective pedagogical practices via TfEL resources to embed authentic student influence in and about learning for all students.

How well are students achieving over time?

The school is to be commended for their commitment to developing a success-oriented culture focused on continuous improvement.

At student interviews held during the ESR, 78% of students in the upper primary class identified that maths was the subject they were really good at. When asked how they knew they were good at maths, students provided a range of responses that included finishing first so that they can do challenge questions, being rewarded and enjoying solving problems. It was clearly apparent that students have a positive disposition towards maths; it is now important for all students to access challenging work, not just early finishers. All students need to know how to improve their numeracy knowledge, skills and understanding across a broad range of numeracy tasks and assessments.

The 2016 NAPLAN Writing data for Years 3, 5 and 7 indicates that 83% achieved DECD SEA, with 33% achieving in the higher bands. As a small school, the aggregated data over time indicates that the majority of students are achieving DECD SEA in reading and numeracy, and the 2016 writing data follows a similar pattern. A significant focus for improvement across the school will be to develop sustained achievement in the higher bands across all areas.

Over the past two years, the school has had a strong focus on tracking students individually through the analysis of the PAT-R and the PAT-M results.

The Principal and teachers analyse the results and determine appropriate resulting actions for each student. For maths, this includes the following options: small group intervention, a commercial intervention program for maths run by the School Services Officer (SSO) or in-class support. Prior to teaching a maths topic the staff go to the PAT-M website for support in developing their planning for groups and individuals. Both classes are split for literacy and maths, allowing for groups of no more than 5 students, the Principal and the upper primary class teacher work with the older students, a very experienced SSO takes one group with the teacher taking the second group in the junior primary class.

The results of these strategies have seen some outstanding results in PAT-M assessments with only one student from Years 1 to 7 not achieving DECD SEA in PAT-M.

The PAT-M data indicates that students from Years 3 to 7 who achieved SEA all performed well above benchmark. The lowest scale scores were up to 18 points above benchmark and the highest scale scores were up to 24 points above benchmark.

All students achieved DECD SEA in PAT-R, the highest scale scores were up to 28 points above the benchmark.

At the staff meeting held during the ESR staff identified that there was a disconnect between the high levels of achievement in PAT-M and PAT-R assessments, grade allocations, school-based literacy datasets and NAPLAN results.

The following example provides evidence of the apparent discrepancies at Year 7. A-E allocations over both assessment periods indicate that 100% of students were allocated an A or B in English. One hundred percent of Year 7 students achieved benchmark in PAT-R. These results are not congruent with NAPLAN Reading and Writing where, in both, 50% achieved in the higher bands and 50% did not meet SEA.

School-based Running Records data has indicated that all Reception students, except one, achieved above the DECD SEA benchmark. All Year 1 and Year 2 students achieved reading levels of 30 plus. These are outstanding results and indicate that the students can achieve to a very high level.

Staff identified that the explicit and structured dimensions of the literacy block combined with small group structured support by expert practitioners were key factors in the outstanding results. Staff also identified that while they investigated the PAT-R and PAT-M results by individual student, and used the PAT-R and PAT-M resources to guide their teaching, they did not analyse NAPLAN results to the same extent.

Next steps for the school are to transfer the strategic and successful pedagogical practices that have resulted in significant growth in Running Records, PAT-M and PAT-R to all aspects of literacy and numeracy. A specific focus on improving and sustaining higher-band achievement in reading, writing and numeracy is essential.

Students have demonstrated their ability to engage in intellectual stretch and challenge within specific parameters, however, this progress will not be sustained unless students are provided with opportunities to demonstrate their skills and understanding across a range of assessments using multiple measures of data and evidence. Students require ongoing opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding across the broad range of curriculum content. Staff indicated during ESR interviews that they had found transforming tasks to be very successful in maths, and identified that they required further support to develop proficiency in this area. Opportunities to work with peers from the local small schools network may provide additional support and further strengthen teachers' skills in this area.

Direction 2

Develop and implement a whole-site approach to intellectual stretch and challenge through the development of transforming tasks with multiple entry and exit points across a range of curriculum areas.

How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

Classroom teachers at Blanchetown Primary School are early career teachers who display a strong commitment to improving their professional practice. Staff indicated via a survey during the ESR that they have accessed a range of different professional development opportunities; one common aspect of learning was in the area of Growth Mindsets. It was indicated by staff in interviews held during the ESR that strengthening student resilience and persistence for learning was an ongoing area for development. It was also stated that students were scared to make mistakes. The school has identified Growth Mindset development as a priority within the SIP. A strategically and collaboratively planned, ongoing focus across the school community in Growth Mindsets will support all students to develop and sustain positive learning dispositions.

In a survey conducted during the ESR, relating to a recent unit of work, teachers identified learning design as the area they perceived they were least effective in. Learning design brings together the what (curriculum) and the how (pedagogy) of teaching. Learning design is a complex process for many educators, this is even more so for teachers in small rural schools where they are responsible for the planning, teaching, assessing and reporting of up to five and, at times, seven year levels across most areas of the curriculum.

Staff indicated that they were spending many hours on curriculum planning and found that they were revising their planning regularly due to the planning looking different to the practice. Staff indicated that they had experimented with a range of different planning frameworks but still found it difficult to reconcile planning so that all aspects were covered at appropriate year-level equivalents. Self-reflection and the ability to adjust planning to the evolving needs of the students indicates a strong commitment to ensuring the learning program is both accessible and appropriate for every student. The planned work later this year in learning design and moderation across the partnership will support staff to strengthen their skills in this area.

It should be noted that the school works in very small groups for English and maths, thus, individual students are taught according to their ability level with planning occurring on an individual level for these curriculum areas.

Staff identified they had found it difficult to track content areas that had been previously taught across a range of curriculum areas. The potential for students to have gaps in their learning can be minimised through the development of curriculum mapping that is tailored to the needs of the school.

The school is part of a local small schools network, all of whom have multiple year-level groupings. Consideration should be given to providing opportunities for teachers from across sites to work together to share current progress and concerns in relation to planning for multiple year-level classes. The development

of curriculum maps incorporating subject-specific scope and sequences that identify content to be covered over a two-year period could be developed and implemented across sites. In this way all students will have the opportunity to access a viable curriculum. It is important that processes are implemented to ensure careful tracking and monitoring of curriculum access, which is aligned to year entitlements that are implemented and reviewed annually. In this way, provision for coherence and congruence across planning for the Australian Curriculum can be provided.

Teachers are supported in their professional development through classroom observations that are based on the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) framework. The framework has three key aspects: reflection and goal-setting, professional practice, and feedback and review. The Principal undertakes classroom observations on a specific area of learning early each term and then meets with teachers individually to provide constructive feedback. Later in the term, peer observations are undertaken, using the TfEL review tools resources to guide observations and feedback. Staff indicated that the process was very useful in identifying areas for improvement and that receiving feedback from their peer about what was working was affirming.

Staff come together each Thursday after school for a meeting that is dedicated to professional development and linked to performance development plans. Specific times are allocated to look at identified datasets which are aligned with the school's assessment schedule. The support of the Principal Consultant in establishing structures to support productive conversations was acknowledged by the Principal. It was also noted that the Partnership was looking at establishing peer observations across the Partnership later this year.

As early career teachers, the staff have provided clear evidence of a strong commitment to the students in their care and to improving their personal knowledge, skills and understanding as practitioners. The Governing Council and parent group noted during the ESR interviews that they were very supportive of the staff; they could see their children progressing and their children were very happy coming to school.

The opportunity to work with peers in like schools to strengthen curriculum planning for multi-year level classes is essential in supporting teachers to develop competence and confidence in the delivery of a viable curriculum for every student.

Direction 3

Provide planned and regular opportunities for staff to participate in planning for multi-year level classes across the Australian Curriculum with like schools.

What is the school doing particularly well and why is this effective?

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practices that are contributing significantly to school improvement at Blanchetown Primary School.

Effective practice in School Community Partnerships, in particular, the effective way the school has built and maintained relationships with community was strongly evident. The development of partnerships with parents and community has been instrumental in supporting the Principal to implement a range of strategies aimed at increasing enrolments at the school. The community was very anxious to increase enrolments to ensure the viability of the school. The Principal worked with the Governing Council, and encouraged more parents to join the Council to adhere to the constitution, a parents and friends group was re-established and, presently, every child has a parent on either the Governing Council or Parents and Friends Group. The Principal worked with the two representative bodies to improve school pride: a new uniform, school logo and motto have been established. The website has been updated, and a Facebook page has been developed. The Council has determined that currently there are 29 students under 4 in the local area; this is considered to be the highest number for many years.

In particular, the panel noted that community members have offered their time, resources and expertise to support improvement of facilities and resources at the school to a considerable degree. The Principal is to be commended for the strong collaboration and support that is now evident between the school and the community. As one staff member stated "the school community is coming back". Evidence of these practices was verified by parents, staff, Principal, and Governing Council members through interviews and discussions held during the ESR.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

Blanchetown Primary School has developed a very thorough approach to self-review, which is regularly and strategically used to determine the impact school strategies and practices are having on student achievement. The school has demonstrated growth in student achievement in some aspects above what would normally be expected of a school in a similar context.

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

1. Strengthen the school's regular self-review processes by developing congruence in effective pedagogical practices via TfEL resources to embed authentic student influence in and about learning for all students.
2. Develop and implement a whole-site approach to intellectual stretch and challenge through the development of transforming tasks with multiple entry and exit points across a range of curriculum areas.
3. Provide planned and regular opportunities for staff to participate in planning for multi-year level classes across the Australian Curriculum with like schools.

Based on the school's current performance, Blanchetown Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND
PRESCHOOLS

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.



David Ness
PRINCIPAL
BLANCHETOWN PRIMARY SCHOOL



Governing Council Chairperson

Appendix One

Policy compliance

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

The Principal of Blanchetown 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 documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2016 was 91.4%.

Appendix Two

School Performance Overview

The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

In considering the data below, there needs to be some caution in making a judgement due to the low numbers represented in the student cohorts at the school. This is done for two reasons: to overcome the anomalies that may occur in any one year, and to minimise the possibility of identifying individuals in any small cohort of students. The data below represents a summary of aggregated data from Blanchetown Primary School from 2012-2016.

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. From 2012 to 2016, 60%, or 6 of 10 Year 1 students, and 86%, or 6 of 7 Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

From 2012 to 2016, the reading results, as measurable by NAPLAN, indicate that 70%, or 7 of 10 Year 3 students, 57%, or 4 of 7 Year 5 students, and 67%, or 6 of 9 Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA.

From 2012 to 2016, 20%, or 2 of 10 Year 3 students, 29%, or 2 of 7 Year 5 students, and 33%, or 3 of 9 Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 1 student from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7.

Numeracy

From 2012 to 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 70%, or 7 of 10 Year 3 students, 29%, or 2 of 7 Year 5 students, and 78%, or 7 of 9 of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA.

From 2012 to 2016, 30%, or 3 of 10 Year 3 students, no Year 5 students, and no Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, no students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7.