Department for Education

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Blanchetown Primary School

Conducted in July 2020

Review details

Our education system aspires to become the best in Australia by seeking growth for every student, in every class and in every school.

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

The External School Review framework is referenced throughout all stages of the ESR process.

This report 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.

We acknowledge the support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community. While not all review processes, artefacts and comments are documented here, they have all been considered and contribute to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Tanya Oshinsky, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Sunny Vogt, Review Principal.

Review Process

The following processes were used to gather evidence relevant to the lines of inquiry:

- Presentation from the principal
- Class visits
- Attendance at staff meeting
- Document analysis
- Scan of Aboriginal Education Strategy implementation
- Discussions with:
  - Governing Council representatives
  - Leaders
  - Parent group
  - School support officers (SSOs)
  - Student groups
  - Teachers

School context

Blanchetown Primary School caters for students from reception to year 7. It is situated 140kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2020 is 31. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 23. The local partnership is Waikerie.

The school has an ICSEA score of 944, and is classified as Category 4 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 6% Aboriginal students, 13% students with disabilities, no students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, 13% children/young people in care and 23% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a 0.7 FTE principal in her 2nd year of tenure and a 0.3 FTE principal.

There are 2 teachers, with none in the early years of their career and no Step 9 teachers.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

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.**

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.**

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 impact has the implementation of previous directions had on school improvement?

In recent years, Blanchetown Primary School has been genuinely addressing the previous directions as part of the improvement agenda. Clear documentation and evidence of the journey that has been undertaken were provided.

TfEL resources have been used to support planning, staff dialogue and initiate student influence in learning. The principal regularly uses TfEL as reference and reflection points in her weekly emails to staff and to foster staff meeting discussions.

Recent professional learning in 'Transforming Tasks' and planning for multi-year level classes using the Australian Curriculum has been supported by external expertise and from within the partnership, to build the capacity of teachers. As a small school, partnership opportunities for 'Network Learning Teams' and being part of the Riverland West Small Schools Network, provide opportunities for teachers to collaboratively share, plan and moderate units of work.

Whilst there has been progress against each element within the directions, leaders are aware that there is still work to be achieved in embedding initiated practices. There has been targeted attention to enhancing the learning environment for students and a positive culture exists within the school and its community, which provides a strong foundation for this work.

Lines of inquiry

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

How effectively does the school monitor and enhance its improvement strategies and actions based on their impact on student learning?

Leaders, teachers and school service officers (SSOs) work cohesively in all aspects of the school and, as a result, the school improvement plan (SIP) was developed through consultative processes. Through professional learning communities, performance development plans (PDP) and staff meetings, staff regularly discuss data and analyse the needs of individual students to inform the improvement agenda. There has been a genuine attempt to make the SIP a live document with clear alignment between the SIP, professional learning and PDP processes. Building clarity for parents and students about the school improvement agenda could further promote community engagement in the SIP.

With small cohorts of students, trends in data are difficult to determine. The principal reported using PAT as one of the main predictors of student growth and a data wall is evident in the staff room. Structures for regular self-review are in place at 5 weekly intervals and staff value these check-ins as an opportunity to reflect on and refocus their daily work. A 'traffic light' system is used twice per year to monitor progress against the SIP. Self-review processes still tend more towards reviewing and reflecting on actions rather than evaluating how agreed practices are impacting upon learning outcomes. This year, teachers are trialling the collection of evidence against the SIP success criteria, in individual student SIP journals.

There have been significant staffing changes over time and increasing numbers of students. Whilst a data schedule exists, it was noted by the panel that the way in which teachers collect their data still differs. With further changes to staff and students probable, it will be important for the school to establish an online data tracking system that will enable student growth and progress to be evident to all stakeholders over time. Systematically tracking students will provide ongoing information about each individuals' achievement against year level curriculum requirements as they progress through school, regardless of changes to staffing, to ensure continuous stretch in learning.

Direction 1   **Further enhance the school's capacity to assess impact and adjust practice, by electronically collecting an agreed set of data that effectively measure growth in student achievement over time, to ensure continuous stretch in learning outcomes.**

EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND STUDENT LEARNING

How effectively are teachers using evidence-based pedagogical practices that engage and challenge all learners?

Teachers follow a daily structure and implement agreed programs to develop consistency in site practices. Whole-school agreements are in place for literacy and numeracy, and consistency of language between the two classes is identified as a strength. Two teachers work collaboratively and their combined planning time facilitates this. Their professionalism and commitment to meeting the needs of their students was evident to the panel.

From the analysis of data, students are placed in ability groups for literacy and numeracy for a significant portion of the week for drill practice and extending learning. Six student groups are facilitated by teachers, SSOs and leaders. Staff facilitating these groups record anecdotal information about the students, and ongoing assessment of the learning enables these groups to change according to students' needs. SSOs are supported through professional learning and teacher planning, to ensure rigour of learning in all groups. Staff, students and parents reported to the panel that literacy and numeracy groups had a strong and positive impact on student outcomes.

Professional learning and moderation opportunities provided teachers with more clarity in supporting students to know what higher-level learning looks like. Students believe they have opportunity to be challenged in their learning, but also reported that their learning is often repetitive. They describe having to do the easier or repeated task first before doing the harder task. Teachers believe they know their students well and differentiate the learning for them, with 'stretching' the learning often through group work.

In supporting student learning in multi-year level classes, teachers stated they select a focus, prioritise the learning at a particular level and rotate through groups, so that students work independently at times or with them for targeted support. Planning addresses year-level requirements; however, teachers acknowledge that multi-year level planning continues to be an area for growth. Using literacy and numeracy progressions for learning was identified by the principal as a 'next step' in supporting teachers and students to identify required learning and the challenge and stretch for individual students.

Direction 2   **Strengthen the development of teacher capacity in curriculum delivery, by using learning progressions to support clear and structured approaches to teaching, assessment and reporting.**

EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND STUDENT LEARNING

To what extent do teachers ensure that students have authentic influence in their learning?

Most students demonstrate strong and positive dispositions about themselves as learners and enjoy coming to school. There are trialled actions for fostering student voice, particularly in updating the school's facilities and students sharing learning with their families. Student voice afternoons were introduced to give students ample opportunity to talk with various adults about their learning and ideas they have for improvement. Teachers trial opportunities for students to lead learning. For example, younger students teach preschool children about their learning on their Wednesday visits, and the primary class had a day of sharing their learning with their peers.

Teachers sometimes use learning intentions, success criteria and goals in learning; these are yet to become embedded practice. Teachers seek feedback from students about their learning, and students can articulate verbal feedback they received during learning. There is little evidence of written feedback in bookwork. Regular formative assessment practices providing specific constructive feedback to continuously move learning forward continues to be an area for growth. Students generally had an idea of how they were going; however, they were unsure if they were achieving what was expected of them at their year level, or how they would know what they needed to learn next. Parents also reported that they would like more information, more regularly, about the progress of their children.

For students to have authentic influence in their learning and become independent learners, empowered to set their own goals, which continuously stretch their learning, they need an understanding of what they know and what they need to know. Using the progressions of learning with students will help them understand how they are tracking against expectations, therefore, benchmarking their learning and knowing next steps. This will build more coherence between teachers assessing students, students taking a more active role in setting, monitoring and reviewing SMARTAR goals, and parents being regularly informed about their child's learning progress.

Direction 3   **Develop student agency by regularly sharing assessment with students and providing them with clear information about the progression of learning, in order for them to set explicit learning goals and become self-drivers in their own improvement.**

Outcomes of the External School Review 2020

At Blanchetown Primary School, staff are committed to improvement and a culture of shared learning and collaboration. The school works to develop and maintain positive links with the community. Students enjoy coming to school and are proud of the school environment. Leaders are providing strategic direction and staff genuinely want to support students to do their best and are willing to embrace new learning. Regardless of frequent changes to staffing and student numbers, the school has developed a clear improvement agenda, which will be a strong foundation for the work ahead.

The principal will work with the education director to implement the following directions:

Direction 1   **Further enhance the school's capacity to assess impact and adjust practice, by electronically collecting an agreed set of data that effectively measure growth in student achievement over time, to ensure continuous stretch in learning outcomes.**

Direction 2   **Strengthen the development of teacher capacity in curriculum delivery, by using learning progressions to support clear and structured approaches to teaching, assessment and reporting.**

Direction 3   **Develop student agency by regularly sharing assessment with students and providing them with clear information about the progression of learning, in order for them to set explicit learning goals and become self-drivers in their own improvement.**

Based on the school's current performance, Blanchetown Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2023.

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Appendix 1

School performance overview

The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the Department for Education 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 cohorts of students. The data below represents a summary of aggregated data from Blanchetown Primary School from 2016 – 2019.

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. From 2016-2019, 75% of year 1 and 93% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA.

From 2016-2019, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 75% of year 3 students, 75% of year 5 students and 83% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA.

From 2016-2019, 25% of year 3, 50% of year 5 and 33% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands.

Numeracy

From 2016-2019, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 58% of year 3 students, 100% of year 5 students and 67% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA.

From 2016-2019, 17% of year 3, no year 5 and 17% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands.