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 Helyn Strokowsky, 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 Reynella 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 has implemented comprehensive tracking and intervention processes, and was found to be compliant with this policy. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 93% which meets the DECD target of 93%.

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**School context**

Reynella Primary School is a Reception to Year 7 school situated 22kms south of the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2015 is 421 students. The school has an ICSEA score of 996, and is classified as a Category 6 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 2% Aboriginal students, 7% students with Disabilities, 1% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) background and 20% of the total student population are eligible for school card support. There are 15 Reception to Year 7 classes and 25 teaching staff.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal who is in his seventh year and second tenure at the school, a Deputy Principal (0.8) and an Assistant Principal.
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?

The achievement of students over time in both literacy and numeracy has been consistent over recent years across Years 3, 5 and 7, with the proportion of students achieving DECD Standard of Achievement (SEA) ranging between 70 to 88 percent. Consistent with this trend, analysis of 2014 student achievement data shows that 86% of Year 3, 70% of Year 5, and 79% of Year 7 students met the SEA on the NAPLAN literacy-reading test. Scores for the NAPLAN numeracy test report that 79% of Year 3, 70% of Year 5, and 77% of Year 7 students achieved the SEA.

The data also shows that the proportion of students scoring in the higher proficiency bands at Year 3 have been trending upwards from 25% in 2012 to 41% in 2014 in literacy and 9% in 2012 to 31% in 2014.

Examination of year level data, however, reveals that a significant number of Year 5 students do not achieve the SEA in either literacy or numeracy. Analysis of the data at two yearly intervals for same student cohorts shows there is a pattern of more students achieving SEA in Year 7 than in Year 5, a pattern that has been consistent over the past four to five years.

The school is aware of this trend and has literacy and numeracy initiatives and interventions outlined as key priorities in the school's 2015-2017 Site Improvement Plan (SIP). A key aspect of the SIP is the aim of attaining higher standards of learning achievement for all students, as the school agrees with the Review Panel that there is potential for students to move into the higher proficiency bands, particularly in numeracy, and for more students to be retained in these higher bands over time.

Based on the review of achievement data, and the school's priority for improving student achievement, the Review Panel focused on the effectiveness of teacher pedagogy to achieve the priorities, and the extent that students are engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning.

To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

The school has a clearly defined vision and mission for building a dynamic learning community where high expectations, effort and continuous improvement are valued. The evidence provided to the Review Panel suggests there are sound and regular self-review processes, and that the leadership provides strategic direction, planning, and focussed professional development opportunities in support of the school priorities for improving student learning outcomes. The Professional Development process includes opportunities for classroom modelling and observations and team reflections, and time to work on aspects of the Australian Curriculum, pedagogy and numeracy with key support staff and coaches.

Most teachers outlined strategies that support individual progress and provide a range of ways for students to show their understanding of new learning. There were instances of teachers using pre-tests or pre-assessments to benchmark learning when introducing new work to students, or to inform the teaching and learning process. There were no explicit connections, however, with how this practice supports academic
challenge for meeting the diversity of student learning needs. There is a view that leaving the learning intentions broad or general is ‘more meaningful’, allowing students to discover the learning themselves. In adopting this approach, ensuring the discoveries are purposeful and applicable to desired learning outcomes, requires careful planning and effective scaffolding. Accordingly, there is an opportunity for staff to explore ways to scaffold authentic learning challenges that offer greater complexity and deeper understanding of concepts, and make learning meaningful and relevant for all students.

From the students’ perspective, they collectively expressed positive dispositions towards learning, and believed in their capacity to improve as learners. They enjoy learning, describing it as ‘fun’. They feel they learn a lot, and that they are good at learning. Across all year levels, students cited factors such as being attentive, managing time effectively, effort, persistence and getting things right, as the key attributes of a good learner and learning engagement. It was noted, however, that while students are developing positive dispositions and using language reflective of mindset shifts, for example, ‘pull yourself up out of the pit’, there were indications that some teachers place the onus on students to solve their school and learning-related problems, rather than creating an environment of shared responsibility.

For example, with respect to planning for and integrating intellectual challenge into learning, the examples for extension work shared by students and teachers favoured the students exploring an extra topic, doing more of the same work, or the student creating their own extension activities, in contrast to scaffolding greater complexity or higher order thinking and learning.

Direction 1

Increase the capacity of students to become expert learners by building the capacity of all teachers to create supportive, challenging and critically reflective classrooms that ensure students are provided with optimal conditions for sustained, relevant and rigorous learning.

To what extent are teachers’ pedagogies reflective of the Teaching for Effective Learning Framework?

In support of its mission, the school has been involved in trialling aspects of Teaching for Effective Learning (TFEL) over a number of years, and the leadership group talked of the school’s pedagogical approaches and professional standards for teachers being linked directly to TFEL and the Australian Curriculum requirements. Further, a key action outlined in the school’s SIP for attaining higher standards of learning achievement is the explicit linking of TFEL with classroom practice. In exploring this focus area, the Review Panel was particularly interested in how teachers share learning intentions with students, and how students know and understand what they are learning and why.

Most teachers reported sharing learning intentions with students. Examples included talking through the focus of the topic, explaining how students are to undertake the tasks, what actions are required to complete the work, often accompanied by a demonstration of the skills or concepts involved.

In comparing student work samples and comments, together with teacher reflections, the Review Panel saw little evidence of scaffolding that supports students in the ongoing development of targets or goals for their own learning that uses relevant curriculum guidelines, or the active involvement of students in the design and evaluation of assessments.

Similarly, most students lacked clarity about the desired learning outcomes of the various tasks and work samples they shared with the Review Panel. In most instances, with respect to the work they shared, they were unable to describe or discuss the intent, planned learning outcomes, or associated success criteria. Where students did refer to intent or success criteria, their understandings reflected a surface level understanding based predominantly on teacher delivered information in contrast to authentic discussions or negotiations with students.

The leadership team recognise that some staff involve students in the planning and sharing of learning intentions to a greater extent than others. While teachers are at different stages of the journey, there is the opportunity for the school to strengthen teacher capacity and pedagogical approaches with the aim of creating the optimal conditions for sustained, relevant and rigorous learning within all classrooms across the school.

What was also evident is that many of the effective pedagogical strategies outlined by teachers for reading were not always evident in the pedagogical strategies used in maths. The school will benefit from revisiting the
TfEL Framework to determine which aspects are on track, and which areas will be the focus of an improvement agenda aimed at developing expert learners and lifting student achievement to higher levels of proficiency. It will also be beneficial for the school to identify a small number of pedagogical strategies that every lesson, unit of work, curriculum area and classroom culture will monitor, measure and evaluate regularly in terms of effectiveness for improving student achievement and learning outcomes.

Direction 2
Evaluate the implementation of the TfEL framework to date and identify areas for consolidation and further development and improvement, with the aim of lifting student achievement across the school.

How effectively does the school promote respectful, productive relationships with students and parents?

All students and parents the Review Panel spoke with perceive the school to be a safe and supportive learning environment. This was confirmed by responses to the student survey. There is also a high level of satisfaction with school leadership. It is perceived as supportive, and parents and students feel they can go to the leadership team and be heard, and that appropriate action will be taken in response to their concerns.

In relation to formal communication between the school and parents, a lack of consistency was discussed in how aspects of student learning are communicated, particularly across year levels. Parents expressed considerable interest in receiving information that assists them to know about, and support their child’s learning program and progress. Professional interactions that communicate consistent messages to parents and encourage them to be partners in their child’s learning will support the building of an effective learning community.

Direction 3
Improve student achievement by enabling parents to be involved as partners in their child’s learning through a coordinated whole-school approach to communicating the benefits, intentions and outcomes of student learning, wellbeing and engagement.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Reynella Primary School is tracking well with evidence of a clearly defined vision and mission for building a dynamic learning community where high expectations, effort and continuous improvement are valued.

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

1. Increase the capacity of students to become expert learners by building the capacity of all teachers to create supportive, challenging and critically reflective classrooms that ensure students are provided with optimal conditions for sustained, relevant and rigorous learning.

2. Improve student achievement by enabling parents to be involved as partners in their child’s learning through a coordinated whole-school approach to communicating the benefits, intentions and outcomes of student learning, wellbeing and engagement.

3. Evaluate the implementation of the TfEL framework to date and identify areas for consolidation and further development and improvement, with the aim of lifting student achievement across the school.

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

Tony Lunniss  
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.

Steve Freeman  
PRINCIPAL  
REYNELLA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson