



EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

Report for East Para Primary School

Conducted in May 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 Liz Matheson, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Steve Clarke, Review Principal.

School context

East Para Primary School is situated 16km north east of the Adelaide CBD. The school has an ICSEA score of 986, and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school is in the DECD Montague Partnership.

The school enrolment is 444 and has slowly decreased since 2013. The population includes 5.2% (23) Aboriginal students, 1 child in care, 7.4% (33) students with disabilities, 10% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), and 24% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in the 1st year of her tenure and a Senior Leader in Student Wellbeing.

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 four key areas from the External School Review Framework:

Effective Leadership: To what extent are the school's professional and performance development processes effective in building teacher capacity?

Effective Teaching: How effectively are teachers using DECD pedagogical frameworks to guide learning design and teaching practice?

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

Improvement Agenda: How well does the school evaluate the effectiveness of programs and strategies?

To what extent are the school's professional and performance development processes effective in building teacher capacity?

East Para Primary School has experienced an unsettling period with three principals in a short a period of time, following a long-standing Principal and several other members of staff retiring. A new Principal was appointed and commenced in Term 4 2016. Teachers and the Governing Council spoke positively about the open and collaborative style of the new Leadership Team and the clarity of the strategic direction of the school. A leadership position for a Senior Leader with responsibility in Pedagogy and Innovation development has not been filled. At the time of the review, the Leadership Team was considering whether to proceed with that vacancy, or to develop the leadership capacity from within the staff to support pedagogical improvement.

In Term 1, each teacher developed a Performance Development Plan (PDP). Teachers were expected to make a personal connection in their PDPs with the Professional Standards for Teachers and the school's Site Improvement Plan (SIP). Teachers have held discussions with their line managers, where achievement levels and progress of students have begun to be a feature. Teachers were also expected to identify one pedagogical shift they would undertake to support students' learning. The Senior Leader talked about these processes aiming to build capacity, involving thoughtful and challenging questions, but not to impose any one way. There is an understanding in the Leadership Team that one size doesn't fit all, and the key to improvement in student learning is quality teaching matched to each student's assessed needs. Teachers have received written feedback from the discussions in Term 1. The Leadership Team plan to conduct classroom observations in the next phase of the performance development. The teacher released from classroom teaching duties with responsibility for "Outcomes for All" is working with classroom-based School Service Officers to oversee the implementation of targeted intervention strategies and provide ongoing professional learning for SSOs.

There appears to be a wide range of pedagogical shifts identified by teachers through their PDP processes. Some teachers have talked about changing the way furniture and space is used within their classrooms, others plan to seek and respond to feedback from students, and several have undertaken to investigate flip learning pedagogy. A few teachers are working on making learning intentions and success criteria more visible to students so they have greater understanding of the purpose of their learning and how to be successful.

The Review Panel was interested to find out what structures within and beyond the school are in place to support teachers to develop their pedagogies, to achieve their identified pedagogical shift, and how would they know the extent of their impact on students' learning.

The notion of de-privatisation of teaching and the need for improvement-focused collaboration has been supported by evidence as a critical factor in sustained school improvement. At the time of the review, most of the staff meetings within the school so far this year have been managerially or whole-school focused. This is partly because the new Principal has spent time and effort to establish relationships with staff, build a positive whole-school culture, valuing what has worked well, and identifying what might need to change to improve student learning. In response to a survey during the review, many teachers indicated more opportunities for collaboration, to work in PLCs, and for team meetings to support them in ensuring their teaching approaches are consistent with their colleagues.

The Review Panel explored what structures and processes the school will need to support teachers to achieve their pedagogical shifts. Previously, the school was structured into 'portfolio' groups, aligned with a SIP priority. There were various views about how effective these structures were in impacting at a classroom level. Others spoke about leading change as a mentor; however, these teachers had experienced frustration in the low level of 'take-up' by some teachers in their classroom practices. Currently, some teachers within the same year levels work closely together and there is a degree of informal collaboration. Many teachers, however, indicated through a survey that there need to be structured opportunities for smaller groups to work collaboratively and innovatively.

Since all teachers have undertaken to investigate, trial and develop their pedagogical practices, in an aspect they have chosen as part of their PDPs, the Review Panel was of the view that there should be structures and processes that enable teachers to learn together and be accountable to each other. They need to work out how they are going to collect evidence that their changes have had an impact on student learning and, ultimately, whether there are implications for the whole school. In this way, the school will be building internal capacity to continuously improve.

Direction 1

Establish structures and processes to enable professional collaborative learning and evaluation of pedagogical practices to build teachers' capacity.

How effectively are teachers using DECD pedagogical frameworks to guide learning design and teaching practice?

The Review Panel spoke to 28 students from Years 3 to 7, as well as the School Captains and Ministers, about what and how teachers' practices (that is, pedagogies) help their learning, and what doesn't. In addition, the Review Panel visited classrooms to see children learning. The classroom environments were attractive, providing a rich literate environment. In some classes teachers and students were seen using the visual scaffolds on display.

A wide range of teaching practices was evident across the school. Parents and the Governing Council were of the view that the level of engagement, challenge and academic progress their child is making depends on who the teacher is. They were not confident that the same expectations of rigour and improvement applied in each classroom.

The Review Panel found that, in some classes, teachers use explicit teaching and modelling to demonstrate skills to the whole class, groups and with individuals. The groupings of students are fluid, depending on the assessed learning needs.

Some students have set goals to focus their learning. These goals were based on specific strategies, such as

first thinking to see what I already know; I need to check my understanding. Others talked about getting post-it notes and “do who and what” to better comprehend the text. One student said, “my goal is to choose other people to work with, not just my friends”. In some classes, the goals are developed with students, and regularly reviewed and refined. In the classes where students are actively setting, working towards achieving and reviewing SMART goals, these processes were seen as helpful in keeping students focused. Feedback to students was a regular feature of these classrooms, and students could talk about what they needed to do to improve.

In their reflections at a staff meeting, several teachers indicated they want to improve the way they track students’ progress by involving them so it was a more jointly owned process. Others want to improve the way they set and review goals with students. They thought the goals, and also the success criteria of tasks they set, were not always clear to students. These teachers intend to create opportunities for greater student agency in the learning and assessment processes.

In other classes, whole-class teaching, and extensive use of commercially-based worksheets, albeit at different levels, appeared to be common practice. The purpose of the lesson or activity was not clear to students, other than to get the answer right. Students talked about being put on levels, but they couldn’t recall the level, and were not able to discuss the skills or strategies they were learning. In these instances the ‘SMART’ (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time Framed) goal was to get as many stickers in their books as possible. Marking of student work was mainly a tick or cross, with a sticker, without clear explanation of what the student needed to do in order to improve.

Students were asked about practices that did not help their learning. They spoke about the work being repetitive and boring, too easy and they “know it already”, and also having little or no say. One student summarised her experience this year as mainly “recapping”, where she is picking up ‘bits and pieces’ but, in general, she didn’t think she is learning anything new, or more complex. This seemed to be a common experience of students in some classes. These sentiments were confirmed by the perceptions of Year 6/7 students in 2016 (102 students), who reported a low level of engagement in their learning in the annual survey of wellbeing and student engagement. Their responses suggest they do not often become absorbed in the task or lose track of time.

In summary, teachers’ pedagogies vary significantly in the extent they engage students, provide rigour and more complex thinking, and develop student agency.

As described in the first section of this report, each teacher is expected to work on a shift in their pedagogical practices as part of their PDP. While this is a new initiative, the Review Panel concluded there needs to be a common understanding by teachers of what constitutes evidence-based high-leverage teaching pedagogies. In other words, teachers should know what research has concluded about pedagogies that make a difference, and all work towards becoming more proficient in these.

Direction 2

Develop a common agreement of high-leverage teaching pedagogies, and implement and embed these into daily practices.

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

The Review Panel heard positive stories about how students with learning disabilities and difficulties were supported by teachers. There were a number of examples of how teachers had been flexible and modified classroom routines and behaviour management practices to fit with the child’s needs. Several examples were provided where teachers helped diagnose a child with autism, a child with global delay, and supported a child experiencing significant trauma. Students were also able to describe how teachers and School Services Officers (SSOs) support students with specific learning needs and, in some cases, give these students considerable time so they can be more successful.

Most teachers knew where the achievement of the students in their class was assessed in relation to the Standard of Educational Achievement. Teachers had seen the NAPLAN results of students in their class, year level cohorts and the school as a whole. They are beginning to interrogate the PAT test results to a deeper level and it was evident in the focus on comprehension strategies in some classes.

Teachers were asked in a survey how they track student learning and how they assess and determine progress between the standardised tests. Some teachers pre-test their students, identify the gaps, share this data with their students, and support them to develop, and then post-test to see what they have learnt. Others use various methods of formative assessment including observations, use of checklists and weekly tests.

It was not clear, however, how well formative assessment information is being used to design learning to intellectually stretch students. As described above, a reasonable percentage of students indicated they are bored, recapping, as they get the same type of work, admittedly at a harder level, rather than tasks that require more complex thinking or new learning.

Teachers at East Para Primary School are involved in task design and moderation of student work with Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) from within their DECD Partnership. The Review Panel sighted many of the tasks teachers had designed and used with their classes, and noted the willingness of some staff to openly share their reflections and critique of their tasks. The Partnership PLCs appeared to be a positive learning experience for teachers. A number of teachers, including those in NIT roles, reflected they need to be more mindful of how to transform tasks for students to enable intellectual stretch and make the success criteria clearer and more visible.

Direction 3

Strengthen the use of formative assessment and feedback to and from students to provide more targeted and tailored learning design for all students.

How well does the school evaluate the effectiveness of programs and strategies?

East Para Primary School has documented English and Mathematics Agreements setting out the types of assessments needed to be conducted, in-class expectations and a genre plan. A number of teachers indicated through the review survey that they found the agreements helpful, and ensured their teaching approaches are consistent with colleagues. There is also an agreement named R5 – Read and Relax, Reflect and Respond, Rap – which sets out students’ and teachers’ roles in daily reading.

The agreements have been refined, as the school has introduced a systematic synthetic approach to phonics in the Junior Primary, purchased a student achievement management system, and system requirements have changed over time.

It was not evident to the Review Panel, however, the extent to which agreements and other practices and programs were evaluated to determine whether they were having the desired impact on student achievement. This point relates particularly to the R5 approach. Appendix 2 of this report provides an outline of the achievement patterns as measured by NAPLAN. The Principal advised the Review Panel that the results from the PAT tests are very similar. It shows that there is little or no improvement in the percentage of students achieving the SEA in reading in all year levels over a 4-year period, and a downward trend in higher band achievement at Year 3 in reading and numeracy.

Schools are encouraged to become better evaluators, as doing the same things when they are not realising the desired results, doesn’t lead to improvement. During the review process, several teachers across year levels spoke about modifying the R5 approach, while others were exploring quite different pedagogies. They were keen to check the achievement data through the next PAT test, to see if there was any change in their class reading scores. These teachers told the Review Panel that, anecdotally, they knew more about their students’ reading skills than they had previously, enabling a more targeted approach to their planning and instruction.

The R5 is one example of a school-wide approach that should be evaluated. Regular self-review processes need to consider and analyse the available data (achievement, growth and engagement), but also evaluate the effectiveness of school processes, pedagogies and programs. In this way, schools can make strategic decisions about whether to strengthen what works or stop spending energy on ineffective practices. Evaluation leads to growth. This growth leads to improvement in future planning and implementation at school and classroom levels.

Direction 4

Ensure regular self-review processes evaluate the effectiveness of programs and strategies.

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

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practice is contributing significantly to school improvement at East Para Primary School.

Effective practice in teaching and learning in mathematics was evident from the 3-year improvement in Years 5 and 7 NAPLAN numeracy achievement data. Teachers have engaged in professional learning and applied it to their mathematics teaching blocks. They are positive about their participation in the DECD Partnership PLC to improve task design and to moderate student work. The tasks are open-ended and allow multiple entry points. The Review Panel saw teachers engaging in discussion with each other, and demonstrating preparedness to critique their tasks, with a strong desire to improve.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

East Para Primary School has a culture of improvement characterised by high expectations and a willingness of staff to develop their capacity. There are examples of high-leverage pedagogies, and the challenge for the school is for these to become the daily practice in every classroom.

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

1. Establish structures and processes to enable professional collaborative learning and evaluation of pedagogical practices to build teachers' capacity.
2. Develop a common agreement of high-leverage teaching pedagogies, and implement and embed these into daily practices.
3. Strengthen the use of formative assessment and feedback to and from students to provide more targeted and tailored learning design for all students.
4. Ensure regular self-review processes evaluate the effectiveness of programs and strategies.

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

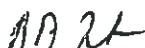


Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
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Anne Millard
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The school will provide an implementation plan to the Education Director and community within three months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing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



Ros Frost
PRINCIPAL
EAST PARA PRIMARY SCHOOL



Governing Council Chairperson

Richard Old

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 East Para Primary School has verified that the school is working towards being compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal advised action is being taken to comply with the following DECD policies:

- Governance, Items 2, 3, 4 and 5: The site improvement planning processes are being reviewed to ensure there is engagement of the Governing Council in reviewing the schools' initiatives, policies and programs and collaborative development of the School Improvement Plan. This will involve regular updates to the Governing Council on the improvement work being undertaken through the year, and annual update of the school community on the school's strategic directions and SIP priorities through the Annual Report.
- Governance, Item 8: The Principal will work collaboratively with the Governing Council to monitor the site's policy and practices in relation to student behaviour including suspensions, exclusions and expulsions.

When the school's actions achieve compliancy with DECD policy and procedures, the Principal must resubmit the Policy Compliance Checklist to the Education Director.

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 92%.

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).

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2016, 63% of Year 1 and 69% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). For Year 2, this result represents little or no change, and for Year 1, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

In 2016, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 73% of Year 3 students, 76% of Year 5 students and 65% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 5, this result represents little or no change and for Year 7, a decline from the historic baseline average.

For 2016 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the range of results of similar students across DECD schools.

In 2016, 29% of Year 3, 36% of Year 5 and 16% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 67%, or 16 of 24 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016, and 37%, or 7 of 19 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.

Numeracy

In 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 66% of Year 3 students, 73% of Year 5 students, and 73% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 7, this result represents a decline, and for Year 5, an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend has been upwards, from 57% in 2014 to 73% in 2016 in Year 5, and 62% in

2014 to 73% in 2016 in Year 7.

Between 2012 and 2016, the trend for Year 5 has been upwards, from 48% in 2012 to 73% in 2016.

For 2016 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the range of the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools.

In 2016, 13% of Year 3, 24% of Year 5 and 16% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Year 3 has been downwards, from 40% in 2014 to 29% in 2016.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 77%, or 13 of 17 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016, and 75%, or 6 of 8 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.