

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW
REPORT FOR VIRGINIA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in May 2015



**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 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 Tony Sullivan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Rosalind Frost, 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 Virginia Primary School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal of Virginia Primary School advised that all policies and procedures identified in the Policy and Compliance document have been actioned and implemented at the school.

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 92.9%, which is fractionally below the DECD target of 93%. The school was compliant with this policy and has strategies in place to improve the overall student attendance rate.

School context

Virginia Primary School is a metropolitan school with an enrolment of approximately 295 students catering for students from Reception to Year 7. The school has an ICSEA score of 953, and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The enrolment has been stable for a period of time but there has been an increase in numbers, particularly in the last two years. The Principal reports some enrolment pressure from outside the school zone.

The school population includes 7% (20) of Students with a Disability and 2% (4) Aboriginal learners. There is a large percentage (43%) of English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) learners. Approximately 25% of families are eligible for school card assistance. The school has an on-site preschool with a current enrolment of 40 children.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal, Deputy Principal and three School Coordinators. These roles influence the priority areas of English and literacy, Quality Teaching and Learning, Maths and numeracy and student review. The school operational structure comprises 4 school teams – Junior School, Middle Primary, Upper Primary and an SSO team. The improvement process is implemented through the Critical Pathways Teams responsible for ensuring agreed actions are enacted across the school.

Lines of inquiry

During the review process, the panel focused on two key areas from the External School Review Framework:

Student Learning: **How well are students achieving over time?**

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

How well are students achieving over time?

Analysis of reading achievement through Year 1 and 2 from 2011 to 2014 indicated that an average of 59% of Year 1 students achieved the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) as expected, and at Year 2, 73% achieved this standard. The reading achievement over the last 7 years (as measured by NAPLAN) showed an average of 79% of Year 3, 75% of Year 5, and, 79% of Year 7 students meeting the SEA. In relation to the percentage of students who achieved in the higher reading bands (as measured by NAPLAN) over the last 7 years, there was, on average, 24% at Year 3, 14% at Year 5 and 19% at Year 7 in the top two bands. For those students who achieve in the top two bands in reading at Year 3, less than 50% of them remain in these bands at Year 5, however, this has increased to approximately 70% as they track through to Year 7.

The numeracy achievement over the last 7 years (as measured by NAPLAN) showed an average of 71% of Year 3, 70% of Year 5, and 80% of Year 7 students meeting the SEA. The percentages achieving the standard have fluctuated at each of the year levels over the previous four years. In relation to the percentage of students who achieved in the higher numeracy bands (as measured by NAPLAN) over the last 7 years there was, on average, 17% at Year 3, 12% at Year 5 and 25% at Year 7 in the top two bands. For those students who achieve in the top two bands in numeracy at Year 3, approximately 50% of them remain in these bands at Year 5, however, this has increased to approximately 74% as they track through to Year 7. This is consistent with the reading result.

The school received an ACARA commendation for demonstrating above average gains in 2014 NAPLAN results compared to other schools with similar cohorts/starting points of students. The above data pattern led the Review Panel to consider the following lines of inquiry.

How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

The Principal, Leadership Team and staff clearly described the extent of the self-review process undertaken at the school. It was evident through staff comments and documentation that a strategic process was used to engage all staff in understanding and implementing the agreements reached as a team. Data was central to the process used by the School Planning Committee in identifying strategic improvements. The Critical Pathways Teams led the process of implementation, monitoring and review of each priority with staff in an ongoing way throughout the year.

School-based data sets presented to the Review Panel verified the school's capacity to collect, analyse and track student learning and wellbeing over time. A range of data sets collected throughout the year was verified from school documentation and staff comment. The Principal confirmed that the teachers plan, assess and report using the Australian Curriculum and that the grades are collected and disaggregated into cohorts and grades for analysis. The school data management system offers staff an opportunity to access available learning data in diagnostic and timely ways to inform planning at the team and class levels.

Staff confirmed that they use data to determine student support, set learning targets for every child and to confirm their professional judgement about children's learning. Data was also used by teachers to address identified deficiencies and strengths in learning. The Review Panel verified an expectation that teachers plan a Maths inquiry three times per year to further build student understanding about the importance of learning mathematical concepts and relevance to their lives. In numeracy, mental strategies and problem

solving approaches, documented in the 'statement of practice', were verified through staff comment as being implemented across classes to support and challenge students.

A clear agenda for improvement was presented by the Leadership Team that focused on literacy, numeracy and pedagogical practice. An expectation that staff work in teams to implement the 'statements of practice' aligned to these three priorities was verified through documentation and staff comment. Teamwork and collaboration between all staff was a school expectation and this was observed throughout the onsite review and verified through staff comment. Leadership Team comment and school documentation revealed a strategic intention to move the team approach from collaboration to one of 'critical' collaboration to further strengthen rigor in the improvement process. The Review Panel acknowledged this as an important next step for teaching and learning design.

Direction 1

Lift the achievement and growth rates of student learning through staff teams rigorously examining class-based data, task design for learning, success criteria and moderation of assessment through a methodology of 'critical' collaboration.

The school put 'faces on the data' and documented where each child was positioned in terms of their achievement and growth in learning. Data walls in the staff room provided evidence of the school's capacity to collect, analyse and use this information to focus school improvement efforts. A Student Review Team operated to identify and plan for intervention for those students with learning and wellbeing needs. This team was released each term to consider the class-based and out of class interventions required based on school data and external professional assessments.

The school used external consultants in support of staff professional learning related to the improvement plan, supported by coordinators on the school Leadership Team. Research and synthesis of school data confirmed that staff needed to do more to help students to problem-solve and develop positive dispositions for learning through formative assessment practices. Staff and leadership comment toward this change was to 'slow down' and embed the changes to a level of sustainability. Staff and students spoke about having 'learning intentions' and 'success criteria' made explicit in all classrooms. As one Leadership Team member commented: "We want it to be a part of everything we do." Review Panel observations in classrooms verified that these practices were implemented.

Direction 2

Raise the levels of challenge and engagement in learning for students by consolidating 'learning intentions' and 'success criteria' as commitment to delivering agreed and effective, evidence-based teaching practices across the school.

Students commented about other strategies used with them to challenge and engage them in their learning. These included checking for understanding, pre and post-testing, higher year level extension work in mathematics, individual goal-setting and end-of-term personal reflection. They commented about teachers tracking results, moving students into different ability groups and providing different word lists and contracts based on their individual performance.

Parents commented about the challenge presented to their children without the students feeling pressured. One parent commented: "They look to challenge the students and push them to the next level." Parents also spoke supportively about the information they received about their children's progress. They indicated that they received information about learning through diaries, communication books, the Schoolbag App, Facebook, test results sent home and formal reporting. One parent commented that there was a level of consistency in the reporting of student progress from year to year.

Students verified that teachers provided them with feedback about how to improve in their learning. They indicated that the feedback occurred through written notations on work, verbal explanations, using a coloured card system to check for understanding and seeking assistance, using scores to demonstrate progress, and through the use of assessment rubrics in Year 6 and 7 classes. Students also commented about the celebration of learning success through assemblies. The awards provided to students were

described as being very specific and related to their personal goals for improvement over the term. The students acknowledged the importance of this celebration.

Parents verified that they knew where their children were positioned with their learning and where they needed to be in relation to 'next steps'. Students and parents were informed about their reading levels and standards against the Australian Curriculum via interviews and written reports. Parents described the reports as personalised and detailed. They indicated that their children could talk readily about their learning and how to improve with one child voicing to their parent: "I need to do this to improve."

The Principal and staff commented on the importance of professional learning, performance and development and accountability to one another. They described aspects as principal walkthroughs, visits to other classrooms, planned sharing at staff meetings, teacher self-assessment using the Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) tool and getting feedback from students as aspects that supported their professional work. The professional expectations were conveyed via a staff comment: "People really analyse their practice."

The Review Panel verified the implementation of a staff performance and development process that included personal plans, goal-setting and personal reflection against teacher professional standards and explicit written feedback from the leaders to staff. Some staff commented positively about the effectiveness of some initial observations by other professionals in their classrooms and the value offered to their professional practice. Staff and leadership spoke of the need to go 'narrow and deep' to enculturate the improvements they are making with learning, teaching and the student dispositions for learning success. Teachers and leaders commented about the value of teachers observing teachers in a culture of mutual respect, professional integrity and design to improve teaching practices across the school.

Staff and students commented about some of the changes in teaching practices that have engaged students in their learning. These included providing students with more 'wait time', not using hands in classes, allowing more time to consolidate learning and using the 'I Do, We Do, You Do' approach in classes to develop clarity for learning. Some staff commented on their use of positive mindsets with students to build upon their capacities to learn. This was a relatively new initiative in the school but one which was commented on by students, parents and staff as an important foundation for successful learning.

Direction 3

Improve the challenge and learning achievement of all students through an expansion and refinement of teacher to teacher observations, reflective and constructive feedback of teaching practice in line with agreed and documented 'statements of practice' and TfEL.

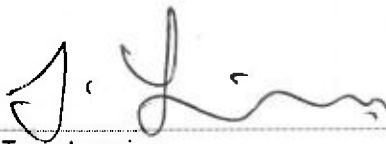
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Virginia Primary School is tracking well. Good performance was evident through the presence of student centred leadership, a culture of improvement and focus on teacher professional learning.

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

1. Lift the achievement and growth rates of student learning through staff teams rigorously examining class-based data, task design for learning, success criteria and moderation of assessment through a methodology of 'critical' collaboration.
2. Raise the levels of challenge and engagement in learning for students by consolidating 'learning intentions' and 'success criteria' as commitment to delivering agreed and effective, evidence-based teaching practices across the school.
3. Improve the learning achievement of all students through an expansion and refinement of peer observations, reflective and constructive feedback of teaching practice in line with agreed and documented 'statements of practice' and TfEL.

Based on the school's current performance, Virginia 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.

Ilia Tsoutouras
PRINCIPAL
VIRGINIA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson