

# **The Department for Education**

## **External School Review**

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

**Report for Whyalla Town Primary School**

Conducted in August 2018



## Review details

A priority for the Department for Education 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 government schools.

The external school review framework underpinning the 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 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, they all have been considered and contributed to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Helen Tunney, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Susan Copeland, Review Principal.

## School context

Whyalla Town Primary School caters for children from reception to year 7. It is situated 380kms from the Adelaide CBD, and is part of the Whyalla Partnership. The enrolment in 2018 is 337 students, and has been stable over the last 5 years. The school is classified as Category 5 on the department's Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school's ICSEA score is 1020.

The school population includes 8% of Aboriginal students, 7% of students with a verified disability, 10% of families eligible for School Card assistance, 9% of students of EALD background, and 2 children in care.

The school leadership team consists of a principal in the 16<sup>th</sup> year of her tenure at the school, a senior leader curriculum, and a senior leader wellbeing, who is also the Visible Learning impact coach. There are 16 teachers, including 7 in the early years of their career and 2 Step 9 teachers. In the last 5 years there has been a change in the teaching demographic, with proportionately more early career teachers 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 3 key areas from the External School Review framework:

**Effective Teaching:** How effectively does the feedback students are given motivate them to improve?

**Improvement Agenda:** How effective is the school in realising the targets and outcomes in its site improvement plan?

**Student Learning:** How effectively are students challenged to aspire and achieve?

### How effectively does the feedback students are given motivate them to improve?

Formative assessment is carried out by all teachers, providing students with verbal feedback on a regular basis. The Partnership Visible Learning work has developed teacher knowledge and capabilities on the provision of feedback to students in order for them to know the next steps in their learning. This work has begun in the school and is on the way to becoming consistent in teacher practice. The panel was given only a few examples of students providing feedback to teachers other than through the Visible Learning survey. A next step for the school is to work with teachers to explore the value of collecting information from students about the impact of teaching on their learning.

Parents are aware of the focus on Visible Learning and understand the value of developing student metacognition about learning. Some students said they are regularly provided with assessment rubrics and that they find them very helpful.

There is a common language about learning intentions and success criteria, with evidence available in multiple classrooms and in conversations with teachers; however, students showed only a basic understanding about success criteria. There is more work for the school to do in this area.

Parents value the weekly school and class newsletters that are sent home, as they tell the family about upcoming events at the school and the child's learning program. The school also uses some electronic communication such as text messaging and Facebook. The school is trialling an app for more regular communication between the teacher and the family. Parents told the panel that they are dissatisfied with feedback to them about student learning. Formal reporting to parents meets minimal requirements only. Parents said they would like to know much sooner than the end-of-semester report if their child is behind in some aspect of learning. Parents were shocked by some aspects of their child's report, such as an early years child being given an 'E' for effort. Parents are able to discuss learning concerns with teachers, but only if they ask. Use of communication books is viewed as ineffective in reception classes as teachers do not use the books.

Parents noted the care the school provides for the social and emotional wellbeing of their children, and the way the school develops student social and emotional self-regulation in learning.

The panel concluded that the school has begun to understand the value of quality feedback to students. The school is well-placed to develop deeper and more consistent practices in the provision of feedback to students that enables every student to know where to next in their learning. Communication with parents about learning is minimal and inconsistent in the school. A next step for the school is to consult with parents and improve communication with them about their child's learning, ensuring it is regular and timely and enables them to optimise support as a partner in the learning process.

#### **Direction 1**

**Strengthen feedback structures and processes to students and parents about learning.**

### **How effective is the school in realising the targets and outcomes in its site improvement plan?**

The school performance report indicates that growth in student achievement is at or above the SEA. The school has whole-school agreements about assessment, explicit teaching, data scheduling, and data collection. Aspirational school benchmarks are set in all of the English components. These benchmarks are set higher than the SEA.

The school has developed strong evidence-based improvement practices through the use of 5 weekly cycles of targeted teaching. Pre-and post-assessments are used to measure the effect size of teaching impact. Teachers work in data teams, led by a focus teacher, to collaboratively analyse data to identify explicit teaching foci and to examine data before and after testing. This work has focused on every aspect of literacy and has recently been extended to a unit of maths work. Writing has been an explicit improvement focus, with pre-and post-assessments and a 'types-of-writing' teaching schedule developed. Writing is now taught systematically and explicitly in accordance with this genre map. Teachers understand the importance and value of data, particularly the *summative* use of data, but feel that there is an over-emphasis on it.

Consistent teaching blocks for literacy have been developed with very specific elements prescribed to each teacher. Whilst they acknowledge the impact of whole-school explicit practice on student learning outcomes, many teachers expressed concerns about this highly prescriptive literacy block. They said it does not allow them to connect with students who work independently at this time. Some teachers expressed a desire to observe a literacy block as they are new teachers and unsure of how the block should and can operate.

Teachers talked to the panel about performance and development practices, including observations, and value and seek such practices in order to develop professionally. Teachers are clear about what and how they are expected to improve aspects of student learning. However, performance and development practices are inconsistent, and some teachers said they have had minimal performance and development over an extended period.

Only the principal line-manages staff, which is seen as inhibitor to consistent and regular performance and development meetings. Senior leaders said they would value being able to line-manage staff. There should be more use of negotiation and follow-up feedback in classroom observations.

Currently, teachers are unaware of how their improvement work is linked to the site improvement plan (SIP), and they had not seen the current SIP. Increased ownership by staff of an improvement agenda would help realise the school's priorities.

There is a need to provide more coherent links for staff between site improvement planning, performance and development, and collaborative development of teacher practice. In the collaborative data teams, more balance between summative and formative uses of data is required. The school has strong and effective whole-school practices; however, there is a need to regularly monitor and seek feedback from staff about these practices, to ensure they are continuously evolving to meet the needs of both teaching and learning.

#### **Direction 2**

**Develop a clear and comprehensive cycle of improvement that is coherent for staff.**

Teachers and parents believe decision-making processes lack authenticity, consultation is minimal and feedback is seldom reflected in decisions made. Staff and parents commented that the subcommittee structure does not work well as the principal is a member of every committee and is overloaded.

Decision-making procedures within the school need to be reviewed. 'Effective schools value two-way communication and ensure all have a voice and a sense of identity' (External School Review Framework). Quality decision-making is timely, democratic, transparent, and results in stakeholder ownership of and commitment to the decisions that are made.

#### **Direction 3**

**Improve decision-making in the school and ensure it is inclusive of authentic consultative and monitoring processes.**

### **How effectively are students challenged to aspire and achieve?**

Amongst staff there is an awareness of growth mindsets, the need for a range of entry points into tasks and for differentiation. The capabilities work in every class is led by the senior leader wellbeing and reinforced at weekly whole-school assemblies. Teachers are expected to incorporate these capabilities into their classroom practices. Through the capabilities work, students have become more accepting that learning is hard and requires effort. Parents value the capabilities, which they see through assemblies.

The school is led by the principal to be highly aspirational in learning. Staff, parents and students respect the school's high-achievement expectations. Students are continuously challenged to achieve and to reach the aspirational benchmarks set by the school. Parents and teachers said that the school continually achieves well in NAPLAN, and described teachers as enthusiastic and wanting their children to do their best and achieve.

The school has practices for literacy interventions, which are data-informed and managed by the special education teacher and senior leader wellbeing. Parents report that these interventions are effective in lifting the reading fluency of their children. Further intervention support in classrooms for reception to year 3 students with special needs will assist, as the school does not provide any numeracy intervention in reception to year 3. Parents see the benefits of the Jolly Phonics program in the early years.

A practice of subject specialisation for students in years 4 to 7 has been in place for a number of years. Each year 4 to 7 teacher teaches a single curriculum area to students in each 4 to 7 class in the last hour of every day. This practice (the 'specialisation program') has benefits such as quality curriculum coverage, and rich, focused subject-based teaching. However, it reduces opportunities for classroom teachers to develop integrated units of inquiry and students are being exposed to up to 11 different teachers in a week.

The panel concluded it would be helpful if the school develops a clear and consistent understanding about intellectual stretch and challenge. Some teachers recognise it is for all students all of the time, while others understand it as an extension for identified students. The school is well-placed to create better links for staff between work in Visible Learning, which deepens the agency of students in their own and each other's learning, and the design of quality integrated teaching and assessment tasks that provide all students with opportunities for higher-order, inquiry-based thinking and learning.

#### **Direction 4**

**Ensure deepening levels of student engagement and intellectual challenge in their learning.**

### **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 Whyalla Town Primary School.

Weekly assemblies are held at the school and hosted by each class on a rostered basis. Assemblies are publicised through the weekly school newsletter and are well-attended by parents (60-70 each week). They are focused on capabilities that are being explicitly taught in each classroom by the senior leader wellbeing. Awards based on these capabilities are given to students, and award recipients photographed and acknowledged in the school newsletter. This practice is valued, creating and maintaining a positive whole-school culture around a common set of values, and developing partnerships with students and parents focused on effort and learning outcomes.

A five-weekly cycle of collaborative analysis of pre and post datasets has been in place for some time. Each teacher collects data at the start of a unit of teaching using an agreed tool then post-tests. The 2 datasets are analysed to determine if growth in student learning has been achieved. This work is done in all aspects of literacy, and has recently been initiated in a unit of maths. Through this process teachers are able to calculate the effect size of their teaching practice on elements of student learning. Time is given each week in staff meetings for teams of teachers to engage in this work. The practice has led to increasingly intentionalised teaching and evidence-based improvement in student learning outcomes. Intervention programs are also accurately targeted based on the data.

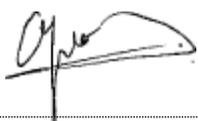
## Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

At Whyalla Town Primary School there is a culture of improvement characterised by high expectations for students. Student achievement data is used to inform decisions and actions at the individual student, class and whole-school level.

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

1. Strengthen feedback structures and processes to students and parents about learning.
2. Develop a clear and comprehensive cycle of improvement that is coherent for staff.
3. Improve decision-making in the school and ensure it is inclusive of authentic consultative and monitoring processes.
4. Ensure deepening levels of student engagement and intellectual challenge in their learning.

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



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WHYALLA TOWN PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Governing Council Chairperson

# Appendix 1

## Attendance policy compliance

Implementation of the Education Department student attendance policy was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy.

The school attendance rate for 2017 was 91.5%.

# Appendix 2

## 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).

### Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2017, 88% of year 1 and 86% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2015 and 2017, the trend for years 1 and 2 has been upwards, from 72% in 2015 to 88% in 2017, and from 64% in 2015 to 86% in 2017, respectively.

In 2017, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 85% of year 3 students, 81% of year 5 students, and 89% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the SEA. For years 3, and 5, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average. For year 7, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

In 2017 year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN reading, the school achieved within the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2017, 48% of year 3, 40% of year 5, and 20% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 60%, or 15 of 25 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2017, and 39%, or 7 of 18 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2017.

### Numeracy

In 2017, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 87% of year 3 students, 83% of year 5 students, and 94% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3 and 5, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average. For year 7, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

In 2017 year 3 and 7 NAPLAN numeracy the school achieved higher than the results of similar groups of students across government schools. In 2017 year 5 NAPLAN numeracy, the school achieved within the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2017, 47% of year 3, 13% of year 5, and 40% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 3, this result represents a little or no change from the historic baseline average.



Between 2015 and 2017, the trend for years 3 and 7 has been upwards, from 14% in 2015 to 47% in 2017, and from 9% in 2015 to 40% in 2017, respectively.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 29%, or 2 of 7 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2017, and 100%, or 8 of 8 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2017.