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 Ann O'Callaghan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Fione Love and Ms Jayne Heath, Review Principals.
Policy compliance
The External School Review process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are implemented and adhered to.

The Principal of Augusta Park Primary School has verified that the school is working towards being compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal has noted which policies are currently being reviewed.

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 86.9%, which is below the DECD target of 93%. This rate is an improvement on 85.2% in 2013. Members of the Attendance Committee analyse attendance and punctuality data at regular intervals. The school provided evidence of comprehensive daily monitoring and contact regarding unexplained absences and chronic non-attendance. Follow-up is undertaken by the Aboriginal Community Education Officer (ACEO), the School Counsellor and as necessary in conjunction with DECD support services and other agencies.

School context
Augusta Park Primary School is located in the town of Port Augusta 300 km north of Adelaide at the head of the Spencer Gulf. There are 302 enrolled students at the school. Since 2011, the overall enrolments have risen by approximately 25%. The school has an ICSEA score of 786, and is classified as Category 1 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 72 (24%) students with a Disability, 159 (53%) Aboriginal students, 150 (50%) students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) background including Aboriginal students and 59% of students are eligible for school card assistance.

There are 13 mainstream classes across the school and one regional special small class of eight Reception to Year 2 students with disabilities. The numbers of students arriving at and departing from the school in the last year equates to a transient factor of 20%.

The school leadership team consists of the Principal in her fifth year, the Deputy Principal appointed in 2013 after being the Literacy Coach in 2012, a Senior Leader appointed as the Numeracy Coach and Literacy Coach and the School Counsellor appointed in 2011. There is a high staff turnover with 63% of the current teaching staff working at the school for less than three years.
Lines of inquiry
During the review process, the panel focused on three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

Student Learning: How well are students achieving over time?
Effective Leadership: To what extent is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change evident?
Effective Teaching: To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

How well are students achieving over time?

In 2014, the reading results as measured by NAPLAN indicate that 32% of Year 3 students, 35% of Year 5 students and 57% of Year 7 students demonstrated the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). In 2014, the numeracy results as measured by NAPLAN indicate that 39% of Year 3 students, 32% of Year 5 students and 50% of Year 7 students demonstrated the SEA. These latest results at Year 3 and Year 5 show neither a decline nor improvement from the historical average performance, while at Year 7 the latest results indicate improvement from the historical average. The numeracy result for Year 7 in particular, showed 20% improvement in the number of students achieving SEA in 2014, as compared with the number of students achieving SEA in Year 5 in 2012.

In the 2014 Annual Report, the school provided self-review examples of an analysis undertaken of what is described as “disappointing NAPLAN results”, including a description of the complexity of factors impacting on students and their learning.

These factors include the increasing numbers of students at the school who have a developmental delay, a speech and language difficulty, who use EALD, and or who are poor attenders. For example, in 2014, in the Year 3 cohort of 30 students, 40% were verified as students with a Disability, 46% used EALD and 12% were chronic non-attenders. In this cohort of students who achieved the SEA, four students scored in the higher two proficiency bands in reading and two students scored in the higher two proficiency bands in numeracy.

The staff maintain high expectations for the students and are consistently challenged in their work to raise low levels of achievement and inconsistent patterns of growth. To assist them in this work, the school utilises multiple measures of information to ensure a deep analysis leads to greater understanding of complex needs. The school collects a wide range of profile data and records this for each individual student as a cumulative record of growth and achievement over time. As a part of regular self-review processes, the data sets are analysed and used to calculate the effectiveness of improvement strategies. Staff reported that recently, information from the progressive achievement tests (PAT-M; PAT-R) was proving to be especially fair, useful and reliable for their planning. The diagnostic information provided by these tests, is used to inform curriculum overviews, programming and instruction. While few students are currently demonstrating achievement at the age expected stanine, staff reported some noticeable growth towards benchmark from Year 4 to Year 7.

However, several staff reported that there was so much data collected over time for each student that they “need a better way” to collect, collate and access the information. They felt that the spreadsheets had become cumbersome and therefore not as practical as they need to be. The Principal reported that several software programs were being considered. Members of the Review Panel concur that an effective system is required to ensure data is easily accessible, up-to-date and readily available for individual teachers to use on a regular basis to plan against targets and for professional discussions about analysis and implications.

Additional reasons for a new data system relate to the impact that student transience and staff turnover have on school performance. Such mobility impacts the continuity of learning for all students and the capacity of staff to maintain the momentum of the school's improvement agenda. These circumstances highlight a further rationale for the learning growth of all students to be intentionally tracked over time.
Direction 1
Ensure higher levels of student achievement by enabling all staff to easily enter and track information about each student’s learning and growth, to better plan for the targeted teaching of the skills and knowledge required for all students to be successful from Reception to Year 7.

To what extent is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change evident?

The Review Panel found that there is an embedded culture of continuous improvement at the school. The focus is strategic and outcome oriented, aiming to see improved student learning outcomes over time and to improve the effectiveness of teaching to meet the range of needs of learners. There is also relentless attention given to supporting pro-social and emotional wellbeing of students and to the provision of a respectful, safe and orderly school environment.

The Principal and leadership team foster this culture by providing considerable support to staff at all levels. Underpinning this work, are expectations for all learners in relation to application, achievement and behaviour. The staff opinion survey reported that 94% of staff and 89% of students say the school looks for ways to improve. In addition, 86% of staff reported that the school takes their opinions seriously and 93% reported they are well supported in their work. Ninety-two percent of students said their teachers expected them to do their best. Relational trust surveys are also conducted to inform the professional learning community.

The Review Panel found that even with this embedded professional culture of improvement, actually realising sustainable change to achieve higher levels of student performance over time has been difficult.

For example, at the start of the 2015 school year, the Principal and the Site Improvement Team members led discussions to revisit the school’s strategic and operational plans. At the time, the integrity of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) was challenged because the majority of the current staff expressed little recognition and ownership of the strategies and directions originally initiated in 2011 and last reviewed 2013. The Site Improvement Team consequently devised a ‘scanning’ process to capture staff ideas and understanding of site improvement processes and priorities.

As a result, a new site improvement process was designed and was coincidentally launched at a staff meeting during the external school review. The cycle aims to support individual staff to connect with the improvement focus of the school. Supporting the improvement model is a four stage cycle of ‘Identify, Develop, Action, Evaluate’ which staff will use to develop inquiry questions around the school’s strategic directions. In addition, the four operational plans for 2015-2016, were reviewed to describe the whole school priorities, along with the approaches required to achieve improvement. These plans now address the priorities of social and emotional wellbeing, foundations of literacy, numeracy, and expert and effective teachers. Each plan is extensive and presented in a format documenting expected outcomes, evidence and achievement targets, and strategies to be implemented.

The Review Panel noted that omitted from any of these levels of planning, is a clear and concise vision to guide the improvement efforts. The school would benefit from developing an overarching, powerful and simple statement of learning and teaching that is student-centred, aspirational and improvement focused. To align the work of staff with this new vision, the Review Panel discussed with the Principal the benefits of consolidating the current strategic directions and operational plans so that a ‘less is more’ approach would assist staff to concentrate on targeted and effective teaching.

Direction 2
Sustain higher levels of learner achievement over time by concentrating all priorities on realising the expected outcomes of a student-centred and aspirational vision for learning.
To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

Students spoke positively about school with a sense of connectedness and belonging saying that “more kids want to come here because they think we are responsible”. Students talked about ways the teachers expect them to do their best. They feel safe at school, know who they can go to for help and know that incidents will be followed up. All students talked about what they hoped to learn, their goals or their individual learning plans.

Parents also appreciated the work the school was doing to develop individual learning plans. They said that their children took the plans seriously and were able to talk about strategies that helped them to achieve the goals. Parents reported that the school knows their children and their learning needs and that they saw them improving over time. They valued the recent parent interviews, term overviews and the assistance provided by support teams in the school. Some parents said that the school supported them to help their children at home. They said the school’s reputation had improved a lot over the last few years and that “standards had been lifted”. The Governing Council members felt the Council was effective because they had a say in the school’s directions.

As reported earlier, meeting the varied needs of learners through targeted differentiated teaching is considered an essential professional practice for teaching and non-teaching staff and specialist teams at the school. Staff said they had been working on developing their skills to implement targeted strategies in the class program, particularly in mathematics and literacy intervention. They said that professional learning about designing multiple-entry points to support success and using a range of open questions to develop understanding was helping them to better engage students in learning. Some staff reported that previously developed curriculum agreements designed to support continuity for all students, were not always consistently used across the school. One group of staff reported that when they organised shared planning times after school it supported them to really understand what was expected. While professional learning community teams do meet on a scheduled basis to focus on the improvement agenda, structured time for weekly collaborative planning is not formalised.

In 2015, the Site Improvement Team reintroduced the ‘track a student’ model to support staff to use data to select teaching strategies specifically designed to meet the learning needs of students. This process requires each teacher to identify four students, representative of the range of diverse needs in their class, and then use these students as ‘points’ for further grouping of the other students to then plan for differentiated teaching and learning. The outcomes of the model are discussed with line managers as part of the school’s performance and development process. The model provides timely impetus for collaborative planning.

Through strategic collaboration, staff work in teams to review data, consider the Australian Curriculum and design open-ended learning tasks to support all students. A structured and systematic process will support staff to enact the shared commitment required to address the range of learner needs and raise student achievement over time.

**Direction 3**

Provide structured and focused time to regularly monitor student progress against the goals of individual learning plans and to regularly engage in collaborative planning of differentiated teaching strategies.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Augusta Park Primary School is tracking well. Good performance is evident by a positive culture of improvement with self-review processes regularly and strategically used to determine the impact of school strategies on student achievement.

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

1. Ensure higher levels of student achievement by enabling all staff to easily enter and track information about each student's learning and growth, to better plan for the targeted teaching of the skills and knowledge required for all students to be successful from Reception to Year 7.
2. Sustain higher levels of learner achievement over time by concentrating all priorities on realising the expected outcomes of a student-centred and aspirational vision for learning.
3. Provide structured and focused time to regularly monitor student progress against the goals of individual learning plans and to regularly engage in collaborative planning of differentiated teaching strategies.

Based on the school's current performance, Augusta Park Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2019.

Tony Lunniss
A/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.

Fiona Voigt
PRINCIPAL
AUGUSTA PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson