EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

Report for Airdale Primary School

Conducted in February 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 Helen Tunney, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Marie-Louise Adams, Review Principal.

School context

Airdale Primary School caters for children from Reception to Year 7. It is situated 226kms north of the Adelaide CBD in the regional centre of Port Pirie, and is part of the Pirie Partnership. The enrolment in 2016 was 118 students. Enrolment has declined over the last 7 years, from 172 in 2010.

The school is classified as Category 1 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school's ICSEA score is 785. The Airdale Primary School student population includes 33% (36) Aboriginal students, 22% (24) students with a disability, 78% (87) students living in families eligible for School Card assistance, 14% (16) students of EALD background, and 10 children in care. The student population is highly transient.

The Principal is in the 7th year of his tenure at the school. The other school leader is a School Counsellor (0.5FTE). There are 9 (7.5FTE) teachers, including 2 in the early years of their career, and 3 Step 9 teachers.

The school motto is: achievement for all. The school's vision is: to work in partnership with the local community to provide opportunities for all students to reach their full potential.

Lines of Inquiry

In considering the data summary in the School Performance Overview (Appendix Two) 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 three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

Student Learning: **How well do teachers work with students to set goals and targets, and review their progress as a continual process?**

Effective Teaching: **To what extent is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction?**

Effective Leadership: **To what extent is a positive and focussed approach to improvement and change evident?**

How well do teachers work with students to set goals and targets, and review their progress as a continual process?

At Airdale Primary School, a culture of student goal-setting has been developed. All students with special needs have individual learning goals and, in some classes, the teacher supports every student to develop personal learning goals.

The panel found, however, that this goal-setting is variable. Some students have support from their teacher to base their goals on data (evidence-base) but this is not consistent across the school. Currently, there is also a difference across the school in terms of parent knowledge about personal student goals. Parents told the panel that they value their child's happiness and positive behaviour at school over learning achievement. By ensuring every student has a relevant short-term learning goal that is reflected upon and reviewed in a short timeframe, and by communicating these goals and student progress against them to families, parent and student understanding about the value of academic learning will be enhanced.

Leadership members, teachers, School Services Officers (SSOs) and parents told the panel that individualised learning plans are developed for all students with special needs and, in some classes, teachers develop an individual plan for every student. However, SSOs did not refer to individual learning goals for the students they support. There could be stronger links between student support from SSOs and the achievement of individual learning goals.

Students told the panel that they judge their success in learning through aspects such as accuracy, the teacher's response, and when they can do the task on their own. A school-initiated student forum identified that students want more feedback from teachers about their learning and how to use this feedback to be more engaged and successful in learning.

SSOs have noticed a positive change in students' attitudes to learning. Students, teachers and SSOs want improved learning. Teachers identified that improving students' fluency in literacy and numeracy is the most critical priority in the school and that developing students' capacity to use literacy and numeracy for higher-order learning is a need. Students who do have high level fluency in literacy and numeracy are provided with individual project work. It was clear to the panel that all groups of stakeholders are united in their desire for increased academic student learning, and that they are eager for this to happen.

Students liked getting homework and parents value homework too, as long as it is at the child's independent level and not too much. Students said that teachers help them work by responding if they put their hand up, giving different work if the task is too hard, and explaining without giving the answer. But the panel found little evidence that feedback to students about their work is explicit and contains information on how to improve. Further, the panel found little evidence of the regular statement and review of learning intentions and success criteria with students. A significant way for the school to positively impact on student academic learning is to empower students with greater understanding about how to improve through feedback, and to develop students' understanding about what they are learning and why.

Teachers use some of the following to enable students to influence their own learning:

- some topic choice
- some choice in work presentation
- goal-setting
- some reflection on learning
- having a say in class seating
- being able to have a turn
- being able to express an opinion
- activity centres
- and keeping the content of a unit of work flexible in order to follow student interests.

The school is in a strong position to involve students far more deeply in the learning process, and to enable students to influence their own and each other's learning in positive ways.

The panel concluded that the culture of student goal-setting that has been developed in the school is currently under-utilised and has the potential to develop metacognition about learning and the value of learning, in both students and their families. The school can make student learning more powerful and of a higher order through developing personal, measurable, short-term learning goals for every student, and explicitly connecting the goals to teaching through always stating and discussing learning intentions and success criteria with students.

Direction 1
Develop student metacognition about themselves as learners and the learning process itself through feedback that is explicit and contains information for students about the next steps to improve.

To what extent is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction?

'Streaming' is practised deliberately and widely at the school. Teachers work in teams of two with multi-aged classes in order to spread and dilute social and emotional complexity. These teams then ability group students within their two classes combined so that teaching content can be targeted at the needs identified by teachers through data summaries.

Annually, staff review NAPLAN, PAT and some other school datasets (Running Records and Oxford Words), which is valued by teachers as it facilitates the identification of like groups. The school also uses these data summaries to identify what skills students are 'lacking' to inform whole-school literacy and numeracy agreements about content to be taught. However, the panel found little evidence of consistency in pedagogical approaches across the school. Literacy and numeracy agreements are scope and sequences, and do not reference pedagogies. The panel found that teachers struggled to distinguish pedagogy from content.

Transience is prevalent at the school and has particular implications for ATSI students who travel between the school and country. It is the perception of the school that transience has increased in the past five years. An annual data day, when all staff examine PAT and NAPLAN results, misses some students who may come and go within a year.

Teachers practise discretionary collection of other assessment data to inform the evolutionary development of the groups throughout the year. Also, they use these assessments to collect baseline information about students who come new into their class during the year. Assessment tools used at classroom levels include: Running Records; Mathletics; Alpha check; Jolly Phonics and Grammar Checklists; Australian Standard Spelling; Phonological Awareness; Oral Language checklists; *I can do maths*; and Accelerated Reading quizzes. There is no whole-school consistency in the use of these tools. The type of assessment used by each teacher is determined by age level and teacher judgement about ability levels, as well as the preference of the teacher. A point of development for the school is to achieve more whole-school consistency in the application of assessment tools at the classroom level to ensure the needs of every student are met. Additionally, the panel found little evidence that teachers are using student achievement data diagnostically to identify intentional teaching. Teachers appear to base their work on identifying what to do rather than evaluating the effectiveness of their teaching. This is a point of growth for the school.

As a performance and development strategy, peer observations have been implemented for the past two years. Teachers have both given and received feedback to and from a peer. Some teachers found it helpful; some found it confronting and daunting. Some teachers valued the learning about teaching strategies that it provided. Teachers themselves determined the focus of the observation. Mostly, the focus was generalised and not specific to one aspect of practice. Observers focused on what the teacher was doing, not on evidence of students learning.

Writing improvement has been identified as an area of need by teachers, however, a teacher said she avoids giving writing tasks due to children's negative reaction to writing. Writing is moderated using the language and literacy levels for EALD and ATSI students and for some, but not all, other students.

Staff identified that the focus of work with ATSI students has typically been wellbeing and behaviour. They acknowledged that they now need to make the focus on learning growth for these students. Aboriginal teaching staff are aware of the importance of making individual learning plans more visible and 'living' in the daily work of teachers in the classroom.

The panel concluded that a key point of leverage for the school is to develop teacher skills in assessment for learning. Assessment for learning: seeks clear evidence about how to grow individual student learning to the next point of development; uses clear and regular feedback from and to students so it is clear what a student has learned or not and, therefore, what that next point of teaching for them needs to be; and makes clear to students what level they are working on and what they need to do to get to the next level.

Direction 2
Develop the data literacy of teachers to use assessment information to both inform intentional teaching for individual and groups of students, and to regularly and collaboratively evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching.

Moreover, the panel concluded that the development of whole-school agreements about the 'how' of teaching (pedagogy) are much less established than whole-school agreements about the 'what' of teaching (curriculum content). A key leverage point for the school is to shift the collaborative work of teachers to a focus on 'how' to teach in order to continuously develop best practice, and to ensure coherence for students in their learning experiences as they move through levels of schooling at Airdale Primary School.

Direction 3
Use teacher evaluation of their effectiveness to develop whole-school agreements about best-practice (pedagogies).

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

The panel was told by all stakeholders that the school has dramatically improved since 2011. A positive culture has been developed, the good order of the school has been restored, and the work of the school has become settled and focused on learning and students being in classrooms doing their work. A culture of learning has been developed. The reputation of the school in the broader community has been transformed from poorly-regarded to highly-regarded.

Student behaviour management has become proactive and successful. Parents of students with complex behaviours value that the school keeps their child at school using effective strategies, through the personal skills of the Principal in the de-escalation of high-level student behaviours. They believe that these skills are being imparted to staff, in the interests of whole-school effective behaviour management.

All teachers believe there is support for them at all times from leadership and from each other. Parents value the calm, professional and orderly organisation and management of the school. The school operates transparently; as one parent stated, "nothing ever is hidden". Smaller class sizes are a priority for school resourcing, and this is valued by teachers and parents, as it supports quality student-teacher relationships and maximises individual student support from the teacher.

Relationships between teachers and SSOs have become very professional and respectful. There is an inclusive culture at Airdale Primary School for all staff. It was reported to the panel that "We are not just an SSO. Teachers respect us". SSOs use informal opportunities to seek directions from teachers about what and how to support identified students.

The school has been reconnected to its community through whole-school events that bring parents into the school to see their children on show. This has enabled a dialogue to develop between school staff and those parents who may otherwise be reluctant to come into the school. After-school activities for students, such as science and drama clubs, and sports coaching, have bonded groups of school stakeholders; parents and students value the discretionary effort that teachers put into this out-of-hours work. The school is now the only DECD school that offers out-of-school hours care. This is another indicator of the whole-of-child way in which the school views its relationships with and responsibilities for students and their families.

Strategies for informing parents about student learning include informal chats, statistics in the Newsletter and the family night, amongst others. Parents judge student growth in learning through their child's reading levels and the skills they exhibit in the homework the children are doing. Some teachers suggest ways for parents to help students at home, which is valued by the parents.

The school has developed effective and streamlined processes for the identification and support of students with special needs. The classroom teacher meets with the Leadership Team and support staff to discuss each child's wellbeing and learning, and to set goals. This occurs at least twice a year.

Parents said there is a cohesive atmosphere at the school between and within all groups of stakeholders. The school provides a lot of non-judgemental and unconditional support for students and their families. Parent perception is that the children feel that teachers have a vested interest in them. Parents describe all teachers as caring, compassionate, committed and connected to each other, leadership, students and their families, and believe they are "going the extra yards". They recognised and valued the individualization of learning for their children.

Each team of teachers identified that student resilience for academic learning is a high priority for the school. They are 'hoping' that the planned greater whole-school emphasis on the Growth Mindset model will facilitate this, and students will develop skills and dispositions for emotional self-management that they will then transfer to their academic learning. The panel is concerned that deeper developmental work needs to happen with teachers so that the Growth Mindset work is explicitly linked with academic learning. 'Hoping' this work will have the desired effect is not enough. Teachers must be supported to plan carefully and intentionally, and explicitly link strategies for social and emotional regulation to the development of student resilience in challenging learning, including the sitting of NAPLAN and other formal testing.

The panel concluded that a strong foundation exists in the school to raise expectations of student academic achievement. The school has the trust of its community, a united student-centred vision, and effective management for the good order of the school.

Direction 4
Raise whole-school expectations of student academic achievement by building student capacity to self-manage behaviourally and emotionally within challenging learning tasks.

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 Airdale Primary School.

Consistent and agreed classroom management processes effectively enable learners to engage in the learning tasks. These practices were verified by reports from teachers, SSOs and parents, student behaviour management data, and by panel observations in classrooms and experience of the general level of calm at the school. Student behaviour in the classroom is consistently managed through good student-teacher relationships, preventative strategies that focus students' attention on their learning, and responsive strategies that provide consistent, logical consequences for classroom behaviours that disrupt the teaching and learning. These processes are highly consistent across the school and school leadership prioritises quick responses to teachers for incidents of persistent disruption or aggressive and anti-social student behaviours. Leaders provide and model high-level skills in the de-escalation of complex student behaviours.

Various strategies are used to enable families to be involved as partners in their child's learning. These practices were verified to the panel by reports from parents, Governing Council and staff. The school priorities enact respectful, positive, learning-centred relationships with and between all groups of stakeholders. A parent's role in their child's schooling is always dealt with in a proactive way, and the school is continuously seeking ways to give parents confidence to engage with the school about learning. This positivity has seen a significant increase in the number of families who: attend school events, interviews and meetings with teachers; volunteer in the school, including for classroom support; nominate for Governing Council; and work with school and support staff to individualise and review the learning programs for their child. This sensitive and respectful investment in families is critical to continuously improving the experiences and outcomes of schooling for students in this Port Pirie Community.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

At Airdale Primary School there is a shared vision, strategic planning, actions and interventions that are data-informed and sustained over time. There is shared leadership across the school and authentic student influence in decision-making in the management of the school.

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

1. Develop student metacognition about themselves as learners and the learning process itself through feedback that is explicit and contains information for students about the next steps to improve.

2. Develop the data literacy of teachers to use assessment information to both inform intentional teaching for individual and groups of students, and to regularly and collaboratively evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching.

3. Use teacher evaluation of their effectiveness to develop whole-school agreements about best-practice (pedagogies).

4. Raise whole-school expectations of student academic achievement by building student capacity to self-manage behaviourally and emotionally within challenging learning tasks.

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

Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY

Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND
PRESCHOOLS

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.

Geoff Saunders
PRINCIPAL
AIRDALE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson

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 Airdale 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 documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2016 was 82.5%.

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, 36% of Year 1 and 54% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). This result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average in Year 1 and an improvement in Year 2.

In 2016, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 31% of Year 3 students, 38% of Year 5 students and 20% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 7, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average. For Year 5, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

In 2016 Year 3 and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school achieved lower than the results of similar students across DECD schools. In 2016 Year 5 NAPLAN Reading, the school achieved within the results of similar students across DECD schools. Due to high transience, high absence from testing and small, fluctuating cohort numbers, the school's NAPLAN results are especially cohort-specific. For the past 6 years, the school's NAPLAN Reading results have been within the range of achievement against like-DECD cohorts for 67% of the time.

In 2016, 15% of Year 3, no Year 5 and no Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Since 2014, no Year 5 or Year 7 students have achieved in the higher reading bands.

Numeracy

In 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 39% of Year 3 students, 38% of Year 5 students and 20% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Year 3, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average. For Year 5, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. For Year 7, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

In 2016 Year 3 and 5 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school achieved within the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools. In 2016 Year 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school achieved lower than the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools. Due to high transience, high absence from testing and small, fluctuating cohort numbers the school's NAPLAN results are especially cohort-specific. For the past 6 years, the school's NAPLAN Numeracy results have been within the range of achievement against like-DECD cohorts for 61% of the time.

In 2016, 8% of Year 3, no Year 5 and no Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Since 2013 no Year 5 or Year 7 students have achieved in the higher numeracy bands.