

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR ECHUNGA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in April 2016



**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.

This External School Review was conducted by Lyn Arnold, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Brenton Conradi, Review Principal.

Policy compliance

The External School Review process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are adhered to and implemented.

The Principal of Echunga Primary School verified on 21st March 2016 that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies except the following DECD policies:

Part 4 People and Culture: Item 3

DECD Performance and Development Policy: all staff must have a Performance Development Plan.

During the Review process, it became evident that Echunga Primary School was not compliant with a randomly selected sample of policies and procedures. This concern has been referred to the Education Director and must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

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

Implementation of the *DECD Student Attendance Policy* was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found not to be fully compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2015 was 92.2%, which is marginally below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Echunga Primary School is an R-7 school located 31kms south-east of the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2016 is 79 students distributed across three composite classes, up from 72 students in 2015. The school is classified as Category 6 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school's ICSEA score in 2014 was 1038.

The school population in 2015 included 2 Students with Disabilities, 4 Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) enrolments, ≤1% under the Guardianship of the Minister, and 15% of students eligible for School Card assistance, and no Aboriginal students.

The school Leadership consists of a Principal in his eighth year at the school.

School Performance Overview

The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). As the school has small cohorts in individual year levels, the focus is necessarily on tracking individual growth and progress over time, and caution should be exercised in making judgements or drawing conclusions from the data below given the small number of students.

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2015, 6 of 8 Year 1, and 7 of 9 Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 1 has been upwards, from 4 of 9 students in 2013 to 6 of 8 students in 2015.

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 5 of 8 Year 3 students, 4 of 4 Year 5 students and 4 of 8 Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Years 3 and 7 has been downwards, from 88% and 100% in 2013, to 63% and 50% in 2015 respectively.

For 2015 Year 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school achieved lower results than similar students across DECD schools.

In 2015, 2 of 8 Year 3, 1 of 4 Year 5 and 0 of 8 Year 7 students achieved in the top two 2015 NAPLAN Reading bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 1 of 1 student from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015.

Numeracy

In 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 5 of 8 Year 3 students, 3 of 4 Year 5 students and 3 of 8 Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA.

Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 7 has been downwards, from 83% in 2013 to 38% in 2015.

For 2015 Year 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school achieved lower results than similar groups of students across DECD schools.

In 2015, 0 of 8 Year 3, 0 of 4 Year 5 and 0 of 8 Year 7 students achieved in the top two 2015 NAPLAN Numeracy bands.

Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 7 has been downwards, from 50% in 2013 to 0% in 2015.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 0 of 1 student from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015, and 0 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015.

Lines of Inquiry

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

Effective Leadership: How effectively does the school leadership foster a culture of learning?

Student Learning: To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

How effectively does the school leadership foster a culture of learning?

The Review Panel explored several aspects of the school's culture, with particular emphasis on the improvement focus and change strategies, coherence of the teaching and learning approach, student voice, and staff professional learning.

With respect to professional learning, the staff have participated in a range of programs, at both the school and partnership level over the past three years. Examples include Positive Education, Mindfulness, Assessment for Learning, Thinking for Learning, Learning Design and Transforming Tasks in TfEL, and the Australian Curriculum. As part of the review, staff were asked to outline what professional learning has influenced their teaching practice the most and in what ways.

Individual reflections revealed a focus on Positive Education to be the most consistent practice across the school. The approach to the implementation of other professional learning initiatives is highly individualised; that is, every teacher uses different approaches informed by their own personal prior experience. A possible reason given for the higher level of coherence in the implementation of the Positive Education approach was the commitment to action by all and, particularly, the leadership. This explanation is plausible as research shows that without the support of leadership, improvement reforms falter and lack sufficient sustainability to enable real improvement.

This provides an opportunity for the school to identify and adopt high-leverage approaches across all year levels as agreed whole-school approaches. At the time of Review, the school had a 'verbal' whole-school agreement to implement literacy blocks. The first step is to document this agreement within the context of rigorous professional conversations and debates that establish a rationale for the approach and how it links with the school's improvement agenda and improved student learning outcomes. Through this process, staff should develop clear descriptions of what will happen in literacy blocks and why, their shared understanding about learning and achievement in literacy, and how these will be consistently implemented across the school. Within this context, staff can determine if and how the Big 6, which is an identified SIP priority, fits within the agreement and how its effectiveness will be monitored and evaluated in terms of improving literacy outcomes. A similar process should then be adopted in the development of a whole-school agreement for numeracy and other identified key improvement priorities.

Direction 1

Improve student learning outcomes by implementing documented whole-school approaches that embed effective pedagogical approaches and improvement reforms within a context of collective action, responsibility and accountability.

In support of this outcome, a coherent school-wide approach to building teacher capacity should be planned, implemented, and evaluated. The allocation of professional learning budgets and resources should be systematic, equitable and transparent, and align with SIP priorities and individual teachers' Professional Development Plans (PDP). Individual and whole-school professional learning should be practical and action-oriented, and focus on embedding two to three key teaching strategies within a set timeframe, with the aim of progressively building the capacity of individuals to deliver sustained improvement. Given the small number of staff, a School Improvement or Professional Learning team could manage the planning process with all staff involved in the implementation and evaluation stages.

As the school is in the process of formalising and documenting PDPs, the opportunity also exists to develop systematic approaches for regularly monitoring and evaluating quality teaching and student progress against targets that support a sustained focus on improvement. Options such as peer observations against key improvement priorities, group professional development planning sessions, as well as individual planning sessions, should be considered.

Additionally, the school's approach should include an explicit and consistently applied range of strategies and structures that enable teachers to share and disseminate professional learning and good practice on a regular and ongoing basis which, in turn, informs self-review and ongoing professional debates about current and future student, classroom and whole-school improvement priorities and strategies.

Direction 2

Develop a positive culture of improvement by implementing a coherent school-wide approach to professional learning, professional development planning, and evaluation that aligns with the SIP.

A critical aspect in developing a culture of learning in a school is for the vision and actions to be student-centred, creating a sense of belonging for students and the wider community.

Parents spoke of choosing Echunga Primary School because of the sense of community and its 'large family' atmosphere. They appreciate the links to the sporting community, the natural environment setting, the size of the school, and how older students look after the younger ones. Students also reported an appreciation of their school. While there were some behaviour-management incidents referred to, overall, students feel it is a safe learning environment.

While students experience a sense of belonging, all stakeholders confirmed there are no agreed school-wide strategies in place for valuing or including student voice in their learning or school decision-making. At the time of review, there was no Student Council or coherent approach to the provision of student leadership opportunities. This was particularly evident in the upper primary years, where students spoke of feeling powerless to have their views heard or concerns addressed effectively. Examples of student-initiated events were limited and ad hoc, being reliant on an individual student approaching the Principal to gain support. How leaders and teachers respond to student input and work with them to make their ideas come to life is critical, and DECD schools are expected to implement effective strategies to ensure the voices of children and young people are heard and incorporated into decision-making as well as teaching and learning.

As a matter of urgency, structures and processes should be implemented to build student capacity for authentic participation in school and learning decision-making processes. The urgency relates to ensuring that current students, especially Year 7 students, do not miss the narrowing window of opportunity to develop these important skills and contribute to their school community. As a result, school planning should reflect students' opinions and aspirations.

Direction 3

Implement structures and processes to engage student voice authentically in school decision-making processes, and embed student influence in teaching and learning, and school improvement planning and evaluation processes.

To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

A complementary Line of Inquiry within the External School Review process focused on the teaching and learning experience of students across the school.

The students the Review Panel met with were enthusiastic in their discussions and proud of their school. They were eager to share their work with the panel and are to be commended for being open and honest in their views and thoughts about their school.

Students told the panel that they have good teachers at their school, and an examination of a range of student work, together with discussions about their learning, revealed that students:

- had a sound understanding of what needed to be done for particular tasks or learning activities, and
- wanted to do and present their best work at all times.

As the school had engaged in professional learning on 'Assessment for Learning', the Review Panel was interested to see how this aspect of teaching and learning was being put into practice. Formative feedback was diverse, ranging from high-value, critically constructive written comments to personalised positive affirmations, stickers and awards with little task relevance. In talking with parents and students, it also became evident that students have limited opportunities or strategies to benchmark their progress. Some spoke, for example, of not being able to achieve an A because the teacher doesn't award these to anyone. Similarly, parents were unclear on what was needed for a child to achieve a higher level or improve their grade. Further, it was found that student achievement or test data is not shared or discussed with parents or students unless the parents specifically ask to do so at the interview. This provides an opportunity for the school to explore ways to assist students to interpret rich and diverse data to understand where they are in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there.

The authentic engagement of students in the planning and setting of personalised learning goals has the

potential to address a major concern expressed by parents; namely, keeping their child motivated when placed in the same class with the same teacher for three years. This poses challenges for both the school and the child. While there are entrenched expectations and 'favourite' activities with which everyone is comfortable, such as Country of the Week, there also needs to be flexibility in learning design, and opportunities for increasing learner independence, critical thinking, and deep learning in personalised and intellectually challenging ways.

As part of the development and implementation of whole-school agreements, all aspects of teaching and learning programs should be critically evaluated to determine the extent to which they support TfEL and, in particular, the development of Expert Learners (Domain 3), which is an identified improvement priority in the current SIP. The self-review and evaluation processes should reflect student feedback, as discussed previously, and lead to clear descriptions of what performance and achievement looks like against the Australian Curriculum standards, which is shared with students to facilitate informed self-monitoring and evaluation of progress towards identified learning goals.

Direction 4

Build the capacity of staff and students to participate in data discussions, the design of assessment, determining the associated benchmark measures, and establishing success criteria in ways that motivate students, personalise learning and develop expert learners.

Direction 5

Explore and implement approaches that integrate and effectively embed intellectual stretch, challenge and rigour into daily classroom teaching and learning.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Echunga Primary School has the opportunity to develop an improvement-focused culture that aims to provide a coherent whole-school approach to learning and teaching.

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

1. Improve student learning outcomes by implementing documented whole-school approaches that embed effective pedagogical approaches and improvement reforms within a context of collective action, responsibility and accountability.
2. Develop a positive culture of improvement by implementing a coherent school-wide approach to professional learning, professional development planning, and evaluation that aligns with the SIP.
3. Implement structures and processes to engage student voice authentically in school decision-making processes, and embed student influence in teaching and learning, and school improvement planning and evaluation processes.
4. Build the capacity of staff and students to participate in data discussions, the design of assessment, determining the associated benchmark measures, and establishing success criteria in ways that motivate students, personalise learning and develop expert learners.
5. Explore and implement approaches that integrate and effectively embed intellectual stretch, challenge and rigour into daily classroom teaching and learning.

Based on the school's current performance, Echunga Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2017.



Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard
A/CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

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.

Alex Ponury
PRINCIPAL
ECHUNGA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson