



EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

Report for Renmark North Primary School

Conducted in May 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 June Goode, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Brenton Conradi, Review Principal.

School context

Renmark North Primary School is located 246kms east of the Adelaide CBD, and is part of the Renmark/Loxton Partnership. Enrolments are steadily declining from 205 in 2012 to current enrolments of 156. The school has an ICSEA score of 985, and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 6% Aboriginal students, 6% students with disabilities, 47% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), and 31% of families eligible for School Card assistance. Twenty-one percent of students travel to and from school by bus.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in the first year of her tenure, School Counsellor, Coordinator and EALD teacher.

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 three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

Effective Leadership: To what extent has a coherent approach to curriculum been developed and actioned?

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

School Community Partnerships: How effective is the parent/school partnership?

To what extent has a coherent approach to curriculum been developed and actioned?

Throughout the leadership presentation the team spoke about their individual roles and also the strategic manner in which they are leading a collaborative approach to school improvement. The Principal is committed to ensuring staff are on-board and feel respected for their voice and contributions to the review process and decision-making. The awareness of the pace of the review process was evident ensuring staff were not being overwhelmed. In conversations with staff, the Review Panel was able to verify staff involvement and confidence to raise concerns and suggest opportunities for improvement. Staff stated that the culture of the school has changed, which was reflected in many comments including: "we want improvement, it is a shared responsibility", "if we want to make a difference and improve learning outcomes for all students we have to do it together", and "there is a sense of energy and optimism now".

The Principal commented on how whole-school data was shared with all staff at the commencement of the school year. This investment in time provided a sense of purpose and common understanding, which was verified through a consistent language being heard in data conversations. Teachers were able to comment on where students were at and the growth that was evident. Empowering staff to embrace purposeful data was verified as having a significant impact across the school: "I have each student's data at my finger tips" and "I now use it to monitor growth and identify where I need to modify my teaching". Informal comments also indicated a practice of celebrating student growth and sharing responsibility for every child.

Staff were asked to individually complete a survey during a staff meeting. One of the questions was *What professional development has had an impact at a whole-school level?* The majority of staff indicated the Collaborative Impact Program (CIP) as one that is purposeful and valued. Whilst in the initial year of a three-year program, staff are embracing the opportunity and are keen to go deeper in developing their learning.

The Review Panel sighted common documents for literacy and numeracy agreements and were curious to investigate how staff work collaboratively to implement these. The level of consistency and/or common

practice of the literacy and numeracy agreements was not evident to the Review Panel. There are many programs and approaches being delivered across the site and in varying degrees.

The Natural Maths model was also referred to by staff for having a positive impact. This was verified in student workbooks and conversations with students who confidently articulated the learning of maths through the use of language such as, mental routines, rainbow facts, deep thinking, problem-solving and reflection. The Review Panel found there was also significant variation in the implementation of this model across the school. The Review Panel noted areas of conflict within the school between Natural Maths and the 'Invision' program, as to which was the program and which was the resource. A number of students shared their boredom and frustration about the repetitive nature of their maths lessons: "we did the same worksheets last year" and "I used to love maths, but now I can't be bothered".

The EALD teacher spoke of her role and the gradual release of responsibility she is providing ensuring all staff are 'owning' the language and literacy scaling of levels and programing to ensure all student needs are being met. Staff spoke highly of her mentoring and how much they have learnt from her. Comments reflected the tips that she shares, resources that she has made and how she empowers them in developing their skills to teach not only EALD students but all students. One document sighted by the Review Panel was the *Text type/Metalanguage Genre Map*. This document would enable a coherent approach to writing development, however, not all staff adhere to this guide.

Collaboration between leadership and staff was clearly evident during the review. The Review Panel commends the pace and strategic process being implemented in regards to the change agenda. The Review Panel concluded that there is a broad range of programs being delivered at Renmark North Primary School, and a review of each in relation to their impact on student learning is encouraged. A narrow and deep focus would ensure consistency and coherence resulting in improving student learning outcomes.

It appeared to the Review Panel that the school was trying to do too much, and needs to focus on providing coherency for students as they progress through school, Reception to Year 7.

Direction 1

Prioritise whole-staff Professional Learning that has a strategic focus on areas that will provide the greatest leverage to embed consistent pedagogy and application across the school.

How are students challenged to aspire and achieve?

Data from the School Performance report is showing a decline from the school's baseline average in both reading and numeracy. The Review Panel was keen to explore the possible cause of this decline.

At the staff meeting, teachers were asked to reflect on a recent unit of work. Sixty percent of staff indicated they were providing students with clear learning intentions. Fifty percent of staff indicated that they were creating opportunities that provide stretch and challenge for all students at a medium extent. One hundred percent indicated a medium extent for providing feedback to students. For the question *How effectively are students involved in developing success criteria?* 50% indicated low extent and the remaining 50% a medium extent. Students' comments about their voice for learning aligned to staff reflections with the responses indicating varying levels of involvement in designing rubrics and being asked their opinions on the learning process and purpose for learning.

All students referred to the *flexible learning levels* in conversations. They were able to articulate what each level represented. In conversations with students and via walkthroughs no student wanted to be on level one. As one Early Years student commented: "it means the teacher is the boss, and makes the decision because you're not doing the right thing". Whilst the highest level meant more independence for students, the majority of student comments didn't reflect the ambition or desire to achieve at this level. This was also reflected when discussing grade achievement; again, the common thread wasn't about achieving an "A" it was more aligned to: "a B is good, it gives me some independence in my learning and I'm okay with that". When asked if their learning was easy, at the right level or challenging, responses were varied depending on the lesson. The majority of students spoke about the need to put in more effort to the learning area/s they least like and that they find the most challenging.

During walkthroughs and classroom visits, the Review Panel noted the high engagement of students and the high standard of quality work. However, when speaking with students about the purpose of the lesson, their comments included a bias towards teacher responsibility: “the teacher asked us to do it”, “the teacher told us it will help us to get a job”, and “don’t know, the teacher said I have to do it now or for homework”. Many commented that they were pleased with their work, however, a significant number of others commented that the learning was repetitive, boring and “we had already done the same worksheets last year”. When asked about what they could do to improve their learning, the majority spoke about listening to the teacher, not being distracted, “having a go” and “doing what I need to do”.

Comments from representatives of the parent group and Governing Council indicated their belief that their children are not being challenged in their learning. Some parents reflected on the desire to bring back excitement in learning activities, and for the school to aim at achieving higher levels of academic success and growth.

As part of the Collaborative Impact Program students have been involved in conversations about *what learning is*. The Review Panel concluded now is the time to challenge students and support them in higher-order thinking tasks, including critical and creative thinking, which would be practical in providing rigour and stretch to all students.

Direction 2

Extend the collegial conversations across the site to develop student voice for learning, through involvement in learning intentions, transformational tasks and success criteria that promote higher-order thinking to increase levels of intellectual stretch.

How effective is the parent/school partnership?

The Principal shared as part of her presentation the value and importance of ensuring parent voice is recognised as integral to the school improvement process. Throughout the ESR, the Review Panel noted areas where communication channels could be refined and improved. Governing Council representatives commented that school data was shared with them, however, they requested deeper connections with links to professional learning and the impact it has at a school and class level. In particular, deepening their understanding in how programs such as Natural Maths are being taught in classes. Governing Council members also shared concerns that students were not being involved with programs that extended their learning or increased their excitement and passion for learning.

Members of parent representative groups spoke about concerns with not knowing where their child is at, and being shocked when they received the school report. Communication regarding intervention was being received and parents did comment positively on their participation in any planned meeting. Comments also reflected the pride they felt when teachers shared their child’s academic and social growth.

Parent comments reflected the variance in levels of communication from school to home across the school, from extremely effective to extremely limited. They requested the school should provide greater notice of upcoming events and not at the last minute. Comments also reflected positive changes to the school newsletter and the Principal’s willingness to listen. Parents spoke of the approachability of staff; however, considerations would be appreciated for working parents and other families, to ensure effective communication between all parties is provided in a timely manner. Overall, comments reflected the approachability of staff with the realisation that communication needs to be a two-way approach.

Parents and Governing Council members spoke of their knowledge of the school priorities. They were able to comment on programs and initiatives in place, such as Natural Maths, Growth Mindsets and the four levels for learning: “sometimes we read it in the newsletter and we often hear about it from our children”, and “it would be good to learn more about these different programs so that we can support our child/ren”.

Governing Council members commented on their involvement and the levels of communication being shared by the Principal, including the Site Improvement Plan and school priorities. However, they would appreciate and value more connectedness with staff in supporting school improvement.

The pride and passion Governing Council and parent representatives have for the school was very obvious throughout the review.

Direction 3

Engage the Governing Council and the parent community in refining and improving current communication channels, particularly in regards to student learning outcomes.

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 Renmark North Primary School.

The process to significantly build the collaborative culture of self-review and improvement has been well-paced and influential. Deliberate positive changes have resulted in staff ownership of the process for school improvement. Ongoing reflection has shown a positive change to the culture of the school and one well placed to improve student learning.

The active participation of all staff in the “Collaborative Impact Program” has had a significant influence on building teacher and leadership capacity. Ongoing participation will continue to strengthen student voice for learning, students leading their learning and teachers seeing learning through the eyes of the students.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

Renmark North Primary School is on a year of reflection and renewal. Effective leadership is providing strategic direction, planning and targeted interventions aiming for whole-school improvement.

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

1. Prioritise whole-staff Professional Learning that has a strategic focus on areas that will provide the greatest leverage to embed consistent pedagogy and application across the school.
2. Extend the collegial conversations across the site to develop student voice for learning, through involvement in learning intentions, transformational tasks and success criteria that promote higher-order thinking to increase levels of intellectual stretch.
3. Engage the Governing Council and the parent community in refining and improving current communication channels, particularly in regards to student learning outcomes.

Based on the school's current performance, Renmark North 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.



Mary Shannon
PRINCIPAL
REMARK NORTH 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 Renmark North Primary School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies.

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

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 92.7%.

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, 57% of Year 1 and 61% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). This result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

In 2016, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 75% of Year 3 students, 64% of Year 5 students and 72% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3, 5 and 7, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Year 7 has been downwards, from 85% in 2014 to 72% in 2016.

For 2016 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the results of similar students across DECD schools.

In 2016, 25%, or 4 of 16 Year 3, 28%, or 7 of 25 of Year 5, and 16%, or 4 of 25 Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 50%, or 4 of 8 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016, and 33%, or 3 of 9 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.

Numeracy

In 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 69% of Year 3 students, 72% of Year 5 students and 68% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3, 5 and 7, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Years 5 and 7 has been downwards, from 81% in 2014 to 72% in 2016 for Year 5, and from 81% in 2014 to 68% in 2016 for Year 7.

For 2016 Year 3 and 5 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools. For Year 7, the school is achieving below the results of similar students across DECD schools.

In 2016, 12.5%, or 2 of 16 Year 3, 20%, or 5 of 25 Year 5, and 16%, or 4 of 25 Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 100%, or 5 of 5 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016, and 66.7%, or 2 of 3 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.