

# **The Department for Education**

## **External School Review**

**Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division**

**Report for Birdwood Primary School**

**Conducted in November 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 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 Greg Graham, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Simon Harding, Review Principal.

## School context

Birdwood Primary School caters for children from reception to year 7. It is situated 55kms from the Adelaide CBD, and is part of the Torrens Valley Partnership. The enrolment in 2018 is 290 students. Enrolment has been steady over the last 5 years. The school has an ICSEA score of 1016, and is classified as Category 6 on the department's Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 2% Aboriginal students, 10% students with disabilities, no students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD), 5 children/young people in care, and 30% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a principal in the 3rd year of her tenure at the school, a deputy principal and a literacy coach. There are 14.6FTE teachers, including 2 in the early years of their career and 11 Step 9 teachers.

## 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 2 key areas from the External School Review framework:

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

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

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

Based on a four-year history, the assessment data trend for the school, as measured by NAPLAN, shows that the average student achievement in reading and numeracy across the year 3, 5 and 7 range is 78%. The Running Records assessment data trend over the same time period is also averaging 78% for year 1 and 2 students.

The principal stated that the school focus for 2016 and 2017 has been in numeracy as part of the combined work of the partnership and school. During this period the school has been able to track and monitor the growth of the students in numeracy reception to year 7 using the NAPLAN and PAT test data. Data indicated that more students were in the higher bands and the students' attitude towards maths had lifted.

Teachers identified several forms of assessment used to measure student abilities and to assist in organisational planning. These assessments include Running Records, Jolly Phonics, PAT data and individual tests for specific subjects. The test results have enabled teachers to group children who need assistance, follow whole-class trends and inform parents at interviews. Assessment data is recorded and stored electronically through the MARKiT program accessible to all staff.

The work conducted through the partnership moderation processes combined with the 'Back to Front' maths assessment focus has been valued by staff, with most teachers changing their classroom practices in the teaching of maths to address mathematical misconceptions and problem-solving.

*Formative* assessment strategies are the main focus for whole-school professional learning in 2018, with dedicated time and action being conducted in classrooms by all teachers. The leadership team and staff acknowledged that this work is at a foundation level and will continue to be a priority in professional development.

Staff acknowledged that assessment data is shared amongst colleagues and used to support the co-planning of units of work. Pre and post-tests were strategies used by some teachers to plan lessons, construct rubrics or success criteria matrices and form *summative* tasks, verified by samples provided by some.

Intervention assessment data from programs such as Quicksmart maths and Reading Doctor is collated by school services officers (SSOs), and the information is shared with the class teachers and literacy coach. This information is also recorded on MARKiT and referred to during One Child One Plan/NEP meetings with parents.

Both staff and students talked about the sharing of assessment results and achievement data via individual conferences and class discussions. The assessments include NAPLAN and PAT data with the students being able to describe how it helps them focus on specific aspects of their learning to improve.

Parents commented favourably on the school reporting and interview process, and acknowledged that term reports and parent interviews were informative and validated by the assessment records that teachers kept. Equally, parents reported that the teachers were able to draw upon a broad range of assessment or test results at short notice when discussing any concerns raised.

Processes are in place for the next step of planning and developing learning design and changes in teaching practice and assessment. Work through the partnership and site follow-up using the SIP strategies is to continue. It has been recognised that the school does use information from a variety of assessment datasets to support and plan for student learning. The next phase of the school's future planning would be to continue to work on explicit assessment criteria, task design and moderation that incorporate feedback processes to and from students. Engaging staff in data analyses that triangulate information about student achievement from a range of sources, including collated A-E data, will clarify learning progress, as well as identify what students know and can do, and what each student is ready to learn next. There is further work to be undertaken, to ensure that teacher input becomes aligned with the learning of the student.

Future considerations for the school include continuing work on: learning design and moderation (LDAM) through partnership and in-house; understanding what formative assessment is and how it can be used in the planning process; and continuing to share assessment data with the students to enable ownership in their learning growth.

#### **Direction 1**

**Strengthen the whole-school assessment processes to include school agreements in using formative assessment practices based on the collaborative use of data and effective pedagogy that builds on teacher capacity.**

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

The 2017 annual report survey results demonstrated a collective response in strongly agreeing that 'high expectation' and 'motivation' in student learning is highly valued and recognised across the school by the parents, students and staff. One of the 2018 SIP priorities is to 'ensure task design provides intellectual stretch and challenge' using literacy as the starting point. Complementing this priority, the principal

reported that, in 2018, all teachers are familiar with and use student learning data with the aim to provide quality tasks to engage and stretch all students.

Several staff members reported that recent professional training in programs such as STEM 500 – Technology, LDAM, and Back to Front maths, has challenged their thinking about how they teach, with a strong focus on ‘stretch’ in learning. Understanding the pedagogical methodology of the STEM 500 work, and combining it with design thinking of LDAM, was seen as transferable across the curriculum. As stated by one teacher: “We are changing from doing lots to a more narrow and focused approach to lesson planning”.

Recent work in understanding the elements of formative assessment has enabled teachers to trial aspects of the process in student engagement. Their learning has been conducted with support from the literacy coach and district senior leader learning improvement primary (SLLIP). Staff are trialling aspects of formative assessment process that include verbal and non-verbal feedback (for example, traffic lights and written feedback).

Teachers recognised that they have a diverse range of students within their classes; however, differentiated learning strategies for these students vary amongst staff. The review panel witnessed ability grouping as the main strategy for catering for the students’ different learning needs. Teachers used a number of diagnostic tests to form these groups, and indicated that they rotate explicit teaching amongst these groups. During the classroom observations, there was a bias towards working with students who needed more intensive explanations, while more capable students worked independently.

Depending on the age group, teachers commented on their use of different scaffolding approaches and entry points for learners. These include simple check-ins, rephrasing instructions, modifying work and questioning. The majority of students supported these approaches in saying that their teachers explained things clearly and use different ways to help individuals. Students also said that teachers sometimes made learning interesting through games, demonstrations, videos and humour.

The use of learning intentions varied across the school, with some teachers describing their use of learning intentions as the topic focus, while others said it was student goals. Evidence of learning intentions was displayed in some classrooms and, when asking students what it meant, there was low-level understanding of the purpose. Learning goals were not clearly understood or talked about with parents. Teachers recognised that the use of learning intentions and learning goals is an area for further development.

The students generally agreed that their learning was interesting, with teachers offering a number of ways to present their work. However, when asked about how challenging it was, the students indicated that only about 50% of the work given over an average week was ‘hard’ with a bias towards the lower side. Student survey results indicated that 60% of respondents think ‘that learning should be challenging’. Students would like to see more challenging hands-on tasks, with less worksheets and workbooks.

Students interviewed indicated that conversations with their parents about their learning took place rarely to occasionally. In most situations, students only initiated the conversations when the learning was interesting to them (for example, a project topic or a specialist subject lesson). Students were unanimous that parents asked them about their school day on a daily basis. Parents indicated that, generally, their children only talked about hands-on or ‘fun’ activities but rarely about their literacy and numeracy learning (apart from test results). The school may consider strategies to promote enthusiasm and engagement about student learning across all curriculum areas, incorporating student voice in the planning process.

From class observations, in the majority of classes, the learning culture was interactive, positive and respectful. Most students knew what was expected of them and what to do, especially with routine-type activities. There were some differentiated tasks set with teachers, or SSOs, checking on work, conferencing individuals or groups, and providing oral feedback.

Teachers could articulate their own personal understanding of what stretch and engagement means and what strategies they employ within their classrooms. General comments about stretch for all students tended to focus on the lower ability groups, with little reference to the middle and higher band range.

Parents were generally happy with learning opportunities offered to their children; however, further challenge in their learning would be preferable, especially for the more able children. This sentiment was supported by a parent comment that improved learning is “beyond working at the table”. Some parents would like to have more information about the level of challenge offered, and its comparison to either other cohorts or like-schools. Parents acknowledged the school’s consistent focus on learning.

The governing council reported that student achievement data is presented regularly and clearly, explained by the leadership team and teachers.

Processes are in place for the next step of developing teacher capacity in developing themselves to improve their pedagogical knowledge and practices in stretching and challenging all students with their learning. The school is poised to build a culture of learning and high expectation within the classroom, across the school and the broader community. Revisiting tools, such as growth mindset and the learning pit, to specifically teach students about stretching themselves and being persistent/resilience at a deeper level, would be helpful.

The school would benefit from developing and embedding common understandings relating to intellectual stretch and challenge from the perspectives that intellectual stretch is applicable for all students and in all learning areas and is most effective when tasks are designed that provide multiple entry and exit points. In this way, a whole-school approach to intellectual stretch and challenge can become embedded practice that is known, understood and supported by students, staff and community.

#### **Direction 2**

**Collaboratively develop a whole-school approach that embeds intellectual stretch and challenge, promotes and sustains engagement and rigour in daily classroom teaching and learning, and is understood by the whole school community.**

### **What is the school doing particularly well and why is this effective?**

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practice is contributing significantly to school improvement at Birdwood Primary School was evident at the school.

The school community partnerships of Birdwood Primary School are seen as a strength that serves to improve school programs and climate, connecting families with others in the school and broader community. The Farm Day is a long-standing event that unites the school with the local community and beyond. Its value has a number of facets that impact on student learning, including team and relationship-building amongst staff, parents and students in working together for a common cause; the development of enterprise skills of the students in creating products to sell; a sense of community service; positive relationships between the school and local business; and the generation of funds to support the learning programs in the school.

## Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

Birdwood Primary School teachers are provided with and use structured time for ongoing collaborative professional learning.

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

1. Strengthen the whole-school assessment processes to include school agreements in using formative assessment practices based on the collaborative use of data and effective pedagogy that builds on teacher capacity.
2. Collaboratively develop a whole-school approach that embeds intellectual stretch and challenge, promotes and sustains engagement and rigour in daily classroom teaching and learning, and is understood by the whole school community.

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




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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 91.3%

## 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, 96% of year 1 and 59% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement for year 1 and a decline for year 2, from the historic baseline average.

In 2018, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 59% of year 3 students, 73% of year 5 students, and 77% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the SEA.

For 2018, year 3 and 7 NAPLAN reading, the school is achieving below, and for year 5, within the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2018, 33% of year 3, 29% of year 5, and 11% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 83%, or 10 of 12 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 and 36%, or 4 of 11 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2018.

#### Numeracy

In 2018, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 71% of year 3 students, 80% of year 5 students, and 80% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For year 5, this result represents an improvement, and for years 3 and 7, a decline from the historic baseline average.

For 2018 year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN numeracy, the school is achieving within the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2018, 21% of year 3, 9% of year 5, and 26% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 3, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 43%, or 3 of 7 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5, and 67%, or 4 of 6 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2018.