EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR TWO WELLS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in June 2015
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 Liz Matheson, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Julie Taylor, Review Principal.
Policy compliance

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

The Principal of Two Wells Primary School has verified that the school is working towards being compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal advised action is being taken to comply with the following DECD policies:

- Governance: The Principal is holding discussions with the Chairperson of the Governing Council on how they can encourage more parents to be involved and how they can be more consultative.
- School Organisation: Currently the notion of cyber-bulling is incorporated into the existing School Discipline Policy; however the Principal advised it needs to be highlighted as a particular concern and may need a stand-alone policy to be developed.

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 91% which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Two Wells Primary School is an outer metropolitan Reception to Year 7 school with an enrolment of 305 students. There are 13 classes. Two Wells is located in a semi-agricultural area, 40 km north of the Adelaide CBD. The school has an ACARA ICSEA score of 943, and is classified as a Category 3 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 30 Students with Disabilities (9%). The school has identified a further 111 students with additional learning needs.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in her third year of tenure, a Deputy Principal appointed in 2014, a School Counsellor currently on maternity leave and backfilled internally within the school, and a Curriculum Coordinator appointed in 2015.

The school has had a high proportion of teachers employed on contract for a number of years, which has impacted on the stability of staffing within the school. In 2015, the Principal has been able to employ a majority of permanent teachers, which should result in reduced turnover of staff.
Lines of inquiry
During the review process, the panel focused on four key areas from the External School Review Framework:

Student Learning: How well are students achieving over time?
Effective Leadership: How well does the leadership facilitate the development of high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?
Effective Teaching: To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?
To what extent is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction?

How well are students achieving over time?

The pre-review analysis of student achievement data over time revealed that 23 out of a total of 43 (53%) Year 1 students in 2014 met the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) in Running Records. The average percentage of students who met the SEA during the period 2011 to 2013 was 26.5%. In Year 2, 21 out of 32 students met the SEA (i.e. 66%) which is an improvement on the average of 48% between the period 2011 and 2013.

In Two Wells Primary, the ratio of growth was 28% at low growth, 49% at medium growth and 23% of students in upper growth in Year 1. The growth rates in Year 2 were more promising with 59.5% of students demonstrating upper growth. This trend is positive and may reflect a more systematic and synthetic approach to teaching the alphabet principle and phonics since 2013.

At this stage, this positive trend has not impacted on student achievement in regard to NAPLAN testing in Years 3, 5 and 7. In 2014, the participation rate of students was lower than past years as a result of absenteeism and withdrawal. The Principal advised that there was a significant change in 2015 as very few students were absent.

In 2014, 26 students (59%) met the SEA Year 3 reading. This compared with 28 out of 30 students (89%) in 2011. There has been a downward trend in achievement levels from 2011 to 2014. The proportion of students meeting the SEA in numeracy dropped to 45% (20 out of a total of 44 students) from a previous 3-year average of 91%.

Achievement in Year 5 has declined compared to the school’s historic average from a previous 3-year average of 91%. The gradual decline in the proportion of students meeting the SEA in Year 5 is similar to Year 3. The growth rate between Year 5 in 2012 and Year 7 in 2014 was also a concern with a much higher than expected percentage of students in the low growth domain. NAPLAN student achievement data indicated that over several testing periods, the achievement in writing attainment is the lowest of any of the literacy aspects of the test in all year levels and over several testing periods.

The Review Panel considered achievement as measured by PAT-R and PAT-M. The panel was cautious of drawing conclusions on these results as there has only been one testing period and it is not possible to make any statements about growth. There appears, however, to be alignment between results in NAPLAN and these data sets.

Based on the findings of the pre-review of student achievement and low growth, the Review Panel investigated the extent that the school has high expectations of students and a focus on learning. Consistent high expectations for students are one of the ‘defining’ characteristics of school improvement. The Principal was very clear in her presentation that she is trying to change the expectations of student learning and to engender a culture of improvement. The Principal is strategically acting to use data and a whole-school approach to make improvements. The Review Panel listened to members of staff and did not detect blame or discounting of students’ achievement levels. The discussion topics focus was “what can we do to support our students?”
The School Improvement Plan (SIP) refers to the achievement of the National Minimum Standard in NAPLAN as a target. This is common in many schools as the concept of the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement as a higher benchmark was a new initiative in 2015. The Principal was clear this would be changed in the next SIP.

Direction 1
Address the downward trend in student achievement and low growth by maintaining a focus and high expectations on student learning.

How well does the leadership facilitate the development of high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?

The Principal has promoted a whole-school approach in literacy and numeracy to provide coherence and consistency in learning for students. This work has also been driven by the impact of high turnover of teachers over the last few years and the need to articulate and document expectations of pedagogy and assessment.

The school has drafted Literacy and Numeracy Agreements as a starting point to this work. The Agreements are clearly referenced to the Australian Curriculum. These documents are considered ‘works in progress’ and it is expected that the Literacy Agreement, in particular, will be further developed as teachers gain greater understanding.

The Literacy Agreement outlines the evidence-based strategies to teach reading, known as “the big 6.” There is an agreed approach to teaching phonics and grammar. A genre-map Reception to Year 7 specifies the text types requiring focus at each year level. Guided reading is a small group pedagogy expected to be used across the school. Teachers in the early years are discussing the best approach to developing students’ oral language and one teacher talked about developing oral literacy through intentional play. The Junior Primary has been successful in obtaining a grant to work more closely with the preschool (ECHO project) and, through this, it is planned to gain greater continuity in children’s learning as young people transition to school. The Daily 5 provides a framework for the literacy teaching in the middle primary years, although there were different approaches between the teachers. Students in Years 6 and 7 informed the Review Panel that there was consistency between the upper primary classes, and described a focus on the development of comprehension skills.

The Numeracy Agreement outlines the expectation that students will participate in frequent mental routines, problem-solving and reasoning. The emphasis in the document reflects the Proficiency strand in the Mathematics Curriculum. The intention of the pedagogy underpinning learning in mathematics is to enable students to learn a variety of strategies to avoid ‘one way’ of solving problems. Teachers are expected to identify misconceptions students may have developed and to provide explicit instruction and reflection time to address this thinking. The use of equipment, hands-on resources and differentiation to support all learners is expected.

The school has adopted a common approach to behaviour management designed to build resilience and self-regulation in students. Teachers explained this approach was effective as it helped students to problem-solve and take risks. Many students who met with the Review Panel indicated they were familiar with the concept of smart choices.

Professional learning has been provided to support teachers to develop their pedagogical practices and knowledge. In order to minimise the negative impact of teacher turnover over the last 5 years, the school has acted to ensure similar approaches are promoted and expected. A newly-appointed Coordinator is released from classroom responsibilities to enable teachers to translate their learning into classroom practices. The establishment of learning teams is a new initiative and, consequently, there is a varied level of collaborative planning and review within the teams.
The challenge for the school is to ensure the evidence-based practices outlined in the Agreements are implemented and the quality of instruction is continually improved to positively impact on the downward trend in student achievement. Each teacher has produced a Performance Development Plan in 2015, which outlines their specific performance objectives for the next 6 to 12 months. Most of these plans indicate teachers have examined their students’ achievement levels and include specific strategies and performance indicators to support their students to achieve acceptable levels of growth.

The Review Panel considered that these plans provide a platform for ongoing data-informed discussions between teachers and their line manager. Leadership also needs to take into account the individual learning needs of teachers and use various processes, such as formative observation and feedback, as well as discussions with students, about how they are learning, to ensure that the quality of teachers’ planning and instruction is continually improving.

Direction 2
Provide students with cohesion and consistency in their learning by ensuring quality instruction and the implementation of the evidence-based practices outlined in the whole-school agreements.

To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?
The Review Panel met with a group of parents whose children have been verified with a disability. The stories told by the parents reinforced the need for teachers to be able to effectively make adjustments and modify their planning and instruction to support all children.

The school is endeavouring to identify and support specific learning needs early in children’s schooling. The Deputy Principal has developed systems to identify students, track and review their progress. Intervention for students with specific plans and modifications is provided by School Support Officers (SSOs), mainly within the classroom, with the students’ learning tasks designed by teachers. Leadership and teachers reported this system is working well. The school is encouraged to continually review this approach to ensure it continues to add value while, at the same time, supporting teachers to develop their capacities to provide targeted and effective differentiation.

Communication with parents is a professional obligation. Furthermore, research shows that partnerships with parents are a contributing factor in students improving their achievement and engagement in learning. This is most effective when parents are viewed as partners, particularly when students are having difficulty. The Deputy Principal acknowledged that the development of more effective partnerships with parents of students with additional needs was an aspect of the school’s performance which could be improved.

Through their performance plans, many teachers identified they have a range of learning needs within their class. One example indicated that the range of reading levels within one Junior Primary class varied from some students on a level 1 to 2, while other students were on levels 25 to 26. Other teachers have indicated in their performance plans that differentiation of their curriculum was their main objective for professional improvement. The Review Panel acknowledged this is a complex task and investigated how teachers are supported to do this effectively.

Differentiating instruction involves the planned provision of multiple pathways designed to meet students’ developmental needs without compromising expectations and beliefs that all children can improve. It does not mean ‘less of the same’. The Curriculum Coordinator is working in classes with teachers to model and support effective differentiation. Some teachers provided the Review Panel with the individualised approaches they use to extend students and to provide greater scaffolding for those who are struggling or have a verified disability.

Direction 3
Support teachers to provide multiple entry points and explicit scaffolding to enable all students to access the curriculum. Enable teachers to effectively plan for differentiation and to set and regularly review goals for and with students, to improve.
To what extent is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction?

The analysis and use of achievement data was identified by leaders and teachers as critical to providing targeted support for students. The Principal advised that the school has reviewed and streamlined a number of data sets being collected by teachers, with the focus increasingly on the use of this data to inform planning and intervention and to track progress more frequently. The collection and use of Running Records in all year levels, until students are deemed to be independent, was a new initiative. Teachers reported their recent participation in a deeper analysis of the students' answers in NAPLAN and PAT-R tests had been helpful for them in understanding what skills students had difficulty with and, therefore, the implications for their teaching.

The school has compiled the distribution of A–E grading or equivalent in 2014. At this stage it is too early to identify clear patterns of growth and achievement. However, the data set provides teachers with an opportunity to explore the implications for their assessment practices and consistency in their judgements across year levels. Teachers are learning how to assess students' writing and to allocate a Language and Literacy level using the DECD scaling system. Teachers reported they have found this process to be complex. As students progress through their schooling, the requirement to compose texts in all curriculum areas increases. For teachers to be able to support their students, they also need to know how to assess writing and to determine what constitutes quality. As the achievement in writing, as measured by NAPLAN, is lower than other aspects, it will be strategic to persist with using the Literacy and Language assessment processes.

The Review Panel asked students from Years 3 to 7 what they needed to do to improve in their learning. Some students talked about reading-on, sounding out, putting the word into context if they did not know a word when they were reading. Many students did not know how they were going and, other than in reading, were not able to articulate how they could improve or what constituted quality work. A few students talked about teachers using rubrics and these provided students with a greater idea of what teachers used to mark their work. Research shows that the use of quality feedback, which shows students what they have to do to improve, has a positive impact on achievement as well as increasing the motivation of students to want to improve. This impact is strengthened when students have a good understanding of assessment criteria and exemplars of quality work. Furthermore, when assessment is used as a formative and continual process (rather than as a summative task), teachers gain greater insight into what students are having difficulty in understanding and can provide timely support and intervention.

**Direction 4**
**Support students to improve by using formative assessment processes and quality feedback.**
**Enable teachers to collaboratively plan assessment tasks and to moderate students’ work to ensure rigour and consistency of judgement in assessment processes.**
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Two Wells Primary School is tracking satisfactorily. The school has developed whole school approaches to provide cohesion and continuity for students and is using data to inform planning and instruction.

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

1. Address the downward trend in student achievement and low growth by maintaining a focus and high expectations on student learning.
2. Provide students with cohesion and consistency in their learning by ensuring quality instruction and the implementation of the evidence-based practices outlined in the whole-school agreements.
3. Support teachers to provide multiple entry points and explicit scaffolding to enable all students to access the curriculum. Enable teachers to effectively plan for differentiation and to set and regularly review goals for and with students, to improve.
4. Support students to improve by using formative assessment processes and quality feedback. Enable teachers to collaboratively plan assessment tasks and to moderate students’ work to ensure rigour and consistency of judgement in assessment processes.

Based on the school’s current performance, Two Wells Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2019.

Tony Lunniss  
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.

Lynda Fitzpatrick-Brown  
PRINCIPAL  
TWO WELLS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson