

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

Report for Kersbrook Primary School

Conducted in June 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 Liz Matheson, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Katherine Holman, Review Principal.

School context

Kersbrook Primary School is situated 36kms north-east of the Adelaide CBD and is part of the Torrens Valley Partnership. The school caters for 81 students from Reception to Year 7. The school has an ICSEA score of 981, and is classified as Category 7 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 2 Aboriginal students, 6 students with disabilities, 4 students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), 1 child in care, and 12 students eligible for School Card assistance. The school has 3 classes and the students are in multi-levelled classes.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in her 1st year of a five-year tenure. In 2016, there were 3 temporary principals, following a principal who had previously been at the school for 10 years.

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 two key areas from the External School Review Framework:

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

Improvement Agenda: To what extent do teachers use data and information to inform their planning and instruction?

How embedded and planned are the systems and practices for self-review?

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

The staff and the Governing Council appreciate the greater organisation and structure provided by the newly appointed Principal, particularly following an unsettled year in 2016, with a number of temporary changes in the Principal position. Staff members are confident the solid team collaboration underpinning the way they work will be strengthened with greater clarity and direction. Most importantly, all groups observed the way in which the Principal is formalising and documenting procedures and policies, providing a basis for consistency and the development of shared understandings.

Teaching and learning in mathematics and numeracy is a priority for the Torrens Valley Partnership. Teachers have engaged in Professional Learning (PL) at Partnership forums, as well as through webinars and discussion at school. The Review Panel was provided with extensive evidence that the PL was having a direct impact on student learning of maths and numeracy. Most students from Years 4 to 7 cited mathematics as their favourite learning area. They described the problems set by teachers as "challenging but not overwhelming". The Review Panel noted the use of mathematical vocabulary as they described the kind of problems they had to solve and explained their 'hard thinking'. Students observed teachers were using less worksheets and making problems relevant to their interests. Students also commented on the teachers' ability to explain the task in different ways to help with their understanding. They talked about choices they have in learning involving collaboration, negotiation, and reflections with their teachers.

Teachers were asked how their pedagogical practices had changed as a result of the focused professional learning. They were more cognisant of asking open, and less leading and suggestive questions. Most importantly, there was a common understanding that "reasoning and problem-solving gives students the skills rather than content". By focusing on the proficiencies, students develop strategies they can use and transfer to other contexts. The Review Panel observed teachers share their thinking and learning with their students, as a metacognition practice. This was clearly helping students' understanding.

Teachers were adamant they would sustain these pedagogies in their classrooms beyond the Partnership focus. The recent Partnership professional development in moderating student work was seen as most useful, providing insight into the importance of task design. Several teachers talked about their learning design in other Learning Areas, and were thinking about how they could support students to demonstrate higher-grade learning.

The professional learning is an ongoing collaborative process within the school with active participation by the Principal. At this stage, there is no documentation of whole-school expectations in relation to learning, literacy or mathematics.

In relation to literacy teaching and learning, the Review Panel observed variation in the practices and understandings across the school. There also did not seem to be the same level of explicitness and rigour as observed in mathematics teaching. This concern is supported by the 2016 NAPLAN Reading data outlined in Appendix 2, which showed that 10 out of 15 students (67%) met the SEA in Year 3, the lowest percentage in the Torrens Valley Partnership. Furthermore, the percentage of students achieving in the Higher Bands in all year levels has decreased. On a positive note, in reading, Year 7 students achieved above the comparative level of similar students across South Australia.

The Review Panel met students who love reading and are prolific readers. Most of these students considered themselves to be good readers because they were reading “thicker books with smaller print”, and when they came across an unfamiliar word, they could work it out. They clearly have good fluency and decoding skills. When asked, however, how they could become better readers and what strategies they used for comprehension of all text types, they were less articulate. Some students admitted they do not stretch themselves during reading lessons, and often choose the same genre.

The school identified the development of students’ inferential comprehension skills and informative writing as school priorities. At the time of the review, the school has not yet had time to focus on these areas. The Review Panel wondered if there was a common understanding amongst staff of how children learn to read. Phonics, spelling and vocabulary development are being taught in each class, however, it was not clear whether there is a systematic school approach using evidence-based instructional strategies. There is no current system of tracking students’ reading and writing skill acquisition, including comprehension strategies. In discussion with teachers during the review, there was an acknowledgement they may not be using the same level of explicit and metacognitive strategies as they are using in teaching maths.

As stated above, teachers are appreciating greater clarity in direction and expectations provided by the new Principal, as aspects of school life are being documented and formalised. At this point of time, these procedures and structures relate more to organisational matters. Over time, there also need to be agreed understanding and expectations in regard to teaching and learning, so that students experience greater coherence in their learning as they progress through their schooling.

Direction 1

Develop and enact school agreements to ensure common understandings and expectations of assessment, pedagogy and the curriculum in numeracy and literacy.

To what extent do teachers use data and information to inform their planning and instruction?

There are currently three multi-level classes at Kersbrook Primary School. Within each class there is a broad range of learning needs, including students with special needs and others who need to be intellectually stretched. This context adds a complexity to teachers’ planning. The Review Panel was keen to investigate the extent teachers, and the school, analyse achievement data to provide key pointers to the gaps or ‘next steps’ in student learning and more targeted planning and teaching.

The three classes were using a rubric to track student progress in mathematics, based on the proficiency strand in the Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards. This common approach gave teachers a clear indication of the next steps in learning. In relation to the ACER PAT tests, it seemed the school uses this data to see if students have progressed, plateaued, or even gone backwards. Not all of the teachers were aware that the PAT tests can provide a student and class profile of strengths and gaps, and a direct line of

sight to more targeted planning.

In the early years children are regularly tracked in the acquisition of sight word recognition. In relation to the Running Records, the Review Panel noted these were being taken twice a term. For Reception and Year 1 children the records are being used to group children of similar reading levels, however, the analysis of Running Records was not evident. Running Records are a vehicle for teachers to closely observe students' ability to self-correct, to use visual, semantic and meaning cues as they are learning to read. For most children, these strategies need to be explicitly taught and practised.

A few children are not making the expected progress in reading. While they are receiving small group support, the Review Panel did not see evidence of specifically targeted and designed learning experiences informed by fine-tuned diagnosis of the learning difficulties.

In relation to other Learning Areas, some teachers are using explicit success criteria so that students know what is expected as they do inquiry-based learning. The Review Panel saw outstanding work students had done with their families displayed in the library, and students were able to explain why they had achieved their grades. This work is captured in the form of samples and photos in a portfolio, and forms part of the school's reporting system.

Teachers were asked to reflect on the school's capacity to make data-informed judgements about student learning. Teachers know their students' levels, and those students who are below, at, or above the Standard of Educational Achievement. The recent experience in moderating student work samples in mathematics was seen as useful in gaining greater consistency in their judgements, as well as in task design. The use of achievement, growth and perception data to inform the strategic priorities is relatively new to the school. As outlined above, the Review Panel concluded that the use of data to intentionally design learning programs and interventions could be improved. Furthermore, enabling students to set goals and, most importantly, be able to articulate and understand the strategies they need to master, could be strengthened, so that they are partners in the assessment and learning process.

Direction 2

Strengthen the analysis and use of data to intentionally design more targeted learning experiences and interventions.

How embedded and planned are the systems and practices for self-review?

The Site Improvement Plan (SIP) has three priorities, which align with the Torrens Valley Partnership Plan. The SIP articulates the strategies that will be used to lift the achievement so that the school can realise its targets. The targets refer to outcomes as measured by Running Records, PAT tests and NAPLAN, the number of students meeting the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement and retained in the higher bands. The Review Panel noted the targets for Running Records achievement were low, and the Principal agreed they should be increased as some children in Year 2 had already reached and surpassed the target at the end of Term 1.

At the end of 2016, the school dedicated time in a pupil free day to examine students' achievement data. Prior to this, it appears the analysis was at a more surface level and conducted during staff meeting time. Staff had noted the drop in higher-band achievement in reading in all year levels, and development of inferential comprehension skills was identified as a priority to improve.

A SIP is not intended to include all of the things a school does or values as important. An improvement plan needs to focus on the priorities and strategies that are new, or need to be strengthened. Schools need to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies, so that they can embed what is most effective into everyday practices in each classroom.

There is clear evidence from the achievement results and the way in which students could articulate their learning that improvement is occurring in maths teaching and outcomes. The key for the staff is to clearly identify the practices that have had this positive impact, so that they can be replicated and embedded. The Review Panel believes that the coherent and consistent approach across the school, the intentional development of students' mathematical vocabulary, emphasis on the proficiency strand of understanding and reasoning, the open questioning and problematised tasks, explicit teaching and the use of meta-

cognition as an instructional strategy and students' voice in the learning process, have all been key ingredients in their success.

Through the discussions of the SIP, it was agreed that the strategies outlined in the literacy section would not necessarily result in the school realising the targets. Professional learning and resources may help, but research into school improvement shows the quality of teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge and capacities make the difference, as has been evident in maths teaching.

Staff members at Kersbrook Primary School are dedicated and passionate to support their students to improve in their learning. They want to work smart and effectively. The school is encouraged to think about, and agree on, how they will evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies in the SIP; that is, how to evaluate their impact. Through regular and cyclical process, teachers and the school, as a whole, need to become better evaluators, as we know that the same pedagogical practices will not result in improvement. In determining impact, student reflections and voices provide an insight into what has and hasn't resonated and, therefore, what strategies are effective.

Direction 3

Develop self-review and improvement planning, utilising students' voices as a key component of evaluation processes, to ensure effective strategies are developed and actioned to achieve strategic priorities.

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 Kersbrook Primary School.

[Effective practices in establishing collaborative and student-focused connections between learning and school are contributing to students' passion for learning and improvement.](#) There is a collaborative culture between the staff, with a willingness and desire to continuously improve. Staff members are participating in professional learning in teaching and learning in numeracy, and are applying it to their classroom practices. The Governing Council are on the same page and clearly represent the interests of the whole school community.

Evidence of these practices was verified in discussions with students, via walkthroughs of classrooms, a Governing Council meeting, interviews with teachers, and the Principal's presentation.

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Kersbrook Primary School has a strong collaborative, improvement-focused culture. Teachers are keen to learn and apply their learning to their classroom practices.

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

1. Develop and enact school agreements to ensure common understandings and expectations of assessment, pedagogy and the curriculum in numeracy and literacy.
2. Strengthen the analysis and use of data to intentionally design more targeted learning experiences and interventions.
3. Develop self-review and improvement planning, utilising students' voices as a key component of evaluation processes, to ensure effective strategies are developed and actioned to achieve strategic priorities.

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



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Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY



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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.

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Jill Gurner
PRINCIPAL
KERBROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL

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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 Kersbrook 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:

Site Procedures Item 1

The school is revising and updating the OHS Management Plan and Safety policy. There is one building yet to be audited using the Hazardous Chemicals Datasheet, and a plan to check every 5 years needs to be developed and actioned. The school needs to check it is using the required checklist for plant management purchase and disposal.

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 91.6%.

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, 73% of Year 1 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. The results for Year 2 are unavailable, as the school did not enter this data within the required timeframe.

In 2016, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 67% of Year 3 students, 70% of Year 5 students, and 86% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Year 3, this result represents a decline, and for Years 5 and 7, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

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

In 2016, 20% of Year 3, 20% of Year 5, and 14% of 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, 33%, or 1 of 3 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016, and no students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.

Numeracy

In 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 73% of Year 3 students, 80% of Year 5 students, and 86% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 5, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average, and for Year 7, little or no change.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Year 3 has been upwards, from 56% in 2014 to 73% in 2016.

For 2016 Year 3 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the range of results of similar groups of students across DECD schools, whereas for Year 5, the achievement was above.

In 2016, 27% of Year 3, nil percent in Year 5, and 29% of 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, no students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016, and 1 of 1 student from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.