

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

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR GAWLER EAST PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in November 2015



**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 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 Brett Darcy, 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 Gawler East Primary School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies.

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 91.5%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Gawler East Primary School caters for children from Reception to Year 7. It is situated 58 kilometres north of the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2015 is 423 students. The school is classified as Category 6 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school's ICSEA score has declined from 1027 in 2011 to 981 in 2014.

The school population includes 12 Aboriginal students, 32 Students with Disabilities, 126 families eligible for School Card assistance, and 7 students under the Guardianship of the Minister.

The Principal is in the final year of his tenure at the school. The Governing Council and DECD have agreed for the Principal to continue leading the school for one more year beyond his tenure. The school has a Senior Leader currently working part-time at the school and part-time in a Corporate DECD role. There is a Senior Leader with a Curriculum and Pedagogy focus and a School Counsellor (0.8FTE). Both of these leaders are in their first leadership appointments.

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 Teaching:	How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?
School Community Partnerships:	How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and throughout the school?
Improvement Agenda:	How well does the school make data-informed judgements about school learning?

How well are students achieving over time?

In the early years, reading is monitored against Running Records. Over the past four years, an average of 62% of Year 1 students reached Reading Level 15 or above, and 75% of Year 2 students achieved Reading Level 21 or above.

Analysis of 2015 student achievement data shows that 80% of Year 3, 53% of Year 5, and 70% of Year 7 students met the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) on the NAPLAN Literacy-Reading test. There was a 3-year upward trend in Year 3 reading achievement. The proportion of Year 5 and 7 students meeting the SEA in the reading test, however, decreased from an average of 71% and 74% over the period 2008 to 2014, to 53% and 70% respectively.

In relation to students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands in reading, 33% were in Year 3, 19% were in Year 5, and 20% were in Year 7. This compares to an average of 31%, 22% and 19% for Years 3, 5 and 7 respectively, between 2008 and 2014.

Scores for the NAPLAN Numeracy test show that 80% of Year 3, 58% of Year 5, and 66% of Year 7 students achieved the SEA. This compares with the proportion of students achieving the SEA during the period of 2008 to 2014 as 69%, 69% and 72% respectively.

In relation to students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands in the numeracy test, 29% were in Year 3, 9% were in Year 5 and 8% were in Year 7. This compares to an average of 18%, 15% and 17% for Years 3, 5 and 7 respectively, between 2008 and 2014.

In regard to the school's testing of PAT-R and PAT-M, 71% of Year 6 students met the SEA, whereas 34% of Year 4 students met the SEA in the PAT-M test. Although 2015 was the first year the school has assessed students using the standardised PAT tests, the results will provide student achievement data on an annual basis to enable the school to make strategic decisions and targeted interventions.

How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

Teachers talked about the 'density' of the Australian Curriculum and ways they are working together to ensure students have a solid foundation of skills and knowledge. The percentage of students in the higher bands in NAPLAN and in the PAT tests suggests teachers also need to stretch and challenge students. The overarching proficiencies and big ideas in each curriculum area have been designed to enable deeper learning and intellectual stretch. Teachers are encouraged to ensure these are at the forefront of their thinking and planning as they design curriculum units.

Many teachers develop assessment rubrics to outline to students what is expected of them in work units. Some have been developed with students and use student-friendly language. Teachers reported these rubrics are not yet rigorously aligned with the Achievement Standards in the Australian Curriculum.

The Literacy Agreement is evidence-based and outlines the expectations of teachers to ensure all 6 components of the reading process are explicitly taught. The Numeracy Agreement outlines program expectations reflecting the four proficiencies in the Mathematics curriculum. Some teachers reported that their participation in professional development has impacted significantly on their understanding of teaching problem-solving using real-life contexts.

The development of Literacy and Numeracy Agreements is intended to provide greater coherence and consistency for learners across the school. This includes an expectation that teachers will take and use Running Records across the school in 2016 and beyond.

At this stage, the impact of Agreements in classroom learning was not clearly or consistently evident. For example, some students' workbooks consisted of mass-produced work sheets, pages of computations and the same weekly spelling activities. Students indicated they did not master skills or retain knowledge from these kinds of activities.

Direction 1

Establish structures and processes to facilitate collaborative planning and reflection of the pedagogies teachers are using to implement the school's Literacy and Numeracy Agreements and the Australian Curriculum.

How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and throughout the school?

The Governing Council and majority of teachers at the school recognise that the school's culture is more student- and improvement-focused than in past years. Most are keen to work together to realise the school's vision to "develop a community of independent learners who are able to contribute as active members of society".

Many teachers expressed concern about the level of engagement of students in their learning. They described students as often completing work without enthusiasm or motivation. Some teachers talked about the need to raise the school's academic and behavioural expectations of students. A few teachers suggested students at the school lack aspirations.

Most teachers have embraced the school's approach (i.e. Play is the Way) to develop students' capabilities to self-regulate their behaviour and demonstrate greater resilience towards their learning. This is a significant change, from a punitive to an educative approach to managing students' behaviour and learning. It provides common and consistent language and structure across the school.

A group of teachers formed a volunteer Professional Learning Community (PLC) in a *Learning Frontiers* innovations project, which seeks to develop greater engagement and aspirations. Other teachers have since joined this voluntary group. Teachers provided examples of what has occurred at the classroom level as a result of their participation in the PLC. Their inquiry-based pedagogy engages students in using digital, visual and written texts to research and find information. Students are provided with opportunities to work with others, to have greater choice about topics and how they present their learning. They are actively involved in the learning process through participating in excursions, creating designs and applying their learning to relevant contexts. Teachers provided anecdotal examples of how their innovations are impacting positively on students' persistence and motivation. They reported students are asking questions about the topic of study and showing greater interest. Students indicated they find the inquiry-based learning to be interesting and motivating. Many teachers are trialling and endeavouring to use digital technologies to build greater student involvement in the learning process. Junior Primary students have responded positively to learning coding.

One example provided by the Governing Council and students related to work on Anti-Poverty, which involved an in-depth study, raising money and communicating with politicians. It enabled students to make connections beyond the school. They were the first Primary School to be recognised for this work.

As stated above, many teachers joined the PLC because of their concern about the level of engagement of students. The initiatives that have been implemented through involvement in the PLC appear to be having a positive impact; however, a common understanding of what is meant by rigour and engagement and what it doesn't mean was not clearly evident. In undertaking this work, the school needs to consider that engaging with young people is more than a one-off event as it requires sustained activity over time. Furthermore, to enable the school to be strategic and analytical about the impact of their practices, they need to agree on a method of measuring student engagement, which takes account of relationships, school practices and classroom pedagogies.

Direction 2

Develop an agreed understanding of what is meant by student engagement, high expectations and rigorous learning. Establish an agreed method of measuring the extent of student engagement so that the school and individual teachers can evaluate their effectiveness.

How well does the school make data-informed judgements about school learning?

The school's Agreements have established clear protocols on the collection of data. Some teachers do pre- and post-testing of concepts and skills. Junior Primary teachers are using Running Records to inform their planning. At this stage achievement data is used to various degrees.

The student achievement data shows that different approaches are needed to cater for the range of learning needs. For example, the percentage of Year 5 students achieving SEA in reading and numeracy is just above 50% and there were 8 students achieving in the upper bands. While a few identified students will receive intensive intervention provided by SSOs, teachers' daily instructional strategies need to be tailored to target the specific learning needs within each class.

In 2015, performance development processes were more data- and outcome-orientated discussions. The school is in the early stages of triangulating achievement data to inform strategic decisions.

Based on this evidence, the school needs to strengthen its use of data to tailor support for individual students, at a class level. Furthermore, student achievement data and growth need to be used to evaluate the impact of school programs and to refine the school improvement plan.

Direction 3

Use achievement data to plan and implement tailored and targeted instruction, to track and monitor progress and to inform strategic decisions.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Gawler East Primary School has developed a greater student and improvement-focused culture. Teachers have been engaged in developing agreed approaches to student behaviour and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy to provide consistency and coherence for students. It is now time to rigorously and collaboratively use data more strategically and to implement the whole-school Agreements in each classroom.

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

1. Establish structures and processes to facilitate collaborative planning and reflection of the pedagogies teachers are using to implement the school's Literacy and Numeracy Agreements and the Australian Curriculum.
2. Develop an agreed understanding of what is meant by student engagement, high expectations and rigorous learning. Establish an agreed method of measuring the extent of student engagement so that the school and individual teachers can evaluate their effectiveness.
3. Use achievement data to plan and implement tailored and targeted instruction, to track and monitor progress and to inform strategic decisions.

Based on the school's current performance, Gawler East Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2019.



Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL
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.

Robert Wildy
PRINCIPAL
GAWLER EAST PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson