

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

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR ELLISTON AREA SCHOOL

Conducted in October 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 Linda Olifent, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Pam Kent, 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 Elliston Area 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:

- DECD Performance and Development Policy. Staff Performance plans will be a focus in Term 4, 2015.
- Responding to Abuse and Neglect training is scheduled for Term 4, 2015.
- A Volunteer Policy in line that accords with DECD guidelines will be developed in Term 4, 2015.
- Cyber Safety Policy – A review of user agreement forms and the development of a whole school policy is scheduled for Term 4, 2015.
- WHS Risk Management Matrix – will be used by staff from Term 4, 2015.

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 88.7%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Elliston Area School is a Reception to Year 12 school, currently with 63 enrolments, Reception to Year 9. The school is situated on the Eyre Peninsula, approximately 648 kilometres from Adelaide. The school is classified as DECD Index of Disadvantage Category 5 and has an Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) score of 971.

The school population includes 6% Students with verified Disabilities, 11% Aboriginal students, 3% students from English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) background, and approximately 21% of families are eligible for School Card assistance.

The community base is one of farming, fishing and surfing. Clearly defined values underpin the school's structures and learning programs.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in her second tenure at the school (the role encompasses a 0.2FTE teaching load), and a Coordinator.

Lines of inquiry

During the review process, the panel focused on three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

Student Learning:	How well are students achieving over time? To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged?
Improvement Agenda:	How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement and to what extent are the improvement plans developed collaboratively and agreed to by all staff? How effectively are evidence and data translated into actions?
Effective Teaching:	How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning and to what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged?

How well are students achieving over time?

Considering the data below, there needs to be some caution in making any judgement due to the small numbers represented in the student cohorts at the school.

In the early years, reading achievement is monitored against Running Records. In 2015, 6 out of 9 Year 1 students and 4 out of 5 Year 2 students met the Standard of Educational Achievement.

The reading achievement, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that, in 2015, 7 out of 8 Year 3, 5 out of 5 Year 5, 2 out of 3 Year 7, and 3 out of 5 Year 9 students met the SEA. The Year 5 result is significantly higher than in previous years.

The 2015 NAPLAN student progress result in reading, from Year 3 to 5, between 2013 and 2015, showed 80% of students had demonstrated middle to upper growth. No report of Year 5-7 and Year 7-9 growth is recorded due to the small numbers of students in these year levels.

In relation to the number of students who achieved in the higher reading bands, as measured by NAPLAN, the 2015 results were, 2 out of 8 students in Year 3, 3 out of 5 students in Year 5, 1 out of 3 students in Year 7, and 2 out of 5 students in Year 9.

In 2015, Higher Bands retention rate was 3 out of 4 students from Year 3 to 5, 1 out of 1 student from Year 7 to 9, and 2 out of 3 students from Year 3 to 9.

The Numeracy achievement, as measured by NAPLAN, indicates that, in 2015, 8 out of 8 Year 3, 5 out of 5 Year 5, 3 out of 3 Year 7 and 4 out of 5 Year 9 students met the SEA. This is an excellent overall achievement for the school.

The 2015 NAPLAN student progress result in numeracy, from Year 3 to 5, between 2013 and 2015, showed 60% of students had demonstrated middle growth, and no students were reported as making upper growth. No report of Years 5 to 7 and Years 7 to 9 growth is recorded due to the small numbers of students in these year levels.

In relation to the number of students who achieved in the higher numeracy bands, as measured by NAPLAN, the 2015 results were, 3 out of 8 students in Year 3, 0 out of 5 students in Year 5, 1 out of 3 students in Year 7, and 0 out of 5 students in Year 9.

In addition, 1 student in Year 7 in 2015 was retained in a Higher Band from Year 3.

The challenge for the school is to lift the numbers of students in the higher proficiency bands, and retain them at these higher levels as they progress through the school.

How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement and to what extent are the improvement plans developed collaboratively and agreed to by all staff?

Sustained improvements in educational outcomes come about by engaging in collaborative self-review both of analysis of performance, and the evaluation of practices, programs and improvement strategies that inform future improvement priorities. The Review Panel was interested in exploring the extent to which whole-school strategies were agreed to and implemented across the school.

In 2015, the site improvement priorities at the school are Literacy and Numeracy, Australian Curriculum, Student Wellbeing, and Review, Improvement and Accountability.

The Site Improvement Plan outlines evaluation measures and broad targets in relation to the improvement priorities. The panel noted that there was clarity across the staff about the priority areas. However, there was a need for a higher level of agreement and documentation about specific strategies to drive classroom implementation, particularly in the Reception to Year 6 section of the school. Staff confirmed that due to the small cohorts of students, explicit targets for learning outcomes are more useful when individualised.

The panel heard that student achievement and progress was collated and discussed at staff meetings. There was evidence of comprehensive data/evidence being collected by teachers. An online data system has been initially established, and there is a need for this to be further developed to enable easy access for all staff, to inform shared discussions about student learning and to facilitate smooth transition between year levels and sub-schools.

Student wellbeing is a continual focus at Elliston Area School. The school is to be commended for the strong ownership and community culture that exists. Students identified that they are accountable to each other and everyone takes care of each other, that there is no bullying and that "people with disabilities are looked after". Staff agreed that student behaviour is positive, and productive relationships with students and parents result in the wellbeing of individuals being more easily catered for. Parents stated that a community environment exists and the children are motivated by the relationships they have with their teachers.

An issue raised by several teachers related to the breadth of planning and differentiated teaching required in addressing the curriculum demands in multi-year level classes. Through careful budgeting the school has been able to reduce class sizes to support teachers catering for the complexity. The Principal confirmed that this would be sustainable in the foreseeable future.

Leadership and teachers confirmed the quality support they had received from the Australian Curriculum facilitators, engagement in Professional Learning Communities with colleagues from the Central Eyre Partnership, and participation with a range of credible professionals through a variety of initiatives. There was individual and collective evidence of this learning being enacted to varying degrees across the school.

The Principal meets with each staff member once per term for professional discussions that include teacher professional learning requirements and individual student needs. The staff performance development structures are currently being revised.

Direction 1

Improve the reading, numeracy, achievement and growth across the school, by ensuring the improvement plans have a clear focus on classroom implementation, with specific and agreed strategies. Develop explicit targets for individual student learning outcomes that are regularly evaluated.

How effectively are evidence and data translated into action?

The collection of data across the school is aligned with the school's data schedule. The panel saw evidence of a variety of data and evidence collected by class and specialist teachers. Teachers also spoke about additional data sets that they collect to inform their teaching. The view of most Primary teachers was that their own data was more reliable than NAPLAN, PAT assessments etc. The panel noted that there were inconsistencies in the Primary Years assessments in relation to the amount of scaffolding and support given to students. The reliability of assessment data would be increased by the implementation of a consistent approach to conducting assessments.

School data and evidence (student work samples), together with the NAPLAN data, conflicted with A-E grade levels according to the Australian Curriculum. The panel heard from teachers and leadership that there was a need for Professional Development in the area of moderation, through external networks, due to the small cohorts of students.

It became apparent to the panel that a few students were graded and reported against a lower year level. Teachers also described their reluctance to grade a student less than a 'C' because of the belief that it would negatively impact on the student's self-esteem.

Teachers spoke of formal and informal opportunities for discussing student learning and achievement. As a result, teachers reported that intervention programs and groupings within and across classes were constructed to cater for common needs. Most teachers verified the availability of some learning opportunities for extension of more capable learners; this was confirmed by the students.

Leadership presented a NAPLAN mapping tool which clearly showed individual student growth. The intent of plotting and graphing this data was for use in analysis processes and to inform practice. The panel noted that the analysis of what had led to increased or decreased learning growth was yet to be explored. Intentional strategies to translate the data into action were not explicit.

Reporting formats included student portfolios in the Primary sector. These contained extensive pieces of evidence demonstrating improvement. It was unclear to the panel how much scaffolding and support had been given to the students in the completion of the artefacts. Discussion with teachers confirmed that in some cases extensive support had been given.

Parents confirmed the value of the portfolios and written reports, and were particularly pleased that effort was included together with the grades. They expressed confidence that the class teacher or Principal would contact them if issues were identified in relation to learning and/or behaviour.

School-based student data led to the realisation that some students spent more time in Junior Primary than is typical. To ensure the school best meets the learning needs of all students the practice of students repeating year levels should be critically reviewed. Evaluation is required in relation to how students could be transitioned through the year levels, with support through effective classroom pedagogy and intervention programs.

Direction 2

Develop agreed protocols for conducting and moderating assessments to provide accurate data on which to base teaching and learning programs, and A-E grades. Report on all students with curriculum grades at their year level (Except DECD-identified students on Negotiated Education Plans).

How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning and to what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged?

A broad range of curriculum offerings were noted by the panel. The Principal explained that this is a focus due to the small/isolated environment that students reside in. The students acknowledged the community and natural environment they are part of as positive and spoke of the programs connected with the community e.g. wool show. Students reported feeling comfortable asking for assistance with their learning and describe

the school as providing good learning opportunities in relation to the range of subjects, and their involvement in leadership programs. Students were appreciative of having smaller classes and, therefore, more access to teacher time. In terms of individual goal-setting, the students generally could not confirm their involvement in designing and setting learning targets.

There was common agreement amongst staff that many students are not achieving their potential. Students' strengths and areas for improvement were articulated by leadership and teachers. The nature of the community results in the staff knowing the students and their families very well. Staff reported the students' commitment to learning and drive for academic excellence, particularly in the secondary years, is governed by lifestyle issues and choices, and their learning can be influenced by farming routines, weather, tides and waves. Parents also acknowledged that senior secondary students leave the school for further social connections, but that this is not viewed as negative about the school. The challenge for the school is to focus on high expectations and raise the aspirations of students.

The Principal talked about how attendance is tracked and analysed. There is a pattern of lower attendance in Reception, Years 8 and 9. The panel saw evidence of documented processes being enacted to address non-attendance, with particular success in individual cases. The data for Semester 1, 2015 shows improvements are being made. The Principal explained that there had previously been a trend of Reception students not attending fulltime when they commenced school. Steps are in place to address this through transition processes with the preschool and communication with parents/caregivers.

Assisting teachers to better understand strategies to cater for individual differences, and aligning support mechanisms in a coherent fashion, are pivotal improvement strategies to meet the explicit needs of students.

A high level of appreciation of leadership support for access and involvement in quality professional development was acknowledged by staff across the school. Examples included the Scientist in Residence Program, Ann Baker Mathematics strategies, Edutech, and working with the Australian Curriculum Coordinator. These opportunities were described by the teachers as having a high impact on their teaching to engage learners. In the upper year levels, the panel saw evidence of the explicit connections made by staff between the Australian Curriculum and SACE. Through discussions and artefacts presented to the panel, it was clear that all staff had increased their professional reflection and implemented their learning, to varying degrees, in their current practice to engage and challenge the students. Students spoke of their appreciation of the visits and resulting changes in Maths lessons from the Australian Curriculum Coordinator. Years 4 to 10 students confirmed that the use of rubrics in assessments in a variety of subject areas assisted them in understanding what was required of the learning task and how they could improve.

Teachers across the school reported a range of techniques that are used to provide differentiated learning tasks to engage the diverse range of students within each cohort; for example, multiple entry points, a variety of assessments tasks including models, Power Point presentations, and the use of ICT visual media. Students were less clear about how the learning was differentiated in the classroom for different year levels and abilities. They acknowledged the complexity for the teacher, but some primary students experienced a sense of frustration in regards to the lead time in instruction and support.

The panel cited some examples of differentiation and noted that there is a constant need to continue to strengthen this work across the whole school, and for all staff to provide a coherent curriculum and increase student challenge and engagement.

The enthusiasm and commitment of the staff as a whole is conducive for improved teaching to engage and challenge students at Elliston Area School.

Direction 3

Develop, implement and document coherent differentiated teaching practices. Engage the students in goal-setting focused on high expectations and ensure task design provides opportunities for intellectual stretch for all learners.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Elliston Area School is tracking effectively. The Principal proactively engages staff in professional learning to further build their capacity to deliver an engaging curriculum from Reception to Year 12.

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

- 1. Improve the reading, numeracy, achievement and growth across the school, by ensuring the improvement plans have a clear focus on classroom implementation, with specific and agreed strategies. Develop explicit targets for individual student learning outcomes that are regularly evaluated.**
- 2. Develop agreed protocols for conducting and moderating assessments to provide accurate data on which to base teaching and learning programs, and A-E grades. Report on all students with curriculum grades at their year level (Except DECD-identified students on Negotiated Education Plans).**
- 3. Develop, implement and document coherent differentiated teaching practices. Engage the students in goal-setting focused on high expectations and ensure task design provides opportunities for intellectual stretch for all learners.**

Based on the school's current performance, Elliston Area School will be externally reviewed again in 2019.