

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

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR ELIZABETH DOWNS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in November 2016



**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.

This External School Review was conducted by Ann O'Callaghan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Susan Copeland, Review Principal.

Policy compliance

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

The Principal of Elizabeth Downs PS 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:

Part 1 Governance: Items 2, 4, 5 and 6

The Principal has reported that collaborative practices with Governing Council are under development.

Part 2 Learning Improvement: Item 9

Cultural Competency training will be provided for all staff in 2017 as part of the Aboriginal Strategy 2013-2016.

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 is 88.3%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Elizabeth Downs Primary School is located 26 kilometres north of Adelaide, and is a member of the Uleybury Partnership. The school has an ICSEA score of 853 indicating that eighty-two percent of families are in the lowest demographic quartile. The school is classified as Category 1 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. Sixty-five percent of families are eligible for School Card assistance.

There are 354 students at the school, comprising 254 students in the mainstream and 100 students in the Intensive English Language Program (IELP). There are currently ten mainstream classes and eight intensive English language classes. Since the start of 2016, student numbers on-site have increased rapidly, including additional IELP classes – three in Term 3 and fourth in Term 4. There are 34 nationalities represented in the school community.

The mainstream population includes 30 (11%) Aboriginal students, 30 (11%) students with disabilities, and 69 (27%) students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD). Seven students with high support needs receive Resource Allocation Adjustment Panel (RAAP) funding. The mainstream student transience rate during the year is 42 students (17%) transferring in and 53 students (20%) transferring out.

The Preschool runs two groups per week for 60 children, a playgroup and an occasional care program.

The Leadership Team consists of the Principal and a Deputy Principal both new to the school in 2015, a Senior Leader: IELP who won the position from the start of 2015, and a Senior Leader: Wellbeing, who has been at the school for 18 years, and in 2017 starts her fifth tenure in the position.

There are eleven permanent teachers in the mainstream with ten or more years of service at the school. A number of contract teachers fill other teaching positions across the school, including five new graduate teachers in the IELP. Fourteen School Services Officers (SSOs) and six BSSOs provide student and intervention support and administration services across the school. There is a team of six educators working in the pre-school.

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, 30% of Year 1 students (7 of 23) and 26% of Year 2 students (9 of 34) demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

This result represents an improvement at Year 1 compared to the historic baseline of 22%, and little change at Year 2 from the historic baseline of 28%. Historically, there is no, or a low rate of growth from Year 1 to Year 2.

In 2016, the reading results for Years 3, 5 and 7, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 58% (18 of 31) of Year 3 students, 36% (11 of 31) of Year 5 students, and 37% (14 of 38) of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA.

For Years 3 and 5, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average of 41% and 27% respectively. The Year 7 result is a decline from the historic baseline average of 48%.

For 2016 Year 3 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the range of the results of similar students across DECD schools. At Years 5 and 7, the school is achieving lower than similar groups of students. Between 2014 and 2016, the school consistently achieved lower in Years 5 and 7 relative to the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools.

In 2016, 10% (3 of 31) of Year 3, 7% (2 of 31) of Year 5, and 3% (1 of 38) of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 2 of 3 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016, and 1 of 3 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.

Numeracy

In 2016, the numeracy results for Years 3, 5 and 7, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 45% of Year 3 students, 32% of Year 5 students, and 37% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 7, this result represents little or no change. The Year 5 results represent a slight improvement from the historic baseline average of 29%.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Years 3 and 7 has been upwards, from 33% at Year 3 and 23% at Year 7. For 2016 Years 3, 5 and 7, the school is achieving lower than the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools. These low results are seen in the numeracy data as a trend over time.

In 2016, one Year 3, one Year 5 and one Year 7 student achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 1 of 3 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.

Summary

The Review Panel discussed with the Leadership Team the school's entrenched patterns of low results and low growth over time, and selected the ESR overarching question as the main line of inquiry for the review: *How well does the school improve achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity?*

The Review Panel also gathered a range of evidence and opinions about what deliberate actions would be required to strengthen the school improvement agenda so all students can be successful learners.

Lines of Inquiry

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

Student Learning: **How well does the school improve student achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity?**

Effective Teaching: **To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?**

How well does the school improve student achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity?

To explore this line of inquiry, the Review Panel considered a range of data, surveys and documents. The panel also met frequently during the on-site visit with the Principal and Leadership Team to correlate the analysis of information gained from students, staff and parents. This evidence was drawn together as a synthesis and reported by the Review Officer for discussion at the post-review meeting with the Principal and the Education Director.

Overall, the Review Panel found that the Leadership Team and staff have a genuine and personal desire to improve the wellbeing and learning of the students at the school. They said they are “willing to do what it takes” to help students achieve “beyond their best”. All staff also shared, honestly, that they felt stretched by what needed to be done and by the perceived complexity of the workload required to bring it all together.

In response to recurring attitudes of this ilk, the Principal said she had taken steps in the first part of this year to create an urgency that ‘to do what it takes’ needs to start with a shared commitment from ‘all of us’ to make necessary changes in pedagogy to support all students to reach their learning targets.

To make the point strongly, a wide analysis of whole-school datasets was used by the Principal to present a clear picture to staff of the school’s performance. This ‘hard conversation’ showed that student learning outcomes, as measured by NAPLAN, were and still are significantly lower than similar schools, and less than what would be expected of other students with similar starting points.

The Review Panel’s analysis of school performance over time confirms the need for an urgent response. Historically, a low level of achievement in the early years is contributing to a cumulative effect from one year to the next, manifesting as limited or little progress as students move through the school. The latest results indicate that a higher percentage of students are achieving the SEA at Year 3 than at Years 5 and 7. In 2016, an average of 44% of students were in the lower progress groups from Year 3 to 5, and Year 5 to 7, in both reading and numeracy, compared to the state average of 25%.

Staff audits, surveys and interviews indicated that, while the results are a real concern, there is evidence of an underlying and understated acceptance that “it has always been like that”. Reasons provided for why a lower standard of work still exists included behaviour management issues, attendance being a hurdle, not enough support, class sizes being too big, the need for more training, parents not being involved, and “we can’t work any harder than we are”. Having said that, positive-mindset reflections were also shared by staff about what could be done better by the teachers themselves, as individuals and/or in different ways in teams (for example, by planning together) to start to see a transformation over time.

The school has spent the last two years immersed in processes of reflecting on current practice trying to identify ways to turn the school’s results around. The theme of ‘Reflect to Improve’ had been used in 2015 and ‘Ignite and Unleash’ was the theme for 2016. The self-review processes have included numerous audits, surveys and reflections, all recorded and many collated in a Floor Book. Most recently, the school started a process of looking collaboratively at the root-cause of the low achievement in an attempt to identify issues and challenges, investigate hunches and explore solutions.

A one-page Site Improvement Plan exists as a statement of the targets to be met in Literacy, Numeracy, Student Voice in Learning and Attendance.

While the Leadership Team has introduced a number of whole-school approaches, including student learning commission, data collection, assessment schedule, and programming expectations, they are not linked to any systematic strategic approach.

To put learning improvement and targeted teaching foremost and upfront on the school's agenda a process of detailed priority planning is now required.

The school needs to become extremely strategic and focused on what can be achieved within a 3-month, 6-month and 12-month cycle. These timelines allow for short targets to be set, supported and achieved. A collaborative process will ensure that a workable plan is designed and implemented methodically and in consultation with key staff and with others who may bring additional expertise. Such a plan will help to make the agreed whole-school expectations clear, include the key actions required to guide the targeted teaching strategies, and make transparent the support and accountability for implementation.

Direction 1

Raise the level of student achievement by collaboratively designing, implementing and resourcing a strategic and systematic approach to leading learning improvement.

Direction 2

Establish processes for teachers and students to engage regularly in opportunities that monitor the effectiveness of the strategic approaches and the impact on learning.

The Review Panel heard that knowing where every student in the school is up to in their learning has been one of the focus areas for the current school Leadership Team. Since 2015, a database has been created and available data recorded. In 2016, additional data has been added to ensure that the collection will support staff to track student achievement over time. Examples of this, referred to by the Leadership Team and other staff, were the Trust the Count (numeracy) data and ongoing Running Record (reading) data collected and collated for all students from Reception to Year 7.

The Leadership Team has recently documented a Whole School Data Calendar to list what school-level data is required from mainstream and IELC and when, term-by-term. While the list provides a management timeline to update spreadsheets and Scorelink, it is overwhelming as it stands alone. It will be timely in 2017 for all staff to take the most useful baseline data available, analyse it collectively to identify starting points for learners and staff, and then use it collaboratively, team-by-team, to develop a set of coherent and prioritised commitments to action.

Direction 3

Build the school's capacity to improve student achievement by engaging teaching teams in regular disciplined dialogue that informs collaborative planning and tracks the progress of individual students.

To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

Across the school, teachers and SSOs are challenged to plan rigorously for each child and track progress to ensure that *all* students make one year's growth every year from their own starting point, and towards or beyond the benchmark. The Principal is also aspiring for the school to achieve eighteen months growth to 'catch children up' to graduate from the school at the Standard of Educational Achievement.

All staff at the school are aware of the challenges they have as teachers. They talk about the complex needs of their students and appreciate the opportunities they have for professional learning to understand and respond to the many emotional and social needs presented by the students.

Amongst a range of implications they consistently identified was the challenge they face to engage all students in learning when they have limited language, literacy or numeracy skills to participate.

The importance of intervening through differentiation is, therefore, first and foremost in their planning. At the meeting of staff, the teams of teachers shared ways they are currently supporting students individually by trying to address the varied needs in a range of ways. They also identified ways they might increase the way they work with each other to do so: "I know how some teachers do it, but I don't know how we all do", or ways they could involve students more by 'finding out what students know' and 'what they would like to

learn”.

The staff responses about their professional learning needs provide an insight into a long list of professional goals and interests: the challenge is to be strategic about what will be included as part of a systematic approach and what will be set aside for later.

Although all prompt questions related to differentiated teaching, the Review Panel’s analysis of the feedback found that the high yield questions referencing task design and monitoring progress provide a relevant and strategic starting point for teachers to work on and monitor together.

Direction 4

Support teachers to work in partnership to plan and design learning tasks and use formative assessment processes to meet the varied needs, skills and interests of the learners in every lesson.

In these same discussions, it was clear that teachers recognise that many of the students are vulnerable and at-risk as learners. While the role of language in learning is a high consideration in the IELC, it is also a significant aspect in the mainstream and has a daily impact at the school yard.

The school’s aim to develop a learning community through the Tribes philosophy and values, needs to be constantly and consistently reinforced so that all students can feel included, that their sense of belonging at the school is strong and respected, and so that through common language, conflict can be addressed and cooperative learning undertaken.

The Review Panel heard from staff that despite a ‘Tribes in Action’ agreement that sets out expectations, these are not necessarily implemented consistently across the school or across year levels.

Within this context, it must also be reported that the Review Panel found recurrent evidence that some barriers to learning exist due to matters related to student behaviour. During the review, examples were shared by all staff, students and parents, about the impact that disengaged, interruptive and challenging behaviour is having on teaching styles and learning outcomes for all students. This is backed-up in the staff members’ associated Term 3 review, and in the recent opinion surveys, where 41% of staff felt there was room for improvement, as did 40% of students and 6 of the 8 parents who responded.

Some staff, especially teachers new to the school and early career teachers, spoke about the importance of having a consistent approach to teaching in place to ensure safe conditions for learning and supportive classroom management practices result in engaged students, more time on task and less interruptions.

Direction 5

Ensure that safe conditions for rigorous learning exist across the school, and that wellbeing for learning policies, practices and procedures empower all students to be resilient and thrive as capable and connected citizens.

The Leadership Team shared with the Review Panel the curriculum agreements used to support a whole-school approach. In addition to the one mentioned earlier for data collection, the documents cited related to Guided Reading, Programming and Planning, Literacy Agreement Planning Map (2014) and a Draft Mathematics Agreement (2014).

The IELP has an explicit Teaching and Learning Cycle that staff use effectively as a program requirement.

However, audits undertaken over the last year indicate that all the other agreements are not yet, for a range of reasons, consistently implemented across the school or even across year levels, a factor also, no doubt, contributing to the root-cause of the low and declining achievement across the school.

The Principal has recently introduced professional conversations with all teaching staff to support them in developing their professional practice and their competency progression against the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

The Review Panel endorses this process and commends the staff on their preparedness to be learners themselves in order to improve learning for all students at the school.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Elizabeth Downs Primary School has set aspirational targets for improvement and is taking steps to change pedagogy and raise the levels of achievement for all students from Reception to Year 7.

To meet the wide and varied needs of learners the teachers will need to engage fully in the process of strengthening their individual and collective practice. This includes addressing the challenges emerging in the Intensive English Language Program, which has doubled in size and, consequently, is managing an increasing number of personalised programs. All staff, students and parents would like to see more students engaged productively in their learning and a reduction in off-task and unacceptable behaviour.

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

1. Raise the level of student achievement by collaboratively designing, implementing and resourcing a strategic and systematic approach to leading learning improvement.
2. Establish processes for teachers and students to engage regularly in opportunities that monitor the effectiveness of the strategic approaches and the impact on learning.
3. Build the school's capacity to improve student achievement by engaging teaching teams in regular disciplined dialogue that informs collaborative planning and tracks the progress of individual students.
4. Support teachers to work in partnership to plan and design learning tasks and use formative assessment processes to meet the varied needs, skills and interests of the learners in every lesson.
5. Ensure that safe conditions for rigorous learning exist across the school, and that wellbeing for learning policies, practices and procedures empower all students to be resilient and thrive as capable and connected citizens.

Based on the school's current performance, Elizabeth Downs Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2018.



Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY



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.



Meredith Starkey
PRINCIPAL
ELIZABETH DOWNS PRIMARY
SCHOOL



Governing Council Chairperson
Sonia Mason.