

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

On-track evaluation report for Elizabeth Downs Primary School

One-year return conducted in March 2018



On-track evaluation process

A priority for the Department for Education 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 government schools.

All government schools are externally reviewed over a 4-year cycle. After the review the principal and the governing council chairperson receive a written report with a number of directions for improvement.

A copy of the External School Review report is available on the school website.

In some cases, when the review panel finds cause for concern about the levels of achievement and growth, together with evidence about the school's capacity for systematic improvement, a school will be advised that they will be visited again in a year.

Schools with a 1-year return are assisted during the intervening period by the education director and other department staff to ensure they receive coordinated, targeted and systematic support. Intervention is concentrated on building the school's capacity to improve teaching and learning across the school, lift expectations and achieve results as measured against the Department for Education Standard of Educational Achievement.

During this process, which occurs 12-15 months after the initial visit, a review panel determines the extent to which the school has, with external support, developed sustainable internal capacity to improve effectiveness and raise student achievement.

The school's priority improvement plan was the main document used as the basis for this review.

The review visit was conducted by Helen Tunney, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate, and Katherine Holman, Review Principal.

This On-Track Evaluation report should be read in conjunction with the report of the External School Review conducted at Elizabeth Downs Primary School in November 2016.

Directions from the External School Review report November 2016

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.

Additional information about the school context

The principal has advised that there are now 9 intensive English language classes (IELCs) in the school and 10 mainstream classes.

Development of a priority improvement plan (PIP)

The principal has advised that the PIP was finalised in February 2017.

The plan was sent to the executive director, Partnerships, Schools and Preschools in term 1 2017.

Strategic support provided to the school over the past 12 months

The principal has advised that the school was supported through the following:

- Learning Improvement division
- Principal consultant
- Education director
- Leadership coaching.

Evidence and evaluation referenced to directions in the priority improvement plan

Direction 1

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

On-track evidence

The ESR and 1-year return outcome has been instrumental for the school. Since then, leadership has:

- Narrowed the focus for improvement
- Focused on growth for every child, not just reaching SEA
- Created safe conditions for improvement
- Prevented distractions
- Made implementing the ESR directions everyone's business.

A strategic focus has been adopted and leadership has acknowledged that there is still a way to go.

The PIP team has been an important strategy for improvement. It has facilitated buy-in by all teachers. Release for teachers to regularly attend PIP meetings has been critical. These teachers identified work for each tribe learning community (a TLC is a professional learning group ('tribe') of teachers) from the PIP.

PIP teacher leaders have led the TLC work with the support of 1 school leader. The agenda for the TLCs is kept strategic and targeted, which is valued by all teachers.

Teachers stated that teacher membership in the PIP team gives them a voice at a leadership level in the school. This had not been the case for a long time at the school.

The PIP/TLC structure will remain regardless of the outcome of the OTE. The school will embed and sustain this improvement structure.

Ancillary staff meet fortnightly with leadership to link their work to the PIP. Staff have responded well to a more structured approach to improvement.

The panel found a very good structured response to the ESR findings and directions that has resulted in deep shared ownership by all staff of the improvement agenda. The panel was provided with abundant evidence of common understandings of, and commitment to, the school's directions. Staff talked to the panel in a common way about their undertaking of improvement, and were strongly committed to it.

One teacher said "the leadership provides clear direction, narrow and deep focus for the school, and a consistent deliberate approach". This comment reflects the view of all teachers.

The artefacts sighted provided significant evidence of a planned and resourced approach to leading learning improvement. Staff have been supported to deeply investigate and improve the impact of their practices through coherent, connected processes that include professional learning; coaching; group and individual performance and development and written feedback; observations; and inquiry-based, collegiate developmental foci. Leaders have been supported to lead this work with teachers and SSOs.

Whole-staff agreements, including a new rationale and belief statement 'Growing Learning Success', which redefines the core business of the school, shifting it from wellbeing to learning, have been developed and implemented.

The 2017 school performance report (SPR) shows that the school has improved in 5, had little or no change in 1, and a decline in 9 of 15 indicators. In response to this, a very detailed analysis of NAPLAN and

PAT data has been done by the school, which shows high actual levels of individual and cohort student learning growth that is not captured by the standard analytic process used to formulate the SPR. This school-based analysis shows that the overall school results, as represented in the SPR, are significantly impacted by high levels of students who do not sit the test but are not exempt; transient students (72% of these students did not meet the NAPLAN SEA in 2017), and EALD students, especially those from traumatic backgrounds and/or no previous formal schooling. The school-based analysis provides a far more nuanced picture of student learning growth in this school. This detailed, evidence-based approach also extends to an evaluation of the impact of school-based wave 2 intervention processes. This whole-school data work is an indicator of how much more strategic and systematic the leading of learning improvement has become since the ESR.

Review panel evaluation

Since the ESR the school has implemented a strategic and systematic approach to leading learning improvement. It is the view of the panel that, whilst the school has done this with support from LID and LET, internal capacity to continue this work unassisted has been strongly developed. This is largely due to the success of the PIP Review Team/TLC model, which has ensured all teachers have identified with, owned and become accountable for improvement in the school.

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.

On-track evidence

The school decided to discontinue involvement in a social work student program (which was historical and long-standing), as it could find no evidence that it was positively impacting student learning.

Multiple datasets are used to demonstrate learning growth in each student.

A school survey reflected that 74% of students said that teachers make learning intentions clear. This was verified in what students told the panel.

The school is monitoring the impact of improvement strategies.

Each student has a SMART goal that is monitored every 5 weeks. This deepens intentionality of teaching.

The efficacy of the TLCs is monitored. Reflection time is built into the TLC agenda.

A culture of shared accountability has developed through the TLCs. Teachers confirmed that each teacher makes a commitment to action and is accountable to share the results of their actions with their TLC.

Teacher focus has shifted from teaching to learning. There is more focus now on the evidence of learning to determine next teaching.

Artefacts of teacher reflection about developing dialogue and feedback to move mathematics learning forward show that teachers' views about learning in maths, and their role as facilitators of this, has shifted significantly (written feedback from 3 teachers was provided).

Review panel evaluation

The panel concluded that the school has established processes for teachers and students to engage regularly in opportunities that monitor the effectiveness of the strategic approaches and the impact on learning. Ownership for improvement has been fostered through the TLCs. The panel found through the

surveys and teacher interviews a high degree of enthusiasm for the PIP team and the TLCs to improve learning. The panel believes the school has developed the internal capacity to continue their work in this direction.

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.

On-track evidence

The school has developed a culture of collaborative planning through its instigation of 'tribes'. Each TLC is resourced through common NIT times, as well as other structured opportunities to meet, including regularly in staff meeting time. Some TLCs have worked very effectively in the Simon Breakspear model of 'learning sprints', where teachers examine intentionality of their teaching. The outcomes of this deep quality work include: students becoming more independent in maths lessons during IEL math classes; teachers more able to provide specific learning intentions and success criteria; and students becoming skilled in giving feedback to peers.

The work of other TLCs has been less deep but still effective. More work around the notion of 'grouping for purpose' is planned for 2018, with each teacher paired with one other in the TLC, and expected to plan for differentiation across both classes. This is the minimal expected level of collaboration in 2018 and the school plans to build on the quality of collaboration from this base. Teachers are unanimously committed to the TLC collaborative planning strategy.

Teachers talked to the panel about their collaborative use of an improvement cycle in their work. They now collaboratively use a range of data to plan, teach and assess in cycles.

The panel heard that teachers have developed the capacity to lead in different areas, for example, in data analysis, literacy and numeracy.

Targeted training and development has been provided to develop common knowledge and skills in priority areas fostering common language and practices.

Teamwork has become the norm at the school. All teachers work in teams and value this, and seek to do it increasingly in the future. "The TLCs make us accountable for doing things differently. It's made us more explicit, it's given us permission to try something different. We can then debrief with each other about how it's gone".

Teachers spoke to the panel about having a commitment to action and being more accountable. Further, they do not see this accountability as being imposed from the top. It is generated by their participation in, identification with, and commitment to their TLC.

Data has become central to the work of staff. Previously data was regarded with suspicion and seen as not relevant to planning learning for students in a Category 1 school. Teachers now value data and accept responsibility for its timely and accurate collection.

A group of teachers who were interviewed, self-rated their improved use of data as 8 to 9 out of 10. This improvement has occurred since the ESR.

Staff have identified that some data was not consistent or accurate, and have undertaken training to address this. At school, class and individual level, multiple measures of data and a range of data to inform decisions and judge efficacy are used.

The school uses research-based approaches to literacy and numeracy improvement. These approaches underpin whole-school agreements that are continuously reviewed and refreshed. Decision-making has become data-informed.

Intervention programs are fully evidence-based and monitored for efficacy. Intervention strategies have been modified based on observations of effective practice in another site.

Student transfer of skills from interventions into mainstream classroom learning is monitored.

Teachers identified that there is seamlessness through use of data between classroom practice and interventions.

Review panel evaluation

The panel concluded that teachers are collaborating successfully in increasingly sophisticated ways, using data to track the progress of individual students and to inform practice. The success of the PIP team was talked about at leader and teacher level. This structure has developed disciplined dialogue and the leadership capacity of teachers, and enabled them to lead for learning improvement through TLCs. An evidence base is being brought increasingly to this work. The panel believes the school has developed the internal capacity to continue their work in this direction.

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.

On-track evidence

The school has built the capacity of teachers to use feedback to inform practice. Staff understand and analyse feedback and identify its implications for their practice, stating: “We have been challenged about what we think our kids know” and “greater feedback to and from students enables the kids to analyse themselves, how they are going in their learning”.

Teachers are using data with students to develop metacognition and student learning agency. This enables students to see their own learning growth and to make their schooling more meaningful and purposed around learning.

Teachers are committed to the use of a common language and approach to literacy and numeracy learning. They are working collaboratively to develop a common dialogue to support deep thinking and problem-solving in students across the school.

Teachers talked to the panel about the use of formative assessment strategies. The panel observed these practices in classrooms, and students spoke to the panel about teachers’ use of these strategies.

Teachers spoke about wanting more time in TLCs for collaborative planning and assessment design.

The expertise of the IELCs has been centralized in the school and drawn on as capacity in literacy, numeracy and language learning improvements.

The ‘grouping for learning’ work planned for 2018 reflects this direction around planning and designing learning tasks and the use of formative assessment.

Review panel evaluation

The panel was given considerable evidence of teachers’ commitment to collaboratively design learning and use formative assessment. All teachers have changed their practices in the last 12 months as a result

of the improvement work. This was apparent through interviews, and also in the written survey that staff completed. Eighty-one percent of teachers had provided input to the panel either in person or by survey. The panel believes the school has developed the internal capacity to continue their work in this direction.

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.

On-track evidence

There has been a major shift in understanding of the core business of the school. Previously, it was focused on wellbeing, whereas now it has been strongly established as student learning. The panel found that all stakeholders identified that the business of the school and the reason everyone is there is to ensure quality student learning.

There has been a significant raising of expectations of student academic achievement. Rigorous, quality learning is expected for every child, with a 'no excuses' mantra continuously articulated.

A teacher said "we were doing lots of rescuing of students. Now we focus on their learning and supporting them with strategies to work hard in challenging learning".

Ways of tracking and monitoring student learning growth have been set in place to demonstrate small increments of student growth and to target teaching.

Students as agents of learning are being empowered through student leadership, student feedback, and the development of student metacognition. Also, growth mindsets, mindfulness and 'interoception' are being developed in students in the context of hard academic learning. Students are being supported explicitly to self-manage emotionally and to enjoy and value hard work and challenges.

A 'learning between the bells' mantra has been developed. This supports students to leave social and emotional issues outside of learning time so that quality learning is quarantined.

The school's core moral purpose of learning is used effectively by teachers to manage student behaviour. Teachers accept that if each child experiences authentic learning growth they will be more behaviourally self-managing.

Leadership provides rapid response to behaviour issues, but teachers work to support each other so that only major matters escalate to leadership intervention.

The panel felt that an area for development in the school is to strive for a greater feeling of calm. It was the view of the panel that students are very 'hyped-up' in their movements around the school. They are noisy and run a lot even inside. In a couple of classes, teachers spoke in very loud voices. It could be taken on as a goal to bring everything down to a calmer level.

The highly structured teaching (HST) class is seen by teachers as very effective, in terms of the learning for the students in the class, as well as significantly improving the learning environment in mainstream classes. This class has a significantly reduced student-teacher ratio as well as a full-time SSO. Behaviour data from the HST class and the whole school shows a significant level of improvement.

The school has become committed to continuously exploring ways to connect parents with their children's learning. Lack of parent engagement with the school is not used as an excuse for poor learning outcomes.

The success of the following combined strategies of redefining the school's core moral purpose; improving engagement and stretch in learning through quality pedagogies in both IELC and mainstream classes; improving student metacognition about learning and being a learner; and different, high-level resourcing for students with high-level, antisocial behaviours through the HST class, is evident in the school's behaviour data comparison of 2016 and 2017.

The physical improvements to the school are significant, including:

- Decluttering
- Disposing of mismatched and donated furniture
- Painting and re-carpeting to unify and refresh the appearance of the school
- Landscaping
- Upgrade of school uniform.

All stakeholders talked to the panel about the importance of these improvements. The school has become professional in its appearance, with stakeholders valuing both themselves and the learning work of the school.

Review panel evaluation

The panel concluded that the school has made significant progress in developing safe conditions for rigorous learning. No teacher identified student behaviour as a barrier to teaching. This is a significant shift from their responses in the ESR. The panel concluded that the school has the internal capacity to continue to work proactively in this space.

Outcomes of the on-track evaluation

Based on the evidence provided, Elizabeth Downs Primary School is on-track to effectively implement the External School Review directions.

The review panel found that self-review processes are regularly and strategically used to determine the impact school strategies and practices are having on student achievement. Effective teaching actively engages learners and provides challenging tasks. There is a culture of improvement characterised by high expectations for students. Student achievement data and other evidence are used to inform decisions and actions at the individual student, class and whole school level. Effective leadership provides strategic direction, planning and targeted interventions. Teachers are provided with and use structured time for ongoing collaborative professional learning. The school works in partnership with parents and stakeholders.

The principal will continue to work with the education director to implement the External School Review directions.

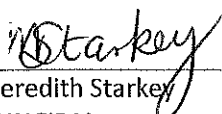
Based on current performance, Elizabeth Downs Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



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