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 Tony Sullivan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Helen Tunney, 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 Mulga Street Primary School has verified that the school is working towards being compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal of Mulga Street Primary School advised that action is being taken by the school to ensure it complies with:
- Cyber Safety Policy. The school ICT committee with be drafting a policy in Term 2, 2015 and presenting it to staff and Governing Council for approval.

Implementation of the DECD Student Attendance policy was checked specifically against a documented set of criteria. The school identified lateness as an issue and strategies are in place to address this and to improve overall student attendance. 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 93.2%, which exceeds the DECD target of 93%.

School context
Mulga Street Primary School is a school located in the regional city of Mount Gambier, with approximately 400 enrolled students. The enrolment has been relatively stable over many years. The school has an ICSEA score of 949, and is classified as Category 4 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 4% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students, 6% Students with Disabilities and a small percentage of students under the Guardianship of the Minister. Approximately 32% of families are eligible for school card assistance. The Principal has noted a change in the complexity of student needs emerging over the past five years. There is an onsite Children’s Centre now in its sixth year of operation with 60 children currently enrolled.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in her eighth year at the school, a newly appointed Deputy Principal and a Director for the Children’s Centre. Other leadership roles exist in the school organisational structure including a School Counsellor, curriculum and ancillary staff leaders. The school operational structure comprises four year level teams: Early Years, Junior Primary/Lower Primary, Middle Primary and Middle School.
**Lines of inquiry**

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

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<th>Student Learning:</th>
<th>How well are students achieving over time?</th>
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<td>Effective Teaching:</td>
<td>How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?</td>
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**How well are students achieving over time?**

Mulga Street Primary School has maintained a focus on literacy, numeracy and student wellbeing as strategic priorities over time. The pre-review analysis of student achievement data revealed a slight downward trend in literacy and numeracy achievement against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) over the past four years in the Year 3, Year 5 and Year 7 cohorts. Reading data for Year 1 and Year 2 indicates that reading gaps are identified and addressed as students move across the junior primary section of the school.

The school demonstrated its effectiveness in supporting student achievement with approximately 30% of students consistently reaching the upper two proficiency bands in reading (as measured by NAPLAN) over the past seven years. In particular, approximately 33% of the Year 3 cohort achieved in the upper two proficiency bands in reading over the past three years. The percentage achieving in the upper two proficiency bands dropped slightly at Year 5 and then rose marginally at Year 7. Approximately half of the students identified in the upper two reading proficiency bands at Year 3 are retained in these bands at Year 7.

The result for achievement in numeracy (as measured by NAPLAN) is not as positive, however, with the pattern of a slight dip at Year 5 and rise at Year 7 remaining consistent. The percentage of tracked students retained in the upper two proficiency bands in numeracy from Year 3 to Year 7 has been erratic. Approximately 40% of these students are retained in the higher bands through to Year 7.

This data pattern led the Review Panel to consider the following line of inquiry.

**How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?**

Evidence was presented by members of the school leadership team, staff members and members of the Governing Council that confirmed the school’s effectiveness in undertaking regular and comprehensive self review. Analysis of a range of data sets across all levels of schooling supported the school’s decision-making with respect to setting directions and resourcing for improvement. Governing Council members provided positive comments about the school’s directions and clearly articulated their knowledge and understanding of the agenda for school improvement through open and transparent engagement with the school leadership team and staff members.

School-based data sets presented to the Review Panel verified the school’s developing capacity to collect, analyse and track student learning and wellbeing data over time. There was an agreed expectation that staff members use the available data to guide improvement at the classroom level. However, leadership team members and teachers commented there were differences in how effectively this data was used. The new school data management system offers staff an opportunity to use the data in informative and timely ways at the team and class levels.
Direction 1

Improve student learning through staff learning team analysis of available data to differentiate their teaching to meet the varying needs and interests of learners in classes.

Evidence presented to the panel verified that staff members and the Governing Council actively engage in the school improvement process at Mulga Street Primary. Effective structures and processes exist to engage staff members in implementing the improvement priorities identified. Leadership skills across the staff team were used to implement the agreed improvement agenda. These were evident during observations of staff participating in professional learning in collaborative teams. Documented evidence demonstrated the effective use of data to guide curriculum decisions at the school-level to meet the learning needs of students. For example, the school had implemented oral language development in the early years, guided reading from Reception to Year 4 and, a whole school focus on narrative writing based on effective data analysis by school staff.

The school's vision statement 'Together Everyone Achieves More Success' (TEAMS) leads the way for school improvement. The panel observed inquiry teams and professional learning teams working professionally to implement directions documented in the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Professional discussion, evidence-based research and commitment to action research in classes were planned, discussed and documented in staff learning teams.

It was evident in documentation produced and discussions that took place during the External School Review that the collection and analysis of a broad range of data sets took place. Learning, behaviour, process, demographic and staff, student and parent perception data was used to monitor, review and plan for whole school improvement. A culture of inclusion for students with complex learning and social needs was evident in leadership, staff and Governing Council discussions.

During meetings with the leadership team, staff members, parents and students, reports were provided about the time spent addressing behavioural demands and the resultant impact on classroom learning. The leadership team confirmed the use of time, resources and whole school strategies to address this presenting need. Staff members and parent groups highlighted the need to support teaching staff to focus on students in the middle and upper bands of proficiency while addressing the highly complex needs of a minority of students.

Direction 2

Create safe conditions for students and teachers to engage in learning that supports, challenges and extends the needs and abilities of all learners.

Direction 3

Redefine a culture of high expectation for learning achievement within the school community for the benefit of all students.

Teachers were well informed about the various needs of students in their classes. It was evident from discussions with staff members and parents that class data sets and information are transferred between teachers to inform the learning program. Intervention programs are used to support the needs of identified students across all year levels. Various individual learning plans were verified for targeted cohorts of learners, e.g. Students with Disabilities and ATSI learners. Class teachers established learning goals and targets for students in reading and made these visible in learning spaces around the school in the form of individual growth charts. Programs implemented by the school such as 'Quality Start' and 'Play is the Way' were acknowledged by staff members and parents as important social and cultural programs enabling the reinforcement of positive learning dispositions.

Teacher professional learning was clearly evident within meetings held during the review period. Various team structures were established to guide the development of curriculum knowledge and teaching practice of staff. Leadership staff and parent comment confirmed the existence of effective curriculum and pedagogical
leadership. During the review, the panel observed a number of staff teams undertaking moderation of student writing against expected standards to develop consistency in teacher judgement with this aspect of literacy.

Staff teams undertook inquiry approaches to improving aspects of identified curriculum priorities and this was verified through documentation and panel observation of meetings. Early Years teachers acknowledged their important contribution in setting students up for success to be measured against national, state and school standards. This level of peer accountability was evident with other staff teams interviewed during the review, particularly as it related to the delivery of a connected curriculum scope and sequence developed by the staff team over many years.

The school leadership team, students and parents commented on the professional, dedicated, hardworking and collaborative approach presented by all staff members. The staff team varied in their length of teaching experience with ‘buddy’ mentoring established across the school to support those with less experience. Teaching staff were inducted into the school via verified documentation and performance management processes. Performance and development for all staff was verified through meetings with staff and in provided documentation. There was one sample of collated student feedback to a teacher evident in teacher performance and development documentation.

Documented whole school agreements were evident in the core aspects of literacy and numeracy across the school. The professional learning communities (PLCs) led these developments over time to support the staff to deliver a comprehensive and connected learning program. These professional learning teams led the curriculum development through consultation with all staff members. Accountability to peers was achieved through staff reporting structures and verified through staff comment and documentation.

Evidence was presented to the panel about the direct links these agreements have to the Australian Curriculum and Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL). Each of these agreements documented a scope and sequence, data collection schedule, resource ideas, teaching strategies and scaffolds for students. The use of assessment rubrics for the purposes of differentiated teaching, guiding intentional learning and formative assessment in writing was verified through staff and student comment and in documentation provided to the Review Panel.

The Australian Curriculum and TfEL were verified as fundamental to the core work undertaken by staff at the school. Assessment of student achievement across all year levels against the Australian Curriculum standards was undertaken for all students. This data was collected and aggregated by the school over a two-year period, but it was not clear how this data was being validated against other achievement and growth measures. In writing, it was verified that staff were planning common assessment tasks in teams, moderating student work against established rigorous criteria and reporting progress to students and parents. Parents and Governing Council members reported on the effectiveness of the formal and informal structures that were used to inform them of the educational progress of their children.

School structures and processes were in place to support teachers and students to engage with a planned and sequenced learning program from Preschool to Year 7. Early identification of student learning and social needs, and support provided through various interventions, was evident through school meetings. Parents, students and staff members reported of a requirement to focus on the needs of more capable learners through challenge, engagement, critical and creative thinking and high level expectations in class learning programs. Students spoke about a need to be intellectually challenged in their learning through meetings with the Review Panel and in samples of student written feedback to teachers.

Direction 4
Increase the proportion of students achieving the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement through rigorous, engaging learning tasks planned by the year level teams using the agreed whole-school developed Australian Curriculum sequences, assessment rubrics and team moderation.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Mulga Street Primary School is tracking well. Good performance was evident through effective leadership providing strategic direction, planning and targeted intervention. Teachers use structured time for ongoing collaborative professional learning related to curriculum development and improved teaching practices.

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

1. Improve student learning through staff learning team analysis of available data to differentiate their teaching to meet the varying needs and interests of learners.
2. Create safe conditions for students and teachers to engage in learning that supports, challenges and extends the needs and abilities of all learners.
3. Redefine a culture of high expectation for learning achievement within the school community for the benefit of all students.
4. Increase the proportion of students achieving the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement through rigorous, engaging learning tasks planned by the year level teams using the agreed whole school developed Australian Curriculum sequences, assessment rubrics and team moderation.

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

Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Anre Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
PRE-SCHOOL AND SCHOOL 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.

Janine Milson
PRINCIPAL
MULGA STREET PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson
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