EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR MONASH PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in August 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 Lyn Arnold, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Linda Olifent, 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 Monash 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 was found to be compliant with this policy and has implemented comprehensive tracking and intervention processes. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 91.2%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Monash Primary School is a Reception to Year 7 primary school located 230km north-east of Adelaide in the Riverland district. Enrolments in 2014 were 211 students, with a steady increase from 192 students in 2012. The school is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage, and has an ICSEA score of 1012.

The school population includes ≤1% Aboriginal students, 8% Students with Disabilities, 3% Students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), ≤1% Students under the Guardianship of the Minister (GoM) and 21% of families eligible for School Card assistance. There is a kindergarten co-located on the site, which serves the school community but is not part of the school.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in the sixth year of his first tenure at the school, a Teaching & Learning Coordinator (0.2), and a School Counsellor (0.4).

How well are students achieving over time?

In 2014, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicated that 89% of Year 3 students, 90% of Year 5 students and 86% of Year 7 students achieved the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). Between 2012 and 2014, the trend for Years 5 and 7 has been upwards from 68% in 2012 to 90% in 2014, and 70% in 2012 to 86% in 2014 respectively.

In relation to students who achieved in the NAPLAN higher proficiency bands, 37% were in Year 3, 35% were in Year 5 and 21% were in Year 7. This compares to an average of 29%, 17% and 20% for Years 3, 5 and 7 respectively over the previous five years, 2009 to 2013, indicating an upward trend in Year 3 and 5 results.

For those students who achieved in the NAPLAN higher proficiency bands in reading, 5 of 9 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2014, and 5 of 10 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2014. This compares to an average of 3 students retained in the upper bands at both Years 3 to 5 and Years 3 to 7 between 2008 and 2013.

In 2014, numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 78% of Year 3 students, 70% of Year 5 students and 79% of Year 7 students achieved the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Of students who achieved in the NAPLAN higher bands for numeracy, 37% were in Year 3, 5% were in Year 5 and 18% were in Year 7. This compares to an average of 23%, 6% and 18% for Years 3, 5 and 7 respectively over the previous five years, 2009 to 2013. As the data shows, there has been an upward trend at Year 3 over time, while the proportion of students at Years 5 and 7 are similar.

Examination of results for the retention of students, who achieved in the NAPLAN higher proficiency bands in numeracy, shows that 1 of 8 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2014 and 4 of 6 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2014. This compares to an average of 2 students and 1 student retained in the upper bands for Years 3 to 5 and Years 3 to 7 respectively, between 2008 and 2013.

On the basis of discussions relating to the student achievement data and the school's improvement priorities, the Review Panel explored two lines of inquiry. The first related to effective teaching and learning practices, and the second explored the consistency of approaches in reporting against performance standards.

To what extent are teachers' pedagogies reflective of Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL)?

The school's Teaching and Learning Site Improvement Plan 2015, amongst other objectives, states the aim is to develop successful learners who are motivated by and comfortable with challenge, and reflect on their learning in the context of how they learn and how they construct knowledge.

In support of this outcome, the school has a continuing focus on professional learning and the development of a whole-school mindset for effective pedagogy. This focus includes the use of the Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) framework and Compass Tool and, within individual teachers' formal Performance Development Plan, the identification of a TfEL domain that will be maintained, and another that will be improved upon in their classroom practice. Teachers have also engaged in collegial observation and

feedback processes to determine which pedagogical practices are being implemented, and to establish key areas for growth.

Given the school's investment in building the capacity of teachers to deliver quality pedagogy, combined with the improvement focus for building a positive school culture, the Review Panel explored a line of inquiry centred on Domain 2 of the TfEL framework; namely, 'Creating safe conditions for rigorous learning'.

This domain has four elements: developing democratic relationships, building a community of learners, negotiating learning, and challenging students to achieve high standards with appropriate support; all of which formed the basis for discussions and interviews with staff, students and parents.

Throughout discussions with the leadership and staff, the Review Panel encountered a willingness to engage in professional learning, adopt new approaches to teaching and learning, and to change things that are not working effectively.

Teachers were invited to self-rate the degree to which each element is embedded into their practice and responses suggested a high level of confidence for adopting the elements. Analysis of the accompanying descriptions for how they are putting the elements into practice further confirmed the staff is in the early implementation stage of a complex and long-term pedagogical change process.

Individual teachers, for example, provided illustrations of quality pedagogical practice in each element. The examples demonstrated that practices for developing democratic relationships and building a community of learners, in particular, are strongly linked to the school values of respect, responsibility and success, class expectations and the development of a positive 'no blame' school culture. The effects of the school's efforts in this regard were evident when talking with students. Overall, students are positive about their school environment. They uphold the school values, are able to articulate what these mean, and the values are observable in the way students interact with each other. They understand and work with the school expectations, report that they enjoy school, feel safe, and point out that the school is bully-free, suggesting the school has created safe conditions for learning.

This provides a strong foundation for the school to explore opportunities for the creation of rigorous learning as outlined in the TfEL framework through the further development of school-wide approaches to negotiating learning and challenging students with appropriate support.

In regard to negotiating learning, for example, the Review Panel saw some evidence of teachers using rubrics to help students gauge their progress towards achieving assessment and learning goals. What was interesting, however, was that many students were saying they could go beyond the 'Excellent' criteria in the rubric. From their perspective, it wasn't all that hard to achieve the top level criteria. When asked why they don't always achieve an 'excellent' grade, they explained it was because they did not have the time to complete all the tasks, did not organise their time or resources, or did not understand the requirements. Their comments suggested it was rarely because they could not do the work. Similarly, when asked what they thought would help improve their learning they collectively agreed as a group: 'make the work a bit harder'; 'set a couple of assignments instead of just one so we learn to manage two to three at a time'.

Further exploration of the design of rubrics revealed minimal evidence of student input into the development of the rubrics, design of assessment tasks and the associated measures, or the determination of success criteria across a range of tasks and projects. These findings offer an opportunity for the school to explore ways to increase the influence students have on their learning in authentic ways. In considering ways, for example, to share data that promotes personal benchmarking of achievement and progress and planning for improvement, the school will assist its students to understand the value and purpose of various testing and assessment procedures and the relevance of associated activities, tasks and feedback. Further, the involvement of students in collaboratively determining success criteria, how work will be assessed and graded, peer assessment and self-assessment, together with discussions of summative grading within a formative framework, will help build ownership and empower students to achieve their personal best.

Direction 1
Encourage students to achieve their personal best by developing consistent school-wide practices for involving students authentically in the design of assessment tasks, determining the associated benchmark measures, and establishing success criteria.

With respect to aspects of intellectual challenge, teachers spoke of setting learning goals. Examination of students' work, and through discussions with a range of students, it appears that learning goals are determined and set predominantly by the teacher. The Review Panel saw and heard very few examples of students setting personalised learning goals, or goals that develop complex reasoning or higher level thinking. Where goals were observed, most were related to task specific feedback, such as, 'next time use capital letters', 'use full-stops', 'include when things happen in your story next time'. Some goals were specific and measurable, and there were isolated examples of students being encouraged to build independence through goal-setting, mainly in the upper primary classes. Few goals, however, were time-bound or scaffolded student monitoring of progress or mastery in the pursuit of improving broader achievement outcomes.

Direction 2
Challenge students to achieve high standards with appropriate support by developing a continuum from *emerging skills* to *skill consolidation* across Reception to Year 7 of what personalised learning goals and intellectual challenge look like at each year level.

How effective are the processes to support a consistent approach in reporting against the Australian Curriculum performance standards?

In examining the A-E grades awarded by teachers at each year level, there is a disconnection between the NAPLAN and PAT-R results (standardised tests) and the teacher judgement of achievement. Overall, the A-E grade is generally lower than the standardised test results.

Parents also spoke of inconsistencies in the reporting of student achievement; the grade does not always match the comment and there is significant variance across the school in what information is shared in the report and interviews. The parents expressed a high level of interest in their child's educational progress and want information that helps them support their child. With respect to the written report, for example, there was general agreement that they would prefer to have more information about their child's achievements rather than the extensive information provided about the curriculum content covered across the semester.

The Review Panel recognised the moderation and reporting of A-E grades is an evolving teacher capacity, and current reporting practices are potentially reflecting teacher confidence, prior experiences and transition to the current requirements for benchmarking and communicating achievement to parents.

The school, therefore, will benefit from critically evaluating their judgements against evidence from student work samples and triangulating the grades with other forms of assessment and standardised testing. In assisting staff to align their judgements with other benchmarks, and refine assessment design that delineates the grades with greater accuracy, there is the opportunity to not only build teacher capacity to report A-E grades, but also provide a framework to share with parents that explains how grades are determined in ways both parents and students can understand.

In achieving this outcome, the leadership will want to explore ways the school can build the capacity of staff to lift and refine professional performance through formalised performance development plans. The current positive collegial relationships that have been developed within the school provide an ideal foundation for progress to the advanced levels of professional mentorship consistent with the Australian teacher professional standards for professional engagement in improving practice and student learning.

Direction 3
Promote transparency for the benchmarking of Australian Curriculum Standards across the school community by developing the capacity of staff to challenge each other's practice and lift professional performance to the next level with respect to making consistent and comparable judgements of student learning progress and achievement.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Monash Primary School is tracking well with evidence of student achievement data and other evidence being used to inform decisions and actions at the individual student, class and whole school levels, and effective leadership providing strategic direction, planning and targeted interventions.

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

1. Encourage students to achieve their personal best by developing consistent school-wide practices for involving students authentically in the design of assessment tasks, determining the associated benchmark measures, and establishing success criteria.

2. Challenge students to achieve high standards with appropriate support by developing a continuum from *emerging skills* to *skill consolidation* across Reception to Year 7 of what personalised learning goals and intellectual challenge look like at each year level.

3. Promote transparency for the benchmarking of Australian Curriculum Standards across the school community by developing the capacity of staff to challenge each other's practice and lift professional performance to the next level with respect to making consistent and comparable judgements of student learning progress and achievement.

Based on the school's current performance, Monash 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.

Brenton Chapman
PRINCIPAL
MONASH PRIMARY SCHOOL

Paula Nelsson
Governing Council Chairperson