

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

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR SOUTH DOWNS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in August 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 Tony Sullivan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Grant Small, 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 South Downs Primary 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:

Part 1 Governance: Item 2

The Governing Council will:

- Contribute to the collaborative development of the Site Improvement Plan;
- Engage in the school's self-review processes in relation to planning, initiatives, evaluation of student achievement, policies and programs;
- Report to the school community on a regular basis;
- Work collaboratively to document the school's Parent Complaints policy;
- Work with the Principal to monitor the school's policy and practices in relation to student behaviour;
- Monitor the school bullying data/trends/and initiatives as least twice per year.

Part 4 People and Culture: Item 4

The Principal will develop and implement a site Induction Policy in accordance with DECD guidelines.

Part 6 Site Procedures: Item 2

The safety, action and reporting on-line system (STAR) is current.

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 a documented set of criteria. The school had implemented tracking and intervention processes, and was found to be compliant with this policy. In 2015, the school reported attendance of 85.9%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

South Downs Primary School is located in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. The school caters for approximately 130 students from Reception to Year 7.

The school enrolls students from within and beyond the local community. The school does not have an on-site Preschool or OSHC facility, which impacts enrolment numbers.

The student cohort consists of approximately 12% Aboriginal or Torrens Strait Islander (ATSI) students, 18% Students with a Disability, 11% with English as an Additional Language or Dialect background, and 58% eligible School Card holders.

The school is classified as Category 2 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage with an ICSEA value of 909.

The school Leadership Team comprises a Principal in her first year of tenure and a Senior Leader position, which is currently shared between two staff members.

School Performance Overview

The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

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

Reading

In the early years, reading is monitored against Running Records. In 2015, 7 of 19 (37%) Year 1 students and 4 of 10 (40%) Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). Both results are below the school's historic average. From 2013 to 2015, there was a downward trend from 63% to 40% of Year 2 students achieving the SEA.

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 11 of 16 (69%) Year 3 students, 7 of 12 (58%) Year 5 students and 8 of 21 (38%) Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Year 7, the results are below, and for Years 3 and 5, they are within the school's historic baseline average.

For 2015 Year 3 and 5 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the results of similar students across the DECD system. For Year 7, the school is achieving below the results of similar students across the DECD system. The school is advised to monitor the comparative results at the Year 7 level as there is an emerging pattern over time (except for 2014) of achievement at the lower end of results of the comparative group of students.

In 2015, 2 of 16 (13%) Year 3, 3 of 12 (25%) Year 5, and 1 of 21 (5%) Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result is below the school's historic baseline average.

Of the 4 students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading at Year 3 (2013), taking into account arrivals and departures, 3 students remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015. This result shows an improvement compared to the school's historic baseline average. A single student in the top two bands at Year 3 (2011), taking into account arrivals and departures, remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. This result is below the school's historic baseline average.

Numeracy

In 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 7 of 16 (44%) Year 3 students, 6 of 12 (50%) Year 5 students, and 5 of 21 (24%) Year 7 students, demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 5, this result shows little or no change compared to the school's historic baseline average. The Year 7 results are below the school's historic baseline average.

For 2015 Year 3 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving below the results of similar students across the DECD system. For Year 5, the school is achieving within the results of similar students across the DECD system. The school is advised to monitor the comparative results at each of the year levels as there is an emerging pattern over time of achievement at the lower end of results of the comparative group of students.

In 2015, 1 of 16 (6%) Year 3, 1 of 12 (8%) Year 5, and none of the 21 (0%) Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result is below the school's historic baseline average.

Of the 2 students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy at Year 3 (2013), taking into account arrivals and departures, 1 remained in the top two bands at Year 5 in 2015. The Year 5 result shows little or no change compared to the school's historic baseline average.

The Principal's presentation highlighted the influence of all staff in taking professional responsibility for the improvement of all students at the school. This was reflected in her statement: "We all take responsibility for every child at South Downs". Her deliberations also emphasised a personalised approach to supporting all students through knowing the students well, and identifying the areas of improvement through patterns presented in learning data that is strategically collected and analysed.

The Principal outlined her intent to strengthen the integrity of the work that has commenced so that the students experience a high level of consistency as they move across the school. The Principal stated: "We

will take something and work it until we've got it". The staff have fully committed to their professional learning to engage students in literacy, numeracy and developing Growth Mindsets for learning. The Principal described the staff members' concerted efforts with families to improve students' attendance at school to maximise their engagement and outcomes from the structured learning programs on offer.

As a result of the above data and the Leadership Team's presentation, the Review Panel explored the Lines of Inquiry below.

Lines of Inquiry

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

Effective Teaching: **How effectively are teachers using DECD pedagogical frameworks to guide learning design and teaching practice?**

School Community Partnerships: **To what extent does authentic parent engagement with the school impact on student learning?**

Improvement Agenda: **How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?**

How effectively are teachers using DECD pedagogical frameworks to guide learning design and teaching practice?

The prevailing culture at South Downs Primary School is one of adults (teachers and SSOs) taking responsibility for the learning and wellbeing of all students across the school. A key aspect of this work involves knowing the presenting needs of students through the learning and demographic data strategically collected and analysed by staff at the school.

Literacy learning, in particular reading comprehension and vocabulary development, is a focus area for improvement. A number of literacy strategies are evident in the school to a high level of consistency: Guided Reading, Guided Talking, word walls (Tier 2 words), subject-specific vocab walls (Tier 3 words), talking without writing (to overcome blocks to learning), and levelled questioning were evident in classes across the school. Reading intervention is supported through leadership time, but also has a strong in-class focus through the support of school-generated SSO time. These expectations are clearly documented in a whole-site literacy agreement sighted by the Review Panel.

The staff at the school have determined through their data monitoring processes that numeracy is to continue as a priority for improvement at South Downs Primary School. An analysis of the datasets collected by the school has revealed a need to focus on a problem-based approach to develop stronger student engagement and interest in this learning area. Class diagnostic testing has revealed many misconceptions that students presented in numeracy. These are now being addressed through the learning programs. School-based analysis of PAT-M data reveals 66% of students from Year 4 to 7 achieved at least 12 months growth or more between annual assessments in 2015.

In an effort to maximise learning and support time for students, the school introduced 3 literacy and 2 numeracy blocks of time over the school week supported with allocated SSO time. As one student interviewed stated: "There is a lot of literacy and numeracy done here". The school has also demonstrated a raised intensity to ensure that students attend school regularly through the introduction of proactive strategies in partnership with students and parents.

The start to the school day has been modified to include fitness/movement and 'Play is the Way' activities to generate a positive start to the school's learning program each day. Termly awards are presented to students who achieve 97% to 100% attendance. At the time of the review, the school data revealed an improvement rate of 2% higher attendance than at the same time last year. As one teacher stated:

“Parents are now ringing the school about their child’s non-attendance!”

Target-setting for learning is a relatively new initiative introduced for every student at the school. It was trialled in 2015 but is being used comprehensively in 2016. Teaching staff meet with every student to establish three learning targets to be achieved in each school term in reading, writing and numeracy. These targets were explicitly displayed in all classrooms as visual cues for students. Students were able to articulate their learning targets during class visits and in interviews. The targets are reflected at the end of each term using a four-point achievement scale extending from ‘I’m on My Way’ to ‘Got It’. The achievements against the targets were reported in writing to the parents at the end of Semester 1, 2016. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the students are keen to work towards these targets. A teacher commented: “The use of the targets with reading has improved the ‘Lexile’ levels in my classroom”. A student survey is planned as an aspect of reviewing the effectiveness of this approach. About target-setting, one student interviewed commented: “It works for the students. If we don’t achieve the target, it remains there for the next term”.

Various teaching strategies were introduced to increase student engagement in learning, including: ‘no hands up’; ‘wait time’; ‘no rescuing’; the use of ‘pop sticks’; and the ‘gradual release of responsibility’ from the teacher to the student to generate thinking from all students during lessons. Intervention is occurring from Reception to Year 4 for the maths concept of ‘face and place value’. This is being led by a trained teacher who is also building the capacity of other teachers and the resources to support teachers’ work in this curriculum area. The teaching staff have engaged in professional learning in numeracy through structured ‘Webinars’ about the ‘back to front’ approach to design of learning in numeracy.

Staff performance and development planning commenced with the DECD template in 2015. The Principal modelled the expectations for staff in establishing small personal goals linked to the Site Improvement Plan (SIP). These plans are guiding professional conversations between line managers and staff. The AITSL ‘professional standards for teachers tool’ is also used for teacher professional reflection and performance discussions with members of the Leadership Team. Documented examples of this practice were provided to the Review Panel as evidence of this commitment.

Verbal and written feedback is provided to staff following performance conversations, walkthroughs and shared practice observations. The Principal recognises further approaches are needed to formalise the feedback for staff as it relates to their pedagogical practices. About these observations, the Principal reflected: “Learning alongside the teacher was quite instructive. I learnt a lot”. The students described the teachers as: “Enthusiastic; who make learning fun; they all like their job”.

The staff feel encouraged to ‘try new things’ in their teaching, and acknowledge that they have changed “the way we’ve taught”. They are supportive of the changes that have been implemented and work well together as a team. This was evident during the review and was reinforced through staff, parent and student comments. However, there was one prevailing theme mentioned by staff: “We like the changes being implemented through our teaching, but we just need time to settle them in – time to cement the work”.

Direction 1

Embed the agreed curriculum and pedagogical initiatives to a high level of competency and consistency across the school, using the evident teaching and leadership practices currently impacting a positive school improvement culture focused on student growth.

To what extent does authentic student and parent engagement with the school impact on student learning?

The local DECD Partnership has explored the role of authentic student voice in learning through the establishment of ‘Student Commissions’ in each site of the Partnership. The focus has been on developing Growth Mindsets and giving/receiving feedback between students and teachers. Anecdotal feedback from both indicates that the dialogue for learning has increased at the school. As an outcome from this work, the school is looking for more co-design of the learning happening between teachers and students. The current target-setting strategy used at the school is an effective reference point for this work.

Another initiative introduced into the school through the Student Learning Community (SLC) representative group was a focus on different levels of questioning. The SLC representatives introduced Level 1-4 questions into each class to encourage different levels of thinking related to their learning. This influence was evident in scaffolds on classroom walls and in conversations between students and teachers during observed lessons. Students were able to differentiate between the levels of questioning used to generate thinking about topics, themes and concepts being taught. The premise behind this work was documented as: "Good questions cause hard thinking".

A highly effective strategy employed by the school is the Student Case Management approach used to consider the 'holistic' needs of every student at the school. This approach originally expanded from a student wellbeing model to include a learning focus. Leaders and teachers meet termly to discuss the relevant strategies to be applied to support each learner in the school. The detailed staff knowledge of the varied needs of learners was verified during the on-site review. Documented evidence of identified needs and support provided was sighted by the Review Panel. This approach also resulted in the development of school spaces for the 'Shakers' (social skills development; self-regulation in the 'interception' room) and play-based learning in the Early Years.

There is still a level of reluctance by some parents to engage fully in their children's educational experience; however, small successes are acknowledged. Parents confirmed that school staff are open and approachable when discussing presenting issues. They acknowledged that, due to the school size, the staff know the students and parents well. In relation to students who display inappropriate behaviour, every attempt is made to keep those students engaged in school, rather than just suspending them. Staff are noting that parents are talking more about the importance of attendance, celebrating improvement in their child's reading, and the raised expectation for improvement in learning at the school.

Parents commented on the 'extra miles' some teachers went to connect students to the school and their learning, as well as the teachers' abilities to pick up where children were falling behind and provide support where needed (in some cases 1:1). The parents interviewed reinforced the work being done across the school: lifting attendance; setting learning targets with students; and developing Growth Mindsets with students. Parents appreciated the staff attempts to connect with them daily and through formal Negotiated Education Plan (NEP) meetings. There were a couple of topics that parents indicated they needed more communication about, including: provision of learning in composite classrooms; different approaches used in maths; classroom furniture designs; and time to read reports before parent-teacher interviews.

The school has established a Playgroup that operates in a central part of the school. This resource provides a powerful connection at many levels within the community. Although not all students who attend the Playgroup attend South Downs Primary School, the teachers see the value in addressing some presenting patterns of need, for example, oral language/speech development, and play and social skill development, through this link.

There is a presenting opportunity to further build parent understanding about school organisation, curriculum priorities and teaching approaches used to further the partnership for continued improvement in student learning.

Direction 2

Extend the authentic voice of students in learning to include parents and families, with the intended purpose of creating a realised culture of engagement and achievement evident through multiple data measures, but ultimately, through improved student achievement and growth in learning.

How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?

A reading intervention program (MultiLit) was trialled in 2015 in support of improving reading intervention for primary-age students. A review of this program determined that the number of students who received intervention and achieved little growth warranted a different approach to reading intervention. This review has now resulted in the appointment of a site-funded position to support three groups of identified students three times per week. Anecdotal evidence from teachers reported transference of learning from this new intervention support model back into the classroom.

The school staff operate as one Learning Community where: "Whatever we do, we do as a whole-site approach". The Principal led the interrogation of learning data at both the school and Partnership levels, with a focus on student growth and achievement. The Review Panel confirmed: a data collection schedule is established for collection points of learning data over the year; learning goals are set and reviewed at the start and end of each term; shared practice observations (of teachers teaching) are undertaken and discussed as a staff team each term, to further build their professional capacity.

The school is well-established in the collection of various learning datasets, inclusive of: Running Records, Reading Lexile levels, PAT-R, PAT-M, NAPLAN and various school-based literacy benchmarks. The A-E standards (teacher judgments against the Australian Curriculum) are also used as a valid assessment in conjunction with these other assessments. This evidence is stored in individual student assessment/achievement folders and also on the school digital database system.

Whilst each of the above monitoring processes is undertaken as a discrete practice, together they form components of an effective self-review process to monitor school improvement over time. When asked about the strategic nature of school self-review at a whole-school level, a staff member commented: "Self-review happens on more of an ad-hoc basis". The Principal also commented that there was further opportunity for self-review to become more strategic in its impact and influence on school improvement. Such a planned process will inform whether particular improvement strategies should be embedded to a sustained level, or 'morphed' slightly, based on evidence presented through self-review.

Members of the Governing Council spoke highly of the school and, in particular, the support provided by each of the teachers. They acknowledged some of the new developments happening in the school, such as: Growth Mindsets; AUSLAN as the new Language Other Than English (LOTE); attendance improvement; target-setting in learning; and development of the Junior Primary playground. Governing Council members verified access to Principal reports and newsletter items to keep them abreast of initiatives with regard to school improvement.

The Principal, staff and Governing Council are united in their vision to 'make a difference' for students at the school. Members of the Governing Council stated that they were united by the explicit values of the school – *Unity, Responsibility, Respect and Self-Discipline*. This working relationship and partnership is vital. It is also critical that all stakeholders consider data (multiple measures) in an ongoing and strategic way to ensure whole-school success at all levels of the school organisation.

Direction 3

Strategically develop and implement a cycle for ongoing self-review (timeline, systems, processes and multiple data measures) that monitors, informs, reports and accounts for whole-school improvement and student learning growth over time.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

South Downs Primary School is working with committed resolve to support the many varied presenting needs of students at the school. There was evidence that the school operates with positive energy, staff are highly professional and supportive of each other, and the parent group values the learning opportunities provided within a strong sense of 'community'.

The Principal and staff are highly visible, communicate readily, and work to meet the needs of every student at the school. The Principal and staff are student-focused, and know and understand the needs of every learner. Individual student targets are set and monitored for every child in the school. A case management approach for every student ensures that supports and differentiated approaches are applied to best meet the needs of every student.

The staff are working to implement agreed strategies across the school to engage and improve learning in literacy and numeracy. In particular, oral language and vocab development are being emphasised with a view to raising reading levels across the school. Staff and parents are working together to raise attendance levels at the school through the introduction of a number of strategies, which is already having an impact on the attendance rate in 2016.

The teachers and SSOs work in effective partnerships within classrooms to deliver the learning in an engaging and personalised way. There is certainly an 'air' of expectation that all students are capable of learning, and a preparedness by staff to accommodate changes where necessary to keep students engaged and learning.

The Principal and staff are committed to improving their professional practice and engage in meaningful professional learning aligned to the school strategic plan. The staff support each other through shared practice observations in each other's classrooms to improve their professional practice as teachers.

Parents value and appreciate the commitment of the school Leadership Team and staff in providing a highly valued learning program and support for families.

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

1. Embed the agreed curriculum and pedagogical initiatives to a high level of competency and consistency across the school, using the evident teaching and leadership practices currently impacting a positive school improvement culture focused on student growth.
2. Extend the authentic voice of students in learning to include parents and families, with the intended purpose of creating a realised culture of engagement and achievement evident through multiple data measures, but ultimately, through improved student achievement and growth in learning.
3. Strategically develop and implement a cycle for ongoing self-review (timeline, systems, processes and multiple data measures) that monitors, informs, reports and accounts for whole-school improvement and student learning growth over time.

Based on the school's current performance, South Downs Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2020.



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Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY



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Jayne Johnston
CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

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.

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Renee Miller
PRINCIPAL
SOUTH DOWNS PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Governing Council Chairperson