

# **Department for Education**

## **External School Review**

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

**Report for Nuriootpa Primary School**

Conducted in March 2020



## Review details

Our education system aspires to become the best in Australia by seeking growth for every student, in every class and in every school.

The purpose of the External School Review (ESR) is to support schools to raise achievement, sustain high performance and to provide quality assurance to build and sustain public confidence in government schools.

The External School Review framework is referenced throughout all stages of the ESR process.

This report 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.

We acknowledge the support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community. While not all review processes, artefacts and comments are documented here, they have all been considered and contribute to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Tony Sullivan, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Graeme Fenton, Review Principal.

## Review Process

The following processes were used to gather evidence relevant to the lines of inquiry:

- Presentation from the principal
- Class visits
- Attendance at staff meeting
- Document analysis
- Scan of Aboriginal Education Strategy implementation
- Discussions with:
  - Governing Council representatives
  - Leaders
  - Parent groups
  - School Services Officers (SSOs)
  - Student groups
  - Teachers

## School context

Nuriootpa Primary School caters for children from reception to year 7. It is situated 69kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment at the time of the review was 276 students. The local partnership is Barossa Valley.

The school is classified as Category 5 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 5% Aboriginal students, 5% students with a disability, no students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, 4 children in care and 27% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a principal in their 8<sup>th</sup> year of tenure, an acting deputy principal and an acting wellbeing coordinator. There are 25 teachers including 1 early career teacher and 10 Step 9 teachers.

## The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

- Direction 1** Expand opportunities for staff to work collaboratively to strengthen the strategic approach to whole-site self-review and improvement.
- Direction 2** Prioritise whole-staff professional learning that has a strategic focus on areas that will provide the greatest leverage to embed consistent pedagogy and application across the school.
- Direction 3** Continue the focus on differentiation and building staff capacity in this area to provide common language and approaches to challenge and stretch student learning above and beyond current levels.
- Direction 4** Foster the engagement of staff and students in the use of authentic, critical and formative feedback (staff to staff, student to staff, and staff to student), to develop understanding and purpose in learning.

### What impact has the implementation of previous directions had on school improvement?

When considering various datasets as indicators of school improvement since the previous review, it is apparent that there is a need for continued, focused strategic action to be undertaken with external support.

It is evident that the school has intensified its improvement actions towards the latter part of the review cycle. Creating clarity and certainty about approaches to be applied across the school is critical to the improvement process. Continuation of the agreed strategic approaches to improvement to allow time for them to be implemented to a deep and coherent level across the school will also be important.

The review panel acknowledges the genuine efforts of many staff to strengthen practices articulated in the previous directions. The school has engaged support for its improvement work and this has started to make an impact. This was evident in the data and information gathered during the review.

The urgency for improvement remains the single challenge for the school. Given the impact of the most recent external support, the school is well advised to continue this course of action in order for each key dataset to improve.

## Lines of inquiry

### EFFECTIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

#### *How effectively does the school monitor and enhance its improvement strategies and actions based on their impact on students' learning?*

The school has undertaken work with its planning process to narrow the focus of its improvement agenda. This has happened with the support of the Senior Leader, Learning Improvement (SLIPP). Staff and parents were clear about the priorities set by the school in reading and maths. The Site Improvement Plan (SIP) clearly articulated the practices to be implemented by teachers and the targets for improvement expected as an outcome of their work.

The school has implemented 'Big Ideas in Number' across the school to strengthen this strand of mathematical thinking, understanding and application with the students. A whole-school agreement, describing the structure of lessons and key teacher practices of explicit instruction, formative assessment and differentiation, was documented. Classroom walkthroughs and teacher interviews verified the implementation of the practices described in this documentation.

For reading improvement the school is focusing on the 'Big 6' of reading with particular emphasis in the early years (Jolly Phonics) on a synthetic approach to phonics development and phonemic awareness. Jolly Grammar is used in other primary classes. Across the school, a 'wave' model of intervention is used to differentiate for a range of learners in each class. Again, this was evident throughout classroom and teacher discussions.

A school assessment schedule, which is currently under review, outlines when various datasets are collected. Class datasets are provided to class teachers during handover at the end of a year as a guide for planning. Achievement standards referenced for each year level are documented in reading, spelling and maths. More formative assessment data is being collected and analysed by staff and this was evident in the staff meeting action plan for 2019-2020.

The review panel acknowledged the collection and use of learning data at key points in the year. There is a need to cross reference learning data with process and perception data to gain a deeper understanding about what is working and what needs adjusting in an ongoing, responsive manner. This holistic view of, and response to, multiple measures of data is not yet an integral part of school review and improvement. Continual self-review will help to sustain the focus and commitment to planned whole-school improvement.

**Direction 1** Use the success criteria in the School Improvement Plan as reference points for validating the effectiveness of the improvement strategies upon student learning.

## EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND STUDENT LEARNING

### *How effectively are teachers using evidence-based pedagogical practices that engage and challenge all learners?*

Impact on student learning will be an outcome of how effectively the agreed teaching strategies are applied across all classes. It is important that staff consider the precision with which the defined strategies are applied across classes through their own observed perceptions. Such perception data can be invaluable in guiding improvement in the implementation of evidence-based practices.

In class walkthroughs and student discussions, the review panel noted a number of aligned approaches being implemented across the school as a result of improvement efforts. The 3 key teaching strategies identified for learning improvement at the school are explicit teaching, formative assessment and differentiation. The panel evidenced these aspects in the classroom and in teacher conversations, but they were not deeply and coherently embedded across the school. The language for learning and student understanding about the learning process coming from the teaching practices above, is not yet part of student learning vocabulary. These aspects require further clarification and understanding by staff so that they are clear on the 'what' and 'how' of defined approaches across all classes with a high degree of alignment. It is also important that students develop a deeper understanding from teachers about the practices being used and how this supports their learning.

In a general sense, students are happy, respectful and compliant with the learning and teaching that was being undertaken. In discussion with students, their general understanding of challenge was related to the group they were allocated to in maths or spelling.

The teaching staff has focused on the 3 key drivers in their teaching practices. In their current documented form, and in their implementation into practice, these drivers will need further definition, understanding and explicitness of what each strategy looks like across classes. In turn, this will need to be made explicit for students to understand.

**Direction 2     Impact student learning by building and encouraging teacher capacity to effectively implement and embed high impact teaching practices aligned to the Site Improvement Plan.**

## EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

### *How effective are the school's professional learning and performance and development processes in building teacher capacity?*

The school staff has engaged in professional learning and performance development processes at the individual and group level. To a large extent it was evident that these are aligned to the improvement agenda as described in the SIP. It was evident that this has reached a more intensive and strategic level over the past 18 months with support from the SLIPP.

The school has implemented a performance and development process that clearly aligns with department expectations. Learning overviews are provided each term to the leadership team and parents. Performance and development plans are prepared by staff and accompanied by performance meetings with members of the leadership team. Written feedback is provided for staff in these plans. Importantly, the exemplars sighted by the review panel showed clear alignment with the school goals for improvement.

Classroom observations by members of the leadership team are also an integral part of the performance and development process. Classroom visits, informal chats and documented feedback also form part of this process at the school. Ideally, it would be strategically beneficial to complement observations of teachers, by teachers, to further enhance capacity building. The panel gathered evidence through the review process that these changes have been challenging in gaining traction.

The panel was provided with evidence of a well-structured and connected professional learning program conducted through staff meetings over the course of 2019, and in term 1, 2020. Again, this plan was facilitated by the SLIPP and the principal.

An important component of staff professional learning is the opportunity to meet in smaller year level teams to connect the work to the classroom. Staff and leadership team members stated that these meetings operated with variance. During the review the panel observed the sharing of classroom practice via video in staff year level teams. The panel commends this endeavour as high level collaboration and openness to learning and improvement, and encourages the expansion of this approach to build and connect the practices together. Such practices and behaviours must become the norm rather than the exception in building a highly collaborative staff team. Recent work initiated to enable this is timely.

**Direction 3      Raise student achievement by strategically supporting staff collaborative endeavour in sharing practice across the school.**

## CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE STUDENT LEARNING

### *To what extent does the school promote a culture of learning with high expectations of achievement for all learners?*

In considering a broad array of data and information before, during and after the review, there are a number of indicators that caused the panel to reflect on the culture and expectations existing at the school. Data in isolation can be misleading but when triangulated with other data and information it becomes compelling and must be addressed.

School performance can be determined by a number of indicators including enrolment, school culture and climate, parent engagement, leadership, students' engagement and student achievement. In considering such indicators, the review panel validated that a whole-school approach to continued improvement is required by all at the school. Bringing about effective change requires clear leadership, highly collaborative staff teamwork, purposeful clear action and high expectations for every student.

This improvement work resides with everyone as it cannot be done alone. Internal accountability for the actions to be implemented, the degree to which they are enacted, and monitoring the impact on student learning, is a whole-school responsibility. The review panel verified from staff, students and parents that there had indeed been a relatively recent positive shift in what the school is doing with respect to teaching and learning. The review panel agreed that this needs to be normalised as the predominant work culture expected from all within the school.

The panel acknowledges positive attempts by all at the school to influence the learning of students. Building a coherent curriculum, high quality teaching practices with students at the centre of this work is underway and must benefit all learners at the school, including those who identify in higher bands as they progress schooling. Learning data and student comment indicated that this is an area for improvement. This is not additional work on top of the work that has begun. It is a continuation of the work that has started.

As an example, there are 44% of year 3 students in 2019 who achieved in the higher bands in reading, which is a commendable result. These students must be identified, tracked and monitored over time to ensure they are getting the stretch and challenge needed to sustain their learning. Support and intervention must happen at all levels in the classroom through learning design. For some time, this pattern of not sustaining or improving students at standard or in higher bands of learning has been evident. This is an area that requires ongoing focus and attention.

**Direction 4**      **Maintain high expectations for all learners including those students identified in higher bands of learning.**

# Outcomes of the External School Review 2020

Nuriootpa Primary School has sought and implemented support to impact its improvement work in teaching and learning over the past 18 months. Multiple measures of data indicated this could have occurred much earlier, given the directions provided through the last external school review. Leaders and staff agree that there is a small but discernible shift in the focus, drive and practices evident across the school of late. This shift in culture, collaboration and teamwork directly aimed at implementing highly effective teaching practices must be consistent and embedded to ensure maximum impact on student learning. It is evident that the support is making a difference to the school in its current work. It is therefore important that such support continue for the school to ensure that a turnaround is sustained.

The principal will work with the education director to implement the following directions:

- Direction 1** Use the success criteria in the School Improvement Plan as reference points for validating the effectiveness of the improvement strategies upon student learning.
- Direction 2** Impact student learning by building and encouraging teacher capacity to effectively implement and embed high impact teaching practices aligned to the Site Improvement Plan.
- Direction 3** Raise student achievement by strategically supporting staff collaborative endeavour in sharing practice across the school.
- Direction 4** Maintain high expectations for all learners including those students identified in higher bands of learning.

Based on the school's current performance, Nuriootpa Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



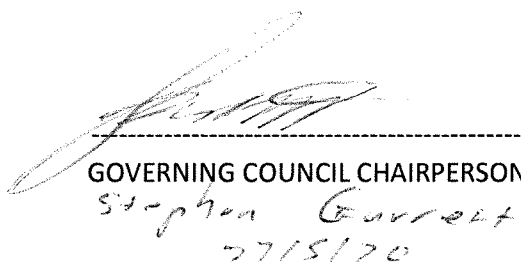
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# Appendix 1

## School performance overview

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

### Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2019, 48% of year 1 and 63% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. In year 1 this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average, and for year 2, an improvement.

In 2019, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 63% of year 3 students, 66% of year 5 students and 69% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3, 5 and 7 this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019, the trend for year 3 has been downwards, from 83% to 63%.

In 2019, year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN reading, the school achieved lower than the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2019, 44% of year 3, 13% of year 5 and 9% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3, this result represents an improvement and for years 5 and 7, a decline, from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 20%, or 2 out of 10 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 and 24%, or 4 out of 17 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.

### Numeracy

In 2019, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 70% of year 3 students, 69% of year 5 students and 73% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For year 3, 5 and 7, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For 2019, year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN numeracy, the school achieved within the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2019, 16% of year 3, 0% of year 5 and 16% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For years 3, 5 and 7, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 0%, or 0 out of 5 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 and 43%, or 3 out of 7 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.