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 June Goode, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Sue Mittiga, 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 Nuriootpa 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 documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2015 was 91%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Nuriootpa Primary School is located 69kms from the Adelaide CBD with an enrolment of 326 students, and is part of the Barossa Valley Partnership. Enrolment shows a steady growth from 2012 to 2015. The school has an ICSEA score of 982, and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 3% Aboriginal students, 5% Students with Disabilities, 1% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), 1% students under the Guardianship of the Minister (GoM), and 15% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in her 4th year of tenure at the school, with the Deputy Principal in her 3rd year of tenure, who together share and lead the school's improvement process. The Deputy Principal also provides counselling and reading and learning needs support. The school has a Pastoral Support Worker with 15 hours allocated per week to support the wellbeing and engagement of students.

School Performance Overview

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

Reading

In the early years, reading is monitored against Running Records. In 2015, 21 of 34 (62%) Year 1 students, and 20 of 53 (38%) Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). The Year 1 result is above the school's historic average, and the Year 2 result is below the school's historic average.

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 82% (28 of 34) of Year 3 students, 65% (24 of 37) of Year 5 students, 90% (38 of 42) of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 7, the results are above the school's historic baseline average. The Year 5 results demonstrate little to no improvement based on 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 above the results of similar students across the DECD system.

In 2015, 44% (15 of 34) of Year 3, 27% (10 of 37) of Year 5, and 15% (8 of 42) of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result is above the school's historic baseline average.

Of the 12 students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading at Year 3 (2013), taking into account arrivals and departures, 50% (6) remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015.

Of the 12 students in the top two bands at Year 3 (2011), taking into account arrivals and departures, 33% (4) remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. This result is a decline based on the school's historic baseline average.
**Numeracy**

In 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 74% (25 of 34) of Year 3 students, 62% (23 of 37) of Year 5 students, and 81% (34 of 42) of Year 7 students, demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 5, this result shows a decline compared to the school’s historic baseline average. The Year 7 results are above the school’s historic baseline average.

From 2013 to 2015, there is a downward trend evident for Year 3 Numeracy, from 84% to 74%.

For 2015 Year 3, 5 and 7, the school is achieving within the results of similar students across the DECD system.

In 2015, 24% (8 of 34) of Year 3, 16% (6 of 37) of Year 5, and 26% (11 of 42) of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result shows little or no change compared to the school’s historic baseline average.

Of the 10 students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands in Year 3 in 2013, 5, or 50%, remained in the top two bands at Year 5 in 2015.

Of the 5 students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands in Year 3 in 2011, 5, or 100%, remained in the top two bands at Year 7 in 2015.

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**Lines of Inquiry**

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

- **Improvement Agenda:** How well does the school’s strategic direction and site review process impact on learning and outcomes?

- **Effective Leadership:** To what extent are the school’s Professional Learning and Performance and Development processes effective in building whole-school consistency in improving student learning outcomes?

- **Student Learning:** To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

- **School Community Partnerships:** To what extent do teachers adapt and refine their teaching strategies in response to feedback from students?

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**How well does the school’s strategic direction and site review process impact on learning and outcomes?**

The Principal’s presentation positioned the school as one where the school Leadership Team, Principal and Deputy Principal, have purposefully and strategically driven the change in culture to the current collaborative and inclusive school for all. During the course of the review, the panel was able to verify this from staff, Governing Council and parents through both formal and informal discussions. Parents acknowledged the Principal for her proactive strategies to ensure partnerships with parents and the wider community were apparent and valued, resulting in building positive and trusting connections between home and school.

The Review Panel was provided with evidence from the Principal’s presentation and documentation to demonstrate what has been done to develop shared accountability and improved decision-making processes across the site, with the use of data collection and assessment protocols. Although, in the early stages of data analysis, the Review Panel was provided with examples that demonstrated teacher use of multiple measures of data at class level. Interrogation of various datasets will identify specific targets, as well as addressing root cause and identifying whole-school approaches for improvement.

Common agreements in numeracy have been put in place and ownership of these has been verified...
through discussions with staff and student comments, with particular emphasis on natural maths and transforming tasks. A review of the literacy agreements is being scheduled for later this year. Another key focus has been on developing a common approach and language with the introduction of growth mindsets and goal-setting.

Through formal and informal discussions with staff, students, and class walkthroughs, the Review Panel verified that there were varying degrees of implementation of the priorities across the site.

The Review Panel acknowledges the work being commenced in the area of self-review, but could not verify the depth of connectedness between strategic directions, site improvement plan and class teaching down to the individual student level. It was also noted that the Site Improvement Plan requires further sharpening and depth with SMARTa evidence-based targets and an interrogation of the data to inform future directions.

Direction 1
Expand opportunities for staff to work collaboratively to strengthen the strategic approach to whole-site self-review and improvement.

To what extent are the school’s Professional Learning and Performance and Development processes effective in building whole-school consistency in improving student learning outcomes?

Regular and ongoing Professional Learning and Performance and Development processes are key to ensuring consistency in practice and improvement, whilst building the capacity of staff to learn and challenge each other to improve student learning outcomes.

The Review Panel acknowledges the work being done to strengthen professional development including, formal meetings and observations, feedback, walkthroughs and peer observations.

In her presentation, the Principal spoke about the focus on mathematics across the site and the numeracy agreements in place. There has been emphasis on transforming tasks with the expectation that staff are trialling these in class.

The Deputy Principal spoke about natural maths being the springboard for strengthening pedagogical practices across the school. Comments, including written feedback from staff, indicate there is a variance amongst staff as to the degree of confidence in implementation. Some staff reflected on the use of texts as the tool used for open-ended tasks rather than creating their own. Many staff commented they would like further whole-staff Professional Learning to develop consistency in planning, delivery and assessment: “this will enable us to learn from each other, share what works”, and “training needs to be more focused with all staff attending, a whole-school approach, all inclusive.”

Whole-school Professional Development opportunities, together with developing reflective feedback both by leadership and peers, would result in a move away from texts to powerful learning opportunities for all students. The Review Panel acknowledges the structure and importance of the pre-arranged Professional Development meetings with the next opportunity involving peer-to-peer feedback. Whole-staff understanding and practice into what is effective feedback is imperative, enabling a forward movement from asking safe, low-order questions, to becoming critical colleagues, where asking the challenging questions is about building professional relationships whilst developing consistency across the school.

Staff comments were positive on the current professional conversations they have with their line managers, with comments such as “supportive”, “valuing”, “challenging” and “opportunities” resonating throughout the discussions.

Staff also commented that informal observations, mentoring and sharing between colleagues, are in place. Collegial support was heard and observed throughout the review.

The implementation of growth mindsets, following Professional Development, was witnessed by the Review Panel in observations, visuals in classrooms and comments by staff and students. Evidence from class walkthroughs and informal conversations with students confirm that a higher degree of implementation was happening in the upper year levels. One student in the Early Years, when asked to explain a growth mindsets poster, commented: “We don’t really do it in class, but I know about it because
my older brother always talks about it at home, especially when I can’t do something”.

It was evidenced by observations, conversations with staff, students and parents that these two strategies, natural maths and growth mindsets, are the foci across the school. A consistent and coherent approach to whole-staff professional learning should evolve into the development of strategic actions aligned to the Site Improvement Plan. It is therefore imperative that the impact of both is determined to identify future directions about what will have the greatest leverage to build consistency 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.

To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

From the data in the school report, 44% of Year 3 students in 2015 achieved in the higher bands in reading, which is above the school’s historic baseline achievement. Numeracy was significantly lower at 24%. A decline was evident for both Year 5 and 7 students attaining the higher bands in reading and in numeracy.

There is a decline in the percentage of students retaining at higher bands in reading, whilst in numeracy, the percentage of students retaining at higher band levels showed little to no change. However, the 5 out of 5 students who achieved higher bands in Year 3 retained this level in Year 7, 2015.

The opportunity to accelerate the percentage of students in higher bands needs to be a priority given the high percentage of students achieving at SEA standards. A deeper analysis of data needs to be addressed that would then provide a more specific target to monitor and strengthen at the site, and drill down to year level to class, and finally involving students in setting individual targets.

The Review Panel can verify with written and verbal evidence that all teachers have high expectations for students and the data clearly indicates the potential of students.

The Review Panel sought clarification as to how students were engaging in learning. Documentation and conversations with staff, including support staff, AET and Deputy Principal provided evidence of the support to improve Wave 2 student learning outcomes. The Deputy Principal shared how strategic approaches for identifying and tracking individual students were purposeful and targeted to their needs. The targeted programs and achievements are continually being reviewed in professional conversations with SSOs, teachers and line managers.

For students in Wave 1 there were limited verifications, based on observations and feedback received, of students being engaged with rigour and higher-order learning opportunities, which challenged and engaged them to extend their current levels of academic achievement across the curriculum. The Review Panel acknowledges the current work being done at the site level in both transforming tasks in mathematics and growth mindsets. Whilst both strategies are in the early stages, it will be imperative that leadership continues to build teacher capacity with both. This, in turn, will develop consistency in understanding and application with a purposeful approach to moving from the comfort of the textbook to powerful and engaging learning through the sharing of good practice and common language.

There are varying levels of uptake of growth mindsets across the site, with evidence from observations and student comments indicating that students in the Primary and Middle Years are developing their understanding and purpose of this strategy: “learning is using your brain, if it’s easy, that’s not learning, it just means you know it, but you can get it wrong and that’s when you fall into the pit”; “you need to use a Growth Mindset to get out”; and “that’s my brain working and that’s when I know I’m learning”.

Students provided evidence across the year levels of the focus on mathematics with positive comments, particularly on the approach to the teaching of maths: “I had problems with maths, but now I love challenging myself with hard tasks” and “now I try harder, because there is not just one way to get the answer”.

When questioning students in discussions, there was little clarity about what they themselves could do to improve both achievement and growth. Comments from students demonstrated the pride in themselves when teachers showed them the results of pre- and post-tests; however, when questioned about what
they could do to improve, there were limited responses, with the majority reflecting back to teacher responsibility.

Teacher-directed tasks were commonly observed with no genuine evidence of differentiation in the lessons observed by the Review Panel. Differentiation of the curriculum to cater for the full range of student needs is lacking consistency. The sharing of creating transforming tasks would be an opportunity for staff to share what worked and also what didn’t; then, together, develop deeper understanding and confidence for delivery back in the classroom. Follow-up with peer-to-peer observations and feedback would develop coherence and consistency. This would then lead to pivotal improvement strategies that provide rigour and challenge in moving students to above and beyond SEA.

**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.

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**To what extent do teachers adapt and refine their teaching strategies in response to feedback from students?**

The Review Panel verified, through documentation and discussions with staff, that there is a level of commitment to increase levels of student engagement through feedback to students. Evidence was also provided by students that some teachers sought feedback to improve their teaching practice. The Review Panel acknowledges the work of the school to ensure student voice is being heard at a whole-school level through student surveys that seek feedback on the levels of safety, trust and responsibility for individual learning. A few students commented that their teacher asked students to write her a letter on how she could improve her teaching: "I felt she read what I said as I noticed that something I wrote actually happened"; "It made me feel proud that she asked us our opinions".

When asked by the Review Panel, "How are you going in your learning?" students commented that they felt okay with what they were learning and that the teacher provided extra tasks if they need to. When queried if they knew what grade they were going to receive prior to the recent mid-year report, some students commented that they were a "bit shocked" that they received a lesser grade. One student then commented that he was okay with it because he trusts his teacher and where she believes him to be. Student comments indicated that whilst teachers requested feedback on their teaching, students were not involved in the planning process or assessment criteria.

It was observed and verified by student comments in formal discussions and informal chats, that whilst there were positive relationships with teachers and all staff in general, the emphasis on learning and what it took to better their individual learning was being more explicitly directed by the teacher.

When the Review Panel sought evidence on how teachers provided feedback, the students responded stating teachers provide written feedback in the books when they hand them back, others stated they receive verbal feedback, and they all agreed that teachers provide them with ideas on how to improve. The Review Panel could not verify the authentic use of feedback to challenge and involve students in the learning process.

All teachers stated they have high expectations for students. To ensure that this also equates to higher and sustainable achievement and above-average growth, it will be important for staff and students to find out the extent and level of feedback. Then, together, they can determine the feedback that is required to engage and challenge learning opportunities to improve student achievement.

With the current change in culture to a more collaborative learning environment, an opportunity to promote the purpose and use of critical, reflective feedback between staff would be timely in addressing the level of feedback being used in classes through observations and collective sharing.

**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.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Nuriootpa Primary School is tracking well with the focus on high expectations for all students. The strong parent and community relationships with the school have resulted in a culture of inclusivity leading to the shared focus on learning.

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

1. Expand opportunities for staff to work collaboratively to strengthen the strategic approach to whole-site self-review and improvement.
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.
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.
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.

Based on the school’s current performance, Nuriootpa Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2020.

Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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.

Jill Hess
PRINCIPAL
NURIOOTPA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Acting

Governing Council Chairperson