

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION

## EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

# REPORT FOR RENMARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in April 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 Rob Harkin Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Matthew Saunders, Review Principal.



### **Policy compliance**

*The external review process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are implemented and adhered to.*

The Principal of Renmark Primary 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 has implemented, and was found to be compliant with this policy and have strategies in place to improve the overall student attendance rates. In Term 4, 2014 the school reported attendance of 86.5%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

### **School context**

Renmark Primary School is a regional school with an enrolment of approximately 360 students. The primary and junior primary schools were amalgamated in 2013 to form one campus school. The school has an Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) program and, although on separate campuses, is also co-located with Renmark High School. The school has an ICSEA score of 924, and is classified as Category 2 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 14% Aboriginal students, 11% students with Disabilities, 24% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) background and 52% of families receive school card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal and a Deputy Principal, both in their first tenure. The leadership team also includes a Student Counsellor, and two Coordinators; one in Reception to Year 7 Maths/Numeracy; and one in Early Years Literacy (Oral Language and Play for Learning). This Coordinator is also the Early Years reading support teacher. The operational structure comprises of three year level teams: Early Years, Middle Primary Years and Upper Primary Years.



### Lines of inquiry

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

<b>Student Learning:</b>	<b>How well are students achieving over time?</b>
<b>Effective Learning:</b>	<b>How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?</b>
<b>Improvement Agenda:</b>	<b>How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?</b>

### **How well are students achieving over time and how effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?**

The Review Panel observed that there has been a coherent, evidence based leadership focus on building a school culture that focuses on improving student achievement. When the two sites amalgamated at the end of 2013, the new leadership team identified that the achievement data, particularly NAPLAN, showed that there were significantly high percentages of students achieving below the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA), and with low growth over time. The Site Improvement Plan's (SIP) literacy improvement strategy reflects the leadership team's concerns about student literacy outcomes.

The school-held Running Record data for 2013, indicates that at Year 1, 36% of students were achieving the SEA. By end of Year 2 (2014), this figure was closer to 50% of students, and the improvement trend was confirmed by the 2014 NAPLAN data where, at Year 3, 59% of students were at the SEA for reading, and 20% of those were achieving in the higher bands.

This improvement trend in the school's literacy data in the early years is significant given that the school has identified a large number of students coming to school who have significant gaps in their oral language development. The Crevola and Vineiss Oral Language Assessment scan reveals that nearly 50% of students are not at benchmark by end of their first year of schooling. That is, they are identified as either at early emergent or emergent levels in terms of their oral language development. The PAT-Reading data collected by the school in 2014, also confirmed the school's concerns about the achievement data for early years students, where just 34% were at benchmark for reading. The school has responded by implementing a targeted 'early years structured play-based learning program' each morning with an intentional oral language focus. Additionally, there is an intended focus on 'visible learning strategies' in classrooms embedding the use of vocabulary, mnemonics, word walls and technical language applicable to various curriculum areas. A number of staff have participated in oral language training and development facilitated by Hugh McCusker.

The Review Panel commends the leadership team for its work in lifting literacy outcomes.

The school's numeracy data is even more challenging particularly when measured against NAPLAN achievement outcomes at Years 5 and 7 over the past few years. Again, this is recognised in the school's 2015 SIP priorities and strategies. Only 8% of Year 2 students were at benchmark for the PAT-Mathematics assessment tool, and no other cohort group achieved higher than 43% against the PAT-Mathematics benchmark when tested in Term 3 2014. Early years teachers reported significant gaps in students' capacities with number, place value and other mathematical concepts. In 2013 NAPLAN only 29% of Year 5 students achieved the SEA, although this lifted to 49% in 2014.

The leadership team has been proactive in addressing the numeracy agenda and, in 2015 a Reception to Year 7 Mathematics Coordinator position was established. The Coordinator has been working with the upper primary team to develop a trial intervention program with a focus on 'Big Ideas in Number'. The process has drawn on careful analysis of data, including an evaluation of the trial of a numeracy software support program that was implemented in 2014 to support student learning.



The Review Panel observed that the trial design was strategic and evidenced-based. The team is in the process of identifying key pre- and post-program measures that will enable an accurate evaluation of the trial. It is noted that the school's most significant improvement in numeracy achievement to date is in the upper primary student cohort.

#### **Direction 1**

**Monitor and evaluate the upper primary team's numeracy trial to identify numeracy improvement strategies that can be transferred across the whole school.**

Corresponding to the focus on improving student achievement has been a decision by the leadership team to build a school culture that is characterised by positive reinforcement and raising expectations. There has been a staff professional learning focus on 'Growth Mindset' strategies. The Review Panel observed a number of indicators of successful implementation of this focus across the school. During the staff meeting workshop, teachers and School Service Officers (SSOs) talked about recent examples of greater positivity and resilience in student behaviour, and their optimism about student' capacity to improve their learning. It was evident that staff are embracing a shift from fixed to growth mindset in their work. Similarly, a number of students spoke about what they saw as a changing focus by teachers about increased expectations and confidence in their capacity to achieve.

An analysis of the school's data indicates that the dual focus on improving learning outcomes and building a culture that is framed by the principles of 'growth mindset', is beginning to take effect, particularly in literacy. The percentage of students achieving the SEA in NAPLAN reading is beginning to lift and this trend is underscored by the school's PAT-Reading test data which has shown growth from 2013 to 2014.

Also, the percentage of students achieving in the higher bands of NAPLAN, particularly in reading, has increased in the past year when compared to historic trends. These trends are coming off relatively low bases, but are indicative of a stronger focus in recent times to lift student achievement levels.

An analysis of the school's Australian Curriculum A-E data for the corresponding cohorts of students shows that the percentage of students achieving either an A or B in English and Mathematics is even higher in comparison to NAPLAN data. This is especially so for Mathematics. For example, at Year 5, 8% of students achieved in the higher proficiency bands compared to teacher-based judgement of 40% achieving either an A or B. The Review Panel noted that more work needs to be done in terms of assessment and moderation of student work so that there is greater consistency across the school.

Differentiated teaching practices and more effective use of data to inform teacher planning and practice have been identified by the school as key improvement agendas. There is evidence that the leadership team is developing these agendas consistently, and are challenging staff to continue to lift expectations and standards. The Review Panel observed that greater consistency in terms of staff take-up is yet to occur across all sections of the school.

The Review Panel was advised by leadership team members, that there will be a continuing focus on assessment for learning and moderation of student work, and the panel observed evidence of this in room and corridor displays.

#### **Direction 2**

**Continue to strengthen the focus on positive mindset strategies, develop common curriculum agreements and work with teachers to improve their capacity to use effective assessment and differentiated teaching practices to lift student achievement.**



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

The school is data rich. A comprehensive planning and data collection schedule has been implemented. By the conclusion of Term 1, at least eight sets of data would have been collected and collated. The data sets cover phonics, phonemic awareness, oral language, reading and numeracy.

The school has developed organisational structures and processes to facilitate opportunities for professional growth and conversation. The school's professional development planner indicates that weekly staff meetings are almost entirely focused on professional learning. Students are dismissed earlier each Thursday, to facilitate sub-school team meetings or Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), where the expectation is that the PLC agenda will primarily focus on data analysis and improvement strategies. Similarly, the leadership team meets every Monday morning with an intended focus on improvement work.

However, an analysis of the meeting minutes by the Review Panel for each of these teams revealed other issues were discussed in place of focusing on analysis of the data and strategic planning for improvement. The Principal reported that 'highly complex day-to-day community and student issues, involving student safety, wellbeing and trauma', have consumed leadership time and energy during this year. This was also affirmed by the Education Director. However, sub-school team members also reported that the busy nature of the school agenda meant that PLC time was subsumed by management matters, and that improvement agendas were managed by what were termed 'corridor conversations'. For example, while the early years team has focused on oral language and play-based learning, and organisational planning, they had yet to find time for strategic analysis of numeracy, which had been identified as a school priority.

#### Direction 3

**Ensure there is structured professional learning time for the leadership and staff teams to regularly analyse data for evidence-based planning and teaching.**

A recent innovation at the school has been to map student Running Records data on a data wall. The representation, using student ID photos, of the distribution of student achievement across the range of reading levels, has provided a visual prompt for teacher discussion and analysis.

The data wall representation illustrates quite clearly that there are a significant number of students who are at risk, in terms of reading achievement, at each year level. The school has reviewed its 2015 SIP targets, to more accurately reflect this context. For example, by the end of Term 3, the target is that 50% of Reception students will be at reading level 7 or higher, compared to the 2014 SIP target of 100% of Reception students at reading level 11 or higher. This refinement of targets, is far more likely to assist the school achieve its learning goals.

Conversations with teachers and leadership team members revealed that there is still much work to be done in strategically tracking student progress in reading using Running Records data. The school agreement is that teachers will conduct at least two Running Record assessments each term and the Review Panel was able to confirm adherence to this agreement. However, there is no identified process in place for benchmarking where students need to be at particular intervals across the school year, or of what intervention is to occur, in order to achieve the identified SIP target. For example, a scan of the reading levels data wall reveals that by the end of the first term of schooling, there are still a significant number of students at level 1.

The school's intervention program focus is on students with an identified disability who have negotiated learning plans (NEP) or Individual Learning Plans (ILP). Improvement plans are developed and reviewed on a regular basis. Early years classes receive an additional four hours of SSO time each week to facilitate support for those identified students, and there is a leadership expectation that class teachers will use some of that SSO support time to provide additional support for other students in need.

The school's data indicates that there are significant numbers of students who are not at, or near, the benchmarks of the various data sets collected by the school. However, the Review Panel observed that there is far less coherence or clarity about how these students are identified, tracked and supported. For example, an analysis of the School's NAPLAN numeracy data sets indicates that this group of students could number as high as 30% of enrolments.

A concerted focus on intervention support for this cohort, could impact significantly on the school's achievement data.

**Direction 4**

**Support students by using achievement data to identify and benchmark student learning needs, and by developing targeted learner intervention processes across the school.**

### OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Renmark Primary School is developing a strong improvement agenda that focuses on building teacher knowledge and skills to lift student achievement.

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

1. Monitor and evaluate the upper primary team's numeracy trial to identify numeracy improvement strategies that can be transferred across the whole school.
2. Continue to strengthen the focus on positive mindset strategies, develop common curriculum agreements and work with teachers to improve their capacity to use effective assessment and differentiated teaching practices to lift student achievement.
3. Ensure there is structured professional learning time for the leadership and staff teams to regularly analyse data for evidence-based planning and teaching.
4. Support students by using achievement data to identify and benchmark student learning needs, and by developing targeted learner intervention processes across the school.

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



Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
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Anne Millard  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
PRESCHOOL 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.



Lyn Bretag  
PRINCIPAL  
RENMARK PRIMARY SCHOOL



Governing Council Chairperson