

# Department for Education

## External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

### Report for Cowandilla Primary School

Conducted in May 2019



## 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 Simon Harding Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Katherine Holman, Review Principal.

## Review Process

The following processes were used to gather evidence relating 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 Support Officers (SSOs)
  - Student groups
  - Teachers

## School context

Cowandilla Primary School caters for children from Reception to year 7. The school has a Children's Centre and an Intensive English Language Program on site. It is situated 4kms from the Adelaide CBD. The school has an enrolment of 460 students with enrolments increasing over the last 5 years. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 289 students.

The school has an ICSEA score of 1024, and is classified as Category 3 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 4% Aboriginal students, 5% students with disabilities, 45% students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD), 8 children in care, and 40% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a principal completing the first year of her first tenure, a deputy principal in the fifth year of her tenure, a senior leader (intensive English) in the fifth year of her current tenure, a student wellbeing leader in the second year of her current tenure and a senior leader (Learning Resources Manager/Digital Technologies) in the fifth year of her current tenure.

## Previous ESR or OTE directions were:

- Direction 1** Increase the number of students reaching the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) and achieving at the higher levels of proficiency by creating authentic opportunities for students to undertake increasingly complex real-world learning and intellectual challenge.
- Direction 2** Improve learning outcomes for all students by using the standards in the Australian Curriculum to benchmark student achievement and negotiate learning design and assessment with students, and further promote transparency for what is required to achieve at or above standard.
- Direction 3** Set clear benchmarks for the expected increase or improvement in student learning growth and achievement at each year level in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) to enable teachers to monitor progress at the year, class and individual levels against the improvement priorities.
- Direction 4** Establish opportunities for teachers to regularly engage in their learning teams, with the support of leadership, to monitor, assess and measure student progress, the impact of interventions, the value of learning approaches being implemented, and how their monitoring and measurement of student progress supports the school improvement priorities.

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

The school has demonstrated that they have taken a number of actions in relation to the previous ESR directions.

Teachers are regularly meeting in teams to discuss and analyse student progress and reflect on the impact of current practice. The focus of the teams has been narrowed in 2019 and closely aligned to the Site Improvement Plan (SIP). Teams are more autonomous and self-directed with some opportunity for teams to share actions across teams. Teachers are focused on improving practice to better support the learning needs and achievement of students.

There has been growth in student achievement over time particularly in the area of reading, with more students achieving SEA and higher bands. There are clear targets in the SIP and teachers are able to reflect and articulate how their work relates to the targets. The continued use of external consultants underpins improvement work in literacy and numeracy and is highly valued by staff. There has been some work in learning design and making learning visible for students. This continues to be a focus across the school.

## **Lines of inquiry**

### **EFFECTIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING**

#### ***How effectively does the school use improvement planning processes to raise student achievement?***

It is evident the school uses a range of processes to support their improvement planning and implementation cycle. Staff are clearly focused on improving student achievement through building their capacity to best support the students in their care. Leadership and staff stated that decisions are taken using evidence-based data sets, with value also placed on anecdotal surveys. Staff stated that the development of the SIP included high levels of consultation, where their opinions and feedback are valued, leading to high levels of ownership and commitment to the plan. Parents are aware, and feel their opinions are taken into consideration, as part of the planning cycle, stating that they have a high level of trust in leadership and staff to make the necessary decisions to enable improvement.

Professional Learning Teams have been established with a focus on supporting the implementation of each SIP action plan. Whilst these groups feature a leadership team member they are working with increased autonomy. Staff value the clarity of focus and time these groups have been provided. While PLTs have been a feature of the school, their use as a key driver in the implementation of the priorities in the SIP has strengthened. Developing clear measures of the impact of this strategy will be key for future decisions when reviewing and evaluating progress of the plan. While there has been some sharing amongst PLTs, continuing to find ways to deepen the conversations and critical collaboration across teams would strengthen this work. Teachers have regular common release time to collaboratively plan and reflect on practice. The school continues to invest time and financial resources as they engage external experts in both literacy and numeracy. This long-term strategy continues to be a key driver in consistent practice across the school and improved student learning achievement. Establishing clear statements of practice in relation to training and practice would strengthen this work. The support offered by consultants is differentiated for individual teachers and is negotiated with leadership.

**Direction 1** Establish clear processes to measure the impact of Professional Learning Teams in driving the SIP priorities, both within and across teams.

## **EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND STUDENT LEARNING**

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

There is a strong understanding and commitment by staff that the child is the focus of learning. It is evident that there is a high level of collaboration amongst staff, as well as a recognition of the existing expertise of colleagues, as they provide support when planning and teaching. Staff affirmed that the support from leadership for regular training and development, and regular access to consultants, is valued and contributes to strengthening consistent pedagogical approaches across the school. Teachers willingly model lessons to colleagues, and seek and provide feedback through peer observation, much of which is teacher initiated and highly valued.

Teachers use a variety of diagnostic assessment tools to inform their planning and modify teaching strategies. Discussions with teachers provided evidence of students being involved in setting learning goals. A previous initiative was reintroduced this year which included the development of student learning goals as part of an initial meeting with students and parents at the beginning of the year. However, responses from students did not clearly indicate how they then use their learning goals, or their effectiveness to increase student knowledge of the next steps in their learning. Parents, while generally valuing this new process, would like more clarity about the progress of their child in relation to the goals set, with some stating they would like their child to have greater challenge when learning.

Students can clearly articulate how they are challenged in their learning, with most indicating they were challenged between 30 – 50% of the time. Building on this, some students talked about the original tasks being ‘easy’ but the extension work ‘super hard’. They could talk about the strategies they use when they get stuck in their learning. Teachers shared a variety of strategies they use to differentiate learning for individual students. The depth of knowledge and practices in relation to differentiation varied across the staff. Strengthening common understanding and consistent practice around differentiation by utilising existing staff expertise is an area for further development.

**Direction 2** Strengthen common understandings and effective practice in relation to differentiation which provide challenge and stretch for all learners.

## **EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

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

Quality teaching is the single most influential factor on student achievement. It is evident that teachers are committed to self-reflection and improvement as they strengthen their practice. There are high expectations and support from leaders for improving achievement for both students and teachers. New staff have access to training in the priority areas of literacy and numeracy and teachers shared how leadership is supportive of them attending training linked to their Professional development plans (PDP). Leaders expect clear links between the PDPs and SIP priorities, with the structure of PLTs central to driving improvement.

The commitment to engage long-term with consultants in literacy and numeracy continues to provide staff with a clear platform and common approach to move forward collectively. The support and training offered by consultants is individualised in acknowledgement of each person's learning journey. Leadership ensure consultants focus on priorities in the SIP and therefore individual support is closely aligned to whole school priorities. One teacher commented about this approach: '...it has been invaluable, and has transformed my teaching.'

This culture of improvement positions the school well to build teacher capacity to effectively engage students with the next steps in their learning. There is evidence, from both teachers and students, of the use of goal setting, learning intentions and success criteria. Individual teachers, and teams, analyse a range of cohort data to track progress while teachers have strategies for individual student tracking. The consistency and depth of practice in relation to individual students, and how their data influences the intentional teaching, is continuing to develop. Providing students with clear feedback about their performance i.e. sharing their data, can be powerful as students co-construct learning goals and have a clear understanding of their next steps.

An improvement culture amongst all staff is evident with the expertise of peers clearly and openly recognised by others. Teachers regularly initiate discussions both formally and informally about how to improve their practice. Teachers also talked about how they willingly seek and provide feedback through peer observations and modelling. Opportunities are provided for teachers to share their knowledge, with some staff currently involved in a mentoring program which will see them become literacy mentors for colleagues.

**Direction 3**      Utilise current expertise/structures to strengthen teachers' capacity to increase student agency in learning design and progressions.

## Outcomes of the External School Review 2019

It is clearly evident that staff, as a whole, are committed to the students at Cowandilla Primary School. They are also committed to the development of skills and knowledge so that they best meet the needs of all students. There was evidence of critical collaboration amongst staff as they endeavour to improve practice. Parents have a high level of trust in the school, believing that staff do their best for their children. Effective working relationships across all community members and the wider community are strong and this continues to be a high priority.

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

- Direction 1**      Establish clear processes to measure the impact of Professional Learning Teams in driving the SIP priorities, both within and across teams.
- Direction 2**      Strengthen common understandings and effective practice in relation to differentiation which provide challenge and stretch for all learners.
- Direction 3**      Utilise current expertise/structures to strengthen teachers' capacity to increase student agency in learning design and progressions.

Based on Cowandilla Primary School's current performance, the school will be externally reviewed again in 2022.



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Marcello Bronzini

# 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 2018, 65% of year 1 and 76% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement for both year 1 and year 2 from the historic baseline averages.

Between 2016 and 2018, the trend for years 1 and 2 has been upwards, from 52% in 2016 to 65% in 2018 for year 1 and 51% in 2016 to 76% in 2018 for year 2.

In 2018, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 77% of year 3 students, 72% of year 5 students and 70% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the SEA. For years 3 and 5, this result represents an improvement and for year 7, this represents little or no change from the historic baseline averages.

Between 2016 and 2018, the trend for years 3 and 5 has been upwards, from 66% in 2016 to 77% in 2018 for year 3 and 59% in 2016 to 72% in 2018 for year 5.

For 2018, years 3, 5, and 7 NAPLAN reading, the school is achieving within the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2018, 49% of year 3, 35% of year 5 and 21% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 64%, or 14 out of 22 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2018, and 63%, or 5 out of 8 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2018.

### Numeracy

In 2018, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 72% of year 3 students, 78% of year 5 students and 70% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3 and 5 this result represents an improvement and for year 7, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline averages.

Between 2016 and 2018, the trend for year 5 has been upwards, from 56% in 2016 to 78% in 2018.

For 2018, years 3, 5, and 7 NAPLAN numeracy, the school is achieving within the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2018, 35% of year 3, 20% of year 5, and 33% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 59%, or 10 out of 17 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2018, and 50%, or 3 out of 6 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2018.