EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR MARION PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in May 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 Ann O'Callaghan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Lia Tedesco, 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 Marion 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 3 School Organisation: Item 5

The Camps and Excursions Policy is currently under review.

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 documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2015 was 92.5%, which is just below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Marion Primary School is located 10 kilometres south-west of the Adelaide CBD, nestled in a sub-division west of Marion Road and south of the City to Seaford rail link, and is an active member of the Marion Inland local Partnership. The school has an ICSEA score of 991 and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

There are 161 students at the school. Enrolment numbers have increased by 17% from 133 students in 2013 following concerted effort to do so. The majority of students (80%) come from neighbouring suburbs including Marion, Mitchell Park, Sturt, Darlington and Oaklands Estate. Other students commute from outside the immediate area.

A weekly half-day program: "Get Ready Engage and Thrive" (GREAT) is offered mid-Term 1 to mid-Term 4 for young children enrolled to start Reception at the school in the following year.

The increasing enrolments have enabled an additional class to be established and an additional NIT program to be provided. There are now six classes: one Reception class and five composite classes.

The school population includes 10 (6%) Aboriginal students, 16 (10%) Students with Disabilities, and 52 (40%) students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD). Forty-eight percent of families are eligible for School Card Assistance.

The Principal was appointed in Term 2, 2013 and is now in her fourth year of tenure at the school. The School Counsellor is in the final year of a three-year full-time contract working 0.6FTE in the role.

The teaching staff profile includes 50% early career teachers and 50% experienced teachers, most of whom have been at the school for ten or more years. Specialist teachers provide Spanish LOTE (Languages Other Than English) and The Arts (Visual Art and Drama) programs.

There are nine non-teaching staff providing administration, curriculum and student support.

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 progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2015, 38% (6 of 16) of Year 1 and 48% (7 of 15) of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). This result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average. Between 2013 and 2015, the trend at Year 1 shows a decline from 68% to 38%.

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 86% of Year 3 students, 74% of Year 5 students and 83% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3, 5 and 7, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 3 has been upwards from, 67% to 86%.

For 2015 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the range of results of similar students across DECD schools. At Years 3 and 7, these results are at the upper bound of the range.

In 2015, 32% of Year 3, 26% of Year 5 and 8% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading 60%, or 3 of 5 students from Year 3, remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015, and 33%, or 1 of 3 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. This result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

Numeracy

In 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 82% of Year 3 students, 74% of Year 5 students and 67% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average, little or no change at Year 5, and a decline at Year 7. Between 2013 and 2015, for Years 3, 5 or 7 there is no improvement trend.

For 2015 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools. At Year 3 the results are at the upper bound of the range.

In 2015, 27% of Year 3, 32% of Year 5 and 25% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, these results represent an improvement from the historic baseline averages.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 100%, or 2 of 2 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015, and 67%, or 2 of 3 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Summary

The Review Panel followed several lines of inquiry to verify the effectiveness of practices supporting continuous improvement at the school and to identify directions that will raise and sustain higher levels of student achievement over time. These directions acknowledge the school context and the intentional strategies in place to ensure all students 'show a love of learning' and are achieving to their full potential.

Lines of Inquiry

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

Improvement Agenda: **How embedded and planned are the systems and practices for self-review?**

Student Learning: **How well are students achieving over time?**

Effective Teaching: **How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?**

How embedded and planned are the systems and practices for self-review?

The Review Panel was provided with a copy of the Site Improvement Plan 2016-2017 (SIP) along with copies of two previous SIPs: 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. As a set, the three sequential plans reflect the development of a systematic approach to building respectful and responsive relationships as a community; supportive and safe conditions for students to be successful learners; and a clear intent to establish and embed coherent whole school approaches to teaching and learning.

A positive and focused culture of continuous improvement exists. This culture is visible to the Governing Council and other parents with up to 90% of respondents in the last Parent Opinion Survey saying 'this school looks for ways to improve'. To identify the long-term directions for the school, the Governing Council reported that they had earlier (2014) worked with the Principal and staff to create a mission statement and a set of values to guide current endeavours. The school is striving to 'inspire, challenge and support students to be curious, show a love of learning, and become lifelong learners who will contribute successfully as valued members of their community'.

Parents said they felt the Principal was leading positive changes and had established consultative processes for improvement. Governing Council continues to be involved in discussions about the site's action plans. Further evidence of the school's inclusiveness and openness is noted in the use of improvement targets. The targets are set against the SEA, other school datasets and relevant process outcomes, all of which will be measured on an annual basis. By using targets of this nature in strategic planning, it makes expectations transparent and public.

The school's yearly planning processes are currently led by the Principal. Increasingly, other staff are taking an emerging lead in the design of implementation strategies and self-review processes. For example, the School Counsellor is now leading the school community's 'KidsMatter' Action Team; there are two or three staff sharing the lead around numeracy improvement; and the Reception teacher is embedding the early years transition to school program. All staff teams are involved in discussions at the end of each term to monitor the implementation of action plan strategies.

Comprehensive data collection and analysis has developed over the past few years as a driver in school improvement. This again has been led by the Principal. The data is regularly used in discussion with staff in whole staff or group meetings. Individual student summary reports are used in professional conversations (Pro Chats) as part of the school's performance and development processes (for example, NAPLAN Writing).

The Review Panel was provided with a folder of data and evidence collected and used over the last three years to assess starting points, develop policy and agreements, track progress, review intervention strategies, and inform next steps at a whole-school or cohort level.

A summary of the school's detailed scrutiny of key datasets related to site improvement is published in the Annual Report, including an explanation of 'effect size' as a measure of progress over twelve months. Perception data, student social and emotional wellbeing surveys, behaviour records, and a range of scheduled assessment information form a valuable bank of multiple measures to corroborate analysis.

Staff reported that since they now have both manually collected and electronically stored data available the 'data analysis is more thorough'. Originally, the staff had looked at the data they had to support the

needs of students who were struggling. However, now they are able use data to identify students already demonstrating the standard, and then plan for ways to challenge everyone to achieve at higher levels.

To support this intent, the school's 2016-2017 teaching and learning priorities aim to raise student achievement by improving student engagement and upskilling teachers in the teaching of literacy, mathematics/numeracy, and the Australian Curriculum.

The Review Panel heard that as part of the school's culture of continuous improvement, teachers will work together to look at the data and plan the programs. Professional openness is highly valued by the staff and the Leadership Team. They said they discuss student needs and teaching ideas with each other all the time. Staff reported that being in a small school meant they get along well and are very collaborative as a group, speaking frequently with each other on an informal basis.

Valuable just-in-time discussion is not, however, left as the only way teachers work together. The use of Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) is a key strategy in the school improvement plan. As part of the staff meeting cycle, there is formal opportunity for groups of teachers to meet as professional learning teams on a regular basis. The panel also heard that some teachers do, and others could, meet more frequently in school time as far as their timetables permit or after school as available.

The Review Panel found that the school has a well-planned and enacted cycle of internal review. Within this cycle, 'staff professional learning' is clearly depicted as integral to embedding 'whole-school agreements' and 'consistent and coherent teaching and learning programs'.

The school is now well-placed to build on the collaboration achieved at a whole-school level by adopting a more rigorous model for collaboration at the classroom level. This can be achieved by refocusing the function of the professional learning teams to be "professional learning", that is, ensuring that staff work together to build their capacity to target and monitor teaching towards achievement and growth.

Along with the introduction of a structured set of expectations and processes for disciplined dialogue, each teacher will need to be supported to access, bring and share the information they have about the progress of their own students so they can work with others to utilize this assessment information for planning and instruction. In this way, curriculum planning, differentiated teaching and intervention become the continuous improvement work at the school.

Direction 1
Increase student achievement across all year levels, and build teacher capacity to do so, by positioning the work of professional learning teams as being fundamental to continuous improvement at the school.

How well are students achieving over time?

At Marion Primary School in 2015 the school performance report highlights the improvement made at the school in comparison to the school's own historic baseline averages. In NAPLAN reading, there was an improvement in the proportion of students achieving the SEA at Years 3, 5 and 7. In NAPLAN numeracy, there was improvement only at Year 3, with little or no change at Year 5, and a decline at Year 7. These results show improvement in four out of six DECD measures. In addition, for reading and numeracy, there was an increasing percentage of students achieving in the higher two bands in 5 out of 6 measures.

The site improvement plans reveal that the use of datasets such as these are assisting the school to target and answer questions about 'how well students are achieving over time and how do you know?'. To bring the use of valid data and information to the fore, the Principal is supporting staff to track individual student progress year by year and/or term-by-term. The records available allow achievement to be tracked over time, at a whole-school level, cohort-by-cohort, class-by-class, and/or student-by-student.

The datasets include: Running Records for all students up to level 30; all four aspects of NAPLAN scores and bands at Years 3, 5 and 7; PAT-M, PAT-Rc and PAT-Spelling results over a one to three-year period for Years 3–7; and, for the first time, the collation of summative A-E Grades against the English, mathematics and science Australian Curriculum achievement standards.

However, in any school, an indicator of effective practice is not just that the data collection exists, but that teachers use the data and other assessment information to monitor student understanding and progress,

and modify teaching plans in response to interrogation.

At Marion Primary School, the teachers reported a number of strategies they are using to improve their assessment for learning approaches at the school and with the local Partnership. They were aware that formative assessment and task design are not straightforward and involve:

- the use of a range of processes to analyse or diagnose needs and plan for differentiated teaching;
- common approaches across year levels;
- ongoing feedback to students about their learning and progress; and
- moderation to ensure consistency of teacher judgement.

These elements are an essential part of knowing how well students are achieving at any point in time, how well they are progressing from their own starting point over time, and how well a student knows this.

All students who spoke to the Review Panel were able to talk with much enthusiasm about their school and about what they were learning. They felt they had good relationships with the teachers and that, as was backed up in the KidsMatter surveys, they were 'encouraged to take on new challenges'.

Across the school there was a range of responses about how teachers helped them learn and how they knew at what standard they were achieving. Younger students reported that they knew how they were going in their learning because 'the teacher tells us' and they helped them by telling them 'not to rush' or 'keep practising' or 'leave some brain space'. One student said: "it really helps when the teacher tells me what to improve and how". Older students said the teacher helps them when "they go over things a few times and explain things in different ways" or "if my persuasive text is not strong, the teacher gives examples of how to improve".

These groups also described a number of strategies used with students to develop self-regulation and independence as learners: 'the teacher works with me until I can do it alone'; 'the teacher doesn't give us the answer, she questions us'; 'rubrics help us to know what the teacher is looking for in our work'. During the classroom walkthroughs the Review Panel was also able to see some examples of goal-setting processes made visible with students to share with their peers in a safe environment.

The Review Panel noted that there was a range of targets used as goals and various, or no defined timelines for expected achievement. Some students were not too sure for how long they would have the goal or what the teacher was going to do to review it. Others were excited to share their WOW work on display as evidence of progress toward their goal.

The school's teaching for effective learning focus on 'being a learner' was evident in most classrooms by way of posters to support behaviour education strategies and others that supported the use of a common language to develop positive attitudes and growth mindsets.

Direction 2
Support and challenge all students to achieve high standards by implementing consistent processes that empower students as learners, including opportunities to set goals, to give and receive feedback, and to monitor progress against benchmarks.

Overall, the group interview responses, the displays in the spacious learning environments, the strategic planning documentation and other related evidence considered by the Review Panel, describes a picture of a school that is establishing systems to support a successful learning journey for each student.

Stages of this journey to be addressed in the near future were discussed at the Post-Review meeting. For example: strengthen the developmental learning program for young children transitioning to school; engage students and parents in knowing the progress milestones at each year-level from Foundation onwards; ensure rigorous conditions exist for ongoing learning progression through Year 1 and 2; and ensure each child achieves their entitlement against the Australian Curriculum standards Years 1–7.

These specific matters can be incorporated within the current priorities, strategies and measures included in the site improvement plan and do not require any further direction from the Review Panel.

How well are teachers supporting students in their learning?

Staff reported that they are all want to see consistency in the school to support learning improvement for every student from Reception to Year 7. During the on-site visit, the Review Panel conducted a feedback process at a meeting of staff that was related to the effectiveness of the school's Literacy Agreement. The teaching and non-teaching staff members present were asked to identify five top aspects of the agreement that they found to be having the most impact on supporting students to be successful and why.

This agreement is an example of how the school wants to point teachers towards using the key elements of effective teaching. The one-page document has 'Curriculum, Assessment and Pedagogy' at the centre of the agreement. The associated lists itemise the curriculum programs, data tracking as per the assessment schedule, the expected achievement levels as per the SEA, and targeted literacy practices that together constitute the essential elements and strategies the school wants to see implemented. In addition, in this agreement are three highlighted aspects of the SA TfEL Framework, and an additional set of expectations for "At Marion Primary School" - engaging learning; professional development; and assessment and reporting. Staff responses were varied with each staff member identifying what was most effective, and why. The collation of the most mentioned points include the following 'most effective' elements (and why):

- TfEL growth mindsets (support students to achieve more);
- Explicit teaching (breaking down learning);
- Feedback for learning (showing students how to improve);
- Differentiated curriculum (all students have an entry point and a stretch point); and
- Support (peer, additional and intervention).

The Review Panel's analysis of the comments indicated that in the 'Top 5', not one same element was identified by all staff. The collated summary was reported to the Principal and all data left for further analysis and follow-up. The Review Panel found that this process highlighted quite easily that it would be timely to revisit the format and function of the agreement as it has been published. It may well be that further down the track a specialised list, such as the one currently existing, is 'scattering efforts' rather than targeting the essentials to be achieved at each level of schooling or in each classroom in any or all areas of the curriculum.

The above five elements may well provide sound evidence from which any essential set of actions can be built and a commitment to action be made. For example, the school is currently working on implementing a mathematics/numeracy improvement agreement as part of the site improvement plan. The staff involved in leading this initiative felt that having an agreed focus on data-informed action was a starting point to ensure all students achieved at higher levels (not just intervention groups); teachers will need professional learning in mathematics pedagogy to challenge all students ('sting in the tail'); and that the development of an explicit lesson routine or format will scaffold learning in all classes. These familiar aspects of improvement may point to additional essential elements.

Following the success of the achievements to date, the school is on the verge of being able to make clear exactly what effective teaching and learning looks like at Marion Primary School. Such a commitment to action will focus the school's teaching and learning agenda and be reflective of the school's mission to develop lifelong learning skills and attitudes.

Direction 3
Support consistency in teaching and learning across the school by clarifying the essential elements of a whole-school approach to effective curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Finally, the Review Panel heard from parents that there is 'a sense of pride' at Marion Primary School. They like the fact it is a small school: it is a unified community, caring and welcoming, and there is a feeling of belonging. Parents were very impressed with the way the school's values (Courage, Harmony, Integrity) are instilled in the students through frequent use of the language and positive acknowledgement of the associated actions and attitudes (for example, at Assembly). They felt their children are well-supported, especially those who have learning difficulties. They can see progress in their children as learners. Parents felt that when students graduate they are well and truly prepared for high school and their futures.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Marion Primary School has built a culture of continuous improvement and is tracking well. Staff are working collaboratively and productively together. Self-review processes are regularly and strategically used to determine the impact school strategies and practices are having on student achievement. The school is now focussed on supporting and challenging students to achieve at higher levels.

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

1. Increase student achievement across all year levels, and build teacher capacity to do so, by positioning the work of professional learning teams as being fundamental to continuous improvement at the school.

2. Support and challenge all students to achieve high standards by implementing consistent processes that empower students as learners, including opportunities to set goals, to give and receive feedback, and to monitor progress against benchmarks.

3. Support consistency in teaching and learning across the school by clarifying the essential elements of a whole-school approach to effective curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Based on the school's current performance, Marion 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.

Cheryl Ross
PRINCIPAL
MARION PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson