EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR ALLENBY GARDENS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in April 2015
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 Julie Hardy, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Pam Kent, Review Principal.
Policy compliance

The External School Review process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are implemented and adhered to.

The Principal of Allenby Gardens 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:

- the Site Improvement Plan will be collaboratively developed inclusive of External School Review Directions
- the school Behaviour Management and Discipline Policies are currently being reviewed and will be ratified by Governing Council by Term 3, 2015
- Volunteer Policy – 2015 RAN training for volunteers will be completed on 7 May 2015

Implementation of the DECD Student Attendance policy was checked specifically against a documented set of criteria. The school has implemented comprehensive tracking and intervention processes, and was found to be compliant with this policy. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 92.8% which is fractionally below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Allenby Gardens Primary School is a Preschool to Year 7 school with approximately 475 students situated in the western suburbs of Adelaide. The school has an ICSEA score of 1041, and is classified as Category 6 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school has an on-site preschool with approximate enrolments of 65 children, most of whom will go on to attend the school.

The school population includes 19% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), 7% students have identified learning disabilities, and 18% are supported by School Card.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in the first year of his first tenure, a Deputy Principal in the second year of his first tenure, and a Coordinator, Early Years.
Lines of inquiry
During the review process, the panel focused on three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

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How well are students achieving over time?

Literacy has been an improvement focus at Allenby Gardens Primary School in recent years, with a particular emphasis on writing. In 2014, NAPLAN mean scores in writing exceeded similar schools and national means at Years 3, 5 and 7. In reading, the percentage of students achieving the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) has consistently over time been above 75%. For example, in 2014 the percentage of students at or above the SEA in Reading at Years 3, 5 and 7 was 89%, 81% and 88% respectively.

Higher order skills are assessed in the upper proficiency bands of NAPLAN. At the School the percentage of students achieving in the upper proficiency bands is highest at Year 3. For example in 2014, the percentage of students in the higher proficiency bands in Reading at Years 3, 5 and 7 was 38%, 29% and 17% respectively. This pattern is also evident in Numeracy where the percentage of students in the upper proficiency bands is lower than in Reading. The school is currently moving to a closer focus on improving teaching and learning in numeracy as well as literacy.

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

In order to evaluate the extent to which the school works in a systematic, planned and collaborative way to achieve improved outcomes for students, the Review Panel was particularly interested in the self-review processes that the school uses to assess progress and identify future directions.

Parents, including members of the Governing Council, students and teachers identified the welcoming, inclusive and supportive culture of the School as being a key strength. Parents who spoke to the Review Panel were confident that they were aware of how their children were progressing at school and felt comfortable to seek further information from teachers if required. Parents identified the open relationships with teachers, and their willingness to engage parents as equal partners in the children’s learning, as very supportive.

The Review Panel heard that the school is undertaking a range of reviews of existing planning, processes and policies. Parents and teachers reported that they felt that review processes are inclusive and transparent and that the leadership team is responsive to suggestions for improvement. Parents and leaders identified the need for up-to-date, consistent and documented policies as a priority. The Review Panel heard how the outcomes of these reviews, together with the findings of the External School Review, will inform future planning and policy updates.

The school has a range of valid student achievement data that is collected systematically and stored centrally. Collated school data is analysed at cohort and individual level by all teachers. Teachers in the Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) who spoke to the Review Panel talked about how they use this data to inform their teaching; in particular, results from Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading and Maths (PAT-R and PAT-M) as well as results from EALD Language and Literacy levels, Spelling Continuum, Running Records and Jolly Phonics checklist. The school has identified maths as a focus for improvement based on
data analysis. The panel saw evidence that the leadership team use multiple measures of data to inform planning.

The school has developed a number of values over time. Each year one value is a particular focus and students earn a wristband by demonstrating the focus value over time. The panel noted the opportunity to revisit the school directions and support their implementation by collaboratively developing a shorter term improvement plan that includes specific, agreed strategies and targets for student outcomes, particularly in mathematics.

Direction 1
Provide direction and consistency in planning and review processes by aligning the vision and values of the school with long-term strategic directions and short-term improvement planning.

To what extent is curriculum coherent from the perspective of the learner as they progress through the school?

Students who spoke to the Review Panel, talked confidently and articulately about their learning. Students identified their positive relationships with teachers as being central to their learning. All students who talked to the Review Panel felt they had a good relationship with their teacher and this supported their learning. Students talked about their aspirations and had high expectations of themselves. They commented on variation in approach between classes as they have progressed through the school. Students talked about how this variation had positive and negative aspects. Positive, in terms of providing variety and allowing children to benefit from teachers’ expertise in specific areas, and negative in terms of feeling more challenged in their learning in some years more than others.

The Review Panel heard that there are several teaching approaches that are common across the school. These are supported by documented whole of school agreements in reading, writing, spelling and maths that describe expectations in relation to differentiated teaching approaches and data collection. The whole school approach to writing is particularly successful, as reflected in NAPLAN achievement over time. EALD language and literacy levels are also used to track student progress in writing and inform teaching.

Staff members indicated that there was some variability in the degree to which agreements are implemented across the school, particularly in maths. The leadership team has conducted classroom observations based on expectations outlined in the whole of school agreement in mathematics and provided feedback to teachers to support consistency. Staff members indicated that though there was a degree of consistency across the school, there was room for greater alignment.

One way of supporting sharing of practice and collaborative planning is through forming professional learning communities. At the School, the leadership team has fostered a collaborative environment by developing PLTs of the teaching staff. Teachers in similar year levels have shared release time each week as a PLT. In 2015, this time is self-directed and the Review Panel heard how teachers used these opportunities for a range of collaborative purposes.

Leadership capacity is being developed more broadly amongst staff by providing the opportunity for PLT leaders to meet together and build a shared understanding of learning across the school. The PLTs provide an avenue for teachers to engage in moderation of work samples and analysis of tasks to lift the consistent level of intellectual challenge experienced by all students.

Teachers talked to the Review Panel about a range of professional learning opportunities that various staff have attended, in particular, those related to maths teaching. Teachers reported that these workshops allowed for deeper and ongoing learning and were providing a basis for common approaches to be developed across the school. However, it was felt that those staff who attended the professional learning had a greater understanding of the approach and implemented it more thoroughly in their classrooms. Similarly, teachers who did not attend the workshops felt they had a more limited understanding and this impacted on their ability to implement approaches consistently.
Direction 2
Accelerate the learning of students in mathematics by ensuring professional learning translates into consistent practice across classes. Include explicit expectations for student achievement in whole school agreements and align with professional learning and performance improvement processes. Clarify the leadership of pedagogy and curriculum to ensure coherence across the school.

In exploring the consistency of curriculum and practice across the school, the Review Panel was interested in how the varied needs of learners are catered for. Students and teachers confirmed the consistency in catering for the range of learning needs, particularly for students requiring additional support. It was reported however, that the extent to which students find tasks intellectually challenging varies. Comments indicated the level of rigour in higher order thinking tasks provided to students is not yet consistent for all students. This perception supports the data as measured by NAPLAN, which showed the numbers of students achieving in the higher proficiency bands are not retained in numeracy across the school.

The Review Panel heard about a range of strategies to differentiate learning tasks to meet the needs of those students demonstrating high-level skills. These included using rubrics that describe learning at different levels to support assessment, students setting individual learning goals, planning tasks at three levels and using open tasks with multiple entry points to engage all learners. Some of these approaches were also evident in the planning shared with the Review Panel.

Planning and programming from Reception to Year 7 is based on the Australian Curriculum and the Review Panel saw evidence of structured and sequenced programs. A number of teachers use the Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) diary to support weekly planning. The Early Years Learning Framework guides programming and planning in the preschool and programming draws heavily on the dispositions and interests of the children. Some teaching staff work in both the preschool and school setting, providing the potential for a seamless transition from preschool to school for learners, although teachers talked about differences in philosophy and practice that are yet to be resolved.

Direction 3
Increase the number of students demonstrating high level learning outcomes by consistently providing challenging learning experiences for all children and using collaborative practices to support transitions and consistent approaches from Preschool to Year 7.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Allenby Gardens Primary School is tracking well. Good performance was evident through strong parent and community relationships, collaborative review processes and the use of student achievement data and other evidence to inform decisions.

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

1. Provide direction and consistency in planning and review processes by aligning the vision and values of the school with long-term strategic directions and short-term improvement planning.

2. Accelerate the learning of students in mathematics by ensuring professional learning translates into consistent practice across classes. Include explicit expectations for student achievement in whole school agreements and align with professional learning and performance improvement processes. Clarify the leadership of pedagogy and curriculum to ensure coherence across the school.

3. Increase the number of students demonstrating high level learning outcomes by consistently providing challenging learning experiences for all children and using collaborative practices to support transitions and consistent approaches from Preschool to Year 7.

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

Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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.

Yunni Seindanis
PRINCIPAL
ALLENBY GARDENS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson