

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR McDONALD PARK SCHOOL

Conducted in November 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 Ann O'Callaghan, Review Officer, Review Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Vonnie Dolling, 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 McDonald Park School 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 comprehensive tracking and intervention processes, and was found to be compliant with this policy. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 93.4% which exceeds the DECD target of 93%.

School context

McDonald Park School is located in Mount Gambier, 468 kilometres south-east of Adelaide. The Reception to Year 7 school has an ICSEA score of 971 and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

There are currently 611 students in the school, allocated to twenty-two classes. The enrolment numbers include 26 (4%) Aboriginal students, 28 (5%) Students with Disabilities, and 4 (approximately 1%) students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD). 28% percent of families are eligible for School Card assistance. Due to enrolment numbers the school enforces a local catchment area.

The Principal is in her eleventh year at the school, originally as Principal of the McDonald Park Junior Primary School and, since 2010, as the Principal of the amalgamated Reception to Year 7 McDonald Park School. The acting Deputy Principal has been appointed to the school for two terms to backfill the tenured Deputy Principal, currently in an Acting Principal position elsewhere. The Senior Leader, Curriculum, is in the first year of her tenure, and the Counsellor (0.8FTE) is in her second year of tenure.

The school has new and upgraded building facilities supporting a variety of connected teaching spaces and a number of special programs. The school grounds include a natural bush play area and a well-developed student-centred kitchen garden.

Lines of inquiry

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

Student Learning:	How well are students achieving over time?
	How effectively is student learning growth monitored and evaluated?
Effective Leadership	How does the school know that its professional learning and performance and development processes are effective in building teacher capacity?
Effective Teaching	How effectively do teachers build a positive and supportive class learning culture?

How well are students achieving over time?

McDonald Park School has an improvement agenda focused on increasing the percentage of students demonstrating higher levels of learning each year. The Principal and the Steering Committee members reported that while growth is evident in some aspects of learning, performance in literacy and numeracy is yet to be consistent over time.

In the early years, Reading achievement is monitored against Running Records. In Term 3 2014, 52% of Year 1 students achieved the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) of Level 15 and above, and 73% of Year 2 students achieved the SEA of Level 21 and above. As a result, the school set a site improvement target for 2015 for 80% of students to achieve year level standard (SEA) in Running Records.

In September 2015, 55% of Year 1 students achieved the SEA, and 74% of Year 2 students achieved the SEA. While the results at both year levels show slight improvement, with a trajectory at Year 2 heading towards the school's aspirational target, there remains a significant number of students at both year levels not yet reading at the expected standard. The school's improvement target of 80% is not met.

In 2015, the Reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 79% of Year 3 students, 63% of Year 5 students and 70% of Year 7 students achieved the SEA. Between 2013 and 2015, there is no improvement trend at Years 3 and 7, and at Year 5, the trend is downwards from 81% in 2013.

In relation to the number of students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands, 31 out of 75 students (41%) were in Year 3, 16 out of 71 students (23%) were in Year 5, and 11 out of 73 students (15%) were in Year 7. At Year 3, the current results compare well to the 2008 to 2012 historic average of 32%. There is also an improvement on the 2008 and 2012 baseline upper bound of 25% (the baseline is currently a measure used by DECD for Year 3 only). The Year 5 and 7 results are about the same as the historic averages.

In 2015, the Numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 70% of Year 3 students, 70% of Year 5 students, and 65% of Year 7 students achieved the SEA. Between 2013 and 2015, the trend at Year 3 is downwards from 84% in 2013. There is no improvement trend at Years 5 and 7. In 2015, 11 of 76 (15%) students at Year 3, 8 of 71 (11%) students at Year 5, and 9 of 74 (15%) students at Year 7 achieved in higher bands.

Retention of upper bands is measured by DECD as an indicator of school performance over time. In Reading, at Year 3 in 2013, 20 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands. Out of these, 13 students remained in the upper levels at Year 5 in 2015. In 2011, at Year 3, 21 students achieved in the top two bands. In 2015, there were seven of these students remaining in the top two bands at Year 7. In Numeracy, the retention of higher-band results achieved for Year 3 students from 2013 show that at Year 5 in 2015, 7 of the 14 students remained in the upper bands. Out of the 10 students achieving higher bands at Year 3 in 2011, 4 students remained in upper bands at Year 7 in 2015.

During the review, the Principal presented the school's 'Numeracy Improvement Journey' as an example of data-informed self-review processes.

Additional information relating to numeracy achievement over time was shared indicating a high standard deviation (SD) in numeracy mean scores over time and low upper growth percentages over time. These results correlate with evidence about the ongoing challenges identified by staff, related to differentiating for the range of abilities and needs amongst the students in their classes. Teachers of some students talked about ‘filling in the gaps’ when low literacy skills were having an impact on numeracy achievement, while others mentioned disengaged behaviour as a factor compounding the challenge of differentiation.

Along with increasing the number of students achieving at and above basic levels of proficiency, the school needs to ensure that all students improve upon their own results, every year, as they progress at school. The implementation of research-based strategies that provide ‘high support’ for all students now form the school’s improvement priorities. The Review Panel found that an analysis across a range of data sets has identified the need for high expectations to be made explicit so all students can be supported to be ‘numerate, literate and successful’.

Direction 1

Raise the percentage of students achieving at higher levels by making the school’s ‘high expectations for all’ explicit, and use these standards to assist students to set and realise their learning goals.

How effectively is student learning growth monitored and evaluated?

This inquiry question directs the school towards the importance of reflecting on the effectiveness of the way student learning is monitored to be able to answer questions about “how well” individual children are progressing over time, using their own starting point as the basis for comparison.

The standard deviation data for McDonald Park exemplifies the wide range in results over time. In 2013, the SD at Year 3 was 77.8, and in 2015, it was down to 68. In 2015, at Year 5, the SD is 64, up from 53.4 in 2013. At Year 7, the SD is up and down over the three year period. Tracking individual scores for some students is useful in understanding difference and needs.

The upper growth rate also indicates progress over time and, in this case, there is no improvement trend. Over the last three years there has been little change in the upper growth progress rate of 16.5% at Years 3 to 5, and Years 5 to 7. The school has an upper growth target of 25% for 2015.

The Site Improvement Plan states upfront that it is committed to giving every student the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Knowing where each child is “up to” in their learning, at any point in time, is the baseline from which growth is monitored, learning programs are planned, achievement is measured and progress is evaluated.

The school’s data schedule (updated October 2015) lists term by term, week by week, what data will be collected and analysed and for what purpose. For example, at the start of the year, each team looks at the assessment results from the end of the previous year, for their class of current students. By the middle of Term 1, each team and class teacher establishes targets for improvement. These are discussed in performance and development meetings twice per year.

The current system generally looks at analysing school and cohort level data. For example, in 2015, teachers have been focusing on two main areas for targeted teaching of numeracy: addressing misconceptions and supporting higher-order thinking.

In 2015, student achievement data is now also monitored at the classroom level by teachers using their own checklists, spreadsheets and other resources designed by the team. As yet there is no systematic process for monitoring growth and progress against the year-level milestones, benchmarks or standards.

To redress inconsistency in results over time, the needs and starting points of each student must be known and monitored. A multi-level approach to tracking progress should be introduced to ensure effective teaching, timely intervention and informed enrichment for each student, and even more specifically for those whose learning is at greatest risk.

Direction 2

Increase the numbers of students consistently achieving the Standard of Educational Achievement in literacy and numeracy by tracking the learning growth of every student, and by using this information systematically to inform planning and respond with targeted instruction.

How does the school know that its professional learning and performance and development processes are effective in building teacher capacity?

Over the past few years (2012 to 2014), with the leadership and support of a part-time literacy coach (now the Senior Leader), the school has developed a Literacy Agreement. The comprehensive document includes practices that all staff have been supported to understand and are expected to implement. It addresses the gradual release of responsibility model of teaching; use of assessment and data; intervention and support; partnerships with parents; and it includes site developed curriculum overviews that indicate year-level achievement standards and essential skills. The *McPark Toolbox* provides a collection of supplementary resources accessible via the school's curriculum network. Staff understood that the purpose of such an agreement is to increase consistency in practice and raise student achievement.

The Review Panel heard teachers talk positively about a similar model being used to develop the draft Numeracy Agreement. The professional learning strategies backing this intention are currently directed towards quality teaching in mathematics to ensure continuity in learning from Reception to Year 7.

These agreements are part of the Site Improvement Plan. The Site Improvement Plan also clearly states that a commitment to action is required by everyone so that learners are supported at the classroom level to achieve the numeracy and literacy targets. There is provision for regular and structured time for staff to work together in teams as part of the professional learning program. This includes active participation in the four-week staff meeting cycle that supports professional learning; research and feedback; planning and undertaking professional learning walks; and team action planning.

The panel heard from teachers that expectations are made explicit in relation to lesson structure and thinking routines, planning units of work together, and designing assessment tasks to meet the range of needs. School documentation indicated that performance and development processes have a team and an individual focus linked to classroom teaching.

The panel members also analysed group responses collected from a self-review staff meeting during the review visit. All staff teams identified that the regular teamwork and timely additional release is valued, well-used and should be sustained and embedded. Firstly, staff said that this is because the time provides opportunity to do curriculum planning together, to look at class data as a starting point and to check prior learning and post-teaching. Secondly, the release time enables them to moderate the design of assessment tasks and teacher professional judgement about student work. Supporting the students to show that a 'C' means learning in a 'new context' has been part of the work.

The teachers also said there is 'more to be done' in this area verifying evidence that a strong culture of professional learning exists in the school. Teachers and non-teaching staff not only learn from each other and key members of the leadership team, they access high quality professional learning in the Partnership and further afield. At other times, the staff members are working with external consultants on-site to build their knowledge of subject content and effective pedagogy.

The panel heard that professional learning achieved during 'classroom walkthroughs' was also seen by staff as being enriching for everyone, especially when undertaken across the school and not only within their own year levels or with buddy teachers. The teachers said the preparation and process promotes a whole-school culture of sharing, encourages the deprivatisation of practice, and builds connections across teams. With such a positive attitude to the way ideas are shared, peer feedback from quality processes like the walkthroughs, can now be aligned with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) to build teacher capacity and leverage consistency of practice across the school.

The Review Panel found that the Leadership Team, in consultation with staff, has set an ambitious improvement agenda to achieve coherent teaching practice to support learners from Reception to Year 7. Staying on this course over time will support the school to attain the achievement and growth required.

Direction 3

Strengthen teacher capacity by ensuring there is successful implementation of site improvement strategies in every classroom, that student learning outcomes are monitored, and that the impact of professional learning processes are regularly evaluated against the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

How effectively do teachers build a positive and supportive class learning culture?

The existence of a classroom learning culture that enables students to talk about their learning and wellbeing, give and receive feedback, and make real choices about what and how they can improve, is fundamental to supporting all students to be engaged and successful at school.

The Review Panel heard from students, staff and parents that they want a productive, safe and sound learning culture in every classroom. This year, the Site Improvement Plan has a strategic intent to deliberately implement a whole-school focus on developing positive mindsets for learning.

Parents said they had heard their children talk about being positive, about 'the learning pit', and about knowing how to problem-solve their learning in class and friendship issues in the yard. Parents said they valued the connections they and their children make with teachers. They appreciate it when a teacher has helped their child to 'click' as a learner; someone who understands their child and what they like.

Central to the success of the focus on 'growth mindset' is the embedded use of formative assessment processes. This pedagogy is supporting teachers to include a range of strategies allowing students to give and receive feedback that is clearly connected to their learning needs. Students shared a range of these strategies as evidence of the extent to which assessment for learning is being implemented across the school. They said they were using 'coloured cups' if help was needed, 'thumbs up thumbs down' to show their understanding, and 'pop sticks' for random selection when sharing ideas. Some teachers are currently talking with students about work that is "at, below, and above" standard. These students said this helps them know what they are learning and to set goals for the term. When asked about the feedback they received from teachers, students felt the "best feedback is feedback that tells us what to do next", feedback about "how to do it better", or information about "parts to improve".

The Review Panel found that the take-up of assessment for learning focus across the school was very well-supported by staff, with some teachers telling the Review Panel how highly-motivated they were by the responses from students, as well as by the positive impact they were seeing on their own teaching.

All groups interviewed said it was beneficial to everyone when all students were focused in their learning.

The school is in the beginning stages of implementing formative assessment strategies in daily practice, and across the curriculum. This should be continued. As the Leadership Team and the Steering Committee work together to raise student performance, it is important that a strengthened focus on engagement and challenge be included as part of the school's agreed pedagogy.

Direction 4

Empower students to take responsibility for their progress and success by strengthening the use of a range of formative assessment and problem-solving strategies to build resilience and other learner dispositions, and increase the positive engagement of all students in every class.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

McDonald Park School is focused on improving the performance of students from Reception to Year 7. Student achievement data and other evidence are being used to make informed decisions about improvement. Teachers are provided with and use structured time for ongoing collaborative professional learning. Self-review processes are strategically used to improve teacher effectiveness.

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

1. Raise the percentage of students achieving at higher levels by making the school's 'high expectations for all' explicit, and use these standards to assist students to set and realise their learning goals.
2. Increase the numbers of students consistently achieving the Standard of Educational Achievement in literacy and numeracy by tracking the learning growth of every student, and by using this information systematically to inform planning and respond with targeted instruction.
3. Strengthen teacher capacity by ensuring there is successful implementation of site improvement strategies in every classroom, that student learning outcomes are monitored, and that the impact of professional learning processes are regularly evaluated against the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.
4. Empower students to take responsibility for their progress and success by strengthening the use of a range of formative assessment and problem-solving strategies to build resilience and other learner dispositions and increase the positive engagement of all students in every class.

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



Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL
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.

Sandy Davey
PRINCIPAL
MCDONALD PARK SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson