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 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 Dernancourt School R-7 verified that the school is working towards being compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal advised that the school's Cyber Safety Policy was being collaboratively developed with staff and Governing Council. In the interim, Cyber Safety was being taught as part of the Child Protection Curriculum.

The 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 94.1%, which exceeds the DECD target of 93%.

School context

In 2013, Dernancourt Primary School and Dernancourt Junior Primary Schools amalgamated to form Dernancourt School R-7. The school is situated in the inner north eastern metropolitan area and has a student enrolment of 290 students. The school has an ICSEA score of 1033, and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school reflects a culturally diverse community. The school population includes 3% Aboriginal students, 42% students with English as Additional Language or Dialect, 17% Students with Disability and 26% are supported by School Card. The school includes two district special classes.

The leadership team consists of the Principal in her third year of tenure since the amalgamation (three years prior to this as Principal of the Dernancourt Junior Primary School) and the Deputy Principal in her third year of tenure.
Lines of inquiry

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

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<th>Student Learning:</th>
<th>How well are students achieving over time?</th>
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<td>To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning and how do you know?</td>
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<td>Effective teaching:</td>
<td>How effectively are teachers using the Australian Curriculum to support and improve student learning?</td>
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How well are students achieving over time?

Reading and writing has been a consistent focus at Dernancourt School R-7 in recent years. The pre-review discussion of student achievement data found that NAPLAN results in reading and writing exceed similar schools at Year 3, 5 and 7 in 2014. This is not yet the case for numeracy and the lines of inquiry focused on numeracy and mathematics teaching.

The percentage of students achieving the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) in numeracy is generally higher at Year 3 and lower at Year 7 and this has been a consistent pattern since 2010. For example, in 2014 the percentage of students achieving the SEA in Years 3, 5 and 7 was 76%, 74%, and 58% respectively.

Higher order skills are assessed in the higher proficiency bands of NAPLAN. At the school, the percentage of students achieving in the upper proficiency bands is highest at Year 3 and Year 5 and lower at Year 7. For example, in 2014 the percentage of students in the higher proficiency bands in reading at Years 3, 5 and 7 was 45%, 41% and 11% respectively. This pattern has been evident in numeracy as well.

In 2015, numeracy was identified for improvement by staff through analysis of NAPLAN data and parents who spoke to the Review Panel identified the impact of the focus on literacy as a strength and the need to now include numeracy. The school improvement priorities are literacy, numeracy, wellbeing and implementing the Australian Curriculum.

The Review Panel acknowledges the strategic leadership of the amalgamation process that took place in 2013, the bringing together of practice and understandings, the establishment of a collaborative culture from Reception to Year 7 and the establishment of whole school agreements and standards aligned to the SEA.

To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning and how do you know?

Teachers, students and parents identified a range of practices that support challenge. The Review Panel saw evidence of differentiated planning that provided opportunities for students to be challenged in their learning. Executive function has been a focus for five years at the school, supported by a cluster neuroscience coach who works part-time in the school directly with classes. Students and parents described how neuroscience helped children self-regulate, focus on the tasks at hand and being 'the best learner they can be'.

The Review Panel heard how a 'Big Thinkers' group provided opportunities for students to engage in intellectually challenging activities and that the Teaching for Effective Learning (TFEL) focus across the school is on using teaching strategies that build the skills of students to become expert learners.

Some teachers provided examples of how intellectual stretch was being built into numeracy tasks but were unsure of the consistency of this approach across the school. In discussing the range of approaches employed to provide challenge in learning, parents, students and teachers were unclear about which strategies were having an impact on learning.
Direction 1
Increase the number of students demonstrating high level learning by providing consistent and challenging learning experiences for students from Reception to Year 7. Use current collaborative planning practices to ensure that task design provides opportunities for intellectual stretch and allows children to demonstrate learning at a high level.

How effectively are teachers using the Australian Curriculum to support and improve student learning?

Parents identified the school’s ability to cater for the varied needs of students as a key feature and reason to bring their children to the school. Teachers described the Principal’s approach in leading learning as ‘hands-on’, particularly in supporting intervention planning, individual student goal-setting and monitoring of student progress. In literacy, learning growth is monitored and tracked closely. The progress of priority groups is systematically monitored. Individual Learning Plans (ILP) are collaboratively developed and regularly reviewed and updated.

Teachers use the results from identified standardised assessments, as well as formative assessment tasks, to inform teaching. Parents, teachers and students identified goal setting as a consistent and useful practice to ensure all students are progressing. Teachers reported that they set whole-class goals based on common teaching points identified through analysis of assessment tasks. Teachers work with students to design individual learning plans for literacy. Students reported that some teachers use the collaborative goal-setting process to set goals in areas other than literacy.

In addition, learning goals are set by teachers to guide intervention programs for students requiring additional support. Progress towards goals is reviewed at least once a term by the teacher with the Principal and EALD teacher. School Support Officers (SSOs) provide classroom support to allow teachers to provide explicit instruction to identified students. In some classes, progress towards individual student learning goals is reviewed weekly by the teacher.

Direction 2
Increase the number of students achieving high level outcomes in mathematics, by developing a model for numeracy improvement that does not "displace" current practice in literacy. Identify successful approaches to literacy improvement that are relevant to numeracy improvement and collaboratively develop a documented numeracy agreement and implementation strategy.

The Review Panel heard from parents that the personal approach from staff, particularly the leadership team and attention to communication about learning, was influential in their decision to enrol their children at the school. Teachers reported that the leadership team is strategic in maintaining the focus on learning, and that while the leadership team provide overall direction, teachers felt that they took joint responsibility for learning outcomes across the school.

Teachers talked about their collaborative work with the Australian Curriculum Implementation Officer as one way they ensured their planning was consistent with the context of the Australian Curriculum. In addition, the Review Panel heard how teachers plan together in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to ensure that the curriculum is coherent from the perspective of the learners, as they move through the school.

Teachers reported that the structure around the PLCs created a sense of shared responsibility as well as individual accountability for implementing agreed approaches. Teachers reported that PLCs are highly valued within the school and provide scope for staff to develop a deep understanding of curriculum. The Review Panel saw evidence of shared and consistent planning based on the Australian Curriculum using the TFE design tool.

Teachers and leaders talked about how an ongoing cycle of collaborative review was undertaken during PLC meetings twice a term. Governing Council members also spoke to the Review Panel about the analysis of school-wide data and improvement planning processes. Staff and parents talked openly about strengths and weaknesses in school data and plans for improvement. Professional learning is linked to improvement approaches and teachers attending professional learning events have a responsibility to share within their PLC and with the wider staff.
The Review Panel talked to three of the four PLCs and joined a PLC who were working together to analyse formative and summative assessments to inform joint planning and teaching. The Review Panel heard that some PLCs had been working together for longer than others and that this had allowed a deeper level of shared work to be undertaken. Due to staffing changes, the upper primary PLC was newly formed in 2015 and teachers reported that they were working towards greater consistency in their planning, task design and assessment. Staff identified further moderation of shared tasks as one way that value could be added to student learning through PLCs. This is supported by the Review Panel as a strategy to address the variability of achievement in mathematics, particularly in the upper primary years.

Direction 3
Increase the number of students demonstrating high level learning in numeracy across the school, particularly in the upper primary years, by increasing the consistency and rigor of planning and teaching using the PLC model for planning, goal setting and moderating shared tasks.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Dernancourt School R-7 is tracking well. Good performance was evident through a culture of improvement and the use of student achievement data and other evidence to inform decisions and actions at the individual student, class and whole-school levels.

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

1. Increase the number of students demonstrating high level learning by providing consistent and challenging learning experience for students from Reception to Year 7. Use current collaborative planning practices to ensure that task design provides opportunities for intellectual stretch and allows children to demonstrate learning at a high level.

2. Increase the number of students achieving high level outcomes in mathematics, by developing a model for numeracy improvement that does not “displace” current practice in literacy. Identify successful approaches to literacy improvement that are relevant to numeracy improvement and collaboratively develop a documented numeracy agreement and implementation strategy.

3. Increase the number of students demonstrating high level learning in numeracy across the school, particularly in the upper primary years by increasing the consistency and rigor of planning and teaching using the PLC model for planning, goal setting and moderating shared tasks.

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

Tony Lunniss
A/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.

Christine Ferguson
PRINCIPAL
DERNANCOURT SCHOOL R-7

Governning Council Chairperson