

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

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR UPPER STURT PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in February 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 Tony Sullivan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Wendy Moore, 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 Upper Sturt 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 1 Governance: Items 2, 3, 4, 5, 7

The Governing Council will provide advice to the Principal so as to strengthen and support public education through the collaborative development of the Site Improvement Plan and self-review in relation to plans, initiatives, and evaluation of student achievement, policies and programs at the school. The Governing Council will work collaboratively with the Principal to report to the school community, on a regular basis, on the school's finances; an annual update of the strategic directions and site improvement priorities through the Annual Report; documenting and monitoring a site Parent Complaints Policy; and monitoring site bullying data, trends and initiatives at least twice per year.

Part 3 School Organisation: Item 2

The school will implement an attendance improvement plan with clearly stated targets and strategies to manage attendance.

Part 4 People and Culture: Items 2, 5 and 7

Merit Selection Policy and procedures must apply to vacancy selection and recruitment processes in the school. Processes will be put in place to manage employee complaints and grievances. The school must establish a Personnel Advisory Committee which consults with, and represents staff in relation to human resource matters.

Part 5 Safety: Items 4 and 5

The school will implement a Volunteer Policy and Cyber Safety Policy that accords with DECD guidelines.

Part 6 Site Procedures: Item 1

Consultation outcomes about health and safety issues are reported back to workers. Health and safety is an agenda item on all staff meetings.

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 93.9%, which is above the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Upper Sturt Primary School is located in the Adelaide Hills, approximately 20kms from the Adelaide CBD. The school has had a stable enrolment of around 32 students over the past 4 years (2012 to 2015). The 2016 enrolment is 52 students. The school has an ICSEA score of 1104, and is classified as Category 7 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 3 Aboriginal students and 4 Students with Disabilities. There are no students identified with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), or students under the Guardianship of the Minister (GoM).

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in her fourth year of tenure at the school. The Principal has a 0.4FTE teaching component.

The school operates with a Reception class and two mainstream multi-age classes.

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 considering the data below, there needs to be some caution in making a judgement due to the low numbers represented in the student cohorts at the school. This is done for two reasons: to overcome the anomalies that may occur in any one year, and to minimise the possibility of identifying individuals in any small cohort of students. The data below represents a summary of aggregated data from Upper Sturt Primary School over the years 2011 to 2015.

In the early years, reading is monitored against Running Records. From 2011 to 2015, 10 of 29 (34%) Year 1 students, and 9 of 21 (43%) Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

From 2011 to 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 15 of 19 (89%) Year 3, 11 of 12 (92%) Year 5, and 10 of 13 (77%) Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement of the DECD SEA.

From 2011 to 2015, in Years 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the average results of similar students across the DECD system.

In NAPLAN Reading, from 2011 to 2015, 9 of 19 (47%) at Year 3, 3 of 12 (25%) at Year 5, and 1 of 13 (8%) at Year 7 students achieved in the top two bands.

Numeracy

From 2011 to 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 18 of 20 (90%) Year 3 students, 8 of 12 (67%) Year 5 students and 8 of 13 (62%) Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA.

From 2011 to 2015, in Years 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the average results of similar students across the DECD system.

In NAPLAN Numeracy, from 2011 to 2015, 6 of 20 (30%) Year 3 students, 1 of 12 (8%) Year 5 students, and 1 of 13 (8%) Year 7 students were in the top two bands.

The Principal's presentation described her early focus on improving facilities and school environment, before exploring how the natural environment, pertaining to local bushland, could serve to support student wellbeing and learning, and set the school aside from other mainstream schools. The school is continuing to build its identity using play-based and project-based learning, and the surrounding natural environment to support the delivery of the Australian Curriculum.

As a result of the above data, and Principal's presentation, the Review Panel explored the following Lines of Inquiry to determine the impact and effectiveness of these approaches on improving student learning and wellbeing.

Lines of Inquiry

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

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

Effective Leadership: How effectively does the school leadership foster a culture of learning?

Improvement Agenda: How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?

How effectively does the school leadership foster a culture of learning?

The Principal has sought to develop a school identity with staff and parents over the past two years based on a number of presenting factors. These include: the local heritage bush environment; a locally identified need for student positive psychology; local research into the 'Forest School' concept in the UK, Europe and Canada; a need to sustain and grow student enrolments; and the skillset of the contract teaching staff. The Principal is currently researching this initial concept of Upper Sturt as a 'bush school'. This was verified in conversations with staff, parents and Governing Council representatives and in documentation.

The Principal and staff presented evidence that they worked collaboratively to design the delivery and curriculum focus through an agreed school timetable that uses the natural heritage environment as a conduit for learning. The Early Years teacher has a preschool background and incorporates play-based learning into a nature-based program. The other teachers incorporate project-based learning into aspects of their class programs. This was verified in planning documentation and observation during the review.

The Principal engaged a Primary Curriculum Consultant to work with staff in building and designing the curriculum based on the outcomes described in the Australian Curriculum. These were verified in displays, student assessment folders and student reports. The staff engaged in Hawker Brownlow training to support their design of the learning program, working backwards from outcomes sought, to identify the most engaging way to deliver the outcomes within the school environment. Teacher planning and programming documentation verified this as a consistent approach used effectively across the school.

The role of the Principal in a small school requires the capacity to operate at both operational and strategic levels to effect positive school change, and to determine the level of effectiveness evidenced through the impact on student learning. The school community of staff, parents and students is continuing to build its identity based on this vision, local environment and staff approaches to curriculum delivery. Through the Principal's leadership, the impact of the planned change agenda on all aspects of student learning will require further monitoring, tracking, analysis and reporting, using data and evidence collected beyond what currently exists. The Principal stated: "We don't know what the impact will be yet."

The Principal acknowledged that determining what difference has been made has only just commenced at a basic level. Rigorous self-review of the comprehensive coverage of the curriculum delivered, and the resultant impact of the pedagogical approaches used, needs to be implemented and monitored in a planned way. The Review Panel believes it is possible to consider learning and wellbeing data over time using 2014 as the baseline to gauge improvement. This was the year when the school commenced its journey. Most of this data is readily available to the school. In particular, student achievement and growth over a two-year period will be available to support tracking through to 2016 to determine effectiveness.

Direction 1

Strategically monitor, self-review and report on the effectiveness and impact of the school's pedagogical and curriculum implementation on student achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and wellbeing.

How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

The Review Panel verified that school staff identify key topics or themes to deliver in cross-curriculum units of work each term for the multi-age classes at the school. These topics contain a link where learning can be explored and connected further in the local 'bush' setting. Staff discussion and documentation verified their collaborative teamwork to expand on these topics to ensure that they cover all aspects of the Australian Curriculum (Possible Lines of Development 'PLOD'). Planning documentation and learning artefacts in assessment folders verified that HASS subjects are delivered in an integrated way. Student thinking or 'understanding' about their learning is recorded in their individual learning journals. The panel verified that teachers use these to gauge students' level of engagement and understanding with the learning program.

Evidence was verified that teachers work with students to establish their prior knowledge and understanding with these subjects, and to build onto this using 'inquiry' or 'provocations', generating student engagement with their learning. This was evident in school and class displays, as well as in student learning journals. Students confidently discussed how learning was differentiated for them. One of the teachers provided evidence about how he refines the inquiry questions in a strategic way to best deliver the learning outcomes described for each curriculum area and year level. Students and staff consistently referred to these questions as 'wonderings'.

Literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills are taught more explicitly in the primary classes, as evidenced through teacher comment and observations. The teachers work together to plan for the range of learning needs across these classes and deliver the learning using both inside and outside (BIO) environments. The outside environment is used in a planned way to build the connections with the literacy and numeracy concepts being taught. The panel verified evidence of the mathematical concept of 'larger/smaller' being introduced through team-teaching across Years 3 to 7, with differentiation being applied into more complex mathematical concepts of area/perimeter for older students.

It was verified that each student had a learning journal and an assessment folder where their reflections, work and assessments are recorded. Each class has a 'floor book' in which the class learning process, activities, reflections, learning connections, photos and evidence are captured. Learning outcomes expected for students in each year level are documented by teachers in the back of these artefacts. Teachers monitor achievement and transference of these outcomes through observation and assessment. At the end of each term the school invites parents in for a celebration evening where these documents are shared. This was verified through staff and parent comment. At key times, the Principal invites parents, via email, to discuss their child's learning by communicating key concepts (for example, viscosity of water) taught in units of work. Parents confirmed that they were surprised at the level of student understanding of the various concepts covered through these units.

The panel verified that the teachers use rubrics, scores, comments and grades to assess student learning. An assessment regime occurs at the beginning of the year to establish learning needs in aspects of literacy and numeracy. These are kept in student assessment folders and are sent home at the end of each year. The panel saw samples of these folders from the 2015 school year.

Teachers have recently begun to describe the learning intentions expected from students through engagement with the planned learning program. This was evident in one classroom visited. Differentiation based on student needs and abilities was evident in classroom observations, groupings of students, negotiated education plans and staff discussions.

Curriculum overviews and classroom programs were requested by the Review Panel; however, due to the early timing of the review these were not available as evidence of this aspect of school effectiveness of supporting students in their learning. Similarly, the two curriculum 'maps' in spelling and grammar were from other schools and not contextualised for the Upper Sturt learning context.

During parent and Governing Council representative discussion, it was expressed that the Principal and teachers enjoy a high level of trust from the parent community, which has been established over a number of years. Parents were articulate in their desire for their children to be challenged in their learning. It is important that evidence-based practices and curriculum design exist for students as they progress from Reception to Year 7. The contract nature of staffing at the school necessitates the sustainability of both of

the key components to ensure curriculum continuity for students currently at the school. Documentation of policy and practice are critical for this purpose.

Direction 2

Ensure Australian Curriculum provision and pedagogical practices are delivered in a coherent and planned way to sustain continued student achievement, engagement and challenge over time.

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

The Principal and staff described ongoing school self-review as a relatively informal process that happens constantly due to the nature of working in a small school environment. The nature of close working relationships, teachers working with students over a number of years and an awareness of individual strengths and areas for development, were cited as precursors to this approach.

The Review Panel observed a staff meeting where the above approach was used to decide on student groupings for literacy, intervention required for some students, the need for greater complexity to be used in students' narrative writing and a collection date of writing samples for further reflection at the end of Term 1. The Principal commented in the staff meeting: "Writing should be a focus for us as it emerged from NAPLAN."

The panel noted and independently discussed the lower ratio of students reaching the SEA in reading from Reception to Year 2 over time with the Early Years teachers and Principal. The Reception teacher acknowledged that the 'pace' and intensity of her reading program over the year should be adjusted to lift standards of reading, commensurate with the capacity of students at the school. The Year 1/2 teacher described her reading program as more explicit. It is noted in the data that the SEA in reading in Term 2 of Year 3 (NAPLAN) shows that a higher percentage of students have attained the standard set for this year level.

The Principal stated that the strategic collection, analysis and synthesis of data and evidence are areas for her further development as a school leader. The data collected at the classroom level was used by teachers to plan and implement programs for their group of students. This needs to happen at the school level where patterns can be discerned, acknowledged and addressed by all staff in combination with their professional judgement. The staff presented evidence of their capacity to work with data and evidence to impact school improvement.

Data and evidence related to student learning exists in various forms throughout the school. The Review Panel verified data spreadsheets inclusive of various diagnostic and formative assessments tracked over time. A to E scores were provided against learning areas for students in Years 1 to 7; however, these were not used in other ways beyond reporting to parents. The reports did place emphasis on the General Capabilities from the Australian Curriculum.

The Principal commented that she would require support in developing her capacity to lead whole-school improvement through a scheduled, timely and strategic approach to data collection and analysis as it relates to student learning and wellbeing. In doing so, the Principal will have definitive evidence of the impact of curriculum and teaching practices on learning, and make strategic adjustments to achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity based on this evidence.

At the time of the review, the Principal presented a draft Site Improvement Plan that was in an early phase of development. This draft did not describe how the improvement work will impact directly on student learning. The Principal has agreed to strengthen this plan through the support of the Principal Consultant and in a consistent 'Backwards by Design' style being asked of the classroom teachers.

Direction 3

Collect, analyse and interrogate various data and evidence to strategically plan, at both the classroom and school levels, for the learning and wellbeing needs of all students.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Upper Sturt Primary School is providing an engaging Australian Curriculum for students using pedagogy that builds upon what students know, understand and can do through an inquiry approach to learning, within the local heritage bush environment of the school, to make learning relevant and explicit. Over time, the school has been achieving within the average results of similar students across the DECD system. The school must work to maintain higher percentages of students in the top two learning bands in numeracy and literacy over time. The Principal must strategically monitor and review to determine the impact of school strategies and practices on student achievement, and plan for continuous improvement over time.

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

1. Strategically monitor, self-review and report on the effectiveness and impact of the school's pedagogical and curriculum implementation on student achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and wellbeing.
2. Ensure Australian Curriculum provision and pedagogical practices are delivered in a coherent and planned way to sustain continued student achievement, engagement and challenge over time.
3. Collect, analyse and interrogate various data and evidence to strategically plan, at both the classroom and school levels, for the learning and wellbeing needs of all students.

Based on the school's current performance, Upper Sturt 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.

Barb Jones
PRINCIPAL
UPPER STURT PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson