EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

Report for Blakeview Primary School

Conducted in February 2017

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.

The External School Review Process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are adhered to and implemented. This information is provided in Appendix One of the report.

This External School Review was conducted by Helen Tunney and Vonnie Dolling, Review Officers, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Sue Toone, Review Principal.

School context

Blakeview Primary School caters for children from Reception to Year 7. It is situated 29kms north of the Adelaide CBD. The local DECD Partnership is Uleybury. The school enrolment in 2017 is 570 students, increasing from 492 since 2012. The current enrolment includes 26 students (3 classes) in an annexed, purpose-built Disability Unit. The number of students in this unit will rise to 32 in Semester 2 when an extension of facilities will accommodate a 4th class.

The school is classified as Category 4 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school's ICSEA score is 934. The Blakeview Primary School student population includes 8.7% (50) Aboriginal students, 14% (80) mainstream students verified with a disability, 31.4% (179) students living in families eligible for School Card assistance, 5.2% (30) students of EALD background, and 6 children in care.

The school Principal is in the second year of his tenure at the school. Other school leaders include: a Deputy Principal, a Director of Curriculum, a Leader of Learner Engagement and Wellbeing, and a Leader of the Disability Unit. There are 34.8FTE teachers, including 2 in the early years of their career and 7 Step 9 teachers. Leadership in the school has been unstable for a number of years, and this has, in turn, impacted the stability of the teaching team. This overall staffing instability is expected to improve from 2017.

The school values are: Respect, Responsibility, and Honesty.
The school motto is: empowering learners for positive participation in our school, community and world.

Lines of Inquiry

In considering the data summary in the School Performance Overview (Appendix Two) and the Principal's Presentation, the Review Panel explored the following Lines of Inquiry to evaluate the school's effectiveness in raising student achievement and sustaining high performance. During the external review process, the panel focused on three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

Effective Leadership: **How well does leadership facilitate the development of coherent, high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?**

Student Learning: **To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?**

Effective Teaching: **How well do teachers design tasks to engage students and to build on their prior skills and knowledge?**

How well does leadership facilitate the development of coherent, high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?

At Blakeview Primary School a large and cohesive Leadership Team has developed, that is visible and whose members share and support each other to improve the effectiveness of the school. Since 2016, numerous systems and processes that have needed review and modification have been effectively addressed. During this time there has been a period of rapid and necessary change that has led to significant cultural improvement at the school. Parents reported feeling highly confident in what is now happening in the school and how it is being led, and the benefits of this to the morale of staff, students and families was apparent. Teachers stated that the change of leadership has significantly and positively impacted their professional and personal wellbeing. What has been achieved includes: improved professional and personal staff morale and mental health; increased student pride and sense of security in the school; restoration of parents' trust and confidence in the school and its staff; renewed optimism in school leaders; and greatly strengthened connectedness between leadership and staff. The culture of the school has been rejuvenated.

A culture of regular staff teams (called Professional Learning Communities or PLCs) is well-established in the school and valued by teachers and School Services Officers (SSOs). These PLCs meet weekly and staff members support each other to share practice and sometimes to collaborate in operationalising initiatives. The panel concluded that teachers and SSOs are using planned PLC time to implement strategies and share new ideas, and so are well-placed to collaboratively evaluate these practices and the impact they are having on student learning outcomes.

The Leadership Team facilitates staff access to student achievement data and data is being used to track student learning growth over time. Leaders are now in a position to upskill teachers in the analysis of their own student achievement data in order to inform learning design through the identification of intentional teaching points in cycles of self-review. A major point of development for the school is to move to an evidence-based approach to improvement to ensure that strategies that are being implemented are monitored for effectiveness.

There is a structure of committees for the implementation of the Site Improvement Plan (SIP) priorities. Some teachers questioned the decision-making process for moving committee recommendations to whole-school agreements, and expressed a desire to have more discussion about agreements before they become mandated practice at the school.

Teachers identified whole-school approaches as enabling of their work. New teachers this year felt strongly supported through the school's induction processes, and having whole-school processes and agreements is a significant mechanism for this. The school has provided a wide range of professional learning over the past 5 years. All groups of teachers stated that, whilst they appreciate and value the whole-school approach to the implementation of strategies and the professional learning, they feel either at-risk of being overwhelmed or over-loaded because of the volume of expectations being generated. Not all T&D has been accessed by all teachers and there is inconsistency in the impact of T&D on practice. Non-mainstream classroom teachers told the panel that they experience a lack of relevance in school and Partnership professional learning. A point of development for the school is to resource a narrower, deeper approach to improvement.

There was little evidence that SIP priorities, professional learning, performance and development and the work of the PLCs have been made coherent for staff. No teachers referred to performance development as facilitative of improving practice. It is an important next step for the school to provide more coherence for staff so they participate in complementary, not competing, strategies for improvement in the school.

By developing an evidence-based improvement approach continuous growth will be enabled. For example, whilst attendance monitoring has been addressed and made more rigorous at a school level, teachers and leaders identified poor attendance as of continuing concern. By engaging more stakeholders in the evidence about attendance through collaborative analysis of it, ideas about 'what else?' can be collaboratively generated, put into practice and then evaluated for effectiveness.

There has been a prioritised focus on improving student social and emotional self-regulation in the school environment through staff training in a wide range of accredited professional approaches. However, teachers stated that students do not transfer their learning from social skills programs into academic learning. The panel concluded that there is a dominant assumption in the school that an emphasis on improving behaviour through social skills development is a necessary precursor to improving learning engagement and achievement. To now move forward, the school can use the DECD Position Paper *Wellbeing for Learning and Life* to re-frame thinking about the interconnection of learning and wellbeing, in order to keep improved student achievement always as the core business of the school.

Procedures for better support of teachers with students exhibiting challenging behaviours have been successful and greatly valued by teachers. However, teachers continue to identify student behaviour as a barrier to learning. It was not evident that systems for the collection of behaviour data at the classroom level are in place. By involving teachers in the analysis of student behaviour data and setting-up processes to collect information about how students are behaving in classrooms, an evidence-based approach to improving the effectiveness of classroom management will be enabled.

The panel concluded that the Leadership Team has successfully stabilised the operational and management structures of the school, and has developed a cohesive learning-focussed culture. The school is now in a position to support its teachers through coherent site improvement processes to understand the links between engaging students through quality pedagogy, the activation of student agency in their own and

each other's learning, and effective classroom management.

Direction 1
Narrow the learning improvement focus and provide coherent cycles of change that link SIP targets, professional learning, the work of PLCs, coaching, and performance development.

To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

Through the staff meeting activity that the panel conducted it was clear that Blakeview Primary School staff collectively has a deep understanding of intellectual challenge as being about pedagogies, the 'how' of their teaching. The staff also demonstrated a collective, rich knowledge base of how to implement such pedagogies. However, the panel found little evidence that there is wide-spread application of pedagogies for intellectual challenge. This was verified through conversations with students. A point of leverage for the school is to consistently apply pedagogies that enable students to engage in learning that is more intellectually challenging, that stimulates critical and creative thinking that engages students in higher-order tasks, that utilizes students' skills and interests, and that enables collaborative learning.

Students being able to influence their own and each other's learning enhances engagement and intellectual challenge. At Blakeview Primary School the panel was told that the following strategies are used to enable students to have some influence in their learning:

- Input into class culture, rules and organisation.
- Some reflection about learning (e.g. coloured cups).
- Class dojos.
- 2 stars and a wish.
- Goal setting.
- Exit slips.
- Collection of perception data.
- Use of 'no hands-up' strategies.
- Class meetings.
- Some choice for students in their history topic in one class.

Not all strategies are used in all classes and in some classes no such strategies are used. Student influence in learning is critical in order to move students into becoming self-managing as learners, learners who are empowered with understandings about themselves as a learner and the learning process itself. The school can develop student metacognition about learning through the regular statement of learning intentions and success criteria.

At Blakeview Primary School a culture of individual student goal-setting has been established. There is a whole-school expectation that these goals will be individually reviewed and re-set twice a term. However, the panel found there was little evidence that mainstream student learning goals are being used by students and teachers to increase student agency in their own learning. The foundations are laid for the school to foster deeper application of this strategy by linking it to the regular statement of learning intentions and success criteria, the provision of feedback to students, and regular communication of these goals to parents.

Supporting students over time to become fluent in the language of learning is also important. Students struggled to talk about their learning to the panel. Many students are operating in the casual language register and do not have skills in the formal language register of the classroom. Supporting students over time to develop metacognition as a learner, and to communicate about learning itself are important next moves for the school.

The Disability Unit is a strength of the school and it is valued by all groups of stakeholders. There is strong and successful integration of primary students from the Disability Unit into the mainstream, and the seamlessness of integration of Disability Unit staff brings expertise to the school. There are rigorous and effective processes in place to review, set goals and plan learning for students with special needs, with students being included in these reviews. The school is well-placed to explore the application of *specific, measurable, realistic, achievable, time-bound, agreed and reviewed* (SMARTAR) goal-setting in the

mainstream. Using the expertise of the Disability Unit staff teachers in the mainstream can support their students to recognize what they can know, do and understand, and to know what the next steps are to take them to the next level of learning.

The provision of quality extra-curricular opportunities has been welcomed and valued by students and families. These initiatives have enhanced the re-connection of the school and its community. The school can now capitalise upon the restoration of parents' trust and confidence in the school and its staff to enhance the quality of dialogue about learning between students and their families.

Parents expressed a desire to know more about the learning programs so they could better support their children's learning. Parents would like more information more regularly about student progress against standards. The panel found the parents interviewed to be passionate and committed to supporting the school and its work. Re-framing the school's narrative about parental aspirations for and commitment to student learning is a next step for the school.

The panel concluded that there is expertise in the school to raise student achievement by deepening engagement, and increasing the level of intellectual challenge in learning. If teachers, with students, set and review measurable student goals in short review cycles and share this with parents, develop students' metacognition about learning and their capacity to think and speak in the formal register of education, and use pedagogies that promote critical and creative thinking, there will be opportunities for all students to reach higher levels of academic attainment.

Direction 2
Deepen student engagement in learning through effective learning design that enables agency in their learning and intellectual challenge for every student.

How well do teachers design tasks to engage students and to build on their prior skills and knowledge?

At Blakeview Primary School teachers differentiate through:

- Ability groups.
- Some provision of scaffolds for independent learning.
- Individual spelling programs.
- Different entry points into tasks.
- SMARTAR goals for students verified with a disability.

This differentiation is largely confined to literacy learning. Much deeper and more nuanced differentiation will evolve when teachers are supported to work collaboratively in their PLCs to analyse their student achievement data in order to inform learning design.

Student literacy learning data is being made available to teachers. All staff recognize the need to improve literacy and numeracy across the school. Teachers are using data to track growth and identify starting points for groupings. However, the panel found little evidence that teachers are using data diagnostically to identify intentional teaching points for individuals and groups of students. There has been some moderation of student writing in some teams, but it is not consistent across the school. An important action for the school is, through cycles of self-review, to upskill teachers in the analysis of student learning data to form an evidence-base for their learning design.

Teachers work cooperatively with each other, with support staff and leadership, valuing this cooperation and investing energy in establishing and maintaining quality working relationships. Improved communication between teachers and SSOs about student support is enabling more targeted teaching for students with special needs.

The panel concluded that there is a good foundation at Blakeview Primary School for teachers to make their learning design more intentional for individual and groups of students. By capitalising on the strengths of their PLC, teachers can become more skilled in using their own student achievement data in cycles of assess-plan-teach to identify, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of intentional teaching for individual and groups of students in the mainstream.

Direction 3

Strengthen the effectiveness of teaching through the development of teachers as continual self-evaluators of the impact their practice is having on student learning.

What is the school doing particularly well and why is this effective?

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practices that are contributing significantly to school improvement at Blakeview Primary School:

A culture of regular PLCs is well-established in the school. These teams include all teachers and SSOs. The PLCs meet frequently in staff meeting time; the school ensures common non-instruction times so that the teams can also work together at their discretion. PLCs have become 'naturalised', embedded in the systems and culture of the school, and staff use their team to share, support, and trial new strategies. In the future, this quality PLC culture will enable staff to deepen their collaboration in order to evaluate the effectiveness of their practice in self-managing cycles of review, planning and implementation.

The school evaluates and tracks the effectiveness of its interventions to support the inclusion and engagement of students with complex needs. This is done through the resourcing of an individual approach to each of these students. Students with verified disabilities now have their plans reviewed and goals re-set each term. Individual Learning Plans have been reinstated for Aboriginal students. Students with serious and persistent behaviour issues are tracked through office support. There is a proactive team approach taken to review small increments of progress against SMARTAR goals and to resolve issues. Families and the student, as well as the teacher, a leader, and support staff are included in the 'team around the student'. Continuing to resource and to improve upon such individualised management is significant in order to both cater for the varied complex needs of these learners, as well as to improve the learning environment for all.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

At Blakeview Primary School teachers are provided with and use structured time for ongoing collaborative professional learning. The school works in partnership with parents and stakeholders.

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

1. Narrow the learning improvement focus and provide coherent cycles of change that link SIP targets, professional learning, the work of PLCs, coaching, and performance development.

2. Deepen student engagement in learning through effective learning design that enables agency in their learning and intellectual challenge for every student.

3. Strengthen the effectiveness of teaching through the development of teachers as continual self-evaluators of the impact their practice is having on student learning.

Based on the school's current performance, Blakeview Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2021.

Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY

Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND
PRESCHOOLS

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.

Brenton Conradi
PRINCIPAL
BLAKEVIEW PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson

Appendix One

Policy compliance

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

The Principal of Blakeview Primary School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies.

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 2016 was 88.5%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

Appendix Two

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 2016, 58% of Year 1 and 47% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average in Year 1 and little or no change in Year 2.

In 2016, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 53% of Year 3 students, 46% of Year 5 students and 60% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. This result represents a decline from the historic baseline average in Years 3 and 5, and little or no change in Year 7.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Year 5 NAPLAN Reading has been downwards, from 57% in 2014 to 46% in 2016. Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Year 7 NAPLAN Reading has been downwards, from 79% in 2014 to 60% in 2016.

In 2016 Year 3 and 5 NAPLAN Reading, the school achieved lower than the results of similar students across DECD schools. In the 2016 Year 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school achieved within the results of similar students across DECD schools.

In 2016, 15% of Year 3, 13% of Year 5 and 8% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3 this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 33%, or 3 of 9 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016, and 8%, or 1 of 13 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.

Numeracy

In 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 48% of Year 3 students, 42% of Year 5 students and 55% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. This result represents a decline from the historic baseline average in Years 3 and 5, and little or no change in Year 7.

In 2016 Year 3 and 5 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school achieved lower than the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools.

In 2016, 7% of Year 3, no Year 5, and 5% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3 this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, no students (none of 7) from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016, and 33%, or 2 of 6 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.