

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

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR RENMARK WEST PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in August 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 Liz Matheson, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Gael Little, 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 Renmark West Primary School has verified that the school is working towards all applicable DECD policies.

Part 2: Learning Improvement. Cultural competency training has been planned for Terms 3 and 4.

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 93.1%, which is above the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Renmark West Primary School is Reception to Year 7 school located 243kms east of the Adelaide CBD in the Riverland, and is part of the Renmark Partnership. The school has an ICSEA score of 975, and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

Due to the limited physical space available, the school has a ceiling on its enrolment of 190 students. There are also restrictions on the number of children enrolled in the nearby preschool. Over the next 3 years, the large Year 7 cohort will leave the school and it is expected that the overall enrolment will drop.

In 2016, the enrolment is 189 students. Student enrolments include 26% of students eligible for School Card assistance, 2% Aboriginal students, 11% of students from a Non-English Speaking Background, and 8% of Students with a Disability.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in the 4th year of her tenure at the school. The school has a 0.6FTE School Counsellor. There is a mix of experience amongst the teaching staff, with half in their first 10 years of teaching and the other half in their last 10 years.

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 2015, 50% of Year 1 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA), which represents an improvement from the historic baseline average in Year 1.

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicated that 81% of Year 3 students, 54% of Year 5 students and 75% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 7, this result represented an improvement, and in Year 5, a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2012 and 2015, the trend has been steadily upward in Year 3, from 62% in 2013 to 81% in 2015. In Year 5 the trend was downwards, from 81% in 2012 to 54% in 2015.

For 2015 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the range of results of similar students across DECD schools.

In 2015, 14% of Year 3, 21% of Year 5 and 25% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result represented a decline from the historic baseline average. Between 2013 and

2015, the trend for Years 5 and 7 has been upwards, from 10% to 21% at Year 5, and 6% to 25% at Year 7.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 50%, or 2 of 4 students from Year 3, remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015, representing a decline from the historic baseline average. In contrast, 100%, or 3 of 3 students from Year 3 in 2011 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. This result represented an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Numeracy

In 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicated that 57% of Year 3 students, 57% of Year 5 students, and 81% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 5, this result represented a decline from the historic baseline average, whereas for Year 7, it represented an improvement.

Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 3 has been downwards, from 79% in 2013% to 57% in 2015.

For 2015 Year 3 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the range of results of similar groups of students across DECD schools. The Year 5 results were just within the range (by 2%).

In 2015, 5% of Year 3 (1 student of 21), 11% of Year 5, and 38% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result represented a decline from the historic baseline average. Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 7 has been upwards, from 11% to 38%.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 20%, or 1 of 5 students from Year 3, remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015. This result represented little or no change from the historic baseline average. For those who achieved in the top two bands in Year 3 in 2011, 80%, or 4 of 5 students, remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. This was an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Lines of Inquiry

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

Student Learning:	How well are students achieving over time, particularly in mathematics and numeracy?
	To what extent are students intellectually challenged?
Effective Teaching:	How effectively does the feedback students are given motivate them to improve?
School Community Partnerships:	How authentic is the influence of students on learning and through the school?

How well are students achieving over time, particularly in mathematics and numeracy?

The School Performance Overview outlined above shows some concerning trends in students' achievement in numeracy, as measured by NAPLAN, particularly in Years 3 and 5. In Year 5, the results were low compared with students with similar characteristics in other DECD schools and have declined over the last 2 years. The results in numeracy, as measured by the PAT-M tests, were similar. The Review Panel was keen to find out what the school was doing to address this decline.

Through the staff meeting and interviews, teachers identified the development of whole-school consistent approaches in numeracy as 'work-in-progress'. The Numeracy Agreement was documented this year, and is seen as a 'starting point. It is not well-owned by staff at this stage, and needs further elaboration. A numeracy block outlining the elements of daily maths lessons has been introduced and was evident in discussions with students. Some teachers are utilising practices they gained through professional development, including more problem-solving using authentic situations.

Many students interviewed in Years 3 to 7 reported they enjoy mathematics. They were able to describe the normal routine in their lessons, which involves mental routines or number lines, explicit teaching of a concept (or 'topic'), problem-solving, hands-on activities and reflection. They particularly enjoy the active learning, and noted that there has been a change in the way teachers are approaching maths, from a worksheet base to 'hands-on'. They described how the problem-solving allowed them to 'go deeper' into their learning, to ask questions and to follow their interests. This was supplemented with daily mental routines designed to support students to gain accuracy and fluency in number.

Several teachers said they are getting more enjoyment from their maths teaching and search the internet for different ways to 'hook' students in and teach various concepts. Some teachers are doing pre- and post-testing to assess the progress made by students. During reflection time, some teachers take anecdotal notes, as the way in which students describe their learning reveals the depth of their understanding.

An intervention program has been introduced in 2013 for a small number of students who have difficulty with working memory and, therefore, recall of number facts. This program appears to be having a positive impact on those students. There was discussion amongst some teachers about whether this intervention should be commenced at lower year levels. This idea can be explored, but the school needs to ensure their decision is in line with the design and intention of the program.

When asked what they can do to improve the results, several teachers stated the school needed to 'lift the bar' and have higher expectations of what students can and should be able to learn. Many thought they need to develop a curriculum continuum based on mathematical skills and concepts in the Australian Curriculum, so that students' progress can be more regularly tracked. They acknowledged there is work to do in designing the tasks and 'problematized situations', so that students who are capable, have the opportunity to demonstrate higher level proficiencies. At this stage, there appeared to be limited use of the web-based resources associated with the PAT-M test, which can help teachers to plan activities that specifically target students' skill gaps. There is also opportunity in other curriculum areas, such as HASS and PE, to intentionally incorporate numeracy activities, so that students are continually applying the concepts they learn in the numeracy 'block'.

The Review Panel concluded that the school has a collaborative and improvement-focused culture, which makes them well-placed to work together to make significant inroads into the students' numeracy outcomes.

Direction 1

To improve student achievement, lift the expectations of students, and develop and implement consistent approaches to pedagogy, assessment and tracking, particularly in mathematics and numeracy.

To what extent are students intellectually challenged?

The school has a small number of students achieving in the higher proficiency bands. In 2015 Year 3 reading and numeracy, there was a decline compared with the historic average. In contrast, there was a 3-year upward trend in Higher Band achievement in Year 5 reading and in Year 7 numeracy.

In speaking with students, there was overwhelming agreement that the school-wide adoption of the WRAP program and Lexia Reading had helped them in literacy. WRAP is a systematic and integrated approach to literacy instruction. Students talked about coming across unfamiliar words in reading, and how they were able to use their knowledge of the rules in the English Language to work them out. There was, however, also a view that there could be more opportunities to stretch their thinking. Some students, for example, who had progressed to Lexia Plus, described it as repetitive, and said it was difficult to know how it extended their comprehension skills. In contrast, the novel study in Years 6 and 7 had involved discussion of how the author used language to convey meaning, and had developed their vocabulary.

The Review Panel talked to 6 groups of students, and there was significant commonality in what they had to say between the groups. They talked about wanting to explore and apply their learning, rather than do many things at a surface level. Inquiry tasks were seen as motivating and stretching. One example related to 'Enterprise', in which students had to borrow money, and then work out how they could earn enough to pay back the loan. Younger students found the experiments in science stretched their thinking, as they had to hypothesise and predict what might happen. Art lessons were described as inspiring as they were taught different techniques using other young people's art work. Students and teachers talked about the greater use of IT to support learning in recent years. In activities where there is a reliance on worksheets, students were very aware that this approach had limited interest and impact on their learning.

In order for students to be stretched in their thinking, they need to have the perseverance to make plans, to complete tasks and to stick to things even when they get hard. In 2014 and 2015, students in Year 6 and 7 did a survey to check on the students' wellbeing. In 2015, 9 (23%) students reported that they have high perseverance, 18 (45%) to a medium extent and 13 (33%) to a low extent. This result showed students at Renmark West Primary School reported lower levels of perseverance than the state average. Parents also talked about some of their children being 'perfectionists', and that they did not cope so well when they did not get their work all right.

The school is aware of the need to provide strategies to develop greater perseverance and risk-taking by students. The school has moved from a behaviour code approach to more of a growth mindset method. Teachers reported that *Play Is the Way* is now implemented across the school. This involves students playing games that value courage, risk-taking, self-regulation, empathy and independence. The Review Panel saw examples of these mindsets being supported within the daily classroom learning. In talking about improving, students referred to using self-talk: "don't let the monsters pull you down", when they were about to give up. This approach is essential as students progress through their schooling and meet future challenges.

Direction 2

To provide intellectual challenge, develop the design of tasks and pedagogical practices for 'stretch', while working with parents to support students to use growth mindset dispositions in their learning.

How effectively does the feedback students are given motivate them to improve?

In the 2015 client satisfaction perception surveys, both parents and students placed the question *Teachers at this school provide my child with useful feedback* as the lowest of the domains, even though the number of responses from parents was small (12). On this basis, the Review Panel looked into the kind of feedback given to the students, and the extent that it provides students with explicit strategies and motivation to improve.

Parents were given their children's reports at the end of Term 2. The students and parents, with whom the Review Panel spoke, thought that the reports were generally 'spot-on' in the grades allocated. There appeared to be no surprises. Students were keen to improve their grades. When asked how they would do

that, the responses varied in specificity. They talked about using a sharper pencil, making sentences more complex by using adverbial clauses, not speaking too softly or too fast in drama, paying attention, concentrating more, and trying harder.

Some students have worked out goals with their teachers, and these were clearly motivating. In one class, they set 5 goals at the beginning of the term, and reviewed how they went at the end. In another class, students set SMARTA (achievable and measurable) goals to improve their levels in Lexia. They were highly motivated and most students were setting higher goals after 5 weeks. Others had goals in mental maths and they 'checked out' when they got 100% accuracy in 16 minutes. Students interviewed told the Review Panel that every student had improved dramatically. It was described as nerve-wracking, but fun. Parents also gave examples of goals as being motivating for their children and keeping them interested in more routine tasks, such as mental maths and Lexia.

Teachers were asked about how well they thought their students understood their learning intentions, and how well their students could articulate what they need to do to improve. All teachers rated themselves to a medium extent in response to these questions. In answer to the question *How effective is goal-setting and review motivating for your students?* 6 teachers rated themselves to a medium extent, and 2 to a high extent. One teacher commented that "feedback can alter effort" and create more enthusiasm with students wanting to produce higher standards of work. Student goal-setting and continuous review can be a powerful tool in supporting students to improve. Goal-setting, however, may have little impact, if it is at a surface level and not regularly reviewed, as an ongoing cycle of improvement. Most importantly, research indicates that students need to be actively involved in setting their own goals. Skills for goal-setting need to be explicitly taught and, over time, goal-setting and reflection needs to be embedded into daily practice.

At the staff meeting teachers also talked about the importance of their learning intentions being clearly understood by students. The Review Panel heard from a Junior Primary teacher who is using WALT (*we are learning to*) and WILF (*what I'm looking for*) to involve young people in understanding the purpose of their learning, and develop the criteria for success.

Teachers design activities and tasks to facilitate students to learn the intended skills or develop understanding. While teachers know why they have engaged students in a particular activity, students are not always able to differentiate between the activity and the learning that it is meant to promote. A carefully framed learning intention will direct students' attention to the learning. The learning intention emphasises what the students will *learn*, rather than what they will *do*.

When there is alignment between teachers' learning intentions, their feedback to students on how to improve, and goal-setting, students are more likely to see the connections and focus on improving their learning.

Direction 3

To support students to know how to improve, ensure learning intentions are understood, provide explicit feedback and modelling, and create opportunities for students to engage in goal-setting, in an ongoing cycle of review.

How authentic is the influence of students on learning and through the school?

The Review Panel met with members of the Student Representative Council (SRC). It was obvious they were proud of being selected as an SRC member. Parents shared anecdotes of how it had lifted their children's confidence in themselves. The school has a practice of selecting students for a semester and rotating the Chairperson. The Review Panel was advised that the SRC discussed school issues, such as swearing, especially at football, football cards, yard cleanliness, as well as playing a key role at assemblies and collecting feedback on events. SRC members provide a report of their activities and issues to the Governing Council. The Review Panel observed the SRC to be thoughtful and insightful, and that their perspectives could be more aligned with the school's improvement agenda.

Student Wellbeing for Learning is one of the school's three improvement priorities. The school seeks to align its practices to 'reflect the principles of Positive Psychology' and use *Play is the Way* as a practical methodology for social and emotional learning. The School Improvement Plan (SIP) outlines the indicators

for success; for example, *students will be able to articulate the 5 key Play is the Way concepts and give an example of when they have used a concept successfully*. There are ten other indicators listed that involve evidence from students. The SRC could play an important role in collecting data in regard to this priority, and in reviewing the extent to which these practices are evident and embedded into students' thinking and behaviours to support learning.

Within the classrooms, some teachers are exploring ways of building greater student voice in their learning. As stated above, goal-setting is one such practice. At this stage, peer and self-assessment practices, opportunities to work together, and processes to enable students to construct questions did not seem to be widely used. The Review Panel felt there could be more ways that teachers use to seek students' input into their learning.

Direction 4

To strengthen student engagement in their learning and throughout the school, align the work of the SRC more closely with the school's priorities, and provide opportunities for all students to be more involved in their learning and assessment within their classrooms.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Renmark West Primary School has a culture of improvement and a high level of congruence and consistency across the school to support students' learning. There is a clear strategic direction and targeted interventions.

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

1. To improve student achievement, lift the expectations of students, and develop and implement consistent approaches to pedagogy, assessment and tracking, particularly in mathematics and numeracy.
2. To provide intellectual challenge, develop the design of tasks and pedagogical practices for 'stretch', while working with parents to support students to use growth mindset dispositions in their learning.
3. To support students to know how to improve, ensure learning intentions are understood, provide explicit feedback and modelling, and create opportunities for students to engage in goal-setting, in an ongoing cycle of review.
4. To strengthen student engagement in their learning and throughout the school, align the work of the SRC more closely with the school's priorities, and provide opportunities for all students to be more involved in their learning and assessment within their classrooms.

Based on the school's current performance, Renmark West 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.

Judy Cottam
PRINCIPAL
REMARK WEST PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson