

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

Report for Spalding Primary School

Conducted in May 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 Liz Matheson, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Gael Little, Review Principal.

School context

Spalding Primary School is located 182kms north of the Adelaide CBD in a rural farming community, and is part of the Mid-North Clare DECD Partnership. The school caters for students from Reception to Year 6 and consists of 2 classes. The school has an ICSEA score of 1034, and is classified as Category 4 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population is 25 students, including 4 Aboriginal students and 4 students with disabilities.

The school leadership consists of a Principal in her first year of a 5-year tenure. The school has had 5 Principals in 5 years.

Lines of Inquiry

In considering the data summary in the School Performance Overview (Appendix 2) and the Principal's presentation, the Review Panel explored the following Lines of Inquiry to evaluate the school's effectiveness towards 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:

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

Effective Teaching: How effectively does the design of assessment enable students to demonstrate higher-order thinking and use of skills and concepts in new contexts?

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

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

Spalding Primary School has a cohesive, supportive and student-focused culture evidenced by interviews with students, parents and teachers. Students confirmed that staff members know them very well; their interests, learning needs and families. Several parents new to the school spoke about the growth their child has made in their learning, particularly reading, and how much happier the family is now. Parents indicated they "trust the staff and we are working together to move forward". Whilst the school's achievement data exceeds the SEA, the teachers still continue to strive for even further improvement. They were aware the staff members were keen to 'push themselves' and participate in professional development. The parent group wanted their children to 'keep up', which includes their ICT capabilities. There appeared to be strong alignment between parents, the Governing Council and staff. There are also close links with the broader community, indicating that success and growth at school are valued.

Teachers were asked what they were doing to sustain the high achievement over time. They spoke about the way they teach, "from where the child is at and go from there". One teacher commented that "year levels are not meaningful". Teachers acknowledged that the close working relationship with parents really helped, and parents were active in embracing advice on how to help their children. Students also knew they were making progress.

Students develop goals for improvement, which they share with their parents in the 3-way interview process, and in Term 3, they review the extent they have achieved their goals and refine the goals for the rest of the year. Each student has a comprehensive Individual Learning Plan (ILP), and students can see their progress in work samples and test results over their schooling.

The Review Panel wondered how the students from Spalding Primary School manage the transition from a small supportive environment into bigger secondary schools, usually at the end of Year 6. The school community is very aware of this situation, and has created opportunities for students to regularly mix with children from other schools, to participate in leadership opportunities within the town, and in Adelaide, and to be confident as they transition into the next phase of their schooling. Students were also aware of

this transition, and talked about how they play weekly sport with kids from other towns, and were confident they would thrive in a bigger environment. Parents provided examples of children from the town gaining awards, and achieving 'dux' of their secondary school.

Although the numbers of students at each year level are small, the achievement data in Appendix 2 shows that many students are in the higher-proficiency bands. The Review Panel was keen to know how students were being intellectually stretched. Teachers talked positively about the multi-year level classes, as it enabled students to build their proficiencies by explaining concepts and demonstrating how to solve problems to other students. Conversely, students who were in lower skill levels 'tuned in' as teachers worked with more capable students, and sometimes joined the group.

The Review Panel sighted examples of tasks in which students had to solve maths problems in different ways. These examples are evident in both the junior and upper level classes. Students talked about being stretched when they learnt 'new' things. Their examples were mainly focused on harder work in numeracy, such as learning long multiplication or learning tables, rather than skills requiring more complex thinking. One teacher shared an example in which she had used a student's writing exemplar, and the class critiqued it together, focusing on the quality of the vocabulary and writing skills. The outcome of this process was that two students decided to start their work again, to improve it.

Students have a choice of topics and organisational routines within the classroom. The level of student agency in their learning could be strengthened through involvement in assessment and joint construction and critique as described above. Teachers are also exploring possibilities by discussing Student Voice cards provided through DECD Results Plus professional development and are auditing their current practices.

The Australian Curriculum General Capability in Critical and Creative Thinking provides a learning continuum from level 1 (typically by the end of Reception) through to level 6 (typically by the end of Year 10). It describes the thinking skills and understanding required for students to use inquiry processes, to generate ideas, possibilities and actions, to reflect on thinking and processes, and to analyse, synthesise and evaluate reasoning. These are not meant to be taught as stand-alone skills and processes, but to be developed within curriculum learning areas. The use of meta-cognition, which is reflecting on thinking processes so that they are transparent and intentional, is recognised in educational research to support intellectual stretch.

Teachers need to be teaching and modelling these thinking skills, whilst incorporating aspects of the learning continuum into the tasks they design for students. For example, at a basic level, instead of teachers asking questions about a text, they would ask students to pose and construct questions to inquire into the author's thinking and techniques, which requires deeper thinking by the student. It also reveals to the teacher what the student is thinking about the text (fiction or non-fiction). Students can learn the discipline of Socratic questioning so that they can use it in reasoning through complex issues, in understanding and analysing the thinking of others, and in exploring the implications of what they and others think.

Over the past year, the school has had Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a strategic improvement priority. The development of the school's network and hardware infrastructure is ongoing work. Teachers also see their professional development in being better able to use ICT as a learning tool as on-going work, guided by the ACARA General Capability.

Direction 1

Strengthen pedagogical practices to facilitate greater intellectual stretch by using the Creative and Critical Thinking Learning Continuum and student agency in the learning and assessment process.

How effectively does the design of assessment enable students to demonstrate higher-order thinking and use of skills and concepts in new contexts?

Teachers, parents and students are very aware of levels of achievement in the annual and biannual standardised testing in reading and numeracy. Teachers use this data to inform the development of Individual Learning Plans and to tailor and personalise their programming and teaching. The growth in the skills of students new to the school is an indicator that teachers are successful in their interventions.

The Review Panel and Principal noted that the grade distribution in the school reports (A to E equivalent) followed a typical bell curve with 65% of grades falling into the C band and 29% into the B band. The A-E grading did not appear to reflect the same levels of achievement in comparison to the NAPLAN and PAT data. The Principal indicated there may be two factors contributing to this phenomenon. It could be that students are not reaching the higher levels as the tasks are not being designed to enable achievement at A and B levels, and/or that teachers are not confident to grade at higher levels.

Teachers told the Review Panel that as they are all part-time and share classes, they have the opportunity to moderate their assessments together. The current reporting format focuses on the Australian Curriculum standards. It might be an opportunity to modify the reports and use the Achievement Standards with a 'backwards by design' process, to ensure students have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and understandings in the relevant Standard at higher levels.

The Mid-North Clare Partnership is focusing on transforming tasks to provide intellectual stretch. This work involves teachers being careful and intentional in what they ask students to do. For example, in science or history, there is a significant difference required by students to describe something, rather than compare or contrast, or justify the conclusion. When teachers get together to moderate students' work samples, there is an opportunity to critique their task selection or design, and to reflect on how the tasks set for students could be improved. While the teachers at Spalding Primary School do this to some extent with each other, these practices need to be expanded to include all curriculum areas and with a broader range of student examples and tasks.

Direction 2

Engage in the moderation of student work samples across curriculum areas and the critique of tasks with teachers from other schools, and within the Partnership, in order to reflect on and improve task design.

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

A staff professional development day was held at the end of 2016 to review the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and to set priorities, directions and actions for 2017. The staff involved in this process reviewed the achievement data and the 2017 plan was formulated based on this data and teachers' anecdotal evidence. Changes in the Principal's teaching time and SSO allocation were made following this self-review.

Spalding Primary School is a small school, and it takes time for teachers to make and embed pedagogical shifts in their practices. Schools are often 'time poor', and so staff members have to use the limited time they have together wisely. The Review Panel found staff members to be passionate about teaching and learning, as well as talking positively about their students. The staff meeting appears to be increasingly used as a time for professional development and dialogue, rather than dominated with organisational matters.

A SIP is not intended to reflect all of the things the school does or values as important. An Improvement Plan needs to focus on the priorities and practices that are new, or need refining or strengthening, which will be developed and trialled to impact positively on student achievement and growth, including the extent of intellectual stretch. With this in mind, the SIP needs to be achievable and measureable, using achievement and perception data and patterns over time. Most importantly, the school's strategic direction needs to be collaboratively developed, based on data and evidence, so that it is broadly owned and all parties are contributing to its achievement.

It was noted that some of the strategies outlined in the 2016 plan were actions that are, or should be, documented into the school's literacy and numeracy agreements, as they are part of the everyday life of literacy and numeracy teaching. The Review Panel, for example, wondered if the school actioned all of the strategies under Key Priority 1, would they *develop powerful learners who demonstrate resilience and a growth mindset?* as strategically intended and, further, how this was being measured.

The self-review processes need to become more regular and evaluative, so that staff, individually and collectively, are more able to determine the impact of the actions on student learning. In the context of Spalding Primary School, this will involve students' perceptions about the extent they are intellectually stretched, and the evidence of thinking and meta-cognitive skills. In this way, teachers find out what they

need to strengthen, embed or emulate in their practices. It is an ongoing process of continuous improvement, with a focus on impact.

Direction 3

Develop and refine self-review and improvement planning processes to ensure strategies are developed and actioned to achieve the strategic priorities.

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 Spalding Primary School.

Effective practice in establishing collaborative and student-focused connections between learning at school and home are contributing to students practising and consolidating skills, and developing pride and confidence in their achievements. Teachers cater for the diverse needs of learners in multi-level classes and each child has an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). Students are involved in setting and reviewing their learning goals. Teachers participate in professional learning and apply this learning to their classroom practices.

Evidence of these practices was verified by students, parents, Governing Council and staff, through interviews, group meetings, and the Principal's presentation.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

Spalding Primary School has a student-focused culture, and works effectively in partnership with parents and the broader community. The school has demonstrated sustained growth in student achievement and is performing above what would be reasonably expected of a school in a similar context.

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

1. Strengthen pedagogical practices to facilitate greater intellectual stretch by using the Creative and Critical Thinking Learning Continuum and student agency in the learning and assessment process.
2. Engage in the moderation of student work samples across curriculum areas and the critique of tasks with teachers from other schools, and within the Partnership, in order to reflect on and improve task design.
3. Develop and refine self-review and improvement planning processes to be achievable, and ensure strategies are developed and actioned to achieve the strategic priorities.

Based on the school's current performance, Spalding 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.

Alicia Huddle
PRINCIPAL
SPALDING 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 Spalding 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:

- Camps and Excursions Policy: The policy is being drafted for ratification by the Governing Council.
- Site Induction Policy: The policy is being drafted for ratification by the Governing Council.
- Cyber Safety Policy: This policy is currently under review. It will be updated, ratified by the Governing Council and implemented in Term 2.

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 advised to review and update the current policy, which appears to have been developed and approved in 2011.

The school attendance rate for 2016 was 95.3%.

Appendix Two

School Performance Overview

In considering the data below, there needs to be some caution in making 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 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 Spalding Primary School from 2012 to 2016 to overcome any anomalies.

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. Between 2012 and 2016, 67% (18 of 27) of Year 1, and 58% (11 of 19) of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

From 2012 to 2016, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicated that 93% (13 of 14) of Year 3 students, 100% (9 of 9) Year 5 students, and nil percent (none of 1) of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA.

Between 2012 and 2016, 79% (11 of 14) of Year 3, and 66% (6 of 9) of Year 5 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands.

Numeracy

From 2012 until 2016 inclusive, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicated that 93% (13 of 14) of Year 3 students, 89% (8 of 9) of Year 5 students, and nil percent (none of 1) of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA.

From 2012 to 2016, 43% (6 of 14) of Year 3, and 67% (6 of 9) of Year 5 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands.