EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR LOXTON 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 Lyn Arnold, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Philip Garner, 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 Loxton 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:
> That the Governing Council works collaboratively with the Principal to report to the school on the achievement of the student group as a whole, and on the Governing Council's plans and operations.
>
> The Principal is organising training for Governing Council members.

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 93.1%, which meets the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Loxton Primary School is a Reception to Year 7 school situated on the southern side of the River Murray, in South Australia's Riverland district, approximately 250kms from Adelaide.

Enrolment numbers have been steady over the past few years with 366 students currently enrolled, and distributed across 14 classes. The school has an ICSEA score of 986, and is classified as Category 4 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

In 2015, the school population included 9% Aboriginal students, 9% Students with Disabilities, ≤1% of students under the Guardianship of the Minister, and 8% of students identified as being from a NESB background. Approximately 30% of families were eligible for School Card assistance.

The school Leadership Team consists of a 1.0FTE Principal in the 3rd year of her first tenure at the school, a Deputy Principal (0.6FTE) who also has a 0.4FTE Counselling role, a 0.2FTE Curriculum Coordinator: Training and Development/Australian Curriculum, and an additional 0.4FTE Wellbeing teacher.

There are 19FTE teachers, which includes mostly part-time teachers in Years 2 to 6, and many staff who have served over ten years at the school.

School Performance Overview

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2015, 45% of Year 1 and 53% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). This result represents a decline at Year 2 from the historic baseline average but an improvement in Year 1.

Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 1 has been upwards, from 30% to 45%.

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 73% of Year 3, 71% of Year 5 and 79% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. This result represents a decline for Year 5 and an improvement for Year 7 from the historic baseline average.

For 2015 Year 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving higher than the results of similar students across DECD schools.

In 2015 NAPLAN Reading, 34% of Year 3, 27% of Year 5, and 26% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two 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, 67% of students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015, and 64% of students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. For Year 3 to 5 and Year 3 to 7, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For the last 3 years, the trend for Years 3 to 7 upper band retention is upwards, from 29% to 64%.

Numeracy

In 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 73% of Year 3 students, 73% of Year 5 students and 81% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Year 7 this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For 2015 Year 3 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving higher than the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools.

In 2015 NAPLAN Numeracy, 25% of Year 3, 15% of Year 5 and 19% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in Numeracy, 33.3% of students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015, and 60% of students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. For Year 3 to 5, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For the last 3 years, the trend for Years 3 to 7 upper band retention is downwards, from 90.9% to 60%.

Lines of Inquiry

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

Improvement Agenda: To what extent does the school monitor student achievement, and review the effectiveness of improvement processes and strategies?

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

Effective Leadership: To what extent is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change evident?

To what extent does the school monitor student achievement, and review the effectiveness of improvement processes and strategies?

The school utilises a range of diagnostic tests and assessments to monitor student progress and achievement. In addition to the four DECD-required assessments (NAPLAN, PAT-R, PAT-M, Running Records), the school has an agreed schedule of six tests conducted at relevant year levels throughout the year. These include spelling, reading, and general ability assessments.

Teachers across the school reported conducting 18 additional assessments or tests to those listed on the schedule, mostly in literacy, with several supporting the implementation of the WRAP (A Writing Approach to Reading) program. The timing of these self-reported assessments varies from weekly, fortnightly, two to three times per term, to annually. These assessments and tests are in addition to any teacher-designed curriculum assessments of learning against the Australian Curriculum standards.

Through discussions with teachers and examination of school documents, the Review Panel found the collection of student data across the school, while extremely comprehensive in literacy, is implemented inconsistently and repetitively, in that it collects similar data from the same cohorts across all year levels.

Furthermore, while there is genuine intent to use data strategically, the actual use of data varies considerably across classrooms and within year levels, as do teachers' understandings of why many of the tests are conducted. Most teachers, for example, reported using some of the data to inform their teaching, report student progress, and to "gauge improvement or decline", but stated that several of the tests are administered only because they are mandated, and that not all of the data is used systematically to inform teaching.

It is therefore timely, in light of new DECD-required assessments, for the staff to review the number and nature of assessments conducted across the school, and to streamline the data collection process. The school will benefit from focusing on what each dataset tells teachers about how they can help more students be more successful. Any additional diagnostic assessments and achievement tests should be restricted to those that assist teachers in making effective and informed decisions about student learning needs, growth and progress against the SEA. All other diagnostic testing at the classroom level should be discontinued.

Direction 1
Review all assessments and diagnostic tests conducted across the school to determine which ones best support teachers to track student progress, design effective teaching and learning programs, and make timely judgements about individual learning needs.

How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

Realising improvement in student learning outcomes requires a sustained commitment to change in practice over time. In support of this outcome, the staff of Loxton Primary School engage in regular self-review processes and develop an annual School Improvement Plan (SIP). The 2015 SIP outlined three priorities: literacy, numeracy and wellbeing, with a focus on further developing four elements of TfEL guided by the principles of 'Visible Learning'.

The Review Panel was particularly interested in how the staff commitment to "using Learning Intent and Success Criteria consistently in literacy and numeracy teaching and learning" was realised in terms of the school's identified evaluation measure: "students will be able to articulate the Learning Intent and Success Criteria of their learning".

The leadership and staff independently confirmed that this priority had been a focus of discussion and professional learning throughout the previous year. To explore the extent to which this improvement priority has been achieved, the Review Panel invited the four Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to define 'Learning Intent and Success Criteria' and to describe how it is integrated into their teaching and learning programs.

PLC responses indicated a varying degree of understanding of the concepts within a teaching and learning

context. Notably, across all groups, there was little evidence of developing or embedded links to TfEL, Visible Learning, or expected learning outcomes. Students were also asked about the Learning Intent and Success Criteria in relation to the examples of work they shared with the Review Panel. The Review Panel used diverse phrases and terminology to elicit relevant examples, and asked older students to think back to the previous year for relevant examples. Students, however, displayed limited understanding of the concept and provided few illustrations of the approach in practice.

While evidence suggests that staff are working hard, and the best interests of students are central to their practice, the Review Panel found that:

- improvement priorities, targets and/or associated outcomes are not attained or embedded school-wide, and

- significant resources committed to programs and professional learning do not appear to have the expected impact on student achievement.

All programs and initiatives should be the subject of rigorous and regular monitoring and evaluation, to ensure the school has sound evidence that resources are used effectively to achieve the best possible learning outcomes for all students. The Reception to Year 7 WRAP program, for example, has been deeply embedded in the school's literacy approach for over ten years, but has not been critically evaluated since the introduction of the Australian Curriculum and SEA. An evaluation should be undertaken with some urgency given that 19 and 21 Year 2 students, and 10 and 18 Year 7 students, in 2015 and 2014 respectively, did not achieve the SEA in reading, and consideration given to what alternative strategies may be appropriate for those students not achieving SEA.

PLCs would benefit from using planned time to monitor and evaluate key improvement strategies, programs, and innovative teacher practices to determine the degree of impact on student learning. This process of continuous review should aim to simultaneously:
- build collective and individual responsibility and accountability for the achievement of agreed improvement strategies, and
- guide the selection of appropriate programs, and the effective allocation of resources to meet the diverse needs of all students.

Direction 2
Establish continuous and rigorous evaluation processes that monitor the effectiveness of programs, interventions and professional learning initiatives in achieving identified school improvement priorities.

Leadership, teachers and parents spoke of the SSOs' commitment to the school and its operation. Students similarly spoke of their appreciation of the support provided by the SSOs. Over time, many SSOs have taken on the management of key aspects of the school's teaching and learning interventions; for example, the WRAP/Early Assistance support program, the Library/Resource Centre, and the Kitchen and Stephanie Alexander Garden. The degree of responsibility and autonomy in managing these programs and interventions is extensive. While support programs are highly valued across the school community, again, each should undergo critical evaluation on a regular basis to ensure there is appropriate teacher input, guidance and accountability for the learning design and outcomes of all SSO-facilitated programs and initiatives.

Direction 3
Within the evaluative process, ensure structures are in place to provide appropriate levels of professional guidance and accountability to all school support programs and initiatives.

Students who the Review Panel met with in small groups, in classrooms and in the yard, were respectful and articulate representatives of their school. Many spoke passionately about the values of their school, enjoy the sense of community, and believe the school is safe and that students 'look out for each other'.

Discussions with students about their learning highlighted effort and compliant behaviours, such as: 'be a good listener'; 'try hard'; 'focus'; and, 'do extra homework'. Student comments also highlighted some issues related to differentiation of learning across the school, for example: 'everyone has the same question' and 'sometimes one sheet is too easy for some and hard for others'. Some students reported finding aspects of learning challenging, while others want more challenge, reporting that activities only

challenged them 'a bit', and that they would enjoy doing more 'sting in the tail' problems. Yet another group of senior students shared their enthusiasm for several new strategies and approaches being implemented in their classroom this year. Their attitudes, particularly towards mathematics, reflected a marked, positive change. Notably, these students all expressed a conviction that learning was now fun, interesting, and engaging. Their learning empowerment appears to be having a positive impact on their attitude and motivation. The school should identify and evaluate the key strategies contributing to this change in student perspective, with a view to developing a common understanding and coherent approach to pedagogy across the school that elicits similar responses school-wide, and engenders the TfEL elements and Visible Learning approaches identified in the SIP.

Direction 4
Increase student motivation, engagement and achievement by implementing a coherent, evidence-based, school-wide approach to teaching and learning that empowers students.

To what extent is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change evident?

Throughout the review process, staff shared their knowledge of the school's teaching and learning context, and their views and perceptions of issues impacting on student achievement, in a professional manner. During the Review Panel's meeting with the teachers and SSOs, all groups developed constructive and insightful suggestions for improvement that contributed to the development of this Report.

The parents and Governing Council representatives who met with the Review Panel expressed a strong sense of ownership and historical connection to the school, and a desire for the school to retain the good reputation it has held in the community over time. While being happy with the school, a key theme that emerged is the need for consistency in student learning experiences across Reception to Year 7. Of particular concern to parents are the differences in teacher expectations and standards for learning, behaviour, and assessment within and across year levels, and inconsistent processes for sharing student progress that result in 'surprises' in Term 2 and 4 Reports. Notably, these differences were also reported by students, who similarly spoke of wanting greater consistency in the way teachers manage classroom learning and student behaviour across the school. Parents further expressed an interest in gaining a greater understanding of what happens in classrooms so they can support their child's learning at home. This interest presents an opportunity for the school to explore ways to connect with, and engage parents as partners in their child's learning via parent workshops, student learning demonstrations, and the increased use of digital technologies.

Evidence provided to the Review Panel from multiple sources suggested that many of the inconsistencies observed across the school are associated with a residual lack of coherence and collaboration. As the contributing factors are multifaceted, the first step is to further develop the trust, collaboration and respect within and between members of the school community, to ensure:

- effective communication with all stakeholders
- clear roles and lines of accountability
- consistent implementation of school-wide decisions and agreements relating to curriculum, pedagogy and school processes, and
- a unified approach from all stakeholders in the school community.

Direction 5
Build and sustain a cohesive, collaborative approach and collective responsibility of leaders, staff and the Governing Council, to meet the challenges of improving the learning outcomes of all students.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Loxton Primary School has the opportunity to build on an improvement-focused culture endeavouring to provide a coherent whole-school approach to learning and teaching.

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

1. Review all assessments and diagnostic tests conducted across the school to determine which ones best support teachers to track student progress, design effective teaching and learning programs, and make timely judgements about individual learning needs.

2. Establish continuous and rigorous evaluation processes that monitor the effectiveness of programs, interventions and professional learning initiatives in achieving identified school improvement priorities.

3. Within the evaluative process, ensure structures are in place to provide appropriate levels of professional guidance and accountability to all school support programs and initiatives.

4. Increase student motivation, engagement and achievement by implementing a coherent, evidence-based, school-wide approach to teaching and learning that empowers students.

5. Build and sustain a cohesive, collaborative approach and collective responsibility of leaders, staff and the Governing Council, to meet the challenges of improving the learning outcomes of all students.

Based on the school's current performance, Loxton Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2020.

Tony Lunniss
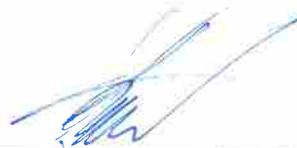DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY

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.

Jan Slape
PRINCIPAL
LOXTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson