

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION

**EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW**  
**REPORT FOR PORT PIRIE WEST PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Conducted in March 2015



**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 overarching review question is "How well does this school improve student achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity?"*

*This External School Review has evaluated:*

- *the school's self review processes and findings,*
- *the school's achievement data and progress over time,*
- *the outcomes of the meetings and interviews with representatives from the school, and*
- *parent and student views about the school.*

*The External School Review included an analysis of the school's key policies and procedures.*

*The support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community is acknowledged.*

*This External School Review was conducted by Lyn Arnold, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Lia Tedesco, Review Principal.*

### **Policy compliance**

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

The Principal of Port Pirie West Primary School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies with the exception of the DECD site induction policy implementation. The Principal verified action is being taken to comply with this policy and that it was scheduled for review in Term 2 and completion by end of Term 3, 2015.

Implementation of the DECD Student Attendance policy was checked specifically against a documented set of criteria. The school has implemented comprehensive tracking and intervention processes, and was found to be compliant with this policy and has strategies in place to improve the overall student attendance rate. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 90.8% which is below the DECD target of 93%.

### **School context**

Port Pirie West Primary School is a Reception to Year 7 school situated 225 kilometres north of Adelaide with approximately 250 students currently enrolled. The school has an ICSEA score of 894, and is classified as Category 2 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage, with 75% of the total student population being eligible for school card assistance.

The school population includes 13% Aboriginal students, 11% Students with Disabilities, 5% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) and 38% have speech/language or communication difficulties. There are 11 Reception to Year 7 classes supported by 13.8 FTE teaching staff.

The senior leadership structure consists of a Principal who has just begun her second tenure at the school and a Deputy Principal.



#### Lines of inquiry

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

#### Student Learning:

**How well are students achieving over time?**

**To what extent do students perceive school to be a place in which they undertake relevant and purposeful learning?**

#### Differentiated Teaching:

**How are teachers monitoring progress, and supporting students to achieve identified goals?**

#### How well are students achieving over time?

Analysis of student achievement data revealed that the school is moving more students into the Higher Proficiency Bands in NAPLAN literacy (reading) and numeracy than in previous years. In 2014, for example, the proportion of students retained in the Higher Proficiency Bands from Year 3 to Year 5 was 75% in reading and 50% in numeracy. This is in contrast to the average proportion of retention over the previous four years of 37% in reading and 5% in numeracy.

Further examination of this data confirmed there has been an upward trend at Year 7 in reading over the past four years, with the percentage of students achieving at or above the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) in NAPLAN reading tests increasing steadily from 48% in 2011 to 60% in 2014.

Reference to school-based analysis of NAPLAN results further showed that 86% of Year 3, 64% of Year 5 and 63% of Year 7 students demonstrated achievement at or above Band 3 in writing.

This continuous improvement in student achievement over time is likely to have its source in a range of timely and targeted interventions designed to meet the unique needs of individual students. For example, while the Data Dashboard does not show reading growth information, analysis of school-based data shows a notable seven-month growth linked to a 15-week reading intervention program, which is substantiated by other reading assessments.

Although moving an increasing number of students into Higher Proficiency Bands in numeracy, the percentage of students achieving the SEA in NAPLAN numeracy in 2014 varied: with 39% of Year 3, 52% of Year 5, and 40% of Year 7 students achieving the SEA. The school recognises the need to improve student achievement in numeracy and as a result is reviewing the teaching of mathematics and numeracy across the school. As part of this ongoing review and evaluation, the school is developing a targeted site improvement process as a key priority that includes identifying effective intervention approaches and assessment programs, and establishing a whole school agreement for the teaching of mathematics.

#### Direction 1

**Implement a school-wide approach that supports effective teaching and learning in numeracy and mathematics, and evaluate regularly and rigorously the impact of all interventions and assessment practices designed to lift student achievement.**

As the school has sound self review and site improvement processes in place with respect to raising the standards of student achievement over time, the Review Panel explored two supportive factors relating to student engagement, namely how students understand the relevance and purpose of their learning, and how teachers monitor and support students to achieve identified learning goals.



**To what extent do students perceive school to be a place in which they undertake relevant and purposeful learning?**

The school has put in considerable deliberate, planned and passionate effort over the past few years in building a culture centred on the Powerful Learning approach, which is reflected in their motto 'when we all believe we can all achieve'. Commitment to, and enactment of this ethos was consistently verified during conversations and interactions with individual staff, staff groups, students, school support officers, the leadership and Governing Council Chairperson.

Within this context, the school promotes four foundational Qualities for Learning: respect, responsibility, confidence and persistence. During the walkthrough of the school, a positive learning and learner-centred culture was evident in all R - 7 classroom and student areas. These four qualities were prominent both visually on the walls, and inherently within teaching and learning practice.

In discussions with students, they reported enjoying the challenges associated with learning, monitoring their progress using data walls and pre-test/post-test spotlights, helping each other learn by helping someone work it out rather than telling them the answer, and receiving teacher feedback that helps them improve and learn 'better'. They also showed an understanding that they should ask the teacher for harder work if they find what they are doing is too easy and described teachers responding positively to this and provide additional work. They explained their teachers tell them making mistakes is okay as they are viewed as learning opportunities.

Some students shared their views about their learning with the Review Panel. For example, some felt what they are learning at school would help them get a job or go onto to further study at TAFE or university, and others felt when their learning was good and when they progress, they and their teachers feel proud.

All the students interviewed by the Review Panel reported they felt safe at school and reported that teachers took action to make them feel safe. This perception was confirmed by parent responses to a school survey which indicated that the vast majority of parents were happy with the way the school is managed and felt that their child is safe and happy at school. Students also expressed a sense of belonging to the school community and pride in their school. Wednesday is Breakfast in a Bag day, and this program appears to promote a sense of community and supports student engagement in tangible ways. For example, attendance is highest on these days.

Further exploration of the lines of inquiry during discussions with students revealed that they are keen to be challenged and know what they are learning and why. Discussions also revealed that senior students in particular engage in effective student representative structures and processes that develop their leadership skills and allow their involvement in authentic decision making and improvement planning at the school level. Senior students, in particular, spoke positively about a new initiative which aims to build the capacity of students to engage authentically in their learning and school operational decision making processes, actions and outcomes. The initiative which is taking the concept of authentic student voice to a new level operates in addition to the R - 3 and 4 - 7 Student Representative Council, and consists of a Student Action Team (SAT). This team meets weekly and works with the Principal to analyse student achievement, attendance and behaviour data, and develop solutions to identified issues. SAT members are invited to attend all Governing Council meetings. School captains and vice captains who are members of the SAT, report fortnightly to the school community via the school newsletter. In light of positive comments from the senior students, finding ways to involve the students from the early to middle years sections of the school in this type of solution-based process will be beneficial in sustaining the existing positive learning culture.

Further, by continuing to promote and build upon this student-centred improvement pathway, there is the potential to promote even greater opportunities for students, especially those in the early and middle primary years, to influence learning and the school processes in ways that make learning even more purposeful and relevant to them.



## **Direction 2**

**Increase the number of students reaching the DECD SEA and achieving at the higher levels of proficiency and maintain high expectations of student engagement in relevant and purposeful learning by creating authentic opportunities for students to undertake increasingly complex real world learning challenges.**

As goal setting is a critical component influencing the accomplishment of targets and challenges, the Review Panel investigated how students are supported in setting and achieving learning goals at the classroom level.

### **How are teachers monitoring progress, and supporting students to achieve identified goals?**

There was evidence of consistent approaches across the school for the tracking and regular monitoring of student growth, particularly in literacy and mathematics. The Review Panel also observed evidence of the timely analysis of data at the whole school level, and this data being transformed into relevant and useful information that is, in turn, implemented in ways that aim to improve student learning.

Evidence from teacher reflections and subsequent discussions, however, revealed inconsistencies in their understandings of the aim, purpose or desired outcomes for how and why students engage in setting individual goals and targets that shape their immediate and future learning.

In particular, a coherent understanding of the role and nature of individual or personalised learning goals, or how goals and targets are developed and scaffolded across the years of schooling was lacking within and across year levels and learning areas. Notably the concept of a goal was used in diverse ways, both in classroom contexts and the goals being set by teachers for students participating in timely interventions and enrichment programs in the school's Learning Centre. For example, some teachers perceived the setting of learning goals primarily as an outcome of diagnostic evaluation (does not use apostrophes appropriately in texts or can't write numbers 1 to 20 – so the goal is to work on this; the target is to master the concept). Others spoke of goals in terms of long term goals related to the school qualities with subjective outcomes where success is determined by the teacher rather than offering clearly measurable outcomes by which the student can monitor their progress (needs to develop social skills to ensure they work successfully in the classroom environment). There was also variability with respect to who sets the goal, i.e. it could be set by the teacher, the student, or the teacher in collaboration with the student.

Evidence of students setting individual goals was observed via posters placed on some classroom walls. The variability expressed by teachers, unsurprisingly was reflected in students' goals. Some were specific and measurable "I want to improve my reading and go up a level", but none were observed to be time-bound, and many lacked outcomes that supported scaffolded self-monitoring of progress or goal achievement.

During the Review Panel's discussions with teachers, there were also debates amongst teachers on how many learning goals should be set and in what areas of learning they should be set. For example, questions were raised as to whether or not there should be a learning goal for each curriculum area, or goals for what the school measures and rewards such as social responsibility, attendance, achievement, and growth.

This debate provides the opportunity for developing a common understanding, language and practice for the setting of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound) learning goals for and with individual students within and across all classrooms and the learning centre. The school will benefit from exploring how teachers can involve students in the goal and target setting process to encourage students to take responsibility for managing their learning and progress towards goals and targets, and how agreed approaches can be implemented school-wide.

## **Direction 3**

**Support the staff in the development of a common understanding, language, and consistent practices for authentically involving students in setting SMART goals for personal learning and progress.**

### OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Port Pirie West Primary School is tracking well with student achievement data and other evidence used to inform decisions and actions at the individual student, class and whole-school levels.

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

1. Implement a school-wide approach that supports effective teaching and learning in numeracy and mathematics, and evaluate regularly and rigorously the impact of all interventions and assessment practices designed to lift student achievement
2. Increase the number of students reaching the DECD SEA and achieving at the higher levels of proficiency and maintain high expectations of student engagement in relevant and purposeful learning by creating authentic opportunities for students to undertake increasingly complex real world learning challenges
3. Support the staff in the development of a common understanding, language, and consistent practices for authentically involving students in setting SMART goals for personal learning and progress

Based on the school's current performance, Port Pirie West Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2019.



Susan Cameron  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
PRESCHOOL AND SCHOOL  
IMPROVEMENT

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.



June Goode  
PRINCIPAL  
PORT PIRIE WEST PRIMARY SCHOOL



Governing Council Chairperson