EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR MORPHETT VALE EAST PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in August 2015
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 Liz Matheson, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Tim McLeod, 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 Morphett Vale East Primary School has verified that the school is working towards being compliant with all applicable DECD policies. The Principal advised action is being taken to comply with the following DECD policies:

- Teaching and Learning: Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for Aboriginal students. The ILPs were not transferred from the Special Education teacher to the new Deputy Principal when the allocated responsibility changed in 2015.
- HR Management: Site Induction policy. Previous induction processes were not sufficiently thorough. The Principal has undertaken that all new staff will be inducted according to DECD requirements in the future.

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. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 89.1%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context
Morphett Vale East Primary School is located in the southern suburbs of Adelaide, 24kms south of the Adelaide GPO. The Junior Primary and Primary schools amalgamated in 2013. As the schools were working closely together this organisational change did not have a big impact. The enrolment in 2015 is 313 students. An increase of 25 enrolments since the commencement of the school year resulted in the establishment of another class during the term. The school has an ICSEA score of 962, and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 9 Aboriginal students, 48 Students with Disabilities, which includes 8 students in a Junior Primary Speech and Language class, 14 students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), and 1 student under the Guardianship of the Minister (GoM). The school has a large majority of boys in the Years 6 to 7 cohort and has established 2 classes, one of which is an all-boys class.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in his 5th year of tenure and a Deputy Principal in her 1st year of tenure.
Lines of inquiry

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

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How well are students achieving over time?

In the early years reading is monitored against Running Records. In 2014, 17% (6 out of 36) and in 2013, 7.5% (3 out of 40) Year 1 students achieved the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) or above. The Year 2 achievement was 42% in 2014 and 13% in 2013. During the review it became apparent that there is a practice in the early years at Morphett Vale East Primary School of moving students through the stages of pre-text skill development before they are allocated a levelled text. There is an urgent need for this practice to be reviewed to determine the impact on students’ reading skills and on their self-belief as readers.

In 2014, the reading results as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 64% of Year 3 students, 58% of Year 5 students and 69% of Year 7 students achieved the SEA. From 2012 to 2014, there has been a downward trend for Year 5 achievement from 75% in 2012 to 58% in 2014. The trends in Years 3 and 7 are inconclusive, neither up nor down.

In 2015, the growth in reading achievement from Years 3 to 5 showed that 59% of students made low progress compared with 12% making high progress. From Years 5 to 7, the percentage of students making low progress was 24% compared with 20% making high progress. The expected low and high growth across South Australia is 25%.

In relation to students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands 24% were in Year 3, 10% were in Year 5 and 10% were in Year 7. This compares to an average of 17.5%, 12% and 15% for Years 3, 5 and 7 respectively between 2008 and 2013. For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading 4 out of 10 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2014 and 2 out of 7 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2014.

In 2014, the numeracy results as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 79% of Year 3 students, 45% of Year 5 students and 59% of Year 7 students achieved the SEA. From 2012 to 2014, there has been a downward trend for Year 7 achievement from 65% in 2012 to 59% in 2014. The trends in Year 3 and Year 5 are inconclusive, neither up nor down.

In 2015, the growth in numeracy achievement from Years 3 to 5 showed that 28% of students made low progress compared with 17% making high progress. From Years 5 to 7, the percentage of students making low progress was 60% compared with 8% making high progress. The expected low and high growth across South Australia is 25%.

In relation to students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands, 9% were in Year 3, 5% were in Year 5 and 3% were in Year 7. This compares to an average of 11.5%, 9% and 10.5% for Years 3, 5 and 7 respectively between 2008 and 2013. For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 1 out of 5 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2014 and 1 out of 4 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2014.
The perception data showed that most stakeholders were satisfied with the school. It is acknowledged as a caring school, with a reputation for being concerned about students’ wellbeing. This view was endorsed by members of the Governing Council. The Principal of the school also reflected that their prime focus had been on the care and wellbeing of students. Schools have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for all students within their care and to actively support their wellbeing. Research, however, shows that student learning must be front and centre and is the clear purpose of schooling, in order for sustained improvement to be achieved.

**Direction 1**
Increase the proportion of students meeting the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement by having a clearer focus on learning and increased expectations of growth and challenge.

**How well does the school facilitate the development of high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?**

The staff members of the school are keen for students to continually improve in their learning and most indicated they believed the school could do better. The Review Panel heard that the key inhibitors to achieving this aspiration relate to the lack of clarity in direction, in communication and in the leadership of change to support new approaches to be embedded into thinking and daily classroom practice.

One example of a change priority that appeared to be taking a long time to come to realisation relates to student behaviour management. Investigation into an appropriate whole-school strategy aimed at educating students and building conflict resolution skills, as opposed to a punitive system, began in 2011. Professional development was provided and teachers were encouraged to use the strategies and games to reinforce the key concepts of self-regulation and problem-solving to build social and emotional competencies. Staff, students and parents reported the behaviour of students had improved over the past few years. Some teachers, however, were of the view that this approach was not fully embedded into each classroom’s management practices. This perception was corroborated by students, as in some classes they were not able to explain the system and how or why it was intended to support their learning. At the time of the Review, the documented expectations of this approach were still in a formative stage and it was not clear how the impact of this approach would be evaluated.

Another example of a change of practice that the school has adopted relates to a structured approach to teaching literacy known as the Daily 5. The Daily 5 entails students engaging in activities: Read to Self, Work on Writing, Read to Someone, Listen to Reading, and Word Work. These activities are designed to support students to master the essential skills in reading comprehension, accuracy, fluency, and to expand vocabulary. The Review Panel saw examples of this system being put into practice to varying degrees of effect. While students were able to name the Daily 5, in many classes they were unable to describe what they were learning through the activities, why those skills were important in learning to read and, furthermore, whether they were improving. It was also not clear to the Review Panel what explicit instruction was being provided in this system and how students’ progress was being tracked.

A new approach to providing intervention seems to be gaining traction. At the beginning of 2015 it was decided to change the practice of withdrawing students from classrooms for intervention support provided by School Support Officers. The drive for this change was to ensure students are connected with the learning within the classroom. Teachers have been released to work with the Special Education teacher to identify the specific skills required to support their RaW (Reading and Writing) groups. The new approach has freed up the Special Education teacher to act as a ‘coach’ for classroom teachers. Furthermore, some students were not being sufficiently challenged and extended. Students talked to the Review Panel about the extension work they are now being given. One teacher said it had been a timely reminder to ensure students were challenged and extended, and the need to differentiate their teaching to meet the breadth of learning needs within the class, rather than ‘pitching’ to the middle group.

Every three weeks the staff meeting is devoted to Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) to enable teachers to meet. It was not clear how these meetings are facilitated to enable teachers to develop their proficiencies
in the new approaches. Although the Daily 5 is the main vehicle to achieve improved outcomes in literacy, a systematic implementation plan to support teachers was not apparent. At the beginning of 2015, teachers asked themselves the question: "Are we all doing it?" Half-way through the year, it was still not clear whether they were "all doing it" and, more importantly, "Are we all doing it well? Is it having an impact on students’ learning? How do we know?"

Every school improvement strategy has multiple elements, however, the single most important element is the capacity of teachers to provide quality teaching. Capacity building requires strong instructional leadership to articulate the current evidence-based practices that form the basis of a coherent teaching programme. They need to build collective responsibility for all students and the commitment of teachers to action the school’s agreed pedagogies and practices. Teachers need to use data and evidence to identify what students need to learn. Allocated time for collaboration, ongoing and targeted professional learning (within and beyond the school), and documented expectations need to be strategically provided with clear direction and guidance.

Direction 2
Clearly define the practices teachers are expected to incorporate into their daily work. Develop the PLTs, performance development processes and targeted professional learning to enable teachers to exhibit these practices confidently and competently.

How well are the results of data and evidence translated into targeted actions?

The School Improvement Plan (SIP) 2014 to 2015 has two priorities: developing the literacy and numeracy of all learners. The plan has clear targets and evaluation measures. The key strategy is to develop an agreed, consistent whole-school process for the collection, analysis and interpretation of data and evidence to identify what students know and what students need to learn.

Through discussion with PLTs, teachers explained that prior to 2015 they had seen overviews of the school’s achievement results, however, were less certain about what actions they should take to address gaps or strengthen achievement. In 2015, the Deputy Principal highlighted the skills the students had most difficulty in demonstrating as place value in numeracy and sentence structure in writing. A question analysis of the students’ responses in the NAPLAN test had identified these key skills as requiring targeted explicit instruction. The staff received in-school PD to gain greater understanding about how to teach these specific skills. This process gave teachers tangible foci and direction for the first semester.

A Connector Group has been established to enable communication between the teams. At the time of the review the Connector Group was more of a sharing forum than a group tasked with review, evaluation and planning. The Review Panel was of the opinion that this group could provide a conduit to ensure the initiatives and work of the PLTs are contributing to achieve the SIP priorities. This work needs to be informed by an ongoing analysis of student achievement and growth data and provided to teachers in a format which empowers them to identify what students know and what students need to learn. These processes need to be systematic and regular so that the year level PLTs can support each other in how to support and extend each student within their classrooms.

Direction 3
Strengthen the role and capacity of the Connector Group to act as an improvement team. Use planning processes to support the implementation of the Site Improvement Plan and agreed whole-school expectations. Ensure this work uses data and evidence to support decision-making and ongoing improvement.

The Governing Council is committed to actively supporting the school. They provided examples of their work and the care they were taking to build a community. Additionally, they provided examples of how the school supported some of their children. They were less informed about the achievement and growth of students and how the school was performing as a whole. The Review Panel felt the Governing Council
should be provided with regular updates on how the school was going in relation to the targets in the SIP, and what the key strategies were to support these targets.

**Direction 4**
Ensure the Governing Council has a clear overview of achievement and growth trends to support the school in setting the broad directions for the School Improvement Plan.

**To what extent does assessment support students to improve?**
During the pre-review data discussion it was noted that the allocation of A–E grades in the last semester of 2014 was comparable to achievement in NAPLAN. Most students gained a C or a D in English and Mathematics. Teachers join with two other schools to moderate their assessment in writing. While this process is acknowledged as being challenging, it appears to have supported teachers to be able to make consistent judgements.

The Principal talked about how the allocation of grades had required a cultural and mind-set shift for all stakeholders to understand that the achievement of an A or B requires a student to demonstrate they are able to transfer skills and concepts into new contexts. Grading needs to be clearly based on students’ skills and the work they produce, not on effort or behaviour, and this understanding was quite different from previous reporting processes.

Most Middle and Upper Primary students who talked with the Review Panel were able to report what grades they had received in the first semester. They showed examples of their work, which ranged from pieces of writing, poetry, word mapping and models they had designed and constructed. They understood that to get an A or a B they needed to produce ‘extra good work’. Most students were unable to tell the Review Panel what they would need to do to improve their grade. They were unsure what their work would look like in order for it to be graded as an A or B. Students need to know what the criteria is for assessment, and the use of rubrics and exemplars can provide guidance and motivation to improve. It makes the process of assessment transparent and visible to students.

**Direction 5**
Provide students with information on how to improve through the use of rubrics, exemplars and quality feedback.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Morphett Vale East Primary School needs ongoing support. The low achievement and growth data is a concern. Processes and practices to systematically build teachers’ capacity are not yet having the desired impact. The clarity of direction and leadership of change to achieve consistent quality practice needs significant improvement.

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

1. Increase the proportion of students meeting the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement by having a clearer focus on learning and increased expectations of growth and challenge.

2. Clearly define the practices teachers are expected to incorporate into their daily work. Develop the PLTs, performance development processes and targeted professional learning to enable teachers to exhibit these practices confidently and competently.

3. Strengthen the role and capacity of the Connector Group to act as an improvement team. Use planning processes to support the implementation of the Site Improvement Plan and agreed whole-school expectations. Ensure this work uses data and evidence to support decision-making and ongoing improvement.

4. Ensure the Governing Council has a clear overview of achievement and growth trends to support the school in setting the broad directions for the School Improvement Plan.

5. Provide students with information on how to improve through the use of rubrics, exemplars and quality feedback.

Based on the school’s current performance, Morphett Vale East Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2016.

Tony Lunniss
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.

Grant Ley
PRINCIPAL
MORPHETT VALE EAST PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governning Council Chairperson