

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR MURRAY BRIDGE SOUTH PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in August 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 John Iannunzio, 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 Murray Bridge South 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:

- ICT Security Policy - The school has most aspects in place but has plans to update for 2016 school year to conform with any outstanding requirements.

Implementation of the *DECD Student Attendance Policy* was checked specifically against a documented set of criteria. The school was found to be compliant with this policy, and has implemented comprehensive tracking and intervention processes. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 87.5%, which is below the DECD target of 93% but higher than other Category 1 schools.

School context

Murray Bridge South Primary School is a Reception to Year 7 site located 85kms east of Adelaide in the township of Murray Bridge. Enrolments in 2014 were 319, which have increased from 291 in 2012. The school is classified as Category 1 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage, and has an ICSEA score of 896.

The school population includes 21% Aboriginal students, 8% Students with Disabilities, 27% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), 3% students under the Guardianship of the Minister (GoM), and 56 % of families are eligible for School Card assistance. There is a high level of mobility in the community with an average of 30% turnover in enrolments over the previous five years, primarily associated with changes in employment opportunities.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in his third year of tenure, a Deputy Principal, and a Coordinator, Curriculum (0.2 FTE) and AET (0.3 FTE), who is also the Coordinator of Primary Australian Curriculum (0.5 FTE) for the Murraylands Partnership, and a Counsellor (1.0 FTE).

Lines of inquiry

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

Student Learning:	How well are students achieving over time?
Effective Pedagogy:	To what extent are teachers' pedagogies reflective of the TfEL Framework?
Parent Partnerships:	How effectively does the school promote respectful, productive relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal families?

How well are students achieving over time?

When compared to the results of other Category 1 schools, Murray Bridge South Primary School's results are well above the average in both literacy and numeracy.

In 2014, for example, the NAPLAN reading results for Murray Bridge South Primary School indicate that 66% of Year 3 students, 59% of Year 5 students and 70% of Year 7 students achieved the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA), which is considerably higher than typical Category 1 school results.

In relation to students who achieved in the NAPLAN higher proficiency bands, 16% were in Year 3, 22% were in Year 5 and 9% were in Year 7. This compares to an average of 16%, 9% and 14% for Years 3, 5 and 7 respectively, over the previous five years, 2009 to 2013, indicating an upward trend in Year 5 results, and a downward trend in Year 7 results.

For those students who achieved in the NAPLAN higher proficiency bands in reading, 1 of 1 student from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2014, and 3 of 9 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2014. This compares to an average of two students retained in the upper bands at both Years 3 to 5 and Years 3 to 7 between 2008 and 2013.

In 2014, NAPLAN numeracy results indicate that 63% of Year 3 students, 51% of Year 5 students and 64% of Year 7 students achieved the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). Again, these results are considerably above the achievement scores of other Category 1 schools. Additionally, between 2012 and 2014, there has been a significant upward trend for Year 3 and Year 7, from 43% in 2012 to 63% in 2014 and 40% in 2012 to 64% in 2014 respectively.

Of students who achieved in the NAPLAN higher bands for numeracy, 3% were in Year 3, 8% were in Year 5 and 2% were in Year 7. This compares to an average of 9%, 3% and 9% for Years 3, 5 and 7 respectively over the previous five years, 2009 to 2013. As the data shows, there has been an upward trend at Year 5 over time, while the proportion of students at Years 3 and 7 has decreased over time.

Examination of results for the retention of students, who achieved in the NAPLAN higher proficiency bands in numeracy, shows that 1 of 1 student from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2014, and 1 of 3 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2014. This compares to an average of one student retained in the upper bands for Years 3 to 5 and Years 3 to 7 respectively, between 2008 and 2013.

While Murray Bridge South Primary School is achieving well when compared to other Category 1 schools, there is scope for improving student achievement in reading and numeracy. On the basis of discussions, relating to the student achievement data and the school's identified improvement priorities, the Review Panel established two key lines of inquiry. The first is related to effective teaching and learning practices that can further improve student learning outcomes. Given the school's proportion of Aboriginal enrolments, the second line of inquiry explored the ways in which the school works with Aboriginal families to engage and motivate their children in education.

To what extent are teachers' pedagogies reflective of the TfEL Framework?

While not having the benefit of participating in Phase 1, teachers at the school have joined Phase 2 of the Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) pilot program being undertaken this year by the Murraylands Partnership. Additionally, the school's Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are using TfEL as a lens for reviewing quality teaching and learning, and to support the planning and sharing of effective pedagogical practice.

Early in the review process, the Panel became aware that most staff had not had the opportunity to examine ways in which their current practices mapped onto the TfEL framework. Consequently, the Panel invited the staff to participate in the identification of their most effective pedagogical practices, and the assignment of these practices to one of three specific teaching domains: creating safe conditions for rigorous learning; developing expert learners; personalising and connecting learning.

At the time of the External School Review, teachers had only been formally engaged in the TfEL program for a short time, and many processes are yet to be embedded fully into practice, but the mapping process demonstrated that some elements of each domain form part of teachers' current practices. Furthermore, the analysis of teacher reflections and the mapping process conducted throughout the External Review corresponded closely with teachers' ratings on the Australian Curriculum and TfEL aspects of the Engaging with the Australian Curriculum survey undertaken in Term 1, 2015. That is, teachers' collated responses on the survey suggested most teachers are at the 'developing' or 'functioning' stages for Domains 2, 3 and 4, thereby confirming the panel's findings.

Specifically, the Review Panel found that teachers and leaders have put significant effort into creating a safe learning environment for students. In particular, there is evidence of effective approaches to behaviour management and student wellbeing, as demonstrated by the reduction in suspensions and exclusions (take homes), and increased attendance rates. Students reported to the Panel being happy at school and feeling positive about their learning, which aligns with their responses to a recent KidsMatter survey. They also reported feeling safe at school. While recognising a degree of bullying and poor behaviour taking place in the yard and classrooms, students perceive it as being dealt with fairly and equitably. They also know the consequences of poor behaviour and feel the measures are appropriate: "teachers take care of us at playtime and bullies get time out". Students also spoke of how they look out for each other and care about others' wellbeing, which also matched with their responses in the KidsMatter survey. Students were able to explain to the Review Panel aspects of various frameworks that underpin positive behaviour management approaches in the school environment.

Less evident in the teachers' reflections were teaching practices that supported the 'conditions for rigorous learning'; namely, the involvement of students in determining the direction of the curriculum, and challenging students to achieve high standards with appropriate support. This presents an opportunity for the staff to build on the safe conditions already established in classroom learning environments to incorporate authentic student influence and intellectual challenge into learning and assessment design. In support of improving student learning outcomes, the school should consider the role of higher order thinking and executive functioning, and how these aspects can be integrated into existing classroom learning programs to build students' capacity to achieve at standard and score in the higher proficiency levels over time.

Direction 1

Build the capacity of all students to achieve at standard, and in the higher proficiency bands over time, by incorporating conditions for rigorous learning into all teaching and learning programs.

The mapping process also showed that some teachers are engaging at a deeper level with various strategies for effectively developing expert learners, as defined within the TfEL Framework. Further discussions and investigations with staff, through the TfEL pilot program and school-based PLC meetings, regarding their understanding of this domain and how it can be realised consistently and effectively in learning design and assessments, should prove beneficial. These discussions and investigations should be linked to the implementation of the Australian Curriculum and opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement and capabilities across the A-E standards in multiple modes, as well as applying their learning in real world, authentic contexts.

In recognition of the student profile across the school, staff will also benefit from opportunities to consider and share practice regarding the allocation of A-E grades that reflect the learning capacities and progress of all students, including those who need extra support but do not have a verified disability. The development of a whole-school agreement, for example, on how achievement and individual learning growth and progress will be shared in visible and relevant ways, and how students can be engaged in setting personal targets for improvement, has the potential to support the school in achieving its improvement priorities.

Direction 2

Increase the number of students achieving standards and benchmarks by developing a collaborative whole-school approach for driving forward effective pedagogical approaches, particularly those that support personalising and connecting learning in relevant ways to students' lives and aspirations.

DECD is committed to maximising each and every child's learning and to improving the educational outcomes for all students. Success in achieving these outcomes relies on providing a climate that welcomes and values students' culture, has high expectations of learning and behaviour, and supports them to achieve learning standards and progress appropriate to their capabilities and capacities.

Respectful, productive relationships and partnerships are critical factors in achieving effective interactions between parents, students and the school.

How effectively does the school promote respectful, productive relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal families?

As nearly one-fifth of the student population attending Murray Bridge South Primary School identify as Aboriginal, the Review Panel explored the relationship of the school with these families within the context of school community partnerships. Further, the school's regularly monitored data shows that the gap between ATSI and non-ATSI student achievement is not closing at the rate the school would like. A major improvement strategy, implemented by the school in 2014, was the provision of a Nunga Room to help re-engage the school's Aboriginal community and its children with learning.

According to members of the Aboriginal community that the Review Panel met with, the provision of the Nunga Room provides a climate that welcomes and values Aboriginal students. The Room is used by Aboriginal staff and volunteers and is open to all children, not only Aboriginal students, at recess and lunchtime. It offers a range of activities and, importantly, someone to talk to when challenges arise. The dedicated space is accessed extensively by students and parents, and the Review Panel saw evidence of a diversity of children accessing the room. In this way, the approach promotes inclusivity rather than exclusivity, and is a positive aspect of the Nunga Room that should be continued.

Critical to the ongoing success of such a partnership, however, is the recognition that once students and the community are on board, it is only the start. Research has shown that when initiatives such as this have a self-reflective element as part of the review cycle, the outcomes improve regardless of the previous year's success, and that ongoing review and evaluation promotes increased results over a number of years.

As part of the planning process within the improvement review cycle, it will be important to consider ways the school can promote positive interactions between the Nunga Room and classroom programs. One example would be creating opportunities to engage members of the Aboriginal community productively in promoting Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum.

Direction 3

Improve the engagement and learning outcomes of Aboriginal students by continuing to build respectful, productive relationships with Aboriginal students, their families and the wider school community, including the implementation of an associated review cycle in support of continuous, ongoing improvement in this priority area.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Murray Bridge South Primary School is tracking well. It demonstrates growth in student achievement above what would be reasonably expected of a school in a similar context and collects relevant data regularly to track and assess the progress of students.

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

1. Build the capacity of all students to achieve at standard, and in the higher proficiency bands over time, by incorporating conditions for rigorous learning into all teaching and learning programs.
2. Increase the number of students achieving standards and benchmarks by developing a collaborative whole-school approach for driving forward effective pedagogical approaches, particularly those that support personalising and connecting learning in relevant ways to students' lives and aspirations.
3. Improve the engagement and learning outcomes of Aboriginal students by continuing to build respectful, productive relationships with Aboriginal students, their families and the wider school community, including the implementation of an associated review cycle in support of continuous, ongoing improvement in this priority area.

Based on the school's current performance, Murray Bridge South Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2019.



Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL
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.

Graham Alder
PRINCIPAL
MURRAY BRIDGE SOUTH PRIMARY
SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson