Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Hawthorndene Primary School

Conducted in October 2020

Review details

Our education system aspires to become the best in Australia by seeking growth for every student, in every class and in every school.

The purpose of the External School Review (ESR) is to support schools to raise achievement, sustain high performance and to provide quality assurance to build and sustain public confidence in government schools.

The External School Review framework is referenced throughout all stages of the ESR process.

This report 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.

We acknowledge the support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community. While not all review processes, artefacts and comments are documented here, they have all been considered and contribute to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Debbie Grzeczkowski, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Mark Vincent, Review Principal.

Review Process

The following processes were used to gather evidence relevant to the lines of inquiry:
- Presentation from the principal
- Class visits
- Attendance at staff meeting
- Document analysis
- Scan of Aboriginal Education Strategy implementation
- Discussions with:
    - Governing Council representatives
    - Leaders
    - Parent groups
    - School Services Officers (SSOs)
    - Student groups
    - Teachers

School context

Hawthorndene Primary School caters for students from reception to year 7. It is situated 14kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2020 is 397. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 357. The local partnership is Mitcham Hills.

The school has an ICSEA score of 1122, and is classified as Category 7 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes less than 6 Aboriginal students, 6% students with disabilities, 4% students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, less than 6 children/young people in care and 6.5 % of students eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a principal in their 5th year of tenure, a deputy principal, STEM/numeracy coordinator and partnership Senior Leader, Learning Improvement Primary (SLLIP).

There are 18 teachers including 2 in the early years of their career and 9 Step 9 teachers.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

Direction 1   Investigate and develop a shared understanding of whole-school agreements about protocols and practices, which genuinely make active and apply student voice to all aspects of learning and school life.

Direction 2   Continue to deepen and sharpen the improvement focus to ensure commitment from and support for all staff and use evidence base of student learning to inform and implement change.

Direction 3   Develop a common understanding of student engagement and intellectual challenge across the whole school, and protocols for pedagogical application of this understanding.

Direction 4   Develop whole-school agreements about practices, which ensure all students, are engaged in quality differentiated learning at all times.

What impact has the implementation of previous directions had on school improvement?
The previous ESR directions guided the school improvement agenda since the last review, with leaders strategically creating processes to capture teacher participation and engagement. Significant professional learning is a feature of the school. Over the previous 3 years it resulted in inquiry, critical and creative thinking and powerful learner attributes being embedded. Continuing the learning teams and introducing professional learning communities (PLCs) supported staff in sharing and refining their practice. Whilst significant work occurred with previous ESR directions, there is still opportunity to deepen understanding, further refine and embed practice across the school. Teachers' use of data evidence to inform their practice and provide differentiated learning is still an area of focus.

Lines of inquiry

Effective school improvement planning

How well does the school review and evaluate the effectiveness of improvement planning processes and the impact on student learning to inform the next steps?

The leadership team has a clear and collective understanding of how to further improve outcomes. They established structured PLCs to drive improvement. Leaders strategically facilitate PLCs based on their professional strengths, and are eager to deepen staff collaboration and distributive leadership. The alignment of staff meeting structures gives staff the option to meet regularly in learning teams and PLCs. Performance development plans (PDPs) are linked to the SIP and targeted professional learning supports the plan's goals.

While all staff are aware of the 3 school improvement plan (SIP) focus areas, they report little ownership of the plan, with the majority of staff reporting the SIP was presented to them for input. Governing council comments provide a similar response. To maximise ownership and understanding of the SIP it is critical to involve all stakeholders in the process which will strengthen a culture of trust and collaboration. Regular review by staff and updates to governing council, parents and students, will ensure whole-community awareness of the improvement focus.

There is opportunity to work collaboratively on a shared vision, reflect on the school's core purpose and strengthen ways to move forward collectively. Leaders recently structured a student free day to enable PLCs to present their work; staff valued the day and would like increased opportunities to share their practice.

PLCs are most effective when they have an unrelenting focus on student learning growth. They are a proven way to increase student learning by creating a culture that is focused on continuous improvement. At their optimum, they link student learning needs with professional learning and practice of teachers.

Although PLCs are in their infancy, some are operating more effectively than others. Strengthening a professional culture, where all staff are committed to evidence-based decision-making and share collaborative expertise, will drive the improvement agenda.

Direction 1   **Collectively strengthen a culture of trust, collaboration and high expectations, which enable PLCs to effectively drive the improvement agenda.**

Effective teaching and student learning

How effectively are teachers using evidence-based pedagogical practices that engage and challenge all learners?

Inquiry and critical and creative thinking is embedded across all classes, and teachers acknowledge its positive impact on their pedagogy. Powerful learner attributes (PLAs) support students and provide common language for learning. Most staff use high-impact teaching strategies, but these are not consistently visible across the school due to variance in teacher pedagogy.

Students talked of being offered a choice of activities. Highly motivated students talked of taking the challenge, but some admitted staying in their comfort zone by taking the 'easy' activity. Although teachers want students to be self-motivated, some students 'coast'. After reflecting on datasets presented as part of the review, some teachers questioned whether they differentiate learning effectively and consistently provide opportunities for students to reach A and B grades. Increased opportunities to refocus on learning design and outcomes would enable stretch and challenge for all students to become routine practice. Teachers highlighted differentiation, stretch and challenge as an area for further support.

Staff talked of collecting data, but most struggled to articulate how it informs and guides their practice. Continue providing focused professional learning in data literacy will increase staff capability to track and monitor all students, and triangulate a variety of data to inform differentiated practice and monitor impact.

Although PDPs are linked to the SIP, leaders are yet to conduct formal observations of teacher practice. Using focused observations to improve teacher pedagogy is a critical driver for school improvement. Leaders have capacity to lead learning and ensure consistency across the school by being visible in classes, and providing explicit feedback to teachers to further improve their practice. Having regular and formalised leadership observations and walkthroughs, linked to PDP and SIP focus, will provide targeted and timely feedback to further strengthen teacher pedagogy and embed consistent practice.

Direction 2   Strengthen teachers' capacity in learning design and use of data for intentional teaching to ensure all students receive appropriate stretch and challenge.

Direction 3   Ensure practice is embedded through ongoing observations and walkthroughs, which provide explicit feedback to improve teacher pedagogy.

Conditions for effective student learning

To what extent does the school promote a culture of learning with high expectations of achievement for all learners?

Students report being safe and proud of their school, and value their strong relationships with staff, reporting that staff care about them and see them as individuals. The school has structured options for student leadership, but this is predominately of an organisational nature, with the opportunity for student input into decision-making.

Most students have writing goals and numeracy 'smartar' goals to provide them with the next steps in learning. One class talked of being shown the curriculum and having input into the 'how' and 'what' they were going to learn. Students appreciate this opportunity and are highly engaged with their learning as a result. Some students worked with student teachers to collectively create success criteria, and hope their own teachers would continue this practice as they felt empowered by the process. Implementing and embedding processes, which provide all students with regular time to input, will support learner dispositions and enable students to authentically own and take risks in their learning.

The majority of students talked of working with peers and using peer feedback to improve and refine their work. They enjoy discussing the thinking behind the process, and felt this deepened their understanding, as opposed to lessons where the sole focus was on the finished product. Whilst there was a variety of student work displayed, including exemplar pieces of student work samples as aspirational examples, will further support student learning.

Majority of students felt they could have increased influence in their learning. Whilst they are presented with choices in lessons, these were mostly teacher-driven. Students have opportunity to become partners in their own learning through consistency and clarity in what they are to learn, the purpose of their learning and how they can be successful. When teachers discuss and collaboratively develop the criteria with their students, impact on learning is heightened. When students have a choice in where, what and who they work with, they report increased engagement in their learning.

Direction 4   **Develop greater student agency through the consistent implementation of teaching pedagogies which enable students to authentically own and influence their learning.**
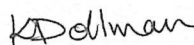
Outcomes of the External School Review 2020

Students report a strong sense of pride in their school and value the strong relationship with the adults who support them. They are confident, happy, articulate learners who display powerful learner attributes. There is a strong focus on learning across the school, supported by a strong cohesive leadership team who align staffing and resources accordingly. Parents find staff approachable and express satisfaction with student support and learning. Both governing council and parents are supportive of the school. Hawthorndene Primary School maintains a strong connectedness to its local partnership, which supports a focus on continuous improvement for all.
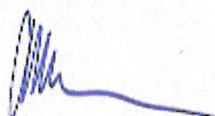
The principal will work with the education director to implement the following directions:

Direction 1   Collectively strengthen a culture of trust, collaboration and high expectations, which enable PLCs to effectively drive the improvement agenda.

Direction 2   Strengthen teachers' capacity in learning design and use of data for intentional teaching to ensure all students receive appropriate stretch and challenge.

Direction 3   Ensure practice is embedded through ongoing observations and walkthroughs which provide explicit feedback to improve teacher pedagogy.

Direction 4   Develop greater student agency through the consistent implementation of teaching pedagogies which enable students to authentically own and influence their learning.
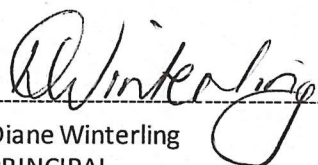
Based on the school's current performance, Hawthorndene Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2023.

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Appendix 1

School performance overview

The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the Department for Education Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2019, 77% of year 1 and 81% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents a decline for years 1 and 2 from the historic baseline average.

In 2019, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 94% of year 3 students, 96% of year 5 students and 98% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 5 and 7, this result represents an improvement, and for year 3, little or no change, from the historic baseline average.

For 2019, year 5 and 7 NAPLAN reading, the school is achieving higher than, and for year 3, within, the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2019, 68% of year 3, 62% of year 5 and 50% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 74%, or 26 out of 35 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5, and 73%, or 19 out of 26 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.

Numeracy

In 2019, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 92% of year 3 students, 95% of year 5 students and 96% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 5 and 7, this result represents an improvement, and for year 3, little or no change, from the historic baseline average.

For 2019, year 5 NAPLAN numeracy, the school is achieving higher than and for years 3 and 7, within, the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2019, 49% of year 3, 47% of year 5 and 55% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 61%, or 17 out of 28 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 and 67%, or 14 out of 21 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.