EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW
REPORT FOR MEADOWS PRIMARY SCHOOL
Conducted in September 2016
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 Helen Tunney, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Tanya Oshinsky, 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 Meadows Primary School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies.

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 92.2%, which is just below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Meadows Primary School caters for children from Reception to Year 7. It is situated 40kms south-east of the Adelaide CBD, and is part of the Heysen Partnership. The enrolment in 2015 was 129 students and 121 students in 2014, fluctuating over the last 5 years. A new housing development is creating upward pressure on enrolments with an influx of young families. The school is classified as Category 6 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school's ICSEA score is 1024.

The school population includes 9 Students with a Disability, 33% of families eligible for School Card assistance, and 3 students of English as an Additional Language or Dialect background. There are no Aboriginal students, no children in care, and no Flexible Learning Options (FLO). In 2015, 26.3% of Reception students were identified as developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains in the Australian Early Development Census. This is down from 57.1% in 2009, but up from 23.1% in 2012. Using the Middle Years Development Instrument, perseverance and absence of worries were identified as areas of concern for Year 6/7 students in 2015.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in the 4th year of her tenure at the school. There are 11 teachers (6.8FTE), including 1 in the early years of their career, and 5 Step 9 teachers. Staffing has been significantly disrupted this year.

The school's value statement is: Respect for self, others and the environment.

School Performance Overview

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

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2015, 75% of Year 1 and 70% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). In Year 1, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. In Year 2, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 1 has been downwards, from 92% in 2013 to 75% in 2015.

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 93% of Year 3 students, 60% of Year 5 students and 71% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. For Years 5 and 7, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

In 2015 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school achieved within the results of similar students across DECD schools. In Year 7, there is a downward trend, from 83% in 2013 to 71% in 2015.
In 2015, 43% of Year 3, 27% of Year 5 and 12% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3 this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 100%, or 3 of 3 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015, and 33%, or 1 of 3 students from Year 3, remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. For Year 5, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. For Year 7, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

**Numeracy**

In 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 86% of Year 3 students, 80% of Year 5 students and 65% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. For Years 5 and 7, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 5 has been upwards, from 44% in 2013 to 80% in 2015. Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 7 has been downwards, from 87% in 2013 to 65% in 2015.

In 2015 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school achieved within the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools.

In 2015, 36% of Year 3, 13% of Year 5 and 0% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 50%, or 2 of 4 students from Year 3, remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015, and none of 1 student from Year 3, remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. For Years 3 to 5, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average. For Years 3 to 7, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

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**Lines of Inquiry**

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

**Student Learning:** To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

**Effective Teaching:** To what extent is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction?

**Effective Leadership:** To what extent are the school’s professional learning and performance and development processes effective in building teacher capacity?

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**To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?**

During the External School Review at Meadows Primary School, the Principal and teachers indicated to the panel that ‘there is now more intentionality around high achievement’. Parents and students perceive that students are doing well at Meadows Primary School, which verifies a shift in perception talked about by the Principal in her presentation. Unlike the past teacher and parent perception of students, currently, they are perceived as ‘good’ achievers, and that students can and do academically well at the school. Students told the panel that they feel they are doing better when they are doing more challenging work, and talked strongly to the panel about their valuing of the individualised support they receive from teachers and SSOs to achieve highly.

The *growth mindset* concept ‘growing your brain’ is impacting positively on student engagement, resilience and persistence. All stakeholders own and value this way of conceptualising productive struggle.
While some students commented that their work is highly worksheet-based, the uptake by all teachers of Back to Front Maths has enthused teachers and students for maths, increased student and teacher maths competencies, and provided a rigorous pedagogy that is engaging and intellectually challenging for all students. Students talked to the panel about their enjoyment of maths. Teachers talked about how open-ended questions engage students, and about using ‘what if’ questions to stretch students.

Writing achievement has been intentionally increased across the school (as evidenced by school-based pre- and post-testing against types of writing rubrics, and 2016 NAPLAN) through explicit teaching. Teachers have noticed that now more students are keen to write and are interested in writing. However, the panel concluded that, overall, intellectual stretch is still largely conceptualised by teachers within a narrative of providing individualised extension and acceleration options, for teacher-identified students, which these students then may or may not choose to take up. The school is well-placed to unite around a common understanding of stretch and challenge as being for all, continuously engaging all students in higher-order tasks and problem-solving.

Some teachers talked to the panel about the value of inquiry-based approaches in history and geography, and the positive impact such pedagogies have on student engagement: “Students love challenge. They love researching and investigating things”. One teacher talked about supporting students to test hypotheses. A next step for the school is to address issues raised by teachers, students and parents about ‘crowding’ of the curriculum. By enabling student access, through inquiry-based pedagogies, to engaging, integrated, topic-based cross-curriculum content, student motivation will be harnessed for higher achievement, as well as facilitating curriculum coverage. Such an approach will also address an issue raised by teachers about the amount of time a student is withdrawn from class for extra-curricular activities. Learning will become more inquiry and less transmission-based.

The panel concluded that at Meadows Primary School teachers mostly give students a voice in their learning through choice of topic or activity, following student interests and Student Representative Council. However, there is expertise amongst the staff in enabling students to influence curriculum and assessment design at higher-order levels. One teacher uses Assessment For Learning strategies in her classroom to seek feedback from students about their learning and her practice. Teachers in various classes use data in different ways, for example, in showing students why and how testing is done to improve teaching, to help students set their own targets, and enabling students to give and receive feedback from each other, thus reducing student reliance on teacher evaluation of the quality of student work. Although feedback to students about learning overwhelmingly includes grading, teachers saying it’s ‘good’, use of stickers and awards, harder work (Year 5 worksheets in Year 4), neatness, legibility, and more effort, only one teacher makes success criteria evident to students in relation to A-C grade standards. The school is well-placed to utilise this existing expertise to apply student voice and influence in their learning more widely and consistently across the school, as a strategy to powerfully and authentically engage and intellectually challenge students.

**Direction 1**

Enhance the effectiveness of teachers in the active engagement of learners and the provision of challenging tasks by developing a common agreement about intellectual stretch and challenge for all students and enabling student influence (agency) in their own and each others’ learning.

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**To what extent is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction?**

During her presentation, the Principal told the panel that since 2013 the school has reformed its collection and application of data. The school has moved from collecting and storing a lot of data but making little use of it, to collecting less but more purposeful data and applying it to provide direction for teaching and learning. Data is triangulated to be analysed more deeply, and to make formative use of it. A data wall has been developed, which serves to: track individual student progress; provide a whole-school overview of growth; celebrate successes; bring student needs to teachers’ attention as they see their data represented in a different way; and stimulate teacher dialogue about growth and evidence. Data is used to set and monitor site improvement targets that are above the DECD SEA.
The panel found evidence of continual openness to new forms of assessments, in line with evolving whole-school agreements about common practice in Reception to Year 7. Data is used to regularly and systematically identify students for intervention and assessments, to review the efficacy of interventions, to transition students from one year level to the next and one teacher to the next, and provide a starting base for the next new teacher. Data has also been used to challenge and raise teacher and parent perception of students at Meadows Primary School as being 'low' achievers. Data is now highly valued by all teachers for grouping of students, identifying students for intervention, tracking growth, and setting targets and goals for students. Some teachers use data to set goals with students and identify intentional teaching.

There is strong information exchange and preschool to school transition. Non-classroom teachers have developed their own ways of using data to inform intentional teaching and judgements about their teaching effectiveness. Parents said that teachers use some data in the parent-teacher interviews. The Governing Council is deeply involved in decision-making at the school, including setting directions through the evidence-base of whole-school student achievement data.

This strong and effective data culture, which has been developed in the school since 2013, allows it to work with parents to improve the quality of reporting to ensure that it is timely, evidence-based, coherent and consistent. In addition, by working more consistently with students and their own data to regularly set and review short-term, incremental personal learning targets, teachers will become more intentional in their practice.

**Direction 2**
Enrich the school’s culture of improvement, characterised by high expectations for students, by enabling students to use their own data to empower them in learning, and by connecting with parents in a broader range of ways to formally report student achievement.

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**To what extent are the school’s professional learning and performance and development processes effective in building teacher capacity?**

During the review, the panel found much evidence that there are coherent, regular, integrated practices to address continuous improvement in teacher capacity that are aligned with site improvement targets. The school has developed, fully implemented, and embedded whole-school agreements about reading, comprehension, spelling, writing and maths. A consistency of language about pedagogy and learning in these areas is well-developed across the school. Staff have ownership of and value the common beliefs, knowledge and practices they share as Meadows Primary School teachers and SSOs. Teachers new to the school are supported with training and development to ensure they are quickly familiarised with agreements about practice. A next step for the school is to simplify its site improvement plan by shifting embedded improvements into existing or new whole-school agreements. Parents and the Principal commented to the panel about the recent high staff turnover at Meadows Primary School; nonetheless, the school is well-placed to review its induction processes regularly to ensure that the impact of teacher turnover is minimised.

The school has shifted the responsibility for the provision of intervention and support from SSOs to teachers, and from withdrawal to mainstream, ensuring that waves of teaching are now fully integrated and coherent for students. A next step for the school is to more closely support non-classroom teachers to link skill-based training and development to their focus curriculum area.

Teachers’ training and development is whole-school, and followed-up with reviews at staff meetings that support teacher application of new, agreed practices. Teachers verified that their performance and development comprises 2 meetings per year, linked to site improvement priorities through the personal development plan. This is supported with training and development and the resources needed to implement programs, inclusive of extra support to early years teachers and those new to the school, comprising observations and modelling of practice, team teaching, and linked to other schools in the partnership. Teachers value the quality of collegiality, support and teamwork at the school, and the quality and style of leadership. There is strong coherence between the site improvement priorities and training
and development, and formal and informal processes for professional learning and development.

A next step for the school is to use partnership resources in targeted ways to add more value to the strong capacity-building of the school.

**Direction 3**

Deepen the effectiveness for teachers of the provision and use of structured time for ongoing collaborative professional learning by moving developed, embedded practices from the site improvement plan into whole-school agreements, and strengthening the induction of new staff into these agreements.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

At Meadows Primary School effective leadership provides strategic direction, planning, targeted interventions, and self-review processes that are regularly and strategically used to determine the impact school strategies and practices are having on student achievement. There is a coherent and engaging curriculum for students using the Australian Curriculum, and student achievement data and other evidence is 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. Enhance the effectiveness of teachers in the active engagement of learners and the provision of challenging tasks by developing a common agreement about intellectual stretch and challenge for all students and enabling student influence (agency) in their own and each others’ learning.

2. Enrich the school’s culture of improvement, characterised by high expectations for students, by enabling students to use their own data to empower them in learning, and by connecting with parents in a broader range of ways to formally report student achievement.

3. Deepen the effectiveness for teachers of the provision and use of structured time for ongoing collaborative professional learning by moving developed, embedded practices from the site improvement plan into whole-school agreements, and strengthening the induction of new staff into these agreements.

Based on the school’s current performance, Meadows 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.

Judy McPherson
PRINCIPAL
MEADOWS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson