

# **The Department for Education**

## **External School Review**

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

**Report for Koolunga Primary School**

Conducted in March 2018



Government of South Australia  
Department for Education and  
Child Development

## Review details

A priority for the Department for Education 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 government schools.

The external school review framework underpinning the 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 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, they all have been considered and contributed to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Greg Graham, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Dan Jarred, Review Principal.

## School context

Koolunga Primary School caters for children from reception to year 7. It is situated 170kms north of Adelaide in the township of Koolunga. The enrolment in 2018 is 30 students, and has been steady over the last 5 years. The school has an ICSEA score of 1012, and is classified as Category 5 on the department's Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes no Aboriginal students, 6% students with disabilities, no students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), no children/young people in care, and 0.6% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a principal in his 7<sup>th</sup> year of tenure. There are 6 staff members consisting of 3 teachers and 3 school services officers (SSOs).

## Lines of inquiry

In considering the data summary in the school performance overview (Appendix 2) and the principal's presentation, the review panel explored the following lines of inquiry to evaluate the school's effectiveness towards raising student achievement and sustaining high performance.

During the external review process, the panel focused on 3 key areas from the External School Review framework:

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Student learning:</b>              | <b>To what extent is professional learning and performance development aligned with the schools improvement priorities?</b> |
| <b>Effective teaching:</b>            | <b>How well do teachers plan and design learning tasks to meet the varied needs, skills and interests of all students?</b>  |
| <b>School community partnerships:</b> | <b>How well do teachers work with students to set goals and targets and review their progress as a continual process?</b>   |

## To what extent is professional learning and performance development aligned with the schools improvement priorities?

The site improvement plan (SIP) identifies 4 key development ideals for Koolunga Primary school. They are Learn, Lead, Improve and Connect, and form the foundation of the school's improvement strategy. The review panel recorded that the staff acknowledged the work of the principal and recognise and support the direction that the school is taking.

Under the priority of 'Learning' the school has committed to a practice of professional learning for all staff both on and off campus. This practice is well-supported by staff who are collegiate, honest and student-focused. Their practices and support is strengthened by their collaboration.

The school has adopted the LOTUS model for performance and review. This model is used to support the SIP implementation, and staff are able to articulate how each stage of the performance and review cycle is used to track the school's progress in addressing the priorities, as well as their personal professional growth.

The staff talked positively about their professional development opportunities and how they had implemented their new learning into their practices. Some of the strategies used include attending combined partnership actions associated with learning design assessment and moderation and STEM, networking with site observations and PLC networking, and informal conversations between local teachers. An initiative undertaken by all staff as part of their record keeping of any new learning that they have experienced is to record their initial impressions of their observations via video on an iPad. This practice has now been utilised as part of the teachers' performance development process, where they record their learning priorities and summarise their achievements and future growth in pedagogical practice. The example provided demonstrated the teachers' actions using the ATSL standards and linking them to the school's SIP priorities. SSOs are equally involved in the professional learning process and the overall direction of the school. Examples included the opportunity for SSO staff to observe intervention practices at other schools and attend targeted conferences and workshops. As a result, modifications to intervention practices, data gathering and recording have been adopted to support the needs of students with learning difficulties. Other professional learning opportunities for both teachers and SSO staff include ICT, Robotics and website design, which supports the second SIP direction of developing knowledge and application of ICT within the learning environment.

The school's SIP curriculum focus areas of numeracy, literacy, digital technologies and Aboriginal education subjects, and professional learning in these areas, is offered to all staff with key teachers taking the lead, based on their curriculum strength. This process has been successful in allowing targeted professional growth of individual teachers, as well as providing leadership in assisting colleagues with their own curriculum development. Staff stated this approach has enabled teachers to learn from each other and deprivatise their learning, strengthened the collegiality amongst staff and that "we all respect and trust each other to learn from each other". One student commented that this approach 'enabled the teachers to know their subject in more depth rather than teaching all subjects in a thin way'. The parents also recognised that each teacher has particular strengths in the curriculum, and the school operates a structure to spread the expertise across reception to year 7. They also acknowledged that there was some inconsistency of practice and learning expectations between the teachers especially when teachers were required to cover lessons normally taught by their child's regular subject teacher.

The panel recognised that the school has developed a systematic approach to professional learning for all staff. Further refinement was identified by the principal to incorporate strategies found in the TfEL document and the incorporation of department's professional development processes would enhance existing professional development reference documents currently used. The connectedness of the professional learning and the site improvement plan are clearly articulated, and provide a united and logical approach to the professional growth of teachers and support staff.

#### **Direction 1**

**Continue to strengthen the whole-school professional learning practices and processes of professional learning and performance development.**

### **How well do teachers plan and design learning tasks to meet the varied needs, skills and interests of all students?**

The school has adopted a teaching structure that maximises the strengths of their individual teachers by subject specialising, with each teacher working reception to year 7 in their focus strength subject(s). This has enabled the curriculum to be delivered in depth, in particular, numeracy, literacy and ICT (STEM).

The school performance report indicates that the achievement trends in reading, literacy and numeracy demonstrate a consistency in students achieving high levels of the SEA standards. The school has a comprehensive level of datasets from which the teachers can draw. These range from A-E grades, NAPLAN, PAT and Running Records, and are complemented and cross-referenced with Lexile and class level assessment records. The school has a data calendar that is used to assist in the mapping of student progress.

The literacy and numeracy data is analysed by the principal and literacy focus teacher, with the information used to support intervention programs and monitor student progress. This data is discussed at staff meetings and referenced when discussing the progress of individual students.

All of the staff have been involved in the partnership schools' professional learning in task design and moderation. These sessions have provided the teachers with support in developing their understanding of task design and changing their practices. This is still being trialled amongst the teachers with 'check-ins' with colleagues from neighbouring schools.

Students with learning difficulties are catered for with the support of SSO staff with specific intervention strategies. These programs are continually reviewed and modified according to the child's progress. The parents acknowledged the support offered to all children and stated that the teachers here know their children as individuals and are approachable.

Differentiated learning strategies vary amongst staff, ranging from ability group and partner work, to literacy blocks, and individual spelling activities. Quality differentiated strategies are recognised forms of learning to which students work within their capabilities. It is important that there are consistent high quality approaches utilised across the school and consideration should be given to building staff knowledge and capabilities.

Generally, staff have high expectations of the work and behaviour of the students. The teachers tend to offer a mixture of opportunities to stretch the students with their learning that range from inquiry based questioning to ability grouping. The panel observed students involved in a STEM Robotics activity where they completed a coding activity. It was noted that some of the students were unsure as to why coding was important. Maths lessons were described by some students as interactive, with students using a range of materials/resources. There were also examples of student choice in topics and class organisation where students chose their investigative inquiry (for example, science and HASS assignment sheets). The panel recognised that these lessons were only a snapshot of the variety of teaching approaches used by the teachers. When asked what is most important thing about school, most students responded that 'learning new things' was important to them. They liked coming to school and respected their teachers. This was verified by their parents. When asked how their teacher can help them improve, responses included: "make the learning clearer", "check up on our work", "make the work harder", and "explain things differently". These comments were supported by the students' further comments saying that approximately 25% of their work time over an average school week was 'hard'.

The teachers recognised that they need to do further work in the co-construction of curriculum planning and learning processes with students. The work done through PD sessions has improved their understanding and reshaped their pedagogy in the learning design and assessment process. There was some evidence of learning intentions being used across the school through introductory discussion with the class; however, this is an area for further development in the task design process.

By strengthening teacher knowledge in task design that involves students through learner voice and co-design, teachers will further develop and embed effective and consistent pedagogical practice in curriculum planning.

## Direction 2

**Build the capacity to design consistent teaching practices that integrate student influence, evidence-based data and learning intentions in a manner that links student learning from reception to Year 7.**

### **How well do teachers work with students to set goals and targets and review their progress as a continual process?**

One of the target strategies, identified in the first learning priority of the SIP, states that the school 'seeks and utilises new ways of sharing data with students at a classroom level to inform student progress or improvement'.

The use of goal-setting has been a new initiative across the whole school, and the response from students and staff has been successful. The school has introduced a system where teachers and students talked about goal-setting and what it means for their learning. Structures are in place to publicly display each child's learning goals and times are set aside each week for students to practice their specific goal in order to master them. The parameters of the goals are numeracy and literacy focused, and teachers discuss the type and appropriateness of the goals with each student. The language of goal-setting was evident across the school for reception students to year 7 students. All students were able to articulate their own personal goals and how they went about achieving their specific goals. Strategies ranged from personal practice and working with a friend, to getting help from parents. The success is varied amongst the students, with some achieving their goals quicker than others. One student on a negotiated education plan (NEP) indicated that he had achieved his reading goal and was now aiming higher. The staff all commented on how successful this activity has been and the enthusiasm of the students for taking ownership of their learning was great. Teachers also commented on how motivated the students were and that they were supportive of each other with their progress. Some parents also indicated that this practice was beneficial for their children's learning. The next consideration for the goal-setting practice is to extend it into the task design, as part of the success criteria and feedback process to and from the students. This will provide the opportunity for students to develop more sophisticated or deeper learning goals and aspirational targets.

Staff identified that feedback to and from the student was limited. Some staff use rubrics to showcase the success of students' improvement. Teachers indicated that verbal feedback is a big part of the feedback journey and is based on questioning. The panel observed a number of feedback techniques in the student's exercise books, ranging from ticks and stickers, to more detailed written comments, including provocations to challenge and extend students learning. The latter form of feedback is a process that staff have gradually introduced but not practiced regularly.

The students said that some teachers gave clear feedback and others didn't. They recognised that the feedback that the teachers provided helped them with their learning but was often inconsistent. When asked about NAPLAN, most students understood that it was a test, but indicated that their results weren't discussed in connection with their maths or literacy. When asked about their A-E report card results and how they could improve their grades, all of the students responded with 'keep trying' or 'work harder'. Only a couple of students referred to the use of their learning goals as a means of improving.

Parents indicated that their children did not talk much about their learning outside of school. Some parents were aware of their child's learning goals and recognised that it was a means of improving their child's learning especially in maths and reading.

All students should be aware of the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) targets used in schools and their relationship to their year level and area of learning. 'Common goals that are reviewed regularly, coupled with feedback, ensure that we are involving the students in the learning process and providing them with opportunities to develop ownership of their learning'. When targets are visible and public, students understand that these are highly valued and important components of their learning and, as such, are motivated to demonstrate and share their achievements.

**Direction 3**

**Strengthen questioning and feedback practices so that they become embedded in task design and, over time, develop to become part of the learning and student goal-setting and review.**

## **Outcomes of the External School Review 2018**

**Koolunga Primary School has demonstrated growth in student achievement is at or above what would be reasonably expected of a school in a similar context.**

**The principal will work with the education director to implement the following directions:**

- 1. Continue to strengthen the whole school professional learning practices and processes of professional learning and performance development.**
- 2. Build on the capacity of staff in the design of consistent teaching practices that link student learning from reception to year 7 that include student influence, evidence-based data and learning intentions.**
- 3. Strengthen questioning and feedback practices so that they become embedded in task design and, over time, develop to become part of the learning and student goal-setting and review.**

**Based on the school's current performance, Koolunga Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2022.**



# Appendix 1

## Attendance policy compliance

Implementation of the department's student attendance policy was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy.

The school attendance rate for 2017 was 93.7%.

# Appendix 2

## School performance overview

The external school review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the department's Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

In considering the data below, there needs to be some caution in making a judgement due to the low numbers represented in the student cohorts at the school. The data below represents a summary of aggregated data for Koolunga Primary School over the years 2011 to 2017. This is done for two reasons: to overcome the anomalies that may occur in any one year, and to minimise the possibility of identifying individuals in any small cohort of students.

### Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. Between 2011 and 2017, 18 of 23 (78%) Year 1, and 14 of 19 (74%) Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the department's Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Between 2011 and 2017, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicates that 15 of 17 (88%) Year 3 students, 13 of 15 (86%) Year 5 students, and 2 of 3 (67%) Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the department's SEA.

Between 2011 and 2017, 9 of 18 (50%) Year 3 students, 7 of 15 (47%) Year 5 students, and 1 out of 3 (33%) Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands.

Between 2011 and 2017, those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 2 out of 3 of students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5.

### Numeracy

Between 2011 and 2017, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicates that 16 of 17 (89%) Year 3 students, 14 of 15 (93%) Year 5 students, and 2 of 3 (67%) Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the department's SEA.

Between 2011 and 2017, 10 of 18 (56%) Year 3 students, 5 of 15 (33%) Year 5 students, and 2 out of 3 (67%) Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands.

Between 2011 and 2017, for those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 4 out of 5 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5.