

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

Report for Moorook Primary School

Conducted in November 2017



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 government 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.

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.

The External School Review process includes verification by the principal that key DECD policies are adhered to and implemented. This information is provided in Appendix 1 of the report.

This External School Review was conducted by Liz Matheson, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Cheryl Ross, Review Principal.

School context

Moorook Primary School is located in the Riverland, 219kms east of the Adelaide CBD. The school's enrolment is 33 and is stable. The school has an ICSEA score of 965, and is classified as Category 4 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school is a member of the Renmark Loxton DECD Partnership.

The school has two multi-aged classes. The school population includes 3 Aboriginal students, 2 students with disabilities, 1 with Interagency Services Behaviour Management (ISBM) support, 2 children in care, and 5 families eligible for School Card assistance. There are close connections with the feeder preschool. Loxton High School provides comprehensive transitioning for students transitioning from the small school environment of Moorook Primary School to a larger secondary setting.

The principal was appointed in 2003, and has a 0.4FTE teaching responsibility. The school has two classes. At the time of the ESR, the teaching staff consisted of two teachers in the Reception to year 2 class working in tandem (0.6FTE and 0.4FTE), and a Graduate teacher in the years 3 to 7 class. Moorook Primary School is a participant in the three-year Visible Learning project.

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:

Effective Leadership: How well does leadership facilitate the development of coherent high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?

Effective Teaching: To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

Improvement Agenda: To what extent do teachers use data and information to inform their planning and instruction?

How well does the leadership facilitate the development of coherent high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?

Moorook Primary School has been on a significant improvement journey over the past 3 years to improve planning and pedagogical practices. The school has joined with 2 other small schools to form a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The PLC has formed into a supportive and dynamic improvement-focused group, supported by a guiding coach. Teachers spoke highly of the professional learning they have gained through their participation in this group.

In 2015, teachers had the opportunity to learn about the analysis of student writing through collaborative discussion and moderation with colleagues in the PLC, as well as developing oral language, recognising the importance of student dialogue (rather than teachers' monologue). Over the last three years, teachers have engaged in collaborative planning to design learning tasks, documenting the success criteria aligned with the Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards, and then sharing and moderating the student work. This has enabled teachers in a small school to gain an in-depth knowledge of the curriculum and the standards expected.

In 2016, it was noted that the schools in the PLC had limited data collection on students' writing. The cluster of schools participated in training and trialled the use of the EALD assessment tool. They found that, as a diagnostic tool, it provided quality information teachers can use for their planning and instruction with their classes. Additionally, the staff engaged in the four Professional Development (PD) modules, Transforming Tasks workshops, to help teachers design open-ended tasks that enable students to

demonstrate understanding and problem solving.

Staff members are keen to improve and learn from each other. In addition to the professional learning in the PLC, the principal and teachers focused on pedagogy, the art and craft of teaching. They planned and taught a series of lessons with peers observing. The peers recorded feedback on a Lesson Observation tool aligned with the DECD TfEL framework. After the lesson, the group met to reflect and share the feedback for improvement. This process has been instrumental in 'deprivatising' learning at Moorook Primary School. The review panel acknowledges the preparedness of the principal to engage in this process as a learner.

In 2017, the school joined a new DECD Partnership, but also maintained their strong connection with the small local schools PLC. The Partnership is committed to a 3-year Visible Learning Project to make learning transparent to students, and to support teachers to become better evaluators of their impact on student learning. Thus far, they have focused on gaining an agreed understanding of a 'visible learner'. Initially, staff used the term, 'good learner', and realised that students understood this as being 'good' in behavioural terms. Consequently, they are using the term 'visible' learner.

The review panel noted the students in years 3 to 7 were able to speak confidently about learning, thinking, and having a growth mindset disposition. When asked what they need to do to improve, students talked about "increasing my stamina", "persist", and "don't be afraid". It was evident teachers use metacognitive strategies to share and model their 'thinking aloud'. Parents were aware of the Visible Learning initiative through articles in the newsletter, although were less able to define or articulate what it means in practice. In 2018, the school will focus on improving the types of questioning and feedback they use to motivate students and to enable them to have more ownership over the learning process.

Coherence is important for students as they transition from one class or school to another, as it helps them to connect concepts, use common language, and to make sense of their schooling experience. The absence of a coherent approach frequently results in educators working at cross-purposes, and results in confusion for students. It was noted by the review panel that the school endeavours to provide a common language and has documented expectations of literacy, numeracy and Running Records practices. During 2017, however, the approaches within the junior primary have been quite different, partly due to some challenging circumstances. Parents also noted, with concern, that it was sometimes quite a jump from the junior primary to the primary class in terms of the volume of work and learning expected. The school is urged to work together to provide seamless progression for students, taking into account individual maturity and skill levels.

The review panel concluded that Moorook Primary School is well down the track in collaborative planning and moderation processes. The next step is to sustain the improvement journey and embed high-leverage pedagogical practices into daily routines. To support this process, peer observations and dialogue and feedback on pedagogy across the PLC will strengthen the progress already made. The focus of observations needs to be on what students are doing, what they have understood, and what learning is occurring, in order to make conclusions about the impact of pedagogical practices.

Direction 1

Further strengthen and deprivatise pedagogical practice within the school and across the Professional Learning Community.

To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

Due to the size of the school, Moorook Primary School has two multi-level classes. Although there are currently some challenging behaviours of students in the junior primary, the multi-level nature of the two classes was not seen as a disadvantage by parents, students or staff. Parents talked about it being an opportunity for their child to learn from more advanced students, or for the more advanced students to explain and model learning to others. The review panel observed students working in pairs or groups of varied ages. These groups are fluid, depending on the purpose of the learning.

Through the Visible Learning Project teachers have worked at making the purpose of the learning and the success criteria transparent and explicit. There were visible displays of learning intentions in the

classrooms. Most importantly, the review panel observed one of the teachers making specific reference to the learning intention to each group during the lesson, to keep students on track and clear about the purpose of their tasks.

The group work is supported by explicit, 'mini' lessons to explain or model a concept, strategy or skill. These 'mini' lessons are energetic and timely. Students in the year 3 to 7 class told the review panel they tune into these mini-lessons as they often learn "bits" of grammar and English, and it is appropriately paced to keep them focused. The review panel observed that students at all levels have been taught how to plan to clarify their thinking before commencing a writing task.

Three students, who are struggling in reading, have been supported by the MultiLit program delivered by the school services officers (SSOs). This has resulted in improvement in the students' accuracy, fluency and confidence. It was observed that the program was not suitable for all students, and requires finer diagnostic testing to match intervention with specific needs. Parents acknowledged the support given to children with special needs. One parent explained that all the staff knew her children's specific needs, and the triggers or signs of sensory overload.

In the first four weeks of this term the school embarked on a trial of small literacy groups, as they were concerned about the lack of growth in some students' literacy. These groups provided targeted instruction in writing in the year 3 to 7 groups. In interviews with the review panel, students commented on the improvement in their writing. One student summed it up as: "When I checked my writing from the beginning of the year to now, it blew me away"! The reception and year 1 children were engaged in hands-on, fast-paced alphabet-based and phonological awareness activities. The anecdotal reports suggest this targeted and active learning has helped to settle this group of children, along with establishing tighter boundaries and timely rewards and consequences.

Each student has an individual learning plan (ILP). The review panel observed that ILPs have specific strategies for students to develop greater proficiency. Parents also commented on the goals and reinforced the documented strategies.

Teachers were asked about how they cater for the varied needs of students in their classes and what they would like to get better at. One teacher reflecting on what she would like to do better, talked about transforming tasks and increasing the engagement of students. Other data available to the school suggests there is a need to work at greater engagement and intellectual stretch. In February 2017, the school developed baseline evidence statements as part of the Visible Learning project, and noted that student engagement was low, as evidenced by the equal ratio of dialogue to monologue by teachers. This appears to have improved during 2017; however, it is ongoing work to get to an embedded level in teachers' practices. The 2016 year 6 and 7 wellbeing and engagement survey showed students also reported low engagement. Only 1 out of the 6 students surveyed reported high engagement, whereas 3 reported low engagement (that is, 50% of the students surveyed). The 2017 NAPLAN results also suggest that intellectual stretch could be improved, as no students achieved in the upper proficiency bands in years 5 or 7 in reading or numeracy.

Older students were asked about the kinds of learning tasks that engage them in their learning. They spoke about having the chance to talk about their learning and achieving their goals, using digital technologies, quizzes and games, fast-paced activities, considering different ways of solving problems, and asking the questions (rather than always answering them). Parents noted nature play had provided an opportunity for imaginative creative play, which was possibly contributing to vocabulary development. Younger children were observed to be more engaged with hands-on activities and absorbed in digital learning.

Direction 2

Work on learning design and engagement to meet the range of learning needs and interests, including providing greater intellectual stretch in learning.

To what extent do teachers use data and information to inform their planning and instruction?

The review panel asked teachers to show evidence of how they track students' progress. There are strong practices in observing students and taking anecdotal notes as a continual assessment practice. Teachers and SSOs document and comment on reading behaviours, not just the level of the text. It was clear to the review panel that the school is working to make the learning more visible to students. Students were able to talk articulately about success criteria, and most were able to describe their goals for improvement. The review panel sighted examples of success criteria and noted the rubrics were in student-friendly language, and focused on concepts and tier 2 vocabulary, not just technical skills. Students indicated it was useful to see examples (exemplars), especially when the class or group discuss what the student could do to make it better. This strategy makes the success criteria even more visible.

There is frequent reporting to parents about student progress through a memo book system in the junior primary, and through profile folders (known by students as "brag books"). A recent initiative involving students in the year 3 to 7 class in reviewing their learning for the week was noted by parents as an excellent way of getting their children to reflect and communicate with them.

Teachers use spelling tests and the annual PAT tests to track progress. In the year 3 to 7 class, students were given a quadrant to plot what they predicted their test result would be, and then compared it to the actual result. Anecdotally, the teacher said it gave some students a surprise and a 'hurry up', as there was a sense of some students 'cruising'.

It was noted that teachers take Running Records and conduct the phonological awareness assessment and spelling tests. The extent these are used for targeted and personalised programming was not clear. Teachers have also used a maths assessment, although have found it of limited use in directing their planning. At this stage, the school is not utilising the PAT resources to help target the gaps in students' learning. The review panel also noted that the allocation of the A-E Achievement Standards is not a dataset that is analysed and discussed with an improvement lens. This dataset, over time, and when compared with other schools in the PLC, can engender discussion and provide pointers for improvement in learning design.

The review panel concluded that the school needs to refine the data collection processes to ensure each assessment provides the information needed for tracking progress but, more importantly, to identify, with students, the next steps for learning. This work is aligned with the school's Visible Learning Plan.

Direction 3

Refine the school's assessment and data collection processes, and use this data for more targeted and personalised planning, and to track the levels growth across the school over time.

What is the school doing particularly well and why is this effective?

During the review process, the review panel verified the following effective practice that is contributing significantly to school improvement at Moorook Primary School.

The school is improvement-focused and staff members are open to learning and improving. In 2017, the junior primary class included a number of students with specific learning needs and challenging behaviours. The class teachers and other staff sought and were open to advice from experts and professionals in other child development fields. It has taken patience and persistence, and working with parents, to settle the group and develop more school-ready behaviours for learning. This example is indicative of the community orientation of Moorook Primary School.

Effective practice working within a partnership with parents, and the broader educational community, was evident during the ESR process. This practice was reinforced in interviews with staff, observations of students in their classes and in a meeting with parents and members of the governing council.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

Students are able to talk confidently about learning, thinking and behaviours that support a growth mindset. Moorook Primary School is working effectively in partnership with the school community. This work has positioned the school well for future improvement.

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

1. Further strengthen and deprivatise pedagogical practice within the school and across the Professional Learning Community.
2. Work on learning design and engagement to meet the range of learning needs and interests, including providing greater intellectual stretch in learning.
3. Refine the school's assessment and data collection processes, and use this data for more targeted and personalised planning, and to track the levels growth across the school over time.

Based on the school's current performance, Moorook Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND
PRESCHOOLS

The school will provide an implementation plan to the education director and community within 3 months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's annual report.

Sonya Warren
PRINCIPAL
MOOROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson

Appendix One

Policy compliance

The External School Review process includes verification by the principal that key DECD policies are adhered to and implemented.

The principal of Moorook 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 2016 was 91.4%.

Appendix Two

School Performance Overview

The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the DECD 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 Moorook Primary School over the years 2014 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 2015 and 2017, 50%, or 4 of 8 year 1, and 63%, or 5 of 8 year 2 students, demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA.

Between 2014 and 2017, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 76%, or 16 of 21 year 3 students, 70%, or 12 of 17 year 5 students, and 73%, or 8 of 11 year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA.

Between 2014 and 2017, 38%, or 8 of 21 year 3, 12%, or 2 of 17 year 5, and 9%, or 1 of 11 year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN reading bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 33%, or 1 of 3 students from year 3 remained in the upper bands at year 5 in 2017, and 100%, or 1 of 1 student from year 3 remained in the upper bands at year 7 in 2017.

Numeracy

Between 2014 and 2017, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 71%, or 15 of 21 year 3 students, 71%, or 12 of 17 year 5 students, and 82%, or 9 of 11 year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD SEA.

Between 2014 and 2017, 29%, or 5 of 16 year 3, 6%, or 1 of 17 year 5, and no year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN numeracy bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, none of the 2 students from year 3 remained in the upper bands at year 5 in 2017, and the 1 student from year 3 did not remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2017.