

## External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

### **On-track evaluation report for Willsden Primary School**

One-year return conducted in August 2018



## On-track evaluation process

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.

All government schools are externally reviewed over a 3-year cycle. After the review the principal and the governing council chairperson receive a written report with a number of directions for improvement.

A copy of the External School Review report is available on the school website.

In some cases, when the review panel finds cause for concern about the levels of achievement and growth, together with evidence about the school's capacity for systematic improvement, a school will be advised that they will be visited again in a year.

Schools with a 1-year return are assisted during the intervening period by the education director and other department staff to ensure they receive coordinated, targeted and systematic support. Intervention is concentrated on building the school's capacity to improve teaching and learning across the school, lift expectations and achieve results as measured against the Department for Education Standard of Educational Achievement.

During this process, which occurs 12-15 months after the initial visit, a review panel determines the extent to which the school has, with external support, developed sustainable internal capacity to improve effectiveness and raise student achievement.

The school's priority improvement plan was the main document used as the basis for this review.

**The review visit was conducted by Tony Sullivan, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Simon Harding, Review Principal.**

**This On-Track Evaluation report should be read in conjunction with the report of the External School Review conducted at Willsden Primary School in June 2017.**

## Directions from the External School Review report

June 2017

1. Support students to understand how to improve through ensuring learning intentions are understood, providing effective feedback and activating student influence as co-constructors in determining performance indicators for success.
2. Increase levels of student achievement and expectations by developing and implementing consistent approaches to pedagogy.
3. Build teacher capacity to use data diagnostically to design teaching and learning that is responsive and differentiated to the needs of all students.
4. Review and refine intervention processes across the school to ensure students are developing targeted skills to increase their learning growth.

### Additional information about the school context

A new principal was appointed at the beginning of 2017, as well as a new senior leader in the position as literacy and numeracy coach. The principal reported significant cultural changes occurred at Willsden Primary School. This shift has highlighted the importance of strong collaboration between leaders, teachers and students.

Student attendance has risen in the first half of 2018.

The school has invested in the employment of an intervention teacher 3 days per week.

An improvement cycle is ongoing throughout the year – one that includes quality professional learning for staff to deliver effective teaching and learning.

### Development of a priority improvement plan

The principal has advised that the priority improvement plan was developed in collaboration with the principal consultant and literacy and numeracy coach.

The priority improvement plan was approved in January 2018, and is monitored by the education director, principal consultant, project officers, school leadership team and governing council.

### Strategic support provided to the school over the past 12 months

The principal has advised that Learning Improvement division project officers support the school a number of times each term.

The school engages in a number of Partnership initiatives inclusive of: principal as literacy leader (PALL); Visible Learning and the Aboriginal reading project.

The education director and principal consultant engage in disciplined dialogue with the school leadership team about direction in the priority improvement plan.

## Evidence and evaluation referenced to directions in the priority improvement plan

### Direction 1

**Support students to understand how to improve through ensuring learning intentions are understood, providing effective feedback and activating student influence as co-constructors in determining performance indicators for success.**

#### On-track evidence

- All staff were trained in Visible Learning, and the impact coach supported staff to collaboratively develop learning intentions and success criteria for use in classrooms. This began with a focus on writing, expanding to all aspects of English with the support of the coach.
- The improvement cycle for Visible Learning includes:
  - A collection of baseline data using a team matrix
  - A 'narrow and deep' focus on Visible Learning
  - A systematic planning and reflection
  - Explicit strategies enacted, and
  - Effective staff team professional learning.
- Comparative data collected in June 2018 using the team matrix shows a marked improvement in the vast majority of aspects of the improvement domains linked to Visible Learning, for example, students are engaged and active participants in the learning process.
- The school adopted an 'agile leadership' approach to implementing the direction into classroom practice across the school. Change leaders amongst staff and targeted walkthroughs by senior staff built commitment, clarity and accountability across staff.
- A resource 'bank' for learning intentions and success criteria is accessible to staff on the school network, and staff are supported with developing these practices through explicit professional learning and structured mentoring.

#### Review panel evaluation

The leaders and teachers have been strategic in their approach to change and in building a culture of collaborative endeavour. The change process is documented with clear expectation for staff engagement and delivery of Visible Learning. Staff targets for improvement are documented for each term.

Planning for the implementation phase of the improvement agenda is highly sequenced, and contains clear detail about how progress is tracked and how the school will know when it has been successful in its transformation, with Visible Learning delivered successfully in each classroom.

Whole-school accountability is evident both in the planning and operational processes of performance and development, feedback to teachers, shared planning, classroom walkthroughs, observations and mentoring of staff. All components of the school operational processes work together to support the delivery of Visible Learning.

Joint accountability for this work was evident in documentation where staff contribute to an evaluation of the process and generate ideas for continuous improvement. Staff engaged wholly with this process, and provided excellent feedback about the impact of work, what should be strengthened and vital 'next steps'. Staff also contributed to documented reflections on the development of quality learning intentions and success criteria.

## Direction 2

**Increase levels of student achievement and expectations by developing and implementing consistent approaches to pedagogy.**

### On-track evidence

- At a school level, various datasets (PASM, Running Records, NAPLAN and PAT-R) have been analysed to determine a focus on reading as a central feature of improvement.
- Every classroom has established a reading space to promote, encourage and emphasise the importance of reading to the improvement of student learning outcomes generally. Staff implemented this in a novel and inclusive way, engaging students through the process.
- Staff engaged in professional learning with an external consultant on 'Teaching Reading: The Big Picture' and through leadership engagement in 'Principals as Literacy Leaders' training. The school is now focusing on the Big 6 of reading – oral language, vocabulary, phonological awareness, letter-sound knowledge, comprehension and fluency.
- Staff implement a reading block as a whole-school agreement to address reading improvement. This block is designed with all PALL elements of the effective teaching of reading accommodated in the session.
- Iterations of the reading agreement and classroom expectations went through an effective planning design process involving an 'expert' consultant. Linking speaking and listening from the Australian Curriculum into the planning process is factored into the school's next piece of work.
- An early years playroom has been established with intentional development of oral language and vocabulary constructed within the themes.
- Teachers work with a consistent approach to learning design across the school using 1 or 2 templates only. One is available in the school 'resource bank' on the network, the other is from the Teaching for Effective Learning Companion (TfEL) document.
- Expectations about the improvement work (planning, teaching and learning) to be implemented for each term are clearly communicated to all staff via documented staff notes. This work is undertaken in collaborative pairings involving a mentor and mentee system of support.
- Feedback about the mentoring process is undertaken at the end of term and documented for all staff to analyse. A PMI approach is used to consider the perceptions of aspects working positively, negatively and other interesting outcomes. One such identified challenge is to ensure learning and success are visible for students with low-level reading ability.

### Review panel evaluation

The principal and staff spoke consistently about having high expectations for the students at the school. One of the staff said categorically: "We aim for high expectations". The principal and staff have a 'no excuses' approach to expecting students to be at school and engaged with the learning program.

Classrooms demonstrated a consistent approach to reading improvement in a number of ways. The review panel observed language-rich spaces with many scaffolds for students to develop their word knowledge and vocabulary. Data-tracking charts were evident in classes where students had yet to reach an independent stage of reading. Again, this serves to make visible for students where they are currently at in their reading and where they need to get to by the end of the year.

### **Direction 3**

**Build teacher capacity to use data diagnostically to design teaching and learning that is responsive and differentiated to the needs of all students.**

#### **On-track evidence**

- Data walls are evident in the staff room and classrooms to monitor, track and celebrate student achievement in phonological awareness and reading ability linked to standards.
- Phonological awareness data collected in reception to year 2 shows improvement in student outcomes from term 1 to 2 in 2018. This represents strong affirmation of the focus on the Big 6 approach to reading.
- Two staff meetings per term are allocated to analysing school-based data collections. Data collection requirements are documented in an assessment and reporting calendar. Learning data is shared with students as an aspect of Visible Learning.
- Student progress in NAPLAN reading and numeracy for year 3, 5 and 7 is tracked and highlighted over time using spreadsheets. A question and response analysis is undertaken using student test results to identify patterns for explicit teaching and re-teaching within the reading program. Similarly, PAT-R data is used to track year 3 to 7 students using a 'stop light' approach. This is documented for 2016 and 2017.
- Staff assessed students using the EALD language and literacy scales, PASM and Running Records, and mapped achievement against the year-level progressions established in each. These support goal and target-setting for students, assist with the learning design process used across the school and align with the Australian Curriculum.

#### **Review panel evaluation**

The school is collecting, analysing and using data in a systematic and strategic way. It is using data at the school level to make strategic decisions about curriculum priorities (for example, reading), and at the classroom level to monitor, track and make visible, the outcomes required by students to move towards expected standards.

Data is collected and considered over time to track student growth in learning. This enables the school to identify patterns of improvement and areas needing attention. Data is stored and presented in a manner that enables staff to access and interpret the needs of different students across the classes.

The school has responded to the evidence presented in school data through the application of resources to address the presenting needs. For example, resources such as impact coach, speech pathologist, classroom reading areas, professional learning time and appointment of an intervention teacher are all effective responses to presenting priorities.

### **Direction 4**

**Review and refine intervention processes across the school to ensure students are developing targeted skills to increase their learning growth.**

#### **On-track evidence**

- The school used a consultant to identify current practices of differentiation occurring in classrooms across the school. Staff undertook a review of current research, completed online

training, and invested in workshops to investigate a range of approaches used to differentiate teaching.

- Classroom scaffolds document the wave 1 to 3 model of support required in various classes based on class datasets.
- Learning design plans were made available to the panel that demonstrated the adjustments applied by teachers to presenting student needs.
- Adjustments were evident in the use of school services officer (SSO) time to support focused learning blocks across the school. The use, training and placement of this critical resource is supporting such program aspects as phonological awareness and guided reading.
- During the literacy block the panel observed many SSOs supporting small groups of students and applying consistent approaches to the teachers in their work. For example, there was evident use of concepts such as 'wait time', 'productive struggle' and 'positive talk' observed by the review panel.
- 'Read Up' and 'Repeated Reading' are targeted for specific students based on reading data. Evidence of communication between SSOs and teachers was confirmed with staff and in documentation.
- MiniLit is the reading intervention strategy that is offered to younger students (years 1 and 2) identified 'at risk'.

#### **Review panel evaluation**

The school has made significant strategic changes to the way in which intervention in reading is occurring. There is an emphasis on intervening early. The aspects of intervention are well-founded in research and evidence-based practice. Decisions about levels/types of intervention are based on the reading data. As a result, students are targeted for various levels of support, both in the classroom and beyond. Only 1 intervention strategy occurs outside the literacy block scheduled across the school.

The panel collected sufficient evidence to indicate that the school is structured well for addressing the needs of students at the school. Similar to other aspects of improvement identified for the school, leaders and staff have approached this dimension with strategic intent and application of resources to address identified issues in a planned and structured way across the school.

## Outcomes of the on-track evaluation

Based on the evidence provided, Willsden Primary School is on-track to effectively implement the External School Review directions.

The school culture is united and positive in its approach to improving the performance of the school and the outcomes for students attending the school. There are expectations that every student will learn and improve through connection with the school program on offer. Some of the school-based junior primary reading data is showing improvement in learning outcomes. Anecdotal comments from teachers interviewed also confirmed this as a tangible outcome.

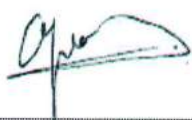
The change processes applied by the principal and leadership team are strategic in nature, and designed to influence the teaching practices of teachers through training, mentoring, review and evaluation. Staff are engaged in improvement, and there is sense of a team and commitment to implement the work in a coherent way. The journey to date is documented, and reflects the staff evaluating the progress along the way in an honest and constructive manner. Leaders and staff are prepared to adjust pace and strategies along the way in response to formalised feedback.

Leaders and staff demonstrated their capacity to implement an effective improvement cycle. Through working in a highly collaborative manner, the plans, strategies, resourcing, monitoring and support all work cohesively to bring about improvement.

Leaders and staff are to be congratulated on producing positive change over the short term. There are effective systems, processes and practices now in place to maintain an improvement trajectory over time. Processes of planning and documenting the improvement effort serve to ensure that school improvement will be ongoing, and embedded effective teaching practice positively impacts student learning over time.

The principal will continue to work with the education director to implement the External School Review directions.

Based on current performance, Willsden Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



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