

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

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Report for Willsden Primary School

Conducted in June 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 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.*

*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 One of the report.*

*This External School Review was conducted by June Goode, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Steve Freeman, Review Principal.*

## School context

Willsden R-7 Primary School is located 304kms north of the Adelaide CBD, and is part of the Port Augusta-Quorn Partnership. School enrolments are relatively stable and the current enrolment for 2017 is 150. The school is classified as Category 1 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage with an ICSEA score of 760.

The school population includes 74% Aboriginal students, 27% students with disabilities, 74% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), 6% children in care, and 84% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in the first year of her first tenure and a Deputy Principal who has been in the position for over 20 years. Both the Literacy/Numeracy Coordinator and School Counsellor were appointed in 2017 and are new to their leadership roles. The Aboriginal Education Teacher completes the Leadership Team.

## 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 three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

**Effective Teaching:** How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

**Effective Leadership:** To what extent is improved pedagogy a priority?

**Improvement Agenda:** How well are the results of data and evidence translated into targeted actions?

## How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

The Review Panel acknowledges that all teaching staff at Willsden Primary School have less than five years of teaching experience, including two members of the Leadership Team. Constructive professional conversations to support reflection on programming and planning, and feedback on pedagogical practice, are critical for improvement within this context. The Principal in her presentation spoke of the numerous initiatives both at Partnership and school level to both build teacher capacity and improve student learning outcomes.

Because teaching impacts so strongly on student learning, the essential focus for all members of the Leadership Team needs to be on instructional leadership with all driving the school improvement agenda to build the capacity of teachers. The provision of time for trialling, reflecting and refining new learning needs to be monitored to enable consolidation of changes to pedagogical practice.

Staff shared their appreciation of the Leadership Team and the methods through which they offer support and guidance. Particular reference was made to the Literacy/Numeracy Coordinator and School Counsellor, and their methods of support in class mentoring, modelled teaching, planning and programming, opportunities to debrief and share concerns and acknowledge celebrations.

The challenge of student behaviour, engagement and attendance was mentioned by both staff and students in terms of its impact on student learning growth. The School Counsellor provided the Review Panel with insights into positive changes to classroom management procedures, including the importance of building relationships with both students and their families. Parent representatives commented on the positive communication and approachability of all staff. Communication between school and community are key factors in developing and supporting student learning and social development. Parents spoke of

the change in direction and the genuine inclusivity for everyone. Mutual respect between the school and the community was mentioned: “We are here together, to help and support, and we all belong”.

During the walkthrough process, the Review Panel noted an insular feeling within the school, with closed doors in all learning spaces and classes. An opportunity to lift the sense of belonging would be to open classes, allow others to see in and to provide the authentic view of collegiality. Pride plays an important part in building the culture of the school. The Review Panel sighted evidence of outstanding student work, yet there were limited examples of quality work on display. Not only would it show student learning being valued, but also provide examples of what quality work looks like for all students.

Participation and active learning are critical elements of student investment in their education with student engagement the key determinant. The Review Panel sought the opinions of students in relation to: “How does your teacher keep you involved and interested in learning?” Students spoke positively about their teachers and many shared how they are being challenged through doing the next year level work. A few shared how they are being challenged by the questions their teacher asks, which “gets our brains working harder”. Students in some classes spoke of how reflection after a lesson is assisting students who may not have been able to solve a problem: “In our class we have learnt the value of reflecting, we share how we solved a problem, then for the students who may have had difficulty they can use the strategies we discussed next time”.

All students commented that their teacher believes in them and that they can and will improve. In multi-year classes the challenge for teachers is to ensure students are provided with a curriculum that meets their individual needs, and that both challenges and stimulates engagement in learning. When students see the purpose of engaging at school, as learners and agents of change, active participation and learning growth will be enhanced. Staff shared the complexities involved to ensure this whilst building their pedagogical practice.

The understanding and importance of Wave 1 teaching was shared by staff who spoke about their awareness of planning, programming and assessments, although they were less sure about pedagogies that support differentiation. Staff spoke about sharing and debriefing with each other, although the level of authentic shared planning and moderation was varied. Working collegially in programming, planning and assessment will support the Reception to Year 7 approach and also support teachers through honest and reflective practice. Most staff shared that they would be unable to differentiate without the support of a School Services Officer (SSO) in the classroom. The depth of using multiple entry points and exit points to cater for individual needs varied and is something that has yet to be developed.

The school’s Coordinator is leading the work for the Teaching Learning Design model. Reflecting on the process is done with samples of learning design being shared with staff at staff meetings as part of professional learning. The next step was verified by staff who shared the expectation that they will use the template to design their units of work. It is essential that this is followed-up collectively as well as individually at professional development meetings. Sharing of good practice is empowering through creating a culture of trust, respect and professional feedback to strengthen the teaching and learning cycle.

During walkthroughs, the Review Panel observed the learning intentions on display in all classes. In general, student responses indicated their awareness of learning intentions, but there was some variance in their relevance and purpose. Increasing student influence in the development of learning intentions will empower students in their learning and enable transfer into other curriculum areas.

When asked how they were going in their learning, the majority of students were unsure; however, when asked if they were improving and how they knew, they were all able to articulate learning growth: “I am learning because my reading levels are going up”, “my teacher tells me I’m improving” and “I’m getting lots of ticks on my work”. The day-to-day use of assessment evaluates both the learning needs of students and the effectiveness of the teaching, and can inform modifications to the teaching and learning process. Whilst staff shared their developing knowledge and understanding of feedback, the next step will be to observe, brainstorm, reflect and practice effective formative assessment.

The school’s performance overview (Appendix 2) is showing low levels of achievement in reading and mathematics. The daily use of assessment practices will ensure the careful and deliberate tracking and monitoring of student learning growth.

Staff commented on the use of success criteria, however, in walkthroughs it was obvious that the criteria were often generic and not linked to performance indicators. Deepening the effect of success criteria through involving students in the development of rubric performance descriptors will support them in ongoing evaluation of their learning whilst in the actual progress of completing a task. It will also provide students with the next steps for them to improve based on the criteria for success.

A degree of inconsistency in assigning grades was mentioned by parent representatives and students. Students could not clearly articulate what a 'C' grade looked like in their learning or what they could do to improve. A significant way for the school to positively impact on student learning is to empower students with greater understanding about how to improve through feedback, and to develop students' understanding about what they are learning and why.

#### **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.**

#### **To what extent is improved pedagogy a priority?**

The Principal in her presentation shared the opportunities that 2017 has presented. As a leader new to the school and with staff in their early years of teaching, communication and collaboration have been essential. Undertaking reviews of whole-school processes with the lens of *What is the purpose?* has provided inroads into ensuring staff voice and collaboration in both the review and refinement process. Induction has been challenging, with many teaching staff in their graduate year and remaining teaching staff in their first five years.

Staff comments referred to the induction process as overwhelming. Whilst roles and responsibilities were part of the induction process, the orientation of the understanding of working at Willsden Primary School was limited. For induction to be purposeful, all aspects, including whole-school agreements, school processes, collegial professional development and knowledge of the school's context, need to be responsive and flexible, taking into account the complexities and responsibilities within the school's context.

Some staff spoke of the challenge to maintain a purposeful and safe learning environment whilst also enhancing their pedagogical practice. Staff and students commented on the barriers to school improvement. Lack of resilience and responsibility for learning was identified. Staff spoke of their understanding of effective behaviour education through the 'Play is the Way' model. The school has put into place the *Student education and management procedure*. The procedure reflects the philosophy of the 'Play is the Way' model to develop students' resilience and problem-solving skills. Although relatively new, all stakeholders commented on the positive changes being recognised. During the ESR, the panel sighted evidence in action, with one student removing himself from the learning environment, and a member of the leadership taking over the class, while the teacher re-engaged with the student. The Principal shared that even though this takes considerable effort and determination, the results are indicating positive changes in student engagement and acceptance of responsibility. Comments from students were favourable, with the majority acknowledging engagement in learning is improving.

The Review Panel was interested in the degree to which teaching and learning is sufficiently consistent from year-to-year, to enable students to build on their learning as they progress through the school. The Leadership Team mentioned the many models of practice being introduced at varying stages throughout the school. The English procedure/agreement promotes the Big 6, writing and grammar. Speaking with staff, variance in implementation and understanding was noted. Students spoke about guided reading, group work, writing and spelling. The Coordinator spoke about the updated version of the English block and the trial being done throughout Term 2. Despite there being a consultative approach to changes to the previous literacy block, there was some clear pushback to the new format. To ensure consistency and an individual and collective responsibility, it is essential to ensure staff are onboard through staff conversations, observations and professional feedback. To support the level of accountability, it will be essential for the Leadership Team to ensure common expectations in relation to the agreements are being

promoted and adhered to by all staff.

In numeracy, the school is involved in the Empowering Local Learners, Back to Front Maths, Results Plus and Choose Maths. The school is working towards merging the programs in order to focus on the development of task transformation to promote resilience, challenge and thinking in mathematics.

Staff at Willsden Primary School are willing and determined to raise student learning outcomes. However, staff stated, in relation to the professional learning: “we are doing everything” and “if we are expected to learn everything, then we can’t learn and embed anything”. With so many new approaches, the energy of staff is at risk, which may result in higher levels of frustration and lower levels of wellbeing. The tendency of schools is to attempt to do too much, too quickly. It is essential for the leadership to carefully consider how many new strategies can be accomplished in a quality manner, turning the ‘everything agenda’ into a determined and purposeful ‘student achievement agenda’.

Early Years staff spoke about their questioning for self-discovery, and also how they share their own experiences and skills within the team. This strategy was described as purposeful in maintaining a consistent approach to the curriculum across the Early Years team.

Two of the four leadership members have less than five years teaching experience. While the Review Panel commends their determination and willingness to support staff, an opportunity for them to have a mentor would be empowering to enhance their skills and knowledge, further develop their leadership capacity and increase their impact.

In order to develop a coherent approach to learning an audit could be undertaken across the site, with the clear intention of reducing and refining approaches, providing consistency and developing a common narrative for all students as they progress through school.

#### **Direction 2**

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

#### **How well are the results of data and evidence translated into targeted actions?**

School improvement planning requires a deliberate analysis of the needs of all students as evidenced by data collection. Measures of student learning outcomes are essential to the school improvement process. In order to ensure an authentic profile of the school, processes for collection, review and analysis of multiple measures of data and evidence relating to student learning and school processes need to be managed through regular and scheduled processes.

At Willsden Primary School, the Review Panel was interested in the depth of the processes used to review student learning progress, school processes and the building of teacher capacity. The Review Panel heard evidence from leadership and staff about how student learning data is being collected and recorded in accordance with the school’s data management processes and how it is being translated into strategic decisions and actions at a whole-school and classroom level.

Staff spoke about Running Records, Boehm, NAPLAN, PAT-R and PAT-M, letter/sound knowledge, spelling tests, Oxford (digital), and EALD scales. Further work is required to ensure the assigned levels in Running Records are correct.

The panel was able to verify that staff are developing a shared responsibility for owning the data, however, confidence in the use of data to inform, reflect and refine teaching and learning programs was not verified.

Whilst there was a common data wall, there was evidence of a lack of triangulated datasets, and an issue about whether the right data was collected to inform student learning.

The school has an intensive intervention program, including speech/language and Read Up. Generally, students are withdrawn to work either in pairs or in a small group. Evidence has shown, over time and based on the school’s performance report, that the impact of such programs is highly questionable, particularly in reference to a lack of student learning growth. Although intervention provides a consistent approach, it is essential that the impact of these programs is monitored, ensuring the skills acquired are

being effectively transferred into all learning areas. The Review Panel could not verify the impact of the school's intervention program.

The Review Panel sighted evidence of the constant disruption to class-based learning with students being withdrawn and then re-entering. This is impacting both on the identified student, as well as having a negative impact on their classmates' learning. In considering the number of hours and resources being put into these programs, it will be important to reflect, refine and rethink how intervention is offered.

**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.**

**Direction 4**

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

## OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

Willsden Primary School is developing self-review processes to determine the impact school strategies and practices are having on student achievement.

The Principal will work with the Education Director to implement the following Directions:

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.

Based on the school's current performance, Willsden Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2018.



Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
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Anne Millard  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND  
PRESCHOOLS

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.

Linda Ritchie  
PRINCIPAL  
WILLSDEN 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 Willsden 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 77%.

## 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).*

#### Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2016, 10% of Year 1 and 11% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). For Year 1, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average. For Year 2, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Year 2 has been downwards, from 30% in 2014 to 11% in 2016.

In 2016, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 12% of Year 3 students, 21% of Year 5 students and 42% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 5, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average. For Year 7, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Years 5 and 7 has been downwards, from 32% in 2014 to 21% in 2016 for Year 5, and 73% in 2014 to 42% in 2016 in Year 7.

For 2016 Year 3 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving lower than the results of similar students across DECD schools. For Year 5 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving just within the results of similar students across DECD schools. For Year 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the results of similar students across DECD schools.

In 2016, no Year 3, 4% of Year 5, and 13% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average. Fifty percent, or 1 of 2 students from Year 3, remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.

#### Numeracy

In 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 28% of Year 3 students, 13% of Year 5 students, and 33% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD SEA. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. For Year 5, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average. For Year 7, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Year 3 has been upwards, from 8% in 2014 to 28% in 2016.

For 2016 Year 3 and 5 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving just within the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools. For Year 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools.

In 2016, no Year 3, no Year 5 and no Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.