

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW
REPORT FOR PENOLA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in June 2015



**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 overarching review question is "How well does this school improve student achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity?"

This External School Review has evaluated:

- *the school's self-review processes and findings,*
- *the school's achievement data and progress over time,*
- *the outcomes of the meetings and interviews with representatives from the school, and*
- *parent and student views about the school.*

The External School Review included an analysis of the school's key policies and procedures.

The support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community is acknowledged.

This External School Review was conducted by Julie Hardy, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Judith Howie, Review Principal.

Policy compliance

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

The Principal of Penola Primary School has verified that the school is working towards being compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal advised action is being taken to comply with the following DECD policies:

Safety:

- Volunteer Policy – all volunteers will have undertaken Reporting Abuse and Neglect training by the end of Term 3 2015.

Implementation of the *DECD Student Attendance Policy* was checked specifically against a documented set of criteria. The school has implemented comprehensive tracking and intervention processes, and was found to be compliant with this policy. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 92.2%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Penola Primary School is a Reception to Year 7 school situated in the south east of South Australia. Enrolments are increasing and in 2015, approximately 200 students were enrolled. The school is classified as DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage Category 6 and has an ICSEA of 1045.

The school population includes 2% Aboriginal students, 6% students with Disabilities, and 22% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The leadership team consists of a Principal in his first tenure, a Coordinator: School Management/ Numeracy Coach, and a Coordinator: Quality Teaching and Learning.

Lines of inquiry

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

Student Learning:	How well are students achieving over time? To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning and how does the school know?
Improvement agenda	To what extent does the school monitor student achievement and review effectiveness of improvement processes and strategies?
Effective Teaching:	How effectively do teachers support students in their learning?

How well are students achieving over time?

The pre-review discussion of student achievement data found that results in Reading and Numeracy exceed similar schools. The percentage of students achieving the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) at Years 3, 5 and 7 has shown improvement on historical average. In 2014, the percentage of students achieving the SEA in Reading in Years 3, 5 and 7 was 87%, 91%, 89% respectively.

In Numeracy, the percentage of students achieving the SEA is similar to Reading. In 2014, the percentage of students achieving the SEA was consistently high across all year levels, that is, in Years 3, 5 and 7 the percentage was 81%, 91% and 93% respectively.

More complex skills are assessed in the higher proficiency bands of NAPLAN. In 2014, at Penola Primary School, the percentage of students achieving in the upper proficiency bands in Reading was 32% at Year 3, 48% at Year 5, and 48% at Year 7. This represents an improvement on the historical average compared to previous years. This pattern has been evident in Numeracy as well.

Given the relatively high percentage of students demonstrating achievement in the upper proficiency bands, the task for Penola Primary School is to focus rigorous improvement processes on ensuring that all students are challenged and engaged in their learning by consistently being provided with opportunities to demonstrate high order learning from Foundation to Year 7.

To what extent does the school monitor student achievement and review effectiveness of improvement processes and strategies?

The panel saw evidence of planning at both a strategic and improvement level. The Governing Council Strategic Plan outlines key strategies to “guide the school community in the short and long term towards continual improvement of student outcomes, state of the art facilities and best practice teaching methods.”

A key feature of the improvement agenda is a focused approach to improving pedagogy. The school’s vision statement centres on developing powerful learners and is underpinned by a statement of core beliefs about learning. Teachers talked about the influence of these beliefs on the development of the current pedagogy reform agenda.

The Site Improvement Plan (SIP) is centred on priorities designed to impact on student outcomes in the areas of literacy, numeracy and learning dispositions. In DECD, the South Australian Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) framework provides a research-based description of effective pedagogy to guide learning design and teaching practice. Given the focus on pedagogical improvement it is important that school planning makes explicit connections between the focus on Playful Pedagogies in the early years, Inquiry in the primary years, and the TfEL Framework to provide an ongoing evidence base to guide development. This connection is evident in the 2015 SIP and the panel noted the importance of maintaining TfEL as a reference point into the future.

The leadership structure is strategically aligned to support the improvement priorities. Teachers talked about the positive impact of the coaching model currently being used to build teacher capacity in numeracy and the role of the previous literacy coach in supporting consistent practice.

Valid and reliable data sets are gathered, collated and stored. This is supported by a documented data collection schedule. The Principal uses an Excel-based system to collate and analyse achievement data, and an online data system is in the early stages of implementation. The Principal shares data with staff and the Governing Council as part of ongoing review processes.

In addition to school-wide data collection, teachers talked to the panel about a range of formative and summative data that they collect at the classroom level to inform teaching. They commented that they preferred to collect their own data to establish an understanding of the performance of students in their classes. Grouping students with similar learning needs, identifying common errors and identifying students requiring intervention were ways teachers reported using the data in daily practice. The panel saw the opportunity to strengthen the use of data by providing opportunities for teachers to work together to examine the achievement of all students in a cohort and co-design learning to meet their needs.

Ongoing self-review processes were evident through validation reports and a summary of actions taken to implement recommendations for improvement. The leadership team outlined improvement processes and outcomes over time. The improvement focus is further strengthened through alignment with professional learning and performance and development processes that are based on inquiry questions drawn from the improvement priorities. Detailed written performance feedback is provided.

While collaborative self-review processes, data analysis to inform improvement and site planning processes were evident, there were no documented systems for monitoring, evaluation and review. The panel noted that the school would benefit from the documentation and scheduling of review and improvement processes to ensure consistent implementation of strategies and monitoring of the impact they have on student learning over time.

Direction 1:

Ensure continuity of improvement practices over time by documenting and scheduling self-review processes that are collaborative, evidence-based, focused on improving student learning, and consistently and rigorously implemented.

How effectively do teachers support students in their learning?

The panel saw evidence of a positive school culture. Parents and students identified affirming relationships with teachers as being core to learning success. Parents who spoke to the panel reported that they were well informed about their children's learning progress, felt comfortable approaching school staff with any issues that arose and felt welcome in classrooms. Students who talked to the panel were positive about the school as a welcoming and caring environment for children and that the Student Representative Council was active in school affairs, including fund-raising, organising school events and liaising with the Principal.

Teaching is effective when teachers have high expectations of all their students and continuously plan, monitor, evaluate, and reflect on their teaching strategies, curriculum content, and the learning needs of their students. Teachers talked about how they program, plan and teach to cater for the varied learning needs of their students. They discussed their written program documents that outlined strategies, tasks and intended outcomes aligned to the Australian Curriculum content descriptors and achievement standards and, for the early years, alignment with learning dispositions.

The panel saw evidence of differentiation in teaching programs and through discussions with teachers about their practice. Students talked about levelled activities in mathematics, where students chose a starting point at their level. Teachers described the use of formative assessment to inform teaching and the activation of prior knowledge through thinking boards, concept maps, negotiation of learning tasks and co-construction of assessment criteria to engage students with their learning. The panel saw evidence of rubrics and assessment criteria being used to support assessment of learning and examples of task design.

Teachers and leaders talked about a range of intervention programs for students requiring specific learning support. Teachers reported using a variety of information to identify students for support programs under the umbrella of teacher judgement, and the panel noted that using more specific assessment criteria would better target intervention funding.

The panel was particularly interested in the way teachers made judgements about the degree to which students met the achievement standards in the Australian Curriculum reflected in the grades reported to parents. The panel heard that a literacy coach had been influential in developing a common documented approach to literacy teaching, which guided consistent practice across the school. Teachers talked about meeting in hub groups to moderate student work samples to strengthen their judgement in relation to achievement against the Australian Curriculum standards in English, though this was not yet the case in Mathematics. The panel noted that moderation processes with staff from other schools in the local partnership would provide an opportunity for teachers to gain an external perspective on achievement levels at the school.

Direction 2:

Use collaborative processes to moderate student tasks and develop a collective understanding of specific strategies to address issues when students fall below the Australian Curriculum achievement standard, and provide intellectual stretch for students achieving highly.

To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning and how does the school know?

Students, who are engaged and motivated, are more likely to want to be at school, and these factors are linked strongly to high expectations, positive mindsets, and willingness to tackle challenging learning activities.

The panel heard that there has been a focus on increasing levels of engagement and challenge in learning at the school in recent years. Teachers spoke about their commitment to build children's learning dispositions and capacity to engage in challenging learning tasks.

A key feature of the change agenda has been a focus on strengthening learning dispositions in the early years and creating a seamless transition from the adjacent preschool to school. The panel saw children engaged in a range of self-directed learning activities during "discovery time" and the use of photos and anecdotal observations to track the learning of children in the early years. Teachers across the school described their intention to design purposeful, "hands-on" learning that provides multiple entry points for learners and enables students to engage in active and differentiated learning.

Teachers and students talked about how students had input into designing learning, choice of learning tasks and input into assessment criteria. Students from the middle and upper primary who spoke to the panel were motivated and talked enthusiastically about their learning, citing examples such as the use of a writer's notebook and hands-on mathematics activities as tasks that gave them the opportunity to learn in meaningful ways. The panel noted that the degree to which this happened varied from class to class.

The school is embarking on an ambitious agenda of pedagogical reform, which is in its initial stages. Teachers talked about their willingness to engage with new pedagogies and desire to find out more about ways they can provide challenging learning for all students. The panel noted that the progress towards attaining the desired outcomes could be accelerated by routinely measuring the impact of pedagogical approaches and consistently implementing them if successful.

Direction 3:

Ensure recently initiated pedagogical approaches are having the expected impact on student engagement and learning through documented, evidence-based, evaluation processes. Implement successful approaches consistently in all classrooms.

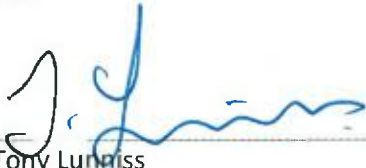
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Penola Primary School is tracking well. Good performance is evidenced by strong growth in student achievement and a focus on high expectations for students and actively engaging learners.

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

1. Ensure continuity of improvement practices over time by documenting and scheduling self-review processes that are collaborative, evidence-based, focused on improving student learning, and consistently and rigorously implemented.
2. Use collaborative processes to moderate student tasks and develop a collective understanding of specific strategies to address issues when students fall below the Australian Curriculum achievement standard, and provide intellectual stretch for students achieving highly.
3. Ensure recently initiated pedagogical approaches have the expected impact on student engagement and learning through documented, evidence-based, evaluation processes. Implement successful approaches consistently in all classrooms.

Based on the school's current performance, Penola Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2019.



Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
PRESCHOOL AND SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT

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.

Paul Harmer
PRINCIPAL
PENOLA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson