DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR CRYSTAL BROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in May 2015

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 Lyn Arnold, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Lia Tedesco, 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 Crystal Brook 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 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 93.9%, which exceeds the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Crystal Brook Primary School is a Reception to Year 7 school situated in the mid-north approximately 200kms from Adelaide. The enrolment in 2015 is 182 students. The school has an ICSEA score of 996, and is classified as Category 4 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 6% of students who identify as ATSI, 7% designated as Students with Disabilities, 1% of students under the Guardianship of the Minister, and 30% of the total student population are eligible for school card support. There are seven Reception to Year 7 classes and 15 teaching staff, which is relatively stable, with 10 of the staff being permanent appointments.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal, whose tenure at the school began in 2012, and a Student Counsellor with release time included for special projects.

How well are students achieving over time?

Analysis of 2014 student achievement data shows that 90% of Year 3, 63% of Year 5, and 88% of Year 7 students met the DECD Standard of Achievement (SEA) on the NAPLAN Literacy-Reading test.

Scores for the NAPLAN Numeracy test report that 95% of Year 3, 68% of Year 5, and 88% of Year 7 students achieved the DECD SEA.

The data also shows that the proportion of students scoring in the higher proficiency bands at Year 3 literacy-reading is stable, with 35% of students scoring in the higher bands in 2014, consistent with the average of 36% over the previous five years. Of the Year 5 students, 21% scored in the higher bands in 2014, which is less than the average 27% over the previous five years. The proportion of Year 7 students dropped further to 16% in 2014 compared with the average of 29% for the previous five years.

In NAPLAN numeracy, 40% of Year 3 students scored in the higher bands in 2014, representing an increase from the average 25% for the previous five years, however, the proportion of Year 5 and 7 students decreased from 25% and 31% to 11% and 20% respectively.

What this data shows is a drop in the percentage of Year 5 students achieving SEA in literacy and numeracy, and that less students score in the higher proficiency bands in Years 5 and 7.

The school recognises the downward trend, particularly in Year 5 achievement results. Various targeted interventions are detailed in the 2015 Operational Plan to support student learning in Years 3 to 7 with the aim of moving students into higher proficiency bands. The Review Panel noted that planned improvement in maths and numeracy is linked almost exclusively to the implementation of one approach - Natural Math. The school, therefore, needs to undertake continuous monitoring and rigorous evaluation of the implementation of the strategy in meeting the diverse range of student learning needs to determine its effectiveness in supporting the achievement of Australian Curriculum mathematics standards.

Based on the review of achievement data and taking into consideration the school's improvement focus on pedagogy and student engagement, the Review Panel explored how effectively teachers are supporting student learning, the extent to which students are engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning and, how authentic the influence of students is on their learning.

To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

The school vision states that every child can learn. On this premise there is a commitment to ensuring all students are engaged in purposeful and relevant learning at all times.

Early in the Review process, during interviews with staff, students and parents, the Panel became aware of school community perceptions regarding students' unwillingness to take risks in learning, to tackle challenging learning activities and be independent learners. On this basis, the panel followed a line of inquiry into how students across all year levels are being engaged in relevant learning, and challenged to aspire and achieve to their full potential.

With respect to school structures, the evidence provided to the Review Panel suggests there are sound and regular self-review processes, particularly in regard to data collection and analysis to assist teachers in determining appropriate levels of challenge for all students. There is also evidence that the leadership provides strategic direction, planning, and staff professional development opportunities that support the school's priorities for improving student learning outcomes.

Discussion with teachers indicated they are committed to implementing the identified strategies that support the school priorities for improvement and, in particular, are developing their capacity to support students becoming expert learners. Their developing capacity is evidenced by some positive examples of scaffolding to help students develop expert learner skills. At this time, however, such strategies are not adopted or implemented consistently across the whole school. For example, work samples showed that students in some learning tasks are given quite clear direction and information about how to improve their learning and achievement outcomes, while in other contexts, sometimes within the same class, the information provided is variable and lacks clarity for the students. The development by teachers of an agreed continuum of dependent to independent expert learner characteristics and skills across the school will help drive this strategy forward.

Direction 1
Support students to become expert learners by developing an agreed continuum of skills and abilities that promotes a coherent approach in teachers' planning and implementation from Reception to Year 7.

The school also provides acceleration programs across year levels designed to lift moderate achievers' results, as well as provide support to low and high achievers. The school is aware there is a lack of clarity about the purpose and who these programs serve, especially among parents. As these interventions have the potential to be highly positive strategies for the school in achieving identified improvement outcomes, the school will benefit from providing further information regarding the value and potential outcomes to promote greater support and commitment across the school community.

In talking with students, it was clear that they like to learn, and their comments showed high regard for their teachers and for their learning at the school. Students, particularly those in the early years, were clear on their learning progress through the reading and literacy levels.

While students are enthusiastic, and it is believed the majority have the capacity and ability to improve and achieve at higher levels of academic proficiency, there are opportunities that are not utilised to full effect within current practices. Based on community perceptions and concerns raised with the Review Panel, for example, there is a need to encourage and reinforce attitudes to achievement that are personally competitive rather than competitive with others, and for teachers to explore strategies for promoting positive personal benchmarking against standards that recognise achievement and growth in all students.

In order to support students aspiring to achieve their very best, assessment tasks need to be structured around equitable processes. The school is aware, for example, that internet access fluctuates and network filters block student access to a range of legitimate research material. Students spoke of not being able to complete all assessment components of various assignments during school time and how this impacts negatively on the grade awarded for submitted work. Comments revealed that students believe if you can use the internet at home, you can get more information and pictures, and then you can get a better grade. Such student perceptions have the potential to reduce motivation and effort when they can't access these resources, and do little to promote positive engagement and willingness to take on challenges in assignments. Consequently, adequate time and access to resources should be provided so that all students believe it is possible to complete assessment tasks successfully and that the outcome is within their personal control.

Students spoke of free time in the mornings, for which the purpose and focus was not clear. Some told the Review Panel that they do their favourite activity, such as building blocks or colouring in every day. Other students spoke of free time, which is perceived as a reward. Language is powerful, and the concept of free time that isn't learning oriented sends a different message to choosing a learning activity designed to

about Natural Math, and other opportunities to include parents in discussions. Programs about student learning should be provided to promote parents as partners in supporting student learning.

Students' learning will benefit from a coherent and consistent approach to feedback, including informal ongoing comments and the regular sharing of assessment criteria and progress, benchmarked against Australian Curriculum standards, throughout the term rather than only at the end of the term or year.

Direction 3
Build the capacity of staff to provide quality formative and summative feedback that helps students to benchmark their progress continuously against standards.

How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and throughout the school?

At the end of Term 1 students were asked to share their views on classroom and teaching practices using surveys designed to match their age and developmental levels. The collated results of the surveys provided a starting point for discussions by the Review Panel relating to the nature of student-teacher feedback, and the extent to which teachers adapt and refine their teaching strategies in response to such feedback.

The use of these surveys is a positive initial step in promoting student feedback to teachers on their pedagogy. As this was the first time such a survey had been conducted, however, the Review Panel found that generally students had mixed understandings of what they were giving feedback on and why. Some thought they were grading the teacher, others thought they were evaluating their own learning, and others believed the survey was about them as learners. Although similar questions were asked, the different perceptions held by students potentially influenced their response and therefore the consistency of the feedback they gave to their teachers.

The evidence also indicated that across all year levels the feedback is not reciprocal or ongoing. That is, the teachers' responses, thinking, or planned actions based on student feedback, have not been shared with students. Students told the Review Panel that teachers took their feedback and that to their knowledge nothing changed or happened as a consequence. Responsive and respectful interactions relating to feedback are a critical aspect of negotiating and developing authentic student involvement and influence on their learning. Building the capacity of staff to engage in a reciprocal feedback cycle that is clear and transparent will help clarify the purpose of the survey and other future feedback opportunities, and assist in taking this approach to the next level of student-teacher interaction.

Direction 4
Raise student achievement by ensuring teachers adapt their teaching practices in response to student feedback, and share explicitly the outcomes with students.

engage or personally challenge students. Expert learners see the opportunities for extending and building their learning in everything they do, and this should be reinforced by language and classroom practices.

In considering the engagement and challenge provided to all students, the Review Panel found evidence that students' individual learning plans (NEP, IEP and ILP) need urgent attention. Tracking the progress and outcomes of our most academically at-risk students is a critical factor in ensuring they make appropriate learning and developmental progress. Once updated, the school needs to implement processes to continuously monitor and evaluate individual student growth and the development of emergent and consolidated skills and achievements, which ensure timely adjustments to teaching and learning plans are made as needed.

Direction 2
Support quality learning outcomes for all students by implementing continuous monitoring and evaluation processes of individual learning plans.

How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

Previous improvement priorities relating to pedagogy were to make learning intentions explicit, provide opportunities for higher order thinking and differentiate student learning. In building on these approaches, the school identifies the giving and receiving of feedback as outlined in the Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) framework as an improvement priority in the current School Improvement Plan. In line with this priority, the Review Panel undertook a line of inquiry into how effective the feedback given to students is for motivating them to achieve standards and improve.

In addition to the Australian Curriculum standards, the school has a comprehensive term by term schedule of agreed Reception to Year 7 assessments for teachers to refer to when planning for differentiation and to evaluate progress against standards.

Middle years teachers also spoke of peer assessment and sharing success criteria by determining them in collaboration with students. Early years teachers referred to success criteria being more teacher-directed and their feedback being predominantly verbal, but also told of encouraging students to show them what they know in 'lots of different ways'. Senior teachers made reference to rubrics to help students benchmark progress. Teacher comments also suggested that learning motivation and feedback is reinforced through assemblies and other sharing activities as students always want to show other classes their work.

Students spoke of receiving verbal feedback on their work, and there was evidence of stickers and written comments in books but, when asked, in most instances, students did not know how they were progressing throughout the term towards recognised benchmarks and standards. Older students mentioned that the teacher usually tells them what they need to improve and do extra work on, and sometimes will say they have done really good work, but also explained that nothing is said about the grade and they don't see or know the grade before they receive their mid-year or end-of-year report.

Student comments also suggested some confusion around assessment and success criteria. Students linked success criteria and academic success to effort and quantity, that is trying harder and doing more. For example, middle and upper primary students explained that one sentence of information could be a 'C,' and that lots of sentences would be a 'B' or perhaps an 'A' because A is just a bit better, but were unable to explain what was needed to make their work a 'bit better'.

The students' focus on quantity and effort can be linked to teacher practice. When asked about motivation and goal-setting, teachers emphasised rewarding students for effort. Examples included students setting the goal to learn their times tables or write more today than last week, and when the target is reached, the child is rewarded, for example, by choosing an activity for Friday afternoon.

In talking with parents about how they feel teachers support their child's learning, there was a level of overall satisfaction. However, they would like more specific information beyond what is currently provided, on areas such as reading progress, intervention programs and classroom learning approaches so they can support their child's learning more proactively. Parents welcome the opportunity to be involved in the upcoming training