

The Department for Education

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Moorak Primary School

Conducted in May 2018



Review details

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.

The external school review framework underpinning the 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 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.

This review was conducted by Phil Garner, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Carolyn Clinton, Review Principal.

School context

Moorak Primary School is located approximately 436kms south-east from Adelaide and 5km from the regional city of Mount Gambier, catering for children from preschool to year 7. The school has an ICSEA score of 969, and is classified as Category 5 on the department's Index of Educational Disadvantage.

Moorak Primary School has a current enrolment of approximately 103 students. The school enrolment has remained relatively stable over the past 6 years. The school population comprises 9% students with disabilities, 4% Aboriginal students and 18% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The principal is in the 4th year of leadership at the school.

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:

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

Effective Teaching: To what extent do teachers use data and evidence to inform their planning and instruction?

To what extent are the school agreements about learning implemented coherently across the school?

Improvement Agenda: How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?

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

When teachers have high expectations for students and provide tasks that are engaging and of high interest, students build self-esteem, increase confidence and improve in academic achievement. This is exemplified when students are provided with opportunities to co-design the learning, are challenged in their thinking and understand the criteria for success. This pedagogical approach has been identified in the school's 2017-18 site improvement plan as a major focus for the middle and upper primary sections of school.

The review panel met with a group of students who were able to succinctly articulate the processes of self-directed learning, and show how they make cross-curricular connections to their learning with integrity. There are high levels of student engagement and achievement in the middle and upper years, with teachers facilitating, conferencing and co-designing the learning with students. Upper and middle school teachers deliberately co-design the learning around the Australian Curriculum and standards of achievement, using critical thinking strategies and ensuring that a balanced and cohesive curriculum is delivered. This was evidenced through discussions with teachers and students and analysis of student

learning plans. The panel observed teacher-student learning discussions in action and explicit examples of formative assessment that challenged student thinking.

One example of self-directed learning was the degree to which upper and middle school students planned for their learning around Anzac Day. Students designed, planned and initiated discussions with the local Returned and Services League, with actionable outcomes for the whole school, including the redevelopment of the front of the school to showcase a student-designed Anzac memorial. Documented evidence from the science teacher was presented to the panel indicating high levels of reception to year 7 student involvement in learning design, with a focus on developing success criteria to stretch student critical thinking.

The degree to which the students have embraced this pedagogical change has a significant impact on student engagement and intellectual stretch in the middle and upper primary schools. There now exists an opportunity to critically investigate how this process can be successfully adapted to further influence engagement and stretch across reception to year four.

The school has a priority focus to improve student resilience through the development of a growth mindset. Students focus on learning, see effort as the key to success, and thrive in the face of a challenge. Parents and students who met with the review panel were able to clearly articulate the growth mindset theories, and how this approach to challenging problems or situations can focus their efforts on identifying ways of working towards achieving goals. This is a new focus for the school, and it will take some time to embed mindset strategies across the whole school.

Playful pedagogy has been implemented in the early years class in collaboration with the on-site preschool. This includes Discovery Time, with the intention of incorporating STEM learning into the play-based lessons. Research suggests that such approaches often outperform direct instruction approaches by encouraging a variety of positive academic outcomes in the early years. However, during classroom observations, the review panel observed limited purposeful learning, with students engaging in small group or individual unstructured tasks.

The parents were concerned about the amount of time spent “playing”. While they are very supportive of school initiatives and the approachability of the teaching staff, they question the rigour of the learning program and what they see as the lack of quality literacy and numeracy engagement. Student achievement data collected at system level over time indicates declining levels of reading achievement in the early years (see Appendix 2).

There is an opportunity for the school to critically review the effectiveness playful pedagogies as an approach to reception and year 1 teaching and learning.

Direction 1

Implement a collaboratively developed, whole-school pedagogical agreement that supports student involvement in co-design, setting and reviewing goals, and ensures quality learning experiences that are responsive, engaging and challenging.

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

Significant time has been invested by the school towards analysing student assessment data to identify where students are in relation to a benchmark of achievement. The school presented evidence of a school data wall that enables staff to track student progress. Brightpaths, a reception to year 7 writing assessment and moderation tool, has been introduced by the school to monitor and track student

progress in writing. The focus on differentiation of learning instruction is an important component of this assessment tool, and provides teachers and students with explicit next steps in learning.

The use of formative assessment strategies was evident to the panel in some classes. Teachers of these classes speak with students about their learning on a regular basis. Students set their own learning goals and regularly use learning sprints to focus clearly on achieving these goals. Conversations with these students and analysis of their work and learning tasks indicate their understanding of where they are in learning and, more importantly, their next steps in learning. However, students are unaware of their Pat-M or Pat-R data results, and how this diagnostic learning tool could be used to identify the progression in their learning.

Classroom teachers rely heavily on external intervention programs, with over one-third of the students receiving individual intervention in either numeracy or literacy. Whilst such programs can support identified students, the analytical use of student achievement data to inform effective pedagogical practice should not be underestimated. Likewise, the collective development of learning tasks that provide multiple entry and exit points is an area for development across the site.

Individual classroom and in-school data was uniformly referred to by teachers as “more useful in informing the planning and programming”. The principal reported in his presentation that the diagnostic use of whole-school data, for example, NAPLAN and Pat Maths and Reading to inform learning design, is an area that the school will need to focus on.

The student achievement data collected at system level over time indicates an improving trend of achievement in reading and numeracy across years 5 to 7. However, these improvements are from a low baseline of previous achievement. The data also reflects declining levels of reading achievement in the early years.

Foundations are in place for collaborative and deep diagnostic analysis of student achievement data by all teachers to design explicit teaching and learning programs that are responsive to student needs.

Direction 2

Implement effective pedagogical practices and explicit learning programs that are planned, structured and sequenced, and reflect the diagnostic use of student data with high expectations for all students.

To what extent are the school agreements about learning implemented coherently across the school?

The single most important element of school improvement is capacity building with a focus on results. The school has recently invested considerable time and finances towards the professional development of teaching staff. These opportunities are highly valued by staff.

Parents were aware of the pedagogical changes as a result of professional learning, for example, the introduction of Jolly Phonics and Brightpath. All teachers indicated that weekly staff meetings are an important component of their professional learning, and value this time to collaborate with each other. Teachers also reported their concerns when the agenda for these meetings changes at short notice to deal with administrative issues.

The partnership collaboration on moderation is seen by all teachers as an important component of their professional learning, which allows for professional dialogue with other colleagues beyond the school.

In most cases, professional learning is linked with the priorities of the site improvement plan. However, all teachers indicated that professional development opportunities are often used sporadically to “plug gaps”, and not as a focus for whole-school improvement.

Document analysis indicated a number of whole-school agreements that have been collaboratively developed by staff, in particular, the literacy and numeracy agreements that were created prior to the current leader's appointment. Teaching staff reported that these documents are not in use at present. The review panel views these quality documents as a solid foundation from which the school can develop collaborative whole-school teaching and learning agreements.

Direction 3

Develop and implement whole-school teaching and learning agreements, in particular, literacy and numeracy, in a collegiate and collaborative way.

How effective are the schools self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?

The site improvement plan guides the whole school on its improvement journey. From the principal's presentation, there is clear intent to bring about collective improvement. The school's self-review process includes termly analysis of student achievement data, and the school allocates a student free day in term 4 for collective analysis of student achievement data, and the evaluation and review of the site improvement plan. However, most staff reported to the panel that "we are clear about where we are going in our class, but not so sure about the whole school".

While it is clear that staff are very supportive of a self-review process, a degree of frustration exists about the "lack of follow-through" on improvement issues. For example, the new school values developed through a whole-school community consultation process, and the subsequent delay in formal adoption by the school. The self-review process will require greater clarity around the improvement of processes and outcomes that focus on raising student achievement.

Direction 4

Collaboratively develop a whole-school self-review process and site improvement plan that reflects a cyclic nature, is rigorous, systematic, transparent and inclusive, and guides the school on a continuous improvement journey.

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

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

Effective practice of building student leadership capacity was evident at the school. The new outside learning area has been influenced by the school's support in providing opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate their leadership skills in its purpose and design. Evidence of this was verified in discussion with the principal, teachers, students and parents.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

Moorak Primary School has demonstrated growth in student achievement that is at or above what would be reasonably expected of a school in a similar context.

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

1. Implement a collaboratively developed, whole-school pedagogical agreement that supports student involvement in co-design, setting and reviewing goals, and ensures quality learning experiences that are responsive, engaging and challenging.
2. Implement effective pedagogical practices and explicit learning programs that are planned, structured and sequenced, and reflect the diagnostic use of student data with high expectations for all students.
3. Develop and implement whole-school teaching and learning agreements, in particular, literacy and numeracy, in a collegiate and collaborative way.
4. Collaboratively develop a whole-school self-review process and site improvement plan that reflects a cyclic nature, is rigorous, systematic, transparent and inclusive, and guides the school on a continuous improvement journey.

Based on the school's current performance, Moorak Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2022.



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.

Peter Mitchinson
PRINCIPAL
MOORAK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson

Appendix 1

Attendance policy compliance

Implementation of the Education Department student attendance policy was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be with this policy.

The school attendance rate for 2017 was 92.8%.

Appendix 2

School performance overview

The external school review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the Department for Education Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2017, 50% of year 1 and 73% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents a decline in year 1 and little or no change in year 2 from the historic baseline average.

In 2017, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 94% of year 3 students, 65% of year 5 students, 70% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the SEA. For year 3, this result represents an improvement, and for years 5 and 7, a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2015 and 2017, the trend for year 7 has been upwards, from 50% in 2015 to 70% in 2017.

For 2017 year 3, 5, 7 NAPLAN reading, the school is achieving within than the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2017, 47% of year 3, 29% of year 5 and 20% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 57% of students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2017, 40% of students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2017.

Numeracy

In 2017, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 82% of year 3 students, 71% of year 5 students, 80% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3 and 7, this result represents an improvement, and for year 5, this represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

Between 2015 and 2017, the trend for year 7 has been upwards, from 33% in 2015 to 80% in 2017.

For 2017 year 3, 5, and 7 NAPLAN numeracy, the school is achieving within the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2017, 35% of year 3, 6% of year 5, 20% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 3, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 25% of students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2017, and the one year 3 student did not remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2017.