

The Department for Education

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Flaxmill School P-7

Conducted in October 2018



Government of South Australia
Department for Education

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 Alison Lynch, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Leanne Trewartha, Review Principal.

School context

Flaxmill School P-7 caters for children from preschool to year 7. It is located 35kms south of Adelaide in the suburb of Morphett Vale, and is part of the Beach Road Partnership. The current school enrolment is 359 students across 16 classes. The school is classified as Category 2 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school's ICSEA score is 937.

The school population includes 36 (8%) Aboriginal students, 25 (7%) EALD background students, 36 (10%), students with disabilities, 8 (2%) children in care, and 165 (46%) students from families eligible for school card assistance. Enrolment has grown over the last 2 years.

The school leadership team consists of a principal in his 3rd year of tenure at the school, 2 assistant principals and a numeracy coordinator (0.8FTE).

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, with a focus on supporting students to achieve and sustain their learning in higher bands achievement?
- School and Community Partnerships:** To what extent do students have authentic influence over their learning as a way of engaging and challenging them further?
- Effective Teaching:** To what extent are the school's agreed pedagogical practices, identified to raise student growth and achievement in literacy and numeracy, delivered coherently across the school?

To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning, with a focus on supporting students to achieve and sustain their learning in higher bands achievement?

Students at Flaxmill School P-7 display a strong sense of pride and connection to the school, are motivated to learn, and enjoy coming to school. In response to questions from the panel, students shared their views about their learning, confidently and openly.

There is clear evidence of a growth mindset focus from teachers and a belief that all children can learn. Posters are displayed in most classrooms and, when asked, students can describe what this involves for them as learners, in terms of the need to persevere and mistakes being part of learning.

Teachers are able to articulate a clear understanding of what intellectual stretch and challenge is, and what it looks like in the classroom including:

- extending students beyond their comfort zone
- using a growth mindset
- providing students with the opportunity to further challenge themselves
- 'thinking hard'
- understanding that mistakes are part of learning.

All 13 teachers, who responded to a survey conducted during the review, created opportunities to stretch students' thinking to enable them to think deeply about a topic, to a medium or high extent. Most students interviewed rated the learning they were exposed to as either 'just right' or 'too easy.' Several students expressed wanting more challenge in their learning. During walkthroughs and from student feedback, opportunities for students to engage in challenging learning, relevant to each child's ability, was limited due to the prevalence of whole-class activities and worksheets.

Students reported that they would seek help if unsure in their learning, but they would just do the work and not tell the teacher if the work was too easy. They showed a heavy reliance on seeking help from the teacher or a friend when the work was hard. Further emphasis on the school's focus on growth mindsets to include problem-solving strategies will support students' understanding and ability to 'have a go' when faced with difficulties in their learning.

When reflecting on what they would have liked to have done better in their planning, teaching and assessment of a recent unit of work, teachers identified providing:

- greater opportunities for personalised stretch and challenge, particularly for the higher level students
- more open-ended tasks
- increased focus on problem-solving and reasoning tasks
- peer tutoring opportunities
- effective feedback
- improved goal-setting and student self-assessments
- more open and deeper questioning.

There is evidence of some differentiation of learning in classes, including the grouping of students and providing additional questions and/or expectations. Further work on the Learning Design and Moderation (LDAM) strategy will support teachers to design challenging tasks that support multiple entry and exit points. By providing a range of prompts and scaffolds, together with explicit teaching, greater differentiation will be enabled across all learning areas. This will allow students to achieve at a higher standard, and accommodate and support the diverse learning needs within each class.

Teachers were limited in their responses about their use of formative assessments, apart from 'thumbs up and down', 'think/pair/share', and the use of individual whiteboards to indicate students' level of understanding during the lesson. Several teachers use pre-testing in the Back to Front maths program. This could be used more widely in all learning areas to eliminate the practice of all students starting at the same level. Regular use of a range of formative assessments during the lesson will provide teachers with timely information to adjust their teaching by responding to the learning needs at any given time. This will allow the more capable students to be challenged in their learning, with greater opportunities to achieve at a higher level and to be retained in the higher bands. Further professional learning and sharing of practice in the understanding and use of formative assessments is recommended, to ensure all students are continually supported and challenged.

The school is established in the collection of multiple datasets, including NAPLAN, PAT and Running Records, with teachers responsible for entering data into a school data system. The analysis of data

occurs several times a year in staff meetings and professional learning communities (PLCs). Teachers indicated this data analysis is used for identifying students for intervention, to group students mainly in reading and spelling, and to identify gaps at a class level. The next step is to ensure this data analysis is used to intentionally design learning programs with opportunities for stretch and challenge, and interventions within the classroom.

Using the data collected, leadership identifies students for intensive intervention programs to address learning in literacy (predominantly reading) and numeracy. Teachers can also nominate students for additional support. Students on these programs have shown considerable growth in their learning, particularly evident in Running Records data in the early years. A contract that is signed by parents to enable inclusion in these programs had a positive impact on students' attendance. These programs are run by skilled school services officers and include MiniLit, MultiLit, Too Smart and QuickSmart.

The PreLit program is delivered as whole-class instruction for all reception students, with over 70% of students currently reaching or exceeding expectations. The Reading Doctor program is also accessed by early years students for 15 minutes daily.

A HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills) program has been run for a number of years, targeting year 1 to 7 students. The focus of these weekly lessons for 8 to 12 students per class, is mainly on developing high level technology skills. Several students commented that the program was the same as in previous years. A greater focus on problem-solving using a range of HOTS and student-initiated learning opportunities would challenge students further. It is important to consider how students who don't access this program can be provided with similar opportunities to stretch their learning and gain new skills.

Direction 1

Provide support and opportunities for staff to plan together to design tasks that provide multiple entry and exit points, using *formative* and *summative* assessments that will extend all students' learning, and enable them to achieve at a higher level.

To what extent do students have authentic influence over their learning as a way of engaging and challenging them further?

Class and school environments, and associated break-out spaces, allow for group work and focused learning. Well-equipped and up-to-date resources in the STEM room, kitchen, extensive aquaponics facility, outdoor classroom and garden, several nature-play areas, designated HOTS room, computer room and laptops for every student, provide exceptional opportunities for students to learn in a range of spaces and learning areas.

Leadership acknowledged that student participation and opportunities to influence their learning is an area the school needs to focus on. Several teachers also identified negotiating the curriculum with students as 'next steps'.

When asked what opportunity there was to 'have a say' in what and how they learn, the responses from students indicated involvement at a surface level. Several students reported that they could occasionally have choice in a partner to work with, how to present their work or some selection of topics within the learning. It is important that students have some influence in the direction of the curriculum, building on their interests, prior knowledge and skills, in order to become more independent learners. The opportunity to have some influence in learning is linked to an increase in student effort, performance and learning, and could include choice of tasks, reporting formats, learning goals, behaviours and

responsibilities. It is recommended the school investigates the use of Student Voice Audit Action Tiles with both staff and students, to identify strengths and opportunities already in the school and those worth exploring, to increase the engagement and involvement of all students.

The school's facilities, resources and learning areas provide multiple spaces for group work and student-led initiatives. This is particularly evident in a year 5/6 class with a strong focus on a negotiated and connected curriculum, heavily influenced by the students. Consideration should be given to building teacher capacity using the expertise of identified staff to provide professional learning and mentor others. This will provide opportunities for teachers to further develop their skills and build leadership capacity.

Student goal-setting has been introduced across the school, but with varying focus and impact. Several classes clearly display the goals, while in other classes, some students were not able to remember their goal nor if they had achieved any set at the start of the year. When student goals are visible and shared publicly, students understand they are highly valued and an important part of their learning. The next step for the school should be to refine the goal-setting process to ensure students, with support from teachers, identify specific skills to be developed. The use of SMARTAR goal-setting practices will ensure the goals are measurable, specific, reviewed, celebrated and updated regularly. This will provide students with greater ownership and responsibility for their own learning.

While staff indicated in a survey that their learning intentions were clear, this was not corroborated by students. Further work on explaining this, together with clear success criteria, designed with students, is an area for improvement. Students indicated limited understanding and use of learning intentions and success criteria within the classroom. This reinforces the need to engage students in discussing the relevance of lesson intentions, collaboratively developing success criteria, and referring to these throughout the lesson. It is important to develop and embed consistent understandings of learning intentions and success criteria with students so they can understand and engage in the *what, why* and *how* of learning. Providing regular time for reflection, recapping the learning, student self-assessment rubrics and the use of exit cards, are examples of formats for reflection of practice related to the success criteria.

Teachers said they provided verbal feedback about the learning to students, particularly in the early years. Students' bookwork showed some marking with ticks and corrections, but little evidence of explicit next steps for learning. Effective feedback identifies what students are doing well, areas for improvement, and provides strategies for students to achieve that improvement. Engaging the students in self and peer assessments and providing feedback to each other, are also valuable means to share the responsibility for learning. Embedding feedback for learning should be a two-way process. This occurs when the teacher provides feedback to students to help them improve, and students have opportunity to provide feedback to the teacher about what supports and hinders their learning.

Direction 2

Develop and embed authentic student influence for learning through communicating clear learning intentions, developing success criteria with students and providing quality feedback to students that identifies what the student is doing well and strategies to further improve.

To what extent are the school's agreed pedagogical practices, identified to raise student growth and achievement in literacy and numeracy, delivered coherently across the school?

Staff are committed to improving student learning and their own practice, relevant to the school's directions. Teachers and leadership have been trained in a number of programs to support the teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy, ensuring greater consistency of practice.

Literacy and numeracy agreements have been developed by leadership and the literacy and numeracy committees with feedback provided by staff. There are connections to the school's data collection schedule and the extensive list of programs used across the school. The panel suggests further refinements to the literacy agreement to include clear strategies and expectations rather than broad statements. These agreements are applied within classrooms, with programs delivered consistently across the school. Teachers are appreciative of and value the leadership team's role in intervention identification, data analysis and the 'blue folder' of resources.

A whole-school focus on professional learning has ensured teachers and leadership are trained in a range of initiatives and programs. Teachers are supported and committed to develop their expertise through engaging in professional learning as a school, rather than on an individual basis. Recent training has included Back to Front maths, Play is the Way and initial work on moderation through the Partnership. Funding is prioritised to ensure all staff have access to quality professional development.

The school has recently introduced Swivl cameras for teachers to use and reflect on their own teaching. The next step is to encourage teachers to share this practice with colleagues to discuss and provide feedback to each other. The Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) Review Tools provide clear processes for involving a triangulation of reflections, including working with students, self-review and working with trusted colleagues. There were varying teaching methodologies and pedagogies implemented in classes that were apparent during observations and walkthroughs. The opportunity for teachers to observe in colleagues' classes will help improve the consistency in approaches. It is suggested that volunteers are called for initially, as staff have not previously been formally observed by leadership or peers. Teachers have a range of skills and expertise from which they would all benefit by sharing their pedagogy and providing critical feedback to each other. While teachers spoke about discussing what they were teaching, activities and programs used, there was little discussion or analysis of pedagogy – the how of teaching. More experienced teachers act as mentors to early career teachers when approached.

The department's performance plan template for teachers is used during an initial meeting with leadership, with a review meeting to occur this term. Term overviews are also developed. Written feedback is provided to staff based on these meetings and the overviews. It is suggested that leadership ensure feedback is also provided for teachers to further improve their pedagogy following observations in classes. Performance and development processes that are aligned to school priorities and meet the department's requirements (the provision of written feedback, classroom observation, regular walkthroughs) need to be collaboratively planned, documented and communicated in advance. Developing protocols around the how and why these observations will occur will ensure a respectful process.

While specialist lessons have been programed to enable coordinated release time for teachers of similar year levels, there is limited collaborative planning and teaching evident, particularly in the primary years. Classroom spaces are grouped according to year levels and provide the opportunity for teachers to work together to plan, teach, use common assessments and analyse student work samples. Recent A-E grade

allocations show a strong disconnect with 2018 NAPLAN results in year 7. Further professional development in moderation and opportunities for teachers to work closely together, should ensure greater understanding and consistency of expectations.

Direction 3

Develop consistent understandings and practices in moderation, and subsequent A-E grade allocation across year levels, through collaborative planning, teaching, assessing and analysing of student work and discussion of teaching pedagogy.

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 Flaxmill School P-7.

Effective practice in the provision of extensive intervention programs was evident at the school. Through the analysis of NAPLAN, PAT, Running Records and class assessments, around 100 places are provided for students to receive intensive intervention support from SSOs, individually or in small groups. This is in addition to the Reading Doctor and PreLit intervention programs run in early years classes, and intervention support for verified students. Training has been provided to enable the effective implementation of a range of programs to support literacy and numeracy improvement. Evidence of this practice was verified through discussions with leadership, teachers, students, parents and extensive data collection. These programs are greatly valued by all stakeholders.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

Flaxmill School P-7 has effective leadership that provides strategic direction, planning and targeted interventions.

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

1. Provide support and opportunities for staff to plan together to design tasks that provide multiple entry and exit points through the use of formative and summative assessments that will extend all students' learning opportunities and enable them to achieve at a higher level.
2. Develop and embed authentic student influence for learning through communicating clear learning intentions, developing success criteria with students and providing quality feedback to students that identifies what the student is doing well and strategies to further improve.
3. Develop consistent understandings and practices in moderation, and subsequent A-E grade allocation across year levels, through collaborative planning, teaching, assessing and analysing of student work and discussion of teaching pedagogy.

Based on the school's current performance, Flaxmill School P-7 will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



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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 compliant with this policy.

The school attendance rate for 2017 was 90.7%.

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, 62% of year 1 and 75% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

In 2018, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 64% of year 3 students, 61% of year 5 students, and 54% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the SEA. For years 3 and 7, this result represents a decline, and for year 5, an improvement from the school's historic baseline average.

In 2018, 30% of year 3, 21% of year 5, and 5% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result represents little or no change from the school's historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading when in year 3, 58% remained in the upper bands at year 5 in 2018, and 17% remained in the upper bands at year 7 in 2018.

Numeracy

In 2018, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 55% of year 3 students, 66% of year 5 students, and 51% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3 and 7, this result represents a decline, and for year 5, an improvement from the school's historic baseline average.

For 2018, for years 3 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving below, and for year 5, within the results relative to similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2018, 19% of year 3, 11% of year 5, and 3% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the school's historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy when in year 3, 50% of students from year 3 remained in the upper bands at year 5 in 2018, and 17% of students from year 3 remained in the upper bands at year 7 in 2018.