

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW
REPORT FOR KEITH AREA SCHOOL

Conducted in May 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 Robin Harkin, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Timothy McLeod, 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 Keith Area 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 93.6% which exceeds the DECD target of 93%.

The school is currently reviewing its Attendance Plan, and has established a benchmark target of 95% student attendance by the end of 2015.

School context

Keith Area School is a school of approximately 350 students, from Reception to Year 12. The school has an ICSEA score of 1028, and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school population includes 3 Aboriginal students, 12 Students with Disabilities, and 11% of families receiving school card.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in his first tenure, a Deputy Principal, and five Coordinators.

Three Coordinators have sub-school leadership responsibilities, with the remaining two having Reception to Year 10 curriculum leadership roles in literacy and numeracy. The operational structure comprises three year-level or sub-school teams – Early and Primary Years, Middle Years and Senior Secondary teams.

Lines of inquiry

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

Student Learning:	How well are students achieving over time?
Effective Teaching:	How well is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction? How well does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?
Effective Leadership:	How well is the school building a culture where there is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change?

How well are students achieving over time?

Analysis of the school's reading and numeracy data measured by NAPLAN indicates that, generally, for a number of the year level cohorts, there has been a decline or little lift in student achievement outcomes over the past three years compared to the seven-year averages.

Early Years Running Records data shows that the majority of students at Year 1, and slightly less than half of Year 2 students, are not achieving the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). Investigation of this data reveals inconsistencies and confusion about how Running Records testing has been conducted, and this issue is now being addressed by the school.

In reading, the achievement data trends for Years 3 and 7 students have been more consistent, and approximately 80% of those students have achieved the SEA for reading. The school's numeracy achievement data is less positive, with achievement levels for all year level cohorts declining for the past year or more.

Senior school retention from Year 11 to Year 12 is very strong, as are the Stage 1 and 2 South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) results. There has been a 100% SACE completion for the past three years and in 2014, 76% A or B results were achieved across all Stage 2 SACE subjects compared to the state average of 64%.

Senior school students affirm that the school provides them with a broad range of SACE subject offerings, and that teachers make particular efforts to ensure that they are able to achieve the SACE outcomes to which they aspire. This view was similarly echoed by members of the Governing Council, who reported a decline in the numbers of students moving away from the school at the end of Year 10, to complete SACE elsewhere.

Senior school students are able to access VET subjects and were also able to complete SACE through that pathway. It is reported that the school was able to support all but one student in the past three years, to secure a successful post-school pathway.

How well is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction?

During a recently-initiated review of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) priorities, a number of staff identified assessment for learning practices as a priority for their professional learning and development. In the course of the review, the Review Panel similarly identified inconsistencies across the school in regards to teacher practice in this area. Students, particularly those from the middle school, reported that there was variability in teacher expectations and standards. Teacher responses also indicated that for some, this aspect of their practice could be improved.

Senior school students reported that the teaching they experienced was very focused, and consistent, and that high expectations were placed on them to do well. As noted previously, the school achieves well above the state average in terms of Stage 2 SACE achievement. A number of senior school teachers are or have been

SACE moderators, and it is reported that assessment grades are very rarely moderated up or down, which indicates that assessment practices are aligned and consistent.

A challenge for the school is that a large number of those teachers are also teaching middle years subjects, where students are reporting inconsistent practices and expectations.

Teachers in the primary years section have been successfully implementing the Australian Curriculum, including moderating student work for greater clarity about what quality of work constitutes a particular A-E grading. Most use rubrics on occasions, but all agreed that more work can be done in using both student achievement data, and more clearly developed assessment tasks, to guide their teaching and make better informed judgements about student achievement.

In his presentation, the Principal identified this as a priority area. Evidence gathered by the Review Panel further confirmed the need for development of common school-wide agreements and teacher practices that will ensure more focused curriculum planning and improved student achievement.

Direction 1

Increase the number of students achieving at, or sustaining, higher levels of achievement by working with teachers to develop common agreements and practices about how to use assessment to better inform and engage student learning.

How well does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

Improved or increased intervention practices, raising teacher expectations and lifting student achievement, and a focus on differentiated teaching, were identified by teachers as possible lines of inquiry for the newly-formed Professional Learning Teams (PLTs).

The school's two Improvement Coordinators have respectively developed draft literacy and numeracy improvement plans. Both documents have a priority of early identification of students who are not at 'benchmark' so that intervention strategies can be implemented. Another significant goal in both documents is lifting the percentage of students who achieve in the higher bands in NAPLAN.

The Review Panel heard these recurring themes being expressed in its conversations with a range of groups across the school. An analysis of the various data sets (standardised reading and spelling tests, Running Records data, NAPLAN, and PAT-M) also confirms that for a number of students, learning growth is less than expected.

Sub-school coordinators expressed confidence in teacher capacities and commitment, but believe that more can be done to extend the more capable students, using differentiated teaching practices and assessment tasks, and extension work. Middle Years teachers report that they are sometimes challenged by the breadth of student capabilities in their classes. In the 2014 Perception survey data, some parents observed that more could be done by the school, to support the learning needs of their children.

Teachers expressed hope that a much greater focus on the collection and analysis of data will provide greater opportunities for them to track learners and their achievement growth, and to better inform their teaching and planning.

In 2015, the school has established a 0.4 specialist 'intervention teacher position' in the early years section of the school. An additional 30 hours of School Support Officer (SSO) time was also allocated to this initiative. A number of students have been identified using early literacy screening tools, and have been receiving intensive support. Early indications are that this intensive and much more focused intervention process is resulting in an improvement in student learning outcomes. Teachers in other sections of the school are now hopeful that this initiative could be further developed across a wider range of year levels. The challenge for the school is that the new model is resource intensive.

The draft literacy and numeracy plans have identified intervention as a key improvement strategy, and it is likely that the development, coordination and leadership of these processes will be the responsibility of the two Improvement Coordinators. There is also the challenge of supporting the learning needs of more capable

students. It is clear that leadership needs to support teachers in building their capacity to provide greater differentiation in their teaching and assessment tasks, and strengthening intervention practices, Reception to Year 10.

Direction 2

Improve student achievement outcomes by implementing effective and strategic intervention processes and differentiated teaching practices, which are informed by knowledge of student achievement data.

How well is the school building a culture where there is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change?

There is evidence that the leadership team, and particularly the Principal, has been driving a thorough audit of most aspects of the school's operations. Using the DECD Improvement and Accountability framework as a guide, the Principal has led staff through a review of the Site Improvement Plan priorities, and what is judged to be the future focus for school improvement at the school. The 'big rocks' identified as a key focus for the school moving forward were Data and Culture, as well as the DECD priorities of numeracy and literacy.

The focus on data has been pronounced. There has been an emphasis on reviewing and, where necessary, broadening the range of data collected, and a focus on more consistent and persistent analysis of the data to inform teaching and planning. Achievement benchmarks are being implemented and the school is now able to better measure student achievement growth. For example, there was some inconsistency regarding benchmarking Running Records outcomes for junior primary students which has now been reviewed and aligned with the DECD Standard (SEA). The leadership team reported that in the past year, there has been a significant shift in focus and a far greater intensity about use of data to drive improvement and inform teacher practice.

The focus on culture has encompassed the introduction of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), what is being termed a 're-invigoration of Teaching for Effective Learning Framework (TfEL)' across the school, shifting the focus from what is being taught to what is being learnt by students, beginning conversations about how to lift expectations and standards, and a review of the current school leadership structure. There is evidence that this focus has had traction with staff, because these priorities were often commented on by sub-school and curriculum leaders and teachers during the external review. The school's staff performance development processes have also been aligned to the focus on culture and data.

To support a stronger focus on numeracy, a coordinator position has been established to initiate a number of improvement projects, including a numeracy audit which will triangulate an evaluation of teacher practice against the school's numeracy achievement data. As noted previously, the literacy and numeracy coordinators have also worked with staff to develop improvement plans for both of these priority areas. The plans include whole of school expectations about lifting achievement, key strategies to be actioned, and evidence-informed improvement targets and measures.

The Review Panel noted that more needs to be achieved; in particular, greater consistency about assessment tasks and moderation, teacher planning and programming, continuing to lift standards and expectations, and greater clarity about intervention processes beyond Year 3. However, there is also evidence that the building of a culture of continuous self-review and improvement is in place.

Direction 3

Work with teachers to engage in continuous self-review of professional practice, student achievement and establishing even higher standards and expectations.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Keith Area School is continuing to develop a strong improvement agenda that focuses on building a culture of improved and informed teacher knowledge and skills that will support increased student achievement.

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

1. Increase the number of students achieving at, or sustaining, higher levels of achievement by working with teachers to develop common agreements and practices about how to use assessment to better inform and engage student learning.
2. Improve student achievement outcomes by implementing effective and strategic intervention processes and differentiated teaching practices, which are informed by knowledge of student achievement data.
3. Work with teachers to engage in continuous self-review of professional practice, student achievement and establishing even higher standards and expectations.

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



Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
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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.



Tobias O'Connor
PRINCIPAL
KEITH AREA SCHOOL



Governing Council Chairperson