

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION

**EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW**  
**REPORT FOR COONALPYN 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 Robin Harkin, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Di Jamieson, 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 Coonalpyn Primary School has verified that the school is compliant in all but one of the applicable DECD policies.

The Principal has reported that the school's Performance Development practices and policy are currently under review and it is anticipated that the school will be compliant in this area by the end of 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 89.2%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

**School context**

Coonalpyn Primary School has a current enrolment of 39 students. There has been a slight decline in enrolment numbers against the five year average of 42. The school has an ICSEA score of 1022 and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 2 Aboriginal families and 6 Students with Disabilities. Approximately half of the students reside in the township of Coonalpyn while the remainder come to school via the school bus. Generally students transition to Coomandook Area School for their secondary education.

There are 8 staff, which includes the Principal, three Teaching staff, four School Support Officers and a Groundsperson.

The school is located in the Murraylands and is a member of the Coorong Mallee Partnership.

### **Lines of inquiry**

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

<b>Student Learning:</b>	<b>How well are students achieving over time?</b>
<b>Effective Leadership:</b>	<b>How effectively has the leadership built a school culture where there is a focus on learning, school improvement and engaging with the school community?</b>
<b>Effective Teaching:</b>	<b>How effectively is leadership supporting teachers to improve learning outcomes for students?</b>

### **How well are students achieving over time?**

In the early years of schooling, reading achievement is measured by Running Records (RR) testing. In 2014 one of four students in the Year 1 cohort achieved the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) and by Year 2, 100% (4 of the 4 students tested) achieved the SEA. The school's student cohort numbers are low and variable and this makes it difficult to draw really accurate conclusions about trends over time for the RR data.

Irrespective of this, frequent tracking and benchmarking of a student's RR levels and analysis of that data is considered an important process in terms of supporting improvement. Discussions with teachers and leadership confirmed that it would be strategic for teachers to conduct Running Record tests more frequently – twice a term as a benchmark – and for teachers to upgrade their training in the taking and analysis of Running Records, to better inform their teaching of reading and reading comprehension in the first years of schooling. It is recommended that the school develops achievement benchmarks across the early years as a guide to achieving the SEA for Running Records.

The 2014 reading and numeracy achievement results, as measured by NAPLAN, showed that all Year 3 students (3 of 3 tested), most Year 5 students (4 of 6 tested), and all Year 7 students (3 of 3 tested) achieved the SEA in both reading and numeracy. The school's 2014 NAPLAN data indicates an improvement in school performance compared to previous years.

An analysis of the school-generated data sets – the Early Literacy Test, SA Spelling Test and the Performance Achievement Test (PAT) for reading comprehension and mathematics – confirms that most students are progressing at or above age appropriate rates in most areas of their literacy and numeracy learning. For example, 64% or 7 of the 11 early years students (Reception to Year 2), achieved at or above their age appropriate levels in the Early Literacy Test, and in PAT-Maths, 10 of the 17 upper primary students (59%) and 11 of the 14 lower primary students (79%) were at or above the Australian benchmark for this standardised test. This progression of achievement assumes the same group of students progressing through school.

In comparison, the percentages of students for these two cohort groups, who achieved at or above the Australian benchmark in the PAT-Reading test, were significantly lower – 41% for the upper primary cohort and 40% for the lower primary group of students.

While the various 2014 data sets generally indicate that student achievement outcomes are lifting across the school, the PAT-Reading data indicates that there needs to be a particular focus on lifting reading comprehension skills for a number of students across all year levels in the school.

### **Direction 1**

**Schedule all teaching staff to undertake training in the taking, and analysis, of Running Records, and establish a schedule for regular collection and tracking of RR data.**

### **Direction 2**

**Increase students' levels of comprehension skills with a stronger focus on teaching inference, making connections and visualisation skills. Build on the Coonalpyn 2015 Skills Sequence document, to develop a ready checklist for year level appropriate skill sets and regularly review and evaluate student progress.**

### **How effectively has the leadership built a school culture where there is a focus on learning, school improvement and engaging with the school community?**

The overwhelming feedback from staff, students and the Governing Council is that the past eighteen months of leadership has focused on, and been successful in, transforming the school culture, to a greater focus on consultation and collaboration in a community-oriented school. In 2014, the leadership focus was on student well-being and on building connections with community, while this year, it is evident that the major focus has shifted to improving student achievement.

Teachers reported that the changed leadership style has engendered greater levels of openness and collaboration and that, in general, morale has lifted. Support Staff reported that their work was now valued more highly and that they were included in professional development opportunities. The Review Panel was informed that two students with hearing loss have now been identified and are receiving significant system funding support, which in turn is reflected in intensive and well planned learning support programs provided by members of the SSO team.

The School Improvement Plan (SIP) has been reviewed and a new plan implemented this year. The Governing Council and staff members report that development of the new SIP was a collaborative process, and consequently, there is strong commitment from all quarters to ensuring that the purposes and intent of the plan are realised. A preface to the SIP describes it as a plan that identifies the ways the school will "move forward to improve the quality of teaching and to use data to enable every student... to reach their potential in numeracy and literacy".

It was evident that the SIP priorities and strategies underpin an improvement agenda that is focusing on improving student outcomes, building a school culture that is forward-looking and optimistic, and increasing community confidence in the school.

An early leadership initiative was to review the processes and practices of managing student behaviour. Previously, there were a high number of recorded exits from classrooms and send-homes. It was reported that the impact of this was two-fold – increased community concern and loss of confidence, and a view that some students were pro-actively opting out. The focus now is putting the onus on students to self-manage and regulate their own behaviour, and for teachers to be pre-emptive in supporting student behaviour.

The older students are challenged to review their own behaviour against the school's values, and then to develop one or more goals which are openly displayed in the classroom. At the end of each day, students are required to reflect on how successful they have been in achieving their personal goal(s). It is reported that the number of behaviour incidents has reduced significantly. Students report that both yard and classroom environments have greatly improved and that they have been helped to "think differently in their head... and to walk away if they are annoyed".

The collection of key data sets is now scheduled and documented in a whole-school agreement. Teachers claim that there has been a marked increase in the analysis and use of data to inform teacher practice and to track student achievement, although it was confirmed by the Principal that the school is at a developmental stage in terms of this improvement process. The Review Panel would agree with this assessment.

The Principal reported that staff performance development processes are more rigorous. Teachers affirmed that they now have regular performance meetings and that they are encouraged to reflect on how their current practices are informed by data, and how aligned they are to the school priorities and achievement targets, and to the Australian Professional Standards.

At the time of the review, the only whole-school curriculum agreement in place was the schedule for data collection. The Principal advised that it is planned to document whole school agreements about delivery of literacy and numeracy, which will be aligned to the current DECD directions. The Review Panel notes that this needs to be an imperative for the school, but also acknowledges that much has been achieved in the past eighteen months.

### **Direction 3**

**Work with staff to develop whole-school agreements about the implementation of high quality literacy and numeracy practices which will continue the focus on raising student outcomes.**

#### **How effectively is leadership supporting teachers to improve learning outcomes for students?**

A major intent of the School Improvement Plan is to support teachers and ancillary staff to improve the quality and rigour of student learning. Leadership has identified a number of improvement strategies to achieve this: the use of data to inform practice, the implementation of a positive growth mindset agenda, and a stronger focus on formative assessment practices, as part of the school's continuing implementation of the Australian Curriculum and the Numeracy Plus agenda.

The Review Panel heard that there is greater clarity about why and what data will be collected. The focus now is about developing teacher capacity in analysing the data to identify the specific trends and areas of required focus which will help inform their practice and identify when and what intervention needs to occur. A continuing conversation for the school is about how to use data and benchmarking to lift expectations and rigour.

The school is now collecting Performance Achievement Test (PAT) data for reading and mathematics. These standardised tests have established Australian Mean Scores for each year level of schooling, against which a particular student's achievement can be ranked. NAPLAN data is highly reliable but by nature is lag time data – the PAT tests provide reliable 'at time' judgements of student progress, and will be useful in monitoring improvement, particularly in furthering the focus on lifting the number of students achieving at higher levels.

The implementation of the positive growth mindset agenda has a range of potential improvement outcomes. It has already been reported by various members of the school community that there has been a significant shift in the culture of the school in terms of positive relationships, student interactions, and community confidence. From conversations with leadership and staff it is becoming apparent that not only student dispositions about learning and achievement are changing but so are those of teachers and support staff. At the staff meeting the Review Panel invited teachers to talk about what they knew of a cross-section of their students – both from a learning and personal point of view. The teachers reported that they were now more inclined to think about their students from a much broader perspective, and to think in terms of what they were capable of achieving, rather than not.

The goal of formative assessment is to continually monitor student learning and provide ongoing and effective feedback to help students to identify their strengths and areas which need greater focus. When questioned, students reported that they judged how they were improving from their test results (for example their Maths Mental checks) or if the work seemed to be getting easier for them. A check of student work books in the senior class showed that teacher comments were still general in nature rather than more directive about what needed to be done to lift the level of their work. However, students also reported that teachers generally did break the learning down into easy to follow chunks and that scaffolds such as rubrics were provided by their teachers. They also reported that some units of work commenced with a pre-test to determine what they already knew. The Review Panel formed a view that formative

assessment processes are being adopted and developed in the school, predominately in the senior classroom.

In 2014 the school began to develop stronger links with other nearby small schools. The initial intention was to enhance the school's excursion program but it became apparent that this initiative provided opportunities for teachers to build professional links beyond their own local context. The Review Panel encourages the school to continue to build on these opportunities for continued professional growth.

**Direction 4**

**Continue the focus on building the capacity of teachers to use formative assessment processes to support and inform students about their learning.**

**Direction 5**

**Use data to identify benchmarks that determine when specific interventions will occur that will support improved learner capacity and outcomes.**

## OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Coonalpyn Primary School is tracking well. There is evidence of a renewed focus on effective school leadership and improving learner outcomes.

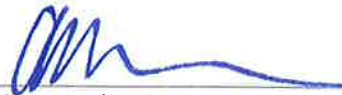
The Principal will work with the Education Director to implement the following Directions:

1. Schedule all teaching staff to undertake training in the taking, and analysis, of Running Records, and establish a schedule for regular collection and tracking of RR data.
2. Increase students' levels of comprehension skills with a stronger focus on teaching inference, making connections and visualisation skills. Build on the Coonalpyn 2015 Skills Sequence document, to develop a ready checklist for year level appropriate skill sets and regularly review and evaluate student progress.
3. Work with staff to develop whole-school agreements about the implementation of high quality literacy and numeracy practices which will continue the focus on raising student outcomes.
4. Continue the focus on building the capacity of teachers to use formative assessment processes to support and inform students about their learning.
5. Use data to identify benchmarks that determine when specific interventions will occur that will support improved learner capacity and outcomes.

Based on the school's current performance, Coonalpyn 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.



Margret Elvey  
PRINCIPAL  
COONALPYN PRIMARY SCHOOL



Governing Council Chairperson