

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION

## EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

### DARLINGTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in August 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 Helen Tunney, 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 Darlington Primary School has verified that the school is compliant in nearly all applicable DECD policies.

The Principal has verified that the school is working towards being compliant in the following policies:

- Development of a Cyber Bullying policy.
- Development of an ICTs Security policy for students.

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 86.9%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

### **School context**

Darlington Primary School has a current enrolment of approximately 320 students. Enrolments have been rising over time and have been particularly impacted by the establishment of five Intensive English Language (IEL) classes in 2012. The school has an ICSEA score of 933, and is classified as Category 3 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 20% Aboriginal students, 10% Students with Disabilities, 3% of Students in Care, 47% of students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) and approximately 40% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal, Deputy Principal, Coordinator of Pedagogy and Curriculum Development, and a leader with responsibility for the Intensive English Language program.

The Principal commenced her tenure in 2013.

The school's operational structure comprises three year level teams: Early Years, Middle Primary Years, and Upper Primary Years. The Intensive English Language classes are integrated across the three year level groups.

### 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 leadership developed a strategic and evidence-informed focus on school improvement?</b>
<b>Effective Teaching:</b>	<b>How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?</b>

### How well are students achieving over time?

In the early years, reading is monitored against Running Records. In 2014, 48% of Year 1 and 65% of Year 2 students achieved the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) or above. Both year level results were an increase against the previous three year averages of 40% for Year 1 and 44% for Year 2.

More recent Running Records data was tabled during the External Review, and this indicated that the school is now achieving stronger growth in early years reading outcomes from 2014 to 2015.

There is a school agreement that teachers assess students twice each term using Running Records. The Review Panel noted that an unintended consequence of this policy may indicate that some students are only progressing two reading levels each term, which is insufficient progress to achieve the SEA at Years 1 and 2.

#### Direction 1

**Work with Early Years teachers to review how they are using Running Records testing to benchmark and track student progress towards the Standard of Educational Achievement for reading in the first three years of schooling.**

In 2014, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 50% of Year 3 students, 42% of Year 5 students and 55% of Year 7 students, achieved the SEA. Between 2012 and 2014, the trend for Years 3, 5 and 7 has been downwards. It should be noted that during this period the school data also includes students enrolled in the Intensive English Language Classes (IELC) co-located at the school.

In relation to students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands, 22% were in Year 3, 13% were in Year 5 and 6% were in Year 7. Between 2012 and 2014, the trend for Years 3 and 7 has been downwards, while the trend for Year 5 has been steady.

For those students who achieved in the upper bands at Year 3 in previous years, only a small percentage of students remained in the upper bands at Year 7, in 2014.

Similar achievement outcomes were recorded for NAPLAN numeracy: 50% of Year 3 students, 42% of Year 5 students and 58% of Year 7 students, achieved the SEA in 2014. The number of students achieving in the top two NAPLAN bands was less than for reading.

A number of students from the Intensive English Language classes do not participate in NAPLAN annually, which does have an impact on the school's overall results.

Consequently, the school has been cross-referencing student achievement data using a variety of other data sets, including the Performance Assessment Tests (PAT) for reading and numeracy. PAT-R and PAT-M testing provides 'on-time' data compared to NAPLAN, and the school has been tracking various year level

and special cohort groups, for example IEL students, and has identified positive growth from 2012 to 2014, in most literacy areas, and in numeracy.

### How effectively has leadership developed a strategic and evidence-informed focus on improvement?

In the presentation to the Review Panel, the Principal described the school's improvement journey from her appointment in 2013. This work has focused on building a culture that is characterised by high quality pedagogy, an aligned professional learning agenda and collaborative, highly evidence-based leadership. The agenda has been framed partly in response to the Principal's own analysis of the developmental needs of the school, and by the key recommendations of an SSI Diagnostic School Review conducted in 2011.

The Diagnostic Review recommended an urgent review of a number of practices, including development of consistent, whole school approaches to teaching and learning pedagogy and curriculum, through high quality professional learning, performance development, self-review, data management, and collaborative decision-making processes.

During the course of the External Review, the panel formed a judgement that high quality and very effective instructional leadership practices are now in place.

The Review Panel consistently observed evidence of a leadership culture that is characterised by high levels of genuine consultation, collaboration, pace and energy, and strategic, informed practice, which is acknowledged by all sections of the school: community, students and staff.

The whole-of-school emphasis on improving pedagogy is driven by a focus on developing expert learners and expert teaching. This work is aligned to the DECD Teaching for Effective Learning framework (TfEL). Central to this work has been the development of a consistent and persistent professional learning program and establishment of effective Professional Learning Teams (PLTs). It is reported by staff and leadership members that the Principal always ensures that professional learning time has precedence over other school leadership and management matters.

The processes used to develop the whole-school agreement and staff uptake of the expert learner agenda typifies the effective instructional leadership model that is in place. The leader takes care to acknowledge and value current practices, while at the same time framing collective inquiry approaches in terms of how the current research describes effective, consistent and informed practice. Any change process is informed by clear evidence and current educational research.

Whilst staff and parents observed that change processes are fast-paced and characterised by intensity, purposefulness and energy, it is also reported that the leadership style is respectful, collaborative and ensures that stakeholders are not 'left behind'.

The expert learner agenda has been skilfully, strategically and incrementally developed, and is now embedded in the culture of the school, evidenced by the language used by leaders, teachers, support staff, students and parents. For example, students spoke about "doing lots of learning", and that "they did lots of learning – not work – because learning is never finished".

Staff professional learning is underpinned by well-developed and coherent performance development processes. Staff report that performance development is clearly aligned to the school's improvement priorities, but is also tailored to their individual professional needs. Staff are supported and encouraged to identify and build those personal professional skills and capacities which will also progress the school's agenda. As an example, an upper years' teacher has been supported to participate in a PLC of teachers from the nearby feeder high school. This work has expanded her own professional growth, but has also helped foster better transition processes for students, particularly in terms of their experiences of more consistent teaching practices leading into junior secondary.

A key recommendation from the 2011 Diagnostic Review, was that the school develop effective data collection practices. Much work has been done in this area, in terms of developing shared agreements and practices about collection, analysis and use of data to inform improvement and teaching.

The Review Panel was provided with a range of data sets and analyses of that data, which provided evidence of a strong focus on self-review and continuous improvement. Of interest is work that has been done in matching student achievement to attendance, and evaluating the significant impact that absence from school has on a student's learning. The practice of tracking specific cohorts could be extended – for example, tracking higher achieving students and their achievement data over time, and evaluating what can be done to continually lift their achievement levels.

In the context of the school's overall improvement agenda, the work on the data initiative is still being fully worked through, and is an area for continued growth and refinement. Significant data is collected and aggregated, and much of this work is currently done by leadership and, particularly, the Curriculum Development Coordinator.

The fundamental planning and organisational constructs are in place. The continuing work is to review and come to an agreement about what data sets will be collected and used, and why, and then a decision made as to how to most effectively manage the data so that both leadership and teachers can best use it to inform practice, and measure and track learner improvement.

A staff member described the school leadership as akin to that of a successful conductor of a large orchestra. This requires the skills and knowledge to coach and fine-tune the capacities and practices of various groups within the school, while at the same time, having the vision and passion to orchestrate the entire performance. In terms of the evidence that was presented at many levels across the school, the Review Panel had to concur with this analogy.

## **Direction 2**

**Finalise the decision on what data will be collected and when, a data schedule, and what software option will be used to collate and aggregate the data, and then work with staff to build their data literacy skills, so that data can better inform teacher practice and the school improvement agenda.**

### **How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?**

Much work has been done to ensure that improving student learning is the major focus of teacher work, and that the pre-conditions for effective learning are in place. The Review Panel observed class areas where students were invariably on task and engaged in their learning. Students were able to talk confidently about their learning, and the intention of the learning task. Success criteria are prominently displayed in classrooms, and students were able to articulate how they used the success criteria to judge and moderate how well they are engaging in the learning task.

Leadership has worked collaboratively with staff to establish a whole school commitment to implementing the expert learner/expert teaching model, which aligns with Domain 3 of the DECD Teaching for Effective Learning framework (TfEL).

The research is clear that effective learning occurs when there is a strong focus on consistency, common agreements and shared expectations. This was an early focus of professional learning and evaluation of practices.

The Review Panel saw and heard evidence of consistent practices across the school in a range of contexts including: leadership behaviour, teacher practice, singularly similar classroom environments and learner scaffolds, and high expectations that learner achievement could improve.

In considering the question “Do we believe, deeply, that all children can learn?” professional learning has focused on both unpacking what the literature says, and evaluating current practices across the school.

The pedagogy that has been developed and implemented at Darlington Primary School is characterised by a number of practices: explicit teaching and a focus on differentiation, effective use of feedback, using assessment and data to inform teacher practice and student learning, and bringing increased rigour and stretch to the learning.

Hattie's research makes clear that effective and authentic feedback that informs and clarifies for students how well they are learning, will have a significant positive impact on increasing achievement. The Review Panel saw evidence of effective written feedback in student workbooks, and in discussions with students, heard that they identified written and verbal feedback from teachers as being one of the key indicators of how well they were learning, and what they could do to improve.

The explicit teaching model ('I Do, We Do, You Do') that has been implemented, is a gradual release of responsibility model. New learning is explicitly taught by the teacher (I Do), the new learning is practised and consolidated collaboratively (We Do), and students are then challenged to further develop their competencies and stretch their learning (You Do). It is at the 'You Do' stage that teachers can differentiate the learning by layering the learning tasks to match the capacities and readiness of the learner to engage. This is an opportunity for greater rigour to be introduced, for students with needs to be supported, and for higher achieving students to be challenged and stretched in their learning.

Differentiated teaching practices are challenging and difficult to implement really effectively, and often require consistent and sustained professional learning support and development for teachers. The Review Panel generally saw evidence of effective teacher practice across the school. Leadership acknowledges that is an area for continuing professional development and learning, and the Review Panel would concur with this judgement.

A key indicator of successful differentiation practices is what the student achievement data is saying. It is noted that there has been growth over time in key data sets, however, as yet, there has been no appreciable lift in the numbers of students achieving in the upper bounds. The Review Panel suspects that there is still a 'lag' in terms of what the data is saying, compared to the quality of teacher practice and focus on expert learning that was observed during the review process. Leadership will need to monitor this.

### **Direction 3**

**Continue to work with teachers to focus on bringing even greater rigour to the learning process and, in particular, identify strategies, for example, personal goal setting, to focus on stretching and challenging more able students to achieve at higher levels.**

Effective learning occurs when students are tuned into the teaching. As part of the expert teaching agenda, there has been a focus on agreed practices about intentionality, that is, of always informing students of the purpose of the new learning, and then regularly checking on how effectively that learning has occurred.

The Review Panel heard evidence from leadership, students and teachers, that this is an embedded practice across the school.

In fact, there was evidence, from discussions with leaders, staff and students, of the consistency of the professional learning agendas of the PLCs and Professional Development processes, evaluation of policies and procedures, and the collaborative and evidence-based decision-making processes that underpinned their development. It is clear that the leader has built a school culture where people are consistently challenged to review and refine their practice and where improving student learning and achievement is always the primary focus of teacher work.

## OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Darlington Primary School is tracking very well. There is evidence of focused leadership of a highly coherent and aligned improvement agenda, sustained and consistent professional learning and development practices, and a significant focus on student learning.

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

1. Work with Early Years teachers to review how they are using Running Records testing to benchmark and track student progress towards the Standard of Educational Achievement for reading in the first three years of schooling.
2. Finalise the decision on what data will be collected and when, a data schedule, and what software option will be used to collate and aggregate the data, and then work with staff to build their data literacy skills, so that data can better inform teacher practice and the school improvement agenda.
3. Continue to work with teachers to focus on bringing even greater rigour to the learning process and, in particular, identify strategies, for example, personal goal setting, to focus on stretching and challenging more able students to achieve at higher levels.

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



Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL  
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.

Kathryn Entwistle  
PRINCIPAL  
DARLINGTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson