

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

## REPORT FOR RAPID BAY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in October 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 Tony Sullivan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Angela Falkenberg, 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 Rapid Bay Primary 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 93.1%, which is above the DECD target of 93%.

### **School context**

Rapid Bay Primary School is a small rural school on the Fleurieu Peninsula, 90km south of Adelaide. The school serves the communities of Delamere, Cape Jervis, Parawa, Second Valley and Rapid Bay. Students work and play in a safe, family-like environment. It has an enrolment of approximately 33 students, catering for students from Reception to Year 7.

The school has an ICSEA score of 1035, and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 9% (3) Students with a Disability, and approximately 16% (5 students) are eligible for School Card assistance.

The school operates with two classrooms, each with no more than 17 students. The school is physically well-resourced. The Reception to Year 3 class is taught by a teacher in her second year at the school. The Year 4 to 7 class is taught by two teachers, one of whom has been at the school for approximately 20 years.

The two main classrooms are linked with a covered play, lunch shed and assembly area. A third classroom is used for Indonesian and Music.

Only one student lives in the Rapid Bay township with the remaining students travelling to school each day by bus.

Information and communication technologies remain problematic for the school. Bandwidth is an issue for the school and mobile phone access is limited due to the school's location in the valley.

A playgroup operates at the school one morning per week.

The school operates under the leadership of a Principal who is in his first year of tenure at the school. The school is well-supported by the Governing Council and parent community.



Staff professional learning has occurred with the Australian Curriculum (AC) with some initial self-reflection of teaching practices aligned to the Teaching for Effective Learning Framework (TfEL). The Principal viewed his educational leader role as being important to the improvement agenda documented for the school in the Site Improvement Plan (SIP). As a consequence, each teacher has set individual professional goals, developed a Performance and Development Plan, and considered individual learning goals for each of the students.

The Principal described the students as having “high levels of resilience” and a capacity to achieve more educationally and personally. The Principal saw the need to further empower students in their learning through clear and purposeful goal-setting and differentiating the learning to support the achievement of these individual goals. To achieve this outcome, the Principal has set a course to encourage teacher professional learning in the areas of pedagogical practice and curriculum knowledge.

As a result of the above data and the Principal’s presentation, the Review Panel pursued the following Line of Inquiry.

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

The school currently has two multi-age classes in operation after three terms of working predominantly with three smaller classes. The current structure includes a Reception to Year 3 class and a Year 4 to 7 class combination, with approximately 17 students in each class. Whilst the multi-age classes require teachers to understand the broader curriculum expectations across these year levels, there exists an opportunity to plan and cater for the learning and personal growth of each student in the classroom context through differentiation.

There was evidence presented to the Review Panel that the staff are working with other professionals to develop their knowledge and understanding of the Australian Curriculum, particularly in literacy and numeracy. This work was reflected in cited documentation inclusive of the Site Improvement Plan, curriculum scope and sequences, and staff Individual Performance and Development Plans. The teachers had also identified and documented aspects for their own professional development, such as information and communication technologies (ICT) and higher-order thinking strategies.

Documented evidence of the scope of planning undertaken by each teacher in delivering a comprehensive numeracy program across the school was presented. Documentation provided by the teachers outlined the coverage of content for each year level through each school term. There was documented evidence that the teachers planned with the knowledge of the curriculum structure, building on what comes before/after in the learning sequence for numeracy. The inclusion of AC proficiencies of fluency, reasoning, understanding and problem-solving, evident in school resource documentation, would further enhance planning beyond curriculum content.

There was evidence presented that showed a level of planning for content coverage in numeracy for each student. There was also documented evidence of goal-setting undertaken by the teachers with the students through individual conferencing each Term. These conferences were confirmed through discussion with both teachers and students. The goals are relatively broad and would better serve the students if they were documented for them and shared with parents, who can support their accomplishment. Personalised and explicit achievement targets against the SEA would further enhance this process of goal-setting and reflection with students. One teacher reflected: “These conferences have made me accountable to them (students).”

### **Direction 2**

**Challenge and engage students further by establishing learning achievement targets against the SEA, and differentiate teaching approaches for each student.**

Professional discussions based on the Teaching for Effective Learning Framework (TfEL) have commenced with the staff team and, individually, with the Principal. Personal goals are set by staff and are documented in their Performance and Development Plans. The Principal meets with the staff individually to discuss these plans and provides them with written feedback related to their professional performance.

Teaching staff have individually reflected on their professional practice as it relates to the effective teaching pedagogies outlined in TfEL. These teaching practices have been mapped at the individual level through self-reflection, as it relates to strengths and areas for further development. The Review Panel noted the common area for improvement in teaching practice across the school, as indicated in the documentation, relates to personalising and connecting learning to students' lives and aspirations.

Other significant perception data presented to the Review Panel included collated student survey information from students in Years 3 to 7. These data sets included: learner engagement survey, powerful learner survey and student opinion survey. The school now has the capacity to cross-reference this information with performance of year-level groups, individual student and teacher self-reflections, to better connect the teaching practices that will best support the students at Rapid Bay Primary School.

Observations in classrooms revealed further opportunities for teachers to present learning scaffolds for students, to encourage greater independence in their learning. Visible scaffolds such as word walls, questions to provoke deeper thinking, numeracy vocabulary and structures for various writing genres would be ideal for the learners at the school.

There was evidence that teaching staff prepare Learning Profiles for each student at the school. These profiles contain useful information about each student's learning progress and goals in literacy and numeracy. These profiles did not describe evidence of the learner's individual background, interests, skills or motivations that could be used in engaging them further in their learning. Documenting and applying such personal knowledge of each learner presents the possibility of engaging students more deeply, or in more complex ways, with their learning. This perception data will serve to build a strengths-based approach to learning and further develop the strategies to personalise learning for every student.

### **Direction 3**

**Engage and motivate students in their learning by personalising the learning for every student and building greater learning independence.**

The school collected a range of data associated with student learning and is using this data to plan and program based on the analysis of the data. The collection of data is scheduled over the year and was evidenced in the Site Planning document. A 'data picture' of student performance was presented to the Review Panel. Individual growth is now being tracked from year to year against the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) for each year level. This is inclusive of the A to E grades assigned by teachers in the mid and end of year reports to parents.

It was verified that the available data is also used to regularly monitor and report progress as an aspect of ongoing school self-review. The documented self-review cycle for monitoring progress was provided to the Review Panel. Parents verified a high level of trust in the school, teachers and the Principal. Regular reporting on school progress is provided by the Principal to the Governing Council. The council members cited the Principal's presentation of the learner survey data as an example of keeping them well-informed of school initiatives to improve the educational outcomes for students.

Parents confirmed the value of the oral and written reports to parents. The reports were verified as referencing student achievement and progress against the standards outlined in the AC. The comments made explicit reference to the knowledge and skills evident through student work and class-based assessments. This was verified in report samples provided to the Review Panel. The students confirmed that the purpose of the reports was to "tell parents how we are going."

Parents also commented about the availability of teachers and the notes sent home via the communication books, as aspects they appreciated. Some parents commented about a level of inconsistency, at times, in

what is communicated through 'face to face' interviews and later in written reports. They expressed a level of frustration at not being able to support and intervene where necessary when concerns were raised later in the year. Parents expressed a desire to be contacted by teachers in a personal and proactive way, in relation to their child's learning or personal progress, outside of the designated reporting process.

#### **Direction 4**

**Use all available data to plan, track, monitor and report consistently on individual student growth over time and against the DECD standards.**

Students, parents and staff all confirmed that the learning environment is a "safe and happy" place to learn. The Principal commented: "It is a pleasure to work with these students – we are very lucky!" This was further emphasised through the following teacher comment: "I don't think the kids realise how good they are."

The primary class students are presented with learning contracts in reading and spelling established each term. Students are provided with a range of activities to choose from related to the above two aspects of literacy. These were evidenced in documentation in teacher planning folders and student learning folders. Most of the negotiated goals relate to the completion of the work contracts during the term, rather than a qualitative approach, which challenges students to achieve their best against a year level standard, or modified personal best.

The older students moved through well-rehearsed classroom routines with their learning contracts and were motivated to complete the work required, which was signed-off by the teacher. The contract requirements were changed each term, but the routines remained constant, as one parent responded: "The activities range in difficulty but the rhythm stays the same."

The use of rubrics to define the work standards expected from each year level as it related to a learning concept, or integrated unit of work, was relatively limited. One teacher commented: "I don't use rubrics myself because I'm with the students a lot of the time." The documented rubrics that were evident during the review were more in the vein of 'work required'. For example, these rubrics outlined requirements for page limits, references, completion dates, choice for presentation style, e.g. movie, diorama, etc.

Students confirmed that the high achievers among them were challenged with work at a higher year level. The students commented positively about the 'Book of Truth', a system used by one teacher to provide personalised formative assessment to students in an ongoing way. The teacher did indicate that its use had lapsed throughout 2015 and that they would work towards reintroducing the concept.

Students indicated that the teachers explained what was required from them at the start of lessons, e.g. Year 4 students might write less than the Year 6 students, or present work in a different way, e.g. wedge-tail eagle movie rather than a written piece. A classroom observation revealed one teacher attempting to record, in written form, the learning intentions for a lesson to create clarity for students. Whilst the examples were broad, it highlighted the beginning of effective teaching practice to make learning clear for all students.

The Principal, teachers and parents indicated, through meetings, that there was 'more potential to stretch' students in their learning. Parents commented that they got to see the exemplars of their children's learning in the student learning profile folders, but "we never know if the work has been marked, feedback given, or they have been challenged to improve." Teachers acknowledged that it is important to work on making expectations clear for the students and to provide them with ongoing formative assessment to help them understand how to improve their learning.

#### **Direction 5**

**Raise student achievement by making the learning intentions and success criteria accessible and clear for all learners in the multi-age classes, and encourage student progress through a culture of high expectation.**

### OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Rapid Bay Primary School is performing well. The school has effective leadership that is providing strategic direction and a school community that is supportive and encouraging. Learning data is collected and analysed to inform decisions for planning and intervention. The teaching staff engage with professional learning and deliver the learning program aligned to the Australian Curriculum.

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

1. Improve reading and numeracy achievement, growth and retention in upper bands across the school through the consistent implementation of agreed, effective and evidence-based pedagogical approaches.
2. Challenge and engage students further by establishing learning achievement targets against the SEA, and differentiate teaching approaches for each student.
3. Engage and motivate students in their learning by personalising the learning for every student and building greater learning independence.
4. Use all available data to plan, track, monitor and report consistently on individual student growth over time and against the DECD standards.
5. Raise student achievement by making the learning intentions and success criteria accessible and clear for all learners in the multi-age classes, and encourage student progress through a culture of high expectation.

Based on the school's current performance, Rapid Bay 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.

Mark Shadiac  
PRINCIPAL  
RAPID BAY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson