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

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

# REPORT FOR COORARA PRIMARY SCHOOL
Conducted in March 2016

**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 framework underpinning the External School 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 of the External School Review 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.*

*The support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community is acknowledged. 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 External School Review was conducted by Tony Sullivan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Lee Sansom, Review Principal.

## Policy compliance

*The External School Review process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are adhered to and implemented.*

The Principal of Coorara 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 documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy.  The school attendance rate for 2015 was 91.4%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

## School context

Coorara Primary School has an enrolment of 197 students, and is located in Morphett Vale, a southern suburb of Adelaide, 26km from the Adelaide GPO.

The school population is made up of approximately 9% (17) of students who identify as Aboriginal, 15% (23) Students with Disabilities, 2% (3) students from non-English speaking backgrounds, 3 students under the Guardianship of the Minister, and 54% (98) students eligible for School Card assistance.

The community is diverse in terms of socio-economic backgrounds. The school is classified as Category 4 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage, and has an ICSEA score of 950.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in her fourth year of tenure and a Deputy Principal in her third year of tenure at the school.

The school has a Primary Special Options class supporting 12 students identified with special needs.

## School Performance Overview

*The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).*

**Reading**

In the early years, reading is monitored against Running Records. In 2015, 79% of Year 1 and 68% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).  Year 1 and 2 results are higher than the school's historic baseline average.

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 79% of Year 3 students, 77% of Year 5 students and 70% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA.  For Years 3 and 5, this result represents an improvement compared to the school's historic baseline average.

From 2013 to 2015, there are no discernible trend patterns evident for any of the year levels.

For 2015, in Years 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the average results of similar students across the DECD system.

In 2015 NAPLAN Reading, 21% of Year 3, 35% of Year 5, and 19% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two bands.

Of the six Year 3 students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading in 2011, taking

into account arrivals and departures, 4 remained in the upper bands in Year 7 in 2015. This represents an improvement in performance compared to the school's historic baseline average.

**Numeracy**

In 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 50% of Year 3 students, 71% of Year 5 students and 70% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Year 5, this result represents an improvement compared to the school's historic baseline average.

For 2015 Year 5 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the average results of similar students across the DECD system. At Year 3, the school is achieving below the average results of similar students across the DECD system. This Year 3 pattern has been consistent for the past 3 years.

In 2015 NAPLAN Numeracy, 8% of Year 3, 12% of Year 5, and 4% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two bands. For Year 3, this result is lower than the school's historic baseline average.

Of the three Year 3 students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy in 2011, taking into account arrivals and departures, 1 student remained in the upper bands in Year 7 in 2015. This latest result represents little or no change in performance compared to the school's historic baseline average.

The Leadership Team described the key cultural changes that had occurred at the school over the past four years. These changes were described as being in key areas such as: using data to guide decisions, maintaining a focus on learning for all, maintaining high expectations of learners, knowing the students well, building positive 'mindsets', fostering student voice, and building pedagogical improvements at Coorara Primary School.

The Leadership Team also described the many structural improvements implemented to support the cultural change. These aspects included: staff professional learning, common agreements in reading, shared accountability for improvement, tracking and monitoring of student learning, literacy data chats, sharing of effective practice, establishment of a 'data wall', facilitating learning walks, and staff performance and development.

## Lines of Inquiry

As a result of the above data and the Leadership Team's presentation, the Review Panel explored the following two Lines of Inquiry:

**Student Learning:** **To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning and how do you know?**

**Effective Teaching:** **How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?**

**School Community Partnerships:** **How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and throughout the school?**

## To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning and how do you know?

The Principal and staff have worked consistently over time to raise the expectations for student achievement and growth. This is evident in the reading data, where there has been a gradual increase in achievement against the SEA over time and against the school's historic average. Reading was verified as a school focus in the Site Improvement Plan (SIP) over many years. The Principal and staff used various relevant DECD and school-based data sets to identify, track, monitor and develop strategies to support reading improvement over time.

It was evident through staff conversations and documentation that staff engage in professional learning that leads to agreed professional practices being implemented across the school with a level of consistency. The documented literacy agreement that describes the curriculum expectations and agreed pedagogical approach (gradual release of responsibility) to be used was verified through classroom visits as being consistently implemented in all classes visited.

Consistent pedagogical practices have been supported through effective performance and development processes implemented by the school Leadership Team. Documented evidence of regular performance feedback was sighted during the review. Learning walks were a feature of teacher professional learning and peer accountability. These planned walks were verified as a key strategy to de-privatise classes, share practice and develop consistency in approaches; for example, Café 5 (reading), WALT (We Are Learning To…), WILF (What I'm Looking For…) and TIB (This Is Because…). These key aspects were verified through staff and student conversations, documentation and class visits.

A common learning 'disposition' evident across the school was the concept of the 'Learning Pit'. Students and staff described what this meant in terms of student responsibility when learning became challenging. Posters in all classes and other learning spaces were used as visual cues to conceptualise this disposition for students in their approach to learning, particularly when being challenged. The Principal expressed a view that the 'Learning Pit' applied equally to staff in modelling the learning process to students. Evidence was presented through staff conversations, documentation and class visits that the teaching staff had begun to take 'professional risks' to further improve their pedagogical practice.

Documented evidence confirmed staff engagement with the Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) framework and 'Compass' to further develop evidence-based teaching practices. There was evidence presented through staff and student conversations that a range of classroom strategies had been employed to gather student feedback about their learning experiences. The strategies sighted included: traffic lights/thumbs up/down (level of understanding), '3 Stars and a Wish', Velcro hands, wait time (thinking time), and student survey information reported directly back to the teacher.

Students and staff verified that teachers' practices had changed as a result of professional learning, feedback provided through student surveys and 'learning walks'. Recounted evidence included: differentiation was provided in groups as a result of assessment information; feedback 'for' learning had increased over time; student self-reflection was undertaken at the end of some lessons; tasks were broken down into smaller 'steps'; and, a more hands-on approach had been used in learning maths.

Students commented that learning was often organised in year-level groups based on curriculum content. They acknowledged that some teachers used 'warm-ups' for learning and 'checked for student understanding'. They commented that more opportunities to negotiate learning in cross-curriculum subjects (for example, geography) would engage them further. Students spoke about the use of ICT (for example, iPads) as rewards for successful learning rather than tools to further engage them in learning.

It was evident through staff and student conversations that a successful start has been made in eliciting, valuing and responding to student voice in learning within classrooms. There was not strong evidence from the students about how this genuinely connected them to their learning at this point. Students were aware of the different approaches used in classes, but did not yet have the meta-language in thinking about their learning to clearly articulate feedback to teachers about the effectiveness of teaching approaches used with them. One teacher summed this up succinctly: "I think it's a matter of getting past the need for students to tell us what they think we want to hear."


**Direction 1**
**Engage and challenge all students in their learning through building the capacity of teachers to design learning based on authentic student feedback.**

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

There was corroborated evidence to verify staff engagement with professional learning in key areas identified in the Site Improvement Pan (SIP), particularly in Reading (over time), Numeracy (most recently), and in developing the dispositions needed to be a successful learner at Coorara Primary School. There was documented evidence to support the school's focus on improving teaching practices in a consistent way across the school to complement the Australian Curriculum agreements reached by the staff.

The teaching staff engage with professional learning at a number of levels. Documented evidence verified their whole-school engagement with external consultants in implementing curriculum and pedagogical changes related to literacy, numeracy, student voice and dispositions for learning. The staff collaborates with two other Partnership schools to improve learning design and moderation in assessment of student learning. Members of staff also work in Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) to achieve consistency in the pedagogical approaches used across the classes. The staff acknowledged the leadership of the Principal in leading the professional learning to achieve improved outcomes for students. This is referenced in the following quotation from a teacher in discussion with the Review Panel: "She's been fantastic. She's put us in 'the pit!' She's awesome!"

Teachers have begun to focus on numeracy improvement using the scaffolds and expectations that have been effective in raising reading achievement over time. Documented evidence of whole-school planning by staff for this improvement area was sighted during the review. The establishment of numeracy word walls, development of fluency in maths, use of a 'Cafe' approach for numeracy and setting more open-ended tasks in maths, were evident in some classroom observations. As one teacher commented: "I am giving them (students) a chance to show me they can do more."

Teachers commented about trying to be more explicit with students by explaining to them what aspects of learning they were looking to assess. This approach was evidenced in the following examples: goal-setting with students, visually displaying three learning intentions expected of students, asking students: "Do you know why I am working on this with you?" and using statements such as: "Today, I am looking for this in your writing."

The Review Panel reflected on the A–E standards across the classes, and noted lower percentages of students who achieved higher scores through teacher judgement, when compared to other DECD-collected datasets. This was also noted by the Principal. This will require further PLC team discussion about the learning design and assessment tasks that enable students to demonstrate their learning at higher levels through class-based assessment tasks.

Individual teacher meetings with members of the Leadership Team were verified as 'invaluable' by class teachers. Teachers verified that datasets, stored on the school database (Scorelink), were used in such discussions and that the performance 'chats' have a student focus. Staff verified that having a 'fresh set of eyes' during these discussions helped to track progress and identify students who require further intervention. Running Records and 'Fountas and Pinnell' levels are used in end-of-term discussions with teachers to set class targets, or plan intervention delivered through the Reading Support teacher or Mini Lit program.

A verified strategy, used to implement agreed practices across the school, involved genuine staff commitment to trial agreed approaches and to report their professional progress after a set period of time. This strategy had served to foster professional accountability across the school and a genuine commitment to whole-school improvement aligned to the school's improvement agenda. Documentation was provided as evidence of this initiative in influencing a 'commitment to act'.

Staff acknowledged that they were in the early phases of numeracy improvement across the school. It was verified that staff were implementing some strategies gained from professional learning with external consultants. As one teacher commented: "We realise we need to do more." Staff spoke of the need to use the 'broad outline' of what maths concepts to teach and when, in conjunction with the 'how'.

Staff commented that they were at the beginning stages of achieving consistency in numeracy teaching practices applied across the school. Staff verified the important learning opportunities achieved through PLTs, year-level meetings, staff meetings and scheduled 'release' times, where consistent approaches are

developed, trialled and reflected upon.

**Direction 2**
**Improve student growth and achievement in numeracy by embedding effective evidence-based pedagogy through the influence of professional learning teams.**

## How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and throughout the school?

Parents expressed their aspirations for their children in terms of being happy, confident and capable young people who enjoy learning in the social context of schooling. They were supportive of the role played by staff in developing a 'love of learning' in students and encouragement for them to 'strive' for their personal best. It was verified through interviews and parent surveys that they believed teachers were approachable and would contact them if follow-up was required. Parents acknowledged that goals were set for students in reading levels and appreciated the tips sent home to assist them to support reading at home.

Teachers and parents spoke about the importance of having 'growth' mindsets in their approach to learning. Staff acknowledged the diversity in the ability levels in all classrooms, and the importance of modelling ways for students to approach challenges in learning. The aforementioned 'Learning Pit' was one such strategy being applied across the school to support this approach to learning.

In her presentation to the Review Panel, the Principal spoke about her perception of students being passive participants in learning. The panel noted this in student comments and during class visits. Students spoke about learning as getting ready for NAPLAN, or getting ready for high school. One articulate student commented: "I'd like to see more personal challenge provided – more than finishing my work on time and using an 'app' as a reward."

When asked to describe 'good' learning in their classrooms the students described behavioural traits such as: paying attention, heads down doing your work, finishing work and not talking or mucking around, as determinants of successful class behaviour. It was evident through class visits that teachers are working hard to provide consistent structures and routines to create safe and supportive learning environments for students. It must also be acknowledged that the teachers are moving towards more student-centred classrooms with 'gradual release of responsibility' as the consistent model for differentiation and teacher personal feedback to guide students in their 'next steps'.

The teaching staff were congruent in their expectations about student learning and their strategies to engage and challenge students further in their learning. They have achieved growth in reading achievement over time (evident in data) and recognise that they are on an improvement journey with some teachers further along than others. Staff were clear about the structures (for example, blocked literacy time, common agreements, SSO support, etc.) that have supported this improvement to date. Importantly, teachers recognise their role and impact in further enhancing student engagement and success in their learning.

All staff had been 'open' to receiving student feedback about aspects related to their teaching practice. The staff individually documented their personal reflections to this information, subsequent adjustments made to their practice and the resultant impact on student engagement.

The school community, inclusive of students, parents and staff, has developed a 'draft' set of additional dispositions to engage students further in their learning. These dispositions provide the scaffold for staff and students to model, and build effective learning together by being explicit, providing multiple entry points and modes of assessment, connecting learning to real-life experiences and building student meta-cognitive knowledge and language about learning across the school. One staff member commented: "It is important that we use the same language for learning across the school, but we need to teach it to the students." Another reflected: "Am I giving students a chance to show me they can do more?"

**Direction 3**
**Engage students further in their learning by making learning intentions explicit, success criteria clear and learner dispositions congruent with community-agreed expectations.**

### OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Coorara Primary School has worked effectively to improve its performance in reading against its historic baseline average. The school has worked strategically to self-review using various datasets in analysing and informing key actions to improve student learning. Staff professional learning and performance and development have been influential in creating consistent understanding and practices across the school in-line with whole-school agreements. The authentic use of student voice in classrooms is beginning to influence teachers' professional practice across the school.

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

1. Engage and challenge all students in their learning through building the capacity of teachers to design learning based on authentic student feedback.

2. Improve student growth and achievement in numeracy by embedding effective evidence-based pedagogy through the influence of professional learning teams.

3. Engage students further in their learning by making learning intentions explicit, success criteria clear and learner dispositions congruent with community-agreed expectations.

Based on the school's current performance, Coorara Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2020.

Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
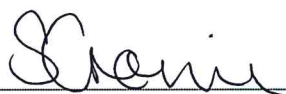REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY

Jayne Johnston
CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

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.

Rebecca Read
PRINCIPAL
COORARA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson