Department for Education

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Darlington Primary School

Conducted in May 2019

Government of South Australia

Department for Education

Review details

Our education system aspires to become the best in Australia by seeking growth for every student, in every class and in every school.

The purpose of the External School Review (ESR) is to support schools to raise achievement, sustain high performance and to provide quality assurance to build and sustain public confidence in government schools.

The external school review framework is referenced throughout all stages of the ESR process.

This report 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.

We acknowledge the support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community. While not all review processes, artefacts and comments are documented here, they have all been considered and contribute to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Phil Garner, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Julie Hibell, Review Principal.

Review Process

The following processes were used to gather evidence relating to the lines of inquiry:

- Presentation from the principal
- Class visits
- Attendance at staff meeting
- Document analysis
- Scan of Aboriginal Education Strategy implementation
- Discussions with: Governing Council representatives
  Leaders
  Parent groups
  School Support Officers (SSOs)
  Student groups
  Teachers

School context

Darlington Primary School caters for children from Reception to year 7. It is situated 15kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2019 is 213 students. The enrolment at the time of the previous review was 320.

The school has an ICSEA score of 928, and is classified as Category 3 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 16% Aboriginal students, 3% students with a verified disability, 21% of families eligible for school card assistance, 44% of students with English as an additional language or dialect background and 8 children in care.

The school leadership team consists of a principal in the 3rd year of her tenure at the school, a deputy principal, assistant principal for the IEL program and a wellbeing leader.

Previous ESR or OTE directions were:

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 years of schooling.

Direction 2   Finalise the decision on what data will be collected and when, a data schedule and what software options will be used to collect 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.

Direction 3   Continue to work with teachers to focus on bringing even greater rigour to the learning process and in particular, identify strategies for personal goal setting, to focus on stretching and challenging more able students to achieve at higher levels.

What impact has the implementation of previous directions had on school improvement?

Running records are the main source of data used to assess student achievement in reading in the early years. The school continues to assess students twice per term. This has identified some students progressing only 2 reading levels each term which is insufficient to achieve the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) in year 1 and 2. Improving reading achievement in the early years continues to be an opportunity for improvement.

The school has recently invested in a data management system that will assist in the tracking of student achievement, however data continues to be analysed by the leadership team and disseminated to staff for discussion. While this process has enabled the school to identify students requiring additional learning support, there is little evidence to suggest that the data is being used by teachers to differentiate the learning for students in all classes. The analysis of student data to inform and refine the teaching and learning is an area for further professional development.

Staff have developed an agreed pedagogical practice policy that incorporates key elements of the Teaching for Effective Learning framework and have recently engaged in professional development around high quality task design that engages and challenges students. To further enhance this learning, there exists an opportunity for staff to work closely with the teachers who have implemented successful pedagogical practices into their teaching.

Lines of inquiry

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

To what extent has the school drawn on evidence of best practice to determine strategies and actions for improvement?

The school has engaged in a collaborative process with all staff to develop the 2019 site improvement plan (SIP) with opportunities provided to suggest, comment and amend the final document. Staff who were unable to attend the meetings were emailed to ensure their participation.

Student achievement data was analysed by staff to determine the challenges of practice that will, if addressed successfully, lead to improved student outcomes. Some of the identified actions focus on evidence-based best practice that has the potential to be highly successful in raising student achievement, while others can be considered organisational actions.

Some staff have indicated a level of disconnection to the SIP with uncertainty about its implications for classroom practice and what is expected of them. Staff understand the importance of the SIP as a guiding document for school improvement and have requested deeper analysis of the actions to increase their clarity, ownership and commitment to their implementation. Readjustment of delivery timelines may need to be made to ensure the realistic implementation of SIP actions. Student involvement in the monitoring and review stage of the SIP provides the school with an opportunity to incorporate student voice.

The success of the SIP, and whole-school agreements, is dependent on individual and collective commitment and accountability for their implementation, a belief that the actions will be effective and absolute clarity regarding everyone's role in this.

Direction 1   Critically evaluate the SIP actions, success criteria and timelines with all staff to ensure absolute clarity, ownership, commitment and accountability for their successful implementation in the teaching and learning process.

Effective teaching and student learning

How effectively are teachers using evidence-based pedagogical practices that engage and challenge all learners?

Staff have recently revisited the school's pedagogical agreement to ensure consistency of practice and effective learning. While this document is written with clarity and referenced to evidence-based research, there remains varying degrees of implementation across the school. A wide variety of effective differentiation strategies are used in the middle years that ensure student learning needs are considered with appropriate learning tasks provided. Some teachers use a gradual release model, slowing the learning down and differentiating the content and challenges for different year levels in their class. There exists an opportunity to further embed these practices in all classes ensuring effective teaching and learning is provided for all students.

The recently introduced focus on 'Why are we learning this?' is having a positive effect on student engagement and motivation with some teachers effectively unpacking the Australian Curriculum which is supporting students to critically reflect on their own learning.

Individual student learning goals have been identified and are part of the learning process in some classes with students engaged and challenged to achieve them. Students the panel met with generally understand the need to have goals and would like to see this become common practice in all classes.

Regular and effective formative feedback, including opportunities for peer assessment, is providing some students with effective assessment which supports their learning. The school is in a position to further improve the assessment and feedback practices in all classes through a strategic approach to professional collaboration that will ensure students can clearly articulate the next steps in their learning.

Across the school there are pockets of excellence in teaching that provide quality engagement and challenge, however this was not evident in all classes. While the school has highly effective interventions for students requiring assistance with their learning, the student achievement data indicates lower levels of student achievement in the high bands of NAPLAN. The school has the opportunity to replicate the effective strategies used in supporting those students requiring intervention to further challenge and engage all students.

Direction 2	Ensure the effective implementation of the school's pedagogical agreement in all classrooms and collaboratively develop and implement a consistent understanding of what high expectations, engagement and challenge mean for effective teaching and student learning.

Effective Leadership

How effective are the school's professional learning and performance development processes in building teacher capacity?

The principal is highly visible across the school and visits classrooms daily, with staff indicating her focus is clearly on learning and pedagogy. Follow-up conversations support professional dialogue between leadership and teachers with areas for improvement identified for action and review.

Performance development meetings are the cornerstone of professional learning and development within the school, however teachers are engaging in the process to varying degrees. While some teachers have clearly aligned their individual learning goals closely with the SIP, not all teachers have the same connection, making it difficult to achieve consistent improvement in whole-school initiatives.

Teaching and learning programs are evaluated by the principal each term and comprehensive feedback is provided with growth points and actions identified for future development and review. Whole-school staff meetings currently provide a medium for professional learning with most topics initiated by the leadership team. However, teachers have indicated that professional learning communities with a specific learning focus would enable the professional learning to be targeted to the challenges of practice and the differentiated learning needs of staff.

Throughout the school there are pockets of professional collaboration where teachers reflect on their practice with the view to improve teaching and student learning. Some teachers indicated that while they understand what is happening in their year level they are not as clear about what is happening in other sections of the school. Coaching and mentoring is a strategy that can have significant impact not only on building the capacity of teachers but also on improved learning outcomes. The school is in an enviable position with many staff willing and capable of leading the professional learning of their colleagues should the opportunities be provided.

Direction 3   Collaboratively develop a whole-school professional development and learning program that caters for the specific learning needs of staff, builds teacher capacity and ensures transference of newly acquired skills to improve classroom practice and student learning.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2019

Parents and governing council members have the utmost respect for teachers at Darlington Primary School. They are of the opinion that staff are very approachable, friendly and welcoming, and are grateful for the time that they freely give to talk to them about their children's learning. Parent/teacher interviews are highly valued and provide a wealth of information to parents about their children's progress. The recently introduced student leadership and ambassador program is developing the leadership qualities of students and the recess buddy program is building a culture of respect and care across the school.

The principal will work with the education director to implement the following directions:

Direction 1   Critically evaluate the site improvement plan actions, success criteria and timelines with all staff to ensure absolute clarity, ownership, commitment and accountability for their successful implementation in the teaching and learning process.

Direction 2   Ensure the effective implementation of the school's pedagogical agreement in all classrooms and collaboratively develop and implement a consistent understanding of what high expectations, engagement and challenge mean for effective teaching and student learning.

Direction 3   Collaboratively develop a whole-school professional development and learning program that caters for the specific learning needs of staff, builds teacher capacity and ensures transference of newly acquired skills to improve classroom practice and student learning.

Based on the school's current performance, Darlington Primary School will be externally reviewed again in May 2022.

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GOVERNING COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON

Appendix 1

School performance overview

The external school review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the Department for Education Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Disclaimer.

The following data cannot be accurately compared to the historic baseline average due to the exemption of Intensive English Language students who were previously included in the data sets.

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2018, 40% or 6 of 15 year 1 students and 54% or 14 of 26 year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents a decline for year 1 and little or no change for year 2 from the historic baseline average.

In 2018 the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 68% of year 3 students, 72% of year 5 students and 77% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the SEA. For years 3, 5 and 7, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For 2018, years 3, 5, and 7 NAPLAN reading, the school is within the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2018, 33% of year 3, 7% of year 5 and 15% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 33%, or 1 of 3 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2018 and 40%, or 2 of 5 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2018.

Numeracy

In 2018 the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 61% of year 3 students, 86% of year 5 students and 77% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3, 5 and 7 this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For 2018 years 3 and 7 NAPLAN numeracy, the school is achieving within and for year 5 above the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2018, 28% of year 3, 7% of year 5 and 8% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 50%, or 1 of 2 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2018 and 50%, or 1 of 2 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2018.