

# **The Department for Education**

## **External School Review**

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

**Report for Uraidla Primary School**

Conducted in September 2018



Government of South Australia  
Department for Education

## Review details

A priority for the Department for Education 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 government schools.

The framework underpinning the 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 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, they all have been considered and contributed to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Greg Graham, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Ronnie Alderman, Review Principal.

## School context

Uraidla Primary School caters for children from reception to year 7. It is situated 19kms from the Adelaide CBD, and is part of Mount Lofty Partnership. The enrolment in 2018 is 118 students, and has been steady over the last 5 years. The school is classified as Category 7 on the department's Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 2% Aboriginal students, 3% students with a disability, 14% of families eligible for School Card assistance, 2% of students of EALD background, and 1 child in care.

There are 5 classes – Reception, Year 1/2, Year 2/3, Year 4/5 and Year 6/7.

The school leadership team consists of a principal, 6 months into her tenure at the school. There are 8 teachers, including 2 in the early years of their career and 4 Step 9 teachers.

## Lines of inquiry

In considering the data summary in the school performance overview (Appendix 2) and the principal's presentation, the review panel explored the following lines of inquiry to evaluate the school's effectiveness towards raising student achievement and sustaining high performance.

During the external review process, the panel focused on 3 key areas from the External School Review framework:

**Improvement Agenda:** How well does the school make data-informed judgements about student learning?

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

**School Community Partnerships:** How well does the school develop partnerships with students, parents and the wider community to improve student learning?

## How well does the school make data-informed judgements about student learning?

During the principal's presentation it was identified that the school is undertaking a review of how the school analyses achievement data, with some teachers starting to graph progress data using strategies such as writing continuums, guided reading and word study groups. Teachers are beginning to understand the need to ensure progress for each child and to differentiate the curriculum. The review panel recognised that further work in unpacking data, sharing analysis and understanding all of the data are to be addressed at future staff meetings and whole-school professional development.

The principal cited that previous data analysis of writing results brought about the employment of a literacy coach to support the teachers' skills in planning and teaching writing and reading. This strategy has complemented the partnership work in moderation through the Learning Design Assessment and Moderation (LDAM) initiative and the school's own work through the intervention program offered to targeted students. The school is in the process of refining and formalising their literacy and numeracy agreements.

Teachers provided the panel with evidence on how they use diagnostic tests to measure student progress. Examples ranged from formal tests such as PAT-R and PAT-M tests, Running Records, and SA Spelling Tests, to individual recording measures such as student portfolios containing examples of work and test results. The school uses the Scorelink program to record all achievement results, which is managed by a school services officer (SSO). It was noted that few teachers enter their own test results or access the Scorelink information when reviewing student progress or for teacher planning. The school may consider revisiting this application with staff to ensure a whole-school approach in understanding data management, cross-referencing data and reporting student progress.

Teachers indicated that they use a variety of pre and post-test strategies to ascertain students' prior knowledge and mastery of the concepts or subjects taught. These strategies range from individual or group conversations, questioning and presenting provocations to formal tests, with most teachers indicating that open discussions were the predominant method. It was evident to the panel that some year level teams share information to assist with planning; however, flow of information to the next year level/teacher was limited.

The school's intervention program is managed by SSOs, using a variety of diagnostic tools such as MiniLit, Words Their Way and Quicksmart maths. Each class has 3 hours of SSO support per week, which is managed in consultation between the teacher and SSO. Most of the intervention support is conducted through small group or individual student instruction. Currently, all students with a verified disability have an NEP or ILP and the school is working towards moving to the One Child One Plan initiative. The SSO staff regularly share the achievement data with teachers at an informal level through conversations in the staffroom or classroom.

The majority of students interviewed were able to describe the different assessments used in the classroom. Students indicated that there was little discussion between them and their teacher about test results and how they can improve or extend themselves. Conversations about NAPLAN are generally conducted during the lead-up to the test week, but there were little or no follow-up discussions between the teachers and students on their results. A few students indicated that PAT tests were referenced by their teachers.

Students were familiar with the A-E grading, and cited that to improve your grades you "just need to work harder". Senior students said that in the report card "a lot of kids get 'A's for effort and mainly 'C's for achievement". This notion is supported in the 2017 A-E grading data presented to the panel demonstrating that 63% of students allotted a 'C' grade with 17.5% of the remaining scores being a B or D in English. Maths scores show that 60% of students gained a 'C', with a slightly higher number (28%) rated at a 'B' level. Further exploration on the grade moderation and understanding of the Australian Curriculum content, standards and capabilities could be considered by the school to support a consistent approach to assessment and planning.

The parent community appreciated the communication about their child's learning through both formal meetings and informal chats or 'catch-ups' in the school yard. They supported the use of the Dojo app, providing them with instant information about their child's learning successes and general class news. However, not all classes use this approach; it is something that the school may need to consider. Parents appreciated the open conversations on any learning issues, and teacher responsiveness to any concerns. The governing council is informed of school data with detailed explanations.

It has been recognised that the school does use information from a variety of datasets to support and plan for student learning. The depth and consistency of assessments used to measure student learning growth should be reviewed with the aim to develop a whole-school agreement in identifying a set of quality measures to be able to triangulate student growth to inform practice.

Whole-school understanding of what evidence-based pedagogy looks like is to be considered for further professional development in the function of data and evidence, and the link with changes in pedagogy, planning and teaching. The next phase of the school's future planning would be to continue to work on explicit assessment criteria, task design and moderation that incorporate feedback processes to and from students.

#### **Direction 1**

**Deepen the application of whole-school assessment processes with a greater focus on the use of data to inform planning and pedagogy, with greater use of feedback to and from students.**

### **To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?**

One of the first ideals of the school's site improvement plan (SIP) states that the school wants '...our children to be confident learners; learning how to learn and engage with their academic life'. The school offers a number of opportunities for the students to be engaged in their learning, both inside and outside of the classroom, through numerous excursions and community projects. Other approaches to promote challenge and engagement include cognitive learning strategies such as Growth Mindset and the Learning Pit. Several students mentioned the Learning Pit as a means of understanding where they were with their learning and knowing what to do to 'get out of the pit'.

Teachers recognised that they have a diverse range of students within their classes, but the use of differentiated learning strategies varied amongst staff. The review panel witnessed the use of ability grouping as the main strategy for catering for the different learning needs of the students. Teachers used a number of diagnostic tests to form these groups, and indicated that they rotate the explicit teaching amongst these groups. During classroom observations it was noted that there was a bias towards working with the students who needed more intensive explanations and the more able students tended to work independently. This was confirmed by the students interviewed during the observation sessions.

Teachers use different scaffolding approaches and entry points for various learners, including simple check-ins, re-phrasing instructions, modifying work and questioning. The majority of students supported these approaches, saying their teachers explained things clearly and use different ways to help individuals. Students also said teachers sometimes made learning interesting through games, using iPads and quizzes.

Use of learning intentions varied across the school, with some teachers describing their use of learning intentions as a mixture of topic focus, whole-class or individual student goals. Formats varied according to age levels, with examples such as a general class goal leading to the task, using a rubric process to measure project outcomes to verbal responses. The review panel saw evidence of learning intentions displayed in some classrooms and, when asking the students what they meant, there was a low level of understanding of their purpose. Learning goals were not clearly understood or talked about with parents. Teachers recognised that using learning intentions and learning goals is an area for further development.

Feedback on student work differed across the school with examples including 1:1 conversations on individual learning 'milestones', checklists, test scores and written comments in books. Most of the students indicated that feedback was usually in written form (ticks and comments). Students recognised that teachers use feedback to help them understand the work and provide clues to the next stage. The use of the Dojo app offers regular feedback about children's wellbeing and academic progress. Other strategies include communication books, text messages and email. Further development of this form of communication may need to be considered by the school.

Students were able to describe the learning process in-class, including routines such as spelling and reading groups, maths textbooks, along with a range of activities such as whiteboards, books, wall charts and working through a book. Most of the students indicated learning best in a quiet classroom setting. Students can confidently talk about their learning and are compliant with their engagement. The majority of students identified writing and mathematics as the subjects that they were 'good at', with most indicating that they were good at them because they 'know the work'. Student influence in their learning was generally limited to a choice of case studies from a set topic or the cosmetic presentations of projects. Student efficacy was evident with the older students in that they were independent workers with their maths and spelling activities.

Students generally agreed that their learning opportunities were interesting, and teachers offered a number of ways to do their work. However, when asked about how challenging the work was, students said that only about 50% of the work given over an average week was 'hard', with a bias towards the lower end. When surveyed, the vast majority of students indicated it was important to 'learn new stuff' while at school. Student survey results indicated that 60% of respondents 'think that learning should be challenging'. There was little or no comment on how their work could be changed to make it more challenging; however, they would like to see more hard work and more hands-on work with less worksheets and working through a book.

Parents interviewed were happy with the learning environment of the school and thought their children were engaged. Extra-curricular opportunities offered to their children were seen as enhancing their learning both academically and socially. A small number of parents did comment that some of the more able students could be stretched in their learning, and there were a lot of projects done in classes. This was followed by comments on stretch in all of the children's learning with questions on the 'deep thinking inquiry'.

Teachers were able to articulate their own personal understanding of what stretch and engagement means and what strategies they employ within their classrooms. Some measures include using achievement data to identify growth, offering different tasks according to student ability, students working independently, students swapping classes to work with learning peers and extension work. General comments about stretch for all students tended to focus on the lower ability groups, with little reference to the middle and higher-band range. Building on the Partnership work in moderation, the school is developing teacher understanding of the relationship between *formative* assessment and task design to support stretch and challenge for all students.

Next steps include developing common understandings for all students, parents and staff that intellectual stretch does not equate to just the provision of work at a higher year level, and that intellectual stretch is applicable to all students and across all areas of learning. Opportunities for students to be intellectually stretched in their learning results from the development of tasks that provide different perspectives and levels of understanding, designed for students to be doing the thinking. Planned work within year levels and learning areas in the development of transforming tasks is important for the school to undertake.

## **Direction 2**

**Explore and implement approaches that integrate and effectively embed intellectual stretch, challenge and rigour into daily classroom teaching and learning.**



## How well does the school develop partnerships with students, parents and the wider community to improve student learning?

The *2017 Annual Report Governing Council report* states 'the school community is central to our successes as a school'. It was evident to the review panel that there are strong connections between the Uraidla community and the school.

As part of the principal's presentation, it was highlighted that community involvement is high, with students being involved in numerous events and activities throughout the township. These events ranged from student performances at local places/events (church and retirement homes), participating in the annual Uraidla Show and representing the school at memorial services. The review panel observed a high number of community events posted on the yearly calendar.

During the orientation walk, student leaders talked confidently about their school and interactions they have with the broader community, which included knowing the history of some families as displayed in the brick wall and floor memorials. Other community links included the school's participation in street-scaping, tree planting, the preschool/school activities and sporting connections. Student voice activities were generally around fundraising activities.

Teachers were supportive of the parent contributions to assist with learning experiences of students, through helping out with excursion supervision and transport, being guest speakers, and supporting student-led charities. Staff also acknowledged the parental support within the classroom through volunteers who listened to reading or helped with cooking or art activities.

Governing council worked on the SIP development, review and planning days. The review panel identified that the current SIP priority of Community Perception focuses on the promotion of the school through being visible in the community. With changes to the department's school improvement planning processes, this priority may need to be re-aligned to accommodate a stronger student learning focus with community actions. Further exploration is needed into understanding the direction of school planning, and the role of governance in being strategic to address 'futures learning' in the stretch and challenge of all students in a changing world.

Communicating student learning across the school community is evident in a variety of ways. Parents are genuinely interested in what is happening at the school, and acknowledge that teachers will make time to meet with them to discuss their child's learning progress.

Work to date in engaging the broader school community with student learning is strongly focused on events and activities. Actions undertaken are commendable and school pride is evident through the comments of teachers, students and parents. School staff and the parent community are poised to explore the balance between student exposure to traditional or cultural events and contemporary learning experiences in a changing environment. Future learning opportunities that are strongly linked to the curriculum with these experiences have the potential to empower students to become creative and competent learners who can reflect on personal challenge and achievement. Fit-for-purpose school community engagement to respond to student learning is an effective way to improve the relevance of learning and to support personal development and student learning.

### Direction 3

**Strengthen school-community understanding and agreement that links with the curriculum and relevant learning opportunities to enrich student engagement and improve student learning.**

## **What is the school doing particularly well and why is this effective?**

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practice that is contributing significantly to school improvement at Uraidla Primary School.

Effective practice in building school and community partnerships was evident at the school. Historically, community involvement in the school has been very strong. Promotion of the school's achievements and invitation of parents and the broader community to become part of the students' extended learning opportunities has been well-received. Parents trust the principal and staff of the school to provide a quality education for their children. The school community appreciate the high-level consultation and know their opinions are valued. The strength of this relationship with ongoing open dialogue and commitment to working together has resulted in a united community with strong support for the school's endeavours.



## Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

Uraidla Primary School works well in partnership with parents and stakeholders.

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

1. Deepen the application of whole-school assessment processes with a greater focus on the use of data to inform planning and pedagogy, with greater use of feedback to and from students.
2. Explore and implement approaches that integrate and effectively embed intellectual stretch, challenge and rigour into daily classroom teaching and learning.
3. Strengthen school-community understanding and agreement that links with the curriculum and relevant learning opportunities to enrich student engagement and improve student learning.

Based on the school's current performance, Uraidla Primary will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



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Governing Council Chairperson

## Appendix 1

### Attendance policy compliance

Implementation of the Education Department student attendance policy was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2017 was 89.7%.

## Appendix 2

### 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).

#### Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2017, 71% of year 1 and 77% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement for years 1 and 2 from the historic baseline average.

Between 2015 and 2017, the trend for year 1 has been downwards, from 91% in 2015 to 71% in 2017.

In 2017, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 100% of year 3 students, 73% of year 5 students, and 77% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the SEA. For years 5 and 7, this result represents a decline, and for year 3, an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For 2017 years 5 and 7 NAPLAN reading, the school is achieving within, and for year 3, above the results of similar students across government schools.

For 2017, 60% of year 3, 18% of year 5, and 31% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 29%, or 2 of 7 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2017, and 57%, or 4 of 7 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2017.


#### Numeracy

In 2017, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 90% of year 3 students, 91% of year 5 students, and 77% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3 and 5, this result represents an improvement, and for year 7, a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2015 and 2017, the trend for year 5 has been upwards, from 79% in 2015 to 91% in 2017.

For 2017 year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN numeracy, the school is achieving within the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2017, 20% of year 3, 18% of year 5, and 23% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.



For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 67%, or 2 of 3 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2017, and 50%, or 2 of 4 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2017.

