Department for Education
External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Blackwood Primary School

Conducted in February 2021

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 Julie Bishop and Rebecca Pears Review Officers of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate with Grant Small and Graham Slarks Review Principals.

Review Process

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

- Presentation from the Principal

- Class visits

- Attendance at staff meeting

- Document analysis

- Discussions with:

    - Governing Council representatives

    - Leaders

    - Parent groups

    - School Services Officers (SSOs)

    - Student representatives

    - Teachers.

School context

Blackwood Primary School caters for students from reception to year 7. It is situated 15kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2020 was 454. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 360. The local partnership is the Mitcham Hills partnership.

The school has an ICSEA score of 1098 and is classified as Category 7 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes less than 6 Aboriginal students, 7% students with disabilities, 13% students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, less than 6 children/young people in care and 15% of students eligible for School Card assistance. Blackwood Primary School has a multicultural population with 45% of students identifying with a background other than Australian.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in the 2nd year of tenure, a Deputy Principal in the 2nd year of tenure and a Curriculum Coordinator with responsibility for guiding the implementation of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Curriculum in the 1st year of tenure.

There are 17 Teachers including 1 in the early years of their career and 14 Step 9 Teachers. Blackwood Primary School has a very inclusive culture and often hosts return to work teachers and SSOs.

The previous ESR directions were:

Direction 1   **Ensure there is rigour in implementing the school agreements, particularly in literacy and mathematics, to provide cohesion in learning for all students, while maintaining the effective intervention programs and approaches.**

Direction 2   **Transform and improve the design of tasks and learning activities, particularly in literacy and mathematics, to ensure students are intellectually challenged and learning higher-order skills and concepts.**

Direction 3   **Align the work of the Student Leadership group more closely with the school's priorities and provide opportunities for all students to be more actively involved in learning and assessment processes within their classrooms to strengthen student influence in their learning and throughout the school.**

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

The Principal provided examples including:

- whole-school learning walks, reviewing literacy numeracy agreements and literacy and numeracy coaches being utilised

- alignment of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) with Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Performance and Development Plans (PDPs), Brightpath moderation, development of literacy practices with consistency from R-7 and regular collaborative planning time provided

- cultures of thinking, challenge of practice, SIP, Simon Brooks' action research, Brightpath writing project, individual goals for literacy and numeracy, differentiation task design staff training with Senior Leader Learning Improvement Primary (SLLIP)

- partnership moderation and task design training, Kath Murdoch training around inquiry and student agency in Term 1 of 2020, PLCs literacy and cultures of thinking, 2020 SIP action regarding phonics program consistency and integrity

- individual goal setting, student involvement in developing success criteria, peer assessment of learning, formative assessment, Student Agency School Representative Council Project 2019 and student generated individual lines of inquiry

- student generated action for IB and student-initiated activities related to interest at lunchtimes.

Lines of inquiry

Effective school improvement planning

How well does the school review and evaluate the effectiveness of improvement planning processes and the impact on students learning to inform next steps?

The school is to be commended for their collaborative and comprehensive approach to school improvement. The panel noted high levels of engagement and ownership of SIP processes. Staff demonstrated cohesive, whole-school understandings of the current intent and content of the SIP.

Whole-staff analysis of SIP priorities has resulted in collective understandings. SIP priorities are directly aligned to the work of the PLCs and PDPs, and are strengthened by ongoing opportunities for staff to undertake relevant professional learning.

Leadership provides extensive, strategically planned opportunities for staff to engage with professional learning aligned to research-based best practices ensuring SIP priorities are comprehensively addressed.

Three goals were developed for the current SIP of writing, numeracy and deep thinking. The challenges of practice for writing and numeracy were directly aligned to retaining and increasing the number of students in the higher bands. The school is well-positioned to collaboratively develop, implement and embed clarity in the subsequent development of task design ensuring all students have planned opportunities to regularly display learning at higher levels.

Staff reported that allocated time to collaboratively moderate writing samples had been very beneficial and reflected cross class moderation processes were highly valued.

During interviews staff identified a review of the current numeracy agreement was an area for further development. It was also noted strengthening and embedding moderation processes in numeracy would support consistency and congruence.

All staff reported they valued the work undertaken in developing a framework for higher order thinking. Some staff reflected that clarity in the identification and implementation of this was an area for ongoing development. Staff reflections included connecting this work to performance and development plans and sharing this new learning with families are aspects for further development.

Direction 1   **To strengthen and embed a whole-school approach to thinking routines for staff, students and families.**

Effective teaching and student learning

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

The panel noted high levels of commitment to ongoing improvement from all staff. Staff reported the collaborative review of their practices in reading included the elimination of ineffective strategies resulting in the implementation of evidence-based pedagogical practices in reading.

Teachers demonstrated high levels of commitment and confidence in planning and implementing differentiated learning across year levels and areas of study. The panel noted growth mindset language and learning dispositions were embedded across the school.

In a survey conducted during the ESR, staff reported only 14% of students understood the learning intention to a high degree in a recent unit of work with 21% of students understanding the success criteria to the same degree.

Staff identified learning intentions and success criteria could be strengthened by the implementation of immediate and longer term goals. The school is well-placed to ensure all students are supported to utilise and reflect on learning intentions and success criteria. Embedding a whole-school approach to the implementation and review of learning intentions and success criteria at regular intervals is an area for ongoing development.

Formative assessment processes are embedded, and the panel noted the extensive application of relevant scaffolds for learning in classrooms across all year levels and areas of learning. The gradual release of responsibility model (I do, you do, we do) is embedded in language and practice.

The school consistently looks to improve and strategically identify next steps in effective pedagogical practices. Staff reported it was important for students and parents to understand the language of learning with specific reference to high impact strategies for the teaching of reading.

The school is well-placed to develop and share the language of learning with students and parents across all areas of learning.

Direction 2   **To develop and embed high impact strategies that incorporate the language of learning with students, staff and parents.**

Effective teaching and student learning

To what extent do teachers ensure that students have authentic influence in their learning?

Students reported they have the opportunity to demonstrate prior knowledge at the beginning of units of study. Students also reflected they have regular opportunities to collaboratively plan and make decisions about their learning especially in inquiry units of study. The panel noted a strong commitment to sustaining a culture of continual improvement across all areas of study and year levels.

Teachers during interviews reported students are regularly provided with opportunities to develop and apply the language of learning. Staff reported modelling the language of learning within context is a valued practice of learning.

The panel noted a strong school culture where students are confident to inform their teachers when their work is too difficult or too easy. During interviews held with students during the ESR, only 7% identified they were challenged in their reading with 43% of students indicating reading was too easy.

The panel observed high levels of commitment and a collective efficacy to ensure authentic student influence is embedded across year levels and areas of study. It was noted by staff that authentic student influence was embedded practice within the IB program but was an area for further development across all aspects of learning. Staff acknowledged students would benefit from regular opportunities to reflect, strengthen and embed the language of learning.

The school is well-placed to collaboratively develop common, whole-school understanding in the implementation of a common discourse to monitor next steps for learning in writing. Implementing processes providing regular, planned opportunities for student driven learning across all year levels and areas of study will embed an authentic student influence in learning.

Teachers identified they would appreciate further opportunities to undertake professional learning to strengthen authentic student influence. The school is well-positioned to work collaboratively with students in the development, implementation and review of authentic student influence.

Direction 3 **Develop a whole-school approach to strengthen authentic student influence in their learning that is supported via planned professional learning for all staff.**

Outcomes of the External School Review 2021

Blackwood Primary School is to be commended for its thorough and comprehensive approach to school improvement. Detailed school improvement processes are embedded, and professional learning is strategically aligned to the school improvement priorities. Staff are strongly supported to undertake new learning. The panel observed a robust and collegiate approach to ongoing improvement. The culture of continuous learning was validated by the following quote from a staff member during discussions: 'there is a culture in the school where you want to improve your practice and you never want to stop improving'.

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

Direction 1   **To strengthen and embed a whole-school approach to thinking routines for staff, students and families.**

Direction 2   **To develop and embed high impact strategies that incorporate the language of learning with students, staff and parents.**

Direction 3   **Develop a whole-school approach to strengthen authentic student influence in their learning that is supported via planned professional learning for all staff.**

Based on the school's current performance, Blackwood Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2024.

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Kris Robson
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Blackwood Primary School

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).

Reading

In the early years reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2019 56% of year 1 and 77% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA.

In 2019 the reading results as measured by NAPLAN indicate 83% of year 3 students, 93% of year 5 students and 92% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For year 3 this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average. For years 5 and 7 this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For 2019 year 3 NAPLAN reading the school is achieving within the results of similar students across government schools. For year 5 the school is achieving lower than the results of similar students across government schools. For year 7 NAPLAN reading the school is achieving above the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2019 55% of year 3, 44% of year 5 and 52% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3 this result represents decline from the historic baseline average. For years 5 and 7 this result represents little to no change.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading 63% or 21 out of 33 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 and 74% or 14 out of 19 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.

Numeracy

In 2019 the numeracy results as measured by NAPLAN indicate 81% of year 3 students, 87% of year 5 students and 87% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA.

For years 3 and 7 this result represents a decline against the historic baseline average. For year 5 this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For 2019 years 3 and 5 NAPLAN numeracy the school is achieving lower than the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2019 40% of year 3, 24% of year 5 and 40% 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 in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy 61% or 14 out of 23 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 and 85% or 11 out of 13 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.