EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR Highbury Primary School

Conducted in May 2016
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 Vonnie Dolling, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Patrick Moran, 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 Highbury Primary School has verified that the school is working towards being compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal advised action is being taken to comply with the following DECD policies:

- Part 3 School Organisation: Attendance Policy
  The school policy is being amended to include teacher responsibilities as part of the policy and responsibilities of staff in regard to attendance are also to be added to the staff handbook.

When the school’s actions achieve compliancy with DECD policy and procedures, the Principal must resubmit the Policy Compliance Checklist to the Education Director.

Implementation of the DECD Student Attendance Policy was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be working towards being compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2015 was 92.8%, which is almost at the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Highbury Primary School is a Reception to Year 7 school located 15kms north-east of Adelaide in the foothills at Hope Valley. The school was first established in 1972 and has a current enrolment of 482. In recent times, the school has experienced declining enrolments and it is anticipated that this trend will continue, due to an ageing demographic in the area. The school has an ICSEA score of 1050, and is classified as Category 7 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 1.9% Aboriginal students, 5.4% Students with Disabilities, 14.7% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D), 1 student under the Guardianship of the Minister and around 15% of students from families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal, a Deputy Principal and an Assistant Principal. At the beginning of 2016, the Principal took leave from her role at the school to take on a short-term position, and the tenured Deputy has been the Acting Principal. Highbury Primary School is part of the Modbury Partnership and is the base school for the Coordinator in Primary Australian Curriculum.

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 progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2015, 69% of Year 1 and 86% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). This result represents little or no change at Year 1 and an improvement at Year 2 from the historic baseline average.

Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 2 has been upwards from 82% to 86%.

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 93% of Year 3 students, 80% of Year 5 students and 88% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 7, this result represents an improvement, and for Year 5, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.
For 2015 Year 3 and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving higher than the results of similar students across DECD schools, and for Year 5, within the results of similar students from across the system.

In 2015, 46% of Year 3, 33% of Year 5 and 25% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. For Year 5, there is a trend upwards, from 19.7% to 33% between 2013 and 2015 respectively.

Of the 29 students who achieved in the top two proficiency bands in NAPLAN Reading, 55%, or 16 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015. Fifty-seven percent, or 13 of 23 students who achieved in the higher bands in Year 3, remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. In Year 5, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average, and in Year 7, this results represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For the last 3 years, the trend for upper band retention from Years 3 to 5 is upwards, from 41% to 55%.

**Numeracy**

In 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 80% of Year 3 students, 72% of Year 5 students and 75% of Year 7 students, demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Year 3, this result represents little or no change, and for Years 5 and 7, a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 5 has been downwards, from 83% to 72%.

For 2015 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools.

In 2015, 37% of Year 3, 20% of Year 5 and 13% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 3 has been upwards, from 29% to 37%.

For those students who achieved in the top two proficiency bands in NAPLAN Numeracy, 9 of 16 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5, and 5 of 13 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. For Year 5, this result represents little or no change, and for Year 7, a decline from the historic baseline average.

For the last 3 years, the trend for Years 3 to 5 upper band retention is upwards from 39% to 56%.

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**Lines of Inquiry**

As a result of the above data and the Leaders’ presentation, the Review Panel focused on three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

- **Student Learning:** To what extent are students intellectually challenged in their learning?
- **Effective Teaching:** To what extent is assessment used to inform planning and instruction?
- **School Community Partnerships:** How authentic is the influence of students on their learning?

During the onsite review, the following Line of Inquiry emerged and was explored:

- **Effective Leadership:** To what extent are the school’s professional learning and performance and development processes effective in building teacher capacity?
To what extent are students intellectually challenged in their learning?

At Highbury Primary School, the strong performing arts focus is highly regarded by students, staff and parents, and affords many students additional opportunities to further their learning in music and drama. There is a Junior and Senior Choir, Junior and Senior Band, a number of instrumental ensembles and an annual musical production. One student referred to the musical as “a way of showing creativity that’s not on paper.” Students participating and competing in sports events through SAPSASA (Primary School Sport) affiliation and involvement is also a strong part of the school culture. The Review Panel observed the teamwork that these opportunities provide and heard about the build in confidence from students and parents.

The results of students at the school in both reading and numeracy, as demonstrated by percentages of students achieving the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) in NAPLAN, have consistently been within or above the results for students with similar characteristics from across the DECD system. In 2015, Highbury Primary School’s results were above those of students with similar characteristics in reading at both Year 3 and 7 levels. Over time, students have been performing better in reading than numeracy. Currently, just over half of the students who demonstrate higher levels of achievement in Year 3 NAPLAN Reading are retained in these levels at Years 5 and 7. In NAPLAN Numeracy, 56% of the students who demonstrate higher levels of achievement at Year 3 remain there at Year 5, and 37% of these students remain there at Year 7. Student work samples provided evidence of some good practice, including building on prior knowledge, and the use of graphic organisers to support making students’ thinking visible. There was an indication that, in some cases, students were working on closed tasks with a single answer response and that these tasks predicted the performance of the students, limiting opportunities to demonstrate higher levels of thinking. Student discussions and sharing with the Review Panel implied a strong focus on achieving at year-level standard.

Teachers were asked by the Review Panel about strategies used to foster intellectual challenge with and for students. Using questioning to stretch some students towards deeper levels of thinking was one approach. Some teachers reported that they didn’t feel confident in implementing such strategies and needed clarity about what they might look like in daily practice. As part of the Review Panel’s gathering of evidence, a process was facilitated with staff where recent initiatives with a positive impact on student learning were identified. There was consensus by all staff that the whole-school professional learning in the natural maths approach as an effective pedagogy has had significant impact in changing and improving classroom practice. The Review Panel heard that this approach had supported differentiation and challenge for students, through the use of problematized situations that encouraged multiple exit and entry points in learning. Student work samples reinforced that the school-based planning opportunities had led to students being involved in learning through more complex tasks that enabled them to demonstrate conceptual understanding at a range of levels.

The natural maths approach includes a particular lesson sequence and stimulus for challenge referred to as the ‘sting in the tail’. Highbury Primary School is developing a whole-school approach to teaching and learning in mathematics documented in an emerging Mathematics Agreement. Implementation of an agreement that promotes good practice of this kind will ensure that appropriate challenge for all learners is embedded into teaching and learning across the school.

An essential first step in planning to engage students in tasks that provide intellectual challenge is the development of a shared understanding and set of beliefs about what intellectual challenge looks like in daily classroom practice, as part of a school-wide approach.

**Direction 1**

Ensure that all students are intellectually challenged in their learning by building teacher capacity to design learning and tasks that engage students in higher-order thinking.
To what extent is assessment used to inform planning and instruction?

The 2016 School Improvement Plan (SIP) requires that Teachers use NAPLAN, PAT-M, PAT-R and PAT-S and other data, along with formative assessment strategies, to inform their practice and support student feedback and self-review. This strategy is to meet the planned outcomes of the SIP priorities in mathematics and English.

Students from some classes showed examples of assessment criteria that were shared with them at the beginning of a set task, and one student described using this as a “a kind of mental checklist”. The Review Panel observed students in an early years classroom using a checklist of writing criteria that had been personalised for individuals. Several students showed examples of feedback that was based on affirmations such as ‘Fantastic work’ and ‘Well done’, without the support of constructive task-relevant suggestions for improvement. During the on-site visit, the Review Panel met with 48 students in small groups and conducted classroom walkthroughs. Discussions with students and sharing of work samples revealed a wide range of practices with regard to feedback to students and the use of success criteria and rubrics to support assessment.

In 2015, the school supported staff to analyse student achievement data, including the PAT-M and NAPLAN, to identify trends and common areas for growth. Some teachers described themselves as being at the beginning stages of using data to target teaching. A next step for the school will be to continue to improve staff capacity in the use of systemic data to determine differentiated approaches to the learning program. Teachers are collaboratively planning units of work in pairs and teams. Working together in data analysis, as well as in designing and using classroom-based assessment strategies, will continue to build consistency across the site, respect teacher judgement and inform targeted teaching.

Teachers are ready to work with assessment and achievement data in ways that will enhance learning programs for individual students. The Review Panel heard from a teacher about using the PAT-M site as a resource to plan for student learning that would engage students in particular tasks to support growth. Students talked of finding the assessment for learning strategy of peer assessment helpful in improving their learning. It was evident to the panel that a developing collaborative culture will support staff in using the full range of assessment for learning approaches essential to good practice.

Direction 2
Motivate and support students to strive towards higher levels of achievement by developing consistent approaches to formative assessment using transparent success criteria and providing constructive task-relevant feedback.

How authentic is the influence of students on their learning?

During 2014, Highbury Primary School built cohesion with students, staff and families through the consultative development of the four school values of Persistence, Respect, Responsibility and Resilience. Discussion with parents highlighted that the sense of community and belonging around the school was strong support for families, and reported that students felt safe at the school amongst their peers. Parents, with whom the Review Panel spoke, indicated that communication about learning and parent support, and involvement in learning, was quite teacher-dependent. All parents who met with the Review Panel reported finding the three-way interview process in Term 1 helpful.

In 2016, there are representative structures in place that support student voice in improving the school community. The Environmental Forum was reported to have influence over students’ actions through initiatives such as Nude Food Days. Students were articulate and positive about the school and highlighted a range of learning areas in their discussions and through work samples shown to the Review Panel. Students from the upper year levels shared a variety of motivations for wanting to do well, including self and parent satisfaction and improving future opportunities. The intrinsic motivation of some students was summarised by one student’s remark: “I kind of just want to show what I’m capable of.”

All of the students with whom the Review Panel spoke were aware of the influence of their own beliefs about their learning capacity on their learning outcomes, and many articulated using positive self-talk to work their way through the ‘learning pit’. The school is working to embed the value of resilience through a
focus on growth mindsets.

Both students and teachers indicated that there was little influence of students over what, when and how they learned. Transmission pedagogy was a dominant approach with student opportunities for negotiation often limited to timelines. Although the Review Panel observed and heard some examples of intentional teaching practices that empower students to know where they are at and where they need to go, these were limited. The Review Panel did not see evidence that students contributed to construction of assessment rubrics when used, or the development of success criteria. In some classes there was evidence of students identifying broad goals such as “to get better in English this year”, that they needed to monitor themselves. There is opportunity for students to work alongside their teachers in engaging with data to develop SMART goal-setting for improvements in personal learning.

Some teachers expressed that the expectation to cover particular content through the Australian Curriculum may have influenced the attention to student choice in learning. In discussion groups and through a staff meeting process, teachers identified that intensive professional learning, and initiatives in reading, specifically in guided reading, had been critical in ensuring consistent language and a whole-school approach documented in the HPS Literacy Agreement (Reading and Guided Reading). The agreed approach is based on the gradual release of responsibility model, and using models and scaffolds such as these will build teacher capacity in moving from teacher-constructed to learner and co-constructed pedagogies, and support teachers in new practices.

**Direction 3**

**Strengthen the use of the gradual release of responsibility model so that students are supported to negotiate their learning and set and monitor appropriate personal learning goals.**

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**To what extent are the school’s professional learning and performance and development processes effective in building teacher capacity?**

Highbury Primary School values being informed about current teaching and learning practices and has supported staff with regular professional learning in a range of contemporary pedagogy.

In the past, teachers reported that this meant that they had ‘dipped into’ a number of ideas, but had not been enabled to follow through by trialling and implementing new approaches. Feedback to the Leadership Team that “less is more” had supported the development of a new structure for staff meetings and a clearer focus on a smaller number of key improvement opportunities. Staff meeting time had a strong focus on professional learning and supported time for collaborative work. Staff communicated that the expectation to work in professional learning teams across like year-levels had been supportive in improving their practice. In particular, the Review Panel heard that teachers valued the support of ‘on-site’ experts from amongst their colleagues and the ready access to resources through the school’s electronic communication systems, including OneNote and the teachers’ drive. This model of professional collaboration was further supported with common non-instruction time release. Some staff reported this as supporting a shift from a culture, which focused on teachers in individual classrooms, to one that encouraged collaborative planning and reflection.

The school has developed and refined a whole-school Performance and Development Plan framework that focuses on paying attention to the school’s priorities through the lens of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers Standards 2 and 5: *Know the content and how to teach it and Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning*. There were 4-5 questions that guided teacher reflection across the three priorities of the School Improvement Plan, prior to setting their professional goals and identifying performance indicators. In some cases, teachers worked through this process collaboratively. All of the teachers who spoke with the Review Panel reported that this planning process was helpful in supporting them to learn and grow as professionals. Teachers appreciated the opportunity to meet with their Line Manager and described the environment as one of feeling comfortable to talk about their areas for growth amongst supportive staff willing to share.

The Review Panel concluded that evidence gathered through this Line of Inquiry had affirmed the school’s most recent approach in building staff capacity through the professional learning and performance and development processes, and did not make a finding for a new direction in this area.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Highbury Primary School has worked cohesively to establish a safe and supportive learning environment that is orderly and friendly. Student achievement data is used to inform decisions and actions for individual students and the Leadership Team works strategically to build a culture of improvement. Teachers use structured time for ongoing professional learning that supports improved learning outcomes for students.

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

1. Ensure that all students are intellectually challenged in their learning by building teacher capacity to design learning and tasks that engage students in higher-order thinking.

2. Motivate and support students to strive towards higher levels of achievement by developing consistent approaches to formative assessment using transparent success criteria and providing constructive task-relevant feedback.

3. Strengthen the use of the gradual release of responsibility model so that students are supported to negotiate their learning and set and monitor appropriate personal learning goals.

Based on the school’s current performance, Highbury 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.

Dominica Thomson
PRINCIPAL
HIGHBURY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson