

The Department for Education

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Mypolonga Primary School

Conducted in May 2018



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 Simon Harding, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Phil Johanson, Review Principal.

School context

Mypolonga Primary School caters for children from reception to year 7, and is located 93kms from the Adelaide CBD. The current enrolment is 137, and has been steady over the last 5 years as the school is at capacity with a waiting list.

The school has an ICSEA score of 1004, and is classified as Category 4 on the department's Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 5% students with disabilities, and 13% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a principal in the 11th year as principal and 4th year of her current tenure, and a student wellbeing leader (Band 1, 0.3FTE) in her 15th year in this role.

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:

- Effective Teaching:** To what extent is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction?
- Improvement Agenda:** How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?
- Student Learning:** To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

To what extent is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction?

The school has consistently demonstrated high levels of achievement in NAPLAN and PAT assessments over time. The use of data to inform curriculum planning by staff was evident to the panel. The principal has strategically worked to ensure that there are school agreements which include the datasets used and when they are collected. Time is planned in staff meetings for review of diagnostic achievement data. The student data is readily accessible through an electronic system for leadership and teaching staff throughout the year.

When discussing the use of data at student and class level, teachers referred to the grouping of students across the school in 'stage not age', in areas such as guided reading and maths, to assist in differentiation of learning programs to meet the students' needs. The panel heard from staff, and as part of the principal's presentation, that the principal analyses whole-school data, such as PAT-R, M, V and NAPLAN, to assist in the formulation of these groups and for identifying students requiring intervention. These groups are fluid; review of student progress by teachers is scheduled at regular staff meetings.

It is important to capitalise on the positive attitude to learning by students, combined with the relatively high percentages of students meeting SEA in NAPLAN assessments over time, along with 30% or more of year 3, 5 and 7 students achieving in the numeracy and literacy higher bands in 2017. PAT results also reflect similar high levels of achievement. Tracking over time of cohort and individual data will continue to be important, as there have been some downward trends in maintaining students in higher bands in both reading and numeracy. However, year 7 writing had 41% of students below SEA.

A whole-school focus on writing was the result of reflecting on the NAPLAN data where staff collaboratively designed rubrics and checklists based on scales and built consistency of editing student work. This also included a focus on vocabulary development, with the introduction of the PAT-V test and student support in class with word walls, 'word of the week' and table charts. A 'literacy cup' with a focus on reading was introduced as an incentive to encourage all students to read regularly at home.

Teachers shared with the panel examples of formative assessment they were using with their students, such as traffic lights, exit passes, learning progressions and peer assessment. Areas that staff identified they wanted to improve in included self/peer assessment, differentiating tasks more to cater for the varied needs of students, especially high achievers, and how frequently to track students. While the panel acknowledges the professional learning and work staff have already undertaken in this area, it is evident that staff are keen to build their capacity and come to common understandings across the site of high-yield formative assessment strategies. The credibility of assessment to inform instruction is paramount in providing a quality and differentiated approach to learning to meet the needs of all learners.

When students were asked what learning area they were good at and how did they know, they could all identify a learning area, saying: "I know it", "it comes easily", with some expressing "it challenges me" and "I used higher-order thinking". The explicit development of success criteria that are clearly linked to the learning intentions within areas of study will support students to be more powerful learners. Deepening understanding for both teachers and students will further support improved outcomes for students.

Student voice is valued and embedded in practice at the school. Older students could clearly articulate that assessments assist in informing them about their learning and how the school has taught them. It assists them in knowing what they need to work on next and is used by teachers for future planning. They stated that getting good feedback informs them how to improve. Every student benefits from regular feedback about their learning. Effective feedback identifies what a student is doing well, what are the areas for improvement and, very importantly, what strategies they can use to improve. Individual student learning portfolios are prepared by students, in conjunction with their teachers, which outline the student's achievements to share with their parents each term. There are whole-school expectations of the development of individual learning goals. While these learning goals were evident in all classes, it has been acknowledged by the school that further work to deepen teachers' and students' capacity to collaboratively set clear goals to be shared with all stakeholders will further enhance learning outcomes for students.

Direction 1

Strategically strengthen each teacher's capacity to more independently collate, analyse and respond to a range of data at the individual, class and school levels to more effectively impact on planning for the varying learning needs of students.

How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?

It was clear to the panel that continuous school improvement was central to the work of Mypolonga Primary School. Staff articulated their commitment to school improvement both through their collaborative work across the school and their commitment to partnership initiatives. The Mypolonga community is to be commended for inclusive approaches they use to incorporate staff, students and parents in relation to the improvement journey. It is through the governing council sub-committees, in which students are involved, that they discuss the development and monitoring of the site priorities achieved.

Through discussions with parents, including governing council, there was evidence provided to the panel that they felt included in decisions made at the school and that their opinions were valued. They supported leadership in decisions that were taken and showed awareness of the site priorities. Parents also valued the process of including the older students on these committees.

The principal shared the work they were embarking on in relation to the site improvement plan using the *Agile Improvement Cycle*, working through 3 phases of development – clarify, incubate and amplify. Time has been planned in staff meetings to have regular discussions about their progress in relation to the priority and to decide the next steps.

Self-review processes included using student achievement, growth, instructional practices and clear targets aligned to student growth to inform future decisions. One priority is reading with a focus on guided reading. This priority was established by linking partnership work with a school-identified area, where home reading programs were not being supported as well as the school would like, especially for the younger students. The data supports this, as lower percentages of students in year 1 and 2 meet the SEA for their year level; however, by year 3 the results are much higher.

Incentive programs such as the literacy cup were introduced, and a whole-school approach to guided reading was developed. This work is supported with the allocation of significant resources through both in-class school services officer (SSO) support and an intervention program. Staff talked about some opportunities, mostly informal, to discuss progress and influence of these programs. There is one break time where staff make themselves available for planning. This work could be strengthened through a more formalised approach at regular intervals to discuss progress of a student involved in an intervention program, or the strategic use of support time offered to students. Part of this process may include setting clear goals for the targeted students. This can be used for discussion, both between staff and with parents, providing parents with further strategies to assist their child's development.

Recent research refers to 3 main types of review: *strategic*, characterised as long-term and focused on key goals related to the school's vision; *regular* reviews that are generally smaller, focused and ongoing and feed into the strategic self-review; and *emergent* reviews, which arise in response to unexpected challenges and opportunities as a result of daily operations and generally fit with the overall goals and link to other reviews. There are opportunities to reflect on these throughout review processes undertaken ensuring there are strategic and regular reviews using the school's strong focus on students across the site.

Direction 2

Strengthen site improvement plan processes through the inclusion and alignment of specific student-centred goals and targets across the identified priorities.

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

It was clear throughout the External School Review (ESR) that the school community, staff, students and parents, were focused on the students and their learning. Students demonstrated pride in the school and valued the opportunities for genuine student voice and leadership. Students talked about being involved in a range of committees, their high-level involvement in the running of the school shop and the connectedness they bring to the local community and beyond.

Students stated that they were happy at school and respected the staff with whom they worked. When asked what were the most important things about school, many students interviewed talked about *learning new things*. Older students could articulate why this was important, and a student shared her experience about developing a positive attitude to learning since arriving at the school a few years earlier. She had not liked doing maths, but now she was in the top maths group and the work in the 'school shop' had a positive effect. Others stated they needed to be the best learners they could be: "we have to do the surface learning and then go deep" and "it keeps you engaged". They also shared that work needs to be challenging to improve - being in the 'learning pit'. These comments provide evidence that older students have a good understanding of the benefits of challenge and intellectual stretch. Younger students mostly focused on learning new things; however, making new friends was also important to them because having friends can help you learn.

During the review, older students indicated that around 35% to 40% of their work, over any given week, was hard, whereas younger students estimated 20% to 25%. They could provide the panel with a range of strategies they use to work through times where they are finding learning harder: "think of things you already know that can help", "have a few goes, ask a peer, then go to the teacher", and "persistence and resilience are developed through being in the learning pit". Students were able to use the language of a growth mindset across the school.

Parents talked about one of the strengths of the school being the learning opportunities and progressions for their child, particularly those who were achieving well, leadership opportunities and those needing further assistance/intervention. The school has a good reputation in the community, which includes the academic success and the learning opportunities offered.

Parents shared they were happy with the information they received about their child's progress, especially at interviews, and how achievement was celebrated at school events. Some expressed a desire to have the chance for another formal interview to keep informed about 'next steps'; while others found staff approachable if they needed further clarification at any point. There was an opinion shared by a few parents that they would like further clarification around A-E grades as there can be differences between what they are told at interview and when grades are awarded in reports. Triangulating data such as PAT, NAPLAN and A-E grades by teachers can assist in building a consistent assessment profile of a student and reflect on curriculum planning and learning design and implications for students demonstrating an 'A' grade.

Building teacher and student capacity to more effectively make consistent judgements is a key priority in the school's site improvement plan. Work in conjunction with other small schools will provide opportunities for teachers to strengthen their understanding and skills in this area.

All staff demonstrated good knowledge of and a genuine interest in the students with whom they are working and across the school. The whole-school community supports the priorities of the school and takes interest in student progress, including the running of the school shop and the significant learning this brings. There is strong community participation in events the school coordinates. Parents support the

school's reporting of student progress, and many shared that staff were approachable when they had a concern.

The school provided significant support for students through the use of SSOs both in class and intervention programs. The school also worked in 'stage not age' groupings where other personnel were brought in, including the principal, to provide smaller classes in guided reading and maths. These support structures and programs were valued by teaching staff and parents. There were positive working relationships between teachers and SSOs. School services officers meet with the principal to discuss progress and intervention each term.

Teachers were asked about their understanding of intellectual stretch and what this looked like in their classroom. Teachers talked about a range of possibilities including open-ended tasks, surface-to-deep learning and setting a 'challenge point'. Students and teachers have further capacity to draw upon to achieve high level outcomes. Through a continued focus and strategic whole-school approach of building common understandings and practices of intellectual stretch, students' achievement will be strengthened.

Direction 3

Collaboratively strengthen teachers' capacity to design and implement learning experiences that further enable differentiation, intellectual stretch and challenge to be an integral aspect of everyday learning for all students.

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 Mypolonga Primary School.

Effective practice in school community partnerships was evident at the school. All stakeholders, students, parents and staff provided a number of examples of how students have the opportunity to have an authentic influence on school life. Some examples included students' involvement in school committees where their opinions are valued, contributing to the development of improvement plans, and taking responsibility in running the school shop.

Effective leadership was clear, with the leadership team highly respected in the community. The leadership team supports staff in their learning and incorporates both school and partnership priorities into their improvement work. The whole school community is committed to providing their children with a quality education. This was evidenced through discussions with staff, parents and governing councillors.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

Mypolonga Primary School demonstrated it has developed a culture of improvement characterised by high expectations for students and working effectively in partnership with parents and stakeholders.

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

1. Strategically strengthen each teacher's capacity to more independently collate, analyse and respond to a range of data at the individual, class and school levels to more effectively impact on planning for the varying learning needs of students.
2. Strengthen site improvement plan processes through the inclusion and alignment of specific student-centred goals and targets across the identified priorities.
3. Collaboratively strengthen teachers' capacity to design and implement learning experiences that further enable differentiation, intellectual stretch and challenge to be an integral aspect of everyday learning for all students.

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

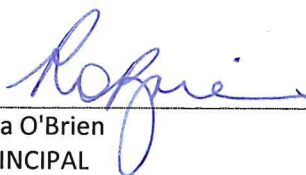


Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
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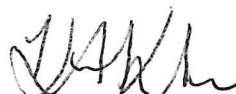


Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND
PRESCHOOLS

The school will provide an implementation plan to the education director and community within 3 months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's annual report.



Rita O'Brien
PRINCIPAL
MYPOLONGA PRIMARY SCHOOL



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 93.5%

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, 47% of year 1 and 42% of 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 2017, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 88% of year 3 students, 94% of year 5 students, 77% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the SEA. For year 3, this result represents little or no change, an improvement for year 5, and a decline for year 7 from the historic baseline average.

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

In 2017, 50% of year 3, 33% of year 5 and 29% 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, 56%, or 5 of 9 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2017, and 60%, or 3 of 5 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.

Numeracy

In 2017, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 75% of year 3 students, 94% of year 5 students, 82% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA.

For year 3, this represents a decline, for year 5, an improvement, and for year 7 little or no change from the historic baseline average.

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

In 2017, 29% of year 3, 28% of year 5 and 47% 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, 71%, or 5 of 7 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2017, and 60%, or 6 of 10 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.