

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

## REPORT FOR EAST MARDEN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Conducted in November 2015



**Government  
of South Australia**

Department for Education  
and Child Development

### **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 overarching review question is "How well does this school improve student achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity?"*

*This External School Review has evaluated:*

- *the school's self-review processes and findings,*
- *the school's achievement data and progress over time,*
- *the outcomes of the meetings and interviews with representatives from the school, and*
- *parent and student views about the school.*

*The External School Review included an analysis of the school's key policies and procedures.*

*The support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community is acknowledged.*

*This External School Review was conducted by Ann O'Callaghan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Bryan Rotherham, Review Principal.*

### **Policy compliance**

*The External School Review process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are implemented and adhered to.*

The Principal of East Marden 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:

1. Aspects of Governance:
  - a. Information regarding the school's Site Improvement Plan (SIP) is shared with the Governing Council and feedback is sought. Parents are not yet directly involved in reviewing the priorities or having input into areas of improvement.
  - b. The Parent Complaint Policy and the Student Behaviour Management Policy will be updated in consultation with Governing Council.
2. Aspects of Human Resource Management:
  - a. Performance Conversations are held twice per year as per the DECD Guidelines with written feedback. However, each staff member does not yet have a documented performance plan for the year ahead.

Implementation of the *DECD Student Attendance Policy* was checked specifically against a documented set of criteria. The school has implemented comprehensive tracking and intervention processes, and was found to be compliant with this policy. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 93%, which meets the DECD target of 93%.

### **School context**

East Marden Primary School is located 8 kilometres northeast of the city of Adelaide. The school has an ICSEA score of 1074 and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

Over the last three years, the school has experienced a period of rapid growth from 558 students in 2013 to the current roll of 645 students. In 2016, there will be 730 students attending the school. The school has reached capacity and has enacted a local policy to manage ongoing enrolment pressure.

The current population includes 17 (2.6%) Aboriginal students, 15 (2%) Students with Disabilities, and four students under the Guardianship of the Minister. There are 257 (40%) students with a non-English speaking background, of whom one hundred children are funded as students speaking English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD). Twelve percent of families are eligible for School Card assistance.

There are 25 classes in the school, including 5 Reception classes.

The Leadership Team consists of an experienced Principal in her first tenure at the school and two new Assistant Principals in their first year of tenure. One of the Assistant Principals is responsible for Early Years, Reception to Year 2 and Literacy Reception to Year 7. The other Assistant Principal is responsible for Primary Years 3 to 7 and Information Technology/Innovative Teaching Reception to Year 7. There is a full-time School Counsellor. The position of teacher librarian will be filled as a Coordinator: Inquiry Learning and ICT.

Since 2013, the unprecedented enrolment growth and a number of planned retirements, has resulted in considerable change to the human resource experience profile across the school.

Fifty percent of the current teaching and non-teaching staff were new to the school in 2015.

### Lines of inquiry

*During the review process, the panel focused on two key areas from the External School Review Framework:*

#### Student Learning

**How well are students achieving over time?**

#### Effective Leadership:

**To what extent is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change evident?**

### How well are students achieving over time?

For the past few years, East Marden Primary School has received public recognition from the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) for achieving consistently high results in all aspects of NAPLAN. This judgement has been made against the proportion of students achieving the national minimum standard (NMS) as reported by ACARA.

In acknowledging this recognition, the Review Panel can add that the school is also performing well against higher band levels, included as reading and numeracy benchmarks in the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

For example, the Reading results at Years 3, 5 and 7 in 2015, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 93% of Year 3 students, 90% of Year 5 students and 80% of Year 7 students achieved the SEA. These results include an upward trend at Year 5 over 2013-2015 from 80% in 2013.

In relation to the number of students achieving in the top two proficiency bands in Reading in 2015, there were 65 of 90 students (72%) at Year 3, 40 of 70 students (57%) at Year 5, and 19 of 45 students (42%) at Year 7. These results show an improvement at all year levels from the respective 2008 to 2012 historic averages. In 2015, 14 of the 16 students who achieved in the top two bands in Year 3 in 2011, were remaining in the upper two bands at Year 7.

In the early years, Reading is monitored against Running Records. In 2015, 68% of Year 1 students (65 of 96) and 67% of Year 2 students (66 of 98) achieved the SEA of Levels 15 and 21 respectively. In 2014, there were 74% of students at SEA in Year 1 (72 of 99) and 81% in Year 2 (68 of 85). In 2013, the results were 61% at SEA in Year 1 (49 of 83) and 78% at SEA in Year 2 (46 of 61). While there is no improvement trend showing in this recent data period (2013 to 2015), the Year 2 cohort size has significantly increased from 61 students in 2013 to 98 students in Year 2 in 2015.

The Review Panel heard that as enrolments have grown, especially in the early years (Reception to Year 2), the school is establishing a process for tracking reading growth of individual students. The purpose of this process is to monitor learning and support students to achieve the school's own newly-stated targets for minimum year-level achievement across Reception to Year 7.

As for Numeracy achievement in 2015, the NAPLAN results indicate that students are tracking well against the SEA. There were 90% of Year 3 students, 84% of Year 5 students and 82% of Year 7 students who achieved the SEA. In relation to the number of students achieving in the top two proficiency bands, there were 48 of 90 (53%) at Year 3, 24 of 70 (34%) at Year 5, and 15 of 45 (33%) students at Year 7. Of the 16 students who achieved in the top bands in Year 3 in 2011, there were 11 remaining in top bands in Year 7 in 2015.

Since 2014, the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA), including the Australian Curriculum achievement standards, and the DECD strategic objective for more students to achieve higher levels of learning, has provided schools with a new set of benchmarks to monitor and measure student performance.

The Review Panel heard that until June this year, the school had not previously collected or collated the A-E grades reported to parents, nor fully aligned the student report format to the Australian Curriculum. The

school is now in the early stages of developing a systematic approach to the development of assessment feedback and the allocation of grades in all subject areas, including the development of assessment tasks, moderation of teacher professional judgement, and the triangulation of data and information.

The Leadership Team and staff are aware that with the DECD Standard guiding performance, the professional challenge is to focus on using pedagogy that will sustain high levels of achievement every year, especially from Year 2 to 3, and maintain this rate of growth from one year to the next.

#### **Direction 1**

**Sustain high levels of achievement from Reception to Year 7, by ensuring each student can demonstrate high levels of learning against the Australian Curriculum achievement standards and general capabilities.**

In 2015, the Leadership Team and staff have embarked upon a focused improvement agenda. The emphases, in a much bigger school, are to ensure continuity in learning for all students from one year level to the next, sustain high performance in literacy and numeracy, and develop learner dispositions.

The Review Panel consequently explored Lines of Inquiry related to the school's culture and the capacity of the school to respond to the needs of students, families and staff in a time of change.

#### **To what extent is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change evident?**

The stated purpose of East Marden Primary School is to 'educate children to fulfil their potential by helping them acquire and develop the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for success.' To this end, the school is embarking on a school improvement agenda to ensure there is teacher capacity and leadership capacity in place, and is attuned to ensuring continuity in learning for all students at each year level.

The agenda is also aiming to ensure there is a whole-school approach to support consistency of practice.

Staff reported that they have been collaboratively involved with the Leadership Team in the development of the Site Improvement Plan (SIP). The current priority areas are: Literacy; Numeracy; Innovative Teaching; and Learner Wellbeing. The SIP is made up of four separate plans that individually identify a target, improvement strategies, evidence to be collected, and evaluation measures to be used as part of self-review processes. There are four committees working on the implementation of the plans, utilising regularly scheduled meeting times and additional support structured into the weekly timetable.

In 2015, the Literacy plan has focused on supporting all students from Reception to Year 7 to 'write at or above appropriate year level'. The Review Panel heard from staff that the improvement strategies have been data-driven from the analysis of student performance using the NAPLAN writing rubric and the school's writing genre map. The panel heard that the most significant improvement this year has been the implementation of a process whereby all teachers collect individual writing samples from EALD students and assess the work themselves against the DECD Language and Literacy Levels rubric.

Prior to the increase in the number of NESB/EALD students, this assessment process had been completed by non-classroom teachers. Staff reported that this year's professional learning, undertaken as a group, along with the support received by the EALD teacher and Special Education staff, was invaluable.

All teachers said the information collected was useful to inform their literacy planning and teaching, not only for EALD students, but for all students. As one staff member said: "even though it was challenging work, it was an excellent learning curve". A number of teachers talked about how much more they had learnt about teaching writing and were keen to have further opportunities to extend their professional learning.

The recent self-review feedback collected from all staff about the 2:2:2 process, identified insights about the benefits of explicit and targeted teaching. The committee can use this information for 2016 planning. The Review Panel found that surveys such as this are characteristic of the emerging self-review processes.

The Innovative Teaching (IT) Committee is also successfully leading a focused improvement agenda that aims to integrate technology in all learning areas and utilise innovative teaching and learning pedagogy. All teams reported that the Inquiry Projects they have been working on together have been worthwhile. The structured time for planning has been well-used. Teachers said they had trialled new approaches; were making learning visible; had incorporated learning intentions and some goal-setting; and were integrating ICT. The collaborative planning has highlighted the value and importance of doing more coordinated work about what is taught; “how balanced is the delivery of the Australian Curriculum”; how is learning assessed; and whether there is consistency across year levels.

The Numeracy plan focuses on implementing a sequence for teaching mental routines as part of a daily mathematics block across the school. While the momentum of this improvement priority had been given less attention at this stage than other priorities, the strategic approach to achieving change is well-supported by staff. Six teachers are currently being trained in 2015 as part of the DECD local Campbell Partnership professional learning program. These teachers are supporting their colleagues through staff meetings and team meetings. Some of these teachers are also trialling use of mathematic vocabulary word walls, problematized situations, use of active learning and reflection as part of a ‘natural maths’ pedagogy.

The Review Panel found that these three examples reflect challenging work led by the school Leadership Team, in association with committee members. The aim to build capacity and develop a shared approach to improvement is evident. Performance conversations introduced this year have been received positively.

The panel felt that the buy-in to the change agenda from staff was sincere and the directions were shared.

## **Direction 2**

**Build the capacity of staff to implement the school improvement plan and the resulting agreements about innovative pedagogy. Include in this work the use of data and information to plan for targeted teaching and to monitor learning progress over time.**

Parents spoke at length with the Review Panel about the school, its inclusive community and the welcoming Leadership Team and staff. The parents all expressed high expectations for their children and felt their children are being challenged. Parents were keen to share their views and suggest a few changes for the better.

All parents interviewed want to know how well their children are going, and how they can help their children improve. The practices they liked were those that enabled them to know more about the class program and updates on their child’s progress and wellbeing. They felt the reporting process was not as yet sufficient and they would like more information about the new format. They valued the courses and meetings that had been offered about literacy and numeracy. Parents felt that they and their children were at the ‘right school’.

Students interviewed by the Review Panel confidently reported that “it’s cool to like school at East Marden!”

They said they have opportunities to be involved in a range of leadership and learning activities at the class and SRC level. They can share ideas through class meetings and engage in service to the school community. Students expressed opinions with ease about a range of related topics raised with them by the Review Panel. They said some teachers use common language about learning, but not all do. Older students said they used to frequently talk about ‘habits of mind’ as learners but not so much anymore. When students need help at school they ‘have a go’ first and try to solve the problem. After this they ask a friend to help and/or tell their family or the teacher. Middle and upper primary students liked it when they received feedback from their teachers about their learning because these conversations “really help us to know how to improve”. Younger students said they liked it when the teachers gave stickers, rewards and written feedback. Some students said they found technology particularly helpful in history and geography lessons; others just liked using the iPads.

The positive attitude behind these comments indicates an enthusiasm for learning and life at school. However, the limited commonality in responses is indicative that there may be a range of different approaches used by teachers across teams and levels of schooling. This evidence affirms the school’s priority to work in

teams to develop more consistency of practice across the school, in each year level, from the Early Years to the Primary Years and into Years 6 and 7.

The targeted actions of a group of staff have begun to visibly lead discussions like this from a data-driven perspective. A data wall has been established in the staffroom that records the achievement of all students in the school. This data wall includes information about students in relation to reading and numeracy using a range of data sets.

Staff reported that the data wall was providing a good starting point for them to make visible, both at a glance and in some detail, the extent that students were achieving, year level by year level, child by child.

They said the data wall was assisting in making judgements about what was working and what needed review, and which students may require intervention or support to progress above and beyond their current levels.

The Review Panel found that staff members are accepting of the shared responsibility each has for their part in the student learning journey at the school. They are committed to creating a whole-school approach that is responsive to the needs of current students and staff, and that honours and maintains the school's record of success.

The positive and focused approach to improvement and change is well-supported by the strategies outlined in the school improvement plan, and will be strengthened by the directions provided by the External School Review to sustain high achievement and build teacher capacity.

## OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

East Marden Primary School is performing very well. Student achievement is consistently high and demonstrated growth is above what would be reasonably expected of a school in a similar context. Parents have high expectations for their children and want to work closely with the teachers. Effective leadership provides strategic direction and planning and is mindful of the challenges ahead to sustain achievement and minimise variance between classes. There is a culture of improvement in the school.

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

1. Sustain high levels of achievement from Reception to Year 7, by ensuring each student can demonstrate high levels of learning against the Australian Curriculum achievement standards and general capabilities.
2. Build the capacity of staff to implement the school improvement plan and the resulting agreements about innovative pedagogy. Include in this work the use of data and information to plan for targeted teaching and to monitor learning progress over time.

Based on the school's current performance, East Marden Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2019.



Tony Lunniss  
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REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL  
IMPROVEMENT

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.

Lana Dubrowsky  
PRINCIPAL  
EAST MARDEN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson