

The Department for Education

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Yahl Primary School

Conducted in October 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 external school review 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 Debbie Grzeczowski, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Dean Clark, Review Principal.

School context

Yahl Primary School is located 10kms south-east of Mount Gambier. The school has recently celebrated its 150 years and currently has 131 students, representing increased enrolment growth over the last 5 years.

The school has an ICSEA score of 972, and is classified as Category 5 on the department's Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 8% Aboriginal students, 8% students with disabilities, no students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD), no children/young people in care, and 38% of families are eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a principal in their 4th year of a 5-year tenure.

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: **How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?**

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

Educational Leadership: **How well does leadership facilitate the development of coherent high-quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?**

How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

Yahl Primary School's focus on student wellbeing is evident throughout the school and supports students by providing safe conditions for learning. Students enjoyed being at school and felt strongly connected and supported by staff and the wider community. Parents appreciated the strong culture of wellbeing and praised the school for treating all students as individuals. Wellbeing was evident in morning assemblies where students articulated and celebrated successes.

Earlier this year, the school celebrated its 150-year anniversary. Students, staff and community collaborated to provide activities to celebrate this important milestone, and link the event to curriculum areas. Student engagement and pride in the event was evident.

With wellbeing fully embedded, the school has attracted increasing enrolments, which produced an added layer of complexity for staff. Staff have recently completed 40 One Child One Plans for students they have identified at risk of not achieving, with only a small proportion of those for students currently identified under department guidelines.

Intervention is accessed through analysis of data, with current interventions being Quicksmart, MiniLit, MultiLit and 1:1 support. Schools services officers and teachers reflected on the informal communication they currently employ and all expressed a desire to access allocated time to discuss and further

strengthen the dialogue to support student learning. The panel felt there was opportunity to formalise arrangements to allow discussion and assist the transfer of learning from intervention back into the classroom.

Teachers collect a range of data used in varying degrees to inform practice. The school has recently purchased Accelerus software that enabled all staff to store and access data centrally. Some teachers were using pre and post-testing to shape their planning and provide assessment, but this was not consistent practice across the school.

The panel was provided with evidence that staff set goals for every student in the school. Goals varied in aspect: some were generalised comments, some were about learner dispositions, and others were linked to learning. The strategic intent to develop targets with students represents staff members' understanding that students having ownership of, and engagement with, their learning as key to maximising potential success. There is opportunity to provide consistency of practice across all classes by setting goals that are explicitly linked to learning.

Some students were supported by teacher feedback and constructive comments in 'bookwork', indicating the next steps in learning. One teacher was actively seeking feedback from students and refined their practice in light of student comments. Another teacher is making good use of student rubrics to support student learning and provide a framework for self-assessment. There are pockets of good practice, but a lack of collaboration and whole-school consistency. Teachers were individually using programs to support literacy and numeracy; however, there was little consistency in the programs they were using, therefore, no coherent approach. Evidence informs us that consistent practices and approaches support student learning as they progress through school. A cohesive staff team drives an improvement agenda which impacts on student outcomes. There is an imperative need for common agreements and staff collaboration to build capacity and provide a coherent approach.

Direction 1

Collaboratively develop and embed common agreements and effective pedagogical practice in literacy and numeracy to produce a coherent curriculum to support students as they progress through school.

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

Students were able to articulate their learning, and most students were exposed to a common language of learning where they talked about the 'learning pit' and 'growth mindsets'. Older students talked about 'sticking with the learning', and saw practice as means of assisting improvement. Younger students were aware of their current reading levels, and were keen to increase their reading skills and move through reading levels. Students felt supported by staff and commented that all staff want them to be "the very best we can be".

Opportunities for student voice exist within the school through Student Representative Council, sports captains, and buddy system; but there is little evidence of authentic student influence within learning, with only 1 teacher actively asking students for feedback as a means of improving their practice. Students articulated that they would like more choice in the what, how and where they could learn. Although the recent 150th anniversary was a success for the school, students reported having little say in what happened as everything was decided by staff. When they were presented with choice, it included

choosing between different options provided by the teacher. There is opportunity to incorporate authentic student influence in every stage of the learning process.

An individual approach to the curriculum exists for students accessing intervention. Through observations and discussions with students the panel found little evidence of differentiation within the classroom. Students reported that different year groups were often given different work, but for the majority of the time students were provided with the same work. There was an extension group for maths, but this was only accessed by a few students and occurred outside of the classroom. Students in year 4 and above reported that 58% of their work was 'just right', and 42% stated their work was 'too easy'. Nine percent of younger students reported finding their work 'too hard', 14% 'just right' and 76% 'too easy'. Students talked of the need to be stretched in their learning and be in the learning pit. A differentiated curriculum, which provides stretch and challenge for all students, could be provided.

Staff reported a growing consistency of grading through their ongoing moderation work, but felt this was an area in which they needed to continue to further develop. The panel believe opportunity exists to engage with the partnership senior leader learning improvement primary (SLLIP) and other sites to investigate learning design, assessment and moderation (LDAM), which would further strengthen practice, create common understanding and transfer into everyday classroom practice.

Direction 2

Engage with SLLIP and partnership sites to provide support and opportunities for staff to work on learning design, assessment and moderation to provide a differentiated curriculum, with stretch and challenge for all students.

How well does leadership facilitate the development of high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?

The school's focus on building wellbeing was evident throughout the review, and the principal articulated how this culture was established and built upon since her arrival which was verified by the education director. As safe conditions for learning are now embedded, there are beginnings of a shift onto data-informed practice and formative assessment.

The panel heard from a variety of sources that the principal took a class and modelled a process where upper primary students co-constructed an ancient Greek inquiry project. Students were able to choose how they presented their inquiry and could choose whether they were going to work independently or as part of a team. When the panel spoke to students they were extremely articulate and animated about the stretch in their learning. There was high-level engagement and clear assessment criteria. This provided an ongoing opportunity for leadership to work alongside staff in a coaching capacity and build common understandings and consistency of practice.

The school is collecting and sharing data centrally, and will be using this data as part of its self-review process booked for term 4. Outcomes from this day will inform the site improvement plan (SIP) for 2019. Whilst data was being routinely collected, the panel felt there was opportunity to map, monitor and triangulate a range of data from the reception to year 7 perspective, as it will identify trends and areas of focus.

When teachers were asked about how the current site improvement plan (SIP) was formed, the panel received various responses, where teachers within the same group provided different responses. A greater connection by teachers with the development and implementation of the SIP would be welcomed.

Since joining the school, the principal has been the only leadership person, but with increasing enrolments, the school is looking at increasing its leadership team and is in the process of employing a learning improvement leader. This will support staff in focusing and building capacity in curriculum and pedagogical practice. This is a positive move to shift the historical focus of wellbeing and firmly focus on improving student learning. The panel viewed elements of good practice, but believe there is a need to strategically 'pull everything together' and provide a coherent approach to support students. By increasing the volume of leadership members, there is opportunity to provide resources to this imperative focus.

Staff report that self-review processes have previously revolved around informal discussions during a staff meeting in term 4. The principal is aware of the need for an in-depth self-review process, and is employing the skills of an outside presenter to run a thorough process in term 4. This will build internal capacity within staff to work in a cycle of continuous improvement throughout the next year and beyond.

All staff are using the new departmental professional development plans (PDP). These are linked to the SIP and staff have met with the principal to discuss their plans. Unfortunately, some of the plans have only been recently created, which does not provide ongoing opportunity to review teacher practice. The timely development, and enactment of PDP plans, linked to the SIP and professional development is a strategic driver for school improvement. The panel saw opportunity to further develop and strengthen these processes.

Direction 3

Collectively work together to provide a robust culture of continuous improvement using self-review practices, which strategically link site improvement planning, professional development processes and teacher practice.

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 Yahl 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 the community worked together to provide a community perspective to events including, but not limited to, the 150th anniversary of the school, the Mount Gambier show, Christmas pageant, Canberra camp and pedal prix.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

Yahl Primary School works in partnership with parents and stakeholders.

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

- 1. Collaboratively develop and embed common agreements and effective pedagogical practice in literacy and numeracy to produce a coherent curriculum to support students as they progress through school.**
- 2. Engage with SLLIP and partnership sites to provide support and opportunities for staff to work on learning design, assessment and moderation to provide a differentiated curriculum, with stretch and challenge for all students.**
- 3. Collectively work together to provide a robust culture of continuous improvement using self-review practices, which strategically link site improvement planning, professional development processes and teacher practice.**

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

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 94%.

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 73% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents a decline in year 1 and an improvement in year 2 from the historic baseline average.

In 2018, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 93% of year 3 students, 64% of year 5 students, 83% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the SEA. For years 3 and 7, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. For year 5, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For 2018 year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN reading, the school is achieving within the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2018, 43% of year 3, 18% of year 5, and 11% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 38%, or 3 of 8 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2018, none of the 4 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2018.

Numeracy

In 2018, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 79% of year 3 students, 59% of year 5 students, 83% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3 and 7, this result represents an improvement, and for year 5, little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For 2018 year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN numeracy, the school is achieving within the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2018, 28% of year 3, 14% of year 5, and 17% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 3, this result represents improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 75%, or 3 of 4 students from year 3, remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2018, and the 1 student from year 3, remains in the upper bands at year 7 in 2018.