EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

Report for Barmera Primary School

Conducted in November 2017

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 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.

The External School Review Process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are adhered to and implemented. This information is provided in Appendix One of the report.

This External School Review was conducted by Liz Matheson, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Marie Wright and Alison Lynch, Review Principals.

School context

Barmera Primary School is located in the Riverland, 225kms east of the Adelaide CBD, and is part of the Berri and Barmera DECD Partnership. The school's enrolment is 225 and is relatively stable. The school has an ICSEA score of 935, and is classified as Category 2 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 37 Aboriginal students, 25 students with disabilities, 40 students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), no children in care, and 93 families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in her first year of tenure, a Deputy Principal and School Counsellor.

Barmera Primary School is a participant in the three-year Visible Learning Project.

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 three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

Effective Leadership: **To what extent is collective responsibility and collective action evident?**

Effective Teaching: **To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?**

Improvement Agenda: **To what extent do teachers use data and information to inform their planning?**

To what extent is collective responsibility and collective action evident?

Barmera Primary School has been through an unsettled time and some challenging circumstances, including having three principals in four years. For a period of time there was uncertainty from term-to-term with the Deputy Principal acting in the position. The current Principal was appointed on a five-year tenure commencing Term 3 2017. There have also been other key changes in staff, a longer-term plan, and a coherent strategic direction that is still a work-in-progress. The 2016 Annual Report summarised a staff survey indicating greater staff decision-making and consultation would be helpful.

The Review Panel was keen to determine the extent to which there is an improvement and collective-based culture at the school. Teachers, School Support Officers (SSOs) and the Wellbeing Coordinator were asked to place the school on a scale of 0 to 5 in response to the question: *To what extent is collective responsibility and collective action evident at Barmera Primary School?* The average scale response was 2.5. A number of staff struggled with the concept of 'collective responsibility and collective action', indicating they were unsure what it means.

During the ESR process many staff members indicated that trust and mutual respect were important ingredients for a collective culture, including there being follow-through on commitments. The Review Panel heard of examples where organisational matters were not followed-up, attended to in a timely manner, or dealt with inconsistently, and this has impacted on perceptions of trust and respect. There were also examples of staff members feeling not listened to or supported, and feeling that their views were 'dismissed'. This was particularly evident in speaking with School Services Officers, who described constant changes in their timetables and duties with little consultation and inadequate communication. Parents described the school as being at a low point, although recognised that most staff were committed to the school and worked hard. These behaviours and feelings developed over time, prior to 2017, and it appeared to the Review Panel, collegial relationships have not yet been satisfactorily mended.

The Review Panel noted that very few staff, leaders and teachers, talked about 'we' as a whole school, except in relation to the junior primary team. There were numerous examples of programs and practices

that had been in place but no longer consistently implemented, or discussions with no clear decisions or commitments for action. Few teachers knew the practices and pedagogies of their colleagues in any depth, leading to a lack of coherence and common approaches.

As part of the school's three-year commitment to the Visible Learning Project, the teaching staff participated in a survey to elicit their beliefs about learning. In the survey teachers indicated they thrive on challenges, and are willing to innovate and try new things. A striking difference between the survey results at Barmera Primary School and other schools in the Partnership related to teachers acknowledging they talk more about teaching than learning, which appears to correlate with the sentiments described above. In other words, at this stage, the school is 'teacher-focused' rather than 'learning-focused'.

While the Review Panel sighted examples of processes used to gather ideas and beliefs from staff members about a range of professional matters, including the School Improvement Plan, there are no current representative structures to build the ownership for implementing the school's strategic agenda. In effect, this means there is limited shared planning of staff meetings, pupil free days, ways in which teams will work, and how and when programs and practices should be evaluated. In the absence of such a structure and an improvement-focused culture, many staff members perceive these processes and recent Partnership initiatives as 'top down'. It was noted that the junior primary team had taken the chance to be released together to moderate student writing and, partly through this process, had developed a greater sense of team and achievement, whereas others had not taken advantage of this opportunity. A representative team responsible for planning the implementation of the strategic improvement strategies could counter 'top down' perceptions and develop a greater sense of shared leadership.

Direction 1
All staff members engage in, and commit to, culture-building and a growth mindset to develop a collaborative and learning-focused improvement culture.

Through the ESR process, students, teachers and parents indicated they are frustrated about the management of student behaviour in the school. Students talked about a few students taking up an inordinate amount of their teacher's time and attention. Many teachers indicated they did not feel supported, and that there were inconsistent responses from members of the Leadership Team, giving mixed messages to the school community.

The current Principal has attempted to improve the situation by supporting training for staff in identifying and managing children experiencing trauma. There are also a number of initiatives established to support disinclined students, such as the weekly Drumbeat program involving ten students. Despite these innovations, all staff groups talked about the school needing to undertake further work in managing 'high end' behaviours.

The Review Panel wondered if staff members expected all children to be given the same consequences, irrespective of their specific conditions and maturity. When challenged with this question, staff indicated they understood that 'one size fits all' is neither possible nor appropriate within a school context. Parents who attended the meetings with the Review Panel also appeared to understand this perspective. They believed their children have the capacity to understand that not everyone can or should be treated the same; however, in their view, there is little communication around these issues and challenges.

The management of student behaviour requires a holistic approach. There need to be clear procedures and routines, predictable and logical consequences, and the staff need to have the capacity to use a range of techniques and strategies to diffuse and deflect students' behaviour, and to maintain and restore relationships. While it is incumbent on leadership teams to support and lead these processes, it is also the responsibility of teachers to provide learning activities designed to engage and meet the needs of all students. It appeared to the Review Panel that the dialogue between the Leadership Team and staff about these dual responsibilities was at cross purposes, and that this is impacting on the overall school culture.

Evidence-based research on school improvement has shown that the capacity of the school to create a safe, caring and orderly environment for student learning is important. Without a safe orderly learning environment, learning will be compromised. However, on its own, it will not result in improved outcomes. In the context of Barmera Primary School, the Review Panel determined that the current level of frustration and discontent around student behaviour management needed to be detailed in this report.

Direction 2
Review the student behaviour management policy and procedures, with a focus on building classroom management and restorative practices and student engagement, underpinned by greater communication and consultation with all stakeholders.

To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

The performance results outlined in Appendix 2 of this report show that there is a range of achievement and learning needs at Barmera Primary School. The Review Panel was keen to explore with teachers, students and parents how the students' varied needs are catered for, and the effectiveness of pedagogies across year levels and the school.

The Review Panel noted that the school is promoting the use of lesson intentions and success criteria, so that students know the purpose of their learning and what is expected. This professional learning is getting traction in classroom practices. In some classes, including in the junior primary, students were able to clearly articulate why they were doing the task, and teachers reinforced this through the course of the lesson. The next developmental step will be to expand this in all classes to different learning areas and involve students in developing the success criteria, so that there is a greater sense of ownership and motivation.

Many students from Years 3 to 7 interviewed by the Review Panel identified mathematics as an area of the curriculum they enjoyed and felt they had improved in. At the junior primary level young students are learning to trust the count, subitising and number patterning. It appears that pre-testing and post-testing is a common practice within junior primary, so that teachers can place students into groups on the basis of this information, and plan activities and experiences to support students to build their skills. In the middle and upper primary school, students are learning number facts and how to apply these to problem-solving. The creation of 'problemitised' situations has enabled more open-ended tasks and multiple entry points. It was a good example of how some teachers were differentiating the learning to cater for the range of skill levels. In a few classes in Years 3 to 7, the use of worksheets was described by students as common. When students finish they are given quiet reading or drawing time, free time or another worksheet. A few students have been selected to participate in the Quicksmart intervention program, to build their level of automaticity. The evidence provided shows this program is having a positive impact on students' confidence as well as their skills.

The junior primary teachers have recently plotted students' writing on a continuum, tracking the progress they have made and, most importantly, clearly identifying the next steps for learning. Across the school, there has been a focus on developing non-fiction writing skills, and this was evident in looking at students' workbooks in which they had studied the key features of procedures and information reports. The school has had a focus on writing for some years, and the results, as measured by NAPLAN, show significant progress, particularly from Years 5 to 7.

The Review Panel found there are varying practices in regard to the learning and teaching of reading. This variation has resulted in minimal improvement of reading results.

The evidence of how children learn to read, and then become proficient in reading texts to support their learning across the curriculum, is no longer contestable. It is known as the 'Big 6'. The junior primary teachers at Barmera Primary School appeared to have a good understanding of the Big 6, and were using groups to provide explicit instruction according to the needs identified through various assessments, including Running Records. This understanding was not evident in the practices in many classes within the primary section of the school. Indeed, it appeared that many teachers, including at Year 3 level, do not regularly (at least weekly) listen to the students reading, or discuss the meaning of the text in any depth. The exception was frequent reading conferences in a Year 4/5 class, where the students were explicitly taught fluency skills (accent and phrasing) and comprehension. In one Year 6/7 class the teacher used a standardised assessment tool to identify skill gaps and has guided reading groups to support improvement.

The approach to spelling and phonics across the school has been influenced by a previous decision to adopt a specific program known as WRAP (Writing Approach to Reading). This has involved significant time on spelling and phonics within literacy learning. This approach was designed to be sequential, so that students

build their repertoire as they progress through school. In interviews with teachers it became clear the WRAP model was implemented to varying degrees. Furthermore, as stated above, it appears this approach has not translated into improved reading achievement results. It is time for a thorough review and evaluation of this approach.

Direction 3
Develop and improve pedagogical practices to provide greater differentiation and targeted support for students, especially in the learning and teaching of reading.

To what extent do teachers use data and information to inform their planning?

The school provided extensive achievement datasets for the ESR. Teachers talked about common expectations, and it was clear what was to be collected, when and by whom. The data trends have been shared at staff meetings, however, it was not clear what plans and actions have been developed as a result of this discussion. The data is not currently in a form that is easily accessible by teachers, although the school leadership is aware of this and is working on developing a data management system to overcome this problem.

The use of data for programming and planning at a class and student cohort level varied. Many teachers collect extensive data through weekly spelling tests, although it is not clear whether this practice is resulting in improved strategies for spelling, word knowledge and vocabulary development. The use of literacy-based datasets and *I can do maths* achievement data appeared to be well-used for grouping and programming in the junior primary. These practices seemed less common in other sections of the school, except for a few teachers. There was an example of NAPLAN and the PAT tests results being compared to identify patterns and gaps.

Once a student is deemed to be an independent reader, and met the DECD Standards in Running Records, a student's reading is assessed using Reading Lexiles. While this program shows students when they have progressed in a level, it is of limited use to teachers for diagnostic and planning purposes.

The Aboriginal Education Team have disaggregated achievement and attendance datasets to track the performance of Aboriginal students. The extent this is used in a targeted way for learning is a work in progress. It appeared that, to date, only one teacher has used the PAT data and accompanying resources in any depth.

The systems for tracking students' growth from one year level to another do not seem to be particularly effective in providing seamless and targeted support. The pattern was similar 2014 to 2016. This is a pattern that the school and relevant teachers need to work to change.

In groups, teachers were asked what actions individuals, and the school as a whole, would need to take to place the school further along the continuum of collective responsibility and collective action if the Review Panel was to return in a year's time. Several groups pointed towards "Using data to help us improve learning – not just look at it!" Others indicated it was time to make decisions about whole-school approaches, such as WRAP and maths, and the strategic analysis of achievement data might be useful in this process.

Direction 4
Refine the data collection procedures and build teachers' capacity to use the achievement and engagement data for more targeted planning and tracking of progress for improvement.

What is the school doing particularly well and why is this effective?

During the review process, the Review Panel verified the following effective practices that are contributing significantly to school improvement at Barmera Primary School.

The school's Aboriginal Education Team, together with staff and families, have worked to improve the attendance and learning outcomes of Aboriginal students. The school's data shows that, on average, a greater proportion of Aboriginal students achieved the DECD Standards than the non-Aboriginal students in the PAT-M tests in Years 4, 6 and 7, and in Year 5 in PAT-R. These outcomes indicate a partnership has developed between the school staff and families. The homework centre is highly regarded and used. Students' attendance is closely tracked and good attendance is publicly acknowledged. The voices and perspectives of families and students are actively sought, and there is an effort to follow-up their ideas.

Barmera Primary School engages in an Environmental exhibition each year involving Year 4 to 7 students, which is highly regarded by parents and students. Students have a choice of topic, and with whom they work. The learning activities are provided over time, varying from a few weeks to a term. Students present their learning to others, including other schools. They receive feedback on their learning. Engagement appears to be high during the exhibition learning as students have more say over their learning.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

There is currently no clear learning-focused improvement culture, characterised by a coherent whole-school approach to learning and teaching at Barmera Primary School. The school has a pattern of declining student achievement, particularly in the number and percentage of students achieving in the higher proficiency bands.

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

1. All staff members engage in, and commit to, culture-building and a growth mindset to develop a collaborative and learning-focused improvement culture.

2. Review the student behaviour management policy and procedures, with a focus on building classroom management and restorative practices and student engagement, underpinned by greater communication and consultation with all stakeholders.

3. Develop and improve pedagogical practices to provide greater differentiation and targeted support for students, especially in the learning and teaching of reading.

4. Refine the data collection procedures and build teachers' capacity to use the achievement and engagement data for more targeted planning and tracking of progress for improvement.

Based on the school's current performance, Barmera Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2018.

Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY

Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND
PRESCHOOLS

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.

Natasha Hefford
PRINCIPAL
BARMERA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson

Appendix One

Policy compliance

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

The Principal of Barmera Primary School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies

Implementation of the *DECD Student Attendance Policy* was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2016 was 90.2%.

Appendix Two

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 2017, 64% of Year 1 and 55% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). For Year 1, this result is within and, for Year 2, below the historic baseline average.

Between 2014 and 2017, the trend for Year 2 has been downwards, from 85% in 2014 to 55% in 2017.

In 2017, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 75% of Year 3 students, 57% of Year 5 students and 69% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 7, this result represents little or no change, and for Year 5, a decline from the historic baseline average.

For 2017 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the range of results of similar students across DECD schools.

In 2017, 40% (16 of 40) of Year 3, 7% (2 of 30) of Year 5, and 3% (1 of 35) 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, and a three-year upward trend.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 40%, or 2 of 5 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2017, and 33%, or 1 of 3 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2017.

Numeracy

In 2017, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 63% of Year 3 students, 60% of Year 5 students, and 60% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 5, this result represents little or no change, and for Year 7, a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2015 and 2017, the trend for Year 7 has been downwards, from 73% in 2015 to 60% in 2017.

For 2017 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the range of results of similar groups of students across DECD schools.

In 2017, 18% of Year 3, 7% of Year 5 and 6% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 33%, or 2 of 6 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2017, and 50%, or 2 of 4 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2017.