

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

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

## REPORT FOR THORNDON PARK 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 Julie Hardy Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Shelley Cameron, Review Principal and Marina Elliott, Director Early Years and Partnership Planning.*

### **Policy compliance**

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

The Principal of Thorndon Park Primary has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies.

Implementation of the *DECD Student Attendance Policy* was checked specifically against a documented set of criteria. The school has implemented 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.

### **School context**

Thorndon Park Primary School is a Reception to Year 7 school situated in the north-eastern metropolitan area. Enrolments have been increasing from 140 in 2010, to approximately 250 students enrolled in 2015. The school is classified as DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage Category 6 and has an Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) score of 1032.

The school population includes 1% Aboriginal students, 10% Students with Disabilities, less than 1% students under the Guardianship of the Minister (GoM), 34% of students for whom English is an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), and 31% of families are eligible for School Card assistance.

The Leadership Team consists of a Principal, Deputy Principal, and Coordinator: Data Management.

### Lines of inquiry

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

<b>Student Learning:</b>	<b>How well are students achieving over time?</b>
<b>Improvement Agenda:</b>	<b>How well are the results of data and evidence translated into targeted actions?</b>
<b>Effective Teaching:</b>	<b>To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?</b>
<b>Effective Leadership:</b>	<b>How does the school know that its professional learning and performance and development processes are effective in building teacher capacity?</b>

### How well are students achieving over time?

In the early years, Running Records provide a measure of reading achievement. In 2014, 57% of Year 1 and 66% of Year 2 students achieved the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) or above. This represents an improvement on historical average at Years 1 and 2.

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 86% of Year 3 students, 63% of Year 5 students and 74% of Year 7 students achieved the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). For numeracy, in 2015, the percentage of students who achieved the SEA or above was 52% at Year 3, 60% at Year 5 and 68% at Year 7. For numeracy, this represents a trend down from 75% at SEA in 2013 to 52% at SEA in 2015 at Year 3, and a trend up from 52% in 2013, to 60% in 2015 at Year 5; results at Year 7 have been consistent.

In reading, 21% of Year 3 students, 27% of Year 5 students, but no Year 7 students achieved in the two highest proficiency bands of NAPLAN in 2015, while in numeracy, 11% of Year 3 students, 10% of Year 5 students and 16% of Year 7 students achieved in the two highest proficiency bands. For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 7 of the 10 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015. In numeracy, 2 of 8 students remained in the upper proficiency bands from Year 3 to 5.

The challenge for the school is to increase and sustain the proportion of students demonstrating high-level learning and achievement in the higher proficiency bands as they progress through the school. Based on the analysis of achievement data in literacy and numeracy, as well as school-based data analysis provided by the Principal, the Review Panel focused on the impact of processes being developed through the school's strategic plan to raise achievement.

### How well are the results of data and evidence translated into targeted actions?

While measures of student outcomes are essential to all school improvement efforts, school improvement involves fundamentally improving what a school does on a daily basis. In order to do this, the school needs a range of regular, scheduled processes through which they collect and analyse multiple measures of data and evidence relating to student learning and school processes.

Thorndon Park Primary School is collecting a range of valid data that measures achievement and growth in reading, writing and maths. A data schedule outlines when data is to be collected and entered into an Excel-based system that is saved on a shared drive. Data walls are displayed in classrooms where non-identified data shows class progress towards documented standards. Students talked about knowing where they were in relation to standards and discussed their next steps with teachers. Australian Curriculum grades are also

collected at a whole-school level but not yet included in the school data system, though this is planned. Attendance data is also entered into individual student data sets.

The panel heard how teachers meet weekly as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to regularly consider and reflect on achievement and growth, as well as collaboratively plan and design assessment. Teachers indicated that this was a valued process that supports their professional growth.

The school uses processes to triangulate the data to compare information related to achievement and attendance. A culture of continuous improvement is evident and staff use data and evidence to reflect, with others, on the effectiveness of their teaching. Given the capacity and willingness of teachers to collect data and track individuals, the panel noted the opportunity to document a systematic process for teachers to “handover” data and their knowledge about how individual students learn best from year to year.

At Thorndon Park Primary School, the panel was particularly interested in the evidence and processes that are used to review progress, and plan for the future. The panel heard how self-review processes bring groups together to consider student achievement, growth and teacher practices. The panel saw documentation of 2015 Site Review Processes and Findings. Staff consider the effectiveness of programs and approaches, as well as student achievement data. This occurs during staff meeting time, a school closure day, and at an emergent level through leadership team meetings. The panel noted the opportunity to strengthen these processes by sharpening the focus on using measurable learning outcomes and perception data to evaluate the impact of strategies and approaches.

Central to a continuous improvement cycle is the Site Improvement Plan (SIP), which describes a small number of priorities for improvement that have emerged from the review processes and are informed by data. Limiting the number of improvement priorities enables the school to maintain approaches that are working well, while concentrating efforts and resources on implementing a few strategies to create better outcomes. In 2015, the Thorndon Park Site Improvement Plan was designed to broadly reflect teaching, learning and leadership across the school. The panel noted the opportunity to narrow the improvement focus to two or three key priorities identified through the thorough analysis of data as part of structured review processes.

#### **Direction 1**

**Collaboratively develop, document and implement a Site Improvement Plan that has a narrow focus for improvement with a limited number of high-yield strategies that impact on measurable outcomes for students.**

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

As great teaching is multi-dimensional and complex, it follows that it needs to be viewed through several lenses. The External School Review looks at how the school uses curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ways that provide multiple pathways for learning, and supports students to make expected growth throughout their years of schooling.

Parents who spoke to the panel commented on the positive relationships at the school and the strong sense of community. They felt that they were well-informed about their children’s progress and were comfortable to approach teachers and talk about their child’s learning. They commented that teachers were proactive in contacting parents and that issues were resolved quickly when they arose.

The Australian Curriculum sets out the core knowledge, understanding, skills and general capabilities important for all Australian students, and what should be taught and achieved as they progress through school. At Thorndon Park Primary School, the panel found that teachers have a thorough understanding of the Australian Curriculum and what is to be taught at each year level. Teachers meet in PLCs to plan collaboratively and reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching each week, as well as using whole-day release each term and informal opportunities. The panel saw evidence of learning programs that are thoroughly planned, structured and sequenced. Teachers reported that moderation processes support teaching teams to assess and grade student work consistently; however, more opportunities to work with teachers across the DECD Local Partnership would give them a broader perspective.

Intervention programs that support students not making expected progress are documented and evidence-based. Students are supported within the classroom and by withdrawal in small groups. Intervention programs reflect needs identified through assessment, and a Student Review Team oversees the identification of students requiring support and matches them to appropriate programs. Teachers design and monitor in-class support programs. The panel noted the opportunity to further strengthen intervention processes by ensuring that data is collected in relation to the learning of students enrolling throughout the year to ensure their learning needs are met as soon as they join the school.

In exploring the extent to which the school caters for the varied needs of learners, the Review Panel was interested in the way teachers differentiate planning and teaching to accelerate the learning of students achieving highly and to support those students not making expected progress. The extent to which these practices are consistent across the school was also a focus.

Students who spoke with the panel were articulate about their learning and reported a strong sense of belonging to the school community. They talked about where their achievement was in relation to the standards and provided evidence of summative tasks that explicitly described achievement against standards. The panel also saw individual student learning goals displayed in classrooms, and students were able to talk about what they needed to do next to improve in general terms. They identified goals related to behaviours, such as 'concentrate more' and 'stay on task', rather than specific skills. The panel noted the opportunity to strengthen the impact of learning goals by ensuring goals reflected specific skills and measures that would allow students to know when their goals have been achieved.

The panel saw evidence of strategies to support learning at a range of levels. Teachers used open-ended tasks, differentiated questioning, tasks planned at different levels of complexity, flexible grouping to address specific needs and personalised learning through inquiry, to provide opportunities for students to engage in learning at an appropriate level. All teachers who spoke to the panel were interested in finding out more about differentiation in order to better meet the needs of their students, in particular, those students who were achieving highly.

The design of tasks that provide opportunities for students to engage in complex thinking and demonstrate high-level learning is crucial to accelerating learning and lifting achievement. The panel saw evidence of learning tasks designed to support the needs of a range of learners. Rubrics and checklists are commonly used to scaffold and guide students' work. An inquiry approach to learning is widespread across the school and, in conversation with teachers, the panel noted variation in understanding of the concept and approach to inquiry.

The panel noted the opportunity to strengthen current approaches by gaining a more consistent view of inquiry as a pedagogy for engagement and ensuring that all tasks provide opportunities for intellectual stretch.

## **Direction 2**

**Use collaborative planning practices to ensure that task design provides opportunities for intellectual stretch and allows children to demonstrate high-level learning.**

### **How does the school know that its professional learning and performance and development processes are effective in building teacher capacity?**

One way of increasing the impact of planning on outcomes for students is to align what is planned with professional development which supports teachers to implement the strategy and performance development processes, allowing teachers to reflect upon their success in supporting the implementation of the planned strategy.

At Thorndon Park Primary School, the panel heard how teachers attended professional learning that was provided in-school by curriculum experts to support the planned strategies, as well as undertaking visits to other sites to see practical examples of planned approaches in action. Teachers reported that they felt that the professional learning program and the support of their peers had been valuable in implementing approaches to literacy, social learning and twenty-first century learning approaches.

The panel noted that the open exchange of feedback between colleagues through PLCs is valued. Classroom observations, where teachers work in pairs to watch each other work and provide targeted feedback, is another useful strategy in building teacher capacity.

In relation to performance and development, the panel heard that teachers have a current and annually reviewed performance and development plan directly aligned with school priorities and the AITSL Teacher Standards. Teachers talked about their performance meetings as being useful in focusing on their proficiency against the AITSL Teacher Standards. Performance and Development meetings are also used to discuss what the data is telling teachers about student learning and achievement in their classes, and how they have modified their teaching in response.

At the time of the review, the school was in the process of implementing a range of changes within the context of developing a school-wide approach to better catering for the needs of students by encouraging independent, child-centred learning where children are increasingly taking responsibility for aspects of their learning and making decisions. These included processes and practices in relation to using data, classroom environments, using outdoor learning spaces, intervention, literacy, social emotional learning, mathematics and inquiry. The panel noted the need for evaluation and consolidation to ensure that successful approaches are captured and embedded in practice as a foundation for further development.

### **Direction 3**

**Evaluate current pedagogical work to determine the most effective strategies to improve student learning outcomes and implement these consistently across the school.**

### OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Thorndon Park Primary School is tracking well. Good performance is evident through a focus on evidence-based improvement with data and evidence used to inform decisions and actions at the individual student, class and whole-school level.

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

1. Collaboratively develop, document and implement a Site Improvement Plan that has a narrow focus for improvement with a limited number of high-yield strategies that impact on measurable outcomes for students.
2. Use collaborative planning practices to ensure that task design provides opportunities for intellectual stretch and allows children to demonstrate high-level learning.
3. Evaluate current pedagogical work to determine the most effective strategies to improve student learning outcomes and implement these consistently across the school.

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



Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
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.



Gina Perotta  
PRINCIPAL  
THORNDON PARK PRIMARY  
SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson