

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

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Report for Solomontown Primary School

Conducted in September 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 Greg Graham, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Bryan Rotherham, Review Principal.*

## School context

Solomontown Primary School is a Reception to Year 7 school located 222kms north of Adelaide in the township of Port Pirie. The school has a current enrolment of 175 students showing a steady enrolment decline. The school has an ICSEA score of 868, and is classified as Category 1 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 35 (20%) Aboriginal students, 52 (30%) students with disabilities, one student with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), 7 (4%) children in care, and 52% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in her final year of tenure. There is 1 Deputy Principal and 1 Counsellor (0.6FTE). There are 15 teachers, including 1 new graduate commencing at the school in 2017.

The school hosts 2 Special Education classes for the Pirie Portfolio; the Early Years class (Reception to Year 2), which has a maximum of 12 learners, and the Primary Years class (Years 3 to 7).

## 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:

**Student Learning:** To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

**Effective Teaching:** How well does the school use assessment data or evidence to inform teaching practices about individual student learning?

**Improvement Agenda:** To what extent does a continuous improvement culture exist in the school?

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

The Review Panel met with parents representing 11 families. The Solomontown community has a strong connection with the school, where a number of second and third generations of families have children enrolled at the school. Parents shared a number of examples of ways that they work in partnership with the school staff to support their child especially in school events. Governing Councillors reported that they feel included in all matters related to the school. The Governing Council members understand the use of student achievement data to support and direct the learning programs. The consensus was that all staff are accessible, listen and respond when issues arise. The parents recognised that the Special Education program offered at the school is very positive.

The students respected all of the staff. The students are happy to be at school and enjoy being with their friends. Student voice and responsibility is limited to House Leadership and school assemblies.

The students from Reception to Year 7 identified maths and English as strengths in their learning. All of the students enjoyed the STEM activities introduced this year, with particular interest in the hands-on activities. Students who spoke with the Review Panel were very articulate about their learning and clear about where their strengths and areas for improvement are. Most of the students indicated that they understood what they needed to do to improve their A-E grade scores although they were not too clear on what each grade level meant. Some of the Primary Years students recognised that their work is scaffolded and indicated that, over a school week, about 30% of their work makes them 'think harder'.

The school student review (STAR) meetings held fortnightly were seen as beneficial in providing direction for targeted students in both intervention and attendance. The Deputy Principal manages and monitors the student intervention processes across the school. The school uses a number of intervention programs, such as *Quicksmart Maths*, *PreLit*, *MiniLit* and *MultiLit*, which are implemented by trained School Services Officers

(SSOs). The communication between teachers and the classroom SSO is positive, with two-way exchange of results and future planning for individual children at the class level.

The Special Options classes are operating well within the school environment. The students participate in a modified curriculum within their own classrooms, as well as being involved in STEM and PE specialist lessons. AET and ACEO personnel work with ATSI students in supporting their numeracy and literacy development.

The teachers demonstrated a mixture of explicit teaching processes (for example, teacher-directed, textbooks, worksheets and group work) which was evident across the school. A staff survey on 'the extent that students were supported' with teaching and engagement, demonstrated that 50% of staff recognised that they 'sit' within the medium range. The parameters of the survey included whether students understand learning intentions, engagement feedback, stretch and deeper thinking, and skill development.

Student Wellbeing was being addressed through the use of *Play is the Way* methodology for teaching social and emotional skills. However, the interviewed students and some teachers have indicated that the inconsistency of the program being implemented across the school was evident.

The school caters for the varied needs of students with a particular emphasis on students involved in the intervention programs. However, there were inconsistencies of practice amongst the staff.

Involving students through learner voice and co-design in their own learning, including in pedagogical and assessment design and decision-making, would deepen and enrich the quality of student learning, and strengthen higher-bands achievement and retention.

#### **Direction 1**

**Explore and implement approaches that integrate and effectively embed intellectual stretch, challenge and rigour into daily classroom teaching and learning to cater for all students.**

#### **How well does the school use assessment data or evidence to inform teaching practices about individual student learning?**

In her presentation to the Review Panel, the Principal identified a change in the Site Improvement Plan (SIP) with a stronger focus on student achievement, in particular, literacy (reading) and numeracy. In recent years, the use of data to support learning has been developing with particular focus for intervention programs to support students with learning difficulties. There are processes where whole-school data collection and analysis is used to monitor whole-school objectives from the SIP. This information is used and advertised through data story-walls, which has enabled staff to make the connection between student outcomes and planned teaching.

Student achievement is compared from year-to-year to identify trends and monitor growth. The school has a documented assessment schedule that focuses on literacy and numeracy. Formal assessments, such as PAT-M and PAT-R are analysed to look for gaps in the students' knowledge and skills, and information is then used to plan intervention support for targeted students. A school-wide focus on reading had been implemented. There is some evidence that this data is being regularly analysed by some teachers to identify the next teaching points and to differentiate instruction for students in the middle and high range of achievement. The explicit teaching of reading is evident across Reception to Year 7, and is being taught with some consistency across the school. The school has implemented PM Benchmarks to track and monitor student achievement in Reading. This dataset is used by teachers to aid in supporting students directly, or with those involved in specific intervention programs.

Some teachers share student achievement data with their students to encourage student reflection on their own learning. The students were able to verify this practice and believed that by knowing what NAPLAN Band level they had achieved, they could then push themselves to work towards self-improvement.

Learning teams and scheduled meetings for data analysis were appreciated and valued by staff. Many staff members commented that these scheduled meetings were sometimes overtaken by other agenda items. Staff noted that these interruptions had created some delay in the monitoring and development of strategies to address changes in teaching practices to support students.

It has been recognised that the school does use information from a variety of datasets to support and plan for student learning, particularly those students with identified learning difficulties. The next phase of the school's future planning would be to develop learning agreements and processes to cater for the abilities of all students Reception to Year 7.

#### **Direction 2**

**Promote a positive culture of improvement by providing regular opportunities for teachers to share and generate effective evidence-based approaches collaboratively that promote rigorous learning for all students.**

#### **To what extent does a continuous improvement culture exist in the school?**

All of the staff are aware of the complexities of social and emotional backgrounds that many of the students experience. The school has used attendance data to ascertain information about the relationship between student engagement and student achievement. In doing so, the school has implemented strategies to improve the attendance of students, which includes work conducted by the School Counsellor. To develop a culture of positive learning, the school has implemented the *Play is the Way* social skills program as a whole-school approach to support the social skills of the students. Evidence from the students and some staff indicated that this program has been inconsistently used across the school. Students indicated that they were only familiar with some of the games from the program, but elements of the classroom program, such as 'circle time', are not practiced. Staff also recognised that the commitment and consistency of the implementation of *Play is The Way* is varied.

Professional learning opportunities are offered to teachers and SSOs. Professional development processes exist both formally and informally for teachers and SSO staff. Strategies employed by the Leadership Team include classroom observations. Teaching staff commented that feedback opportunities on their professional performance have been inconsistent. SSO personnel were appreciative for the opportunities they received to attend professional development seminars and workshops.

Staff commented on the inconsistent approach that the school has gone about implementing programs to support student learning and dispositional growth. This was highlighted by comments made by staff in that the school has, over time, looked at numerous programs (for example, Growth Mindsets and Positive Education) as a means of developing the learning culture across the school. It was commented by the vast majority of staff that there was no commitment to a strategic approach to develop a culture of improvement. In recent times, the school has undertaken the Visible Learning process as part of the Pirie Partnership initiative, to support a shift in pedagogy towards student learning and personal growth. This initiative is in its infancy, with all teaching staff attending the first phase of the program. SSO personnel commented that, as a group, they have not been a part of this process.

Staff and parents commented on the decline in the whole-school celebrations of success or recognition of achievements. Historically, such events were conducted on a regular basis and were valued for their contribution towards focusing on student wellbeing. Many of the staff would like celebrations to be reinstated to reinvigorate a whole-school culture.

Staff reported that they felt the priority of daily operational processes needed to be addressed, to get a shared understanding about what is sometimes assumed as 'the known'. Simple examples include consistency and transparency of decision-making, communication and behaviour management processes, as being important policies and procedures to have in place to further the conditions for continuous improvement in an effective workplace.

From the information presented by the people interviewed, it was evident that there is a collective understanding that a common approach towards the school's vision and its priorities is needed.

#### **Direction 3**

**Develop a collaborative and continuous culture that supports shared ownership and implementation of the school's vision and direction.**

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### 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 Solomontown Primary School.

**The Solomontown Primary School hosts 2 very effective Special Education classes for the Pirie Portfolio.** The Solomontown Special Options classes services students with intellectual disabilities from within the city of Port Pirie and neighbouring rural towns. It offers two classes comprising of the Early Years class (Reception to Year 2), which has a maximum of 12 learners, and the Primary Years class (Years 3 to 7).

The students are involved in some of the mainstream curriculum programs of the school, in particular, the STEM classes and PE activities. The general student population are accepting of the children attending the Special Options classes, and support them in social and play activities during class breaks. Parents who have children attending the Special Options classes are very satisfied with the quality of the program offered and believe that the school is meeting the needs of their children.

## OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

Solomontown Primary School provides effective leadership in strategic direction, planning and targeted interventions for a diverse and complex student population. Teachers are provided with and use structured time for ongoing collaborative planning.

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

1. Explore and implement approaches that integrate and effectively embed intellectual stretch, challenge and rigour into daily classroom teaching and learning to cater for all students.
2. Promote a positive culture of improvement by providing regular opportunities for teachers to share and generate effective evidence-based approaches collaboratively that promotes rigorous learning for all students.
3. Develop a collaborative and continuous culture that supports shared ownership and implementation of the school's vision and direction.

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



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Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY



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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 three months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's Annual Report.

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Sandra Mauger  
PRINCIPAL  
SOLOMONTOWN PRIMARY SCHOOL

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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 Solomontown 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 88.9%.

## 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 2016, the reading progress using the Running Records achievement data, indicates that 63% of Year 1 students and 52% of Year 2 students have demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

In 2016, the reading progress, as measured by NAPLAN, indicates that 68% of Year 3, 42% of Year 5, and 42% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA.

For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. For Years 5 and 7, this result represents little or no change.

For Years 3, 5 and 7, the school is achieving within the results of similar students across DECD.

In 2016, 4.5% of Year 3 students, 4% of Year 5 students and 5% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands.

For Year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, there were no students from Year 3 remaining in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016. For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in Reading, only 1 of 4 students from Year 3 remains in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.

#### Numeracy

In 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 64% of Year 3, 35% of Year 5, and 47% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD SEA.

For Years 3 and 7, this result represents an improvement, and for Year 5, little change, from the historic baseline average. For Years 3 and 7, the school is achieving within, and for Year 5, below the results of similar students across DECD.

In 2016, 14% of Year 3, 4% of Year 5, and 11% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands.

For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in Numeracy, there were no students from Year 3 remaining in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016. For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in Numeracy, no students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.