

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

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Report for Geranium Primary School

Conducted in May 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 Julie Bishop, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Vicky Ireland, Review Principal.*

### School context

Geranium Primary School is located 165kms from the Adelaide CBD, and is part of the Coorong/Mallee Partnership. The current enrolment is 34 students. The school has an ICSEA score of 988, and is classified as Category 6 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 5.5% (2) students with disabilities, 2% (1) children in care, and 20% of families eligible for School Card assistance. The enrolment has been steady over the past five years.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in her first tenure at the school.

### 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 are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

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

**Improvement Agenda:** How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?

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

In interviews conducted with older students during the External School Review (ESR), 41% indicated maths as an area of learning they were not good at. When students were asked what made maths hard for them responses included: "I don't really get it, I've always had trouble with it"; "I don't really get numbers at all", "I get easily distracted". Staff commented that many students had a negative disposition towards maths and that this had been the case for some time.

The data in Appendix 2 indicates that students achieve the SEA, but the proportion achieving in the higher bands is an area for improvement.

The school has acknowledged the need to develop persistence and resilience in all learners. The school value of persistence is a focus within classes. The school and the on-site kindergarten have collaboratively developed a learning toolbox, which includes a language that all children can use to explain the whole-site approach to lifelong learning based on 'when I am... then I can...', for example, 'when I am flexible then I can be curious'.

Staff stated that complacency could, at times, be an issue for students and that it was rare for students to take intellectual risks. It was also stated that: "students are not as poor as they perceive themselves to be in maths".

It is apparent that such perceptions, if left unchecked, may well restrict students from achieving high standards in their learning. The strategic and regular implementation and review of student perception data relating to how they best learn and how they can improve their learning will inform both students and staff in next steps for their learning. When this is combined with a planned, whole-school community approach to embedding Growth Mindset language, students will have multiple pathways to develop and embed the necessary skills required to sustain positive learning dispositions.

The school has developed a very comprehensive visual data display where all students' learning is tracked and monitored; this is a well-designed tool for ongoing staff discussion of student learning. Targets for each assessment are set at an individual student level. This could be further strengthened through the

establishment of aspirational goals that directly involve the student in the goal-setting process. Students should know and understand the DECD SEA targets appropriate to their year level and area of learning. Transparency of common goals ensures students are involved as equal partners in the learning process and provides them with opportunities to develop ownership of their learning.

Students in one classroom were very eager to show and discuss the visual display of their reading progress. This was a very clear indication of students owning their learning and setting their own challenges. Students were able to articulate their recent achievements and where they intended to be by the end of the term. This can be further extended by students setting targets in other areas of learning, for example, sight words or number facts. When targets are visible and public, students understand that these are highly valued and important components of their learning and, as such, they are motivated to demonstrate and share their achievements.

Staff, during interviews and via surveys conducted during the ESR, indicated a clear understanding of intellectual stretch and challenge and the subsequent implications for all learners. Staff commented that having a range of different year levels can make the planning of multiple entry and exit points easier. Clear evidence was provided of an understanding that the range of tasks need to provide opportunities for stretch for every student. Staff commented that they would like to have the opportunity to develop more transforming tasks; they also saw the linking of transforming tasks with inquiry learning to be a useful area for future development.

The staff are well-placed to undertake the next steps in developing resilient and powerful learners through the regular and planned provision of learning tasks that engage and challenge all learners.

#### **Direction 1**

**Develop a whole-site approach to intellectual stretch and challenge across a range of learning areas through the development of transforming tasks, strengthened by students setting their own learning goals.**

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

The Principal has strategically worked to ensure that staff have access to planning tools that provide consistency and congruence in the delivery of curriculum. This is especially important in small schools where teachers are required to teach up to four year levels within one class. The school curriculum map is based on an inquiry-based approach to learning. Each term there is a specific inquiry focus; for example, the focus for Term 1 was 'Who are we?' The focus question is aligned across all learning areas, thus incorporating Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS), the arts, health and physical education, science, design and technologies, and German. Maths core threads and English productive modes are also incorporated. Whole-school events, such as the school camp and maths day, are aligned with areas of learning and incorporated into the curriculum map.

The school is to be commended for their work in this area. Planning against the Australian Curriculum in a sequential manner that ensures students have access to the curriculum of their year level can be overwhelming for staff in small schools with multiple year levels. The curriculum map developed at Geranium Primary School provides direction and clarity for staff, whilst also ensuring a sequential approach to planning for learning.

The staff have worked with the Principal to develop staff guides in both English and mathematics. The documents have been developed to provide clear guidelines for the core essential aspects in English and mathematics from Reception to Year 7. The documents provide clear expectations for teaching staff and facilitate the planning for and tracking of student skill levels across year levels in multi-age classes. The core essentials guide also provides a means to ensure that the content of the Australian Curriculum is appropriately addressed.

The English guide maps curriculum documents across year levels for speaking and listening, reading comprehension, writing, grammar and punctuation. The maps are designed to support the teacher to see the development of specific skills across year levels with the intent to provide increased efficiency when planning for multi-age classes.

The mathematics guide maps curriculum standards and outcomes across the year levels in both core and inquiry threads. It has been reported that this document has become a valuable tool for planning. It is anticipated that the document will be further developed, particularly in the area of tracking students in specific skill development, as a result of further professional development planned for 2017.

All students have access to a daily numeracy and literacy block, both for an hour's duration. The Principal and the upper primary teacher work with students from Years 3 through to 7 in two distinct groups.

English and maths agreements for students from Reception to Year 7 have been implemented. The agreements have been developed to support parent understanding about these two pivotal areas of the Australian Curriculum. Aspects include unpacking the difference between mathematics and numeracy, outlining the three main areas of English – Oral Language, Reading and Writing – and a section on how parents can help their children. The school has also developed an assessment and reporting schedule which includes a data collection timeline for each term.

These documents provide clear evidence of careful and targeted documentation, strategically led by the Principal, to support the delivery of a comprehensive and congruent curriculum for students in multi-year level classes.

There has been very strategic and considered planning in developing and implementing coherent guidelines, curriculum mapping and in-class support options to ensure that students are given optimal opportunities to succeed.

Next steps include developing common agreements on essential components of effective pedagogical practices within the literacy block. In order for students to excel in literacy, congruence within and across classes is essential, especially in small schools. Every student can benefit from the opportunity to be read to, read with and read by themselves on a daily basis. Every student can benefit from regular feedback about areas for development in their reading. Consideration also needs to be given to developing common understandings of how students who have achieved level 30 in reading, can be further engaged and challenged in their reading.

Interviews held with students during the ESR indicated that students, when discussing their strengths as a learner, were able to identify the specific learning area that they were strongest in. When asked how they knew that they were good at that particular area of learning, most responses related to liking the subject, or people telling them they were good at it. Several students stated that they didn't know why they were good at that area of learning. The explicit development of success criteria that are clearly linked to the learning intention within identified areas of study will support students to be able to act powerfully in their own learning.

Learning intentions describe explicitly what students should know, understand and be able to do, as a result of the teaching and learning. There is a recent body of work that indicates learning intentions without success criteria will have limited impact on student learning outcomes. Clarity of success criteria needs to focus on what the students are to learn, not what they are to do. Learning intentions and success criteria are most effective when students are provided with an example of the intended product that is expected of them before they undertake the task. Further work in these areas will support both teacher and student learning.

One hundred percent of staff indicated via a survey conducted during the ESR that feedback to students was achieved to a medium extent. The survey also indicated that 66% of staff identified that feedback from students was achieved to a medium extent, and 33% indicated that this was achieved to a low extent. Staff also provided evidence during interviews, and in reflections on aspects of their teaching practice, that they would like to improve their current processes for receiving and providing student feedback for learning. Staff identified the need to ensure time is allocated for reflection and feedback both during and at the end of lessons.

Every student can benefit from regular feedback about their learning. Effective feedback identifies what students are doing well, what the areas for improvement are and, importantly, it provides the learner with strategies to achieve that improvement.

Feedback from students is an integral component of the teaching and learning process. "When we seek feedback from students about our teaching, we are demonstrating that we value student opinions, we are

## OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

Geranium Primary School has demonstrated that the school works in close partnership with parents and stakeholders. Effective leadership has provided strategic direction, planning and targeted interventions.

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

1. Develop a whole-site approach to intellectual stretch and challenge across a range of learning areas through the development of transforming tasks, strengthened by students setting their own learning goals.
2. Develop and embed a whole-school approach to authentic student influence as a powerful means of students becoming equal partners in the learning process through the planned implementation of T<sup>f</sup>EL resources.
3. Strengthen SIP processes through the inclusion and alignment of specific goals and targets across identified areas of learning.

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



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.



Ruth Clothier  
PRINCIPAL  
GERANIUM 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 Geranium 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:

- Camps and Excursions Policy
- Site Induction Policy
- Volunteer RAN Training
- Volunteer Policy to be in accord with DECD guidelines
- Maintenance schedules for all plant
- Pre-purchasing checklist when purchasing plant.

When the school's actions achieve compliancy with DECD policy and procedures, the Principal must resubmit the Policy Compliance Checklist to the Education Director.

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 93.4%.

## 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).*

*In considering the data below, there needs to be some caution in making a judgement due to the low numbers represented in the student cohorts at the school. This is done for two reasons: to overcome the anomalies that may occur in any one year, and to minimise the possibility of identifying individuals in any small cohort of students. The data below represents a summary of the aggregated data from Geranium Primary School from 2012- 2016.*

#### Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. From 2012 to 2016, 41%, or 9 of 22 Year 1, and 48%, or 11 of 23 Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

From 2012 to 2016, the reading results as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 74%, or 17 of 23 Year 3 students, 88%, or 15 of 17 Year 5 students, and 57%, or 4 of 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD standard of Educational achievement (SEA).

From 2012 to 2016, 25%, or 6 of 24 Year 3 students, 18%, or 3 of 17 Year 5 students, and 14%, or 1 of 7 Year 7 students achieved in the top two bands in reading.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 25%, or 1 of 4 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5, and nil percent from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7.

#### Numeracy

From 2012-2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 88%, or 19 of 23 Year 3 students, 82%, or 14 of 17 Year 5 students, and 71%, or 5 of 7 Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD standard of Educational achievement (SEA).

From 2012 to 2016, 26%, or 6 of 23 Year 3 students, 18%, or 3 of 17 Year 5 students, and 14%, or 1 of 7 Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN numeracy results.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, nil percent, or none of the 2 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5, and nil percent from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 7.

