

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

On-track evaluation report for Coober Pedy Area School

One-year return conducted in June 2018



On-track evaluation process

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.

All government schools are externally reviewed over a 4-year cycle. After the review the principal and the governing council chairperson receive a written report with a number of directions for improvement.

A copy of the External School Review report is available on the school website.

In some cases, when the review panel finds cause for concern about the levels of achievement and growth, together with evidence about the school's capacity for systematic improvement, a school will be advised that they will be visited again in a year.

Schools with a 1-year return are assisted during the intervening period by the education director and other department staff to ensure they receive coordinated, targeted and systematic support. Intervention is concentrated on building the school's capacity to improve teaching and learning across the school, lift expectations and achieve results as measured against the Department for Education Standard of Educational Achievement.

During this process, which occurs 12-15 months after the initial visit, a review panel determines the extent to which the school has, with external support, developed sustainable internal capacity to improve effectiveness and raise student achievement.

The school's priority improvement plan was the main document used as the basis for this review.

The review visit was conducted by Tony Sullivan, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate, and Lia Tedesco, Review Principal.

This On-Track Evaluation report should be read in conjunction with the report of the OTE Review conducted at Coober Pedy Area School in November 2016.

Revised Directions from the On-Track Evaluation Review report November, 2016

1. Improve the level of challenge and engagement in learning by supporting staff to work collaboratively to plan, design and assess learning, use differentiated teaching approaches and moderate professional judgements.
2. Establish and enact strategic whole-school agreements that will enable learning continuity for all students and consistency of practice amongst teachers, especially in relation to literacy and numeracy, and secondary course requirements.
3. Improve the school's capacity to successfully deliver systematic and evidence-based approaches to intervention and support for identified students.
4. Develop and implement an attendance and engagement improvement plan that is proactive and responsive, results-oriented and supportive of the needs of the students who are non-attendees.

Additional information about the school context

The principal has completed the 1st anniversary of her five-year tenure at the school. The principal advised that since the external review in November 2015 the school experienced:

- Four changes in the principal position until term 2 2017, when the current principal was appointed in a 5-year tenure.
- Five new senior leader appointments in 2017, and 2 new changes in senior leader positions in 2018 (all first time leaders).
- Twenty-seven new teachers, approximately 16 new school services officers and 1 new Aboriginal community education officer appointed from 2016 to 2018; approximately 71% of the new teacher appointments are early career teachers.
- A reduction in school enrolment from 273 in 2014 to 224 in 2018.
- A reduction in the school's resource entitlement as a consequence of enrolment decline.
- The establishment of an interreception room (for student self-regulation), an alternative learning centre (secondary intervention) and innovation room (STEAM focus).

Development of a priority improvement plan

The principal advised that the priority improvement plan was discussed, monitored and reported on regularly through the school leadership team and governing council.

The plan was sent to the Executive Director, Partnerships, Schools and Preschools in term 2 2017.

Strategic support provided to the school over the past 12 months

The principal advised that the support provided by members of the Learning Improvement division over the past 12 months has been invaluable to the professional learning and practice of teaching staff at the school. The principal reported that the Systems Improvement directorate provided effective support related to school finance and facilities. The principal acknowledged the advocacy for systemic support provided by the education director.

Evidence and evaluation referenced to directions in the priority improvement plan

Direction 1

Improve the level of challenge and engagement in learning by supporting staff to work collaboratively to plan, design and assess learning, use differentiated teaching approaches and moderate professional judgements.

On-track evidence

- Documented intervention guidelines for reception to year 6 influence the assessments used by class teachers to identify the differentiated approaches to be used in class, small groups or through explicit 1:1 teaching. A wave 1 to 3 model of intervention is implemented and monitored by staff at key points across the year.
- Data now collected across the early and primary years includes: phonological awareness, jolly phonics, oxford words and Running Records. This informs classroom practice for wave 1 and 2 students that is grounded in the 'Big 6' concepts for reading. Wave 3 intervention practices are documented and explicit for those professionals providing out-of-class support. This data is documented and referenced to agreed standards (end of year) and rates of growth (end of each term) from reception to year 3. Some students interviewed knew their reading levels and goals, with one student saying: "I want to go forward, not backwards".
- A documented literacy framework provides an important scaffold for primary teachers to use in the daily literacy block. Documented and explicit expectations for literacy development are important artefacts in a school environment with high staff turnover. The documentation will serve to reinforce the expectations of "the way we do things here".
- Wave 3 literacy intervention (MultiLit) is provided 2 days a week for identified primary (year 3 and above) and some secondary students by a trained and experienced teacher. There are currently 25 students being supported through MultiLit. The teacher connects with 8 to 10 students per day. Trained school services officers (SSOs) now support this approach on other days to support continuity and immersion. Student folders allow the teacher to track the implementation of the documented program when she is not there. School-based data shows that greater attendance in this structured intervention leads to improved outcomes. This data was sighted by the panel. Staff, parents and students commented positively on the impact of this intervention approach.
- Wave 3 data is monitored and tracked by a senior leader and SSO. Growth in Running Records levels, phonological awareness and phonics capacity are collated and tracked 3 times a term for reception to year 3 students. Achievement is acknowledged by individual graduation from wave 3 support. Documentation and tracking of growth was provided to the panel as evidence of effective practice.

- School services officer support is now directly linked to the intervention needs of targeted students identified through the collection and analysis of relevant learning and wellbeing data. This is a significant change and improvement to previous deployment of support hours in the school. More permanent hours enable greater stability in program delivery.
- A guided inquiry approach has been introduced into the early years learning program, evident in documentation and planning exemplars. The school plans to connect this to learning in the secondary years through the introduction of project-based learning to raise levels of engagement and student outcomes. In preparing for this innovation, secondary staff recently collaborated on integrated approaches to learning, including through the design and making of a pizza oven, linking learning in maths, art and science. Teachers acknowledged that student research-based skills will need to be taught explicitly as a foundation to this learning design.
- An oral language assessment has recently been undertaken for primary students, reception to year 3, with a view to establishing an agreed approach to developing this aspect of literacy learning, vital to improving reading outcomes. Further progression of this work is being undertaken through the support of the learning improvement consultant.
- Secondary 'reconceptualization' has begun in an endeavour to strengthen engagement, flexibility and differentiation to accommodate more for the varying needs and interests of students in years 7 to 10. A student forum day and documented feedback has been central to this improvement process. Year 7 students are now connected to the secondary component of the school. Students interviewed are excited about impending changes to the learning pathway after experiencing a trial in semester 2 2017. Staff said that "students voted positively with their feet during this trial". A draft timetable and integrated curriculum map (2019) was provided to the panel as evidence of the school's improvement design. Staff worked with the Learning Improvement division consultants and the SACE Board in readiness for this innovative reformation in secondary learning.
- Junior primary and primary classes are located in flexible learning spaces that encourage deprivatisation of teaching practice, collaborative planning and differentiation based on student needs. Staff confirmed working in hub meetings and year-level combinations to plan, reflect and review the impact of their professional learning, stating: "Together, we implement things we have learned. Our early years classes do a lot together".
- Various assessment data is collected for diagnostic purposes to ensure intervention is targeted towards students at risk in learning. A documented literacy and numeracy assessment guide (reception to year 6) details checkpoints for data collection and entry into the 'Scorelink' database. A documented writing genre map extends from reception to year 7 to ensure coverage of various text types in writing. The principal acknowledged the need to extend this further into secondary schooling.
- Learning intentions and success criteria are used across all primary classrooms as a key strategy to ensure that learning is explicit (and visible) for all students.
- Staff began professional learning on using formative assessment as a high-leverage strategy to improve student understanding and learning in their classrooms. Data evident in a teacher self-assessment tool, and through some teacher commentary with the panel, indicates a need to further develop this approach to a deeper level of understanding and practice. One teacher stated: "We as a staff don't yet have a consistent language in the area of formative assessment".
- Samples of teacher learning design, linked to the curriculum (AC and SACE) and connected to the relevant pedagogical frameworks, were provided to the panel. Backwards-by-design formats from TfEL, SACE learning and assessment plans, and early years planning formats demonstrated staff capacity to design learning explicitly in developmentally appropriate ways.

Review panel evaluation

The review panel acknowledges the significant work undertaken in the school since the previous on-track evaluation in November 2016. The current school principal is strategic in her approach to school improvement. Acknowledging that 'not everything can be achieved at once', she has intensively focused on establishing the capacity of staff, particularly across the primary years to this point, to deliver a highly engaging and quality learning program for these students.

The principal is resolute in building the professional capacity of teachers to deliver highly effective and engaging practices that make a difference to student learning. Staff professional learning has been a priority for the school, but a focus on evidence-based practices is starting to connect the learning for students in a coherent way. Staff worked hard to deliver the agreed practices through working in a collaborative manner. Practice to plan well for student learning and to make the intentions clear and accessible to students is evident.

Relevant data (multiple measures) is guiding the improvement work. The school has a solid base of learning data that supports effective decision-making. It is pivotal in the establishment of proven intervention strategies and programs, redirection of resources and tracking student progress over time. Differentiated intervention strategies are clearly influencing learning improvement, which is evident in the valuable school-based datasets.

The school is demonstrating its capacity to collect, analyse and review its progress in a variety of ways. Importantly, the school is clear about what it plans to do in response to the information it gathers and considers along the way. The site improvement plan is clear and has set the school on an improvement journey that is uniquely and contextually designed. Policy, structure, processes and documentation have provided a strong basis for improvement, and set the expectations for all about what is required from every contributor to this important work.

The leadership team, staff and governing council all acknowledge it is 'early days' in the effort to get the school on an upward trajectory. There is a committed leader, who is making strong community connections and building open dialogue. The school is demonstrating its internal capacity within the leadership team and staff to build and sustain improvement across the school. The principal is mindful of the stages of improvement still required (for example, secondary learning) and is strategically taking staff with her through quality planning.

Direction 2

Establish and enact strategic whole-school agreements that will enable learning continuity for all students and consistency of practice amongst teachers, especially in relation to literacy and numeracy, and secondary course requirements.

On-track evidence

- There are documented whole-school agreements describing literacy and numeracy environments, behaviours, signature practices and weekly lesson structures expected of teachers. New staff are inducted into the literacy and numeracy agreements, structures and practices required through the primary and early secondary years. These are well-documented in the induction policy – critical in a school with high staff turnover – and confirmed through staff interview.
- Natural maths formats and approaches are used by teachers across reception to year 8 having transitioned from a trial mode to a more consistent practice. A senior leader worked with a consultant to create a 'numeracy progressions' document for the school to support staff planning

for explicit numeracy outcomes. This document was sighted by the panel as were numeracy scaffolds and teacher practices evident during class walkthroughs.

- A senior leader is responsible for monitoring and tracking the SACE pathways and requirements for the few students who have the potential to successfully complete year 12. The percentage of students completing SACE with a vocational or trade training pathway has increased from 60% (2014) to 80% (2017) as a result of the school's engagement strategy. The senior leader demonstrated sound awareness of the current status of the 4 students completing their SACE in 2018.
- Secondary teachers are using a range of strategies to support student engagement with their subjects, including applying a gradual release of responsibility, scaffolding for writing genre (for example, report writing), and highlighting technical subject-specific words to build student vocabulary. Staff understand that poor literacy skills impact on student engagement and success in learning. One student podcast her responses as a negotiated accommodation in her assessment format due to her reluctance to write. It is important that each secondary teacher views themselves as a teacher of literacy. This concept is beginning to have resonance with staff.
- The school has introduced a reading comprehension assessment (Literacy-Pro) for secondary students, for teachers to have an informed method to target literacy levels into their subject areas. Students are reluctant to engage with PAT-R assessments, leaving teachers with little data to plan and accommodate for a vast range of literacy levels of secondary students. This levelling process links to 'Lexile levels' in reading resources (both class and library) to support students accessing the curriculum in a differentiated way. The secondary team acknowledged that: "The primary teachers do it so well with data and collecting evidence". The principal plans to extend the literacy agreements across the secondary hubs to connect literacy learning reception to year 12.

Review panel evaluation

Documentation of agreements outlining clear expectations associated with the improvement agenda is a strong feature and outcome of the work to date. Staff engaged in professional learning focused on agreed effective strategies and practices to engage students, and make learning relevant and interesting for them. Importantly, the alignment between the documentation and what is happening in classes as 'featured' practice is evident, particularly across the primary years. This must continue to be embedded to become naturally 'the way we do things here'.

A number of improvement strategies have been identified and implemented strategically across the primary level of schooling, with the designed intention to connect this to the secondary section in a phased manner. Examples of this aligned work include: connection of 'investigations' approaches in the early years to problem-based learning in secondary; and collecting and using relevant school-based data to extend literacy intervention (MultiLit effective in primary) through to the secondary (via Literacy-Pro). Induction of new staff and ongoing professional learning and performance development is evident, and critical in maintaining and building the improvement agenda set for the school and its students. The leadership team members share responsibility for this work. Given the context of staff mobility, and a number of early career teachers, this work is recurrent. Supporting, mentoring and coaching early career senior leaders and staff presents a constant demand for the principal.

Direction 3

Improve the school's capacity to successfully deliver systematic and evidence-based approaches to intervention and support for identified students.

On-track evidence

- A documented data schedule outlines the required collection points across the year, reviewed and refined over time. Agreed student learning data is entered into a data management tool (Scorelink) by SSOs to support the monitoring and tracking of growth across the year, intervention, class planning and school decision-making. Agreed partnership benchmarks support a 'traffic light' system of monitoring student achievement and growth. This data is available to teachers for reporting purposes, and in a documented 'student profile' now in place for reception to year 7 students as they transition between year levels. The governing council chair confirmed that this transfer of information, not evident before, now occurs for her daughter.
- Two initiatives were implemented to further engage students in reading: 'reading dog' and 'everybody reads'. Both are monitored by staff and designed to generate student enthusiasm and reading experience daily. Students said they were reading every day in different spaces and to different adults.
- The governing council chair cites a more significant school focus on the individual child, with a particular emphasis on the progress made by each child, as the noticeable improvement designed by the current principal over the past 5 terms. Governing council members voiced a need for external support to mentor, coach and build the capacity of a 'forming' leadership team, and teacher-leaders in what is a relatively inexperienced teaching staff.
- In reference to the principal's leadership, a senior leader commented: "I have noticed a real difference since Karen's appointment. There is stronger collaboration, and we are working together in a committed way on the school literacy vision – to ensure every child can read. Having data at our fingertips and knowing every student is being tracked is important".

Review panel evaluation

The school has a strong focus on teaching students to read through the early and primary years of schooling. Highly effective evidence-based practices have been implemented across reception to year 7 through targeted professional learning and collaborative teamwork within the school. The principal and relevant senior leaders responsible for this literacy focus have been relentless in ensuring the practices, intervention, data and monitoring are in place and working together to raise this aspect of learning.

There is a strong focus on and expectation of improved learning within the school. There is a forming culture that places emphasis on knowing the individual child and how best to cater for their learning and wellbeing needs. This was emphasised when speaking with members of the governing council.

Intervention in secondary schooling will still require attention through the appropriate hub teams. Whilst the strategic focus has been centred on the primary section, sustained intervention will still be necessary for those secondary students requiring support, and all who need 'stretch' in their learning. This is a looming consideration as the secondary component transitions to a more integrated learning approach. Parents also expressed a need for planned intervention strategies for capable learners within wave 1.

Direction 4

Develop and implement an attendance and engagement improvement plan that is proactive and responsive, results-oriented and supportive of the needs of the students who are non-attende

On-track evidence

- The principal emphasizes and models the importance of strong community connections to foster widespread confidence and trust in the school. She is proactive in her efforts to engage with community members and parents to promote the value of learning and the school's inclusive

nature. Teachers make regular contact with parents to share student successes at school. More parents are feeling comfortable to engage with the school that weren't engaging previously.

- From 2015 to 2016, annual whole-school attendance rates showed a downward trend in attendance from 73% to 67%. In 2017, the attendance rates from reception to year 7 show an average attendance rate of 72%, and in years 8 to 12 the attendance rate is much lower at 56%. An emphasis on increased levels of attendance must be maintained. A school tracking system (DayMap) is currently in the process of being rolled-out across the school to alert parents to non-attendance at school/lessons.
- Rigorous intervention and support approaches, as well as programs across early and primary years, must be monitored as a measure of improved student engagement and supportive learning environment. Student perception data emphasised poor literacy levels as a barrier to school attendance, particularly at higher levels of schooling. At the time of writing this report, the attendance rate for years 1 to 7 has increased to 73%, which should be maintained.
- The principal and governing council introduced a 'no fee' policy for families of students who enrol and engage in the preschool program on-site, to raise levels of attendance, engagement and learning of young children. This is a very proactive approach, and has the capacity to establish stronger patterns of attendance and engagement on entering school.
- A number of purposeful strategies have been introduced consistently across the school to raise student attendance and engagement, and enable students to 'get ready to learn', such as: interoception (self-regulation in class and interoception space); and non-aversive approaches to behaviour, documented in a relatively new Engagement and Inclusion policy. Implementation of this policy is evident in classrooms through explicit charts describing what it means to be successful as a class, teacher and student. Anecdotal evidence through staff, student and parent interviews verified an improvement in students' engagement, calmness and connection to adults at school.
- Student voice and influence is central to engagement. This is being facilitated through year 7 to 10 action teams, year 5/6 student leadership (MAD/Making a Difference), timetable accommodations in secondary school, involvement in establishing an innovation studio (robotics, electronics, 3D printing), and documented student feedback in the secondary curriculum reform survey, supported by Aboriginal students and the Aboriginal education team.

Review panel evaluation

Clarity of expectations in terms of student behaviour and wellbeing are well-documented and implemented with greater consistency across the school. In the eyes of the community and students this has been an important feature in school improvement. Teaching students about self-management and self-regulation of emotions has become more explicit in classes and through the introduction of 'interoception'. Effective relationships built on trust are recognised as keys to fostering stronger engagement by students, staff and parents.

Stronger community connections are being built by the principal and supported by staff, who are proactive in their communications with parents, which is gradually filtering through to the community. The principal is conscious of improving opportunities for student voice within the school, particularly in the classroom setting. Students are genuinely excited at the proposed change to the secondary timetable for 2019. The school has consulted with students and listened to the barriers to engagement through the secondary years. This will take planning, skill and time to implement, whilst maintaining the rigour in the learning and teaching to impact improved outcomes.

Outcomes of the on-track evaluation

Based on the evidence provided, Coober Pedy Area School is on-track to effectively implement the External School Review directions, but will require ongoing systemic support given some of the contextual challenges that exist.

The review panel found that:

The principal is an experienced leader who is establishing effective systems, structures and processes to strategically support and build school improvement and effectiveness. Her focus, and that of her staff team, has centred on establishing solid foundations for literacy and numeracy learning across the primary years using high-leverage strategies to impact on student engagement and achievement. This is a deliberate and intentional design for mid- to long-term improvement.

The principal is building the capacity of the leadership and staff teams to deliver the expectations about improved learning outcomes for students at the school. This will require continued commitment and responsibility from leaders and teachers to support the implementation of agreements to a high level of sustainability. There is evidence that this will occur with further strategic support provided to the school to shore up the foundational work.

Small shifts in the learning data are evident but it is still early days. Perception data collected during the review, from students, staff and parents affirms the directions and purposeful actions being taken to improve learning at Coober Pedy Area School. The school has established effective data collection and evaluation processes to monitor and track student growth. This is particularly evident across the primary section of schooling. This data informs decisions about intervention, resources and impact on students.

The principal and staff are committed to connecting the curriculum and pedagogical approaches across the school so that learning is delivered in a coherent manner. It is important that students feel respected, valued and safe in their school environment to maximize their engagement and growth as learners. Knowing the expectations about learning and behaviour and applying these consistently across the school will support students in their positive engagement with school.

The principal has a clear vision for the phases of improvement still to be implemented. These include: coaching and mentoring of early career leaders and teachers; secondary intervention model; secondary reconceptualization involving integrated learning; literacy learning as a key feature across all learning areas; and the place of formative assessment in effective teaching and learning.

The school is now better placed and on-track to improve its performance and effectiveness than it was in late 2016. A solid foundation has been strategically established through the primary section. It will still require systemic support, at least in the next phase of improvement, to consolidate the work established across the primary years and ensure that the redesign of the secondary integrated approach to learning is functional. It is important that this foundational work is supported to extend the school's capacity further.

The principal will continue to work with the education director to implement the External School Review directions with the school's Site Improvement Plan.

Based on current performance, Coober Pedy Area School will be externally reviewed again in 2019/2020.



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