Mullaloo Beach Primary School

2015

Independent Review Findings

Independent Review of Independent Public Schools
Disclaimer

This document reports the findings of the Department of Education Services' review and verification of the school's self-review. The school's self-review has been complemented by information provided by the Department of Education, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

The findings of the independent review are forwarded to the School Principal, the Board Chair, the Director General of Education and the Minister for Education.

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School and Review Details

Principal: Mr Ian Ralph
Board Chair: Mr Scott Paulsen
School Location: 59 West View Boulevard Mullaloo WA 6027
School Classification: PS Class 4A
Number of Students: 304
Reviewers: Mr Gerry Chapman (Lead)
            Ms Cristina Sandri
Review Dates: 3 and 4 August 2015

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the independent review is to provide assurance to the school and its community, the Director General of Education and the Minister for Education on the extent to which the school has met its commitments as outlined in its Delivery and Performance Agreement (DPA) and associated Business Plan.

The focus of the review is on:

- how well the school has implemented self-review
- how well the school has improved student learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students
- how well the school has created an environment that promotes learning and student well-being
- how well the school is placed to sustain and improve its performance.
Review Methodology

The school has been required, under the DPA, to undertake annual self-assessments of its performance. The outcome of these assessments formed the basis for the school’s self-review. The school sent its self-review documentation to the IPS Review Team, Department of Education Services, one month prior to the commencement of the review.

The IPS reviewers supplemented the information provided by the school with information on the school’s achievements, its processes and its student performance data from a number of sources which included:

- the My School® website
- the Department of Education School Performance Monitoring System
- Schools Online reports.

Reviewers analysed the evidence presented in the school’s self-review documentation to verify achievement and developed lines of inquiry where further verification was required.

An agenda for the review visit was subsequently negotiated with the Principal to enable the gathering of evidence to verify claims made by the school. During the review visit the reviewers sourced evidence to support the school’s self-review claims through observation and discussion with leaders, teaching and support staff, board members, parents and students. The evidence provided by the school, along with information gathered by the reviewers prior to and during the review visits, was used as the basis for the verification of how well the school has met its commitments as outlined in the DPA and Business Plan.

This document reports on the findings of the independent review.
School Context

What are the important features of this school's context that have an impact on student learning?

Mullaloo Beach Primary School is located in the Perth northern coastal suburb of Mullaloo. The school is in close proximity to the beach and a nature reserve which provides a tranquil ambience conducive to supporting a positive learning environment and related learning experiences.

Opened in 1986, the school consists of two main teaching blocks, each comprising six classrooms, and a newly built adjacent kindergarten and pre-primary block. Spacious, well-equipped outdoor playing areas provide students with excellent opportunities for physical activity. The school and community have developed a comprehensive array of before- and after-school programs to utilise the facilities and provide students with a breadth of additional learning opportunities. Other modern resources include a well-equipped library with a computer laboratory, a science specialist laboratory, pods of iPads, a Smartboard in each classroom and well-resourced hub areas in the centre of each learning block.

Student enrolment is mainly from the surrounding Mullaloo suburb and is currently 304 students K-6. This has been gradually rising since 2011 with a slight drop in 2014 due to Year 7 moving to secondary.

The student demographic is characterised by a relatively high Index of Community Socio Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of 1076, being in the second decile with 14% of students having a language background other than English (LBOTE) and eight students with a diagnosed disability (including three special needs children supported by disability resourcing). Student attendance is above both like and total State school averages at 94.4% and transiency is 11.2%.

There is an increasing number of overseas and interstate families choosing to enrol as a result of the school's positive community-based learning environment, strong extracurricular programs and inclusive approach to catering for all students.

Parents are actively encouraged to participate in all aspects of their child's learning. The open communication with teachers is valued by the parents.
Parent support for the school is strong with good levels of engagement and a very active Parents and Citizens' Association (P&C) contributing to a supportive school community and good standards of student engagement and behaviour.

While long-term staffing at the school has been relatively stable, in school leadership changes over the past 18 months have impacted adversely on continuity of processes and community confidence. The school has had four principals in that period. The situation was a concern raised by parents and staff and has affected the school's ability to provide a sustained, rigorous, ongoing accountability process for monitoring school improvement over the full period of the current Business Plan cycle.

The relieving Principal with whom the reviewers met has collated and coordinated the 2015 school review after being at the school for only one term, and has made a significant contribution to refocusing the school on the key areas in the Business Plan of student performance and professional relationships.

The substantive Principal, appointed in 2015, and currently on deferred salary scheme leave, will be returning for the commencement of the 2016 school year. This will provide the school with continuity and the opportunity for ongoing, stable leadership.

The staffing profile is predominately mature, experienced and female with two senior teachers contributing as learning area committee leaders with curriculum responsibility for improving student outcomes. Specialist programs offered include French, music, science, art and physical education and the school has adopted the Online Curriculum Services Project and offers the Primary Extension and Challenge (PEAC) program to six students.

The staff value partnerships with parents and the proactive Board, which is engaging positively with the current leadership team and school community as it progresses towards adopting sound governance oversight of school performance and finances.

A close partnership with the local community kindergarten enables staff from both groups to network effectively and helps provide a smooth transition for children from the kindergarten to the school.

The school is also currently renewing its partnership with Edith Cowan University and accepting teachers on practicums.
The School's Self-Review Process

How effective was the school's self-review in accounting for its performance during the period of the DPA and Business Plan?

The school's 2013–2015 Business Plan identifies two key areas of academic targets (in English, mathematics, science and history) and non-academic targets (in the categories of Excellence in Teaching, Safe and Supportive Learning Environment, Relationships and Leadership).

Academic targets for each learning area are explicitly stated with accompanying details of data to be collected, the data collection cycle to be used, the strategies to be used to achieve the targets, milestones to be reached and the resources needed to enable successful attainment of the targets. Non-academic targets specify strategies to be used, milestones to be reached and an assessment of the extent to which the strategies and milestones have been achieved.

The Business Plan includes long-term plans for mathematics, English, science and history with targets for each learning area. Progress towards the achievement of targets is re-assessed annually. The school's operational plans, self-assessment plans and Academic Data Collection program are aligned and form a logical and cohesive planning process. There is considerable data analysis at the operational plan level being used by the learning area committees to identify areas of weakness and formulate strategies for remediation of whole groups, sub-groups and individuals. Specific learning strategies to address student needs are identified.

In the context of the number of changes in school leadership, the staff have conducted a thorough and comprehensive review of the extent to which the targets in the Business Plan have been achieved. The relieving Principal has quickly familiarised himself with the key issues and coordinated an extensive self-review process. This was well documented, systematic and inclusive.

The self-review identified standards of student achievement and the extent to which targets have been achieved and outlines data collected and used to analyse student performance in each of the major learning areas. Areas of concern and challenges are identified for future remediation and attention in the next Business Plan. Each learning area analysis includes an overview of achievements/celebrations and identifies areas for future directions and improvements.
Targets for history were not achieved and will need to be addressed currently and early in the next planning cycle to ensure compliance with the Australian Curriculum implementation timeline.

Planning for implementation of the National Quality Standard (NQS) for early childhood education is in place; however, immediate progress is necessary to achieve the mandated implementation timeline.

Non-academic targets were analysed and reviewed by acknowledging celebrations, identifying issues and challenges, and then setting future directions. Information regarding achievement of the targets is general and anecdotal. Targets will need to be closely analysed for the next planning cycle to provide more specific data to demonstrate achievement of milestones and strategies.

Survey data is provided, analysed and reviewed to identify and then address areas of concern. The Board’s role in analysis of parent survey responses is acknowledged and will be valuable in informing the next planning cycle.

Staff interviewed by the reviewers confirmed their involvement in the self-review process and acknowledged the need to work collaboratively to ensure that targets in the next cycle will be more specific in terms of progress and improvement in student performance. There was general consensus that future target setting needs to incorporate some measure of the improvement that occurs as an outcome of the quality teaching and learning environment and the level of student ability.

Discussion with learning area leaders and school leadership identified the need to be more concise in terms of priority linked, strategic long-term planning and target setting in the next Business Plan. The inclusion of learning area operational plans in the Business Plan is under review.
School Performance—Student Learning

How well has the school performed in improving learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students?

The school's academic targets aim to make every student a successful student, and each learning area has an additional specific goal focusing on student achievement:

- English and mathematics goal: to focus on individual achievement and success for all students and to raise the overall standard in all areas of English and mathematics.
- Science goal: to focus on student achievement for all by raising the overall standard in science skills and content.
- History goal: to build a strong foundation in history pedagogy.

The school engages in analysis of school-based, standardised, system and national student achievement data against the targets for each learning area at an individual, class and cohort level. Strengths and weaknesses are identified and individual staff endeavour to address these at class level. The school is developing whole-school approaches to provide consistency of teaching and learning across the phases of schooling.

In considering the goals and targets, National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results indicate that, though longitudinal data shows overall student achievement remains within the expected performance range for like schools, absolute overall achievement for the school shows an emerging moderate downward trend.

Though relatively high and tending to be in the upper quadrants, a comparison of student achievement and progress from 2012 to 2014 against like schools, State and national performance shows inconsistencies between the level of achievement and the levels of progress, with progress levels tending to be better than achievement levels.

In analysing the data, the staff have recognised these emerging trends. They are establishing and beginning to implement whole-school focused strategies aimed at arresting and reversing this trend by raising expectations of students and teachers in the teaching and learning program, and planning for improvement in the level of student achievement.
Three of the five targets set for English were achieved:

- Year 3 to Year 5 students at or above the national mean (NAPLAN) in reading and writing
- 20-30% of students in Year 5 moving to Year 6 in the top 20% of Australian schools in reading and writing
- In literacy maintain or improve percentage with like schools.

Spelling, writing, and grammar and punctuation progress for Year 3 to Year 5 and reading for Year 5 to Year 7 was reported in the 2014 Annual Report as being lower than the staff would have liked.

Three of the six targets in mathematics were achieved:

- Year 1 students will achieve one or above in on-entry testing
- stable cohort will achieve above like-school mean
- students on individual plans will reach or improve on their individual targets.

Targets for history were to develop whole-school plans for the phases of schooling. These targets were not achieved. Though lessons are timetabled every week, the school has identified difficulties with collaborative and effective shared planning, teaching, moderation and assessment practices in this learning area. The school is developing whole-school approaches to the implementation and delivery of this core curriculum area.

Between 2011 and 2013, Western Australian Monitoring Standards in Education (WAMSE) longitudinal data in science indicated that students achieved generally above like schools. With the discontinuation of WAMSE testing, the school adopted the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) science testing to monitor student progress in 2014. Ninety per cent of students in Years 3, 4 and 5 achieved above stanine 3 in 2014. Results do, however, indicate a lack of correlation between teacher judgement and ACER test results. A specialist science program is in operation and is taught by a specialist science teacher in the school's science laboratory. The staff has identified a need to link science and other learning areas to develop a greater connection between the science curriculum content and class instruction particularly in English and mathematics.
The staff have identified future directions to improve student achievement in all target areas including:

- engaging critically with the Western Australian Curriculum
- developing ‘SMART’ targets that focus on raising the bar for student achievement
- auditing current practice and developing explicit whole-school direction, plans and approaches to the teaching and learning that reflect best practice
- including whole-school approaches to monitoring student progress and a regime of non-system assessments to create data triangulation of student performance across the school
- an emphasis on oral language particularly in the early years
- establishing clearer phase-of-schooling collaborative team approaches to monitoring student progress and ensuring cohesion
- building the professional capacity of staff and curriculum leaders, including the development of an explicit professional learning plan with related performance and expectations
- staff reflecting and engaging in disciplined dialogue to develop their pedagogical understanding and capacity to differentiate the curriculum and cater for high achieving students
- establishing opportunities for robust, reflective team conversations around data and the requirements of the curriculum
- implementation of peer observation.

Achievement against the targets is reported to the school community in the Annual Report.
School Performance—Quality of the Learning Environment

*How well has the school performed in creating an environment that promotes learning and well-being for all students and the attainment of the school vision?*

The school vision is clearly articulated in the Business Plan, as is the school ethos of *Honesty Respect Knowledge*. The *Nine Values for Australian Schooling*, as adopted in 2010, is reflected in the school song and school creed and is evident as part of classroom practice in most classrooms. The staff have identified a need to revisit current practice and re-establish a whole-school approach in this area.

The Business Plan contains a set of beliefs about teaching and learning under the headings of *Learning, Instruction, Assessment* and *Reporting*. Teaching staff indicated a commitment to these beliefs, a renewed enthusiasm to embrace professional learning, professional responsibility and accountability and a willingness to work collaboratively and collegially. Repeated leadership changes over a short time have impacted on school stability, direction and whole-school curriculum practices.

The staff have identified the need to raise the achievement expectations of students and staff, and establish a culture that promotes successful learning and excellent teaching. To develop whole-school focused systematic curriculum delivery, learning area committees are in place and beginning to develop shared, coherent and sequential plans across the learning phases.

The staff found Business Plan targets in ‘Excellence in Teaching’ difficult to measure. The Australian Curriculum Phase 1 learning areas have been implemented. Engaging with the National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care is progressing. Limited professional learning opportunities for staff and limited opportunities for collaborative, collegiate practices in the school over the life of the Business Plan have impacted on the development of professional relationships and the development of trusting collaborative structures, peer reviews and observation practices. The staff has set the goal to develop a Mullaloo Beach professional learning community based on innovation, excellence and trusting relationships by the end of the next Business Plan.
Despite these concerns, parents and students report a high degree of satisfaction with the student care provided by the school and the positive interactions among students. There is a strong feeling in the community that the school provides a safe and caring learning environment. Student engagement is high with negligible suspension rates. Behaviour management issues are minimal in the school. Staff have identified the need for whole-school training in restorative practices to better manage any playground disputes.

A team approach to the case management of any student at educational risk is in place, involving the School Psychologist, Student At Educational Risk Coordinator, class teacher, parent, support services and the child. Individual improvement plans are established and monitored for at-risk students. The school is fortunate to have the services of a highly valued and respected school chaplain to support students and parents.

An impressive array of extra-curricular and after school activities are provided for students including an art club, Maths Magicians, Little Rascals, chess, choir, running club and lunch time sports. The school shares its facilities with community groups providing music, tennis, karate and Pilates classes and with the Salvation Army and Wheels for Kids. Partnerships are established with Edith Cowan University and increasingly with Ocean Reef Senior High School.

Attendance rates among students is high and improving, with a low number of students in the at-risk category. Unauthorised absences, however, have risen from 8% in 2013 to 42% in 2014 as a direct result of the increasing number of parents taking holidays during school terms. The school has identified this challenge and the need to increase parent awareness that taking holidays during school terms impacts on student learning.

'Relationships' is a focus area in the Business Plan with the school’s commitment to building relationships between all stakeholders in a child’s learning, being the target. Staff acknowledge the importance of working in partnership with parents and the school community. Parents are actively encouraged to participate in all aspects of their child’s learning and open communication is valued, with the school using a variety of communication tools including school bulletins, newsletters, emails, a mobile telephone application and website.
Parents report that the staff and administration are approachable and available. Reference was made to receiving invitations to the ‘Captain's Table’—a strategy employed by the Principal to engage parents.

Parents show strong support for the school through their commitment, levels of engagement and attendance at school events. Parent survey results indicate general satisfaction with the school. Strongest responses reflected students feeling safe at school and wanting to come to school. There was some dissatisfaction with the high leadership turnover, resulting in parents not feeling their opinions are taken seriously. The return of the substantive Principal in 2016 should potentially alleviate these concerns. Observations made during the review visit together with discussions with the school leadership, staff, parents and students confirm that the school is a safe, caring and inclusive environment. The staff have critically examined performance in creating an environment that promotes effective teaching and learning. The staff are commended on the identification of key future directions in all areas of the current Business Plan that will inform the next Business Plan.
School Performance—Sustainability

*How well placed is the school to sustain and improve its performance into the next planning cycle?*

The relieving Principal has placed a priority on developing a sustainable instructional leadership model. This done by implementing significantly improved protocols for professional interaction and practice with a focus on ensuring a learning environment that is safe, caring and inclusive and that promotes a positive performance and development culture for all staff and for improvements to student learning. The leadership is focused on positive staff relationships, clear professional expectations, curriculum reform and sound whole-school assessment processes. This approach will facilitate continuity and consistency as the school moves into the next planning cycle. There is an emphasis on promoting an open, inclusive and collegial working environment. Policy and process review is aimed at achieving improvement in all areas of school operations and outcomes. Parents and staff spoke frankly about the significant improvements occurring during the 2015 year and the changing culture in the school.

Explicit systems and processes to raise the standard of professional practice and to provide transparent leadership are being developed and implemented. An example is the re-establishment of formalised meeting procedures and processes to ensure productive use of staff time and a high level of staff professional, interpersonal interaction. This is to be supported by the development of phases-of-schooling collaborative teams.

Discussion with staff indicated a strong desire for opportunities being put in place for significant collaborative planning and for staff meetings to be used to focus on key planning and professional learning requirements.

School structures and policies have been revised and realigned to enable greater opportunities for staff involvement in decision-making. For example, the learning team planning and committee structures have been revised to re-invigorate staff engagement and facilitate a collegial, collaborative approach. This has ensured greater staff participation in whole-school and financial decisions.
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A whole-school approach to literacy and numeracy is being revisited with specific whole-school pedagogies and approaches to curriculum delivery including the development of scope and sequence content documents for consistency and sustainability.

Ongoing staff involvement in the school self-review process was evident with staff having opportunities for input and critical reflection on areas to be addressed and future directions. Staff spoke with enthusiasm about the next Business Plan and their involvement in the next planning cycle as did members of the Board. Self-review processes are progressively being embedded.

The use of the ACER National School Improvement Tool has enabled staff to focus on current practices and processes and identify areas of opportunity for the school. Staff are being encouraged to be forward thinking and to aim for improvement in student performance based on sound analysis of data. There are higher expectations of staff in all aspects of teaching and learning.

Staff performance development and management processes are moving towards peer observation and conferencing. This is being supported with targeted professional learning and networking with Teacher Development Schools. It is recommended that professional performance expectations of staff are linked to Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Standards and that staff development practices be reviewed to include peer observation and reflective practices. School resources are being directed toward areas of priority and achieving targets in the Business Plan (an example of this being the additional resourcing of planning and professional learning to support improved implementation of the NQS framework). Succession planning is being investigated to facilitate the leadership transition into 2016 with the return of the substantive Principal and Deputy Principal.

When first established the School Board focused on formulating its operational and procedural processes and providing governance in the area of school policy review. Members indicated that they had been involved in the formulation of the current Business Plan and were informed of student performance data. Reviewers were able to verify through Board meeting minutes and discussions with Board members that the Board is involved in overseeing financial reports, reviewing behaviour policy and the formation of sub-committees to review uniform policy and survey data.
The Board Chair indicated that it was the Board’s intention to raise its profile in the community and adopt a greater governance role in the next business planning cycle. The Board intends to take a greater role in strategic planning and build its capacity to critically reflect on school performance.

The Board has conducted and analysed a survey of members in which the majority of responses indicated either strong satisfaction or satisfaction in all areas of its governance and operations. The Board is formalising meeting agenda items and formulating an annual planning cycle of key focus areas, accountability points and events.

With the adoption of the one-line budgeting process and the student-centred funding model, the school has taken a conservative approach to expenditure on human and physical resources. As understanding increases, and with the benefit of now being in a position to critically analyse expenditure in the context of these funding models, the Principal indicated he can confidently allocate future resourcing based on sound data. Teachers interviewed confirmed that the teaching and learning programs were well resourced to meet current needs and school leaders confirmed that the school was well-placed to meet future financial, physical and human resourcing needs and initiatives.
Conclusion

The school has completed a comprehensive self-review which has drawn conclusions as to the extent to which the commitments of the DPA and Business Plan have been achieved. This has been coordinated under difficult circumstances and the staff are commended for working collegially to achieve this outcome. School leadership, teaching staff and the Board are enthusiastic and committed to raising the expectations of teaching and learning in the school to improve student achievement levels. The staff are developing whole-school collaborative approaches and practices as they make adjustments to pedagogy in response to student achievement data. The current review process generated a number of future directions to inform the next Business Plan.

Commendations

*The following areas are commended:*

- the leadership focus on positive staff relationships, clear professional expectations, curriculum reform and sound whole-school assessment processes
- the thorough and comprehensive review of the extent to which the targets in the Business Plan have been achieved, conducted in the context of the repeated changes in school leadership
- the use of the National School Improvement Tool to encourage staff to be forward thinking and to aim for improvement in student performance based on sound analysis of data
- the implementation of explicit systems and processes to raise the standard of professional practice and to provide clear, open and transparent leadership
- the identification of key future directions in all areas of the current Business Plan that will inform the next Business Plan.
Areas for Improvement

The following areas for improvement are identified:

- incorporate some measure in future target setting of the gains made as an outcome of the quality teaching and learning environment and the level of student ability
- closely analyse non-academic targets for the next planning cycle to provide more specific data to demonstrate achievement of milestones and strategies
- address targets for history not achieved by the completion of this Business Plan cycle in the next planning cycle to ensure compliance with the Australian Curriculum implementation timeline
- review planning for the implementation of the National Quality Standard for early childhood education to ensure the school can meet the mandated implementation timeline
- focus on priority linked, strategic long-term planning and target setting in the next Business Plan by developing SMART targets that emphasise raising the standards of student achievement
- implement a whole-school approach to planning, curriculum delivery, monitoring, moderation and assessment practices
- continue to further develop teacher expertise in differentiating the curriculum and improving student achievement
- implement strategies to rebuild positive robust professional learning teams
- link professional performance expectations of staff to AITSL standards and review staff professional development practices to include peer observation and reflective practices.
Declaration

We, the undersigned, hereby confirm that the information provided in this findings document is to the best of our knowledge true and correct and is based on the verification of the evidence provided by Mullaloo Beach Primary School as part of the Department of Education Services’ independent review process. The Principal and Board Chair have had an opportunity to comment on any matters of fact contained within this document.

25 September 2015
Mr Gerry Chapman, Lead Reviewer
Date

27 September 2015
Ms Cristina Sandri, Reviewer
Date

Mr Richard Strickland, Director General, Department of Education Services
Date