Bannister Creek Primary School

2016

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 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 the Department of Education and the Minister for Education.

The Department of Education Services does not endorse any commercial organisation, product or service mentioned in this report.

The Department of Education Services can only guarantee the authenticity of original documents. This document is uncontrolled once printed.

To help people with disabilities obtain access to information, this document can be provided in alternative format on request. Please contact ips@des.wa.gov.au with specific requests or telephone 08 9441 1900.
School and Review Details

Principal: Ms Lynnette Macauley
Board Chair: Mr Mark Burgess
School Location: Purley Crescent, Lynwood WA
Number of Students: 559
Reviewers: Ms Cristina Sandri and Mr John Latham
Review Dates: 14 and 15 June 2016
Initial Review: 2013

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the independent review is to provide assurance to the school and its community, the Director General of the Department 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?

The successful amalgamation of three smaller schools, Kinlock, Ferndale and Lynwood Primary Schools in 2008, resulted in the opening of Bannister Creek Primary School in 2010 with staff from the three schools forming staff of the new school.

The provision of a contemporary and well-resourced learning and teaching environment has continued to be a significant enabler to facilitate, refine and improve the school's practices and procedures. Strong staff and parent involvement in planning, and particularly grounds development, has resulted in a collective sense of achievement and considerable pride for the school.

Overall student numbers have stabilised with 559 students enrolled from Kindergarten to Year 6. It is envisioned; however, that enrolment numbers will rise slightly as early childhood enrolments continue to be higher than the number of Year 6 students exiting the school. The student attendance rate at 93% continues to compare well with the State average.

The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is 1006. Student profiles show an increasing multicultural and diverse school community. Twenty-eight per cent of students are identified as having English as a second language, with 48 languages other than English spoken at home.

Sixty students have been identified with a disability or social/emotional issues through the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with a Disability, with 11 students receiving additional funding for teaching and learning adjustments. The number of students entering Kindergarten with identified language concerns has increased over the life of the DPA with 13% of these students currently identified as developmentally vulnerable and needing intervention. There are 34 Indigenous students enrolled in the school.

Though there has been some disruption to the leadership of the school since 2013, an experienced leadership team comprising the Principal and two Deputy Principals now manage and lead the school.

They, together with a relatively stable teaching staff of 41 and a support staff of 33, provide for increasingly more effective teaching and learning. Staff diversity reflects the community.
Through sound operations and budgeting, the Principal has used the flexibility and capacity as an IPS to mobilise and increase staff numbers and be responsive to the needs of the students. This is particularly evident in the effective provision of support staff for students and teachers.

A very effective Board is in place with members committed to being more fully engaged in their governance role. As the school moves into its third DPA, the Board indicated an enthusiasm to further refine and significantly increase its functionality, and become more publicly accountable. Discussions with parents and Board members confirm a strong commitment to supporting the school in providing a quality education for all students and further confirm that the school and its achievement are well respected in the community. The Board and leadership team make deliberate use of a number of partnerships including experts, families, local organisations and educational organisations to access additional resources for the educational program and support for the school community.
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 began operating as an Independent Public School in 2011. Recommendations from the first Independent Review in 2013 were included in the current Business Plan after consideration by the School Board.

In reviewing performance against the Business Plan targets, the school staff and Board have recognised that the targets set were challenging. Consequently, only student services and science targets were met at the time of this review.

School staff are engaged in evidence-based critical reflection of the planning process in moving toward a more refined third business plan. The school leadership expressed a desire to more closely align the Business Plan to Department of Education planning, the school’s operational planning, classroom planning and accountability requirements within a whole-school focus.

A comprehensive data collection and analysis framework is in place to focus the school community on a cycle of continuous self-review and to support the collaborative whole-school focus. A variety of data are available and used to inform and determine standards of student achievement and progress. Areas of strength and areas for improvement were identified.

The leadership team and K–2 staff have completed a self-audit against the National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care (NQS). The staff rated achievement as “working toward” the standards, except for Standard 4—Staffing Arrangements, which was felt had been met. The leadership team are now planning to use this data to gain further staff understanding, establish common interpretations and consensus for each of the elements and standards, and to proceed with the improvement plan for early childhood education.
School Performance—Student Learning

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

The 2014–2016 Business Plan identifies four key priority areas: English, mathematics, science, and student services. Each priority area has a set of targets with a complementary set of improvement strategies within a whole-school approach to drive the achievement of these targets.

School administrators and curriculum leaders acknowledge the targets relating to English and mathematics are challenging and aspirational and at the time of the review none of these had been met. However, the school leadership team has committed to an analysis of the 2016 NAPLAN data with an intention to review targets relating to mathematics and English in preparation for the 2017–2019 Business Plan. Analysis of available data and discussions with relevant personnel reveals both the science, and student services targets have been achieved.

The School Performance Overview, based on 2015 NAPLAN results, reflects an upward trend in overall absolute achievement. The year three and five cohorts have performed above statistically similar schools and WA public schools in all literacy and numeracy areas tested. Areas of strength identified are year three spelling, and grammar and punctuation in which performance was more than a standard deviation above the predicted school mean in both areas. An analysis of NAPLAN proficiency bands reveals that the year three and five cohorts in most learning areas tested have more students recorded in the upper proficiency levels than their counterparts in statistically similar schools.

Gains between the years three and five in the areas of reading and numeracy have been achieved. The learning areas of spelling, and grammar and punctuation show limited progress in performance. An identified concern is the significant decline in writing between years three and five. In 2013, the year three cohort performed nearly two standard deviations above the predicted school mean but in contrast, the same cohort when tested again as year fives in 2015 performed one standard deviation below the predicted school mean.
The leadership and curriculum teams are aware of this diminished performance and in response have interrogated the data critically and established a number of whole-school improvement strategies which are becoming embedded across all phases of learning. The development and implementation of common assessment tasks across all year levels and subsequent opportunities for staff to moderate student performance judgements has become a deeply embedded part of the school’s assessment and evaluation regime. There is a perception amongst the leadership and teaching staff that the strong correlation between NAPLAN performance and grade allocation is directly attributable to this effective moderation process.

A very comprehensive school-based assessment schedule supports the use of system-level data and common assessment tasks to make judgements about student achievement and to identify areas requiring an improvement focus. The schedule is inclusive of all phases-of-learning within the school and derives data from a variety of school-based and normed external instruments. This process has facilitated the identification of students' learning needs, the planning of a range of appropriate, best practice pedagogies and the formative assessment of students' progress to enable ongoing adjustments to be made to the teaching and learning program.

The Principal and leadership team are commended on their development of a highly structured and well-resourced distributed leadership paradigm enabling the implementation of weekly collaborative meetings to occur within the school's timetable. Integral to this structure are a number of curriculum committees and teams who provide ongoing support and guidance in the gathering and analysis of student performance data and the subsequent planning and development of improvement strategies that are increasingly aligned with the school’s Business Plan and operational plans.

A positive outcome of the processes developed by staff for the identification of areas requiring improvement is the ongoing development and implementation of a range of contemporary research-based pedagogies and explicit teaching approaches, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. The appointment of curriculum leaders, phase-of-learning team representatives and non-teaching representatives has helped to ensure that data analysis, planning processes and teaching emphases are educative, fair and consistent.
Staff commitment to the articulated vision and direction of the school is significant and is evidenced by the way in which teachers have conceptualised the importance of whole-school strategies and the need for these to be implemented effectively and consistently in their classrooms.

There is a significant emphasis in the school on the early years, characterised by a strong Kindergarten to year two program. In keeping with the direction taken by the school, the K–2 structure features a developing learning community that enjoys encouraging levels of staff collaboration and information sharing. Leaders from various curriculum and student services committees attend K–2 collaborative meetings and help to ensure that teaching and learning approaches are more consistent with the direction articulated in school planning documents. A feature of weekly collaboration meetings is the emphasis on ensuring that teaching practice is relevant and connected and that teachers develop and share a common pedagogical language.

A range of data sources are employed by early childhood staff to identify deficits in learning and to plan subsequent teaching and learning approaches. These include but are not limited to the National Quality Standard (NQS), On-Entry testing, data derived from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), and school-based data collected by staff on an ongoing basis.

Staff have embraced the requirements of the NQS and have made considerable progress in achieving many of the elements inherent in the seven Quality Standards. It was noted that K–2 staff have developed very high expectations of student achievement, and as a result, decisions regarding NQS performance are made with intense scrutiny.

A comprehensive attendance policy incorporating a range of support processes and strategies is firmly embedded in the day-to-day operations of the school and has ensured an ongoing focus on targeted areas. The reviewers were able to verify that the school had achieved the three targets relating to student attendance outlined in the Business Plan, though noted the average Aboriginal attendance rates compared to like schools over the last three years, has been lower and remains an area for vigilance.

A recent review of processes designed to manage student behaviour and engagement has resulted in an extensive and detailed policy and set of procedures.
The reviewers, through discussions with a number of stakeholders within the school community, were able to verify consistently high standards of student behaviour and engagement.
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?

Analysis of school documentation coupled with discussions with a number of stakeholders, reveal an established and embedded positive school culture which is conducive to the promotion of optimum student learning and well-being. The environment for student learning is inclusive of the needs of all students and reflects the articulated values of learning, excellence, equity and care.

The embedded process of weekly collaboration meetings has enabled teaching staff to respond effectively to the analysis of student performance data by developing and implementing a comprehensive range of best practice teaching and learning approaches in the literacy and numeracy areas. The services of an external early childhood literacy consultant have been enlisted in the establishment of literacy blocks from Pre-primary to year one with the intention to affect total school involvement in this strategy in the near future.

Reading is taught through weekly guided reading sessions and the delivery of First Steps and Higher Order Thinking Skills strategies from Pre-primary to year six. Support for teachers in the implementation of these strategies is extensive with education assistants, the Aboriginal Islander Education Officer (AIEO), selected parents and the learning support teacher assisting students to scaffold their understanding of a range of texts. The effectiveness of these strategies is evidenced by the school’s upward trend in the area of NAPLAN Overall Absolute Achievement.

The teaching of writing receives a major focus in response to the lack of progress made between years three and five in NAPLAN. This has involved the explicit teaching of concepts, processes and skills including sentence structure, vocabulary development and paragraphing. The provision of a learning support teacher has enabled classroom teachers to more effectively target students requiring extension. The leader of the literacy committee assumes a mentoring and coaching role to build the capacity of staff to implement agreed teaching emphases effectively.

A decline in student achievement in mathematics provided the catalyst for the school’s involvement in the Leadership for Numeracy Learning Project with the assistance of external consultants.
To build the capacity of staff to understand the notion that students learn mathematics concepts differently, the leader of the mathematics committee coordinated a whole-school approach which empowered staff to collaboratively develop a vision statement, beliefs about the teaching and learning of mathematics and formative assessment processes designed to inform teachers' planning. A number of professional learning opportunities assisted teachers to enhance their understanding of contemporary numeracy pedagogy and to reflect on their understanding of course content in the context of their own teaching practices. The implementation of First Steps strategies provides the major teaching focus in mathematics and is supported by explicit teaching models such as iSTAR (Inform Show Try Apply Review) which aims to secure connected practices for learning. Discussions with the numeracy committee leader as well as a number of teaching staff provide evidence that teachers are developing a clearer understand and application of the notion of curriculum differentiation in their classrooms. Analysis of NAPLAN student achievement data in numeracy reflects significant improvement between years three and five.

Science is a priority area in the school's Business Plan. The appointment of a specialist teacher who delivers the science program from Pre-primary to year six has helped to provide a curriculum that is cohesive, engaging, purposeful and rigorous. An initial total reliance on the Primary Science Connections program has given way to an adaptation of this model in an attempt to make the teaching of science more relevant and stimulating to students. The use of ICT, in particular tablet computers, has provided additional motivation for students and has assisted with ongoing research activities. Regular liaison with neighbouring schools has paved the way for informal moderation practices in addition to the sharing of contemporary teaching approaches. It is noted that the staff is beginning to adopt an emphasis on Science Technologies Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) with a focus on strategies such as coding and robotics.

The music program delivers a well-rounded curriculum to all students in years one to six and is enhanced through student participation in School of Instrumental Music sessions featuring the instruments of flute, clarinet and guitar. The establishment of a choral program is a prominent element of the music learning area.

The program is hinged on student participation and engagement and features the establishment of a junior and senior choir. Events such as Sing Fest and the WA Massed Choir Festival provide students with an additional audience.
and purpose for their work. Practice sessions for both choirs are conducted before school and the excellent attendance rate by students is testament to the success of the program.

Instruction in Mandarin is delivered to all Pre-primary to year six students. During the review the reviewers observed a dynamic and engaging learning environment featuring a number of teaching strategies developed to scaffold students' learning including learning stations coupled with the use of language games to ensure that pedagogy was interactive and differentiated for all students.

The use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning is embedded in the learning environment. Developed in consultation with teaching staff, the provision of ICT equipment has been very strategic and targeted with classes having access to a variety of technologies including interactive whiteboards, laptop computers, iPads and tablets, in addition to a range of technology peripherals and software. During visits to classrooms the reviewers observed a number of examples where ICT was being used effectively to enhance teaching and learning. Discussions with staff indicated an appreciation of the availability of a range of learning technologies and an increasing confidence to embrace these as teaching tools.

Effective pastoral care approaches are a prominent feature of the learning environment with parents indicating a high level of support and appreciation for the myriad of strategies and initiatives implemented by the school to enhance students’ mental health and well-being. These include: Act Belong Commit, Kids Matter, Friendly Schools Plus, Preventing Anxiety and Victimisation project (PAVE), Drum Beat, the Chaplaincy program and the Zones of Regulation program which seeks to assist students to be in the optimal zone for learning.

The AIEO provides an important layer of support for indigenous students and families. A major role of the AIEO is a focus on attendance, student engagement and the transition to high school. The fostering of strong relationships with parents and care givers is seen as vital and has resulted in improved relationships with the school.

This has been reinforced through the staging of events such as parent/community afternoon teas, NAIDOC activities and a highly successful Aboriginal Awards night. The AIEO adopts a proactive approach with the issue of early intervention by liaising extensively with the families of three and four year old children prior to their enrolment at school in addition to working
closely with the learning support teacher to assist indigenous students to develop and achieve personal performance goals.

Students with English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) form a significant part of the total school enrolment. Regular collaboration between the EAL/D teacher and classroom teachers has helped to facilitate a learning environment of connected practice between year levels in addition to providing valuable opportunities for assessment moderation. The establishment of initiatives such as the Community Links program and Kindergarten induction processes has helped to foster positive relationships between families and the school.

A comprehensive case management process has been established to identify students at educational risk and to provide ongoing support for teachers in developing intervention plans to address the learning needs of students. A team consisting of the learning Support Coordinator, School Psychologist, AIEO, Chaplain, EAL/D teacher and learning support teacher provides initial assistance for classroom teachers to analyse relevant student performance data in order to identify students at educational risk. Further support is provided through the school year in the form of a referral process enabling teachers to enlist the assistance of the Student Services team as necessary.

An environmental sustainability program, incorporating a range of initiatives and projects, is well known and widely heralded throughout the school community. Discussions with several members of the Sustainability Committee illustrated the passion and enthusiasm injected into this project by students, teachers and parents. The program is strongly embedded in school-based curriculum initiatives and focuses on building positive and effective relationships with the community. A number of accolades have been received by the school from community-based environmental groups. Of note is the national recognition the school has received for its participation in the Water Wise program in addition to the inclusion of the school’s Sustainability operational plan in the publication, Sustainable Schools WA.

Student leadership is highly valued and opportunities are in place for students to develop skills and participate. Eight student councillors are elected and have a variety of duties including setting an example for other students, mediating in playground issues and providing a student voice in discussions with staff leaders. Highlights include the management and promotion of events, conducting lunch time clubs, representing the school and leading important school functions. Eight faction captains and vice captains assist with the organisation and smooth running of the sport program, carnivals and
management of sporting equipment. Music and science leaders assist the program, particularly in the sustainability and conservation area.

Reviewers were able to verify the high regard in which teaching and support staff are held through discussions with parents and Board members. Parents in particular were fulsome in their praise for the wide variety of student-centred activities and projects initiated by the staff. Of note, was the excellent reputation enjoyed by the school in the wider community through its involvement in a range of environmental sustainability endeavours. Parents were very positive about the staff’s capacity to direct focus on the child and in particular, the provision of a multi-layered academic support process. Parents viewed communication as an area of strength and spoke very positively about the wide range of strategies used to disseminate information to the school community. The reviewers analysed the data provided by two National School Opinion surveys to confirm these findings.
School Performance—Sustainability

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

It was evident the staff is refining a systematic approach to data collection and embedding self-review processes that critically analyse the learning of all students to identify areas of achievement and areas for improvement. Discussions with board members evidenced their engagement in the review process and demonstrated an understanding of the governance roles and responsibilities of the DPA. The Board strategically oversees and provides critical reflection on school performance. It is clear the Board, leadership and staff of the school are united and committed to improving student learning and remain focused on whole-school improvement.

The Board and school leadership ensure long-term strategic planning of resources is in place and aligned to the Business Plan, including replacement schedules and workforce plans. Sound planning is in place to ensure that human, physical and financial resources are available to sustain current programs and practices and support future initiatives.

As a result of the self-review process, the staff has identified areas for refinement and improvement in student learning performance and staff development. To build staff capacity, strategic processes are in place, including the use of experts and consultants to guide and support staff knowledge, skills and contemporary pedagogical development. Critical reflection and disciplined dialogue around evidence are being developed as the expected norm in the school.

School leaders are empowering of staff, creating a strong collegial environment, setting clear direction and a focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for the students. The leadership is distributed with many staff taking on leadership roles. Parents and board members commented on the quality of the leadership and the positive impact it was having on student achievement.

Sound practises are in place and others being developed that form and support a strong foundation for future planning and further development of systematic curriculum delivery.
From the staff’s claims, and the evidence provided, the reviewers are confident that the staff has the focus, capacity and community support to maintain achievements and provide for future improvements through more refined target setting, continued workforce planning and maintaining effective management of resources.
Conclusion

Over the life of the DPA, the leadership and staff of Bannister Creek Primary School have continued to develop a whole-school curriculum focus and a strong collegial culture that is intent on quality learning and teaching where every student is expected to learn.

The community values the availability and openness of the leadership and staff, the positive school tone, focus on the individual child and the school ethos that strives to provide a balanced curriculum, with academic opportunity and student well-being. It reflects the staff’s desire to provide a safe, supportive and inclusive teaching and learning environment for children and staff.

Though academic targets set in the Business Plan were not met at the time of the review, the school results reflect an upward trend in overall absolute student achievement with performance above statistically similar schools and WA public schools in all literacy and numeracy areas tested, with more students placed in the upper proficiency levels than their counterparts in statistically similar schools. Attention to refining target setting may rectify this inconsistency.

The Board, school leadership and staff are united, enthusiastic and committed to school improvement.
Commendations

The following areas are commended:

- an effective Board with members committed and engaged in their governance role
- the development of a highly structured and well-resourced distributed leadership paradigm
- an embedded process of weekly staff collaboration meetings which establish collective understandings, skills and practices within a whole-school focus
- effective evaluative process resulting in the very strong correlation between NAPLAN performance and teacher grade allocation
- a comprehensive and highly effective student services strategy
- an inclusive environmental sustainability cross-curriculum program which incorporates an extensive range of initiatives and projects.

Areas for Improvement

The following areas for improvement are identified:

- establish targets in the next Business Plan to ensure they are challenging but a realistic expectation of student achievement and progress
- more closely align the school’s operational planning, classroom planning and accountability requirements to the Business Plan.
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 Bannister Creek 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.

Mrs Cristina Sandri, Lead Reviewer

5 August 2016

Date

Mr John Latham, Reviewer

4 August 2016

Date

Mr Richard Strickland, Director General,
Department of Education Services

18/8/16

Date