Ellenbrook Primary School

2016

Independent Review Findings
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 the Department of Education and the Minister for Education.

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School and Review Details

Principal: Dr Neil MacNeill
Board Chair: Ms Julie Patel
School Location: 65 Fortescue Place Eilenbrook WA 6069
Number of Students: 608
Reviewers: Mr Keith Newton (Lead)
Professor Chris Forlin
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.
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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?

Ellenbrook Primary School is located in a rapidly growing suburb on the north eastern edge of the Perth metropolitan region. It is the oldest, largest and most established primary school in the Ellenbrook area.

At the start of 2003 the population of Ellenbrook stood at 7,000 people, it is now in excess of 35,000 and expected to grow to over 50,000. The My School® Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) has been anything but stable rising from 966 in 2008 to 1010 in 2014 and falling back to 998 in 2015 with 15% and 27% of students in the top and bottom quartiles respectively. The volatility within the degree of socio-economic advantage, the rapid and ongoing growth in the population in general and the development of new subdivisions within the school's local intake area presents the school with significant issues, which it addresses with a high degree of effectiveness, when planning for improvement over an extended period of time.

Central to its espoused goal ‘excellence for all students’ the school focuses on providing a positive, caring and cooperative learning environment characterised by high standards of behaviour, student learning and evidence-based educational programs.

It is within this world view that caring, dedicated staff seek to develop the whole child: intellectually, emotionally, physically, culturally and spiritually, ready for the present and the future, to enable them to make valuable contributions to society.

The school has a teaching staff of 33 (29.6 FTE) inclusive of three allocated to school administration and a further 17 staff (14.1 FTE) in support roles. Leave liability is low with only one staff member having long service leave of more than 66 days outstanding. Absenteeism and resignations are within normal ranges.

The school has an enrolment of 608 kindergarten to year six students with 20% having a language background other than English, 6.2% being Aboriginal and 9.9% identified as having a disability. In semester 1, 2015, the attendance rate for the school as a whole was 93.3% and for Aboriginal students 83.7%
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compared to 93.2% and 85.6% for like-schools and 92.7% and 81.2% respectively for Western Australian Public Schools. The proportion of students attending for more than 90% of the time was 82% overall, and 85% and 38% for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students respectively. The school has a transiency rate of 15.7%.

The buildings are air-conditioned, well maintained and suited to the delivery of contemporary education.

The board is comprised of school staff, community members and parents. It plays a significant part in the ongoing oversight of the school and actively engages in planning with the principal for the delivery of educational programs aimed at improving academic, social, emotional and physical development of all students.

The school was identified by the Department of Education for inclusion in a 2015 Graduate School of Education study (The University of Western Australia), that examined similarities and differences among primary schools whose students achieved better than expected National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores compared with all schools and statistically similar schools.
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?

Rigorous and continuous self-review is an embedded process at the school. This starts with classroom teachers who evaluate their own teaching, the level of learning and the effectiveness of programs in use on a daily basis. Information gained is used to adjust instructional practices within the classroom and to inform the evaluation of whole-of-school approaches. Whilst this is most evident with literacy and numeracy it is also manifest in all other learning areas.

New programs/approaches are only introduced after extensive investigation of what contemporary research has to say about their effectiveness and their applicability to the school’s context. Small-scale, tightly monitored trials are held to confirm the suitability of the programs before they are implemented on a wider scale; but only after dissemination of information and wide spread consultation with all stakeholders. This includes staff, parents and various members of the wider community. The Board is engaged at all stages so that it is able to make an informed decision about whether to support a change in direction.

Within this culture of self-review the school overtly uses its Business Plan which identifies school priorities central to school improvement and the development of successful students. Staff also utilise the Workforce Plan, that documents future workforce needs in order to ensure the school has the right people to achieve its vision and goals.

Balanced judgements are made against the Business Plan targets (expressed as goals and outcomes) using qualitative and quantitative evidence gathered in an ongoing and regulated manner.

The information gathered from each year’s cycle of planning, acting and reviewing informs school improvement and forms the basis for accountability within the IPS review process. In addition, the leadership and staff in conjunction with the board has undertaken a self-assessment against the current DPA and has implemented changes in accord with the areas identified for improvement in the 2013 Department of Education Services’ review.
The annual report provides the community with information about school performance. It gives parents and other members of the community a clear sense of how students are progressing and what is being done to maximise student achievement.
School Performance—Student Learning

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

Verification of the school’s claims about achievement was made possible by the detailed analysis and provision of concise and collated data undertaken by all staff. In addition, student learning is reported in detail in the annual reports. The targets in the Business Plan that were related to NAPLAN scores were evaluated by the staff with links to the evidence that supported the analyses. Targets for Year 3 students to decrease the percentage in the lowest 20% and increase the percentage in the top 20% of Australian students for numeracy and reading were achieved. Similar targets for Year 5 students varied across the triennium either making progress towards them or not yet achieved.

The focus in the Business Plan on specific cohorts of students allowed the staff to confirm that the percentage of students with language backgrounds other than English in the lowest 20% for numeracy and reading had decreased from 2013 to 2016 for Year 5 and for the top 20% had increased for both Years 3 and 5. The target to decrease the percentage of Year 3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the lowest 20% showed a significant improvement going from 33% in 2013 to 0% in 2016; however, the number of students in this cohort was too small to make the analysis valid. Student progress and achievement compared with like-schools 2014–2016 indicates that students from Year 3–5 made higher progress/higher achievement in reading and numeracy and lower progress/higher achievement in spelling, writing and grammar. Scores for Year 3 and 5 students continue to be at or above the predicted school mean. To ensure there are sufficient numbers of students to confirm the analysis is valid, it is suggested that consideration be given to the number of students in cohorts before creating future targets.

A target to improve reading comprehension and mathematics understanding and skills across the whole school was analysed by staff applying biannual ACER assessment in vocabulary, reading comprehension and mathematics. Effect sizes were calculated to provide a detailed analysis of progress. These ranged from 0.5 to 0.83 indicating medium to high effects, enabling the reviewers to confirm the school’s claims that these targets had been achieved.

The staff place a very strong and highly structured whole-school focus on literacy and numeracy with dedicated blocks of time for all classes. Explicit
teaching, using a highly structured approach has been adopted and was evident in all classes. Cross grading has been introduced from Years 4–6 in mathematics to cater for the wide spread of ability among the students. Similarly, cross grading is used for reading where a mastery learning approach is adopted. The staff report that this has been very successful, allowing students to work alongside peers of similar abilities. Guided reading is used in all classes. As part of the literacy block, book studies is used for Years 1–6 with a whole-class seven-step approach to modelling writing. In 2016, the staff was focusing on narrative and provided strong evidence by way of work samples and videos to demonstrate the success of this with students. The school has a very well equipped library that provides an extensive range of materials to support the literacy program.

Explicit teaching in mathematics is through the adoption of the Scholastic PRIME Mathematics program in 2014 for Years 1–6. Although this is based on the Singaporean mathematics curriculum, the staff provided evidence to show that this was being supported by the ACER Junior Elementary Maths Mastery (JEMM) in Years 2–4 and the Elementary Maths Mastery (EMM) in Years 5 and 6. The staff are in the process of mapping outcomes in the PRIME and the JEMM and EMM against the Western Australian curriculum to identify any potential gaps. While the reviewers found that this mapping was work in progress, they are assured that through the adoption of the PRIME mathematics, together with the supplementary materials and mapping against the Western Australian curriculum, the staff will be able to ensure that they meet if not exceed the requirements for teaching mathematics. Prior to transitioning to high school, a six-week advanced placement class is taught by Ellenbrook Secondary College teachers, providing intensive focused teaching for 20 students who are identified as high achievers. The staff report that this connection to the high school has been extremely beneficial; also offering opportunities to liaise with specialists regarding expected achievement levels of students going into Year 7.

The school has four specialist areas consisting of science, performing arts, information and communication technology and physical education that are taught across all year levels by dedicated teachers. The science program is based on Primary Connections and offered one hour per week to all students from Pre-primary to Year 6. This program is aligned to the Western Australian curriculum with a focus on discovery learning. Student perceptions of their level of satisfaction with different aspects of science are very positive and are regularly reviewed through surveys. It was noted by the reviewers that there
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The school has adopted various new pedagogical approaches during the 2014-2016 period. Reviewer discussions with staff verified that there was a relatively large number of students identified with a disability (n=60) or learning difficulty. For each of these students a documented plan is developed that links their learning to the class curriculum by providing a differentiated approach with specific strategies to deliver the necessary support. A range of in-class and small group withdrawal support is provided with a very strong emphasis on early intervention. The documented plans are reviewed consistently and revised each semester. These programs are well supported by dedicated and effective education assistants. It was clear to the reviewers that all staff working with students with disabilities were using the plans to guide their teaching and were providing feedback on achievement against individual goals to the class teacher on a regular basis. In addition, some students had documented individual behavioural plans containing both short and long-term goals to address behaviour difficulties.

It was evident that the use of ICT is embedded across the whole school with effective infrastructure in place. Interactive whiteboards are being used regularly to support the curriculum. Two class sets of iPads are available for in-class use and the specialist teacher has a computer laboratory for whole-class sessions. Teaching of ICT is linked directly to the Western Australian curriculum with online quizzes being used to measure student progress.

A strong and innovative performing arts program is provided by a specialist teacher for all year groups. The program covered all four aspects of the curriculum with a strong focus on singing, dancing, drama and music. Students are also able to participate in a range of extracurricular activities including instrumental sessions and for Years 4–6 the elective annual Showcase. During the visit the Year 6 students were actively engaged in preparing for the annual leavers’ performance. Discussions with staff, students and parents confirmed the importance of performing arts to the students and the students’ positive and motivated engagement with the curriculum.

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The school has adopted various new pedagogical approaches during the 2014–2016 period. Reviewer discussions with staff verified that there was a
proactive method for considering these. In all instances new approaches were initially trialled in one or more classes. Data were recorded and outcomes reviewed by all staff. Based on these extensive trials and a detailed evidence-based review process, several new pedagogies were adopted across the whole school.

Early childhood programming is clearly collaborative and team focused across K–PP. Curriculum planning based on outcome achievement is evident with a strong leaning towards academic progress. In K–PP, the staff reported that the use of explicit teaching of *Jolly Phonics* was providing a very strong foundation for reading. This was supported in Year 1 with a rotational reading program across all four classes that allowed for teachers to meet the range of student abilities. By the end of 2015 every school was to be using the National Quality Standard (NQS) system to be reporting against all seven quality areas. In 2016, the early childhood staff began their review by considering the physical environment and have commenced progress towards achieving expectations. It is recommended that while the staff have acknowledged areas for improvement and processes are in place for reviewing all other aspects of the NQS that this needs to be undertaken with a view to making significant progress in 2017.
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 Business Plan explicitly sets out to establish a learning environment that underpins the achievement of a high standard of learning and behaviour and the raising of aspirations of all students.

The Business Plan focuses on goals related to the development of excellence; academic and non-academic, for all students. This involves differentiating the curriculum to optimise learning for all and enhance the choices students can make during their schooling and their lives in general. The academic goals are focused on explicit teaching targeted at student need, year-level competencies, data collection and teacher accountability. The non-academic goals are focused on appropriate behaviour and the benefits to learning, teaching, safety within the school community, and supportive care for all students, teachers, and parents, with particular emphasis at time of need.

While not overtly stated, the school’s values are evident in practice and collectively foster an outstanding, positive learning culture. The staff make every effort to ensure students are engaged in challenging, meaningful learning and that achievements are celebrated.

The school’s support systems, policies and practices demonstrate a high level of knowledge and understanding by all of the staff. The classroom visits confirm rooms are well resourced and provide students with a positive learning environment. The classrooms present as bright, intellectually stimulating centres for learning excellence. Students display a respectful attitude to each other, their teachers, to the deputy principals and principal. It was evident that expectations are high, with students engaged in their learning and demonstrating pride in their achievement.

Staff use explicit teaching methodology in literacy and numeracy blocks with some extension, where appropriate, to other learning areas with the objective of improving student performance. The school has developed clear, successful learning pathways to support students through various points of transition: K to PP, PP to Year 1 and Year 6 to Year 7. The reviewers observed a very high level of curriculum planning and sharing between staff, supported by the leadership team.
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The provision of extension and specialist programs has enabled the school to enrich the learning environment and extend the learning experiences for all students. Through meetings with staff, parents and students the reviewers were able to verify the strong sense of community throughout the school. Students commented how teachers were approachable and prepared to listen and expressed a view that they were always supported in their learning.

Education is highly valued by the parent community and this is reflected in the consistently high student attendance rate and parents exercising their right of choice by moving into the school’s catchment area. Due recognition is also afforded to the school by parents for the manner in which innovative programs are introduced and the resultant benefits that accrue to student learning and the school community at large. This was verified through extensive conversations and observations during the review; however, there is little data available through the National School Parent Survey to support this due to a low response rate. Further consideration of ways to improve the response rate is recommended.

The school as a whole presented as a stimulating and positive learning environment with a range of strategies and actions that are socially inclusive. The staff encourages students to become engaged in their learning and actively supports them to achieve to their potential in an atmosphere that fosters care and well-being to a very high level.
School Performance—Sustainability

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

The school presents as both caring and inclusive, with a positive culture that embraces the diversity of its student population and provides a curriculum that supports academic and social development within a very supportive environment. The school is seen as an inclusive hub in the community, welcoming multi-cultural families. The uncertainty regarding the rapidly growing local communities and the proposed building of new schools in the area was initially considered to be a potential issue in the development of the current Business Plan; however, the staff has been able to overcome this. The school is highly competitive against the other local schools and student numbers reflect a significant increase in 2015 and 2016.

Through the established, ongoing self-review process staff critically review the impact of all goals and strategies on student learning and ensure high expectations for academic and behavioural standards are maintained. The NAPLAN results continue to be commendable and the whole-school approach to implementing effective pedagogies and monitoring student learning has been very effective. The staff have closely reviewed and responded to all recommendations made in the previous review in 2013. There is clear evidence of improvements in all of these areas.

The staff provides a motivating and engaging curriculum aligned to the Western Australian curriculum. They offer a wide range of extracurricular activities, engaging the community in very positive ways. Targets focus on student learning by offering a consistent and structured approach to teaching across the whole school, with strong evidence of collaborative team decision-making at all levels.

The staff are highly valued and are supported in accessing targeted professional learning. It was evident that under guidance from the strong leadership team that nurtures continued improvement, all staff have the capacity to implement processes and procedures effectively and work cohesively to enable a whole-school approach to improving student learning.

The board is very visible in the school, participating in school activities and maintaining close liaison with parents. Board members act as strong advocates for the school and are proactive in working with the community.
The school is well resourced and financially managed and well placed to sustain current programs and support future initiatives.
Conclusion

Ellenbrook Primary School staff members have implemented a comprehensive iterative data-aware self-review process to analyse performance against priorities and targets in the Business Plan and obligations under the DPA.

The school presents as a highly effective learning environment for all students where decisions are grounded upon theory and research and are therefore evidence based.

The school is held in high regard by staff, students, parents and the wider community. There is a strong belief in the social inclusion policies of the school and the genuine manner in which they are played out by staff, students and parents alike.

The professional knowledge and enthusiasm of the staff in creating quality learning and teaching programs to maximise the educational opportunities for each student was evident throughout the review. This, along with effective school leadership, has resulted in the school having an excellent reputation in the local community.

The school has a well-informed and very capable board that sets the strategic direction, oversees implementation and works with the school to account for its performance. This, when aligned with the team of competent staff and targeted use of resources, ensures the school's goals and obligations are being met.
Commendations

*The following areas are commended:*

- the research and endeavour the school as a whole puts into ensuring commitment and engagement in evidence-based contemporary practices
- the level of student achievement and progress compared to like-schools with particular reference to literacy and numeracy
- the student-centred motivating and engaging learning approach staff bring to all school operations
- the quality of the collective leadership, with particular reference to that of the principal.

Areas for Improvement

*The following areas for improvement are identified:*

- revisit the formulation of targets to make them more meaningful and measurable to support the learning of all students
- revisit the gathering of National School Survey data to improve the response rate
- implement the NQS to record annually the school’s status on all seven quality areas and build improvement priorities into the school plans.
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 Ellenbrook 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.

Mr Keith Newton, Lead Reviewer
9 November 2016

Professor Chris Farlin, Reviewer
9 November 2016

Mr Richard Strickland, Director General,
Department of Education Services
17/11/16