Review details

A priority for the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) is to improve the educational attainment and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

The purpose of the External School Review is to support schools to raise achievement, sustain high performance and to provide quality assurance to build and sustain public confidence in DECD schools.

The overarching review question is “How well does this school improve student achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity?”

This External School Review has evaluated:
- the school's self-review processes and findings,
- the school's achievement data and progress over time,
- the outcomes of the meetings and interviews with representatives from the school, and
- parent and student views about the school.

The External School Review included an analysis of the school’s key policies and procedures.

The support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community is acknowledged.

This External School Review was conducted by Liz Matheson and Ann O’Callaghan Review Officers, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Liz Schyneder, Review Principal.
Policy compliance

The External School Review process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are implemented and adhered to.

The Principal of Ceduna Area School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies.

Implementation of the DECD Student Attendance Policy was checked specifically against a documented set of criteria. The school has implemented comprehensive tracking and intervention processes, and was found to be compliant with this policy. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 85.5%, which is below the DECD target of 93%. The school has an Attendance Policy, Absence Action Plan, documented procedures, designated Senior Leader responsible for active intervention to support students and families to increase daily attendance and strong links with government and non-government agencies. Between 2012 and 2014 the attendance rate has had an upward trend.

School context

Ceduna Area School is in a remote location on the far west coast of South Australia, 775 km from the Adelaide CBD. It is situated on Murat Bay in the Ceduna District Council area. The Ceduna district consists of the small rural communities of Smoky Bay, Penong, Koonibba, Mudamuckla, Charra, Denial Bay and the two townships of Ceduna and Thevenard. There is an Aboriginal population consisting mainly of the local Wirangu, Guguda people and the Anangu people from Yalata.

The school caters for students from Reception to Year 12. The current enrolment is 561 students and has been stable for the last 5 years. The school is divided into 3 sub-schools: Junior School Reception to Year 5, Middle School Years 6 to 9, and Senior School Years 10 to 13. The school has an ICSEA score of 884, and is classified as Category 2 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 32% Aboriginal students, 12% Students with Disabilities including a special class, 22.7% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), and 11 students under the Guardianship of the Minister (GoM). Approximately 27% of students travel to school by bus. The school has had an average transience rate of 30% over the past 3 years compared to a DECD average of 17%. There are 58 students enrolled in the Flexible Learning Options (FLO) programme.

The school’s senior leadership team consists of a Principal, in the third year of his second tenure, a Deputy Principal, Senior Leader, Junior Primary and Senior Leader, Aboriginal Education.

The school is frequently the first appointment to DECD for many of its teachers. Currently, the school has 8 graduate teachers and a total of 20 early career teachers. Many of the Band 1 leaders are in their first leadership role.
### Lines of inquiry

*During the review process, the panel focused on three key areas from the External School Review Framework:*

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### How well are students achieving over time?

In the early years, reading is monitored against Running Records. In 2014, 57% of Year 1 and 64% of Year 2 students achieved the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) or above.

In 2014, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 63% of Year 3 students, 55% of Year 5 students, 77% of Year 7 students and 54% of Year 9 students achieved the SEA.

This compares to an average of 58% for Year 3, 51% for Year 5, 53% for Year 7 and 45% for Year 9 students achieving the SEA during the period of 2008 to 2013. The school’s achievement in 2014 was higher than the historical average achievement in every year level.

In relation to students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands, 26% were in Year 3, 14.5% were in Year 5, 26% were in Year 7 and 15% were in Year 9. This compares to an average of 17.5%, 13%, 8% and 6% for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 respectively, between 2008 and 2013. The trend in Years 3, 5 and 9, between 2012 and 2014, has been upwards.

In 2014, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicated that 60% of Year 3 students, 42% of Year 5 students, 67% of Year 7 students and 52% of Year 9 students achieved the SEA.

This compares to an average of 51% for Year 3, 52% for Year 5, 45% for Year 7 and 45% for Year 9 students achieving the SEA during the period of 2008 to 2013. The school’s achievement in 2014 was higher than the historical average achievement in Years 3, 7 and 9. There is a 3-year upward trend in Year 9 — from 36% in 2012 to 52% in 2014.

In relation to students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands, 23% were in Year 3, 5% were in Year 5, 13% were in Year 7 and 6% were in Year 9. This compares to an average of 12%, 8%, 6% and 4% for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 respectively, between 2008 and 2013.

In relation to the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE), 20 out of 22 potential completers enrolled in 2014 completed their SACE (i.e. 90.9%). This compared with 91.7% in 2011, 86.4% in 2012, and 84.6% in 2013. The percentage of grades that were achieved at a ‘C’ grade or above for attempted subjects was 92%.

### How effectively are Aboriginal students achieving and progressing compared to other groups in the school?

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students’ attendance and achievement are regularly tracked at an individual level and actions are taken to provide support and address issues. A mid-year self-review reported that the percentage of unexplained absences had dropped by 2.4% - from 11.2% in 2014 to 8.8% for the first semester of 2015. In 2014, the attendance of ATSI students was 75.4% compared with 85.9% for non-ATSI students.

The school has an attendance improvement plan, which outlines the priorities in following up unexplained absenteeism, targeting students at risk, promoting the importance of attendance in the community and collaboration with other agencies, services and programs. An Aboriginal Education newsletter with photos and
students’ profiles is produced and distributed. It advises parents that for every day missed from school it takes four days to catch up. The students who attend 95% to 100% of the term are listed and acknowledged in the newsletter. The school has extensive links with relevant government and community agencies to promote the attendance of ATSI students at school.

Personal contact is made with families whose children regularly miss school, by the Aboriginal Community Education Officers (ACEOs) and Aboriginal Education Teachers. Additionally, a number of programs are offered to engage students and to keep them connected to the school, including the Flexible Learning Options program for students who have been significantly alienated from the school system. This program is provided for ATSI and non-ATSI students. The success of this program is measured by the improved attendance, as indicated by 24% in 2013, 65.5% in 2014 and 69% in Semester 1 2015. Of the 24 students tested, every student has increased their reading age during this semester.

Ceduna Area School has had an average transience rate of 30% over the period 2012 to 2014. The impact of transience, and how well the school provides support for students to settle into the school, were explored during the discussion with the Aboriginal Student Forum. Five students told their stories of moving from other schools to Ceduna Area School and indicated members of their extended family within the school made it much easier to settle in. Several students indicated the academic standards at Ceduna were higher than their previous schools, but did not see this as a negative factor.

In terms of academic achievement, the school regularly assesses students’ progress using valid instruments including Running Records, Phonological Awareness, PAT-R/M and Probe. This data is presented to teachers in a format so that they can see the progress of each individual for whom they are responsible. Discussions are held within sub-school forums to discuss their progress. The school reported that 12 ATSI students are on track to achieve the SACE Certificate in 2015, which is the highest number of students compared with any previous year.

Currently, the way in which the data is produced does not enable the school to make conclusions about the progress of ATSI students as a priority cohort group. The school and students were able to give anecdotal examples of students who have improved, turned around in their confidence and enhanced their academic skills. However, unless this data is available and analysed at a cohort level, the school cannot make evidence-based conclusions about the rate of progress of ATSI students, and nor can they know if strategies in their Aboriginal Education Improvement Plan are having a positive impact on learning outcomes.

**Direction 1**
Utilise data management systems to disaggregate the achievement data of ATSI students, as assessed by the various measurement tools, to analyse their progress.

**How effectively does the school leadership develop the capacity of teachers?**

**Curriculum coherence and professional learning**
Over the past 8 years, the school has endeavoured to build coherence for learners from Reception to Year 13. While the school is divided into three sub-schools (Reception to Year 5, Year 6 to 9, and Year 10 to 13), the Admin Team of senior leaders understands the importance of consistency across the school. As one student who is on track to complete her SACE said: “Success doesn’t start at Year 12”.

Integral to the drive to attain improvement is ensuring students have a safe and orderly learning environment with regular routines, predictability and consistent language across classes. As the turn-over of teachers at Ceduna Area School is high, teachers work collaboratively to document the procedures designed to help students to change inappropriate behaviour and to provide teachers with pointers on how to be proactive in managing student behaviour. These documents outline a flowchart, and are nuanced from Reception to Year 5 and Year 6 to 13, to reflect appropriate management practices for the respective age groups. Parents on the Governing Council and the Aboriginal Parent Forum, as well as older students, testified that while it is not perfect, the overall behaviour of students has improved across the school, and that staff members are responsive to concerns as they are raised.
A literacy review was conducted in 2009 to assess the impact of the school's literacy pedagogy and literacy blocks. The review findings were complemented by the Principal's participation in the DECD Principals as Literacy Leaders course, which focused on the evidence for teaching students to read. As a consequence, improvement in reading outcomes became a school focus, and evidence-based practices were articulated and expected to form the foundation of curriculum planning and pedagogy.

To support teachers to develop their understanding that literacy is everyone's business, they worked together to develop a Whole School Agreement. The document outlines the expectation that teachers will use achievement data to inform their planning and differentiate their curriculum to meet the varied learning needs within their classes. An assessment schedule underpins this expectation. In the Junior School (Reception to Year 5) the expected components of the literacy block are documented. A major change has been a focus on developing phonological awareness, alphabet and phonics skills, consistent with international research. The Review Team observed the use of guided reading to target teaching to meet the assessed skill levels of students. The Year 6 to 13 documents outline the teaching of comprehension strategies that are expected to be explicitly taught. Students in the Middle School said that they had been learning to compare and contrast a text and a movie, to infer by searching between the lines and to summarise.

Professional learning in writing has now become a focus within the school's drive to improve literacy outcomes. Student achievement in the 2014 Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 writing test has been graphed against the marking rubrics criteria. The results point towards the use of precise and rich vocabulary and sentence structure as aspects requiring attention. The school is aware of this finding from their analysis and 5 teachers have been trained as facilitators in Literacy for Learning.

To improve numeracy outcomes, the school has developed a strategic multi-pronged plan. To build their capacity, teachers have read and discussed current research to develop their understanding and to articulate common misconceptions. More intensive professional learning is being provided in the context of some classrooms through modelling and coaching by the Mathematician in Residence leader. Until 2015 the school did not have a trained specialist Mathematics teacher and the new appointee is in his first year of teaching. Many students indicated they found maths their most challenging subject. The school acknowledges they are at the early stages of providing a coherent and effective school approach in numeracy teaching.

All classes are expected to use warm-ups and plough-backs as part of the lessons in literacy and numeracy to practise and consolidate students' skills to levels of automaticity. It appears from students' feedback that this approach is used variably across the school.

To support teachers, the school has developed a curriculum planner proforma, saved on the school server, and teachers are expected to use it. It is based on the DECD Learning Design framework and includes the vocabulary, stepping stones and elaborations to help teachers plan units of work.

Through a questionnaire, many teachers indicated the professional learning they had participated in and beyond the school, had impacted on their practice. Many responded that their confidence and understanding of the Australian Curriculum had deepened as a result and some teachers indicated the pupil-free day on using digital technologies was practical. Teachers in the Senior School have participated in SACE clarifying forums. The use of achievement data as a diagnostic and planning tool was mentioned, particularly by teachers in the Junior School.

Teachers were asked how they know what approaches and strategies other teachers in their sub-school use. The responses indicated that informal conversations, as well as section and cluster meetings, helped them to know what others are doing. However, several teachers commented they didn't know what the other sub-schools were doing.

Some students and parents said the transition from Year 5 to 6 and from Year 9 to 10 was still a 'jump', and the differences in teachers' approaches were marked. Senior school students told the Review Panel that Year 10 was a 'bit of a shock', Year 11 was 'crusy' and that they were pushed in Year 12.

The upward trend in results, as measured by Running Records, NAPLAN, PAT-R/M and SACE, attest to the positive impact the whole-school approach has had on students' learning. The Admin Team of senior leaders is
urged to continue to work towards achieving consistency of practice and curriculum coherence for students. It has been a journey and is continuing.

Performance development
The school currently has 8 graduate teachers and up to 20 early career teachers. The Review Panel heard from the Graduate Teachers they felt overwhelmed and, from their perspective, there were varied reports on the level of support they received. They indicated they support each other, sharing their experiences and challenges. Some staff stated they receive feedback on their programs, but seemed to be struggling more with their classroom management and pedagogies to hook students in and maintain their engagement.

The school has a documented Performance Management (PM) process consistent with DECD guidelines. Line management responsibilities are distributed widely across all staff in leadership roles. Staff members are expected to document their Performance and Professional Development Plan. Early career teachers are provided with a USB of resources, observation and feedback, and a mentor to provide ongoing support. The Professional Standards for Teachers have been used in their entirety rather than in a strategic and targeted way.

The performance development approaches appear to vary in both format and effectiveness across the school. Leaders talked about the importance of supporting teachers, but not rescuing, as this would undermine their authority with their class. Teachers are expected to be active in building their own capacity and to ‘manage up.’ There was a sense of some leaders and teachers being overwhelmed by the task of using performance development to impact on the quality of teaching.

While the focus has been on supporting the large number of early career teachers, the performance of experienced teachers in successfully engaging and stretching all of their students is also important. Information from parents, students and leaders indicated that teachers’ capacity to hook students into their learning, sustain their motivation and develop their skills, varies across the school, and was not just based on the level of experience of teachers. This observation is supported by research in which ‘expert teachers’ are deemed to be more effective than experienced teachers.

The Review Panel was of the view that a systematic and strategic approach to performance development needs to be developed and enacted. The school has been successful in being strategic and using data and evidence to gain improvement in achievement thus far. It will be of prime importance, if the school is to sustain its current improved outcomes and further lift achievement into higher standards, to use a similar approach to performance development. It requires the key focus to be on the effectiveness of teachers’ pedagogies in achieving the planned outcomes with their classes. It also needs to be responsive to individual needs and to build greater accountability amongst all teachers for the quality of their teaching. The school leadership is encouraged to use research to inform the development of their approach so that it is a formative, professional, learning-based process. This may mean leaders need to build their coaching and mentoring capacity, as well as their ability to conduct tough conversations, as appropriate. In the busyness of schools, it is frequently the performance development processes which go by the wayside. However, the influence on teachers of colleagues and leaders is the single most positive aspect to improve the quality of teaching.

Just as the school has continually reviewed and modified its approach over time to teaching reading, it needs to adopt this strategy of self-review and evaluation to continually improve its performance development system.

Direction 2
Use current research and resources to develop and enact a performance development system, which builds teachers’ pedagogies to positively support, engage and stretch students’ learning.

How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

Pedagogy
Ceduna Area School has a number of intervention strategies to support students at risk of disconnecting with, or not experiencing success in their schooling. The FLO program is one such example as measured by the
attendance of students and their connections with the community. The Quicksmart program is designed to increase students’ automaticity in numeracy and the Multi-Lit programs were also cited as successful by students, parents and Coordinators.

The school has worked at reducing the ‘tail’ of achievement and their success is evident in their results, although there are still a number of students in every class who struggle with the literacy and numeracy demands in all of their subjects. For instance, in 2014 there were 16 in Year 1, 14 in Year 2, 13 in Year 3, 25 in Year 5, 9 in Year 7, and 24 students in Year 9, who did not meet the SEA in reading. Through a questionnaire, teachers indicated they modify tasks for struggling students and provide extension for students who finish their work more quickly. Students confirmed teachers provide one-on-one support, although that is clearly limited with a whole class. The guided reading strategy was observed to be working well in Reception to Year 5 classes. Some teachers indicated they are beginning to use digital technologies and podcasts, setting goals with students and using visual scaffolds to support the range of learners’ skills. Many students talked about the modelling that teachers provide and how they help, but do not tell them the answer. From the information the Review Panel was able to obtain, teacher direction and explicit teaching is common practice.

Students and parents were asked about the kinds of learning tasks that hooked them in and provided challenge to extend their thinking and skills. Many talked about the student-initiated research in Year 6 (previously in Year 7), which involves inquiry, design, construction and presentation. Others talked about making videos and using digital technologies to research and present their work. The opportunity to work with other students, including in cross-age situations, was seen as supportive but uncommon. Open-ended inquiry tasks that involve a variety of entry points and an opportunity to demonstrate their learning in different ways was seen by teachers (through the questionnaire) as being a technique to extend students. Other teachers use questioning to challenge students. One parent at the Governing Council said that achievement occurred most when student and teacher interests were aligned.

Students were also asked what kinds of tasks and learning experiences did not add value to their learning. They described the use of text books in the Middle and Senior school, copying from the board, frustration due to the internet speed at the time of the Review, and the predominance of teacher-directed learning. The level of challenge with support depended on the teacher. About half of the students interviewed did not see ‘hard tasks’ as the problem; although they admitted that without active support, scaffolding and motivation, many did not complete the tasks.

The school used the Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) Junior Student Feedback survey to gather data in preparation for this review. The school is aware that the way in which the survey was administered needs to be adjusted in the future. Nevertheless, the early indicators suggest that the level of choice, interest and importance to students, are areas requiring more thought and planning by teachers. This data is consistent with the information gathered directly from students through interviews in the other 2 sub-schools.

The use of pedagogies, which activate prior knowledge, build vocabulary and concepts through graphic organisers, involve authentic tasks and incorporate digital learning, need to be explored to enable greater engagement and rigorous learning.

Direction 3
Review current teaching pedagogies and document successful practices that provide opportunities for students to be actively involved, to participate in collaborative inquiry and problem-solving and demonstrate and maintain greater levels of engagement in their learning.

Assessment
Teachers have developed assessment tasks to provide formative and summative feedback to students. In the Junior School, the assessment proforma provides a summary of the task students are expected to complete, the link to the Australian Curriculum and achievement standard, and the extent to which the students have completed the task independently or with support. The Review Panel sighted these assessment task pasted into students’ workbooks, advising parents and students if they are working below, at, or above year-level standard.
Students reported teachers provide rubrics, and some teachers work with them to develop exemplars of what they need to produce to demonstrate an A standard. Middle School teachers are also trying to align their rubrics to the kind of language and descriptors students will use as they progress into the Senior School, as demonstrated by a recent example in the Arts Curriculum. Other teachers use a format that lists the criteria for assessment. The Review Panel suggests the sub-school curriculum leaders refine this approach to assessment, in consultation with the Primary and Secondary Curriculum Education Officers, to develop a common format and language which is accessible to students and age-appropriate. The process of defining the assessment criteria upfront enables teachers to be clearer in their planning about what skills, concepts and proficiencies they need to teach. Some teachers are also using pre- and post-testing processes, so that their instruction is more targeted to individual and group needs.

Teachers described the opportunities to moderate work samples with others within and beyond the school as informative and useful in developing consistency in grading and judgement. Some teachers have accessed the exemplars on the ACARA website; however, more work is required to gain a deep understanding of the Achievement Standards. Working collaboratively to moderate work and to reflect on the design of the task is critical work for teachers. Through this process they reflect on the way they have designed the task, the link to Achievement Standards, and learn how to enable students to demonstrate they can transfer and apply their skills to other contexts. This work is integral to intellectually challenging and stretching students in their learning in all subject areas.

**Direction 4**

Ensure structured time is provided to enable teachers to collaboratively moderate student work samples and to discuss and reflect on the design of tasks. Refine formative and summative assessment criteria and rubrics to ensure they support students to achieve higher levels.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Ceduna Area School has demonstrated growth in students’ learning outcomes. The school tracks progress and uses this data for intervention, for planning and in self-reviewing their effectiveness.

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

1. Utilise data management systems to disaggregate the achievement data of ATSI students, as assessed by the various measurement tools, to analyse their progress.

2. Use current research and resources to develop and enact a performance development system, which builds teachers’ pedagogies to positively support, engage and stretch students’ learning.

3. Review current teaching pedagogies and document successful practices that provide opportunities for students to be actively involved, to participate in collaborative inquiry and problem-solving and demonstrate and maintain greater levels of engagement in their learning.

4. Ensure structured time is regularly provided to enable teachers to collaboratively moderate student work samples and to discuss and reflect on the design of tasks. Refine formative and summative assessment criteria and rubrics to ensure they support students to achieve higher levels.

Based on the school’s current performance, Ceduna Area School will be externally reviewed again in 2019.

Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The school will provide an implementation plan to the Education Director and community within three months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school’s Annual Report.

Jim Michalanney
PRINCIPAL
CEDUNA AREA SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson