**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 Lyn Arnold, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Shelley Cameron, 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 Ardtornish Primary School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies.

The 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 93.4% which exceeds the DECD target of 93%.

**School context**
Ardtornish Primary School is a Reception to Year 7 school situated in the north-eastern suburbs of Adelaide. In 2015, there are 473 students enrolled in the school. The school has an ICSEA score of 1018, and is classified as a Category 6 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 2% Aboriginal students, 7% students with Disabilities, 10% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) background and 19% of students are eligible for school card.

The leadership team consists of a Principal appointed in Term 4 2009, a Deputy Principal (0.8) and an ICT Coordinator, together with leadership in specific areas provided by other staff, including those who have been assessed at Step 9.
Lines of inquiry

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

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<th>Student Learning:</th>
<th>How well are students achieving over time?</th>
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<td>To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?</td>
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<td>Effective Teaching</td>
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How well are students achieving over time?

The achievement of students over time in both literacy and numeracy has been consistent over the previous five years across Years 3, 5 and 7. The proportion of students achieving the DECD Standard of Achievement (SEA) has ranged between mid-70 to high 80 percent. Consistent with this trend, analysis of 2014 student achievement data shows that 83% of Year 3, 78% of Year 5, and 86% of Year 7 students met the SEA on the NAPLAN literacy and reading test. Scores for the NAPLAN numeracy test report that 83% of Year 3, 79% of Year 5, and 76% of Year 7 students achieved the SEA.

Closer examination of the numeracy score data shows that over time, the proportion of students scoring in the higher proficiency bands in numeracy at Year 3 are trending upwards from 18% in 2012 to 36% in 2014, whereas at Year 5 there has been a downward trend from 16% in 2012 to 11% in 2014. There has been a degree of stability at Year 7, with a holding trend of 27% in 2012 and 28% in 2014. The school’s analysis outlined in the Site Learning Plan, however, noted that the number of students in the bottom two proficiency bands has doubled from 11% to 22%.

The improvement of mathematical skills and the development of numeracy skills is therefore a key priority in the school’s Site Learning Plan in 2015. In this plan, the emphasis is on effective implementation of the whole school maths agreements and teachers using assessment tools to track and assess achievement effectively.

Based on the review of achievement data in both literacy and numeracy, together with the whole school agreements, particularly those related to assessment and reporting, the Review Panel focused on how students are engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning and the design of assessments for informing planning and instruction that lifts students’ academic performance.

To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

The evidence provided to the Review Panel suggests there are sound and regular self-review processes, particularly in regard to data collection and analysis, to assist teachers in determining appropriate levels of academic engagement and challenge for all students. Leadership also provides strategic direction, planning, and professional development opportunities monitored through performance development processes in support of the school priorities for improved student learning outcomes.

Staff members have received professional development sessions and resources with respect to the Australian Curriculum scope and sequence, Teaching for Effective Learning (TFEL), and the learning by design approach to planning delivery and assessment. As a result, staff members have developed common understandings of TFEL quality teaching practices and implement these in their lessons, and have examined and implemented ways for students to be more involved in their own self-assessment with a focus on formative assessment processes. At the end of 2014, staff members reported they were confident in assessing the national curriculum materials and that they use the Maths, English, History and Geography resources to plan and assess against year-level standards. Furthermore, the school has organised classes according to a data-driven cohort achievement bell curve to ensure all teachers have an even spread of high, medium and low achieving students in their class groups and all classes have access to learning support time.
The school has an identified strategy for setting challenging targets for each child. This is in addition to students with identified learning needs who have Learning Support Plans with specific targets which form the basis for reporting on progress and achievement.

Within this context, the Review Panel explored how teachers work with students to set challenging targets.

Examination of teachers' descriptions for how planning, instruction, and assessments are designed to provide opportunities for academic challenge, suggests the focus is primarily on upward expansion. That is, doing the next year level's work in contrast to going deeper, wider and with greater complexity at the student's existing level of learning.

Teachers did not refer to setting goals in collaboration with students. In talking with students, their descriptions of learning goals and goal setting practices were inconsistent, and parents generally were not aware of specific goals being set for their child's learning achievement or progress over time. In instances where goals were referred to by students, they were not specific or measurable, and were time-bound only in the sense of needing to be achieved 'by the end of the term' or 'before being tested'. Examples included: 'get better at all tables,' but when asked which times table the response was 'all of them'; be or write neater; 'not to talk as much,' with no indication in which contexts; and 'finish work on time'.

Personalising learning and setting specific, measurable goals has positive effects on student engagement and achievement. Students benefit from knowing what they are learning and why, and from setting personal learning goals and working towards the accomplishment of their targets and challenges.

In talking with parents, it was found that opportunities for providing challenge for a child’s learning are not a key topic of discussion with parents. Parents spoke of teachers telling them that their child's learning progress is 'okay' but rarely did they receive support or ideas for how to move their child beyond okay to higher levels of achievement. Parents also talked of instances of being in regular contact with the teacher and believing their child was progressing satisfactorily, only to receive a written report suggesting their child was not doing as well as they thought. Parents expressed the desire for teachers to share their child’s learning progress more regularly, in ways that enable them to proactively support and challenge their child’s learning in meaningful and relevant ways.

**Direction 1**

**Develop a clear and focused whole-school approach to academic challenge that is monitored and adjusted regularly at the school, class and individual student level, and shared explicitly with parents.**

**To what extent is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction?**

The school is implementing a recently updated assessment policy. The Australian Curriculum achievement standards are the reference point for all assessing, monitoring and reporting of student achievement across the school. The key aims of assessment at the school, are to raise the standard of achievement by establishing clear expectations about the use of formative assessment, establish consistency in assessing achievement and activate students as owners of their own learning, getting them to undertake self-review and engage in metacognitive processes. At the end of 2014, all staff members reported that they could identify areas of the curriculum where students had become more involved in their own assessment in some subject areas.

According to the school's assessment policy, teachers have a responsibility to share learning intentions and explicit assessment criteria with students, undertake agreed summative assessment processes, and make formative use of summative assessments.

Analysis of evidence shows that most teachers referred to using the Australian Curriculum achievement standards to set assessment criteria, and some described 'backwards by design' or 'learning by design' as their approach to designing assessments.

In support of assessment design, teachers' comments suggest they collect data regularly to track and assess the progress of their students. In most instances, the purpose for assessment emphasised identifying the gaps in students' learning and planning what to teach next. Descriptions of assessment processes, focused primarily on how and what data is collected and where it is recorded. For example, iPad, iDoceo or various Apps were mentioned, with little reference to peer assessment or student self-assessment, or practices that involve students in determining success criteria individually or as a class group in collaboration with them.
This overall approach was confirmed by students in their discussions about learning and assessment. They told the Review Panel that they understood that assessment is about evaluating what they know. However, they did not talk about determining success in collaboration with a teacher, or demonstrate a basic understanding of knowing what the success criteria had been, or could be, for various pieces of work they shared with the Review Panel. Where students did offer an understanding of success criteria the emphasis was on neatness, finishing on time, and the quantity of work required to complete the task.

Additionally, the relevance and purpose of learning or assessments was not always clear to students. Students generally reported enjoying doing the work they shared but were unsure what they had learned from doing it. Also, students were not aware of the connections between what they do in different areas of learning, suggesting the transferability of skills is not made explicit or communicated implicitly by teachers. For example, students were not sure if writing a literacy narrative was the same as writing a narrative in history, geography or art.

Students lacked information regarding what constituted an A-E grade or how they could improve their grade on assessments. When asked about the assessment criteria applied to their work, students explained that an I (incomplete) equalled a D, E or a fail grade, but were unable to discuss the criteria associated with A, B or C grades. Notably during the interviews, students would comment on the quality of each other’s work, but strategies for improving their work to get a better grade highlighted generalised and low order actions such as ‘put in more detail’, ‘use better words’, or ‘get better at times tables’.

Various discussions also occurred throughout the External School Review regarding the three-way interview approach adopted across the school for Term 1 progress meetings. Students spoke positively about being involved in these meetings, however, parents were not as enthusiastic. Taken together, the comments suggest a lack of understanding of the purpose, process and intended outcomes for implementing this form of student, parent and teacher interaction within an assessment and reporting context. The school community will benefit from exploring the benefits this approach can offer when students and parents are engaged authentically in the process, and the value that sharing learning design and assessment processes can add to the assessment and reporting process for all involved.

Direction 2
Improve student outcomes by supporting students to benchmark their learning and achievement over time, building their skills to meet identified criteria by implementing transparent strategies across the school for sharing assessment criteria with students.

How well is formative assessment used to provide quality feedback to students?

According to the school’s Assessment Policy the most important assessment happens minute-by-minute and day-by-day in every classroom and improving the quality of this feedback will have the greatest impact on student learning. Consequently, a key strategy for the school is the provision of feedback to students that moves their learning forward, so they know what they have to do next to further improve.

Most teachers recorded that they provide some form of regular verbal or written feedback to students, individually, in small groups or at the whole class level. Although many students were aware that the teacher was assessing their work using their iPad, they did not know for sure how well their learning was progressing, or if they had passed or failed a subject, until the end of term. Evidence suggests that the availability and sharing of this information with students throughout the term varied significantly across classes and year levels. Some students said they asked the teacher to see their progress on the iPad, others said they see it sometimes when the teachers show them, while others know it is there but never see it or know what is recorded.

Students’ knowledge or understanding of ongoing formative and time-sensitive feedback, such as, what or how their work is evaluated as it progresses on a daily or weekly basis, was also limited. For example, in the workbooks and projects students shared with the Review Panel, stickers were used to convey different messages. One group of students explained that a sticker indicated the work had been assessed but there was no indication of the grade awarded or the quality of the work as evaluated against set criteria. Others explained that different coloured stars indicated an A, B, or C, but that a green star was a D. A student who had received a green star, however, was unable to explain why her work was at a D standard, or what she
needed to improve to gain a C. Other students were similarly unable to explain the criteria. In some instances, written feedback was limited to ‘good’, or ‘well done’, and in other instances there were no comments. When asked what this meant, students explained that if you have no comments then it means your work is okay, and if you are in the top group then you must be doing okay; but, if you are not, then you just have to try harder.

Students benefit from ‘just in time’ feedback that provides quality information about their developing learning skills, understandings and knowledge and how to improve their learning outcomes. Increasing teachers’ capacity for implementing this aspect of ongoing evaluation and assessment in their daily practice will help lift student achievement.

Direction 3
Increase teachers’ effective use of ongoing formative assessment practices that focus on constructive and timely feedback for students about learning progress against agreed criteria.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Ardtornish Primary School is tracking well with evidence of relevant data being collected regularly to track and assess the progress of students.

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

1. Develop a clear and focused whole school approach to academic challenge that is monitored and adjusted regularly at the school, class and individual student level, and shared explicitly with parents.

2. Improve student outcomes by supporting students to benchmark their learning and achievement over time, building their skills to meet identified criteria by implementing transparent strategies across the school for sharing assessment criteria with students.

3. Increase teachers’ effective use of ongoing formative assessment practices that focus on constructive and timely feedback for students about learning progress against agreed criteria.

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

Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
PRESCHOOL AND SCHOOL 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.

Mark Hansen
PRINCIPAL
ARDTORNISH PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson