

Department for Education

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Alberton Primary School

Conducted in March 2020



Review details

Our education system aspires to become the best in Australia by seeking growth for every student, in every class and in every school.

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

The External School Review framework is referenced throughout all stages of the ESR process.

This report outlines aspects of the school's performance verified through the review process according to the framework. It does not document every aspect of the school's processes, programs and outcomes.

We acknowledge the support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community. While not all review processes, artefacts and comments are documented here, they have all been considered and contribute to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Tanya Oshinsky, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Susan Copeland, Review Principal.

Review Process

The following processes were used to gather evidence relevant to the lines of inquiry:

- Presentation from the principal
- Class visits
- Attendance at staff meeting
- Document analysis
- Scan of Aboriginal Education Strategy implementation
- Discussions with:

Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer (ACEO) and Aboriginal Education Teacher (AET)
Aboriginal parent group
Co-educators (School Support Officers)
Governing Council representatives
Leaders
Student groups
Teachers
Parents

School context

Alberton Primary School caters for children from preschool to year 7. It is situated 11kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2020 is 297. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 325. The local partnership is Le Fevre Peninsula.

The school has an ICSEA score of 963, and is classified as Category 3 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 19% Aboriginal students, 16% students with disabilities, 26% students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, 2% children/young people in care and 47% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a principal in their first year of temporary tenure, a deputy principal in the first year of a four year tenure, 3 coordinators and a wellbeing leader. The three coordinator roles are Nest Community and Early Years pedagogy, numeracy and literacy.

There are 18 teachers including none in the early years of their career and 8 Step 9 teachers.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

- Direction 1** Map the school's curriculum offerings, to ensure they align with the Australian Curriculum, and review current processes to ensure the curriculum provides students with planned, rigorous learning with increasing complexity, as they progress through school.
- Direction 2** To provide teachers and students with regular information about students' performance progress, and what to do to improve, the school will develop consistent practices and expectations in planning, assessment and tracking, including benchmarking student achievement against the Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards.
- Direction 3** In order to support all learners to improve, particularly in reading and mathematics, the school will continue its focus on professional learning to build the capacities of teachers to target students' learning needs.
- Direction 4** Revise the school's Strategic Plan to ensure it is measurable, achievable, reflects the current improvement needs and is informed and evaluated by an interrogation of student achievement, growth and engagement data.

What impact has the implementation of previous directions had on school improvement?

A continued focus on professional learning has been a strength at Alberton Primary School (APS). The school has engaged external consultants for some time and there is strong evidence of bookmaking and learning conferences in classroom practice. More recent professional learning in mathematics is also beginning to show evidence in teachers' practice.

Mapping against the Australian Curriculum (AC) Achievement Standard for 'Discovery', and in many task designs, was in evidence at the time of review. The 'Essential Guides' that have been developed with consultants include continuums against which student progress is tracked. There is however continuing work to be achieved in teachers' planning, assessing and tracking against curriculum requirements.

Teachers plan collaboratively through their Magpie and Hub Groups when teaching the same Discovery curriculum area and as part of literacy and numeracy focus groups. Whilst staff are to be commended on their commitment to these planning processes, evidence of 'rigorous learning with increasing complexity' was not evidenced through task design, interviews or classroom walkthroughs and therefore, continues to be an ongoing area for further development. Staff are genuinely passionate about, and dedicated to, providing a safe and supportive learning environment for students.

Lines of inquiry

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

How effectively does the school use improvement planning processes to raise student achievement?

Many staff and parents told the panel that they highly value what APS offers, including students being able to "learn at their own rate" and the culture of APS being a safe and caring place that addresses the social and emotional wellbeing of students. Current student achievement, as documented in appendix 1, indicates a moral imperative for change in the school's aspiration for students. Having high expectations for students to achieve higher levels of learning and providing rich and rigorous learning opportunities based on knowledge of individual student achievement, will enhance students' natural rate of learning.

New work commenced in 2020 and is in the early stage of implementation. Literacy and numeracy coordinators are leading curriculum focus groups, equally represented by teachers from each Magpie group. Coordinators have clarity of their work in supporting teachers to execute short 'learning sprints'. Teachers are expected to collect information about student achievement prior and post sprint to ensure impact of actions. It will be imperative that coordinators support teachers to identify what works and why, and then to amplify that practice. Identifying effective practice through this structure, will provide a strong foundation for the Site Improvement Plan (SIP) agenda. The focus on building teacher capacity in developing effective teaching and learning cycles, informed by impact on student achievement, is significant work. Allocated staff meetings for curriculum focus groups to meet, professional learning and learning sprints, are strong enablers of the work ahead.

At the time of the review, the current SIP had not been approved by the governing council. While some teachers acknowledged that they had been involved in review processes and earlier conversations, most staff did not demonstrate a strong connection to the SIP and described a lack of consultation to the panel. The introduction of learning sprints is however enabling SIP work to begin. It will be important for the principal and staff to work together in building a deeper understanding of the improvement work for all stakeholders. Developing self-review processes that monitor, evaluate and review progress regularly to ensure actions are having an impact, will be imperative to the improvement work.

Direction 1 Develop processes to ensure all staff have shared understanding, ownership and accountability of the SIP and that clear structures drive and support the improvement agenda, through continuous monitoring, evaluation and review.

EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND STUDENT LEARNING

How effectively are teachers supporting students to improve their learning?

Local decisions about staffing enable lower student numbers in classes, and Nest and Magpie groups are well-resourced with support from co-educators. Double learning spaces provide opportunity for grouping students in multiple ways. There are well equipped, designated learning areas across the school and the wellbeing of students is a high priority. Students are generally happy in their schooling and see teachers as supportive and willing to help.

Staff and parents are proud of the “nurturing environment” for preschool and reception students. The leader of the Nest reports using both the Early Years Learning Framework and AC documents in planning, while playful pedagogies are at the base of all learning. Learning stories provide students with feedback about their learning, track their progress over time and are highly valued by parents.

Of concern is the low percentage of students attaining standard education levels of achievement in the early years. Phonological awareness and phonics practices are reportedly part of ongoing learning. Low student achievement in acquisition of phonics has been highlighted by Literacy Guarantee Unit advisers and speech pathologists, as identifying the need to review the implementation of explicit systematic synthetic phonics practices at APS. Building a stronger foundation for students in the early years of their learning journey is essential to scaffolding future learning and fostering greater outcomes.

Direction 2 Improve student outcomes by developing and embedding research-based, pedagogical practices in explicit structured synthetic phonics across the school.

Continuums from the ‘Essential Guides’ in reading, writing and maths are used by teachers to track student progress each term. Teachers pass on these continuums, tests and samples of student work, each year to the next teacher. More regular tracking of student learning and how this informs planning was not evident to the panel. Conferences with students provide opportunity to discuss next steps in reading and writing and teachers see these conversations as differentiating learning and providing stretch. Learning discussions are aligned to the guides in preference to the AC. Teachers also report having mini lessons and grouping students to target identified needs of students. Bookmaking is a well embedded practice at the school and a culture of celebrating bookmaking and being an author is proudly described by staff.

Staff are clearly committed to collaboratively planning and learning. In the examples of task design provided to the panel, reference to the AC and AS, was noted. Some plans also identified learning intentions and success criteria, however this was not found to be a regular practice at the school. Task designs provided little evidence of planning differentiated learning, how students could demonstrate higher levels of learning or specific intentional learning strategies for Aboriginal learners and other vulnerable students. Classroom and discovery observations and interviews, added little further evidence of differentiation, curriculum breadth or rigour in learning. The panel also observed a number of students who were disengaged during learning time, for example, in groups but not on task or physically removing themselves from the learning.

Continued familiarisation with the AC, regular assessment practices and rich task design would further build teacher capacity in designing learning that ensures daily stretch, challenge and engagement for individual learners. Formal moderation processes would not only build consistency in practice and grading, but also evaluate whether tasks provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate higher levels of learning.

Direction 3 Ensure differentiated learning, intellectual stretch and challenge as an integral aspect of everyday learning by strengthening teachers’ capacity to design and implement rigorous and engaging learning experiences that are data informed for intentional teaching.

The staff at APS value that students are self-directors in their own learning and progress when ready. The majority of students interviewed told the panel that their work is mostly easy and that they would like it to be more challenging. Most students had little understanding of how they were going in their learning, what they needed to do to improve or what their next steps were. Many students lacked perseverance and some stated to the panel they didn't want to know how they were going. Some students reported only seeing their test results at 3 way interviews or when they discuss their learning with their teacher and parents.

Students felt that they have a voice through the 'Ministries' but not in their learning. Having choice in discovery units was a common example provided. Students at all levels benefit from having opportunities to be active partners in their own learning. Developing a deeper understanding of student agency at APS would enable this. For example, teachers at APS are mindful of providing feedback to students which is not always actioned. In addition, students providing feedback to teachers about their learning, which enables teachers to improve their practice to better meet the needs of their students is not common practice.

Many students were not aware of having learning goals and those that said they had a goal generally provided a broad example such as "focus on maths more". For students to be self-directors of their own learning they require the language of learning, engagement with and analysis of their own achievement data. They need to develop their understanding of learning progressions in order to articulate, track and monitor their own learning growth. Teachers need to use ongoing formative assessment practices that provide students with targeted and timely feedback which is actioned. In addition, visual strategies that inform students about what they are learning and why (learning intentions), how to be successful (success criteria) and visual learning scaffolds that support students in their learning will collectively enable students to benchmark their learning, set SMARTAR goals and become authentic partners in their learning.

Direction 4 Strengthen student agency by making learning visible through sharing with students clear learning intentions, success criteria, assessments and learning progressions, to enable students to benchmark their learning and set SMARTAR goals that continuously stretch and challenge their learning.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2020

Students, staff and many parents were found to be passionate about the unique structure of Alberton Primary School and what it offers students. There are mixed beliefs by parents about the ethos of students setting their own learning pace and the data for the school indicates that students would benefit from the opportunity to achieve higher levels of learning at a more rigorous pace. Staff are dedicated professionals and their engagement in the current improvement journey and aligned structures for building teacher capacity will establish a solid foundation for future improvement work.

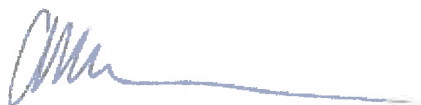
The principal will work with the education director to implement the following directions:

- Direction 1** Develop processes to ensure all staff have shared understanding, ownership and accountability of the SIP and that clear structures drive and support the improvement agenda, through continuous monitoring, evaluation and review.
- Direction 2** Improve student outcomes by developing and embedding research-based, pedagogical practices in explicit structured synthetic phonics across the school.
- Direction 3** Ensure differentiated learning, intellectual stretch and challenge as an integral aspect of everyday learning by strengthening teachers' capacity to design and implement rigorous and engaging learning experiences that are data informed for intentional teaching.
- Direction 4** Strengthen student agency by making learning visible through sharing with students clear learning intentions, success criteria, assessments and learning progressions, to enable students to benchmark their learning and set SMARTAR goals that continuously stretch and challenge their learning.

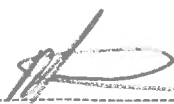
Based on the school's current performance, Alberton Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



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GOVERNING COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON

Appendix 1

School performance overview

The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the Department for Education Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2019, 16% of year 1 and 57% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents little or no change for year 1 and an improvement for year 2, from the historic baseline average.

In 2019, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 51% of year 3 students, 59% of year 5 students and 61% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For year 3, this result represents a decline, for year 5, an improvement and for year 7, little or no change, from the historic baseline average.

For 2019, year 3 NAPLAN reading, the school is achieving lower than, and for years 5 and 7, within the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2019, 21% of year 3, 24% of year 5 and 17% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 67%, or 8 out of 12 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5, and 27%, or 3 out of 11 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.

Numeracy

In 2019, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 49% of year 3 students, 54% of year 5 students and 58% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For year 3, this result represents a decline and for years 5 and 7, little or no change, from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019, the trend for year 5 has been downwards, from 71% to 54%.

For 2019, year 3 and 7 NAPLAN numeracy, the school is achieving lower than, and for year 5, within the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2019, 7% of year 3, 7% of year 5 and 14% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 29%, or 2 out of 7 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5, and 25%, or 1 out of 4 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.