EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR KAROONDA AREA SCHOOL

Conducted in November 2015

**Government
of South Australia**

Department for Education
and Child Development

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, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and John Iannunzio, 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 Karoonda Area School has verified that the school is working towards being compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal advised action is being taken to comply with the following DECD policies:

Aspect of Governance: Further consultation is occurring with the Governing Council to develop the Preschool Quality Improvement Plan.

Safety: The school is doing further work to formalise their Volunteers Policy.

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 92.5%, which is just below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Karoonda Area School is located 145 km from the Adelaide CBD and is a member of the local DECD Coorong–Mallee Partnership. The school provides education for students from preschool to Year 12. It has a steady enrolment of 150 students. Many students (approximately 60) travel to the school by bus.

The school is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage, and has an ICSEA score of 993. The school population includes 21 students identified with special needs. The percentage of families eligible for School Card assistance fluctuates as incomes from farms vary from season to season.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in the 4th year of his first tenure at the school. The Deputy Principal is newly appointed. There is a Senior Secondary Coordinator, Inclusion Coordinator and Primary Counsellor. Most of the leaders are in their first leadership position. There are a number of early career teachers appointed to Karoonda Area School, and 3 teachers who have been at the school for more than 20 years.

Lines of inquiry

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

Student Learning: **How well are students achieving over time?**

Effective teaching: **How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?**

Effective Leadership: **How well does the professional learning and performance development process develop teachers' capacities?**

Improvement Agenda: **How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?**

How well are students achieving over time?

In the early years, Reading is monitored against Running Records. In 2014, 65% of Year 1 and 90% of Year 2 students achieved the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) or above. Between 2012 and 2014 there appears to be a trend upwards in terms of improvement for Year 2.

In 2015, the Reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 73% of Year 3 students, 63% of Year 5 students, 89% of Year 7 students and 78% of Year 9 students achieved the SEA. The trend for Year 7 students has been upwards from 50% in 2011 to 89% in 2015.

In relation to students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands, 3 students were in Year 3 and 1 student in Years 5, 7 and 9.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in Reading, 1 out of 3 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015. From Year 3, 1 out of 2 students remained in the upper bands at Year 7, and similarly in Year 9 in 2015.

In 2015, the Numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 55% of Year 3 students, 100% of Year 5 students, 89% of Year 7 students and 89% of Year 9 students achieved the SEA. The trend for Year 7 students, between 2013 and 2015, has been upwards from 54% in 2011 to 89% in 2015. Except for 2014, there has been a 6-year upward trend in Year 5 Numeracy achievement from 44% in 2008 to 100% in 2015.

In relation to students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands, 1 student was in Year 3 and 2 students in Year 5.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in Numeracy, 2 out of 3 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015. There were 0 students retained in the upper bands from Years 3 to 7 or 9.

In relation to the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE), all of the potential students enrolled in 2014 completed their SACE. This compared with 78% in 2011, 100% in 2012 and 100% in 2013. The percentage of grades that were achieved at a 'C' or above for attempted subjects was 98%. In 2014, SACE was offered through face-to-face teaching, 4 school-based apprenticeships, 5 students engaged in VET qualifications as part of SACE and through distance education.

In 2014, the school conducted an extensive survey with 71 students in Years 5 to 12. Although some teachers and students reported they were unsure what the questions were trying to find out, the survey showed that a large number of students exhibited a fixed mindset to concepts of intelligence and learning. Additionally, the survey raised questions about the level of engagement with the learning tasks set by teachers and the use of digital technologies to support engagement.

How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

Curriculum and pedagogy

The Review Panel sought to investigate the extent that students are supported, particularly in regard to the coherence for learners from Reception through to Year 12, and the extent students are engaged and stretched in their learning.

The school has developed a comprehensive Literacy Agreement, which encompasses the expected pedagogies, intervention strategies, editing guidelines, spelling and grammar scope and sequences. The document sets out targets and performance indicators. It also includes the various text types students from Reception to Year 12 are expected to demonstrate proficiency across all learning areas.

The majority of teachers (9 of 12) identified the development of the Literacy Agreement as a major initiative at Karoonda Area School. Teachers described how it has given greater direction and clarity to their planning. Several teachers said the impact of the Agreement and the closer tracking of students' achievement has led them to place the focus onto students and their learning, rather than just 'doing' the curriculum. Others described greater expectations for student achievement, and that these were apparent to students. An example of a change in practice as a result of the school's endeavour to provide consistency for learners relates to the Junior Primary. After exploring the advantages and disadvantages of various programs, teachers all agreed to adopt a common approach to teaching the alphabet and phonics. Teachers talked about setting tasks that require students to be more analytical in their thinking, rather than the lower level of recounting. The Review Panel saw examples of students' work at the staff meeting, where students were required to use their knowledge gained from research in maths and science, and present and explain it to the rest of the class. Students confirmed that teachers want them to increase their vocabulary and they do this through word walls, 'equipment quizzes' and communication using correct scientific conventions.

Most teachers were of the view that the Literacy Agreement is at the early stage of implementation. Most did not yet consider it to be 'embedded' across the school. Through the staff meeting, some teachers suggested revisiting the Tactical Reading resources to support instruction in reading comprehension across curriculum areas. It was not clear in some of the teachers' termly Unit Planners how they were planning to explicitly teach and scaffold the literacy demands of their curriculum area. While the school has worked to develop an excellent Literacy document and resource, the school needs to progress this work so that it is embedded in all teachers' daily practices.

Work on a comprehensive Reception to Year 12 Mathematics Agreement is in progress. Teachers have participated in professional learning to develop their understanding of the curriculum and pedagogical practices. They are expected to use various tools, including the BitL (*Bringing it to Life*) tool to enable them to use deeper questioning. These practices were evident in some classes as students described their maths lessons. Considering that 100% of the current Year 5 and a high percentage of students in Years 7 and 9 achieved the SEA, as measured by NAPLAN, there is an imperative that these students are provided with tasks that stretch them. Their ability to undertake multiple steps in problem-solving and reasoning needs to be further developed.

The school also supports Primary students in learning the foundation skills and automaticity in numbers through a differentiated approach (known as 'Waves'). Students are grouped according to their ability and are provided with intensive instruction according to their level once a week. The groups are fluid and, prior to each new concept being introduced, students are pre-tested to ascertain their skill gaps. Post-testing occurs to measure the growth in skill acquisition.

The Review Panel spoke to 16 students from Years 3 to 11 and, at the staff meeting, saw examples of the units of work and tasks teachers had set their classes. Students described different ways teachers had hooked them into the topic. For example, one class started with making paper planes before they commenced studying the text. Many students enjoyed learning which involved practical application, such as in PE and science. Older students indicated that as Karoonda Area School is relatively small, teachers know their interests and try to be responsive. In teachers' Unit Planners, the Review Panel noted that pre-testing or methods to activate prior knowledge were common, so that the learning program is built on what students already know. Older students

were asked what practices did not add value to their learning. They spoke about a 'lecture' style of teaching, and where the purpose and relevance was not evident.

The Review Panel saw examples of tasks designed to match the levels of thinking in 'Blooms Taxonomy' which allowed for multiple entry points. At the time of the External School Review, Karoonda Area School had 21 students with a verified disability and other students with specific learning difficulties. Staff members are very aware of the need to provide many entry points and to modify the curriculum to support these students. Parents on the Governing Council were positive about the way teachers support their children, and learn and adapt with their child as they progress through their schooling. In their Unit Planners, teachers are required to show how they have specifically planned to support these students. In some of the plans sighted by the Review Panel was evidence of individualised modifications and tasks tailored with regard to the specific nature of the student's learning difficulty. In other Unit Planners, the planning was of a general nature.

The school has developed a *Teaching for Success* (T4S) framework, which aims for the teaching practices at Karoonda Area School to set students up to be successful life learners. The framework incorporates four pillars: the environment, differentiation, learning to learn and thinking-focused learning. Teachers talked about the use of meta-cognition to demonstrate their thinking. They explained how their level of questioning has changed as they endeavour to build more analytical and deeper thinking rather than being pitched at a recall level. Many teachers talked about their recent work in developing greater persistence, independence capabilities and less 'rescuing'. Students confirmed that most teachers expected them to keep persisting and those teachers will help but not do the work for students. Younger students seemed to be more aware of the concept of a mindset towards the learning process and talked about using a growth mindset. Amongst the older students was a view expressed that if the learning was difficult (hard), then they weren't learning. The explicit teaching of using a growth mindset and the understanding of the difference it makes to outcomes is at an early stage at Karoonda Area School.

As part of the school's development on *Teaching for Success,* staff members have participated in professional learning on Executive Functioning. Teachers talked about the importance of selecting and designing tasks, which enable students to demonstrate their capability in applying the concepts, skills and knowledge in new contexts (known as transforming tasks). This work has gained traction with some teachers and was evident in their tasks and assessments.

Direction 1
Lift the engagement and intellectual stretch of students by using the *Teaching for Success* framework and, particularly the work encompassing growth mindsets and transforming tasks, to embed the pedagogies into daily practices across the school.

Assessment
The Review Panel explored the school's assessment practice to ascertain the link between assessment, planning and pedagogy. Pre- and post-testing and assessment, to ensure the learning program builds on what students already know, was evident in some of the Term Planners. Students are advised how their work is going to be assessed and graded through the use of assessment rubrics. For example, a task requiring an oral presentation in science included the performance indicators at beginning, proficient and exemplary levels. Teachers of younger children take particular care to ensure the language and graphics in the assessment rubric is accessible to the students. Teachers are involved within the school and in Partnership hubs to moderate their grading judgements in order to develop greater consistency. In staff meetings, teachers have discussed a guide which would require the grading of work as an 'A' to include analysis and evidence of application, whereas a 'C' would indicate understanding or proficiency.

When asked how they were going in their learning, many students knew their level of reading, their PAT Maths test results, and their grades in their reports. When asked what they needed to do to improve and get higher grades, most students were less clear. The Review Panel concluded from discussions with students, members of the Leadership Team, and from viewing Unit Planners, that summative assessment practices were well-developed at Karoonda Area School. It was evident that some teachers use testing results and summative assessment at the end of a term to inform their planning for the next term.

The use of formative assessment and gathering of feedback to adapt their teaching through the term was less evident. Feedback is most powerful when it is transparent and used by teachers to adapt their instruction, to correct misconceptions or to demonstrate mastery of a skill during the unit of work. This approach is well-used with Year 11 and 12 students where their progress is tracked and assessed every 5 weeks. Teachers described how they use a traffic light system to provide tuition support to the students and ensure they are on track to complete their SACE. The Review Panel concluded that to realise the aims of the *Teaching for Success* framework the development of success criteria (e.g. assessment rubrics), exemplars and formative assessment practices is key to further improvement.

Direction 2
Continue to strengthen assessment practices and use of formative feedback to support students to know how to improve.

How well does the professional learning and performance development process develop teachers' capacities?

Many teachers talked about the collaborative and learning-focused culture in the school now compared with a few years ago. One teacher told the Review Panel that, previously, teachers would not share their students' data, and now it is available to all teachers through the data wall. Teachers across the school are keen to see how students they have previously taught are progressing through their schooling. The Review Panel witnessed first-hand the interest and willingness to learn from others during the staff meeting process. Some teachers have observed others teaching, to varied degrees of effect. There were examples of teachers attending professional development and using this to improve their own planning and pedagogy. For example, Primary teachers talked extensively about how their participation in external professional development had resulted in a completely different and better approach to teaching spelling.

Through a self-review process at staff meeting it became evident that many teachers are frustrated with the current way in which staff meetings are conducted. They talked about the emphasis on administrative business rather than teaching and learning. Some described the convoluted way in which decisions appeared to be made through staff meetings. One teacher said it would be better if someone just made a decision and "*told us what we have to do*". Further, some staff members apparently convey information in the staff meeting forum, when other modes are available. Parents also talked about the reliance on hand-written notes to be delivered by their children as the main form of communication between home and school, and found that this method was neither reliable nor efficient.

As schools are complex organisations and frequently 'time poor', it is imperative that staff time is used to focus on their core business of teaching and learning. Schools use other ways of collecting and conveying information, and canvassing different views for decision-making. It requires staff to be clear on the purpose and relevance of agenda items and have skill in chairing meetings. Many staff told the Review Panel that the previous years' triad arrangements worked well as they focused on pedagogy, were vertically-organised, and built on greater accountability between teachers. Others expressed a need for more separate Primary and Secondary meetings. The decisions about how to structure staff meetings and PLCs (triads) are best made at the school level, however the overarching question is: *How does our professional learning, particularly in staff meetings, help us develop, review and improve our pedagogies so that we can realise the aims of our Teaching for Success framework?*

The performance development processes have varied degrees of effectiveness. The current arrangements are based on line managers providing feedback on Unit Planners, although this had not been followed through with all teachers. This is a 'looking forward' approach. The Review Panel sighted feedback written for several teachers in the Primary School. They were mainly of an appreciative tone. It may be useful for the Leadership Team to also consider the impact of teaching or the 'looking back' approach, to determine the extent the plans have been effectively executed, or the reflections by a teacher on the previous term's work. Karoonda Area School has a wide range of teachers, from early career to teachers who have been teaching at the school for many years. The Leadership Team needs to ensure that professional and performance development helps teachers to continually improve, be motivated and embrace change.

Direction 3
Ensure that professional learning and performance development, including staff meeting structures and processes, are learning-focused and support a culture of sharing, innovation and critique.

How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?

A significant initiative at the school has been the establishment of the data wall, which has enabled the transparent use of achievement data to track students' progress. The data wall provides a student and class perspective on achievement as measured by NAPLAN, PAT testing and the traffic light system to monitor Year 11 and 12 students in gaining their SACE. The Review Panel witnessed strong ownership of the data wall by teachers. Some teachers are also triangulating this information with the Australian Curriculum and are using the data to identify gaps in student learning. The data wall has led to whole school work in differentiation and providing tailored interventions. One Primary student talked about teachers helping them to meet the standards.

The School Improvement Plan has four priority areas: Literacy, Numeracy, Whole-School Wellbeing and Curriculum Development. The areas of Curriculum Development refer specifically to greater student engagement. This priority area was identified by the student perception survey conducted in 2014, which revealed the importance of a growth mindset and engagement. This is an ambitious plan to achieve the set targets across the school in one year.

In discussion with the Principal, it was acknowledged that the analysis of current data trends and the SEA need to be used by the school to develop targets. Given the current trends, the SIP needs to include reference to students achieving higher level proficiencies, particularly for those students who have acquired the foundation skills. In regard to student engagement, it would be useful to agree on how engagement is best measured in an Area School context, and to then determine the key strategies and pedagogies that will support improvement in this aspect of the school. Furthermore, the emphasis on evaluating whether the school has achieved its targets and realised its improvement, needs to be based on the impact on student learning, not on what leaders or teachers do.

Direction 4
Refine the Site Improvement Plan so that it becomes a vehicle for lifting student achievement and engagement. Ensure the improvement strategies are evaluated by determining the extent they are implemented and have had a positive impact on students.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Karoonda Area School is mostly tracking well, evidenced by upward trends in some of the achievement data. Student achievement is closely tracked and used by teachers to tailor their teaching plans. The school is working towards common and cohesive practices and pedagogies.

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

1. Lift the engagement and intellectual stretch of students by using the *Teaching for Success* framework and, particularly, the work encompassing growth mindsets and transforming tasks, to embed the pedagogies into daily practices across the school.

2. Continue to strengthen assessment practices and use of formative feedback to support students to know how to improve.

3. Ensure that professional learning and performance development, including staff meeting structures and processes, are learning-focused and support a culture of sharing, innovation and critique.

4. Refine the Site Improvement Plan so that it becomes a vehicle for lifting student achievement and engagement. Ensure the improvement strategies are evaluated by determining the extent they are implemented and have had a positive impact on students.

Based on the school's current performance, Karoonda 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.

Daniel Rankine
PRINCIPAL
KAROONDA AREA SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson