

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

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Report for St Agnes Primary School

Conducted in July 2017



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 framework underpinning the External School Review identifies the key levers for school improvement and has been shaped and informed by research.*

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

*This Report of the External School Review 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.*

*The support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community is acknowledged. While, not all review processes, artefacts and comments are documented, they all have been considered and contributed to the development and directions of this Report.*

*The External School Review Process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are adhered to and implemented. This information is provided in Appendix One of the report.*

*This External School Review was conducted by Kathryn Entwistle, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Cheryl Ross, Review Principal.*

## School context

St Agnes Primary School is situated 17kms north-east of Adelaide, and has a current enrolment of 222 students, representing a steady increase from 2011, with 33 in the Preschool. The school has an ICSEA score of 1024 and is classified as Category 6 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 3% Aboriginal students, 3% students with disabilities, 10% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), and 9% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in the second year of her tenure and a Senior Leader with 0.6FTE Administration responsibilities and 0.2FTE School Counsellor's role. The Tier One staffing consists of 9 classroom teachers, with 3 tandem teaching partnerships operating. Non-Instruction Time (NIT) programmes consist of 0.6FTE German, 0.6FTE the arts and 0.6FTE PE. The Senior Leader manages the special needs and intervention programmes in the school.

## Lines of Inquiry

In considering the data summary in the School Performance Overview (Appendix 2) and the Principal's presentation, the Review Panel explored the following Lines of Inquiry to evaluate the school's effectiveness towards raising student achievement and sustaining high performance. During the external review process, the panel focused on three 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 effectively does the school leadership foster a culture of learning?

## How well are students achieving over time?

Analysis of datasets, including NAPLAN and PAT assessments, prior to the External School Review (ESR) process made evident to the panel members that students at St Agnes Primary School are performing well when compared to similar student cohorts (see Appendix 2). Data analysed and synthesized by the school also shows that a greater percentage of students than would typically be anticipated are experiencing higher levels of growth. This data has encouraged the staff at the school to reflect on the potential that exists within the student cohort and how best to maximise this.

Student growth has been plotted against the four quadrants of the Progress to Proficiency model, that identifies if students are experiencing some, minimal or optimum growth or, in fact, 'cruising'. Each student has been plotted on the quadrants and assessments conducted at agreed intervals allowing staff to monitor students' continued development. This data has been used as a reference to inform access to intervention and support, and all students who have not achieved SEA are now supported through this initiative. Interestingly, the school has recently implemented a more strategic approach to the provision of intervention, using the Read Up approach that sees students provided more rigorous and scaffolded opportunities to improve reading strategies. Staff and leaders reported that they have begun to reflect on how best to design teaching that will address the students who are 'cruising' or exhibiting optimal growth, and the ESR panel concurs this is a timely undertaking.

Through the leaders' presentation and document analysis, it was evident that the staff hold an aspirational position regarding the students' potential to achieve at higher levels. As many students reach SEA early, the school has agreed that more ambitious targets are relevant to continue to build upon student achievement. The Tea Tree Gully (TTG) Partnership standards are above DECD SEA and, as such, the school's Site Improvement Plan identifies the intent to have 100% of students reach SEA, and 80% of students achieve the higher standards apparent within the TTG improvement plan. The panel commends the school's intent to continue to raise expectations and build on existing expertise.

Leaders at the school in 2017 have made clear their intent to develop pedagogical approaches that challenge students' thinking and engage them in processes of inquiry that deepen connection to, and ownership of, learning. Priorities at the school focus on problem-solving in numeracy and reading comprehension in literacy; both concepts representative of approaches that progress students' intellectual capacity. At the time of the ESR, opportunities students have to access learning that inspires and influences deeper cognitive behaviours across the curriculum, and allow them to understand and regulate their progress, differ from class to class. Some examples of students being provided provocations to which they are scaffolded to respond through experimentation and inquiry were apparent through the ESR process. Examples of students provided success criteria and formative feedback that informed them of the next stage of learning were also apparent in a few classes. To build on the potential that students at St Agnes Primary School exhibit, the broadening of this practice across the school will be vital.

The concept of students setting learning goals and monitoring progress towards these, of them understanding which criteria represent differing levels of success or constitute grades, is significant in developing student engagement and agency in learning. An example of students being provided opportunity to examine the Australian Curriculum outcomes and standards was apparent during the ESR process. More common, however, were reports from students that they did not know how they were progressing unless a teacher confirmed their success with affirmation, reward, or that they read it in their report card. The ESR panel members were exceptionally impressed by the eloquence with which the students expressed their understanding of the importance of learning; many of whom articulated a desire to access more challenging learning opportunities and some of whom voiced a desire to know more about grade achievement and their progress. The panel agrees that the opportunity to build on this interest and potential, to inspire intellectual challenge and develop a partnership in the learning agenda, is the most exciting prospect that exists at the school.

#### **Direction 1**

**Enable intellectual challenge and student agency through collective inquiry into teaching strategies that make the intent and criteria of the learning clear to students, and that stimulate deeper cognitive reasoning.**

#### **How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?**

The ESR panel was made aware that the school's agreement to prioritise Building Learning Power (BLP) has been introduced in 2016. The panel sourced much evidence that showed this initiative, in such a short period of time, has been embedded across the school and is having a positive influence on all students with whom they spoke. The concept focuses students on dispositions for learning that will support their resilience, reciprocity, reflectiveness and resourcefulness through the gradual release of 'learning muscles', that are introduced to the learners. The students with whom the panel met spoke confidently and articulately about the impact these dispositions have in supporting them to manage distractions, persevere and employ meta-cognition. To support transition from Preschool to Foundation, the principles of BLP are also taught to students prior to beginning school. The concept has been introduced so strategically and expertly that many parents with whom the panel spoke discussed a very clear understanding of, and appreciation for, this approach. The panel highly commends the rigorous and informed introduction of BLP to the school and confirms the positive effect it is having on student learning.

Through conversations with staff, it was evident to the ESR panel that the profile of data and its place in informing planning and practice is a concept recently introduced to the school. A position termed the 'Data Champion' has been created and filled by a teacher from within the school. This person has led staff through analysis of PAT data, and is beginning to work with staff to plan strategically in response to the findings. The ESR panel sees this initiative as highly relevant to staff, as many conversations with teachers made evident that the concept of planning intentional teaching, informed by analysis of valid data and designed to enable multiple entry points, remains a challenge. In addition, teachers were frank in acknowledging that, in the main, identification of a student's progress was often identified through a test. They discussed their understanding that this restricted the potential students have to demonstrate learning at a more sophisticated level, and that testing was of limited value when formulating future plans. Many staff expressed a clear understanding of the importance of rich assessments, alongside a desire to improve

their knowledge and practice in this area.

At the time of the ESR, a few examples of teaching designed to activate prior knowledge, build understanding and prompt inquiry, as well as assessment that allowed students to demonstrate their learning in varying contexts, were apparent. Leaders express a clear intent to promulgate this approach across the school, with particular emphasis on the opportunity students achieving at higher standards have to make evident their knowledge and understanding and be graded accordingly. Opportunities for students to co-construct and negotiate learning will further contribute to this intent. A continued focus on this undertaking will ensure that the staff are indeed catering to the needs of all learners.

#### **Direction 2**

**Cater to the needs of all learners and increase the opportunity students have to demonstrate their learning at higher levels through the consistent implementation of intentional teaching characterised by rich task and assessment design.**

### **How effectively does the school leadership foster a culture of learning?**

Apparent through all aspects of the ESR process was the positive influence and impact that new leadership has brought to the school. All forums conducted made evident that the coherent message from leaders was clear: ensure high-quality teaching and learning that supports all students to achieve. Many members of the school community discussed the work leaders have undertaken to attend to the culture of the staff community, to develop collective responsibility, unity and action. The ESR panel was provided documentation to attest to this. Leaders have initiated a process of inquiry that prompted staff to consider which behaviours and interactions *contribute* to a collaborative culture and which *compromise* it. A display of the responses encourages all staff to maintain a professional and respectful manner and to work with colleagues with optimism and commitment. Conversations with staff, and the inquiry conducted at staff meeting, *Collective responsibility: how do we work together to be the best we can be?* made evident that, in the main, staff bring an understanding of the importance of shared responsibility and commitment, and respond accordingly. Revisiting this concept at regular intervals through the implementation of authentic reflective practice will ensure that collective action and accountability remain a feature of the school.

Effective Performance and Development (PD) and Professional Learning (PL) processes are critical to ensure staff have the capacity to respond to the school's priorities and agreements, and to empower teachers to develop themselves and those around them. Truly effective PD and PL are highly aligned and representative of collective responsibility. Throughout the ESR, both PD and PL processes were discussed by numerous staff and described with a variety of diverse perceptions and understandings. Some staff described PD as operating effectively in 2017, characterised through leaders' walkthrough processes and feedback. Others discussed accessing a one-off meeting in Term 1, where personal goals were set, whilst others reported that no PD processes were operating this year. Regarding PL, the ESR panel heard reports as diverse as Professional Learning Communities having been disbanded in 2017 and no alternative model designed, through to reports that staff meet each week and have regular opportunities to plan together. Given the lack of clarity regarding these crucial drivers of improvement, the panel is clear that collective review and development of understood and agreed PD and PL processes at St Agnes Primary School is essential, and will contribute to staff capacity to respond to the school's expectations and agreements.

The ESR team was impressed by the eloquence and sophisticated perceptions students brought to discussion forums. A number of students hold strong opinions regarding their school and report varying levels of agency to influence direction or change. This evidence was very strong throughout the review. Student input regarding the newly introduced garden represents one opportunity students have been provided to influence decisions at the school. Whilst opportunities for student leaders, those who are sports team captains or have responsibility for a particular job, were apparent, examples of authentic student ownership, the concept of all students as leading stakeholders within the school, were limited. Students are clearly poised to be influential and responsible participants at the school, and the ESR panel encourages staff to undertake genuine consultation to work towards a model of authentic and contemporary student agency; designed with, and for, the students. The opportunity to develop a culture where students are prominent citizens within the collective, and to capture and capitalise on their

enthusiasm, is an exciting prospect for the school.

**Direction 3**

**Develop rigorous and agreed approaches to professional learning and performance and development through the collective design of strategic, influential systems that build teacher capacity and expand a collegiate culture across the school.**

**Direction 4**

**Progress collective responsibility, inclusive of the student community, through the development of systems that enable authentic influence and input of all students, in the classroom and across the school.**

**What is the school doing particularly well and why is this effective?**

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practice that is contributing significantly to school improvement at St Agnes Primary School.

**Effective practice regarding pedagogy that builds learning culture and learner expertise was evident at the school.** Students' dispositions and perceptions of learning have been positively influenced by the strategic introduction of Building Learning Power (BLP). This approach has been quickly yet effectively embedded across the school. Students with whom the panel spoke discussed using strategies to persevere with learning, to manage distractions and to consider how best to solve problems. In particular, the panel noted that the wider school community is aware of, and utilising, aspects of this approach. Many parents discussed the philosophy and terminology, and reported that this has allowed them to encourage their children to think and respond optimistically in situations at home. This compatibility represents a move towards authentic partnerships in learning, and is commended by the ESR panel. Evidence of this practice was verified through conversations with staff, students and families, including Governing Council representatives.

## OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

At St Agnes Primary School, the demonstrated growth in student achievement is at or above what would be reasonably expected of a school in a similar context. Effective leadership provides strategic direction, planning and targeted interventions.

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

1. Enable intellectual challenge and student agency through collective inquiry into teaching strategies that make the intent and criteria of the learning clear to students, and that stimulate deeper cognitive reasoning.
2. Cater to the needs of all learners and increase the opportunity students have to demonstrate their learning at higher levels through the consistent implementation of intentional teaching characterised by rich task and assessment design.
3. Develop rigorous and agreed approaches to professional learning and performance and development through the collective design of strategic, influential systems that build teacher capacity and expand a collegiate culture across the school.
4. Progress collective responsibility, inclusive of the student community, through the development of systems that enable authentic influence and input of all students, in the classroom and across the school.

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



Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND  
PRESCHOOLS

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.

Leanne Trewartha  
PRINCIPAL  
ST AGNES PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson

## Appendix One

### Policy compliance

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

The Principal of St Agnes Primary 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 Site Procedure Item 1:  
Hazardous Chemicals. To be actioned by WHS HSR.  
Site Data Sheets. To be actioned by WHS HSR.
- Aspect of Governance Item 8:  
Bullying data reported to Governing Council twice a year. Will be reported from end of Term 2.
- Aspect of Learning Improvement Item 5:  
All teachers trained in Child Protection Curriculum. Training to be undertaken.
- Aspect of School Organisation Item 5:  
Camps and Excursion policy. Draft policy in development.
- Aspect of Safety Item 3:  
Volunteer policy. In draft form.

When the school's actions achieve compliancy with DECD policy and procedures, the Principal must resubmit the Policy Compliance Checklist to the Education Director.

Implementation of the *DECD Student Attendance Policy* was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2016 was 93%.

## Appendix Two

### School Performance Overview

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

#### Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2016, 91% of Year 1 and 93% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Year 2 has been upwards, from 86% to 93%.

In 2016, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 79% of Year 3 students, 84% of Year 5 students, and 91% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Year 3, this result represents little or no change from, and for Years 5 and 7, an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Year 3 has been downwards, from 86% to 79%.

For 2016 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the results of similar students across DECD schools.

In 2016, 54% of Year 3, 21% of Year 5, and 43.5% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average. Both Year 3 and 7 results are trending upwards, from 32% to 54%, and 12.5% to 43.5%, respectively, for 2014 to 2016.



For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 67%, or 4 of 6 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016, and 64%, or 9 of 14 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.

### **Numeracy**

In 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 96% of Year 3 students, 79% of Year 5 students, and 96% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3, 5 and 7, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Year 7 has been upwards, from 75% to 96%.

For 2016 Year 5 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools. For Year 3 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving above the results of similar groups of students across DECD.

In 2016, 25% of Year 3, 5% of Year 5, and 35% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 17%, or 1 of 6 students from Year 3, remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016, and 78%, or 7 of 9 students from Year 3, remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.