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 Amanda O'Shea and Steve Freeman, 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 Black Forest Primary School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal advised the actions being taken to ensure compliance include:

- Governance items 2 & 3: More authentic collaboration around strategic planning and self review with the newly formed Governing Council.
- Site Procedures: More regular meetings with the WHS representative and committee to ensure adherence with the Action Plan.

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. Between 2008 and 2014, the attendance rate has been above the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Black Forest Primary School is an inner metropolitan school of approximately 500 students including 63 reception students in 2015. The school has an ACARA ICSEA score of 1068 and is classified as Category 7 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population reflects a culturally diverse community and has approximately 20% of students from an English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) background.

In 2015, the governance model of the school, will change to a Governing Council.

The leadership team is newly established. It consists of a Principal in her second year of tenure, a Deputy Principal and a newly appointed Senior Leader.
Lines of inquiry

During the 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 Leadership: How effective is a culture of improvement fostered in partnership with parents?
- Effective Teaching: How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning? How effectively are teachers challenging students in their learning?

How well are students achieving over time?

The pre-review discussion of student achievement data found that approximately 85% of students in all year levels in the period 2008 to 2014 meet the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) in reading and numeracy. This means in 2014, there were nine students in Year 3, Year 5 and Year 7 who did not demonstrate the reading DECD SEA and similarly in reading, numeracy.

The exception occurred in 2014, when only 69% of Year 5 students (16 students) met the DECD SEA in numeracy.

How effective is a culture of improvement fostered in partnership with parents?

In order for the school to systematically and collaboratively improve outcomes for students, the Review Panel sought to ascertain the extent to which the school has embraced a positive and focused culture of improvement and has worked in partnership with parents.

In 2014, the school staff agreed on a set of six principles to represent their shared beliefs: incorporating children and community, the learning environment, children’s voice, ways of learning, learning and 21st century learning. The principles provide a common platform and embody the vision for Black Forest Primary School. These principles are student centred and improvement focused.

Teachers articulated their beliefs and philosophies of learning and contemporary research. These have influenced the development of the classroom learning environments, supported by the use of Chrome books and Google Apps, enabling students to conduct research, use information and to solve problems in a more timely and flexible way. The Review Panel observed students using the ICT tools to support their learning. Student leadership opportunities have been provided in the form of the Tech Cadets training. The Review Panel heard from groups of students, particularly in the middle and upper primary years who were enjoying the flexibility and independence they were gaining from the new learning environment.

Students, staff members and parents referenced school values of respect, honesty, caring, responsibility and friendship as guiding principles applied in the way the school operates. Staff members and parents provided examples of how mutual trust in the school leadership team has been developed. All groups talked about Black Forest Primary School as a supportive community, and were proud of their local school and its diversity.

It was evident from the School Council meeting attended by the Review Panel and the Principal’s report, of a number of phone calls from parents about the new learning environments. Some parents are concerned about the impact of the new learning environments on their children’s learning. Parents and the school leadership team described some exchanges, between parents and teachers as ‘fractured’. Staff members have a strong belief-base for change, however that does not appear to be understood by some families, nor are they certain that the newly introduced initiatives will support their child to achieve.
Current School Council members believed the change to the Governing Council model was a significant benefit in providing a forum for parents to engage and help shape the strategic directions of the School. The Principal has identified in a more informed way, more authentic collaboration in strategic planning and review as an area for improvement. The Review Panel recommends new practices and programs need to be routinely evaluated with the Governing Council and staff to determine the impact they have on positively supporting the group of students who are not currently meeting the SEA. The Review Panel also recommends that regular reviews need to determine the extent to which students are intellectually challenged.

Direction 1

Improve student learning by working in partnership with the Governing Council and broader school community to shape the strategic directions and management of change in the school. Regularly self review and evaluate the impact of initiatives, programs and practices on all students’ learning so that change is data informed and evidence-based.

How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

The Review Panel sought information throughout the review process to find out what support is being provided for students not meeting the SEA and how effective it is.

Teachers identified the analysis of achievement data as being one of the most successful changes in their practice in the last two years. They reported the data is collected regularly and consistently. An assessment map has been developed to ensure there is school-wide consistency in data collection and analysis and that relevant and valid tools of measurement are used. The data is presented in a format that has enabled teachers to engage in the analysis to a much greater degree than previously. The Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are given time to consider the achievement data and to discuss the implications for their classroom teaching.

Teachers talked about how recent connections developed with the feeder kindergartens had impacted on their mindset. They described preparing for incoming reception students, emphasising the school’s responsibility to be responsive to young children’s needs. The induction workshops for parents with children beginning reception appeared to be valued as evidenced by high attendance rates over a five-day period.

The school’s management of intervention support for students with identified special needs (Swannies) is becoming more coordinated. The School Services Officers (SSOs) withdraw individual and small groups from their classes and provide intensive support. SSOs are trained by a teacher to ensure there is coherence between the support offered in the withdrawal programme and the classroom. The Review Panel spoke to a teacher providing the training and an SSO providing the support. They both gave examples to illustrate the emphasis they are placing on developing specific reading comprehension skills. The recent strategic approach to using data will enable the school to frequently track the progress of students not achieving SEA. It will enable teachers to provide more targeted instruction within the classroom as well as inform the focus of withdrawal interventions.

Direction 2

Support students not achieving DECD Standards of Educational Achievement by strengthening the use of achievement data and monitoring student progress to inform targeted instruction and interventions.

How effectively are teachers challenging students in their learning?

The breadth of the curriculum supports a range of student interests. Parents and students talked of the high quality learning accessed through the music (instrumental), art, PE, Italian and garden.

The school leadership team has fostered a collaborative environment by developing PLCs. Staff and leadership capacity is being developed. Teachers reported their recent professional development allowed for deeper and ongoing learning and is providing a basis for common approaches to be developed across the school. Staff members indicated they were concerned about the student outcomes in mathematics. Teachers were offered
the opportunity to apply to participate in a professional development course to address these student needs. Five teachers have been selected, based on the expectation they trial the teaching strategies within their classroom, they allow others to observe, and they share what they learn.

Curriculum cohesiveness in literacy was evident in the junior primary section of the school, with documented agreements outlining expectations, assessment tools, pooling of resources, intervention, and contemporary instructional strategies. The middle years are developing a common approach based on the junior primary example and working to ensure continuity from junior primary to middle primary. This was evident in the literacy agreement that has recently been developed, the resources used by all of the teachers in this section of the school and the common approach to intervention. Year 6 and Year 7 students told the Review Panel about the units of work they were given by teachers across classes which showed evidence of collaborative planning. The current professional learning in numeracy provides an opportunity for the school to use the Australian Curriculum to ensure a cohesive and sequenced approach.

Students and parents confirmed the extent of intellectual challenge within classrooms varies according to the teacher. Their comments indicated the level of rigour and higher order thinking tasks provided to students is not consistent across the school. The use of the Australian Curriculum as a vehicle for improving the level of challenge provided to students is in the early stages of development. The PLCs provide an avenue for teachers to engage in moderation of work samples and analysis of tasks to lift the consistency of intellectual challenge experienced by all students.

**Direction 3**

Provide greater challenge for students by designing rigorous higher order tasks and ensuring consistency in assessment to increase the proportion of students achieving in the upper proficiency standards in the Australian Curriculum and NAPLAN
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Black Forest Primary School is tracking well. Good performance was evident by a culture of improvement and an increased strategic use of achievement data for classroom planning.

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

1. Improve student learning by working in partnership with the Governing Council and broader school community to shape the strategic directions and management of change in the school. Regularly self review and evaluate the impact of initiatives, programs and practices on all students’ learning so that change is data informed and evidence based.
2. Support students not achieving DECD Standards of Educational Achievement by strengthening the use of achievement data and monitoring student progress to inform targeted instruction and interventions
3. Provide greater challenge for students by designing rigorous higher order tasks and ensuring consistency in assessment to increase the proportion of students achieving in the upper proficiency standards in the Australian Curriculum and NAPLAN

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

Susan Cameron
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.

Linda Weetra
PRINCIPAL
BLACK FOREST PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson