

# **The Department for Education**

## **External School Review**

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

### **Report for Freeling Primary School**

Conducted in February 2018



## Review details

A priority for the Department for Education 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 government schools.

The external school review framework underpinning the 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 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, they all have been considered and contributed to the development and directions of this report.

This External School Review was conducted by Greg Graham, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Alison Lynch, Review Principal.

## School context

Freeling Primary School caters for children from reception to year 7. It is situated 70kms north-east of Adelaide in the township of Freeling, and is part of the Goyder and Light Partnership. The enrolment in 2018 is 326 students at the school and 37 at the preschool. Enrolment has been steadily increasing over the last 7 years. The school has an ICSEA score of 985, and is classified as Category 4 on the department's Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 8 (2%) Aboriginal students (2 at the preschool), 16 (4%) students with disabilities, 2 students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD), 1 child in care, and 20% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a principal in her 3<sup>rd</sup> year of tenure, a deputy principal (0.8FTE), a student wellbeing coordinator (1.0FTE), a literacy coordinator (1.0FTE), and a STEM coordinator (1.0FTE). There are 13.5FTE teachers, including 1 in the early years of their career.

## 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 3 key areas from the External School Review framework:

<b>Effective Teaching:</b>	<b>To what extent is there consistency of teachers' practice across the school in numeracy?</b>
<b>Student Learning:</b>	<b>How well do teachers plan and design learning tasks to meet the varied needs, skills and interests of all students?</b>
<b>School Community Partnerships:</b>	<b>To what extent are students involved in collaborative planning and decision-making about their learning?</b>

### **To what extent is there consistency of teachers' practice across the school in numeracy?**

The site improvement plan identifies numeracy as one of the school's priorities with a target of all non-exempt/withdrawn students in years 3, 5 and 7 achieving SEA and above NAPLAN in numeracy. This is to be achieved through a consistent approach as identified on the school's numeracy agreement. Staff acknowledged the work of the principal and members of the leadership team in leading the school in achieving the site improvement plan (SIP) priorities and actions. The school's data on the Australian Curriculum A-E results in mathematics demonstrated an average improvement shift of approximately 5.6% across the A-E grade range from semester 1 results compared to semester 2 end-of-year results in 2017.

All staff acknowledged the work done through the Natural Maths professional development (PD) had an impact on their approach to teaching maths in class. The teachers indicated that the Natural Maths



workshops conducted at the school were extremely beneficial in the understanding and their approach in teaching maths. Staff also referred to the analysis of achievement data as a whole-school exercise, which is conducted through SIP committees. The numeracy committee have provided training and development opportunities for all staff to access, which includes sharing of resources through the curriculum folder on the school's network.

It was stated by both teachers and school services officers (SSO) that there was a more consistent practice of mathematical approaches and strategies across the school, including strategies such as mental routines, task folders and use of open-ended tasks. This was supported by students' comments about how teachers use a variety of tools, such as charts, books, maths packs, interactive boards, conferencing and electronic programs (for example, Mathletics) to deliver and enhance their maths programs.

The collegiality of staff allowed the freedom to seek support for each other, calling upon the strengths and experience of colleagues to help them in their planning and delivery of maths lessons and knowledge of individual students' learning needs and abilities. This process was done both formally and informally.

Numeracy intervention programs focused on the QuickSmart computer program for targeted students. This program is conducted by SSOs, in consultation with teaching staff. The tracking of student progress is recorded by SSO staff and discussed with teachers. Two students identified maths as one of their stronger subjects and commented on how the QuickSmart program helped them in gaining confidence in mathematics. Individual teachers conduct screening tests within their classrooms to identify work groups.

The majority of students identified science (including STEM) and mathematics as the 2 subjects that they were 'good at'. Some students indicated that they were good at maths because they were repeating work they had done in the previous year, as the younger students in a composite class; others said that it came easy to them because they 'get' maths.

Learning Intentions were talked about by some staff, with most coming from the primary group. Only a few students mentioned the use of learning intentions by their teacher as part of their maths program. Some students did indicate that, by having the learning intentions identified, it made the focus of their lessons more relevant.

The students interviewed knew what NAPLAN is, with some understanding the test outcomes and the connection with their learning. Some teachers use the achievement data with their students as part of their conferencing strategies to support and engage the students with their learning. Staff refer to the NAPLAN and PAT data as part of the planning process, and discuss students' progress using this information.

It has been recognised that the school does use information from a variety of datasets and is developing strategies to support and plan for student learning in numeracy.

The next phase of the school's future planning is to continue developing teacher knowledge and pedagogy in numeracy based on the work started. Further professional learning opportunities either at the school level or externally would assist in consolidating the focus on the Natural Maths approach adopted by the school. By using the numeracy agreement as a reference point to work from, and strengthened pedagogical shifts using TfEL teaching strategies, consistency of practice in numeracy and other subjects may be achieved.

Strengthening teacher knowledge in task design will further develop and embed effective and consistent pedagogical practice in numeracy and other cross-curriculum planning.



## Direction 1

Continue to build on the capacity of staff in the design of consistent teaching practices in numeracy that link student learning from reception to year 7.

### **How well do teachers plan and design learning tasks to meet the varied needs, skills and interests of all students?**

The site improvement plan identifies several strategies for teachers to collectively plan and use data to support all students on the learning spectrum, including addressing students in the higher proficiencies to those students having difficulty. The school has provided a number of opportunities for staff to be involved in professional learning through on- and off-site training sessions. These include partnership pupil free days on task design and moderation training, involvement in departmental initiatives, such as Brightpath writing, and site-based actions, including 7 Steps in Writing, growth mindsets, and Big Ideas in Number, to name a few.

The school has successfully appointed curriculum leaders to support the site improvement plan priorities and its implementation. Year level teams meet both formally and informally to discuss and share teaching plans, student progress, and any follow-up from professional learning activities is addressed at staff meetings. Professional development meetings with line managers have a focus on pedagogical change that supports the school directions and partnership priorities.

Differentiated learning strategies vary amongst staff. The school has identified a site goal in the area of STEM that has a 'focus on fostering innovative and forward thinking in students through a culture in which the importance of STEM is recognised and valued'. Teachers are supported with implementation and training through the appointment of a STEM coordinator. STEM activities are seen as an example of stretching the students with a varying degree of involvement, where students direct their own learning using the principles of STEM methodology. Students were all in agreement that STEM was related to science and maths, and involves challenges, experiments or projects. When asked what does STEM look like in other subjects, the students could not provide an answer.

Specialised learning, such as the Crest program, which is offered to recognised students as part of the stretch/challenge option available at the school, was mentioned by several teachers as a strategy to cater for the needs and skills of some students. Classroom observations identified a snapshot of teaching strategies, ranging from play-based activities in the early years classes, to more traditional approaches in the primary years, including ability grouping, and teacher-directed lessons with supportive worksheets.

Intervention programs supporting the learning needs of specific students included QuickSmart maths, PreLit, MiniLit and MultiLit. These programs are implemented by SSO personnel and information is shared between the SSO staff and teachers. SSO personnel are also used in mainstream classes to assist all students with their studies where needed. The school has appointed a literacy coordinator to support teachers in analysing all diagnostic tests, to identify students requiring support and to monitor their progress. This is all done in consultation with teachers and SSO personnel. There was little comment from staff on the influence of assessment processes used across the school to assist in learning tasks.

Of the students interviewed all indicated that approximately 20% of their work time over an average school week was 'hard'. Most of the students indicated that they learn best in a quiet classroom setting.

When asked what the most important thing about school is, 11 responded "learning new things". When asked how their teacher can help them improve, responses included: "explain the learning more clearly", "conferencing work with us" and "make the work harder".



The teacher pedagogical survey conducted during the review indicated that the vast majority of staff identified that they classified planning and execution of a unit of study as 'medium' when focusing on learning intentions, student engagement, feedback and stretch.

The school would benefit from the development and embedding of common understandings relating to intellectual stretch and challenge; in particular, that intellectual stretch is applicable for all students and all learning areas, and is most effective when tasks are designed to provide multiple entry and exit points. In this way, a whole-school approach to intellectual stretch and challenge can become embedded practice that is known, understood and supported by students, staff and community.

## **Direction 2**

**Explore and implement approaches that integrate and effectively embed intellectual stretch, challenge and rigour into daily classroom teaching and learning.**

## **To what extent are students involved in collaborative planning and decision-making about their learning?**

The site improvement plan identifies a review of programs and policies regarding student wellbeing and engagement. The school has embraced the concept of growth mindsets as a strategy to encourage students to develop their persistence and decision-making with their learning. The review panel was able to confirm that the language of growth mindsets was apparent across the school, with comments made from staff, students and parents. The staff are proactive in using growth mindset terms in conversations with their class, and have posters displayed to allow the students to refer to them. The promotion of this concept is well-communicated amongst the parent community through the school's Facebook page, newsletter articles and their observations of teachers and students verbalising the concepts in the class or yard. The language of growth mindset was strongly evident across the school for new reception students through to year 7 students, and its use was helping students with their learning. This is evidenced by comments such as "when it's hard keep trying" or "challenge your brain". The use of a toy gorilla to help the younger children understand the language of growth mindsets and to act as a prompt when talking about "trying hard and not giving up" has been successfully implemented by the wellbeing coordinator.

Students were able to describe the learning process in class, including particular reference to routines such as guided reading tasks, Daily 5 and worksheets. When asked about whether they had a choice with their learning, several students responded by saying that they could select activities from a prescribed list that could be done in any order. It was noted that this type of approach was usually in subjects like spelling, reading and some research projects. Evidence of learning intentions in some classrooms was noted by the review panel with varying degrees of language used to describe the learning intention. These ranged from a simple focus on a specific subject or topic to learning intentions for the term or year. The majority of students said that the learning intentions were only referred to occasionally.

The teaching staff described a variety of strategies used to engage students with their learning, including Reflection time, Wonder Walls, Discovery Strategies and Teaching Moments. Many of the staff indicated that the responses from the students did influence what they did in that particular lesson and future planning to some degree, but admitted that further work was needed.

All of the staff commented on how the STEM activities have captured the students' engagement and their interest in science in particular. This was endorsed by the students, indicating that science was one of their favourite subjects.

Feedback from students on teaching planning/programming is limited, with some ad-hoc approaches. Strategies used include 'Thumbs up-Thumbs Down', '2 Medals and 1 Mission', 'Freeling Fortnight' and Socratic questioning. Several staff stated that they are beginning to be more proactive in changing their teaching approaches to incorporate more student feedback opportunities within their lesson plans. This was supported by the teaching pedagogical survey results, with comments on what they would do to improve, which included the need for further development in effective learning design, creative opportunities for stretch and feedback.

There was little or no evidence of how teachers support students with goal-setting, although rubrics and success criteria processes were used to enable the students to identify how they can improve. Some students indicated that class goals were set for the year and occasionally referred to during the term. Students were aware of strategies to assist them to improve their A-E grades, citing practice and persistence strategies. Student leadership and decision-making opportunities outside of the classroom are in existence through the student representative council, with most of the focus on events, such as fundraisers and sports day.

Students at all year levels benefit from opportunities to be active participants in their own learning. Sharing data, discussing reports, and providing opportunities for students to share how they best learn gives real and explicit opportunities for all students to be successful learners. Feedback for learning provides students with the strategies to know how to improve.

### **Direction 3**

**Develop and embed authentic student influence on learning, which is strengthened by embedding learning intentions, goal-setting and student feedback, as part of regular reviews, including at the beginning and end of units of work.**



## Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

Freeling Primary School has demonstrated growth in student achievement, which is at or above what would be reasonably expected of a school in a similar context.

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

1. Continue to build on the capacity of staff in the design of consistent teaching practices in numeracy that link student learning from reception to year 7.
2. Explore and implement approaches that integrate and effectively embed intellectual stretch, challenge and rigour into daily classroom teaching and learning.
3. Develop and embed authentic student influence on learning, which is strengthened by embedding learning intentions, goal-setting and student feedback, as part of regular reviews, including at the beginning and end of units of work.

Based on the school's current performance, Freeling Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2022.



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Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY



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Anne Millard  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND  
PRESCHOOLS

The school will provide an implementation plan to the education director and community within 3 months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's annual report.



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Nicole Cawley  
PRINCIPAL  
FREELING PRIMARY SCHOOL



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Governing Council Chairperson



## Appendix 1

### Attendance policy compliance

Implementation of the department's student attendance policy was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2017 was 92.1%.

## Appendix 2

### School performance overview

The external school review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the department's Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

#### Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2017, 50% of year 1 and 54% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents a decline from the historic baseline average for year 1 and little or no change for year 2.

Between 2015 and 2017, the trend for years 1 and 2 has been downwards, from 71% in 2015 to 50% in 2017 for year 1, and 85% in 2015 to 54% in 2017 for year 2.

In 2017, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 69% of year 3 students, 81% of year 5 students and 70% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the SEA. For year 5, this result represents improvement, for year 3 little change, and for year 7 a decline from the historic baseline average.

For 2017 year 3 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving lower than the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2017, 25% of year 3, 37% of year 5 and 18% 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.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 74%, or 14 out of 19 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2017, and 33%, or 3 out of 9 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2017.

#### Numeracy

In 2017, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 69% of year 3 students, 88% of year 5 students, and 76% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3 and 7, this result represents little or no change, and for year 5, an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For 2017 year 5 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving higher than the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2017, 10% of year 3, 27% of year 5 and 3% of year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.



Between 2015 and 2017, the trend for year 5 has been upwards from 3% in 2015 to 27% in 2017.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 74%, or 14 out of 19 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5 in 2017, and 33%, or 3 out of 9 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7 in 2017.