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 Ann O’Callaghan Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability, and June Goode, 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 Riverton 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:

1. Aspects of Governance:
   a. Governing Council is not yet engaged in the development of school plans, policies and priorities, including the development of codes of conduct for all parties,
   b. The documented parent complaints policy and monitoring processes require updating,
   c. Processes and procedures are being implemented by the Principal for ongoing collection and reporting of data related to bullying incidents.

2. Aspects of Teaching and Learning:
   a. Training and development will be provided to strengthen and develop teacher understanding of the TTEL framework and the implementation of the framework,
   b. It is a high priority for new staff to undertake the Keeping Children Safe: Child Protection Curriculum training course before teaching the program. To be completed ASAP,
   c. A new Student Learning Plan has been developed. NEPs have not been maintained over time. ILPs are completed. IEPs for Aboriginal students are in their initial stages of development. To be completed ASAP.

3. Aspects of School Organisation:
   a. Attendance Policy is in place but overdue for review. To be completed ASAP (see below),
   b. Bullying and Harassment Policy is in place but is overdue for review. To be completed ASAP.

4. Aspects of Human Resource Management:
   a. Site-based performance and management policy is to be reviewed. All staff yet to work on updating plans against APST.

5. Aspects of Safety:
   a. Not fully compliant with the Volunteer component of protective practices. To be completed ASAP,
   b. Cyber Safety Policy to be developed.

6. Aspects of Site Procedure:
   a. ICT Security Policy to be developed.

Implementation of the DECD Student Attendance Policy was checked specifically against a documented set of criteria. The Principal has advised that the site's current Attendance Policy and Procedures (2011/2013) need to be reviewed and the documentation updated, including the parent information letters. Monitoring and analysis of data is currently ad hoc rather than regular. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 92% which is below the DECD target of 93%.
School context

Riverton Primary School is located in the Gilbert Valley, an agricultural area 96 kilometres north of Adelaide between the Barossa Valley and the Clare Valley wine regions. There are 106 students enrolled at the school. The school has an ICSEA score of 968, and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. Thirty percent of students enrolled are eligible for School Card assistance.

In recent times, as affordable housing has become available in the town and surrounding area, the community demographics have started to change. Consequently, there have been a number of new families enrolling their children at the local pre-school and the primary school during the academic year. Estimated enrolments at the Reception year level for 2016 indicate that the intake will be 40% greater than 2015. These demographics will start to redress the 26% overall decline in enrolment over the four year period 2011-2014.

The school population currently includes 4 Aboriginal students, 11 Students with Disabilities, and three students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD). There are a small number of students receiving additional support for challenging behaviours.

There is a total of 8 teaching staff in the school which includes 100% retention of permanent teaching staff and 33% retention of temporary teaching staff. The non-teaching staff component includes 4 permanent and 2 temporary School Support Officers.

The current Principal was appointed at the beginning of the 2014 school year. The staffing profile includes an allocation of 0.2 FTE for a School Counsellor.
Lines of inquiry

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

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**How well are students achieving over time?**

In 2014, the results for reading indicate that 56% of the Year 3 students, 62% of Year 5 students and 76% of Year 7 students demonstrated the SEA. Numeracy results for the same year show that 63% of Year 3 students, 54% of Year 5 students and 76% of Year 7 students demonstrated the SEA.

By comparison, the overall historic averages (2008-2012) as measured by NAPLAN at Riverton Primary School for reading are 80% for Year 3, 74% for Year 5 and 81% for Year 7. In numeracy, the historic averages are 81% for Year 3 students and 83% for both Year 5 and 7 students.

Compared to the historic data period of 2008 to 2012, there is currently a lower proportion of students achieving in higher proficiency bands across Years 3, 5 and 7, and a lower number of these same students retaining their higher levels of achievement from Year 3 to Year 5 through to Year 7 over the period 2010 to 2012 to 2014.

Further analysis indicates that in the past two years, there is a general pattern of lower numbers of students demonstrating the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) in both reading and numeracy at Years 3, 5 and 7.

In the early years of Year 1 and 2, the Running Record levels for reading indicate that in 2014, 50% of Year 1 students and 45.5% of Year 2 students demonstrated the SEA. In comparison, in 2013 there was 55.6% of Year 1 students and 63.6% of Year 2 students achieving the SEA.

The 106 students at Riverton Primary School are allocated to five classes, and as a consequence, class sizes are generally less than average compared to larger schools. Ongoing staff reported that they know most children well and can provide anecdotal information about each student and their learning background over time in the school. The Review Panel heard from staff that with a number of new students transferring into the school there was a greater need for information handover from previous schools, and both staff and parents felt transition support for the students themselves was important.

The Principal and staff reported that they are aware of the school’s shifting results and have started to collect and analyse consolidated records of achievement and progress data to better understand and respond to the learning needs of the current student population.

On the basis of this data the Review Panel explored several lines of inquiry to determine directions for improvement.
How effectively is student learning growth monitored and evaluated?

The Review Panel heard that the school is in the early stages of looking at individual data to inform teaching across Reception to Year 7. Staff know that effective monitoring of student achievement and growth is part of a multifaceted improvement strategy that involves regularly using formative assessment processes and planning for targeted teaching. The benefits of monitoring data like this across the school over time will also enable the school to be proactive and positioned to identify value added results, to note any low growth points, and to intervene immediately when no progress is observed.

At the time of the review, staff reported that each teacher is using various tests and assessments as part of their own teaching program, but that the approach is not yet fully consistent across same year level classes and from Reception to Year 7.

The Australian Curriculum A-E grades have been collected and collated twice a year since 2013 but have not yet been used for analysis or moderation.

Progressive Achievement Test (PAT) data was initially collected at the end of 2013 and then again in 2014. Expected PAT-R and PAT-M growth data was first analysed at a pupil free day in late Term 4, 2014 when staff met to look at this data and information together with the recent NAPLAN results and other information from class teachers. Late in Term 1, 2015 this information was collated and triangulated by the Principal and shared with staff. Student names were plotted against the expected benchmarks in the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). The students were then grouped according to the level of response required to support them in their learning. The Principal said that she aims to use this data analysis with staff during Term 2 to design structured intervention and support for students with special needs.

During the review, the Principal reported that the experience of collating and triangulating achievement data was a starting point that she wants to build into the regular self-review process of the school. However, she also reported that there are pressures for her and other staff to find time to do so. She said that as a staff they had made a recent agreement to start looking at student achievement information on a five-weekly basis in staff meeting time.

Involving staff in regular and collaborative discussion about agreed standards and shared expectations, and each student’s learning results, must be made a priority so that staff can work together to inform their teaching and raise the achievement of all students to higher levels. A range of decisions about what will be collected in each class and year level, when it will be collected and why, how it will be stored and accessed, and when it will be analysed and used in planning, are essential to provide continuity in learning for all students. Discussion and time for commitment to action must be built into the school day, as well as be scheduled for after school.

Direction 1
Increase the percentage of students demonstrating and sustaining the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement by implementing an agreed assessment policy and schedule to ensure that individual, class and cohort data is used as the basis of informed decision-making across the school.

Direction 2
Ensure a data management system enables teachers to track growth and analyse learner achievement over time for formative and summative purposes at all levels Reception to Year 7.

Direction 3
Provide structured time and support for teachers to work in partnership to ensure the coherent delivery of the Australian Curriculum from Reception to Year 7, including the effective use of assessment design for each achievement standard to support students in multi-age classes.
How does the school know that its professional learning and performance and review processes are effective in building teacher capacity?

The Review Panel heard that the Principal had recently documented a draft School Improvement Plan (SIP) on behalf of the staff and parents. The plan encompasses some very long-term directions building on the priorities included in the previous SIP (2012-2014). English and Mathematics are the curriculum priorities with the development of agreements planned for this year.

Complementing these curriculum priorities is improving teacher pedagogy by focusing on making ‘rigorous and explicit teaching evident in all classrooms’. At the beginning of this year all staff participated in a “Visible Learning” professional learning event with their Lower Mid North Partnership colleagues. This focus is central in the ECD local Partnership Plan. To ascertain evidence of the extent of the school’s capacity to implement this new initiative, the review panel members led a discussion process in a staff meeting during the on-site visit. Staff showed positivity and interest in the ‘Visible Learning’ foundation program and suggested that a “step-by-step whole-school approach” to trialling and implementing what they had learned about teaching and making learning visible would be useful to develop their students as ‘assessment capable learners’. These steps included: student goal-setting as part of learning, keeping progress results accessible for students, ensuring students know what the learning intention and success criteria are in every lesson, and having agreed processes for informing parents about visible learning strategies.

The teachers reported that although they had not yet undertaken any formalised follow-up as a staff to this professional learning, they had shared some ideas informally and also benefitted from a recent protocol used for a classroom walkthrough that resulted in an increased number of the new ‘visible learning’ and explicit teaching strategies being trialled across the school.

The results of this initiative were evident in feedback from the students. Most students who met with the Review Panel gave examples of how teachers were using some “new ideas” to let them know about what they would be learning, how best to learn and how they were going. Older students said they were discussing success criteria and that the teacher was showing them what “A grade” work looks like. Other classes have charts up in their classroom showing success standards for all subjects. Some students talked about ways to solve problems when they were learning something new. They said they knew about “twenty strategies” to do this, including, as one junior primary student said: “If you get stuck, you think your way out”.

This evidence indicates a positive response from students and a common and shared interest amongst teachers. It also indicates that the up-take of the Visible Learning strategies has the potential to build consistency for each year level and across the school, Reception to Year 7. At the time of the review the school had not yet participated in the facilitator training stage but was planning to do so. The Review Panel discussed with the Principal that the research base of this approach was relevant to the school’s plan to focus on formative assessment to monitor achievement, set growth targets with students, and evaluate the effectiveness of intervention.

Direction 4
Increase the numbers of students achieving at higher levels by implementing a whole-school approach to rigorous and explicit teaching that makes learning visible and challenges all students to self-direct and regulate their learning.

The Review Panel heard from staff that the loss of momentum in the lag time between professional learning events and the opportunity to share ideas and/or plan for implementation was not unusual. Some staff felt that there were other times when follow-up had not occurred and/or when expectations from participation in professional learning were not made clear to all.

The Review Panel found no evidence of annual action planning to support the implementation of professional learning initiatives. Staff also said that the opportunity for performance development meetings to reflect on professional learning had been discussed but was not yet formalised or frequent.
Early career teachers, and teachers new to the school, reported that while they valued the collegiate support received on a frequent basis, nonetheless, they would also appreciate a process of formal induction and ongoing feedback.

A common approach to trialling, developing and implementing new teaching strategies to support school improvement must be aligned with each staff member’s performance and development plan. In this way, rigorous and explicit teaching will be more likely to be seen and felt in all classrooms with the desired positive impact on student learning outcomes becoming evident.

**Direction 5**
Ensure there is a coherent school-wide approach to professional learning that strengthens continuity of learning and teaching from Reception to Year 7, and is supported by planned and ongoing performance and development processes.

**How well does the school develop partnerships with parents and the wider school community to improve student learning?**

Parents said they knew how their children were going at school because they had good communication with the teachers. Some felt that the school could always improve whole-school communication practices to follow up individual issues more efficiently and also to try to reach all families. They like to see the Principal and other staff around the school yard and at school functions as a positive way to build community connections. The Open Night at the start of the 2015 school year was well-received as a positive improvement. Parents appreciated the opportunity to move around classrooms, to meet staff and to gain a better understanding of what happens across the school.

Parents on Governing Council had recently completed governance training with other parents in the Lower Mid North Partnership. They reported that the training was valuable and that it assisted with understanding the range of responsibilities and opportunities before them. In discussion they said that the school vision had not been reviewed for many years and they talked about possible opportunities to lead strategically, saying it might be worthwhile to revisit the school’s identity as a community, find ways to reach out and welcome new families and provide support for new students.

The Governing Council had also recently participated in a local Community Partnership Planning meeting which had generated an additional level of interest to follow up at forthcoming Governing Council meetings. Of particular interest was the information available about the changing needs of the local and wider community and information about available services. They cited Rural Care as one such valuable service that had recently been established in the town as a before and after-school care program.

Although the Governing Council reported they had not been actively involved in setting broad directions and improvement planning, the draft school improvement plan captures the parents’ thoughts with an objective that aims to build positive partnerships through the development of effective communication processes, the creation of good relationships and joint programs, and by developing strong family and community partnerships. Included on the plan is a target for the school community to have ownership of the school’s purpose and values. The strategy to consult with students, teachers and parents on this vision is integral to addressing some of the issues raised by parents about the changing nature of the school community and by the teachers about wanting a set of standards against which students, parents and staff can share high expectations.

**Direction 6**
Develop a clear and focused vision for learning that is aspirational, understood, supported by all, and promoted in the community. In order to enact this, use a consultation process, led by the Principal and Governing Council, which involves students, parents and staff.

**Direction 7**
Plan for and provide opportunities for Governing Council and other parents to develop partnerships and work together with the school and wider community to improve student achievement and wellbeing.
How well does the school facilitate various levels of self-review processes to address emergent, regular and strategic issues?

As evidence was collected during the review about the processes used to inform and shape improvement, it became apparent to the panel that these are few and that the Principal and the school is currently challenged to systematically address and balance the many emergent issues, expected practices and new strategic directions that together aim to improve the achievement of all students in the school. The Review Panel heard from staff and some parents that they feel there are multiple issues and aspects of school effectiveness that require immediate attention before the improvement agenda can be fully addressed.

The Principal was frank about emergent issues and strategic challenges. She identified the following improvement questions as being competing demands: “How do we make improvement manageable for staff in a small school? How do we come back to the data to use it in the classroom? How do we come back to Visible Learning as a professional learning focus? How do we create a clear agenda about ‘where to’ so we have a positive impact on improving student outcomes and a positive impact on teaching practice?”

Teachers also reported that they are ready to develop and implement whole-school directions but that they “don’t know where to start”. Some staff who have been at the school for a period of time recalled having worked with a Literacy Coach to develop some agreements for genre mapping and reading standards. However, due to staff turnover in the past two years, the agreements were no longer known or if so, were not owned by all staff and therefore previous practices had “dwindled away”. Staff felt that good things had been introduced over the last year or so but nothing yet was clearly stated or followed through.

To set directions at the start of the 2015 school year, the Principal led a self-review process with staff to identify ongoing matters that required attention. This process resulted in a list of twenty-five wide ranging aspects of school organisation and curriculum management. With ‘Improved Learning Outcomes for Students’ at the centre, the Principal created a chart to collate and order the list and to identify by staff vote, the five so named ‘Big Ticket’ items agreed on by staff as the highest priorities. These were: Data, Literacy Agreement, Numeracy Agreement, Structured Intervention/Special Needs, and Daily Operational Systems. The Principal then added to the list ‘Performance and Development’ to ensure that this policy level of support was available to staff.

Apart from the initial list and the identified ‘Big Ticket’ priorities and a draft Site Improvement Plan, the Review Panel found no evidence of ongoing self-review processes. There was a lack of action planning and an absence in the history of evaluating the impact of teaching strategies on student performance. There was no evidence of structures or timelines embedded in the fabric of the school culture to ensure effectiveness was monitored.

Achieving real and enduring improvement in student outcomes is ongoing and challenging work. Self-review is a regular process, not an event. It requires ongoing analysis of performance and the evaluation of practices, programs and strategies. It takes planning, sustained effort and it takes time. Trying to improve everything at once generally leads to scattered efforts and, as was being experienced at the school at the time of the review, some tension and confusion about which steps to take next.

Direction 8
Ensure that raising student achievement is central to shaping improvement in the school by articulating a focused approach to improvement, supported by clear and concise action planning, ongoing self-review and monitoring processes, and collective responsibility for outcomes.

Staff reported that they felt the priority of “Daily Operational Systems” needed to be addressed as soon as possible. They felt it was “important to formalise what is informal” and get shared understanding about what is sometimes assumed as the known. For example, they identified clarity of SSO roles and specialist support teachers, use of formal meeting procedures, transparent decision-making, use of electronic communication, and shared and delegated leadership, as being important policies and procedures to have in place to improve the conditions for continuous improvement in an effective workplace. The Principal reported that the staff handbook (circa 2008) also requires a full review.
The Review Panel discussed these perceptions and matters with the Principal, who said she understood the staff point of view. She shared a copy of the Work Health and Safety survey (September 2014) as further evidence that there are some stress points for some staff that require a response.

It is certainly time now for the school leadership, administration staff and representatives, such as the Work Health and Safety Committee members and the Personnel Advisory Committee members, to meet with the Principal and, together, on a regular basis, identify and review workplace policies and practices so that positive attitudes and focused collaboration will support and enable the improvements required to raise student achievement levels across the school.

In order for a school to be well placed to manage emergent issues in the future in a transparent and systematic way, it is good practice for school policies to be kept current, be collaboratively developed as may be necessary, ratified by the Governing Council as may be required, and communicated to all stakeholders to ensure shared understanding of rights and responsibilities.

As included at the beginning of this report, the Policy Compliance checklist submitted by the school prior to the on-site visit indicates a number of listed policies that have not yet been implemented or fully implemented. These aspects have been brought to the attention of the Principal and the Education Director.

**Direction 9**

Ensure that all site policies, procedures and guidelines reflect DECD requirements and that the associated documentation is updated as required and reviewed regularly to ensure that expectations are compliant and implementation is consistent.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Riverton Primary School is experiencing some challenges with the ongoing development of a whole school approach to teaching and learning and the provision of a coherent curriculum for learners. Student achievement levels are showing a decline on historic averages. There is a lack of embedded and regular self-review processes and no evaluation of the impact of school strategies and practices on student achievement and progress. Policy development requires attention.

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

1. Increase the percentage of students demonstrating and sustaining the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement by implementing an agreed assessment policy and schedule to ensure that individual, class and cohort data is used as the basis of informed decision-making across the school.

2. Ensure a data management system enables teachers to track growth and analyse learner achievement over time for formative and summative purposes at all levels Reception to Year 7.

3. Provide structured time and support for teachers to work in partnership to ensure the coherent delivery of the Australian Curriculum from Reception to Year 7, including the effective use of assessment design for each achievement standard to support students in multi-age classes.

4. Increase the numbers of students achieving at higher levels by implementing a whole-school approach to rigorous and explicit teaching that makes learning visible and challenges all students to self-direct and regulate their learning.

5. Ensure there is a coherent school-wide approach to professional learning that strengthens continuity of learning and teaching from Reception to Year 7, and is supported by planned and ongoing performance and development processes.

6. Develop a clear and focused vision for learning that is aspirational, understood, supported by all, and promoted in the community. In order to enact this, use a consultation process, led by the Principal and Governing Council that involves students, parents and staff.

7. Plan for and provide opportunities for Governing Council and other parents to develop partnerships and work together with the school and wider community to improve student achievement and wellbeing.

8. Ensure that raising student achievement is central to shaping improvement in the school by articulating a focused approach to improvement, supported by clear and concise action planning, ongoing self-review and monitoring processes, and collective responsibility for outcomes.

9. Ensure that all site policies, procedures and guidelines reflect DECD requirements and that the associated documentation is updated as required and reviewed regularly to ensure that expectations are compliant and implementation is consistent.

Based on the school’s current performance, Riverton Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2016.
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.