2016
Independent Review Findings



Disclaimer

This document reports the findings of the Department of Education Services' review and verification of the school's self-review. The school's self-review has been complemented by information provided by the Department of Education and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

The findings of the independent review are forwarded to the school principal, the board chair, the Director General of the Department of Education and the Minister for Education.

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School and Review Details

Principal: Mr David Ingle

Board Chair: Dr lain Thin

School Location: 50 Falls Road, Lesmurdie WA

Number of Students: 285

Reviewers: Mr Kevin Pilkington (lead) and Mr John Latham

Review Dates: 19 and 20 October, 2016

Initial Review: 2013

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the independent review is to provide assurance to the school and its community, the Director General of the Department of Education and the Minister for Education on the extent to which the school has met its commitments as outlined in its Delivery and Performance Agreement (DPA) and associated Business Plan.

The focus of the review is on:

- how well the school has implemented the self-review
- how well the school has improved student learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students
- how well the school has created an environment that promotes learning and student well-being
- how well the school is placed to sustain and improve its performance.

Review Methodology

The school has been required, under the DPA, to undertake annual self-assessments of its performance. The outcome of these assessments formed the basis for the school's self-review. The school sent self-review documentation to the IPS Review Team, Department of Education Service one month prior to the commencement of the review.

The IPS reviewers supplemented the information provided by the school with information on the school's achievements, its processes and its student performance data from a number of sources which included:

- the My School® website
- the Department of Education School Performance Monitoring System
- Schools Online reports.

Reviewers analysed the evidence presented in the school's self-review documentation to verify achievement and developed lines of inquiry where further verification was required.

An agenda for the review visit was subsequently negotiated with the principal to enable the gathering of evidence to verify claims made by the school. During the review visit the reviewers sourced evidence to support the school's self-review claims through observation and discussion with leaders, teaching and support staff, board members, parents and students.

The evidence provided by the school, along with information gathered by the reviewers prior to and during the review visit, was used as the basis for the verification of how well the school has met its commitments as outlined in the DPA and business plan.

This document reports on the findings of the independent review.

School Context

What are the important features of this school's context that have an impact on student learning?

Falls Road Primary School is a well-equipped Level 4 primary school located in a semi-bushland setting in the Perth hills. The school opened in 1981 and has a student enrolment of 285 kindergarten—year 6 students. Projected student numbers for 2017 are over 300 and continue to grow despite the year 7 students moving to secondary school at the start of 2015.

A number of building programs and minor works initiatives have enhanced the learning environment, including new purpose-built art and music facilities, upgrades to the library and technology and enterprise areas and refurbishments to cabling.

Well-maintained gardens and grounds provide an extension to the learning environment and include facilities such as the nature play area, cubbies, a vegetable garden and a well-equipped playground. Teaching blocks have been set up to enable the effective implementation of a number of learning programs and extension and remedial strategies. A substantial, air conditioned, carpeted and enclosed assembly area provides a first-class facility conducive to a diverse range of activities.

The school has a relatively high Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of 1089 with 73% of the enrolment placed in the top two quartiles, as indicated on the *My School*® website. This suggests a rising trend since the 2013 review when an ICSEA of 1055 was noted. There is a relatively low rate of student transience.

The staff's interrogation of information derived from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) in addition to On-entry testing, signals the emergence of a growing awareness of the increasing numbers of children entering the school system identified with developmental or speech deficits. This has provided the catalyst for the establishment of an early intervention speech pathology program. The overall student attendance rate of 93.4% for 2015 was slightly above the State mean. Student enrolments are drawn mainly from English speaking backgrounds (approximately 97%) with the remaining 3% being represented by Aboriginal, European and Asian backgrounds. Funding is received to address the needs of nine students who have been diagnosed with a disability.

The school enjoys an excellent reputation in the wider community, evidenced in part by the numerous requests it receives for enrolments outside of the local intake area. In addition, requests for enrolments into the Kindergarten program often outnumber the availability of places.

The school has strategically harnessed the flexibilities afforded through IPS status to maintain a staff composition characterised by a well-balanced mix of experienced and early career teachers. Discussions with a number of teaching staff also revealed a representation of personnel with diverse skill sets. Education assistants are well qualified and experienced and provide ongoing and valued support to identified individuals and groups of students.

Discussions with parent representatives and members of the board highlighted the strong community support afforded the school. Substantial support is also provided by the active Parents and Citizens' Association (P&C) through fundraising endeavours including the bi-annual moonlight markets.

The board is represented by a valuable mix of staff, parents and community members with wide-ranging skills who demonstrate a high level of conversance with their governance role. The reviewers were able to verify the regular and interrogative role played by the board in maintaining a focus on the school's implementation and monitoring of the business plan. A sound understanding of the school's financial position by the board was also clearly evident.

The School's Self-Review Process

How effective was the school's self-review in accounting for its performance during the period of the DPA and business plan?

The development and embedding of the school's cycle of self-review has been both rigorous and collaborative. Quality data sets inform judgements about progress toward the targets of the business plan and the extent to which the school is meeting the requirements of the DPA. Analysis of data is interrogative and conducted at teacher, leadership and board level. Data regarding student performance is drawn from a range of standardised tests, teacher judgements and documented observations. Conclusions drawn are shared with the staff and reported regularly to the board and annually to the school community through the comprehensive Annual Report.

The quality of teaching and learning occurring in the school is constantly monitored. The effectiveness of programs and the standards being achieved by students in both academic and non-academic areas is the focus of data analysis. Students are monitored at an individual, class, cohort and whole-school level. Judgements made and reported upon are realistic and evidence based. Comparative data sets enable judgement of school performance against statistically similar schools, national and State standards. While improvement is certainly the focus, where limited or no progress is identified this is acknowledged and strategies are put in place to address the weakness, e.g., whole-of-school writing approach.

Monitoring tools developed and constantly updated by the leadership team clearly display how the school is meeting the commitments of the business plan and the DPA. The tools are reflective and allow easy appraisal of how the school is tracking against targets and the requirements of the DPA. The staff is commended for the development and implementation of the monitoring tools enabling clear demonstration of how the commitments of the business plan and the DPA are being met.

The targets of the business plan are reviewed annually to ensure relevance and whether the data sets available will enable accurate judgements to be made about achievements. The use of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-framed targets has enabled the teachers, leadership team and board to identify areas of strength and weakness. Analysis has resulted in identification of specific aspects in numeracy and literacy as areas of weakness and these have attracted focus and resources in school operational

planning. Documentary evidence and discussion held by the reviewers with teachers, leadership and board members confirm the process as collaborative, analytical, reflective and transparent.

School Performance—Student Learning

How well has the school performed in improving learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students?

The 2014–2016 Business Plan identifies the four key themes of Students, Staff, Community and the Environment which are underpinned by a number of focus areas and improvement strategies. Also integral to the business plan is the articulation of 22 interim, achievement and aspirational targets. For the purposes of the school review process the leadership team focused on reporting progress made against the five academic and two non-academic achievement targets only, but has committed to a more holistic analysis of all targets in their entirety during the next iteration of the business plan.

Five academic targets have been defined in the contexts of numeracy, reading, writing and physical education and health:

- 90% of the year 3-7 stable cohort to be at or above the NMS benchmark in numeracy, reading and writing.
- Identified small groups of students gain the expected improvement + 20% in reading.
- 70% of the stable cohort to achieve a score of 50% or better on the end of year Easy Mark Maths Tests.
- Pre-primary year 2 stable cohort to achieve the end of year On-entry targets in literacy as per the On-entry scale of 1 at pre-primary, 1.5 at year 1 and 2 at year 2.
- To increase by 5% each year the percentage of students at the developing and proficient levels in the fundamental movement skills of overhand throw, two handed catch and sprint.

The non-academic targets related to students' acquisition of good behaviour certificates in addition to a 5% increase in parents' response to the satisfaction survey. There was a strong evidence base to confirm the achievement of both non-academic targets.

Discussions with the principal and key curriculum personnel in addition to an analysis of NAPLAN data and the school's self-review information enabled the reviewers to verify the achievement of the first two academic targets and acknowledge the considerable progress made against the other targets. The reviewers note the decision in 2016 to amend the target relating to

achievement of On-entry checkpoints to exclude year one and two and to investigate the use of other instruments to enable a more practical measure of progress made by these cohorts.

The School Performance Overview based on 2016 NAPLAN results highlights an upward trend in overall absolute achievement. All tested literacy areas, with the exceptions of year 5 spelling and year 5 grammar and punctuation, fall within the expected range of performance; that is, within one standard deviation of the predicted school mean. Year 5 spelling is more than one standard deviation below the predicted school mean. Year 5 achievement in the area of grammar and punctuation, however, is an area of strength and is more than one standard deviation higher than the predicted school mean. Year 5 numeracy is also highlighted as a strong learning area with performance only 0.20 of a standard deviation below 'above expected' performance. The school has performed strongly in comparison to West Australian Public Schools. With NAPLAN longitudinal data revealing school performance in both year 3 and 5 cohorts to be significantly above that of West Australian public schools in all tested literacy and numeracy areas.

The percentages of year 5 students in the top 20%, middle 60% and bottom 20% of West Australian public schools compare favourably to students in like schools with numeracy, reading and writing showing a similar score distribution. However, an anomaly can be seen in the area of spelling where a disproportionately high percentage of students has performed in the bottom 20% of West Australian public schools when compared to year 5 students in like schools. An encouraging result can be seen in year 5 grammar and punctuation with 41% of students performing in the top 20% of West Australian public schools compared to 32% in like schools.

An examination of the NAPLAN longitudinal summary provides evidence of improvement between years 3 and 5 (stable cohort) with slight gains in numeracy and reading being achieved. More significant gains were evidenced in the areas of writing and grammar and punctuation.

The NAPLAN progress bar graphs illustrate an encouraging trend with the year 3 to 5 stable cohort showing progress to be as good as, or better than like schools in all learning areas. The staff's capacity to sustain this progress over a two-year period (2015/16) is commendable.

The longitudinal data highlighted in the NAPLAN progress and achievement (years 3 to 5) quadrants clearly shows that the school's position in comparison

to like schools has improved dramatically since 2012. All learning areas are now achieving in the higher progress—higher achievement quadrant. This trend is strongly evident when making comparisons between the school and West Australian public schools and all Australian schools.

The alignment between teacher judgements and NAPLAN performance is inconsistent. There is a reasonably strong correlation between NAPLAN achievement and teacher judgements in the year 5 literacy areas; however, this is not the case with year 5 numeracy and year 3 literacy and numeracy. It is recommended that the principal investigate and implement processes to provide staff with opportunities for collaborative assessment moderation in order to achieve a closer alignment between NAPLAN achievement and teacher judgements in the future.

A comprehensive assessment schedule has been developed by the school which is inclusive of all phases-of-learning and which derives data from a range of school-based and widely-normed instruments supports the use of system-level data to make judgements about student achievement and identifies areas requiring an improvement focus. This process is constantly evolving and assists with the identification of learning deficits and the planning of appropriate pedagogies.

The reviewers were able to verify the considerable staff commitment to the ethos and direction of the school evidenced by the way in which teachers have conceptualised the importance of implementing strategies in the business plan and operational plans in their classrooms. Discussions with leadership and teaching staff provide evidence of the constantly evolving development of a shared common pedagogical language which is supported by the ongoing pursuit of student improvement.

A range of data sources is employed by staff in the early years' program to identify deficits in learning and to plan subsequent teaching and learning approaches. These include, but are not limited to: NAPLAN, the Early Years Learning Framework, the National Quality Standard (NQS), On-entry testing, data derived from the AEDC and school-based data collected by staff on an ongoing basis.

The staff have embraced the requirements of the NQS and used information emanating from analyses of required elements to inform the planning of teaching and learning. A collaborative and thorough analysis of the NQS by

leadership and teaching staff has confirmed the achievement of all seven quality standards.

The reviewers noted the overall school attendance rate was slightly above that of Western Australian public schools and slightly below that of statistically similar schools. Discussions with the leadership team revealed that the incidence of extended holidays within the school year had a negative impact on attendance fluctuations. The challenge for the staff in the next business planning cycle will be to develop mechanisms to address this issue.

The staff has developed and implemented a comprehensive and effective student behaviour policy. Through discussions with staff, parents and students and supported by an analysis of survey data the reviewers were able to validate consistently high standards of student behaviour and engagement.

School Performance—Quality of the Learning Environment

How well has the school performed in creating an environment that promotes learning and well-being for all students and the attainment of the school vision?

The reviewers were able to verify the existence of a positive and energetic school culture that is constantly evolving and which features the promotion of continual improvement, optimum student learning and the development of productive working relationships.

Discussions with students, staff and parents revealed that high expectations of student achievement, behaviour and engagement have been key drivers in the generation of a dynamic learning environment and in the ongoing pursuit of school improvement.

A common thread interwoven throughout the learning environment has been the quest to develop a shared, common pedagogical language across educational domains which has helped to ensure that professional dialogue is targeted and beneficial. This notion is particularly apparent in the early years and has been extended to involve parent participation in a number of school-based learning activities in order to expose them to a common language inherent in the program. This has contributed to the development of positive relationships with parents and has helped to ensure their role as partners in the education of their children is effective, productive and aligned to the school's improvement agenda.

During the school visit, the reviewers, in discussions with personnel, were able to appreciate how much the leadership team and teachers welcome the opportunity to collaborate on a regular basis with colleagues regarding a range of educational issues. In addition to two formal collaboration sessions scheduled to occur twice per term, teachers liaise regularly with their colleagues regarding pedagogical and operational matters. The efficacy of this arrangement has been the facilitation of critical and effective analyses by teachers of student performance data which has culminated in the development of evidence-based, best practice teaching and learning emphases across many curriculum areas with a primary focus on literacy and numeracy.

Student performance data analysis has evolved from a model directed primarily by the leadership team to one which now encourages the proactive

involvement of classroom teachers. There has been a recent shift away from the use of an external company to scrutinise data to a paradigm that allows teachers to become actively involved in the diagnosis of learning deficits. Discussions with numerous stakeholders confirm that the staff now have more ownership of this process and are more empowered to make decisions about the development of teaching approaches to address identified learning needs.

The principal has enhanced the effectiveness of data analysis by developing a tracking system that monitors the progress of individual students. This has resulted in performance management discussions which are more meaningful, purposeful and focused on the core business of student learning. The admirable progress made by students in the literacy and numeracy domains in 2015/16 is evidence of the effectiveness of this process. The staff are commended on the development of this system which enables gaps in student learning to be identified, progress to be monitored and which subsequently provides the impetus for the development and implementation of targeted intervention strategies.

Operational planning is detailed and has been developed with the input of teaching staff. While some strategies in the plans are whole-school in nature with clear guidelines relating to their implementation, teachers are given scope to develop their own teaching approaches with an expectation that a number of data sources are to be employed formatively to inform planning and teaching.

The teaching of writing receives a major focus in response to the lack of progress made between years 3 and 5 in NAPLAN (2012–14). This has involved a whole-school approach to the explicit teaching of a variety of concepts through the *Seven Steps to Writing* program. Discussions with several teaching groups reveals widespread staff satisfaction with the program, and in particular, the way in which writing tasks are scaffolded to enable optimum student learning. Student progress over 2015/16 has been encouraging, evidenced by the school's placement in the highest NAPLAN achievement and progress quadrant. Students from different year levels spoke articulately about the writing program; specifically, how it had improved their confidence in writing by making the steps involved in the writing process clearer and more practical.

An emphasis on raising the performance of a group of students identified from the NAPLAN middle proficiency bands has resulted in the ongoing allocation of funding for the establishment of the *Florida and Heather Harvey* reading

programs which target students from years 3 to 6. The programs, which are facilitated by a well-qualified education assistant, provide intensive tuition and student-centred learning activities which aim to improve students' comprehension skills. An examination of 2014–16 school-based longitudinal data illustrates significant gains in the reading performance of all identified groups of students.

An increasing number of students entering school identified with language deficits provided the impetus for the initiation of a speech pathology program. A partnership forged with Edith Cowan University in 2012 features the involvement of final-year speech pathology students in screening all kindergarten students on their entry into the school system. School-based data reveals an improvement in the development of articulation and expressive language skills for students who have experienced speech therapy. Another significant measure of the program's effectiveness is the assurance that students presenting with language deficits at the beginning of their formal schooling will be identified, provided with appropriate intervention and monitored for progress. The reviewers commend the leadership team and staff on the establishment of the speech pathology program which is constantly evolving through regular review, reflection and refinement processes.

The leadership team and staff have established strong processes to address the needs of educationally at-risk students at both ends of the academic spectrum. The deputy principal has assumed the role of learning support coordinator and provides assistance and ongoing support for teachers in their development of individual and group education plans. Further support for specific students is given by the school psychologist, education assistants and through outside agencies such as the Dyslexia Speld Foundation. The academic extension of students in a variety of academic contexts including science, mathematics and writing is also a key feature of the learning program. Additional support for students requiring extension is provided through participation in a program conducted by Kalamunda Senior High School staff. Discussions with parents confirmed high levels of satisfaction with the staff's capacity to direct their focus onto the child and in particular the students at educational risk and academic extension initiatives that have been tailored to the needs of identified students. The results of parent satisfaction surveys conducted, published in the school's Annual Report, confirm that parents are supportive of the school and endorse current practices and foci.

A whole-school behaviour management plan has been developed which clearly outlines student behaviour expectations. It incorporates an array of strategies and processes to address negative and positive behaviour. Students demonstrating positive behaviours are rewarded with a number of incentives. Survey data, coupled with anecdotal data collected by the leadership team indicates high levels of positive student behaviour across the school with undesirable behaviour being a rare occurrence. Parents in particular were complimentary and appreciative of staff endeavours to create a safe and inclusive learning environment.

The initiation of the Bounce Back program, which is founded on a set of core values, addresses the key concepts of resilience and emotional well-being and is explicitly taught to students from pre-primary to year 6. Although there was a lack of quantitative data from which to gauge the effectiveness of the program, discussions with staff and parents attest to the high regard and value placed on it.

Conversations with the leadership team and teaching staff revealed the lack of a formal process to monitor mandated staff training in child protection and mandatory reporting. Additionally, it became apparent during the review visit that no formal mechanisms to integrate and embed the major principles, concepts and skills associated with protective behaviours into the curriculum had been enacted. It is recommended the leadership team investigate ways to monitor staff participation in child protection training, with records maintained to monitor participation and currency, and to ensure that the teaching of protective behaviours is incorporated by classroom teachers in the implementation of the curriculum.

The leadership team has exercised timetable flexibility with the allocation of teaching time to enable the delivery of specialist programs in history and the social sciences (HASS), science, physical education, music, art and Italian language. The music program includes the delivery of instrumental music through the School of Instrumental Music in addition to the creation of opportunities for students to participate in a senior choir. Performance-based initiatives such as a school band, musical productions in school and out of school and massed choir recitals provide students with an audience and purpose for their work. The visual art program exposes students to an integrated learning structure through instructional activities which utilise a wide variety of media. A partnership with the music program has given students opportunities to showcase their work at exhibitions and school productions.

The quality of the learning environment has been enhanced by the school's involvement in a number of community partnerships. These include Diana Rigg, Edith Cowan University, Kalamunda Senior High School and the Bibbulmun network of schools.

School Performance—Sustainability

How well placed is the school to sustain and improve its performance into the next planning cycle?

As Falls Road Primary School enters its seventh year as an IPS the staff has established sound practices of cyclical self-review that are understood by all stakeholders and embedded in practice, deliver evidence-based conclusions and guide decision making for future improvement.

Minutes of meetings and discussion held with the board chair and members of the governing body confirm that the board is engaged, well informed and meeting its brief. Board members are well aware of their role and responsibilities and carry them out diligently. Formal induction processes and participation in board training provided by the Department of Education enable all new members to be strong contributors. Members provide an appropriate skill set to govern a high-performing school and provide critical oversight to the school's operations and foci. It is recommended that the board seek data on student performance in areas other than the immediate foci of the business plan in order to maintain critical oversight of summary achievement in all learning areas on a whole-school level.

The continuum of improvement for all students is driven by the leadership of the school. The distributed leadership model in practice enables teacher leaders as well as positional leaders to take an active role in promoting whole-school approaches to pedagogy, implementation of focused programs and data analysis that lead to individual student success. Incorporated in the performance management process for teaching staff is an accountability for student performance and a requirement to continually review the progress of each student.

The composition of the teaching staff is a blend of experienced mid-to-late career complemented by several carefully selected early career/graduate teachers who bring specialist skill sets to meet the needs of students. The staff are collaborative and within the phase-of-learning teams shares planning and discusses student progress. The Workforce Plan is compliant with the requirements of the DPA and reflects anticipated succession planning.

Improved student learning is at the heart of all school planning. Five of the seven targets of the current business plan relate directly to student learning outcomes. The targets are realistic but have proven to be challenging. The

successful formula of the *Business Plan 2014–2016* will form the basis of the refined plan 2017–2019. As indicated by the board and the leadership team, the inclusion of predominately student-learning based targets validates and strengthens the school focus on continual improvement in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

Conclusion

Falls Road Primary School has improved outcomes for students over the period of the current DPA and business plan. A rigorous cyclical self-review process has been demonstrated which has led to improvement in the academic outcomes of the stable cohort students as they progressed from year 3 to year 5 in nearly all areas tested under NAPLAN. Benchmarking students upon entry to the school in the early years enables individual monitoring of each student as well as judgements to be made about the effectiveness of intervention programs in place to improve speech, numeracy and literacy. A wide range of standardised tests conducted in all years together with teacher judgements enables the principal to monitor and accurately report student progress to parents and the board. Students at educational risk at both the top and bottom ends of academic performance are catered for. Significantly, the school has a strong focus on improving the academic outcomes of students who perform at, or marginally above, national minimum standards. It is here that the school is having a real impact in challenging and improving performance.

The well-led and engaged board has received regular updates on how the school is progressing toward the targets of the 2014–2016 Business Plan and the commitments of the DPA. Purposeful monitoring tools developed by the school leadership team have ensured staff and the board have an accurate record of how the school is progressing in both. The next business plan will be developed collaboratively by the teaching staff, support staff, leadership team and board and will maintain a focus on continuing to improve student learning outcomes.

The extracurricular programs on offer in the school fulfil the stated intent of "developing the 'whole child' through exposure to a range of academic, artistic, social and sporting experiences that provide all students with the opportunity to shine". The school is supported by a strong P&C which actively encourages parents to be partners in learning at the school. Students benefit from being a part of this inclusive and supportive environment where strong and informed leadership fosters teachers who are committed to quality teaching and learning and an engaged board provides critical oversight.

Commendations

The following areas are commended:

- the development and implementation of the monitoring tools enabling clear demonstration of how the commitments of the business plan and the DPA are being met
- an encouraging trend with the year 3 to 5 stable cohort showing progress to be as good as or better than like schools in all learning areas sustained over a two year period (2015/16)
- the development of a student monitoring system which enables gaps in students' learning to be identified, progress to be monitored and which subsequently provides the impetus for the development and implementation of targeted intervention strategies
- the leadership team and staff on the establishment of the speech pathology program which is constantly evolving through regular review, reflection and refinement processes
- the level of engagement of the board in meeting the responsibilities of the DPA.

Areas for Improvement

The following areas for improvement are identified:

- the board seek data on student performance in areas other than the immediate foci of the business plan to enable members to maintain critical oversight on a whole-of-school level
- the principal investigate and implement processes to provide staff with opportunities for collaborative assessment moderation in order to achieve a closer alignment between NAPLAN achievement and teacher judgements
- the leadership team instigate a method of ensuring regular staff participation in child protection training including the mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse (teachers) with records maintained to monitor participation and currency
- that the principal ensures the teaching of protective behaviours is incorporated by classroom teachers in the implementation of the curriculum.

Declaration

We, the undersigned, hereby confirm that the information provided in this findings document is to the best of our knowledge true and correct and is based on the verification of the evidence provided by Falls Road Primary School as part of the Department of Education Services' independent review process. The principal and board chair have had an opportunity to comment on any matters of fact contained within this document.

Mr Kevin Pilkington, Lead Reviewer

21 November 2016

Date

V Mr John Latham, Reviewer 21 November 2016

Date

Mr Richard Strickland, Director General, Department of Education Services Date