



EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

Report for Felixstow Community School

Conducted in November 2017



Government of South Australia
Department for Education and
Child Development

Review details

A priority for the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) is to improve the educational attainment and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

The purpose of the External School Review is to support schools to raise achievement, sustain high performance and to provide quality assurance to build and sustain public confidence in DECD schools.

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

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

This Report of the External School Review outlines aspects of the school's performance verified through the review process according to the framework. It does not document every aspect of the school's processes, programs and outcomes.

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

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

This External School Review was conducted by Helen Tunney, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Irene Scriven and Nicole Cawley, Review Principals.

School context

Felixstow Community School caters for children from Reception to Year 7. It is situated 7km from the Adelaide CBD, and is part of the Campbell Partnership. The enrolment in 2017 is 95, and in 2013 it was 68 students. The school is classified as Category 7 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school's ICSEA score is 1130.

The school population includes no Aboriginal students, 19% (18 students, 16 of whom are verified against the Autism Spectrum) of students with a verified disability, 15% of students eligible for School Card assistance, 5% of students of EALD background, and no students in care. Enrolment has fluctuated over the last 5 years. Enrolment is capped at 110 through a DECD Capacity Management Plan.

Felixstow Community School does not operate within a school zone and is considered an alternative schooling choice that is committed to participation in a community environment, where teachers, parents, students and extended community work together as partners in learning.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in the first year of her tenure at the school. There are 7 teachers (5.2FTE), including 2 Step 9 teachers.

Lines of Inquiry

In considering the data summary in the School Performance Overview (Appendix 2) and the Principal's presentation, the Review Panel explored the following Lines of Inquiry to evaluate the school's effectiveness towards raising student achievement and sustaining high performance. During the external review process, the panel focused on three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

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| Student Learning: | To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning? |
| Effective Teaching: | How effectively does the feedback students are given motivate them to improve? |
| | To what extent is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction? |
| School Community Partnerships: | To what extent does parent engagement with the school impact on student learning? |

To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

Through this line of inquiry the panel explored individual and collective teacher understanding about intellectual stretch and challenge. Additionally, the panel explored ways these understandings influence teacher practice, and the impact of teaching practices on the learning experiences of students.

The Principal has developed a rigorous learning environment through high expectations of staff, students and their learning, and families. The panel found a strong sense of optimism and belief about, and excitement in the sharing of the collective potential of the school from all stakeholders.

In recent times there has been an increased awareness amongst parents and staff of the moral imperative for the purpose of schooling to be dominantly about academic learning. The school has become more structured and focused on academic learning and more academically-driven. This narrowing of purpose is supported by the whole school community. The learning environment has been decluttered, both physically and pedagogically. Learning spaces have become more intentionally designed, and learning design has become more targeted, deep and rigorous. Students have become more safe and secure through the provision of consistent and agreed classroom and yard management processes that enable quality engagement in learning and play. The panel was provided with evidence that, amongst the staff, there is a deep, sophisticated understanding of the need and ways to ensure that all learning is

intellectually challenging and engaging for students. Parents told the panel that teachers were reflective about their teaching and were always trying to use evidence-based practices to improve. However, the panel found that not all staff have the same depth of understanding about the need to design learning for intellectual stretch and challenge, and a lack of consistency between teachers. Some teachers perceive intellectual stretch and challenge as only applying to students with higher levels of fluency and/or intellect. For some staff further learning is required to develop depth of understanding of what constitutes a task that will intellectually stretch and challenge children.

There has been intentional whole-school development of growth mindsets. The panel found evidence of the impact of this work. Staff, students and parents talked to the panel about the positive impact of embedding student persistence and resilience within their engagement in learning. It has resulted in better student uptake of more challenging and stretching learning opportunities. Students expressed a strong valuing of learning that stretches them; they enjoy hard work and aspire to high levels of achievement. There is a strong, collective work ethic amongst students and there is a passion for learning in the school.

Students really value opportunities to learn and demonstrate their learning in a range of ways. They value hands-on, activity-based problem-solving, and inquiry-based learning. They want to learn through digital technologies, learn in ways that are connected to real life, and through self-directed, autonomous learning opportunities. The panel found evidence that these preferred learning modalities are common in the school, and the value of them is also recognised by parents and staff. Whilst students told the panel they value learning that is hard and stretches them, the panel found that the ways that students define “hard” learning is limited and of a lower order. Students generally equate challenge with more and levelled work, rather than work that requires higher-order thinking to complete.

Parents know that their children are learning through the quality of conversations about learning that they have at home. The transition of students into high school is successful. The skills, maturity and work ethic of students are noted in their secondary education. A point of development for the school that was identified by parents, teachers and School Services Officers (SSOs) is to improve coherence of the learning program for students as they move between teachers and classes. This requires teachers to work together to agree on common elements of practice, common pedagogical processes, and curriculum scope and sequence.

The school has a history of using play-based exploratory learning. The school is well-placed to become more intentional in the use of play-based learning Reception to Year 7 through programs such as the Walker Learning model. One teacher is very experienced in the application of Walker Learning, so capacity exists within the school to extend the use of this approach across the school. The panel noted the quality of the external physical environment in the school. The space has been intentionally designed to nurture, provide challenge and enable creative imaginative play.

The panel was able to conclude that the school has become strongly united around a common purpose of delivering quality schooling experiences and learning outcomes for all. All stakeholders are eager for learning that is continuously improving. As well, there is collective capacity amongst the teachers to design and deliver learning opportunities that challenge and engage all students through higher-order tasks, inquiry and problem-solving. The school is well-placed to develop a common narrative about intellectual stretch and challenge, and to commit to whole-school agreements about consistent and constant use of teaching practices that always engage students through high-order challenge.

Direction 1

Develop whole-school definitions of intellectual stretch and challenge, and agreements about the application of engaging teaching practices.

How effectively does the feedback students are given motivate them to improve?

Through this line of inquiry the panel explored in what ways feedback to and from students is harnessing the potential agency of students in their own and each other’s learning. Through the regular provision of quality feedback about learning, and by monitoring the efficacy of their teaching by regular feedback from students, teachers can develop an enabling partnership with students in teaching and learning.

The panel was provided with evidence from multiple sources that the Principal has created a safe, supportive environment for teaching and learning. This has been achieved through consistent, transparent processes for the management of student behaviour, and support for the rights of teachers to teach and students to learn. The school has become safer and more orderly; and there is now a perceptible sense of calm. Structures have been built around the school values of respect, responsibility and compassion, by focusing the work of everyone in the school on student learning.

The panel found that students are very articulate about their own learning. There was evidence in some classes that learning intentions and success criteria were made clear to students, referred to frequently, and in addition, students had their own learning goals. However, the panel found a lack of consistency in the quality of feedback that teachers are giving students about their learning. In some classes it is quality feedback that contains information for students about how to make their learning better, whereas, in other classes feedback is low-level: it is about neatness, accuracy and quantity of work, rather than quality of work and how to improve.

Students said they are sometimes given opportunities to use peer-to-peer feedback. They value learning in a small school where there are lots of cross-age opportunities. An example of very successful cross-age practice is the way the school has organised for the provision of the arts curriculum. This is done using an elective style called 'Home Groups'. 'Home Groups' were referred to positively in conversations that students had with the panel.

Parents verified that the school acts on the feedback that it gets from families. The school is well-placed to provide and act on much more regular student-to-teacher feedback about the efficacy of the teaching, and the impact on students of the teaching. One student said: "Putting me in the position of teacher I could change things, but in the position of a student, I can't really do much. If I was the teacher, I'd change the activities, because we've been doing the same activities for a long time, just on different days". In a school where the collective student work ethic is high, as are levels of self-management for learning, it is important that teachers use regular feedback from students to ensure there is engagement in the learning, rather than compliance.

The panel found that, whilst there is a structure for student voice, it is currently under-utilised. An opportunity exists to strengthen the input of students into the life and rhythm of the school.

The panel concluded that the work the school has done so far to raise staff awareness about and skills in the uses of feedback has influenced teaching practices to varying degrees. There is inconsistency in the uptake of such practices by staff. A point of development for the school is to embed the application of all forms of regular quality feedback: both teacher-to-students to ensure students always are given information about how to make their learning better; and student-to-teacher, so that teachers use the feedback from students to monitor the impact of their teaching.

Direction 2

Activate student agency in learning through the provision of quality feedback to students, and through seeking regular feedback from them about teaching efficacy.

To what extent is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction?

This line of inquiry emerged during the site visit. Evidence-based practices are critical to the realisation of continuous improvements in student learning outcomes. When all stakeholder groups have strong levels of data literacy, improvement efforts become clearly focused, grounded in evidence, and strategically aligned.

The panel found that under the current leadership student achievement data has been collected, organised and presented in ways that enable student learning growth to be known about and tracked. This has led to intentionalised intervention programs being provided. As well, awareness of academic learning has been raised by teachers, SSOs and families. The core moral imperative of continuously improving student learning has been activated through these improved uses of data. Data is now able to be used to inform and intentionalise learning design. Teachers, students and parents told the panel that teaching is differentiated in all classes across the school. However, the panel found that teachers' use of data to differentiate teaching is in its early stages, and there are opportunities to deepen and strengthen this to

improve the effectiveness of teaching. Student data indicates high levels of fluency. A point of development for the school is to ensure students have opportunities to translate this fluency into the achievement of 'A' grades across the curriculum. There is an opportunity to use learning data with students to set individual targets and goals.

Support for additional student learning needs has become more targeted through improved data practices. Structures, such as appropriate support timetables, have been put in place and are valued by all staff and parents. Use of data to closely monitor student growth and wellbeing has led to higher levels of identification and verification of students with disabilities, and the securing of entitled levels of support. This has enabled differentiated provisions for identified students, and is resulting in significant increases in their access to schooling and improvements in their learning outcomes.

Targeted support has been provided, and all staff have undertaken training and development to raise awareness of the needs of their students. There is a team approach to teaching and learning within the school. The appointment of a Special Needs Coordinator has strengthened the school's provisions for students with additional needs. SSOs stated that they are valued and listened to, and teachers stated that the support they receive from SSOs is "like having another teacher in the room". SSOs were involved in re-setting the vision and values of the school, and they are invested in working with the teachers and Principal to achieve the school's vision.

SSOs report that they have good access to professional learning, in addition to a strong sense of trust and autonomy. Whilst working under the direction of a teacher, they are capable and confident in making decisions about what to do and when. They know and understand the children they are working with, and are trusted by the teachers to use their discretion to put support and interventions in place to ensure students are safe, supported and successful. Performance and development for SSOs is evolving. There is a need for the school to provide structured formalised time for teachers and SSOs to meet and plan for the student support work undertaken by SSOs. Involving SSOs in individualised learning planning, such as Negotiated Education Plans (NEPs), would add great value to the efficacy of such planning.

The panel concluded that the Principal has used student learning data effectively to create the impetus for significant change in the school. The Principal has successfully reformed the school's intervention practices through the use of student achievement data. The next steps for the school are to embed the use of data by teachers in order to intentionalise teaching, empower students through the use of data, monitor their own learning, set personal goals and targets, and use data more effectively to report student learning to parents.

Direction 3

Develop data literacy across the school in all groups of stakeholders.

To what extent does parent engagement with the school impact on student learning?

Through this line of inquiry the panel explored the degree of parent support there is for the transformation of the school culture from the original Rose Park Family Unit to the 2017 Felixstow Community School. This transition has been challenging, and has required care and courage from all stakeholders.

The panel found that parents have a strong expectation of involvement in the school, which is historical, from the Rose Park Family Unit. The word 'community' in the current school name is a significant, living influence on the identity of the school, and the reason that parents choose the school. Considerable work has been undertaken to develop a common, agreed understanding of 'community' in this current school context. Staff and parents told the panel that they saw and appreciated the learning-centred vision that the current Principal has for the school. This vision has been communicated and reinforced very clearly to them; they share and are committed to this vision. In the transition from the Rose Park to the Felixstow site, the nature of parent involvement in the school became confused and was highly contested. Considerable work has been required to take the school back to its core business, and to ensure all parent involvement is intentionally linked, through learning design by teachers, to quality student learning outcomes. This work has been significantly undertaken through the leadership of the current Principal; however, the Governing Council and the Principal identify that work remains to be done in this space.

The role of the Governing Council has been clarified, and the current Governing Council is now clear in its role to provide advice around strategic matters. The Governing Council members have become clear about the boundaries between strategic governance and the operational management of the school. The Governing Council values understanding these boundaries, and is now able to contribute proactively, appropriately and energetically to strategic planning and internal evaluation. The Principal has used data effectively to inform and engage the Governing Council in this strategic work. This depth and involvement of the parents at the strategic level has become an asset of the school. The Governing Council told the panel that the Principal is consultative, considerate and collaborative in her work with the Governing Council and parents. She has rebuilt trust between parents and the school through transparency and evidence-based approaches.

The establishment of a parent support group for families of students with ASD has resulted in these families feeling supported and connected with each other and with the school. The panel had noted the benefits of this group to children's learning and wellbeing in the school environment. The parents in this group commented that they now supported each other "on days where things were not going well". These parents were also very excited to share in the learning successes of each other's children. There is a strong sense of connectedness, and the group values the opportunity to give back to the school. This group of parents has become an asset to the school, and plays an important advocacy role in redefining and reshaping the connectedness of the parent community to the school.

The wider community is rich both in physical and human resources. The school is well-placed to enrich its curriculum provisions through connections and access to local facilities. Activating and organising the human specialist expertise that exists within the community has the potential to add significant value to student learning. There is capacity, willingness, commitment and energy amongst the school community to contribute to the school and to the learning of students.

Parents and staff talked to the panel about the high quality of home-school connections. Parents unanimously said that all staff are approachable and accessible at all times and proactive in communication. Teachers reported quality relationships with parents and that there was a lot of support from home for their teaching. Attendance and lateness have been identified as issues in the school. There is an opportunity for the school to find strategies to work differently with families, in order to improve student access to schooling.

The panel was impressed by the strong evidence they found that the current Principal has unified the school and redefined it as a site of 21st Century education. The school is safe and orderly, with a clear, shared sense of purpose that is student learning-focused. The school is to be congratulated on what has been achieved so far under its current leadership. The next step for the school in this space is to harness the very rich resources in the parent and wider local community around an intentional narrative about learning.

Direction 4

Collaboratively develop a declaration about learning at Felixstow Community School that will provide guidelines for the interface between community involvement and learning, be useful in promoting the school and defining its points of difference, and inform the induction of new staff.

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

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practices that are contributing significantly to school improvement at Felixstow Community School.

Strategies to ensure the inclusion of students in priority groups are actioned, monitored and adjusted in the school. The school provides a quality intervention program for students with complex behaviours and learning needs. This program engages these students in quality outdoor learning opportunities through problem-solving and creative play in small group settings. To achieve this, the school utilises its quality outdoor learning spaces, including nature play and kitchen garden spaces, and the skills of its groundsperson who brings a range of interdisciplinary skills to the school. Furthermore, wider community resources, both physical and human, are able to be accessed to provide topic-specific expertise. Through

the learning opportunities offered, students are able to develop socially and emotionally to successfully self-manage learning in a mainstream school environment. The program has become so valued that all students, as well as targeted students, are now given some access to it.

Teachers engage collaboratively with colleagues and experts on curriculum understanding, design and implementation. The school has organised the arts curriculum into various disciplines, each taught by a teacher with a speciality skill or interest. Students attend these lessons twice-weekly in cross-age groupings, rotating through different arts disciplines across the school year. Students and parents spoke very positively about this learning program. Students unanimously identified it as their most liked aspect of schooling. This program is important for several reasons beyond the expert teaching and learning it offers. The Reception to Year 7 program preserves a 'family' aspect of the previous Rose Park Family Unit. It offers many opportunities to align with wider school community resources, both physical and human, and it offers potential for students to excel in the arts through curriculum and extra-curricular links.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

At Felixstow Community School there is a culture of improvement characterised by high expectations of students. Effective leadership provides strategic direction, planning and targeted interventions. The school works in partnership with parents and stakeholders.

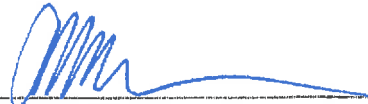
The Principal will work with the Education Director to implement the following Directions:

1. Develop whole-school definitions of intellectual stretch and challenge, and agreements about the application of engaging teaching practices.
2. Activate student agency in learning through the provision of quality feedback to students, and through seeking regular feedback from them about teaching efficacy.
3. Develop data literacy across the school in all groups of stakeholders.
4. Collaboratively develop a declaration about learning at Felixstow Community School that will provide guidelines for the interface between community involvement and learning, be useful in promoting the school and defining its points of difference, and inform the induction of new staff.

Based on the school's current performance, Felixstow Community School will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY

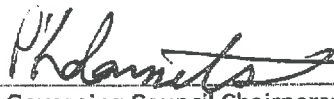


Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND
PRESCHOOLS

The school will provide an implementation plan to the Education Director and community within three months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's Annual Report.



Skye van Heusden
PRINCIPAL
FELIXSTOWN COMMUNITY SCHOOL



Governing Council Chairperson

Appendix One

Policy compliance

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

The Principal of Felixstow Community School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies.

Implementation of the *DECD Student Attendance Policy* was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2016 was 86%.

Appendix Two

School Performance Overview

The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). In considering the data below, there needs to be some caution in making a judgement due to the low numbers represented in the student cohorts at the school. The data below represents a summary of aggregated data for Felixstow Community School. This is done for two reasons: to overcome the anomalies that may occur in any one year, and to minimise the possibility of identifying individuals in any small cohort of students.

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. Between 2013 and 2016, 62% of Year 1 and 50% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Between 2014 and 2017, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 76% of Year 3 students, 85% of Year 5 students, and 92% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA

Between 2014 and 2017, 54% of Year 3, 45% of Year 5, and 56% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands.

Numeracy

Between 2014 and 2017, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 72% of Year 3 students, 76% of Year 5 students, and 88% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD SEA.

Between 2014 and 2017, 30% of Year 3, 18% of Year 5, and 32% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands.