EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

REPORT FOR MOUNT COMPASS AREA SCHOOL

Conducted in June 2016

**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.

This External School Review was conducted by Liz Matheson, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Steve Freeman, Review Principal.

Policy compliance

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

The Principal of Mount Compass Area 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:

Part 2 Learning Improvement:
Aboriginal Strategy. An Aboriginal Community Education Officer started employment at Mount Compass Area School in May 2016. An Aboriginal Education Teacher will commence employment at the school in July 2016. These 2 people will support the implementation of the school's Aboriginal Strategy.

Part 6 Site Procedures:
Plant Management. The farm machinery and equipment maintenance schedule has been tasked to be completed.

When the school's actions achieve compliancy with DECD policy and procedures, the Principal must resubmit the Policy Compliance Checklist to the Education Director.

Implementation of the *DECD Student Attendance Policy* was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be working towards being compliant with this policy and aims to develop and implement a school Attendance Improvement Plan through the Wellbeing Priority Group.

The school attendance rate for 2015 was 90.1%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Mount Compass Area School caters for children from Reception to Year 12. It is situated in a rural community in the southern Fleurieu Peninsula, 57kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment has increased from 345 students in 2010 to 412 students in 2016. The school is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school's ICSEA score in 2015 was 987.

The school population includes 12 Aboriginal students, 14% Students with Disabilities, 4 students under the Guardianship of the Minister, and 4% of students of English as an Additional Language or Dialect background. There are 4 buses transporting students to the school.

The school is organised into 3 sub-schools: Junior School (Reception to Year 6), Middle School (Years 7 to 9) and Senior School (Years 10 to 12) within a framework of Reception to Year 12 support and expectations. Each sub-school is led by a member of the Leadership Team.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in the 3rd year of his first tenure at the school, a Deputy Principal and 4 Coordinators. There has been a 37% turn-over of teaching staff since 2014. In 2016, there are 8 newly appointed teachers to the school, 2 of whom are graduates and 3 others in the early years of their career.

School Performance Overview

The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2015, 43% of Year 1 and 23% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). This result represents an improvement in Year 1 and a decline in Year 2 from the historic baseline average.

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 65% of Year 3, 68% of Year 5, 68% of Year 7 and 51% of Year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 9, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average. For Year 5, there is little or no improvement, whereas in Year 7, there is an improvement against the historic average.

Between 2013 and 2015, there has been a 3-year downward trend from 86% in 2013 to 65% in 2015 in Year 3, and from 82% in 2013 to 68% in 2015 in Year 5.

For 2015 Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the range of the results of similar students across DECD schools.

In 2015, 29% of Year 3, 22% of Year 5, 27% of Year 7 and 20% of Year 9 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 53%, or 8 of 15 students from Year 3, remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015, 67%, or 4 of 6 students from Year 3, remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015, 36%, or 4 of 11 students from Year 3 remained in the upper band at Year 9, and 67%, or 6 of 9 students from Year 7 in 2013, remained in the upper bands in Year 9. These results represent an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Numeracy

In 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 55% of Year 3 students, 68% of Year 5 students, 68% of Year 7 and 63% of Year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 5, this result represents little or no change, and for Years 7 and 9 there is an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2013 and 2015, there has been a 3-year downward trend from 92% in 2013 to 55% in 2015 in Year 3 numeracy 2013 to 2015.

For all year levels in 2015 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the range of results of similar groups of students across DECD schools.

In 2015, 13% of Year 3, 5% of Year 5, 14% of Year 7 and 14% of Year 9 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 25%, or 2 of 8 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015, 100%, or 3 of 3 students from Year 3, remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015, 25%, or 1 of 4 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 9, and 75%, or 3 of 4 students from Year 7 in 2013 remained in the upper bands in 2015 in Year 9.

SACE

In 2015, all 23 students who had the potential to complete their SACE did go on to successfully achieve their SACE. This was an improvement compared with past years and represented a 3-year upward trend from 82% in 2013 to 100% of students completing their SACE in 2015.

In 2015, 93% of grades at SACE Stage 2 were C- or higher, and 91% of grades at Stage 1 SACE were a C grade or higher. In 2015, 22 students completed their SACE through the use of VET.

Achievement in mathematics is the lowest learning area in both Stage 1 and 2. In 2015, 81% of students in Stage 1 and 85% of students in Stage 2 achieved a C grade or above. In 2015, 100% of students in Stage 1 arts and business, enterprise and technology, and 100% of students in Stage 2 business, enterprise and technology achieved a C or above.

Lines of Inquiry

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

Improvement Agenda: **How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?**

Effective Leadership: **How does the leadership facilitate the development of coherent high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?**

Effective Teaching: **How effectively are teachers using DECD pedagogical frameworks to guide learning design and teaching practices?**

School Community Partnerships: **How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and throughout the school?**

How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?

Members of the Governing Council and staff talked about the significant positive changes in the school's culture in the last 3 years. They indicated the expectations are higher and there is greater accountability of staff. There has been a significant change in the teaching staff and more teachers are teaching in their areas of expertise. The focus is clearly on student improvement and engagement from Reception to Year 12, with an emphasis on pedagogy. Staff members were appreciative of the professional development they have been provided with to support them to take on new ways of doing their work.

There are 4 priority areas of improvement, documented in the form of Agreements – Literacy, Numeracy, Pedagogy and Wellbeing – outlining the school's belief statements and the evidence-based research underpinning each priority area. The Literacy and Numeracy Agreements specify the data collection timelines, and the expected achievement standards. Each priority has a 2016 plan developed by the Priority Group responsible for leading the improvement across the school. The Review Panel was told by staff that they are proud of their work in the Priority Groups, and it has helped build greater ownership for the school directions. The Review Panel participated in a staff meeting facilitated by the Pedagogy Priority Group, where the level of shared leadership was very evident.

The use of achievement data has been one of the major changes over the past 3 years. Some teachers described the school as previously being a 'data free' zone. They talked about using the PAT-R and PAT-M data to gain information about their students' strengths and gaps. In Junior Primary, Running Records are taken on a termly basis, except for students who are below the expected standard. For this group of students, teachers take the records more frequently, so that they can ensure the instructional focus in their reading groups responds to the assessed needs. In the year levels using the WRAP methodology, a regular spelling test is conducted to track students' progress. Students spoke favourably about the speed and accuracy assessment in mathematics, which measures their level of fluency and automaticity. In summary, teachers are using data to track individual progress.

The cycle of improvement requires schools to take stock and evaluate their effectiveness at a strategic level. Teachers talked about 'giving things a crack', and 'having a go' for the benefit of their students; however, there needs to be a point when new initiatives are evaluated to determine the impact they are having on cohorts of students. Several teachers said the school has a lot of 'balls in the air': "We start and discuss things, but we need to consolidate and bring things to fruition."

The Review Panel noted that some members of the Numeracy and Literacy Priority groups seemed unaware of the recent patterns in student achievement. In light of the Year 3 and 5 NAPLAN patterns of achievement over the last 3 years, this is a concern. The grade distribution data allocated each semester in Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards did not appear to be a data set used to great effect. The attendance data is not currently analysed to determine strategic implications.

The school has an ambitious improvement agenda. It needs to ensure achievement, attendance and perception data is used at a strategic level to inform the school plan and that improvement strategies are 'do-able' and effectively implemented, to achieve the desired outcomes.

Direction 1
Ensure that school plans and actions are data-informed to enable the Priority Groups to evaluate the school's effectiveness in improving student achievement and progress, and to make ongoing strategic decisions.

How does the leadership facilitate the development of coherent high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?

The Governing Council talked about the importance of a coherent curriculum in providing seamless transition for their children as they progress through their schooling. They gave examples of how the school had intentionally built greater coherence and consistent language in the past 3 years and saw this as a positive step. Teachers also talked about the school-wide programs and methodology (e.g. WRAP) aimed to address learning gaps and build the "R-12-ness". One strategy to support this has been to deploy specialist teaching in the primary years.

The Review Panel was keen to hear what students could describe about their learning, and what pedagogies teachers used to support them. Students spoke positively about the efforts teachers make to explain curriculum concepts and to develop their skills. Older students talked about the assessment tasks they were given and how the rubrics helped them to understand what teachers expect of their work. In SACE, teachers use worked samples to show students the difference between a C grade and an A grade.

Teachers show their commitment to engaging students by striving to make the learning relevant and meaningful. They talked about the WRAP and Tactical Teaching strategies as providing common language and approaches to develop students' literacy skills across subject areas. Students were aware that specific programs, such as Rainbow Reading, were provided to support students with learning needs. Parents also talked about the way the school matches their child with the program. The Review Panel visited classes and saw that teachers were trying to cater for the range of needs, including providing tasks to extend students within and beyond the classroom.

Teachers were asked to rate themselves on the extent that their pedagogies were reflective of the expectations outlined in the school's Agreements. The collation of the data gathered through this survey showed that the pedagogical practices vary and are not yet embedded into daily ways of working. Older students indicated they felt they could be 'pushed' more. The percentage of students achieving in the upper bands suggests there is room for improvement in stretching students.

The school is beginning to do some work on 'transforming' tasks where the focus of the task is on the big ideas underpinning the learning area. The task is designed to support a fundamental shift from teacher-directed pedagogy to a design that requires greater levels of intellectual thinking by students. Leaders need to facilitate opportunities for teachers within their sub-schools to become 'critical friends' to support each other in designing tasks that enable multiple entry points, stretching students to demonstrate their understanding in new contexts, and specifying the literacy demands of the task. There also needs to be clear alignment between the learning intentions and assessment task and success criteria. Teachers need to work towards consistency in their grading.

Direction 2
Provide opportunities for teachers to work in their sub-schools to develop and critique their learning intentions, task design, assessment criteria and moderation to enable multiple entry points and intellectual stretch for all students.

How effectively are teachers using DECD pedagogical frameworks to guide learning design and teaching practices?

The Review Panel attended a staff meeting in which staff looked at the results of the DECD 2015 Student Wellbeing surveys conducted with Year 7, 8 and 9 students. Although only 10 students responded to the Year 7 survey, it indicated a lower level of perseverance and engagement than the state average. Furthermore, the connection with adults at school was lower than expected. The Year 8/9 survey involved 40 respondents. The perceived levels of engagement and perseverance were higher in this cohort compared with the state average, and there was much greater connectedness with adults at school. Staff talked about the recent changes at the school aiming to provide greater seamlessness of learning and reducing the sense of there being a big jump into middle school.

The school's Pedagogy Agreement (together with the Wellbeing Agreement), seeks to develop students' wellbeing, confidence and resilience as learners. The Pedagogy Priority Group has transformed the previous focus of Habits of the Mind into the DECD Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) and Building Learning Power (BLP). The Agreement emphasises that "what teachers do, matters." South Australian research shows us that our support of students is strong, but there is an unintended consequence that can be described as rescuing students from thinking and struggling with the unfamiliar and the complex.

Building Learning Power is a framework aimed to build up students' mental, emotional, and social resilience and resources to enjoy challenge and cope well with uncertainty and complexity. This goal is seen to be valuable for all young people, irrespective of their future chosen pathways. This framework supports the creation of classroom cultures that cultivate the habits and attitudes of curious, confident and independent learners.

The adoption of this framework is new at Mount Compass Area School. Through interviews and the review survey, 15 out of 19 teachers rated their implementation of Building Learning Power (BLP) as 5 or lower on a 10-point rating scale. Many of these teachers also commented that they didn't understand the Agreement and it seemed to be overwhelming. The school instituted the concept of a *Quality Start* at the beginning of this year as a way of introducing learning habits of agility, persevering, concentration, collaborating and self-evaluating. Many teachers, and some students, saw this as a series of activities, and to some extent, a diversion from the real business of studying.

The developers of the BLP framework warn that it is not a quick fix. It demands schools to use the same kinds of resilience and resourcefulness that they are aiming to strengthen in their students. The school needs to keep in mind why they are doing it, so that the process and activities do not become the end point.

Direction 3
Strengthen the support for teachers to be able to confidently implement and embed the *Building Learning Power* framework of learning habits into their daily practices, to support students as learning tasks become more complex and unfamiliar.

How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and throughout the school?

This line of inquiry links strongly with the previous two sections of this report. When senior students were asked what they thought the school could do to support greater improvement, they talked about opportunities for 'more involvement.' Some students appreciated the chance for leadership within and beyond the school and the extension link with Flinders University.

As stated previously, students found the assessment rubrics useful; however, there was little evidence of students being involved in the development of rubrics, the design of assessment tasks, or deciding the direction of the curriculum as outlined in Domain 2.3 of TfEL. This provides the opportunity for the school to empower students to achieve their personal best by:

- identifying and tapping into their interests and aspirations to inform learning plans

- actively involving students in the assessment process, and
- building students' capacity to achieve individual learning potential by engaging and supporting students in goal-setting, planning, self-monitoring, critical reflecting and evaluating within the parameters of curriculum standards and requirements.

Direction 4
Implement a range of school-wide approaches that utilise student voice and influence in the design and assessment of learning.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Mount Compass Area School has a culture of improvement characterised by high expectations of students. Teachers are provided with and use structured time for ongoing collaborative professional learning. Teaching practice increasingly reflects the TfEL framework.

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

1. Ensure that school plans and actions are data-informed to enable the Priority Groups to evaluate the school's effectiveness in improving student achievement and progress, and to make ongoing strategic decisions.

2. Provide opportunities for teachers to work in their sub-schools to develop and critique their learning intentions, task design, assessment criteria and moderation to enable multiple entry points and intellectual stretch for all students.

3. Strengthen the support for teachers to be able to confidently implement and embed the *Building Learning Power* framework of learning habits to support students as learning tasks become more complex and unfamiliar.

4. Implement a range of school-wide approaches that utilise student voice and influence in the design and assessment of learning.

Based on the school's current performance, Mount Compass Area School will be externally reviewed again in 2020.

Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY

Jayne Johnston
CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

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.

Kevin Mooney
PRINCIPAL
MOUNT COMPASS AREA SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson