



Government of Western Australia
Department of Education Services

Little Grove Primary School

2015

Independent Review Findings



Independent Review of
Independent Public Schools

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 Education and the Minister for Education.

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School and Review Details

Principal:	Mr Darryn Martin
Board Chair:	Dr Val Faulkner
School Location:	Gordon Street, Albany WA 6330
School Classification:	PS Class 4A
Number of Students:	205
Reviewers:	Mrs Audrey Jackson AM (Lead) Dr Steffan Silcox
Review Dates:	26 and 27 May 2015

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the independent review is to provide assurance to the school and its community, the Director General 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. Additionally, the findings have the potential to inform school improvement.

The focus of the review is on:

- how well the school has implemented 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 wellbeing
- 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 its self-review documentation to the IPS Review Team, Department of Education Services, 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 and developed lines of inquiry where further verification was required.

An agenda for the two review visit days was subsequently negotiated with the school to enable the gathering of evidence to verify claims made by the school. During these two days 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 visits, 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?

Little Grove Primary School opened in 1997. It is located approximately eight kilometres from the centre of Albany in an area consisting of small rural lots and suburban subdivisions. Despite its relative proximity to central Albany the school's location and catchment area contribute to the creation of a sense of community within the school.

In 2015, the school has an enrolment of 205 students in eight classes from Kindergarten to Year 6. Enrolment has declined due to the transition of Year 7 students to secondary school and a decrease in the number of students in Kindergarten. The school's Index of Community Social and Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is currently 1025 compared to 1054 in 2008. There are four Aboriginal students and no students with a language background other than English. About 8% of students have individual education plans (IEPs).

Attendance rates are comparable with those of like schools at 93.4% overall. No students were classified in the 'severe' At-Risk category in 2014. The transiency rate in 2014 was 12.4%.

The teaching staff are all experienced and have a significant length of service at the school. The staff comprises 14 teachers, some of whom are part-time, an Associate Principal and the Principal, who is non-teaching. Of the teaching staff, six are senior teachers and one is a Level 3 classroom teacher. Additional support is provided by three education assistants who work in the early year's classes and two who support students with special needs.

Partnerships have been established with The University of Western Australia—Albany (UWA—Albany) and the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation. Programs to enhance student learning focus on sustainability including the *Water Wise* program, nature play initiatives and bushland rehabilitation in association with community groups.

In the teaching and learning area, the school has been selected as one of five schools in Western Australia to trial the Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) in Japanese, which is coordinated by Education Services Australia.

The Board is chaired by Dr Val Faulkner, a community member who is an Associate Professor at UWA—Albany. A deputy chairperson has recently been appointed to ensure continuity in the conduct of board business should the chairperson be absent. Minutes of meetings show that the Board is engaged in the review of school performance and the amendment of Business Plan targets resulting from the review. The majority of members are parents of students at the school and they bring a broad range of expertise to contribute to school governance.

With the support of the Parents and Citizen’s Association, the school has developed its resources to enhance learning and teaching and to provide an attractive physical environment. Play equipment is innovative, providing challenges in a controlled environment. The school has also been active in seeking grants from outside agencies to enhance the play spaces. Careful planning and input from the teaching staff has ensured that funds raised and grants received support the direction of the Business Plan.

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?

It was evident to the reviewers that the Little Grove Primary School Board is engaging well with the school's self-review processes. Representative of the parents' association along with school staff and community board members provide a wide-ranging skill set to appropriately interrogate school performance, finances and set direction for the future. The resulting Business Plan responds to the negotiated DPA and incorporates the Department of Education values. These are expanded upon in the school's annual Operational Plan by specifically promoting values of courtesy, pride, sincerity, respect and the pursuit of personal excellence.

The Business Plan has four focus areas: Excellence in Learning; Excellence in Teaching; Positive and Supportive Learning Environment; and Sustainable Learning Environment. Progress against the targets in each area is reported to the school community through the Annual Report and considered by the School Board.

Evidence was provided which demonstrated that performance against the DPA and Business Plan targets has been critically assessed on an annual basis. The school has created a comprehensive school improvement cycle based on structured data collection and analysis by staff at class and year levels and across the junior and senior teaching blocks. This analysis results in the development of annual operational plans to support progress toward achieving both global and individual targets. Each target in a focus area is assessed and where necessary a clear plan for improvement has been established with teaching and learning programs amended on the basis of available data.

Documentation provided by the school and confirmed in discussion with curriculum leaders indicated that while literacy and numeracy targets had been substantially achieved, there was a need to focus on the performance of individual students to achieve the desired levels on an ongoing basis. To facilitate this, the school has created two teaching blocks—the Junior Block, from Kindergarten to Year 2, and the Senior Block, from Year 3 to Year 6. Each block consists of four classes to allow for cross-setting by ability in literacy and numeracy.

In order to embed the focus areas of the Business Plan into school practice, working groups of teachers and support staff have been established. Each of the teaching blocks has a coordinator of excellence in teaching and learning and a curriculum network leader.

It is clear that the Business Plan is central to school planning and one that is subject to analysis by school leadership, teachers and the Board.

School Performance—Student Learning

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

The school provided the reviewers with a detailed analysis of the degree to which targets in the Business Plan had been met. The analysis occurs on an annual basis and forms the basis for school planning and operational plans.

There is a strong emphasis in the school on early childhood education, with on-entry testing at pre-primary level used as a basis for planning and grouping students by the highly experienced staff responsible for this phase of schooling. Consequently, the basis for the literacy and numeracy targets in the Business Plan was the performance of the 2012 pre-primary group in on-entry testing and that of the 2012 Year 3 and Year 5 students in the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests.

The targets were defined as the performance of continuing students in the Year 3 and 5 cohorts being equivalent to or higher than that of students in statistically similar schools in the 2014 NAPLAN tests. For the pre-primary cohort the target was for 90% of continuing students to be at or above the national minimum standard in all components of the 2015 NAPLAN literacy tests. The targets for 2012 Year 3 and Year 5 groups as Year 5 and 7 students, were substantially met. Areas of strength were identified as reading, grammar and punctuation and numeracy, with spelling and writing identified as areas for improvement. Data on the achievement of targets for the 2012 pre-primary students, now in Year 3, cannot be determined until 2015 NAPLAN results become available; however, testing in Year 2 indicates that the targets are likely to be achieved.

Having identified that there were areas requiring improvement, the school implemented the phonics program *Letters and Sounds* from Kindergarten to Year 6 in order to provide a common approach to the teaching of literacy and facilitate cross-setting. The class groupings were re-structured by establishing two teaching blocks with mixed-year groups in each block. The multi-age grouping within the blocks supports cross-setting so that individual students can be supported to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and extension can be provided to more able students. The use of cross-setting is a valuable tool in the implementation of IEPs for students at educational risk.

The school has extended the range of data sources available to assess student achievement. On-entry assessment, *PAT-R* and *PAT-M* testing and a variety of other testing instruments are used. All data is collated through *Gradexpert*, which also records information from teacher assessment records to create an overall picture of each student's learning. Discussions with teachers verified the value of *Gradexpert* as a tool for recording student progress.

Targets for science and society and environment were based on 2013 results in Western Australian Monitoring Standards in Education (WAMSE) testing; however, these tests were discontinued in 2014.

In the arts, the targets focused on improving the performance of boys and stated that the 'amount of A and B grades given to girls and boys would be similar'. In reviewing the target, the staff determined it would have been more logical to express the target in terms of a measurable increase in the number of A and B grades awarded to boys. Using this measure, some progress in achievement by boys in the visual arts has been demonstrated. In 2012, no boys received an A or a B grade in the visual arts. In 2013, 37 boys achieved A or B grades; however, this fell to 16 in 2014.

Learning blocks for these subjects have been restructured so each year group is taught by the same specialist teacher. Teachers rely on formative and summative assessment processes and related data, the outcomes of which are moderated. This has strengthened consistency in teacher judgements and grade allocations.

Targets set for attitude, effort and learning behaviours are unlikely to be achieved, although progress has been made through the implementation of the above model. The data source is student reports which include an assessment of student attitudes; however, these judgements are subjective and not easily validated.

In promoting a safe and supportive learning environment a small team of teachers has developed and trialled a behaviour matrix using the Positive Behaviour Support framework. Behaviour management is supported through explicit teaching of expected behaviours and rewards students who display these behaviours. This model has achieved improvements in behaviour and is widely supported by teachers and parents.

This area of student performance remains important to teachers and discussions have been held in professional learning groups and a rubric established. The staff intends to continue to focus on this domain as a target and to explore ways to improve attitudes to learning and to measure progress made.

Non-academic targets in respect of attitudes to learning, goal setting and confidence have not met the desired levels, but have shown improvement. These targets are not easily measured in an objective manner and have been the subject of discussions in professional learning groups. This will be an area for further consideration as the next Business Plan is developed.

The target on attendance has been achieved, with 80% of students meeting the criterion for regular attendance and overall attendance being comparable to that of like schools at 93.4% overall.

School Performance—Quality of the Learning Environment

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

The reviewers found that Little Grove Primary School is realising its aim of providing a curriculum characterised by inclusive programs of learning that contribute and add value to students' cognitive, social and emotional learning and well-being. Further, the school's *Bounce Back* program is seen to be a particularly effective whole-school initiative that supports the identified priority—Creation of a Positive and Supportive Learning Environment.

In every contact with different groups and sub-groups within the school, the reviewers found that the core values of the school (Learning, Care, Equity and Excellence) were evident and underpinned discussions with staff, students and parents. These values are continuously reinforced in various class activities and form a reference point for school and individual identity, individual responsibility and commitment to learning, and the establishment of trust.

Meetings with parents, students, board members and representatives of partner organisations provided evidence of inclusive practices, planning to meet the learning needs of all students and strong community support for the school.

There is an expectation held by staff that every student can learn and will achieve at their potential and this is accepted by students and supported by parents. Classes are calm and productive with teachers using evidence-based instructional strategies. Student attendance and engagement is at the State average across all student groups and where behaviour issues emerge they are quickly resolved.

Collaborative planning, curriculum delivery and monitoring of student performance are purposefully structured and evident at every level within the school. This includes systematic formative and summative assessment to establish learning needs and the implementation of the range of inclusive learning and pastoral care programs to cater for the diverse needs of the student population.

Staff display openness to critique by colleagues and a willingness to accept others in their classrooms to observe their teaching. The importance of accessing ongoing professional learning aimed at improving classroom practice is acknowledged and supported by all stakeholders and the school budget reflects this orientation with a sustained allocation to teacher professional learning.

It was evident throughout the review process that there is a focus on developing quality learning opportunities for all students. Students are typically engaged in meaningful learning with the staff carefully monitoring and evaluating all programs to assess their effectiveness in meeting the needs of students.

The reviewers were able to verify through interviews with staff, parents and students, as well as first-hand observation, that all parties interact in a positive manner. Parents and families are encouraged to take a genuine and close interest in the work of the school and are welcomed as partners in their children's learning. It was also evident that students are articulate, thoughtful and conscious of doing their best to succeed. This is being achieved within a framework of mutual trust and respect between all stakeholders with students actively presenting a positive attitude toward the school, teachers, and their learning.

In meeting with students, parents and board members, the reviewers were able to affirm the high regard in which the school is held. Parents in particular expressed their appreciation of staff, their honesty and respect, their provision of an environment where students build confidence and social skills, and their commitment and genuine interest in the students. Parent survey data also indicate that they have respect and confidence in the school, the outcomes it is achieving and in its staff and leadership.

The Principal, Board and staff work together in a supportive way with a sense of belonging and respect. There is a clear commitment and belief that the school is serving the learning needs of its students and in doing so is meeting the aspirations of the community.

School Performance—Sustainability

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

The school has begun to strategically develop its workforce and has implemented an appropriate range of programs encompassing academic, cultural and emotional focuses to meet the needs of students and their families. The school's inclusiveness and family orientation is a great strength and has a positive impact on student, parent and community engagement.

It was evident that the school administration and Board are developing an understanding of the role of the Board in the governance of the school. Together, they are establishing processes that will ensure that required policies, documentation and operating procedures are effective.

Staff are aware that curriculum and teaching practices need to be well supported to ensure they remain pedagogically responsive. New approaches and contemporary technologies are integrated into existing teaching practices to enhance student learning opportunities. A corresponding consistent approach to pastoral care complements the learning program and supports the development of behaviourally and socially responsible students who have a developing sense of self-worth and ability to learn.

The school's whole-child approach is based on common understandings which support productive behaviours across the whole school. All stakeholders welcome the commonality of expectations and understand that it serves as a platform for all parties to use in lifting standards.

The staff actively seek and respond to performance data from a wide range of sources. This includes information sourced from staff, students, parents and the wider community, as well as student achievement. While the current Business Plan focuses mainly on NAPLAN achievement data, it was evident through the review process that the school employs a range of data collection practices. It is recommended the next iteration of the Business Plan reflects the range of data collection sources the school employs as an adjunct to NAPLAN results to monitor student performance and achievement.

The school's planning documents indicate it is appropriately implementing the Western Australian Curriculum. This was observed in action by reviewers' visits to classrooms.

There is also careful attention to integrating operational plan targets, Department of Education initiatives and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership standards into the performance management process, thereby providing a focus for continuous improvement in an environment of collegial support.

The staff is developing a systematic structure for gathering evidence as part of the self-assessment process. This is framed around analysis of student achievement and review of activity in the areas of literacy and numeracy, teaching and learning and resources. Each review area is considered in terms of articulated milestone points, action taken and forward planning.

At present, there are two processes employed in planning for improvement: the Business Plan and the annual Operational Plan. It is recommended that both plans are more overtly linked to provide the Board with a more comprehensive picture of progress toward achievement of Business Plan targets. Further work on developing the model as a single framework will enhance the overall self-assessment process. It will also provide continuity for the collaborations currently occurring between teachers, which are enhancing their instructional skills while addressing common student performance deficits.

The school's self-assessment model, as it stands, and is continuing to develop, involves the school leaders, staff and the Board and is reflected in the annual reports.

The Board demonstrated to the reviewers that it has a spread of expertise and independence that enables it to fulfil its governance role effectively. Cyclic self-reviews of its effectiveness, as well as detailed reviews of the school's performance, are an integral part of this.

The staff demonstrated that resource management and workforce planning are appropriately and effectively targeted to align with the DPA and school priorities. There is a comprehensive set of practices that ensure performance is sustained and improved. Staff have appropriate access to resources and professional learning to sustain their roles within the school. The school is well placed to maintain its drive to improve student and school performance.

Conclusion

It was evident to the reviewers that Little Grove Primary School has used the targets of the Business Plan to drive a culture of continual improvement within the school. Discussions with members of the Board, the teaching and support staff, parents and students confirmed that the school has established a positive and collaborative culture within its community.

The focus on enabling all students to achieve their academic and social potential informs school planning. It combines the learning needs of students, the professional knowledge and enthusiasm of the staff and the expectations of the community to create quality learning and teaching programs to maximise the educational opportunities for each student.

The school has created a comprehensive school improvement cycle which links data collection and analysis and other significant drivers to the key focus areas of the Business Plan and hence the annual operational plans. This improvement cycle will be fundamental to the development of the next Business Plan.

Commendations

The following areas are commended:

- the annual analysis of progress towards the targets of the Business Plan and its use in assessing the effectiveness of programs
- the culture of professional engagement among all members of staff evident in the professional learning group's focus on both teaching and learning programs and on school values
- the establishment of two teaching blocks, K–2 and 3–7, with allocated block planning time to achieve coherence in learning programs and provide opportunity for cross-setting to support effective teaching of literacy and numeracy
- the use of data from parent and community surveys to inform and determine key focus areas in the school strategic and operational plans
- the engagement of parents and community groups in school programs, particularly the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden and associated sustainability initiatives.

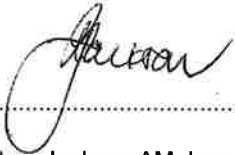
Areas for Improvement

The following areas for improvement are identified:

- more overtly link the annual Operational Plan and the Business Plan to provide the Board with a more comprehensive picture of progress toward achievement of Business Plan targets
- reflect in the next iteration of the Business Plan the range of data collection sources that the school employs as an adjunct to NAPLAN results to monitor student performance and achievement.

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 Little Grove 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.



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Mrs Audrey Jackson AM, Lead Reviewer

15 July 2015

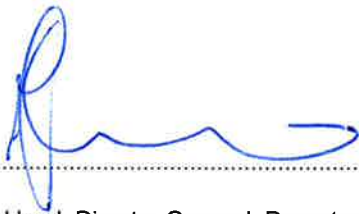
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Dr Steffan Silcox, Reviewer

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Mr Richard Strickland, Director General, Department of Education Services

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