Review details

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

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

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

This External School Review has evaluated:

- the school’s self-review processes and findings,
- the school’s achievement data and progress over time,
- the outcomes of the meetings and interviews with representatives from the school, and
- parent and student views about the school.

The External School Review included an analysis of the school’s key policies and procedures.

The support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community is acknowledged.

This External School Review was conducted by Liz Matheson, Review Officer and Steve Freeman, Review Principal.
Policy compliance

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

The Principal of Meningie Area School has verified that the school is working towards being compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal of Meningie Area School advised of the actions being undertaken to ensure compliance with the following DECD policies:

- Aspect of Governance: Collaborative review and development of the School Improvement Plan
- Aspect of Governance: Collaborative development of the school’s strategic directions
- School Organisation: Under review.

Implementation of the DECD Student Attendance Policy was checked specifically against a documented set of criteria. The school has implemented comprehensive tracking and intervention processes, and was found to be compliant with this policy. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 85.9% which is lower than the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Meningie Area School (MAS) is located 150 kilometres south east of Adelaide in the Murray and Mallee Region. Meningie is near the Coorong, on the south-eastern shores of Lake Albert, one of the Lower Lakes at the end of the River Murray. The surrounding district and community were seriously affected by reductions in water flow and the drought. Dairying was the major industry; however, of the 42 dairies that were functioning in 2006, only six remain operational. This has been a major factor in declining enrolments for the school.

There is a significant Aboriginal Ngarrindjeri population from Camp Coorong, from the township of Meningie and from the Raukkan Aboriginal Community, 45 kilometres away. The current percentage of ATSI students (37.5% in 2015) increased since the closure of Narrung School and changes at Raukkan Aboriginal School in 2008. Students from Raukkan Aboriginal School transition to MAS in Year 6. Buses bring students to the school from as far as Salt Creek, 65 kilometres away.

The school caters for students from Reception to Year 12. The current enrolment is 181 students. The school has an ICSEA score of 854, and is classified as Category 2 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school population includes 4.6% Students with Disabilities, 44% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), and 1 student under the Guardianship of the Minister (GoM). Approximately 27% of students travel to school by bus.

The school’s senior leadership team consists of a Principal in the last year of her second tenure, a Deputy Principal, and two Senior Leaders. Many teachers have been employed at Meningie Area School for over 10 years. Due to the falling enrolments, they have been required to teach outside their area of initial training or specialisation.
Lines of inquiry

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

**Student Learning:** How are students achieving over time?

**Effective Teaching:** How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

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

**School-Community Partnerships:** To what extent does parent engagement with the school impact on student learning?

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

How well are students achieving over time?

In the early years, reading is monitored against Running Records. In 2014, 53% of Year 1 and 60% of Year 2 students achieved the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) or above.

In 2014, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 75% of Year 3 students, 75% of Year 5 students, 54% of Year 7 students and 47% of Year 9 students achieved the SEA.

This compares to an average of 68% for Year 3, 52% for Year 5, 54% for Year 7 and 50% for Year 9 students achieving the SEA during the period 2008 to 2013. The school’s achievement in 2014 was higher than the historical average achievement in Years 3 and 5, and the same or close to the historical achievement in Years 7 and 9. There has been an upward trend in Year 5 reading achievement for the past 3 years.

In relation to students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands, 37.5% (i.e. 9 out of 24 students) were in Year 3 and 31% (i.e. 5 out of 16 students) were in Year 5. No student achieved in the upper two bands in Year 7, and 1 student (out of a total of 19) was in Year 9.

In 2015, the growth in reading achievement from Years 3 to 5 showed that 57% of students made low progress compared with 0% making high progress. From Years 5 to 7, the percentage of students making low progress was 40% compared with 0% making high progress and from Years 7 to 9, the percentage making low progress was 42% compared with 17% making high progress. The expected low and high growth across South Australia is 25%.

In 2014, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 79% of Year 3 students, 75% of Year 5 students, 38% of Year 7 students and 37% of Year 9 students achieved the SEA.

This compares to an average of 56% for Year 3, 45% for Year 5, 48% for Year 7 and 48% for Year 9 students achieving the SEA during the period of 2008 to 2013. The school’s achievement in 2014 was higher than the historical average achievement in Years 3 and 5. There is a 3-year upward trend in Year 5 from 43% in 2012 to 75% in 2014.

In relation to students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands, 25% were in Year 3 and 12.5% were in Year 5. One student achieved in the upper two bands in Year 7, and 0 students in Year 9.

In 2015, the growth in numeracy achievement from Years 3 to 5 showed that 14% of students made low progress compared with 29% making high progress. From Years 5 to 7, the percentage of students making low progress was 30% compared with 20% making high progress, and from Years 7 to 9, the percentage making low progress...
progress was 40% compared with 0% making high progress. The expected low and high growth across South Australia is 25%.

In relation to the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE), all of the potential students enrolled in 2014 completed their SACE. This compared with 77.8% in 2011, 83.3% in 2012 and 80% in 2013. The percentage of grades that were achieved at a ‘C’ or above for attempted subjects was 92%. During the Review, the panel heard from Year 10 to 12 students who have participated in VET and school-based apprenticeships.

Meningie Area School has been using a range of data sets for at least 3 years to track student achievement and attendance over time. The Principal provided data to the Review Panel on the reading comprehension growth as measured by PAT-R, which showed some students improving by over 15 points on the scaled score over the 3-year period. The school has highlighted those students below the year level standard to show teachers what they need to focus on. This process is adopted for PAT-M, Westwood Spelling Test, Language and Literacy levels (EALD students), PAT-AGAT (which measures general knowledge and worldliness). Teachers allocate grades using the Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards. Three semesters of this data show a significant number of students are achieving Ds and Es in English in Years 5 to 8. In semester 1 2015, 4 students gained an ‘E’ in English in Year 7 and 5 in Year 8. Students indicated to the Review Panel that they found writing tasks difficult. In Term 2, over a 10 week period, the school was required to collect and report evidence in accordance with the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) requirements. The Junior Primary (JP) has ongoing assessment processes in relation to phonics and reading acquisition.

The Principal has mapped all of the school’s summative assessment processes across the school year, and there is significant commitment and time given to ensure all the students complete these assessments. While some of these processes are mandatory, it would seem timely for the school to review and refine its data collection expectation and schedules.

**How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?**

The Reception to Year 3 (Junior Primary) section of Meningie Area School has been working consistently and strategically towards improvement since 2011. The school became increasingly aware that oral language was a foundation stone upon which to build students’ literacy and numeracy skills. This awareness has been informed by international research and the school's framework, and instructional practices have been heavily influenced by a Speech Pathologist with expertise in teaching oral language (Oral Language Pie). This approach has been underpinned by the understanding that listening comprehension precedes reading comprehension as students engage with increasingly more complex texts.

The Junior Primary has developed a document called “Mapping the R–3 Student Progress Against Targets”, outlining assessment and planning expectations. Assessment in oral language (receptive language), reading, word recognition and spelling, is used to determine their level of proficiency to measure the progress each student makes and to match the assessed learning needs with instructional strategies. Over the past 5 years, the Junior Primary team have also utilised EALD pedagogy to incorporate the stages of development from ‘building the field’ (vocabulary and concepts), modelling and deconstructing, joint construction to independent writing. The Review Panel saw evidence that their work on oral language has permeated the rest of the school as teachers in older year levels intentionally ‘build the field’. The Junior Primary has also utilised Domain 3 in the DECD Teaching for Effective Learning (TFEL) Framework by promoting dialogue as a means of learning, which aligns with their focus on oral language.

To ensure a consistent approach to assessment and grading, the Junior Primary team have documented the skills students need to demonstrate to achieve a C or above in English, Maths and Geography. The school has based this work on the DECD Language and Literacy Levels, the SEA and Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards to develop this document. The Junior Primary documents provide visual evidence of students’ academic progress. They also serve as a guide for discussion, reflection and review of student progress, as well as informing future direction planning.

The school disaggregates the achievement data of Aboriginal students so that they can evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies to support this cohort. The results of this work are evident in the 2015 NAPLAN reading test, in which 9 out of 12 students achieved their SEA and above, with 3 students achieving in the
higher bands. The achievement in writing mirrored that of reading. Of the 3 Year 3 Indigenous students who sat the writing test, one student achieved band 5, another achieved band 4 and a third achieved band 3.

The Review Panel met with 36 students from Years 4 to 12 to talk about how they are progressing, how they know and what teachers do to support and stretch their learning. Several students talked about the positive impact Multi-Lit and Quicksmart had on their reading and numeracy fluency as a key intervention strategy. Other students talked about how teachers demonstrate, are willing to provide extra explanation and give assignments and rubrics which show the criteria for assessment. They talked about the study ladder, the website tutorials, interactive games and a maths rotational cycle as activities that helped to motivate them in maths lessons. They provided examples of practical experiments in science when learning about generation of electricity and astronomy. In English Language class, they get their choice of book for silent reading, do quizzes, and write a paragraph about the book. Students talked about copying off the board, the use of text books and not being clear on the purpose of the lesson as practices that least helped them in their learning.

Students in Years 10 to 12 were very complimentary about how the Personal Learning Plan (PLP) had helped them develop personal capabilities of persistence and independence, evidenced by their preparedness to do 5 or 6 drafts of their assignments. Teachers find out students’ interests and aspirations through the PLP and VIP (Vocational Industry Pathways) processes. All of the 12 students, with whom the panel spoke in these year levels, talked about their short and long-term goals, how teachers were aware of their interests and connected their learning to real-life contexts. Many of the senior students at Meningie Area School have participated in Vocational Educational Training (VET) courses and obtained the relevant certificates, whilst others were either engaged in school-based apprenticeships or were endeavouring to achieve entry into university. A long-term member of the Governing Council confirmed teachers had worked successfully with employers in the community to open up opportunities for senior students.

Assessment criteria and rubrics have been developed by many teachers in a range of subject areas in Years 4 to 12. The summative assessments in SACE and VET courses (e.g. Certificate 1 Education and Skills Development, Certificate 2 Community Activities) are clearly aligned to performance standards. The Review Panel sighted assessment rubrics in Visual Arts, Mathematics, Science and English. Students talked positively about assessment rubrics as it gave them a better understanding of what teachers expected of their work. Students confirmed some teachers provide exemplars to show them the difference between a C and a D.

The students with whom the Review Panel spoke were less able to explain what they needed to do to improve. Their answers focused on learning behaviours such as: “listen more”, “try different strategies”, “ignore others so I can focus on my work”, “get better at reading”, “train my eyes to read faster”, “work on stuff you are not good at”. Students explained that the rubrics or grids (assessment checklist) are available but they don’t tell them how to improve to get a higher grade. A few students had improvement goals; however, these were mainly of a general nature, and were not routinely reviewed to ascertain whether they had been achieved. Many students also expressed a desire to have more information as to the purpose and relevance of why they learn certain things.

The school has been successful in supporting the majority of students to gain the foundational skills in reading, writing and numeracy, and approximately 30% of students have achieved in the upper proficiency bands in Years 3 and 5. It is therefore probable that the challenges facing teachers, particularly in year levels above Year 5, will be to meet the broad range of learners’ skills, to challenge and stretch those students at the upper end, and to continue to motivate and engage all the students within their classes.

As stated above, summative assessment rubrics and checklists are widely used at Meningie Area School. The clarity of the task and purpose of each lesson, as well as regularly checking understanding and adapting instruction, is critical to enabling students to achieve or exceed the summative performance (achievement) standards. There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ formative feedback. It is important to remember that feedback or formative assessment is only really effective when it is followed by effective instruction; it needs initial learning or surface concepts and skills to be built upon. Low-achieving students need early, structured, and corrective support by offering explicit guidance or directive feedback. For high-achieving students, verification and facilitative feedback in the form of accuracy checks, hints, cues, and prompts can be used.
Through performance development, teachers are asked what feedback they have collected from students to inform their teaching and learning program and practice. From talking to students, teachers and the Leadership Team, the Review Panel concluded the degree that teachers utilise formative assessment and feedback varies. When done well, these practices can complement the use of exemplars and assessment rubrics.

**Direction 1**

Further develop practices which utilise formative assessment feedback to ensure learning intentions are understood, and support is appropriately scaffolded and challenging, for the full range of learners.

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

Many teachers at Meningie Area School have been required to teach outside of their area of initial training and specialisation, to enable the school to continue to offer the breadth of opportunities for students, despite falling enrolments. Teachers have demonstrated their willingness to be flexible, adaptable and engage in professional development to support students at the school. Teachers talked to the Review Panel about their learning of the Australian Curriculum (particularly in Mathematics) and their recent PD to improve their pedagogy. One teacher talked about the recent training enabling her to gain a deeper understanding of the curriculum, such as why students need to learn to apply formulas, which will enable her to provide greater clarity on the purpose of the learning.

Both experienced and early career teachers talked about the professional discussions and exchange of ideas and resources that occurs across faculties and year levels. The Review Panel was provided with examples by teachers of their collaborative work, informally, as well as through the more formal staff meeting and PLC structures, to support students academically and socially. Teachers talk to each other about the learning and wellbeing needs of individual students and are working to provide curriculum coherence and consistency for learners.

At the staff meeting, attended by the Review Panel, teachers shared examples of units of work they designed for students during Term 3. Teachers demonstrated commitment to support all students and to provide engaging tasks that keep them motivated, even when literacy and numeracy levels are low in the secondary years. There were examples of cross-curricula learning, building language about the topic, hands on learning experiences, scaffolding so that students progress from sounds to words to sentences. While teachers were able to describe the tasks and activities they had designed, the clarity of the purpose or learning intentions varied.

The Review Panel asked teachers what structure or process in the school had the greatest impact on their planning and teaching. Teachers talked about the recent English faculty Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting with the guidance of one of the Senior Leaders with a background in SACE. The 6 members of the PLC were deconstructing the Year 6 English curriculum to gain a deep knowledge of the scope and sequence and Achievement Standards at that level. The discussion involved looking at the summative assessment and what learning experiences would support students, particularly in scaffolding writing, to enable them to meet the assessment requirements. Additionally, there has been some moderation of students’ writing samples as a way of ensuring consistency in grading. In light of the number of students achieving Es and Ds in English in the last three semester reports, this initiative seems to be significant and strategic. The Leadership Team confirmed this PLC was operating effectively and supporting teachers to gain greater understanding of the importance of using formative assessment to guide their teaching and planning.

Performance development processes are designed to encourage teachers to use achievement data effectively and to be reflective about the quality of their planning and teaching. The Review Panel sighted three examples. This process can complement the work of the PLCs and the focus on collecting and responding to student feedback as a continuous process, consistently across the school and learning areas.

**Direction 2**

Strengthen the opportunities for staff to work collaboratively to develop their practices in assessment (formative and summative) and planning.
To what extent does parent engagement with the school impact on student learning?

As nearly a third of the students at Meningie Area School are of Indigenous background, the Review Panel was keen to hear from the Aboriginal Community Education Officer (ACEO), parents and students as to how well the school recognises and promotes Aboriginal culture. The ACEO has worked at the school for many years and appears to have strong relationships with all of the Aboriginal groups within the broader community. The students, parents and ACEO confirmed that bullying and racism is not frequent and that the school has clear procedures to deal with it. Aboriginal students were confident to speak to the Review Panel and indicated they were able to show pride in their cultural background at school. The ACEO indicated that a number of teachers sought her advice on how to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into curriculum topics.

The Review Panel was informed that over the years there have been discussions amongst the Aboriginal groups about the possibility of students at the school learning more about the Ngarrindjeri language and culture; however there have been various views about who should and could teach it and which dialect.

The school has worked closely with the Preschool Director and Principal of Raukkan Aboriginal School to ensure there is consistency in the approaches to oral language, phonics instruction and reading development. Students from Raukkan Aboriginal School are invited to attend school events, such as sports day, prior to transitioning to Meningie Area School in Year 6. Although the school has tried various strategies over the years, one of the parents indicated, from her own experience, it was still a jump for Year 6 students to go from a small school and close community of 18 students to a more diverse and larger school community. The current Principal has taken an active role in working with Aboriginal staff and the broader community, and it is critical that this strong leadership role continues into the future.

Direction 3
Continue to explore ways of promoting respectful and productive partnerships with parents of Aboriginal children and strengthen Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum.

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

Teachers provided examples of how they use the annual PAT and NAPLAN tests to identify gaps in students’ learning. At a whole-school level, student progress is tracked and the results are triangulated with attendance, Language and Literacy levels and the PAT test. Intervention programs are individually determined and are evaluated to ensure they are helping to make a difference to student outcomes.

The 2015 – 2018 Site Improvement Plan has 4 focus areas and 7 priorities. There is a strong alignment in the priorities and strategies with the DECD Strategic Plan and the Coorong/Mallee Partnership Plan. Considering the size and complexity of Meningie Area School, it seems to be an ambitious plan. It was not clear to the Review Panel how the actions emanating from the SIP were to be evaluated to determine their effectiveness. The plan included reference to school-wide expectations and procedures, such as those relating to the improvement of attendance and the anti-bullying strategic plan, which seem to be well-embedded into the school’s operations. The Governing Council was a strong advocate for the school; however, members were less informed about the SIP and what improvement the school was aiming to achieve.

The current key improvement challenge is to maintain and increase the number of students achieving in the higher proficiency bands, as well as increasing the numbers of students meeting the SEA in Years 7 and 9. The SIP needs to articulate the key strategies to get this desired lift and how it will be evaluated.

Direction 4
Refine the School Improvement Plan to ensure strategies are designed to achieve the desired lift in achievement, attendance and engagement and the impact of the actions can be measured and evaluated.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Meningie Area School has demonstrated growth in students’ learning outcomes in Years 3 and 5. The school tracks progress and uses this data for intervention and planning. There is a strong professional culture focussed on improvement.

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

1. Further develop practices which utilise formative assessment feedback to ensure learning intentions are understood, and support is appropriately scaffolded and challenging, for the full range of learners.

2. Strengthen the opportunities for staff to develop their practices in assessment (formative and summative) and planning.

3. Continue to explore ways of promoting respectful and productive partnerships with parents of Aboriginal children and strengthen Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum.

4. Refine the School Improvement Plan to ensure strategies are designed to achieve the desired lift in achievement, attendance and engagement and the impact of the actions can be measured and evaluated.

Based on the school’s current performance, Meningie Area School will be externally reviewed again in 2019.

[Signatures]

Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Anne Millard  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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.

[Signatures]

Monica Williams  
PRINCIPAL  
MENINGIE AREA SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson