EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW
REPORT FOR COOBER PEDY AREA SCHOOL
Conducted in May 2015
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 Tony Sullivan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Ann Prime, 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 Coober Pedy 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:

- Governance Item 2: the collaborative development of the Site Improvement Plan (SIP) through Governing Council will be completed in 2015.
- Governance Item 3: collaborative engagement of Governing Council in self-review in a formal and coherent way will be developed throughout 2015.
- Governance Item 5: Governing Council will work collaboratively with the Principal in developing an update of the Site Improvement Plan through the Annual Report process throughout 2015 and beyond.
- Governance Item 6: the approved budget will be linked to the newly formulated SIP.
- Teaching and Learning Item 8: the school's professional learning program will align with the SIP once completed and endorsed by Governing Council.
- HR Management Item 3: the school will ensure that performance plans are developed for all staff throughout 2015.
- Safety Item 2: staff and volunteers will have current training in RAN as per their obligations in child protection.
- Safety Item 4: A volunteer policy in accordance with DECD guidelines will be developed and endorsed by Governing Council in 2015.
- Site Procedures Item 2: Business Manager and on-line documentation and assurance will be made current in 2015.

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 73.1%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context
Coober Pedy Area School is a unique school in the northern part of the state, catering for students from Preschool to Year 12. The school has an ICSEA score of 829, and is classified as Category 1 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The enrolment has fluctuated between 216 to 299 students over the past 5 years. The data extracted from the enrolment census in November 2014 documented an enrolment of 273.

The school population includes 13% (36) students with a Disability, 41% (112) Aboriginal students, 54% (147) students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) background and approximately 40% of families that are eligible for school card assistance.

The leadership consists of the Principal, three Senior Leaders, Aboriginal Education Coordinator and two School Counsellors. The Principal is an experienced leader in his first year of appointment to the school. Leadership roles exist in the structure to influence Senior Years, Middle Years and Early Years of schooling.
Lines of inquiry
During the review process, the panel focused on three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

Student Learning:  How well are students achieving over time?
Effective Teaching:  How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?
Effective Leadership:  How effectively does the school leadership foster a culture of learning?

How well are students achieving over time?

Two cautionary notes need to be applied before evaluating the following data. Firstly, the cohort numbers for the tested year levels are relatively small. Secondly, the student numbers (and therefore percentages) absent from the assessments adversely impact the results.

Analysis of reading achievement through Years 1 and 2 from 2011 to 2014, indicate that an average 39% of Year 1 students (av. 9 students) achieved the expected DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA) and at Year 2, an average of 45% (av. 11 students) achieved this standard. For each of the year levels (3, 5, 7 and 9) in 2014, there was an average of 38% (av. 15 students) absent or withdrawn from NAPLAN participation. Absence or withdrawal from NAPLAN is recorded as not meeting the SEA. The reading achievement, of those sitting the tests, over the last four years (as measured by NAPLAN) showed an average of 44% of Year 3 (av. 9 students), 38% of Year 5 (av. 8 students), 41% of Year 7 (av. 7 students) and 40% of Year 9 (av. 6 students) at the SEA. The Year 7 cohorts show a declining trend from 58% (2011) to 19% (2014).

In relation to the percentage of students who achieved in the higher reading bands (as measured by NAPLAN) over the last seven years, there was, on average, 16% at Year 3, 7% at Year 5, 11% at Year 7 and 4% at Year 9 in the top two bands. Again, some caution must be noted due to low numbers of students in these cohorts.

The numeracy achievement of those sitting the tests, over the last four years (as measured by NAPLAN) shows an average of 46% of Year 3 (av. 10 students), 41% of Year 5 (av. 9 students), 38% of Year 7 (av. 6 students), and 33% of Year 9 (av. 5 students) at the SEA. In relation to the percentage of students who achieved in the higher numeracy bands (as measured by NAPLAN) over the last 7 years, there was, on average, 6% at Year 3, 4% at Year 5, 12% at Year 7 and 2% of Year 9 students in the top two bands. It was noted that the school received an ACARA commendation for demonstrating above average gains in 2014 NAPLAN results, compared to other schools with similar cohorts/starting points of students.

In considering SACE data over the past three years (2012 to 2014), there were patterns that needed cautionary consideration in light of small cohort numbers. Namely, an average of eighteen (18) Year 12 enrolments only, 67% of ‘C’- grades, or above, for attempted SACE subjects; an average of five (5) potential SACE completers; and, an average of three (3) SACE completers from the potential completers. The Principal reported a pattern of downward external moderation through SACE indicating a need for finer tuning with assessment and moderation throughout the secondary years.

The school has established literacy blocks in the school timetable for all early and primary years students, covering all components of reading and writing. An agreed writing genre map with a clear teaching and learning cycle was evident. The school has a literacy assessment schedule in place in support of monitoring and tracking student progress from Reception to Year 10 using a variety of assessment measures. In mathematics, the school uses PAT-Maths to monitor and track student achievement and growth from Year 2 to Year 10. The school has recently introduced numeracy blocks of time into the weekly timetable. It was verified that the school monitors student achievement and growth against the SEA.
The teachers assess student progress against the Australian Curriculum (AC) A to E standards and report these twice per year to parents. Report samples provided to the Review Panel demonstrated evidence of explicit reporting against the expectations in the AC. Such evidence of teacher judgement against the AC standards should be collected and aggregated as valued learning data and cross-referenced to other assessment information.

**Direction 1**
Design learning tasks and assessment criteria in collaborative staff teams that allow students to achieve higher standards against the AC. Moderate assessments in staff teams to further build staff capacity to design and assess learning with differentiated approaches in mind.

The above data pattern led the Review Panel to consider the following lines of inquiry.

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

The Review Panel viewed a DVD of students giving an insight into life as a young person in Coober Pedy and as a student at the school. The student perceptions were enlightening with respect to dealing with a contextual dimension of ‘shame’ about not feeling successful in the formal learning program at school and in needing to seek support with learning. This dimension is evident through the school data, namely: attendance rate, achievement levels, learning growth, behaviour and rates of SACE completion.

Students from the senior secondary years commented on their connection with some of their teachers. They commented about the importance of having positive relationships with teachers, and teachers knowing them as young people. Parents and students described inconsistencies in managing behaviours, maintaining work deadlines, expectations with homework, use of diaries for communication, consequences for non-work completion and class ‘reward’ practices. Such inconsistencies created uncertainty for students and parents with respect to learning expectations and standards across the school. Within the school context it is both consistency and certainty in attitudes, behaviours and expectations that will help create safe conditions for effective learning (see Domain 2 of Teaching for Effective Learning).

**Direction 2**
Raise the level of student achievement across the school by establishing and enacting staff agreed classroom expectations and practices that create consistency for student learning, taking into account the self-esteem and wellbeing of students.

**How effectively does the school leadership foster a culture of learning?**

Leadership members and staff noted a pattern of attendance drop-off at Year 5 and accompanying alternative placement from mainstream classes to the Deadly Centre program as a ‘fail safe’ for students who disengage through inappropriate behaviour. Leaders, teachers, parents and students all questioned the role and extent to which the Deadly Centre contributes to learning improvement across the school. Students interviewed during the review and on the DVD voiced high aspirations for their learning and futures. Such aspirations and positive mindsets voiced by students are commendable and must serve to guide decisions and actions undertaken to realise these goals, including the role of the Deadly Centre in ‘adding value’ to student learning in the mainstream.

The review verified positive comment from students and staff about the emerging direction of the Student Working Actively Together (SWAT) teams to engage students in school pride and ownership through authentic involvement and practical solution finding to emerging issues. Students voiced concern at the level of inappropriate language used in the school, particularly by younger students. This would appear to be an opportunity for student voice and action to come together to improve an identified student concern.
Direction 3
Review the purpose, role and function of the Deadly Centre using a variety of data sets, and redesign its capacity to deliver improved challenge, engagement and equity for identified students in the school.

The major challenge faced is getting students to come to school on a regular basis, as evidenced in the attendance data. To highlight this attendance challenge the school had an average attendance rate of 73% for all students in Reception to Year 12 in 2014. This equates to 50 days absence per student per year, or the equivalent of 650 days (over 3 years of schooling) absence for a student who enrolls from Reception through to Year 12.

As one member of the leadership stated: “Our number one goal is getting the kids here to school.” The school has established structures and practices in place to improve attendance, including a positive link to a nationally funded program called Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS), or locally known as ‘orange shirts’, involving members and parents of the school community. Students commented positively about the role of the ‘orange shirts’ team within the school in support of attendance improvement. The need to build sustainability of actions beyond the ‘life’ of this funding presents a challenge for the school in raising the rate of attendance. The school Student Wellbeing and Attendance Team (SWAT) met regularly to monitor, track, communicate and implement practical strategies to improve student attendance. A case management approach was used in addressing attendance. Staff comment indicated a need for joint professional responsibility from all staff in enacting the attendance policy.

There is a preschool onsite with a newly appointed teacher. The preschool recently achieved an ‘excellent’ rating through a National Quality Standard assessment. Foundations for learning, attendance and positive mindsets are best established early, and there is an opportunity to build this link further across the early years teaching team to connect curriculum and pedagogical continuum for student success. Members of the ‘orange shirts’ team also confirmed the key links to children and parents in playgroup and preschool in establishing positive habits for schooling, including attendance. Oral language development was a consistent focus within the recent preschool program and this is an evidence-based precursor for successful literacy learning. This aspect was verified by senior staff and parents through discussion and needs to be embedded as a programmed approach to literacy improvement.

Direction 4
Raise attendance levels across the school using a targeted strategic approach with a particular emphasis on establishing strong habits and patterns through the preschool and early years of schooling.

Direction 5
Strategically target interventions for improved attendance across all year levels using attendance team data, and support teaching staff in their responsibility to implement, monitor and follow up planned interventions.

It was verified that the teachers plan and assess using the AC and SACE as the curriculum frameworks from Reception to Year 12. The school has a staff agreement about literacy implementation across Reception to Year 10 and the AC was the reference for staff planning. Given the attendance patterns and presenting gaps in student achievement it would be of benefit for the staff team to collaboratively develop a scope and sequence of ‘core’ concepts to be explicitly taught in literacy and numeracy as a basis to engage students with the broader curriculum at Coober Pedy Area School.

This work will serve to support the continuity in learning for students and provide a basic foundation for success. It will also support new teachers inducted into the school and provide a clear framework for planning and teaching basic conceptual knowledge and skills to engage students in the broader curriculum offered at the school.
Direction 6
Lift student achievement and growth as learners by developing a ‘core’ scope and sequence of literacy and numeracy knowledge, concepts and skills that will support and enable successful engagement with the broader curriculum offered at the school.

Undertaking work on curriculum design to meet the presenting needs of students within the Coober Pedy context cannot be done without considering the teaching practices applied to deliver the ‘core’ curriculum and broader curriculum in a way that engages students through multiple entry points. As a member of the leadership team said: “Differentiation is the biggest teaching focus for us.” A teacher also commented on the need to unpack the meaning of differentiation to create clarity of understanding about what this means in teaching practice.

Some staff commented about access to professional learning and feeling supported by members of the leadership team in support of their professional growth. One staff member commented: “There was not a lot of collaboration last year” between teaching staff. Two staff commented about working together to team teach while others said that they “hadn’t opened doors yet.” Leaders and teachers verified the importance of peer observations in classrooms and the feedback that was provided to teachers. Staff confirmed the importance of working in teaching hubs and the commitment of time to meet in teams with one staff member saying: “I think we can create more time to meet.”

As one of the leadership team commented: “The school cannot work alone”, in its efforts to improve learning for students. These profound words also apply to the work of teachers in planning, delivering and assessing learning across the school. Parent observation confirmed a difference in the way primary and secondary teachers assess and report on learning. Review Panel observation at a Year 6 to 9 staff team meeting revealed positive intent to review curriculum delivery in a structural sense to ensure coverage and curriculum integration where the school resources support such opportunities. Discussion among staff centred on the need to integrate the curriculum in more ways than is currently undertaken. The Review Panel noted the school’s capacity to integrate learning through a variety of ways to enrich experiences for students.

The panel verified the use of effective teaching practice across the school but there was not sufficient evidence that these practices were implemented as a focused whole-school approach to improvement. Some of the effective practices evident in some classes included: using strategies to gauge student understanding of learning intentions (traffic lights/coloured cups), class scaffolds for students to self-assess writing standards for the year level (5 star writing), use of assessment rubrics, mentoring, assessment moderation, teaching differentiation and student goal-setting with fortnightly reflection. Creating consistency in the delivery of agreed effective teaching practices across the school presents an opportunity for teacher capacity building and consistency for students across all levels of schooling.

There was clear evidence of the school’s capacity to undertake self-review effectively and plan its improvement agenda in a strategic way. The leadership team presented as a united team with capacity to lead curriculum and pedagogical initiatives across all sections of the school. Teaching staff are valued by leaders, students and parents and the Review Panel collected evidence about effective teaching practice in the school. There was evidence of genuine positive intent by all staff and parents to improve the learning outcomes for students at the school. Achieving alignment between all of these components presents a significant improvement opportunity for the school.

Direction 7
Improve the level of challenge and engagement in learning through supporting staff to collaboratively plan, implement and assess for learning using consistent differentiated approaches across all levels of schooling.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Coober Pedy Area School is experiencing challenges in a number of areas. Achievement and growth of student learning is significantly less than expected. Student attendance and turnover of teaching staff make continuity and consistency of learning problematic for students at the school. As a consequence, there has been limited success in developing an agreed whole-school approach to curriculum and pedagogical initiatives that support students within the school context. There are a number of non-compliance issues identified in the collaborative relationship with the Governing Council with respect to self-review, site improvement planning and annual reporting.

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

1. Design learning tasks and assessment criteria in collaborative staff teams that allow students to achieve higher standards against the AC. Moderate assessments in staff teams to further build staff capacity to design and assess learning with differentiated approaches in mind.

2. Raise the level of student achievement across the school by establishing and enacting staff agreed classroom expectations and practices that create consistency for student learning, taking into account the self-esteem and wellbeing of students.

3. Review the purpose, role and function of the Deadly Centre using a variety of data sets, and redesign its capacity to deliver improved challenge, engagement and equity for identified students in the school.

4. Raise attendance levels across the school using a targeted strategic approach with a particular emphasis on establishing strong habits and patterns through the preschool and early years of schooling.

5. Strategically target interventions for improved attendance across all year levels using attendance team data, and support teaching staff in their responsibility to implement, monitor and follow up planned interventions.

6. Lift student achievement and growth as learners by developing a ‘core’ scope and sequence of literacy and numeracy knowledge, concepts and skills that will support and enable successful engagement with the broader curriculum offered at the school.

7. Improve the level of challenge and engagement in learning through supporting staff to collaboratively plan, implement and assess for learning using consistent differentiated approaches across all levels of schooling.

Based on the school’s current performance, Coober Pedy Area School will be externally reviewed again in 2016.

Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
PRESCHOOL AND SCHOOL 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.

Mark Ireland  
PRINCIPAL  
Coober Pedy Area School

SARAH COUTO
Governing Council Chairperson