

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

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Report for Mount Burr Primary School

Conducted in November 2017



**Government of South Australia**

Department for Education and  
Child Development

### **Review details**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*This External School Review was conducted by Tony Sullivan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Christine Bell, Review Principal.*

## School context

Mount Burr Primary School caters for children from Reception to Year 7. It is situated 390kms south-east of the Adelaide CBD, and is part of the South-East Coast and Vines Partnership. The current enrolment is 55 students, and has been relatively stable. The school is classified as Category 3 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school's ICSEA score is 957.

The school population includes 1 Aboriginal student, 4 students with disabilities, 33 families eligible for School Card assistance, and 3 students in care.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in her second tenure at the school. The school comprises three classes. There are approximately 4FTE teaching staff.

## Lines of Inquiry

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

**School Community Partnerships:** How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and to what extent is it impacting on student learning?

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

**Improvement Agenda:** How well does the school evaluate the effectiveness of its strategies?

**Effective Teaching:** To what extent does the design of learning tasks and moderation in assessment enable students to demonstrate success in learning?

**How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and to what extent is it impacting on student learning?**

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

Over many years the school has focused on improving the culture to one of high expectation for its students, primarily through engaging them in authentic ways in their learning and experiences at school. The voice of students was encouraged in aspects of school life, both in the classroom and beyond. The students are explicitly taught the language to use in learning and getting along with others. As the Principal stated: "Everything is about learning".

In interviewing students and observing classes during the review, the panel verified that students are articulate in talking about their learning. They can explain the purpose of learning goals, curriculum standards, questioning, working independently and collaboratively as natural aspects of learning. This was also verified through interviewing staff and parents on Governing Council.

The middle and upper primary classes use a 'community of inquiry' approach to learning where student prior knowledge and questioning are key approaches in co-constructing the learning. The panel observed this approach with a class co-constructing the technical elements of a text type in writing, and observed its transfer back into the classroom with recorded scaffolds for application at a later time.

The junior primary class also developed co-constructed learning through intentional play and developing their 'wonderings', by generating their questions prior to engaging in a specific topic of inquiry. The teacher had discussed the 'struggle' that needed to happen when undertaking new learning, and used the 'learning pit', analogy to encourage students to persist when learning gets hard. The younger students had drawn their versions of the 'pit' and used this language during class observations by the Review Panel members.

The class walls were covered with student questions and records displaying their thinking about particular subjects covered. The purpose, as stated by the teacher, was: "We want to know about their thinking". Photos and ClassDojo were used by teachers as evidence of learning and supplementary reporting to parents.

The first two weeks of the school year are used to establish the language of 'growth mindsets' with students for the forthcoming year. Staff and students verified this during interviews. Classroom displays (Billy Learner) reinforced this emphasis on developing positive attitudes to learning and using consistent language across the school to help shape a positive culture for learning. This 'language for learning' was evident on walls located throughout the school.

Evidence was presented of teachers unpacking the curriculum standards and making these more explicit for students through class discussions and displays. Teachers also made assessment criteria clearer for students through the use of rubrics and scaffolds using Bloom's taxonomies, for students to show their learning in a variety of ways. A number of these exemplars were made available to the panel during the review. In the junior primary class, the general capabilities were on display, and students considered how they showed these dispositions during 'play sessions' by having their comments recorded. For the upper primary students the general capabilities were built into documented assessment rubrics used by students.

Students engage in peer-tutoring in reading with older students supporting younger ones. Students are trained to assist in this role. During an interview the older students spoke about providing both positive feedback and improvement feedback to their peers. They confirmed that rubrics were used with peers to show whether they were at, above or below the expected standard. Students verified that the standard of achievement was a 'C' or better. They are aware that rubrics offer different levels of challenge for them and that they have the opportunity to strive for higher grades.

Student-led goal-setting is undertaken with teachers and parents, at least once per term, as a strategy to ensure students are clear about where and how to improve. Students are also required to present evidence that verifies the achievement of their goals. Older students meet with their teacher before reports are sent home so that they are able to articulate their achievement to parents. All staff, students and parents interviewed confirmed that this approach is working well, and places students in the centre of the school improvement agenda. Staff, parents and students also confirmed that learning data from in-school and external school assessments are used to inform the goal-setting process.

Students are provided opportunities to provide feedback to their teachers. The Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) Compass has been used by students to give feedback to teachers about the approaches used with them. It was verified that this feedback has been analysed and teachers have adjusted their questioning techniques with students in response to this information.

Older students are required to reflect on their learning weekly, and record their perceptions into a learning journal that is collected and commented on by the teacher to ensure the student is 'on-track'. The journals were made available to the panel and demonstrated a tight commitment to this process. Upper primary students interviewed confirmed that they have more of a say within the school. They confirmed that the process of questioning was purposely designed to cause them to think. One student commented: "They want us to challenge ourselves". Students acknowledged the importance of STEM learning to their futures and voiced their pride at Mount Burr Primary School being the lead school for this initiative.

Teachers have introduced 'workshops' during lesson times when students may choose to meet with a teacher to seek further support, direction or understanding with a particular concept being taught. This was confirmed in interviews with students and staff, and in documentation in student journals. Volunteer teachers (retired) support this process during their time at the school. Students confirmed they are able to move into and out of workshops as needed.

Teachers, students and parents verified that students also connect to school improvement outside the classroom with other community groups. A number of examples were cited, such as the junior nature play area and the primary playground design project. Comments related to the fact that they were developing designs and models rather than 'just talking about it'.

Parent engagement within the school has also been streamlined to connect principally about student learning. Students, staff and parents spoke highly of the following school initiatives engaging parents: student-led assemblies, student gallery walks with parents, staff-led pop-up workshops for parents on key

improvement topics and 3-way goal-setting. Pop-up workshops have included the following topics: A-E grading system, listening to reading, Jolly Phonics and STEM. Parents confirmed the value and importance of these sessions in helping them to understand the school's improvement agenda.

Parents confirmed that the goal-setting process enabled them to directly engage in their child's learning and in monitoring the progress along the way. Parents indicated that the goals were often modified so that they had a direct link to expectations and dispositions that could be observed at home. They affirmed that assemblies showcase learning undertaken by the students and attain close to 100% parent attendance.

Parents on Governing Council verified that they receive relevant and timely information related to the school's improvement initiatives and performance. Governing Council confirmed their contribution in developing the school's improvement plan, and believe they are afforded opportunities to influence the direction of the school in collaboration with the Principal and staff.

#### **Direction 1**

**Embed the existing high-leverage strategies across the school that facilitate authentic student engagement, ownership and empowerment in learning.**

### **How well does the school evaluate the effectiveness of its strategies?**

The school staff collect learning data in a systematic way over the course of the academic year. This process is mapped out on a documented annual schedule and implemented by the teachers. The data is used to refine the priorities on the school's Site Improvement Plan (SIP), and is analysed for student misconceptions resulting in the 're-teaching' of missed concepts. The learning 'gaps' identified also inform the process to establish learning goals in 3-way interviews with students, teachers and parents.

Data from various sources (system and school-based) is used to diagnose and intervene at a school level. There is evidence that teachers cross-reference datasets to determine if there are consistent patterns between the various assessments. This is evidenced with the PAT Reading and PAT Maths assessments, where teachers identified differences in individual student performance between these assessments and NAPLAN. Evidence was presented that showed that these patterns were followed through to a specific targeted action by the school.

The school is monitoring the effect of its impact on student learning through NAPLAN results and this is to be commended. It has measured the growth over two years in numeracy, and aspects of literacy, and determined that the school should focus on writing improvement. At the individual level, the school also tracks each student's learning growth over two years using the mean scores and proficiency band achievement.

The panel confirmed the school schedules a pupil-free day in Term 4 each year to analyse the school data, to determine levels of improvement in student learning, and areas requiring a focus in the teaching and learning program. Sustained improvement work takes time to embed, and it is important that staff consider available data over time as an indicator of impact of the improvement strategies being implemented. Patterns and trends over time provide another valuable insight into determining what strategies are working and what curriculum emphases should be brought into focus.

The Review Panel considered the need for the school to implement agreed whole-school teaching strategies for impact over shorter periods of time, collect evidence of impact, refine where necessary, and consolidate the strategies that work. This shorter improvement cycle will enable staff to plan, implement, observe and reflect on the identified strategies as a team, and value other evidence (beyond NAPLAN annually) to determine improvement and celebrate success as a school.

The school's document titled 'An Agreed Approach to Teaching Literacy 2017' has such an improvement cycle described on the front cover. This cycle could be adapted to accommodate the 'fast-paced' approach with a small and dynamic staff team of Mount Burr Primary School. The staff team possesses proven capacity to deliver evidence-based teaching strategies, collect and analyse a range of class data and evidence, and the adaptability to apply said improvement cycle with integrity.

**Direction 2**

**Implement an evidence-based and regular school self-evaluation cycle that monitors, tracks and refines the implementation of agreed teaching strategies leading to improved student learning growth and achievement over time.**

**To what extent does the design of learning tasks and moderation in assessment enable students to demonstrate success in learning?**

Two staff engaged in recent training that has focused on the important aspect of moderating student learning against the Australian Curriculum standards. It is critical that this work is developed further, particularly as it aligns with the strategies being applied currently to ensure the students know, understand and demonstrate outcomes consistent with their individual year level standard.

As Mount Burr Primary School has only relatively small cohorts of students in each year level, it is important to confirm through in-school and external moderation with other schools, that students are provided with the best opportunities to achieve at or above the expected standard in its current curriculum priorities of numeracy, writing, reading and STEM.

The school has been collecting and collating A-E grade data over time, and presented this to the panel as one of its datasets to track student achievement against 'standards' – a 'C' grade being the required standard for each year level from Year 1 to 7. Given the relatively small proportion of 'A' and 'B' grades assigned for Year 2 to 5 students, there may be some benefit in furthering the work to design and moderate learning as a staff team, so that students may more ably demonstrate 'above standard' performance via this measure.

**Direction 3**

**Continue to work collaboratively to develop learning task design and moderation in assessment, to enable students to demonstrate successful outcomes in learning.**

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

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

**The Principal and staff work collectively to ensure students are provided with highly effective and evidenced-based teaching practices that engage and encourage students to achieve their personal best.** The staff team is highly competent and professional. They work well together as a collaborative team and are clearly focused on delivering the best outcomes for students at the school.

The staff are fully committed to delivering an approach to learning that places authentic student voice as a central component to the teaching and learning program. Students are developing an understanding of the expectations described in the curriculum, that is, standards, general capabilities and proficiencies in an explicit way within the learning program. This was clearly evident from Reception to Year 7. Teachers are making learning explicit for students so that they understand what it takes to be successful in schooling and in future pathways. This was evident in all facets of the External School Review process.

## OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

Mount Burr Primary School has developed a culture of improvement characterised by actively engaging students in the learning process and maintaining high expectations for outcomes of identified goals. The school works in close collaboration with students and parents in building and maintaining a culture of learning. The staff are working collaboratively and professionally to provide a connected and coherent learning program that fully engages students in authentic and meaningful ways.

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

1. Embed the existing high-leverage strategies across the school that facilitate authentic student engagement, ownership and empowerment in learning.
2. Implement an evidence-based and regular school self-evaluation cycle that monitors, tracks and refines the implementation of agreed teaching strategies leading to improved student learning growth and achievement over time.
3. Continue to work collaboratively to develop learning task design and moderation in assessment, to enable students to demonstrate successful outcomes in learning.

Based on the school's current performance, Mount Burr Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND  
PRESCHOOLS

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

Anne-Marie Fitzgerald  
PRINCIPAL  
MOUNT BURR PRIMARY SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson

## Appendix One

### Policy compliance

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

The Principal of Mount Burr Primary 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 5 Safety: Review the cyber safety policy with particular reference to the establishment of a school Facebook page.

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 compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2016 was 92%.

## Appendix Two

### School Performance Overview

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

*In considering the data below, there needs to be some caution in making a judgement due to the low numbers represented in the student cohorts at the school. This is done for two reasons: to overcome the anomalies that may occur in any one year, and to minimise the possibility of identifying individuals in any small cohort of students. The data below represents a summary of aggregated data from Mount Burr Primary School over the years 2011 to 2017.*

#### Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. From 2011 to 2017, 71% (34 of 48) of Year 1 and 78% (36 of 46) of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Between 2011 and 2017, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 78% (46 of 59) of Year 3 students, 56% (32 of 57) of Year 5 students, and 78% (46 of 59) of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA.

Between 2011 and 2017, 27% of Year 3 (16 of 59), 25% of Year 5 (14 of 57), and 24% (14 of 59) of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands.

Between 2011 and 2017, 67% (8 of 12) of Year 3 students remained in the upper bands at Year 5, and 56% (5 of 9) Year 3 students remained in the upper bands at Year 7.

#### Numeracy

Between 2011 and 2017, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 73% (43 of 59) of Year 3 students, 60% (34 of 59) of Year 5 students, and 72% (41 of 59) of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD SEA.

Between 2011 and 2017, 19% of Year 3 (11 of 59), 11% of Year 5 (6 of 57), and 16% of Year 7 students (9 of 59) achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands.

Between 2011 and 2017, 44% (4 of 9) of Year 3 students remained in the upper bands at Year 5, and 63% (5 of 8) of students at Year 3, remained in the upper bands at Year 7.