

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

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Report for Mallala Primary School

Conducted in September 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 Kathryn Entwistle, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and David Manuel, Review Principal.*

## School context

Mallala Primary School is situated 57kms north of the Adelaide CBD and was first established in 1885. Current enrolments represent an increase over the last two years, sitting at 160. The school is classified as Category 3 Index of Disadvantage and has an ICSEA score of 958.

The school population includes 4% Aboriginal students, 10% students with disabilities, 3% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), 3% children in care, and 22% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in the first year of her tenure at the school, a 0.6FTE Counsellor and Band 2 Senior Leader with a focus on teaching and learning. There are six classes operating in 2017, three of which are taught in tandem. Non-Instructional Teaching Time (NITT) is provided in the area of performing arts, and Languages Other Than English (LOTE) is Korean.

## 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 four key areas from the External School Review Framework:

<b>Student Learning:</b>	<b>How effectively is student growth monitored and evaluated?</b> <b>To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?</b>
<b>Effective Teaching:</b>	<b>How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?</b>
<b>Effective Leadership:</b>	<b>To what extent are the school's professional learning and performance and development processes effective in building teacher capacity?</b>
<b>Improvement Agenda:</b>	<b>How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?</b>

## How effectively is student growth monitored and evaluated?

### To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

At the time of the External School Review (ESR) it was evident that leaders at Mallala Primary School have an appreciation of the significance of data in tracking student growth and informing plans at the learner, class and whole-school levels. The intent to raise the profile and influence of data across the school is a priority that the leaders expressed clearly in both the Principal's presentation and discussion groups.

During conversations with staff and document analysis, the ESR panel sourced evidence that a comprehensive data schedule has been generated. Most teaching staff with whom the panel spoke understood that this document informs which tests or assessments are to be conducted and when. In some instances, teachers have used the data derived from these assessments to create folders for each student that documented ongoing achievement, scores and results. How this data is then used to design plans to cater for the students' continued growth was not apparent. The panel also saw teaching plans, which made evident observation data playing a significant part in some teachers' forward planning, with comprehensive anecdotal notes recorded against individual student names.

The place of data in informing intervention for students requiring additional support was highly evident throughout the ESR process. Leaders and teachers discussed reference to PAT data to identify students not at the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). These students are then included in appropriate

processes of intervention, namely through the Multi or Macq Literacy programs. Leaders discussed the importance of regularly monitoring students' progress to inform the efficacy of the intervention and to modify accordingly.

NAPLAN and PAT data sourced prior to the on-site review made evident that in reading and numeracy, early gains students exhibit are not generally sustained as they progress through the school. The 2014 to 2016 data from both areas of learning shows that a number of students achieving in the higher bands in Years 3 and 5 have not retained this achievement when next assessed. Aligned with this evidence, most teachers with whom the panel spoke described data used to determine students not reaching SEA. However, minimal reports were made about data being used to build upon the skills of students meeting or exceeding benchmarks, or to plan for intentional extension within the classroom. The opportunity to raise the profile of data and its place in designing learning appropriate to *each* student's needs, to accurately monitor learners' progress consistently across the school, would be helpful. Building teachers' capacity to use data analytically will be key in achieving this.

In response to both the Partnership priority and whole-school data, Mallala Primary School staff have identified the teaching of numeracy as a priority at the school. This concept is documented in the Site Improvement Plan (SIP), and professional learning has been undertaken to support teachers to deliver learning opportunities that enable students to solve problems, respond to provocations and to challenge and deepen cognition. During the ESR, the panel saw and heard of some examples of the impact this initiative has had in classrooms. When asked how her teacher makes her think hard, one student described responding to a provocation that had minimal teacher explanation and required her to 'think outside the square'. Documents from this student's class showed a range of initiatives planned by the teacher to challenge and engage students in deeper numerical thinking. The panel also saw class displays, and heard one student and teacher describe processes that clearly have been designed to activate prior knowledge, and to build on existing understanding.

The panel acknowledges that the school's work in the design of teaching that extends numerical thinking and intellectual stretch is at a relatively early stage and that, as a result, limited evidence of the impact was apparent at the time of the review. In the main, classroom visits and conversations with students made clear that the teaching of numeracy, and aspects of the literacy agenda, relied heavily on worksheets that required minimal cognitive reasoning. When asked how teachers make them think hard, a number of students explained that they would get a harder worksheet when they finished the first one, or that they get a worksheet they had not had before. Many exercise books the panel saw confirmed the regular use of worksheets in a number of classes.

Processes during the ESR showed that, in the main, students at the school participate compliantly in the learning at hand. However, when asked how they know if they are doing well and on-track for success, most students reported that their teacher's affirmation, through ticks or stamps, or otherwise their biannual report, let them know if they were learning successfully. The criteria for achievement and the intent of the learning were not widely understood by students with whom the ESR panel spoke. The opportunity to develop teaching that stimulates cognition and engages students in purposeful learning across the curriculum is apparent. The school's work in numeracy may well provide a model from which to broaden contemporary practices in all learning areas.

**Direction 1**

**Deliver intentional teaching that maximises each student's potential and systematically track learners' progress across the school by building all teachers' capacity to use data analytically and responsively.**

**Direction 2**

**Engage students in purposeful learning and stimulate intellectual cognition through the implementation of teaching strategies that enable processes of inquiry, and that make clear the intent and criteria of the learning.**

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

When asked about the priorities of Mallala Primary School, almost all respondents discussed Positive Education as the school's precedence. The ESR panel heard from staff, parents and students that the work to embed concepts, such as Mindset and Character Strengths, had achieved significant impact across the school. Students discussed the value of 'making a mistake' in learning, as well as explaining the concept of perseverance. Others spoke about the influence Positive Education has had upon their interactions with peers, discussing gratitude and appreciation of others as important concepts in the class. The ESR panel commends the systematic and consistent approach to the introduction of a school-wide concept aimed at developing independent, resilient and considerate learners.

The ESR panel was also able to source significant evidence regarding the deliberate and strategic approach undertaken to support transition from preschool to school. The on-site preschool provides an opportunity to develop close alignment between Reception and Early Learners, and staff and leaders have capitalised on this. The Positive Education priority has been introduced at the preschool, and parents with whom the panel spoke discussed the opportunity students have to begin to develop these concepts prior to, and then, once at school. Preschool staff attend staff meeting each week and Professional Learning is accessed alongside school colleagues. Professional Learning Community sessions see preschool and school colleagues with responsibility for the Early Years students in discussing practices and processes that inform a seamless transition between the sites.

The school's work in developing approaches to plan numeracy learning that is focused on inquiry and intellectual stretch has been discussed against Line of Inquiry 1. The ESR panel also sourced evidence that the staff have been engaged in processes of moderation with Partnership colleagues. At the time of the ESR, the panel could not confirm that these initiatives had strongly influenced consistent, contemporary planning across the school. Some evidence that a few teachers have designed learning that activates existing knowledge, enables diversity within the learning and stimulates deep thinking was apparent. However, the planning documents provided to the panel in almost every instance were the task and assessment design developed during the Partnership initiative. Few examples of regular planning using learning design or contemporary approaches were evident. During the process of Inquiry conducted by the ESR panel at a staff meeting, teachers discussed the concept of multiple entry and exit points in planning effectively for student learning. The theoretical understanding of this intentional approach to planning is apparent within the staff, but not evident within plans or practice.

At the time of the ESR, most processes operating to determine student achievement were characterised as tests, allowing the teacher to identify student growth or otherwise. Other than the assessment developed through the Partnership initiative, no evidence was sourced that teachers design rich opportunities that allow students to demonstrate and apply their learning in varying ways and at varying levels. The A-E data provided to the ESR panel, and conversation with leaders, made evident the misalignment between students' achievement in systemic tests and the allocation of grades. In 2016, 41% of Year 3 students scored in the high bands for reading, yet no student was awarded an 'A' grade. Conversely, five Year 7 students were awarded an 'A' in maths, whilst one of twenty students achieved high band level in the NAPLAN test. The ESR panel agrees that the time is opportune for staff to work together to research the concept of authentic and rich assessment design that allows students to demonstrate their learning at varying levels and to be assessed accurately against the outcomes within the Australian Curriculum.

#### **Direction 3**

**Deliver differentiated and accessible learning opportunities and enable authentic demonstration of achievement, through contemporary planning and assessment design, informed by recognised DECD frameworks and aligned with the Australian Curriculum standards.**

### To what extent are the school's professional learning and performance and development processes effective in building teacher capacity?

The concept of 'building capacity' is documented as one of the school's main over-arching priorities. Document analysis made highly evident the intent to 'enable us to reach our full potential', and discussion with leaders confirmed their vision to maximise the efficacy and collaborative input of all members of the school community.

Throughout the ESR, much evidence was sourced that a deliberate and focused approach to Professional Learning (PL) has been undertaken. This has aligned seamlessly with the school's priorities of Numeracy and Positive Education, and all staff with whom the panel spoke discussed this opportunity with appreciation, enthusiasm and, in some cases, excitement. The ESR panel spoke with some staff who were frank in acknowledging the areas of their practice requiring development, and these people were clear that the PL offered at the school was instrumental in supporting growth in their practice. School Services Officers (SSOs) staff were also clear in agreeing that PL opportunities have been of value in supporting them to fulfil their role. The panel heard the diverse nature of PL that leaders had sourced to support the ancillary staff, and commends this approach, which ensures increased investment in SSO time is advantageous.

When discussing processes of Performance and Development (PD), teachers were clear on how the process is structured. The panel heard that teachers complete the PD planning proforma prior to an initial meeting with their Line Manager. At the meeting, goals aligned with the SIP are agreed. The panel heard all teachers state that a review of the goals later in the year is then conducted between the teacher and line manager. Discussion with leaders made clear that they intend to introduce the practice of Observation, either by line managers in class or between peers, to the school. They openly reported that this intent has been compromised by daily eventualities, and the Principal reported that a review of the PD policy was a priority for her. The panel agrees that collective development of a PD policy will engender commitment and contribute to authenticity of the process. In reviewing the practical application of PD at the school, the panel urges all staff to consider the importance of the ongoing nature of performance development. The establishment of teachers' goals is the initial, early stage of effective PD. The design of agreed *strategies*, that both the Line Manager and teacher will undertake as partners in improving practice to meet the goals, is crucial in building teacher capacity. Reports to the ESR panel, in the main, comprised teachers attending 'training' to achieve their agreed target. Whilst outside support from an expert in the field can be useful, the *ongoing*, strategic and intentional processes that operate on-site are what will ultimately bring about a change in practice. The ESR report includes Directions that will require teachers to develop and build on existing practice. The place of effective PD in enabling this cannot be overstated.

#### Direction 4

**Build teacher capacity to respond to school agreements and expectations through regular, strategic Performance and Development processes that are collectively designed and implemented, and that are afforded priority within the school's improvement agenda.**

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

The development of the school's Site Improvement Plan (SIP) at the beginning of 2017 was reported as collaborative and inclusive. Most teaching staff with whom the panel spoke were able to describe the process that was structured to allow individual reflection, group conversation and some reference to data, resulting in collation and eventual agreement. The ESR panel acknowledges the clear intent to engage stakeholders in processes that are designed to engender collective responsibility and action.

Another well-intended and designed process was conducted just prior to the ESR. The 2017 NAPLAN data has been reviewed by staff during the staff meeting. Individual students' achievements and whole-school performance have been identified, as well as areas for further development. The ESR panel was provided a copy of this raw data. As the Principal explained, an initial response to the data would indicate that most students and, certainly the school, were performing at high levels. However, during the leader's presentation, the Principal made evident to the panel that the review of the student and school

achievement was measured against National Minimum Standards (NMS) and not the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). The leader and ESR panel agree, to generate valid responses to the NAPLAN data that align with system expectations, and provide accurate direction at the individual and school level, the data will need to be analysed and assessed against SEA.

Prior to the ESR, the Principal was open in discussing the potential that is yet to be realised in developing processes of self-evaluation across the school. Teachers and Leaders explained that, currently, review of the school's progress towards SIP targets is conducted during a Pupil Free Day. The opportunity to further build the culture of shared responsibility and, at the same time, to build teacher capacity through systematic and regular processes of self-evaluation, is apparent. The opportunity exists to collectively establish forums that are provided dedicated and regular times to meet to assess and monitor the efficacy of the school's improvement imperatives and progress to targets. Access to a range of valid data, and staff members' ability to use this diagnostically, will be key in developing regular, emergent and strategic self-review at Mallala Primary School.

#### **Direction 5**

**Ensure continuous improvement and respond to emergent change through the establishment of forums that systematically and regularly analyse valid data and monitor progress towards school improvement targets.**

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

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practice that is contributing significantly to school improvement at Mallala Primary School.

**Effective practice regarding the Effective Teaching aspect of the External School Review Framework was evident at the school.** The student transition from preschool to school has been positively influenced by the strategic and deliberate intent to bring about consistency between the two cohorts. The ESR process allowed the panel to see that the preschool staff and Early Years teachers are definitely a team. Shared meeting times, professional learning, line management, development of agreed approaches and time dedicated to meet, are just some of the ways staff work to support early learners to transition seamlessly to Reception. Students from the school access the preschool nature play area at break times, and preschool children are regularly involved in both formal and informal visits to the school. In particular, the panel noted the consistent approach to Play Based Learning that operates across the sites and contributes to the students' scaffolded and successful movement to school. Evidence of this approach was sourced through conversations with teachers, leaders, SSOs and parents.

## OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

At Mallala Primary School, effective leadership provides strategic direction and targeted interventions, and teachers are provided with and use structured time for ongoing collaborative professional learning.

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

1. Deliver intentional teaching that maximises each student's potential and systematically track learners' progress across the school by building all teachers' capacity to use data analytically and responsively.
2. Engage students in purposeful learning and stimulate intellectual cognition through the implementation of teaching strategies that enable processes of inquiry, and that make clear the intent and criteria of the learning.
3. Deliver differentiated and accessible learning opportunities and enable authentic demonstration of achievement, through contemporary planning and assessment design, informed by recognised DECD frameworks and aligned with the Australian Curriculum standards.
4. Build teacher capacity to respond to school agreements and expectations through regular, strategic Performance and Development processes that are collectively designed and implemented, and that are afforded priority within the school's improvement agenda.
5. Ensure continuous improvement and respond to emergent change through the establishment of forums that systematically and regularly analyse valid data and monitor progress towards school improvement targets.

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



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
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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.

Sharon Okmasich  
PRINCIPAL  
MALLALA 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 Mallala Primary School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies.

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 88%.

## 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).*

#### Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2016, 65% of Year 1 and 28% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). This result represents little or no change at Year 1 and a decline at Year 2, from the historic baseline average.

In 2016, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 69% of Year 3 students, 74% of Year 5 students, and 80% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Year 3, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average, and for Years 5 and 7, an improvement.

For 2016 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the results of similar students across DECD schools.

In 2016, 41% of Year 3, 13% of Year 5, and 15% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 43%, or 3 of 7 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016, and 33%, or 2 of 6 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.

#### Numeracy

In 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 79% of Year 3 students, 74% of Year 5 students, and 75% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 5, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average and for Year 7, little or no change.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Year 3 and Year 7 has been upwards, from 65% to 79% and 44% to 75%, respectively.

For 2016 Year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools.

In 2016, 17% of Year 3, 9% of Year 5, and 5% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for Year 3 has been downwards from 41% to 17%.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 29%, or 2 of 7 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2016, and 25%, or 1 of 4 students from Year 3 remains in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2016.