

External School Review

Northfield Primary School

Final School Summary Report

March 2024



Government
of South Australia

Department for Education

External School Review details

Public education is for every child and young person in every community across our state. Educators and staff work in partnership with families and communities to nurture, develop and empower all South Australian children and young people with the knowledge, skills and capabilities they need to become fulfilled individuals, active, compassionate citizens and lifelong learners.

External School Review teams work in schools with school leaders and staff to enable in-depth evidence-based reflection on their recent improvement journey and their current strengths and challenges, in the areas of expert teaching, school leadership, and conditions for optimal learning.

Round table participants

Donna Beaney	Principal
Paul Newman	Education Director
John Burns	Review Officer
Amy Papazoglov	Assistant Principal
Lucy Zadoyanchuk	Assistant Principal

Review team

John Burns	Review Officer
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Post review meeting participants

Paul Newman	Education Director
John Burns	Review Officer
Amy Papazoglov	Acting Principal
Lucy Zadoyanchuk	Assistant Principal

Expert teaching line of inquiry: How effectively are teachers using evidence-informed pedagogical practices that engage, challenge and improve outcomes for all learners?

Strengths and challenges

- Initiatives with the Literacy Guarantee Unit (LGU) and targeted intervention programs such as InitialLit, Heggerty and the Department phonics scope and sequence are used. Phonics screening data has trended upwards from benchmark 51% in 2020 to 64% in 2023. Students identified as requiring additional support, are placed with trained SSOs.
- Teachers use a range of data sets including NAPLAN, PAT M, PASM, initial testing and progress monitoring assessment in phonics to plan and differentiate learning. They implement a variety of open-ended and multiple entry level learning tasks. Students reported some stretch and challenge in writing and math lessons. Stretch and challenge activities are provided, however, this approach differs from teacher to teacher.
- It was evident that a whole school literacy block is embedded. Teachers demonstrated school improvement planning initiatives with a systematic approach to spelling, reading and phonemic awareness. Phonics lessons are ability grouped, providing additional learning support and stretch opportunities to learn with peers at a similar developmental stage. An opportunity exists for SSOs to be more actively engaged with individuals and small groups, needing additional support, during this instruction time.
- Learning intentions are visible in some rooms or shared with students in PowerPoint and in workbooks. There are a range of student understandings about success criteria across the school, which impacts on their effectiveness. In some classrooms these concepts still need to be embedded and used daily, in an authentic manner. There is an opportunity to make learning intentions and success criteria more impactful by co-constructing them with students, supporting them to access self, peer and teacher feedback.
- The use of explicit goal setting practices is varied and not consistently used. Students are not able to consistently describe what learning goals are or how they support them to improve. Co-constructing student determined learning goals will empower students to understand their next developmental steps.
- Student Pillar leaders engaged with school leaders in the analysis of A-E grades in years 1 to 6. As a result, they reported to teachers that additional scaffolds would support them to know how to improve their future grades. There are a variety of methods across the school to enable students to improve. Students and staff reported using learning intentions, rubrics and exemplars in some classrooms. Strategies such as 'bump it up' walls could be used to support students to self-assess, peer-assess and increase understanding of the next steps in learning.
- Some teachers provide opportunities to transfer and apply learning to new context through the inquiry room and learning through play sessions. There is potential to amplify this process across the school.
- Teachers gave examples of formative assessment and feedback practices including thumbs up, pre-topic writing assessments, flip cards and the use of mini whiteboards. There is an opportunity to refresh and reinforce teacher knowledge of formative assessment and feedback processes.
- Case management meetings between teachers and leaders occur twice per year to review students and their learning data. Parent meetings are then commonly used to discuss learning, social plans and to set goals. SSO support is offered to families to help with NDIS applications and to provide advice on service options available.
- Students report that much of the feedback provided by teachers was verbal or comments added to their work in books. Some students described giving peer feedback to each other, most commonly through 'pair share' opportunities. Teachers describe using just in time verbal feedback with students.
- Students report that assessment data is often not shared with them and consequently they are unsure of their strengths and next steps in learning. There are opportunities to continue to enhance this work by sharing assessment data with students, identifying their strengths and next steps in learning, particularly in spelling and maths.
- Documented literacy and numeracy agreements and assessment schedules are in place and drive whole school assessments and data collection. Leaders mentioned that they will be reviewed and updated in 2024. Teachers use a range of assessment data to inform planning and monitor impact of teaching on student learning outcomes. Some teachers use pre-and-post testing regularly, to inform their teaching and identify next steps in learning for students.
- Teachers work in professional learning teams (PLTs) to moderate common tasks and some summative assessments throughout the year. They report that similar processes also assist them to assign A-E grades. Developing opportunity for a whole-school approach about moderation processes, particularly in A-E grade assignments, would support consistency of grading.

Potential next steps

- Make student success criteria an active part of the learning cycle.
- Co-construct student learning goals to empower students to understand their next steps in learning.
- Provide regular opportunities for students to receive feedback based on their data and evidence of learning to inform action.

Opportunity for improvement 1 Make student success criteria an active part of the learning cycle.

Quality leadership line of inquiry: How effective are the school's professional learning and performance development processes in building teacher capability to accelerate student learning?

Strengths and challenges

- The school leadership team has expanded in 2024. All members have defined roles, individual development plans and key projects for development. Robust organisational structures are in place for meetings, decision making and improvement work. The students, school improvement, collaboration and a consensus model are at the forefront of this highly motivated group.
- There are an extensive range of professional learning opportunities focused on literacy approaches including Heggerty, Learning English Achievement and Proficiency levels, the Department units of work and the phonics scope and sequence. These are delivered through staff meetings, student free days and PLTs. Teachers articulated their professional learning emphasising why each approach is utilised, its purpose and the specific implementation processes required. Tailored professional learning for specialist staff to understand the alignment of school priorities in their subject areas would be welcomed.
- There is alignment between improvement planning, PLTs and professional development (PD), enhancing the consistency of teaching and learning through the implementation of the Department maths units and the 5-day maths program.
- PLTs operate during staff meeting time, non-instruction periods and outside of classroom time. The opportunity exists to clarify the expectations, processes and annual priorities for PLTs to ensure they are consistent, rigorous and improving learning.
- Regular monitoring and review of school priorities supports decisions about what should be continued or stopped. Teachers report that more time to embed reading and numeracy priorities, rather than adding new priorities, would support the direction of the school and allow for greater efficacy.
- Teachers report not being clear about the school's current approach to reading and assessment. Running records are no longer used and 5 out of 11 classes are currently using DIBELS oral reading fluency test. A whole school strategy and associated implementation steps would bring clarity to this area. This could be included into the school agreed approach to English, being updated in 2024.
- Students perceived that there is limited opportunity to provide feedback to teachers about their teaching. The opportunity for reciprocal feedback between students and teachers will enable students to become authentic partners in learning.
- Graduate, early career and new teachers to the school reported receiving leader and peer teacher support, including feedback about curriculum planning, differentiation and assessment. This enables these teachers to feel confident about their practice and implementation of school priorities.
- Coaching opportunities and improvement feedback are provided by literacy and numeracy coaches, assistant principals and the LGU. Support is differentiated based on the needs and readiness of teachers. The numeracy coach is currently providing the explicit instructions for the implementation of the 5 day maths program. This includes setting all challenge questions. In time, there is an opportunity to share these responsibilities with teachers and co-construct the challenge questions and learning tasks.
- Several groups of teachers mentioned peer coaching and 'learning walks' as an exciting opportunity. At times, PLTs visit each other in lessons, informally, and then talk about their practices. There is great interest in discussing this endeavour and establishing a system and associated processes required, to improve teaching practice.
- Walkthroughs and some associated informal feedback are provided by the school leaders. Staff report there is inconsistency in the frequency of this practice. Staff identified that by formalising this process, improvement feedback would be effective, timely and support their next steps to adjust and improve their teaching practice.
- Performance and Development Plans (PDPs) exist for all staff and mid-year meetings with leaders are optional. PDPs connect school priorities, staff goals and training opportunities. Currently, a formal system of lesson observations and feedback does not take place for teachers. Staff would welcome the opportunity for additional teaching and improvement feedback from leaders.
- SSOs support literacy and numeracy initiatives in all year levels, for several hours each day. They support intervention practices and student behaviour regulation processes. SSOs indicate a willingness to be involved in classroom based literacy and numeracy PD when it is available to teachers. Improving two-way communication systems between teachers and SSOs about student intervention strategies and progress would increase the impact of this support.
- The Governing Council understands that the school has an improvement plan. They are aware of the learning areas that are the focus for improvement. Parents mentioned that school-to-home communication could be improved by adding their child's specific learning goals and strategies to achieve them. Parents spoke positively about the school peace code and green room, acknowledging the value this adds to the students.

Potential next steps

- Create opportunities for student feedback to teachers about teaching and learning.
- Develop processes to enable peer mentoring that would improve teaching and student learning.
- Establish processes to provide feedback to teachers inclusive of walkthroughs and observations.

Opportunity for improvement 2

Establish opportunities for student-to-teacher feedback and staff peer mentoring to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

Conditions for optimal learning line of inquiry: To what extent does the school provide, maintain and monitor a safe, supportive and respectful environment to maximise engagement, wellbeing and achievement?

Strengths and challenges

- The school is highly supportive of its diverse and complex community. Leaders are committed to communicating effectively with a large number of nationalities. Teachers are committed to the process of updating One Plans with families, annually.
- There are 31 teaching staff, with almost half being new to the school over the past five years. There are also graduate and early careers teachers new to the school in 2024. These staff are well supported by leaders and peers through set meetings each term.
- Parents describe the school as welcoming to new families, respectful and community minded. This is evident in the 2023 parent survey, where 94% of parents ranked highly that teachers and students are respectful.
- Staff understand and use self-regulation and wellbeing strategies with students, including co-regulation. Calm spaces are available in all classrooms and a calm room exists for regulation, with school leader's input. Students spoke positively and proudly about these processes, in particular, the school peace code. In 2024 attendance is slightly higher, due to the wellbeing leaders being actively involved with follow-up letters and phone calls to families each week.
- Multiple systems and steps exist for student regulation and learning support. Providing stretch and challenge is less systematic across the school. An opportunity exists to personalise learning and provide stretch and challenge by including high impact teaching strategies for students who are at or above standard.
- There is evidence of a positive learning culture throughout the school. Students come to school enthusiastic and wanting to learn. The review team observed a high level of engagement in classrooms and teachers have a clear understanding of the dispositions and fundamental learning habits they want to develop in their students.
- The leadership team has significant impact on the implementation of the school values and peace code, ensuring that all members of the community feel a strong sense of safety and belonging, as confirmed by both students and parents.
- Classroom fixtures, furniture and resources allow for student collaboration and provide a modern, safe and stimulating learning environment. Student feedback indicates there is a strong sense of pride in both their indoor and outdoor learning surroundings. They articulated that there are high quality facilities, spacious grounds and a positive learning environment highlighted by a swimming pool which supports their learning of new skills.
- Students describe their teachers as caring, helpful, providing engaging learning opportunities and supporting both their growth mindset and wellbeing.
- The school facilities include a highly resourced green room for occupational therapy and co-regulation. This is staffed by a highly trained staff member and used by an external occupational therapist. An inquiry room provides classes, small groups with SSOs and individual students with an exciting learning environment that is highly valued by staff, students, and parents.
- Teachers interviewed believe there are high expectations across the school but not all were able to articulate what this looks like. Students gave varied responses when asked about high expectations for learning with some describing high level processes and others not being able to articulate what high expectations are. There is an opportunity for the school to clearly define what high expectations for learning are and implement a school wide approach accordingly.
- Morning community circles for Reception to 6 are a positive new addition in 2024, focusing on student discussions of mindfulness practices, growth mindset and the keeping safe curriculum.
- Teachers describe the implementation of trauma informed practice, zones of regulation, Berry Street strategies and What's the Buzz as highly effective in supporting students' regulation control and wellbeing.
- Students are positive about a range of student leadership opportunities such as peace leaders, student Pillars leaders, sports captains, and additional classroom and school-wide leadership tasks. Peace leaders report back to classrooms and hold regular meetings with their peers. An opportunity exists for greater, more authentic student leadership and involvement in decision making that will enhance students taking action in classrooms and across the school.
- Increasing learner agency is of interest to school leaders and teachers and is seen as an area for development as students provided limited examples of any influence in their own learning. As the school begins to engage with the Strategy in 2024 and beyond, planning could be collaboratively undertaken, developing actions to increase learner agency opportunities.
- SSOs are highly experienced and valued at the school. They provide seamless support both inside and outside of the classroom. Intervention and special education programs are a feature of their work with individuals and small groups. Teachers reported this additional time greatly supports the students' phonological improvement.

Potential next steps

- Investigate stretch, challenge and high impact teaching strategies for students who are at or above standard.
- Implement and document what high expectations for teaching and learning looks like at the school.
- Provide opportunity for authentic student leadership and learner agency in classrooms and across the school.

Opportunity for improvement 3

Implement a culture of high expectations for stretch and challenge and learner agency in classrooms and across the school.

Review Summary

The school community recognises the leadership team's significant positive impact on the school culture through the peace code. The school is welcoming and parents express a high degree of satisfaction with the teachers and school service officers. Students are proud of their surroundings and believe that teachers support both their learning and wellbeing.

Improvement focuses are communicated and staff have input with the school's improvement plan, allowing for the development of new practices. Staff describe a team approach to changes in their practice aided by planning meetings, professional development, and professional learning teams. Development of a whole school understanding of high expectations and cognitive challenge, will enhance the pedagogical excellence.

School leaders model the values and pedagogy they want teachers to implement. They have developed systems to monitor practice and to provide feedback throughout the school year, thus building teacher capability. Data analysis, research and program development have been a priority in the areas of reading and number, with a range of data sets being used. Input from the Literacy Guarantee Unit, Local Education Team and in-school literacy and numeracy coaches has added to the knowledge of the staff.

Students said the school is a great place to learn and that they have opportunities to participate in leadership roles as peace and Pillars leaders. Students would appreciate the chance to be more involved in the design of their learning.

The SSOs are highly valued by staff and parents and are an important part of intervention programs, co-regulation and improving student learning. Teachers reported this greatly supports the students' phonological improvement.

The Governing Council is committed to working with the principal, supporting the school improvement agenda and developing the school facilities and grounds.

The Opportunities for improvement provided by the ESR Report process are intended to provide practical next steps for expert teaching, school leadership, and conditions for optimal learning.

Opportunity for improvement 1	Make student success criteria an active part of the learning cycle.
Opportunity for improvement 2	Establish opportunities for student-to-teacher feedback and staff peer mentoring to improve teaching and learning outcomes.
Opportunity for improvement 3	Implement a culture of high expectations for stretch and challenge and learner agency in classrooms and across the school.

John Burns

Review Officer

Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate

2024

