

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

On-track evaluation report for Riverland Special School

One-year return conducted in November 2018



On-track evaluation process

A priority for the Department for Education 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 government schools.

All government schools are externally reviewed over a 3-year cycle. After the review the principal and the governing council chairperson receive a written report with a number of directions for improvement.

A copy of the External School Review report is available on the school website.

In some cases, when the review panel finds cause for concern about the levels of achievement and growth, together with evidence about the school's capacity for systematic improvement, a school will be advised that they will be visited again in a year.

Schools with a 1-year return are assisted during the intervening period by the education director and other department staff to ensure they receive coordinated, targeted and systematic support. Intervention is concentrated on building the school's capacity to improve teaching and learning across the school, lift expectations and achieve results as measured against the Department for Education Standard of Educational Achievement.

During this process, which occurs 12-15 months after the initial visit, a review panel determines the extent to which the school has, with external support, developed sustainable internal capacity to improve effectiveness and raise student achievement.

The school's priority improvement plan was the main document used as the basis for this review.

The review visit was conducted by Helen Tunney, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate, and Cam Wright, Review Principal.

This On-Track Evaluation report should be read in conjunction with the report of the External School Review conducted at Riverland Special School in April 2017.

Directions from the External School Review report

April 2017

- 1. Develop a whole-school learning continuum document that links to SACE and year level requirements for Australian Curriculum learning areas, and uses the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities of Literacy, Numeracy, Personal and Social Capability and ICT capability, so that expectations of what is taught in bands of schooling across the year is informed and clearly understood.**
- 2. Embed regular and strategic self-review processes for staff to collaboratively analyse data and evidence to inform priorities and targeted strategies across the whole school.**
- 3. Develop a whole-school assessment framework and accessible recording system to track student growth and achievement at individual, cohort and whole-school level, and build coherence with observations recorded using ABLES.**
- 4. Build teacher capacity in the use of SMARTAR goals to support learning outcomes through high expectations.**

Additional information about the school context

The principal advised that in 2018 a new leadership team was appointed. New members include a deputy principal and a senior leader, SACE and VET curriculum.

Development of a priority improvement plan

The principal advised that the priority improvement plan was developed in term 2 2017. The plan was sent to the executive director, Partnerships, Schools and Preschools in term 3 2017.

Strategic support provided to the school over the past 12 months

The school worked with the senior leader learning improvement primary (SLLIP) from the Learning Improvement division (LID), to develop whole-school planning documents addressing the Australian Curriculum (AC).

The school trialled the General Capabilities as a curriculum to cater for students' needs. Staff were advised at a later date to use the chronological age content of each student, and access this content through using the General Capabilities for each student at their own developmental level.

A new project officer from LID supported the use of the General Capabilities as a way of accessing the AC through the 'Big Idea'.

On a student free day staff attempted to develop a program using the 'Big Idea' and the General Capabilities. This school was advised against using the General Capabilities as a curriculum, and to use the chronological age of each student, then to use the General Capabilities to access that content. This was trialled as an approach to planning against the AC.

School leadership attendance at an Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES) training day introduced the school to the whole ABLES suite and its links to the AC (ABLES provides an assessment tool and curriculum planning support for students below foundation level).

The education director advised that specialised support for the school was negotiated between the ED and the Director, Disability Policy and Programs in May 2018. The following support was agreed to:

- The project officers (One Child One Plan) provided support twice a term in terms 2 and 3 2018 to Riverland Special School, Barmera Primary and Monash Primary Schools. Support took the form of staff presentations, implementation, observations in classrooms, meeting with small groups of teachers on personalised planning, goal-setting and coaching.
- In relation to ABLES, the AC and AUSVELs, collaboration between LID and Disability Policy and Programs personnel was discussed. The intent was for collaboration between the 2 groups to look at the 2 curriculum frameworks, similarities, differences and how ABLES can be connected to the Australian Curriculum. It strengthened Riverland Special School staff in their knowledge, understanding and use of the AC and in using ABLES as an assessment tool.
- The project officer – learning difficulties, worked with the principal on the ESR direction about assessment.
- The ED and PC met with the principal as needed to provide ongoing support to address the ESR directions, and ensure the work of the school was kept targeted at the level of teaching practice.

Evidence and evaluation referenced to directions in the priority improvement plan

Direction 1

Develop a whole-school learning continuum document that links to SACE and year level requirements for AC learning areas, and uses the AC General Capabilities of Literacy, Numeracy, Personal and Social Capability and ICT capability, so that expectations of what is taught in bands of schooling across the year are informed and clearly understood.

On-track evidence

- The school focused on developing a whole-school learning continuum that is referenced to the AC, general capabilities and SACE. ABLES has proven a very successful enabler of this work.
- Teachers described how they have used the Victorian pre-foundation curriculum descriptors and linked them to the AC. This process has meant the AC is fitted to the learning needs of Riverland Special School students rather than trying to make their learning needs fit the AC. This has previously been a struggle for staff. The ABLES assessed level of the student is now the starting point for planning, rather than the AC. The school curriculum is now linked to the developmental levels of the child, which ensures the curriculum is far more relevant and useful to each student.
- Planning has become a very clear personalized process for every student. ABLES facilitates this because of the detailed descriptions of students' developmental levels and relevant next step teaching points that it provides. Because of the clarity of ABLES, teachers are able to work confidently outside their areas of trained expertise and skillsets. For example, secondary trained teachers feel confident to work with younger students.
- Teachers said they now have clear direction about what to do and when to do it, and their approach to teaching and learning in the school. There is a clear coherence in planning, the curriculum is linked to development levels, and teachers can be clear about where they are at and where they are going with each student.

- Science content is adjusted to students' developmental levels.
- School services officers (SSOs) are informed and articulate about the purposes and uses of ABLES, and said that teaching has improved because of it.

Review panel evaluation

ABLES has been the platform that escalated improvement in the school, in which the school is an expert user. Student learning has become the school's core business and expectations of what is taught in bands of schooling across the year are informed and clearly understood. The school is now well-placed to develop the meta-cognitive capacity of its students to understand and articulate the purposes and quality of learning.

The revised direction for the school is:

Develop student capacity to plan, assess and talk about their own and each other's learning.

Direction 2

Embed regular and strategic self-review processes for staff to collaboratively analyse data and evidence to inform priorities and targeted strategies across the whole school.

On-track evidence

- Teachers are using an evidence base to support their judgement, and are triangulating data for this purpose. Anecdotal, as well as more formalized assessments are used.
- Data and reporting informs teacher planning. Cycles of planning are now evident. Parents have received the changes well. The cycle of assessment, planning and teaching is clear, and parents can see and understand the growth (or in some cases, decline) for their child. Teachers can show and discuss growth in an informed way and parents value this.
- Teachers said that, by improving the learning program and making it more differentiated and intentional, students have become more engaged, classes have become more settled and teacher time for behaviour management has been reduced. Quality teaching impacts positively on student behaviour and wellbeing.
- The panel saw that students are engaged and settled in learning, and have access to a range of learning content and activities.
- SSOs reported increased collaboration between teachers around the learning needs of students. Students could identify that they are learning and can ask for help when they need it.
- A parent said: "Recently, learning programs have changed slightly. It made it easier for children to pick things up. The school is using a different grading system that is fine-tuned to accommodate different needs and abilities. Families can see and are happy with how things are progressing".

Review panel evaluation

Data literacy and awareness of the value of evidence-based review and planning has increased significantly across the school, in all groups of stakeholders. Quality distributed leadership, tailored systems support, and deeper engagement with the partnership and other special schools is supporting this. The school is proud of what it has achieved, and is keen to continue its improvement work into the

future. The school is well-placed to build on the quality of team work between teaching and non-teaching staff by more formally including SSOs in strategic leadership and whole-school planning.

The revised direction for the school is:

Deepen the involvement of all key stakeholders in determining future school priorities and targeted strategies.

Direction 3

Develop a whole-school assessment framework and accessible recording system to track student growth and achievement at individual, cohort and whole-school level, and build coherence with observations recorded using ABLES.

On-track evidence

- Teachers said that using ABLES has improved the way they plan for students. Previously, it was more compliance-based; however, now it is about genuine planning for growth.
- Teachers said that they are now united around learning, and can discuss learning, planning, progress and growth using the same language.
- Students have been reallocated to classes, and classes re-structured based on identified learning needs and teacher collaboration.
- SACE teachers feel far more confident in the rigor and quality of evidence they are providing for the grades they allocate. SACE programs are clearly aligned with OCOP and can be directly informed by ABLES assessments. Teachers said the ABLES assessment adds great value to the quality and explicitness of SACE programming.
- Senior students have SACE goals. Students know what they are and judge how they are going in learning through achievement of their SACE goals. Senior students could link positive attitudes to learning to success in the workplace.
- Reporting through ABLES has become simplified and meaningful, making it accessible to families and defensible through evidence.
- Teachers are thoughtful and reflective about the use and value of differing assessment tools. Assessment is teacher-driven and not compliance-driven.
- A sophisticated assessment schedule has been developed. It tells teachers what to do and when to do it, and includes supplementary assessments, which teachers can use on a needs basis.
- Moderation of ABLES assessment has begun, and there are plans to develop this further in 2019 through weekly PLCs that also include SSOs. Teachers know that SSO knowledge about student learning progress is valuable.

Review panel evaluation

Assessment has become accurate, planning has become explicit, and increments of growth can be shown through data. Assessment tools are used critically and reflectively to improve accountability to parents and students for learning improvement.

Direction 4

Build teacher capacity in the use of SMARTAR goals to support learning outcomes through high expectations.

On-track evidence

- ABLES has led to more relevant and meaningful goal setting. It has led to a clearer connection between SACE learning plans and NEPs. The NEP has become a genuinely meaningful document.
- Reviewing of goals is happening continuously now, not just once or twice a year.
- Teachers are moderating decisions about achievement of goals and questioning each other's evidence for decisions taken. They feel more confident in writing SMARTAR goals. ABLES provides language and conceptual understandings to do this.
- Work within the ESR directions has connected well to the move to OCOP, and made the NEP process evidence-based. Working with support in OCOP helped the school understand what it needed to do better for its students, and to know what kind of tools it needed to do this.
- OCOP project officers said that the school's work is informing some changes to the OCOP proforma.

Review panel evaluation

The school has developed expertise in both the writing of SMARTAR goals and in the transition from NEP to OCOP. ABLES allows accurate and specific writing of short-term individual goals, which support high expectations of every student, and are understandable to all stakeholders. The school is well-placed to be a resource to other sites in the writing of SMARTAR goals and the uptake of OCOP. A next step for the school is to work more directly with all students in goal-setting and review.

The revised direction for the school is:

Engage students with data to inform SMARTAR goal-setting for improvements in personal learning.

Outcomes of the on-track evaluation

Based on the evidence provided, Riverland Special School is on track to effectively implement the External School Review directions.

The review panel found that:

- There is a coherent and engaging curriculum for students using the AC and SACE.
- There is a shared vision, strategic planning, actions and interventions that are data informed and sustained over time.
- Student achievement data and other evidence is used to inform decisions at the individual student, class and whole-school levels.
- There are sustained high expectations and a culture of improvement.

The principal will continue to work with the education director to implement the following revised External School Review directions.

1. Develop student capacity to plan, assess and talk about their own and each other's learning.
2. Deepen the involvement of all key stakeholders in determining future school priorities and targeted strategies.
3. Engage students with data to inform SMARTAR goal-setting for improvements in personal learning.

Based on current performance, Riverland Special School will be externally reviewed again in 2020.



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