



Government of Western Australia
Department of Education Services

Spencer Park Primary School

2015

Independent Review Findings



Independent Review of
Independent Public Schools

Disclaimer

This document reports the findings of the Department of Education Services' review and verification of the school's self-review. The school's self-review has been complemented by information provided by the Department of Education and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

The findings of the independent review are forwarded to the School Principal, the Board Chair, the Director General of Education and the Minister for Education.

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School and Review Details

Principal:	Mr Alan Dowsett
Board Chair:	Ms Carrie Beeck
School Location:	26 Hardie Road, Spencer Park WA 6330
School Classification:	PS Class 3
Number of Students:	339
Reviewers:	Mrs Audrey Jackson AM (lead) Dr Steffan Silcox
Review Dates:	27 and 28 July 2015

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the independent review is to provide assurance to the school and its community, the Director General of Education and the Minister for Education on the extent to which the school has met its commitments as outlined in its Delivery and Performance Agreement (DPA) and associated Business Plan. Additionally, the findings have the potential to inform school improvement.

The focus of the review is on:

- how well the school has implemented self-review
- how well the school has improved student learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students
- how well the school has created an environment that promotes learning and student well-being
- how well the school is placed to sustain and improve its performance.

Review Methodology

The school has been required, under the DPA, to undertake annual self-assessments of its performance. The outcome of these assessments formed the basis for the school's self-review. The school sent its self-review documentation to the IPS Review Team, Department of Education Services, one month prior to the commencement of the review.

The IPS reviewers supplemented the information provided by the school with information on the school's achievements, its processes and its student performance data from a number of sources which included:

- the *My School*[®] website
- the Department of Education School Performance Monitoring System
- Schools Online reports.

Reviewers analysed the evidence presented in the school's self-review documentation and developed lines of inquiry where further verification was required.

An agenda for the two review visit days was subsequently negotiated with the school to enable the gathering of evidence to verify claims made by the school. During these two days the reviewers sourced evidence to support the school's self-review claims through observation and discussion with leaders, teaching and support staff, Board members, parents and students.

The evidence provided by the school, along with information gathered by the reviewers prior to and during the review visits, was used as the basis for the verification of how well the school has met its commitments as outlined in the DPA and Business Plan.

This document reports on the findings of the independent review.

School Context

What are the important features of this school's context that have an impact on student learning?

Spencer Park Primary School is located in one of the older, more established areas of Albany. The school's enrolment is 339 students in 14 classes (11 primary, two pre-primary and one kindergarten) from Kindergarten to Year 6. Given its location it is expected that enrolment will remain stable at around the current level. The school shares a site with Spencer Park Education Support Centre which is also an Independent Public School. The two schools do not form a cluster in the context of Independent Public Schools. Nevertheless, this co-location provides opportunities for the integration of students with disabilities as well as providing access to the expertise of the staff of the centre to assist in mainstreaming students with learning difficulties. Spencer Park Primary School and the Education Support Centre have a common Parents and Citizens' Association (P&C) and a common newsletter.

The school was opened in 1959 and the linear design of its teaching blocks is typical of schools of that era. Renovations have occurred over time with a significant upgrade of the administration area in 2007 and a new classroom block constructed through the *Building the Education Revolution* program. The latter area includes a purpose-built music room. Music is a significant feature of the school's program. At the beginning of 2015 an early childhood teaching area opened replacing three transportable classrooms. Spencer Park Primary School was part of the '100 Schools Project' and, as a result, has a computer network that is systematically upgraded. In addition each classroom has an interactive whiteboard.

The school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is 924. The 73 Aboriginal students comprise 20.5% of the enrolment. Fifty-four of these students (17%) are on site and 19 are enrolled in the Coolangarras Barmah Aboriginal Kindergarten. This kindergarten is attached to the school and enrolls four-year-old Aboriginal children from across the City of Albany. The school has initiated a twice-weekly play group for Aboriginal families which is located at the kindergarten and is funded and managed by Wanslea Family Services. The future of this program is uncertain due to changes in funding.

In 2014, the overall attendance rate was 92% which is above that of like schools and comparable with the percentage for all Western Australian public schools. The attendance rate for Aboriginal students was 87.1% which is higher than that in both like schools and all public schools. The transiency rate is significant at 21%.

The school has a staff of 51 comprising 27 teaching staff and 24 support staff. The average age of the staff is 51 years. Eleven staff members are over 60. This indicates there is likely to be a high retirement rate in the next three to five years. The Board is aware of this situation and strategies are being developed to ensure continuity of programs.

The Spencer Park Primary School Board comprises seven members including the Principal. All members are either parents or staff members. Board members have a range of skills to contribute to decision-making. The composition of the Board has been relatively stable since 2013 with limited changes.

Rather than formalised partnerships the school has been keen to establish networks with a range of government departments and non-government agencies. These have benefited the school in its efforts to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.

The School's Self-Review Process

How effective was the school's self-review in accounting for its performance during the period of the DPA and Business Plan?

The 2013–2015 Business Plan established targets for achievement in the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), the Western Australian Monitoring Standards in Education in Science and Society and the Environment (WAMSE), PM Benchmark Levels and Attendance. The targets are underpinned by clearly defined focus areas and strategies in the domains of successful students, quality teaching and productive partnerships. The Business Plan is supported by the School Development Plan and both are reviewed annually.

Documentation provided by the school shows that it reviews its performance against the targets in the Business Plan and its responsibilities under the DPA annually and reports on its performance in the Annual Report. The school provided a copy of the comprehensive Student Performance and School Review document which is completed annually and underpins future planning.

The data collection cycle is designed to provide comprehensive data from a variety of sources including student results in NAPLAN, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Progressive Achievement Test – Mathematics (PAT-M), PAT-Science, as a replacement for WAMSE, PM reading and Neale analysis. At the school development day each November the Principal leads the staff in a review of student performance based on the data collection. Members of the Board and the P&C are invited to participate in this review. In addition, a critical analysis is undertaken of both the academic and affective domains of the Business Plan. As a result of the process the strengths and areas for improvement are clearly identified. The outcome is the identification of priorities and strategies which inform both the School Development Plan and the school budget for the coming year.

Data provided to the reviewers on student achievement indicated student performance in literacy and numeracy has substantially improved. In analysing the results staff have recognised that to continue to improve overall results a sustained focus on the performance of individual students is required. The school has therefore developed a very detailed individual education plan (IEP) process with subsequent student plans reviewed on a monthly basis by staff together with parents.

The school administration maintained that such a focus would improve student outcomes and achieve the desired performance levels on an ongoing basis. To facilitate this, the school has adopted literacy and numeracy programs which are supported by explicit models of teaching. Both staff and parents have embraced this form of teaching emphasis at the school.

While it was evident in discussion with the Chair and other Board members that there was significant engagement with review of student performance data from a wide variety of sources this was not documented in Board minutes. The reviewers recommend that Board minutes be expanded to more accurately record the scope of the Board's engagement with student performance data.

School Performance—Student Learning

How well has the school performed in improving learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students?

The targets established in the 2013–2015 Business Plan for student achievement in Year 3 and Year 5 have substantially been met. The NAPLAN results indicate an upward trend and the school achievement is above that of like schools. Areas of strength identified through the NAPLAN analysis are reading, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy, with writing identified as an area for improvement.

Having identified areas requiring improvement and to maintain its upward trend in student performance outcomes the school has implemented an explicit teaching approach in literacy and numeracy. In order to ensure consistency across teaching in this area the approaches advocated by John Fleming have been adopted. Staff commitment to this school direction has been significant. This is reflected in time given to professional learning and in the way staff members have understood the importance of whole-school strategies and the need to implement these in their classrooms.

The school has extended the range of data sources available for analysis of student achievement. There is a strong emphasis in the school on early intervention. On-entry assessment, *PAT-M* (numeracy) testing and a variety of other testing instruments including the PM Benchmarking Tool are used.

The school operates two specialist programs. The first of these is music where every student from Year 1 to Year 6 is provided with a weekly timetabled session of music provided by a music specialist. Another notable feature is the opportunity for all interested students in Years 3 to 6 to join the school choir. This group is highly active, regularly performing at the Albany Eisteddfod, the Albany Primary Schools Music Festival, the City of Albany ANZAC Service and City of Albany Christmas Pageant. Selected students also have opportunities in Years 6 and 7 to learn guitar, clarinet or a brass instrument through the Department of Education's School of Instrumental Music. The school also provides a specialist physical education program.

It was evident during visits to classrooms that the school has embedded the visual arts in the curriculum with student work being prominently displayed.

In order to provide an opportunity for students to showcase their work more widely the school holds a bi-annual art exhibition which is open to parents and the community.

In order to promote student social and emotional intelligence the school employs the *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)* and *Rock and Water* programs to develop skills and understandings in this area. Furthermore, a variety of behaviour management strategies are employed including *Classroom Management Strategies (CMS)*, *Canter Positive Behaviours* program and the 'traffic light' system aligned to a behaviour matrix employed by the school administration. Expected behaviours are modelled and rewarded by staff. It was noted by the reviewers that all staff have undergone training in both CMS and Canter behaviour programs. This model has achieved desired student behaviour outcomes and is widely supported both by teachers and parents. The reviewers were impressed by the implementation of this model and in particular its acknowledgement of cultural sensitivities.

Targets have been set for attitude, effort and learning behaviours and there is anecdotal evidence available that progress is being made. Data sourced from student reports that includes an assessment of student attitudes is also used; however, these judgements are subjective and not easily validated. This area of student performance remains important to teachers and has been a focus of in the professional learning hubs developed to implement teaching and learning strategies across the school.. The school intends to continue to focus on this domain as a target and to explore ways to improve attitudes to learning and to measure progress made.

The school has effectively implemented Phase 1 of the Western Australian Curriculum and sees the development of Phase 2 as a future challenge which will be included in 2016-2018 Business Plan. The school is also on track to meet the National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education (NQS) requirements, with staff having undertaken professional learning in respect to the quality areas.

School Performance—Quality of the Learning Environment

How well has the school performed in creating an environment that promotes learning and well-being for all students and the attainment of the school vision?

The reviewers found that Spencer Park Primary School provides a curriculum characterised by inclusive programs of learning that contribute and add value to students' cognitive, social and emotional learning and well-being.

Meetings with parents, students, Board members and representatives of partner organisations provided the reviewers with evidence of inclusive practices, planning to meet the learning needs of all students and strong community support for the school.

Staff expect that every student can learn and will achieve at their potential and this expectation is accepted by students and supported by parents. Classes are calm and productive with teachers using evidence-based instructional strategies. Student attendance and engagement is at the State average across all student groups and where behaviour issues emerge they are quickly resolved. The school employs an attendance monitoring system linked to SMS messages to parents in case of absence. Parents endorsed this approach and indicated to the reviewers that from their perspective the school offered a warm, caring and safe learning environment.

Collaborative planning, curriculum delivery and monitoring of student performance are purposefully structured and evident at every level within the school. This includes systematic formative and summative assessment to establish learning needs and the implementation of a range of inclusive learning and pastoral care programs to cater for the diverse needs of the student population.

Student learning is supported by the effective use of technology. Every class from Kindergarten to Year 6 has the use of an interactive whiteboard and staff members use this tool proficiently. The reviewers commend the effective use of this technology which is supported by collaborative planning. In the early years effective use is made of mini whiteboards to support the teaching of reading, spelling and writing. Banks of computers for student use are located in learning hubs and in the library and the school is progressively investing in tablet technology.

Staff display an increasing openness to critique by colleagues and a willingness to accept others in their classrooms to observe their teaching. The importance of accessing ongoing professional learning aimed at improving classroom practice is acknowledged and supported by all stakeholders and the school budget reflects this orientation with a sustained allocation to teacher professional learning. The reviewers commend the creation of a culture which promotes commitment to professional growth through professional learning and peer observation.

The reviewers were able to verify through interviews with staff, parents and students, as well as first-hand observation, that all parties interact in a positive manner. Parents and families are encouraged to take a genuine and close interest in the work of the school and are welcomed as partners in their children's learning. It was also evident that students are articulate, thoughtful and conscious of doing their best to succeed. This is being achieved within a framework of mutual trust and respect between all stakeholders with students actively presenting a positive attitude toward the school, teachers and their learning.

In meeting with students, parents and Board members, the reviewers were able to verify the high regard in which the school is held. Parents in particular expressed their appreciation of staff, their honesty and respect, their provision of an environment where students build confidence and social skills, and their commitment and genuine interest in the students. Parent survey data also indicate that they have respect and confidence in the school, the outcomes it is achieving and in its staff and leadership.

A breakfast club run every Thursday by volunteer staff is aimed at assisting students to access adequate before-school nutrition and develop self-management skills. The food provided for this program is donated from a range of sources including Foodbank, local supermarkets and charities.

With the support of the P&C the school has developed its resources to enhance learning and teaching and to provide an attractive physical environment. Play equipment is innovative, providing challenges in a controlled environment. The school has also been active in seeking grants from outside agencies to enhance the play spaces. Careful planning and input from the teaching staff have ensured that funds raised and grants received support the direction of the Business Plan.

The Principal, Board and staff work together in a supportive way with a sense of belonging and respect. There is a clear commitment and belief that the school is serving the learning needs of its students and in doing so is meeting the aspirations of the community.

School Performance—Sustainability

How well placed is the school to sustain and improve its performance into the next planning cycle?

Over the period of the current Business Plan, Spencer Park Primary School has been implementing explicit teaching using the Fleming model. Teachers have attended professional learning and the educator John Fleming has worked with all staff during a visit to the school. Resources have been purchased to support the model's implementation and key teachers identified to champion and support the process. In addition, teaching hubs have been established with shared Duties Other than Teaching Time (DOTT) structured to allow for group planning and the sharing of teaching strategies and resources. This model of teaching and professional practice is well established in the school.

Analysis of student learning is embedded in school practice with the interrogation of data and its use in creating the School Development Plan that supports the Business Plan being a shared enterprise engaging all staff and with the opportunity for the Board and parents to have input. The process of planning from data collection and analysis through critical review of all aspects of school performance to the development of the plan is well documented.

In tandem with Explicit Teaching a strategy of peer observation has been introduced to support the program. This is gradually becoming embedded in teaching practice. Its aim is to empower 'teachers who, if needed, could emphatically and effectively demonstrate their skills to others'. This creates a mechanism to ensure sustainability which, given the demographics of the staff, is a significant issue.

A corresponding consistent approach to pastoral care complements the learning program and supports the development of behaviourally and socially responsible students who have a developing sense of self-worth and ability to learn. All stakeholders welcome the commonality of expectations for student learning and behaviour and understand that it serves as a platform for all parties to use in lifting standards.

The Principal, supported by the two deputy principals, has been a driving force behind the implementation of explicit teaching. Staff members have been supported to attend professional learning sessions with appropriate budget allocations to facilitate attendance. Until 2015 the leadership of the school had remained unchanged for eight years. One of the two deputy principals is now on leave and intends to retire and an acting deputy principal has been appointed. The Principal and the second deputy principal are likely to retire within 18 months and a staged process is anticipated. The Board Chair is aware that this will be a significant issue for the Board to address in order to ensure a smooth transition including the maintenance of effective teaching strategies.

The Board has been effective, representing the school community in both the school decision-making and the review of student achievement. Given the scope of the school's active engagement in activities in Albany, particularly through the arts, it would be of benefit to extend Board membership by the appointment of a community member with links to the broader Albany community. The reviewers recommend that this be a priority for the Board. Further as new Board members are appointed there will be a need to ensure that they are appropriately inducted to maintain the shared understanding of school planning and the analysis of student performance necessary to fulfil their role.

Conclusion

It was evident to the reviewers that Spencer Park Primary School has used the opportunities provided through its IPS flexibilities to drive a culture of continual improvement through a well-considered planning and review paradigm across the school. Discussions with members of the Board, the teaching and support staff, parents and students confirmed that the school has established a positive and collaborative culture and strong relationships within its community.

The school has a very clear focus in its planning to foster and enable all students to achieve their academic and social potential.

The professional knowledge and enthusiasm of the staff and the expectations of the community with respect to creating quality learning and teaching programs to maximise the educational opportunities for each student was evident throughout the review.

The school employs an appropriate school improvement cycle which links data collection and analysis and other significant drivers to the key focus and target areas of the Business Plan and hence the annual operational plans. This improvement cycle will be fundamental to the development of the next Business Plan.

Commendations

The following areas are commended:

- the creation of a culture which promotes commitment to professional growth through professional learning and peer observation
- the effective use of collaborative planning and sharing of resources particularly in supporting the use of interactive whiteboards as a teaching and learning resource
- the whole-school approach to behaviour management based on CMS strategies which also reflects an awareness of cultural diversity.

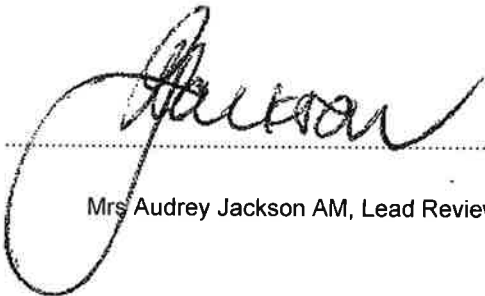
Areas for Improvement

The following areas for improvement are identified:

- expansion of the membership of the Board by the inclusion of a representative of the broader community
- expansion of Board minutes to more accurately record the scope of the Board's engagement with student performance data.

Declaration

We, the undersigned, hereby confirm that the information provided in this findings document is to the best of our knowledge true and correct and is based on the verification of the evidence provided by Spencer Park Primary School as part of the Department of Education Services' independent review process. The Principal and Board Chair have had an opportunity to comment on any matters of fact contained within this document.



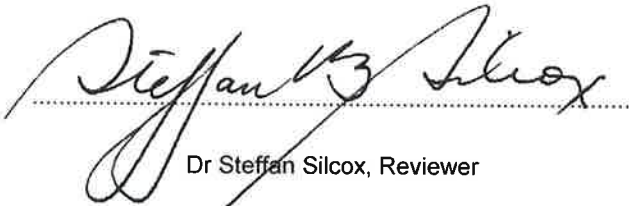
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Mrs Audrey Jackson AM, Lead Reviewer

9.9.2015

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Date



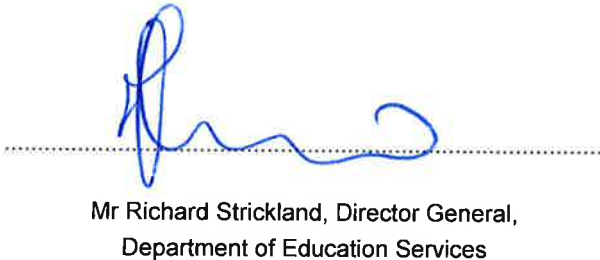
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Dr Steffan Silcox, Reviewer

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Date



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Mr Richard Strickland, Director General,
Department of Education Services

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