Settlers
Primary School

2015
Independent Review Findings
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 Gary Brown
Board Chair: Ms Leeanne Antulov
School Location: Cnr Arpenteur Drive and Tranby Drive Baldivis WA
School Classification: PS Class 6
Number of Students: 801
Reviewers: Mr David Carvosso (Lead)
           Mr Noel Strickland
           Dr Marion Milton
Review Dates: 22nd and 23rd June 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.

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 to verify achievement and developed lines of inquiry where further verification was required.

An agenda for the review visit was subsequently negotiated with the Principal to enable the gathering of evidence to verify claims made by the school. During the review visit 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?

Settlers Primary School is located in the southern Perth suburb of Baldivis. Baldivis is approximately half way between the Perth CBD and Mandurah in the rapidly developing southern corridor serviced by the Kwinana Freeway and the Perth to Mandurah railway line. The suburb is undergoing a period of rapid growth which is demonstrated by the number of schools built within this suburb in the past decade and the size and growth of these schools.

Until Settlers Primary School was opened in 2005, the suburb of Baldivis was serviced by only one primary school, Baldivis Primary School, which for many years after its construction in 1924, was a small bush school. Baldivis Primary School now has in excess of 700 students. More recently the area has seen the construction of Makybe Rise Primary School which opened in 2011 and has in excess of 900 students; Tuart Rise Primary School which opened in 2015 and has in excess of 300 students and Baldivis Secondary College which opened in 2013, caters for students from Years 7 to 10 at this stage and has an enrolment of over 1000 students. A further primary school, Rivergums Primary School is currently under construction and will open in 2016 and will initially cater for more than 400 students. Settlers Primary School had reached an enrolment of 1050 students in 2014 after opening in 2005 with 234 students. The school currently has a student population of 801 with the pressure being relieved by the construction of the new primary schools.

The school is set in an attractive environment and comprises purpose-built classroom and specialist blocks together with transportable classrooms. The school prides itself on ensuring that the transportable classrooms are equipped to a standard comparable with the permanent classrooms. The school has specialist rooms including a library, art, science and music rooms. The school is currently undertaking a resourcing year in its planning cycle and most classes have access to SMART Board technology, which is well utilised by staff. The school is also well resourced with computers and tablets and has internet access through wireless technology.

The school has an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of 1016 which places it in the fourth decile of schools within Australia. 76% of students are from Australia, 12% from the United Kingdom, 8% from New Zealand and 4% from South Africa. There are currently 32 students with
Defence Force parents employed at the HMAS Stirling Garden Island Naval Base. The Defence Force provides a part-time liaison officer for the children of Defence personnel who also undertakes the role of education assistant in classrooms with Defence personnel children. The school is also characterised by a significant number of children who have parents currently employed in locations that require them to be rostered in a ‘fly-in, fly-out’ capacity.

The school has a staff of 87 (70.6 FTE) in 2015 having peaked at 106 in 2014. The influx of staff to accommodate the rapid growth of the school from 2012 to 2014 resulted in staff commencing with a diverse range of experience. This placed pressure on the school in terms of induction and generating any holistic school approach to the delivery of the curriculum or the management of student well-being. The reduction in numbers has allowed the school to make this a priority and the school is now characterised by a harmonious staff and consistent approaches to curriculum delivery and student welfare procedures.

The school has a highly motivated and committed leadership team. In the context of the 2013–2015 Business Plan it is noted that the current Principal has only been at the school since the beginning of the 2015 school year. The staff includes teachers with a range of experience with 92% of the teachers being female. The teachers and students are supported by a dedicated and highly skilled group of support staff.

The School Board comprises a parent Chair, the Principal, two staff members, three parent members, a Parents and Citizens' Association (P&C) representative and a community member, who meet at least once per term and twice in term four. The Board is characterised by strong leadership and a membership with a clear understanding of its role in the governance of the school and its separation from management. Board members are committed and conscientious in their governance role.

The school has strong partnerships with the parent body and has developed links with the Baldivis and Rockingham libraries to support the literacy program in the school. The school P&C is highly active, managing a school canteen and supporting the students with funding for resources.
In 2012, the school was selected and funded for inclusion in the *Improving Literacy Numeracy National Partnership* (ILNNP) program. This program concluded in 2014, however, in its three years of operation, the program provided the impetus to drive reform in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

The school is a well-resourced and attractive primary school providing a pleasing learning environment for students. The school has experienced a period of rapid growth and is now moving into a phase of marginal reduction in numbers, or at least stabilisation. This will allow the school to consolidate, reflect and further concentrate efforts on the improvement of student outcomes. School surveys indicate strong support from parents and students for the educational programs offered in the school and for the resultant student achievement.
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?*

Discussion with the School Board and staff members, together with a review of annual reports, confirmed that the school regularly reviewed its performance against Business Plan targets. The Leadership Team and Board acknowledged that they had incorrectly focused on only part of the performance targets and compared them only to State like schools rather than Australian similar schools as stated in the Business Plan. This, however, did not impact on their thorough process of interrogating both school and system data.

An embedded cyclical school process of analysing data, developing plans to rectify identified weaknesses, implementing these plans and monitoring and reviewing their effectiveness was evident in discussions with the school leadership team and committees, and review of school documentation.

The 2014 Annual Report demonstrates that the school identifies standards of student achievement and progress made in literacy and numeracy. Discussion with staff indicated that the review of student performance and achievement in learning areas other than literacy and numeracy was in its infancy and would be further developed in the next Business Plan cycle.

Staff members and committee members were enthusiastic about their processes. These processes review performance against targets and result in focused operational plans that can be developed at whole-school, phase-of-learning or year-level meetings. These plans then become the focus of regular meetings and at the end of the year are reviewed, results analysed, and future planning directed by the findings.

The school's review process identified areas such as problem solving in mathematics as well as grammar and punctuation in English, as areas requiring improvement. The school leadership group also discussed the planning already in place to use strategies such as year-level grade allocations and networking meetings of specialist teachers to monitor student performance in learning areas other than English and mathematics in the next planning cycle.
Meetings with groups of teachers, parents and board members confirmed the success the school self-review process has had, even though the school has undergone significant leadership changes.
School Performance—Student Learning

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

The Settlers Primary School 2013–2015 Business Plan comprises targets in the areas of English, mathematics, student engagement and well-being. The school’s 2014 Annual Report, which was provided to the review panel and available on the school’s website, identified progress against these targets.

In English, the school established the target of closing the gap between the school and the Australian Schools in the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) mean score in reading, writing, grammar and punctuation and spelling in Years 3, 5 and 7 by at least equalling the like-schools mean.

As stated in the previous section of this report, discussions held with the school’s leadership team confirmed that the staff had reported their judgements against Western Australian like-school information when the documented target in the Business Plan clearly states a target of at least equalling the mean of Australian like schools. Hence, there are some discrepancies in the reported achievements as set out in the 2014 Annual Report, and the actual achievements when the target is analysed accordingly.

In the area of writing, the panel can confirm that the target was achieved in Years 3, 5 and 7. However, in all other areas—reading, spelling and grammar and punctuation—the target was not achieved, although significant progress was noted. Discussions with the leadership group and curriculum team members indicated that, when the 2015 NAPLAN data is available, it is anticipated that the targets in some of these areas will be met as a result of programs undertaken in the school.

The school also set an English target of reducing the percentage of students at or below National Minimum Standard in NAPLAN reading, writing, grammar and punctuation and spelling during the life of the Business Plan.

In this target the school’s 2014 Annual Report identified that the target was not achieved in Year 3 in any of the NAPLAN English test areas. Discussions with the leadership team and the literacy committee members confirmed this finding; however, there was an air of optimism that considerable improvement would be noted with the release of the 2015 NAPLAN results.
The staff members interviewed were confident that educational programs instituted in the early years would result in improved outcomes for students and these would be reflected in the 2015 NAPLAN results when published.

Through the analysis of the data and discussions with the leadership and literacy teams in the school, the reviewers agree with the findings against this target for all NAPLAN tested year levels. The school was either on track to achieve, or had achieved the target in Years 5 and 7.

In mathematics, as for English, the school's 2013–2015 Business Plan set a target of at least equalling the mean for numeracy against Australian like schools in NAPLAN testing. Again, comparisons by the school were made using Western Australian data rather than Australian like-schools. This has resulted in some discrepancies in the findings as published in the 2014 Annual Report. Discussions with the school's Leadership Team and the Numeracy Committee confirmed these understandings. The Australian mean for NAPLAN like schools in numeracy was achieved in Year 3, as identified by the school. The school reported in the 2014 Annual Report that the target was also achieved in Year 5. Discussions with staff agreed that this target had not been met; nevertheless, improvement was clearly evident. The review panel was in agreement with the school's findings that the Year 7 data indicated that the school was 'on track' to achieve this target. In actual fact, the target was met in 2014; however, the average for the period 2012 to 2014 was below Australian like schools.

The second numeracy target, which again mirrors the target set for English, was to reduce the percentage of students at or below minimum standard in the NAPLAN numeracy test 2012 to 2015. In this instance the reviewers and staff agreed on the findings documented in the 2014 Annual Report. This target was not achieved in Year 3; however, it was achieved in Years 5 and 7.

Three targets were set in the area of student engagement and well-being.

The first of these was to increase the percentage of students achieving the rating of 'Consistently' or 'Often' under the 'Attitude, Behaviour and Effort' section of the end-of-year reports. The school's analysis of data tracked over three years to 2014 indicates this target has been achieved. Discussions with the school's leadership team and the engagement and well-being committee members attribute this improvement to the implementation across the school of the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program. The panel observed these strategies being utilised during classroom visits. Charts
highlighting thinking strategies were evident in classrooms, providing further evidence of the importance given to the program within the school.

The second target under the banner of Engagement and Well-being was to reduce the total number of recorded instances of negative student behaviour for all categories recorded in the school’s Student Information System (SIS). The reviewers were informed by the school’s leadership team and the Engagement and Well-being Committee that this target had not been met. The staff had, however, analysed the reasons behind this failure and identified that teachers had been more consistent in reporting behavioural incidents on SIS and were also more proactive in addressing the behavioural needs of specific students. Although the school did not meet this target, the leadership team indicated to the panel that the improved consistency of reporting behavioural incidents was a positive outcome from having this target in the Business Plan.

The third Engagement and Well-being target was to reduce the percentage of students for the ‘Indicated’, ‘Moderate’ and ‘Severe’ attendance categories in the period 2012 to 2015. The reviewers agree with the school findings that this target has not been achieved. The school has remained marginally above the average attendance for Western Australian public schools and comparable to like schools for the past three years, however, the percentage of at-risk students as identified by the terms ‘Indicated’, ‘Moderate’ and ‘Severe’ has increased during the period. To address this identified concern, the staff have developed a good standing policy which has been endorsed by the Board. In interviews with staff, parents and board members it was evident that the school believed this policy was having a positive impact on attendance. Individual attendance plans are developed for severely at-risk children and these plans, together with promotion in newsletters and assemblies of the importance of regular attendance, could see the data in this target move in the direction as stated in the Business Plan.

It was evident in documentation provided to the reviewers that the school has developed meaningful and well utilised operational plans in the focus areas of literacy, numeracy and student engagement and well-being. The targets in these operational plans are refined and focused down to year and classroom level. Analysis of data is undertaken by teachers against the targets in the operational plans and the results of this analysis and the strategies to be applied are discussed at regular phase, focus-area and year-level meetings.
The staff are commended on the collaborative meeting structure developed, both at the phase-of-learning level and in the focus areas identified in the Business Plan, to support staff in the analysis of classroom data and in strategies for improving student learning.

During classroom visits the review panel observed evidence of students being catered for in appropriate group settings. It was evident from both observations and discussions with teachers that the groups were structured in a way that supported the learning ability, stage or style appropriate to each child.

Interviews undertaken with the leadership group and with staff in their role as members of focus groups, clearly demonstrated to the reviewers the detailed analysis of data undertaken by staff and the subsequent identification of areas for improvement. The outcome of this analysis is evident in planning documents provided to the reviewers during the review visit.

Although the school did not achieve all the NAPLAN targets as documented in the Business Plan, the reviewers can confirm the staff’s conclusion that from 2012 to 2014 there has been marked improvement in both progress and achievement against Western Australian like schools’ results in most focus areas. The areas of weakness identified in the analysis are noted as areas for improvement in operational plans and appropriate strategies and resources applied to address this identified area of need.
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 school has effectively embedded a culture which promotes the attainment of the school vision. The school’s beliefs and mission statement are also well embedded and consolidate the school’s vision of Excellence, Success, Citizenship and Security.

The school community (parents, staff and students) is commended for developing a safe and inclusive environment in which everyone is valued. Discussions with parents and students together with analysis of the school behaviour data confirm that the school is a safe environment for students. Members of the Student Council strongly believe that there is very little bullying within the school and are confident that the few incidents that have occurred have been dealt with effectively. The social skills training undertaken by the education assistants targets children who need support, and is highly regarded by parents and staff. Also, the school has been proactive through its Engagement and Well-being Committee in developing a strong focus on student safety in the areas of ‘cyber bullying’ and applying safe practices when using technology.

The staff have vigorously established effective programs such as PATHS, Thinking Classrooms, ICT—iPads, Kids Matter and Runners Club to give the school community tools to ensure the school is safe and inclusive. The Good Standing policy has also been embraced by the school community.

Improved student learning is a focus of the school community. The school has a strong belief that all students are best catered for within their own classroom. As a result, extensive professional development has been undertaken to ensure all staff are able to modify and adapt classroom activities to ensure the needs of all children are met. Staff are supported to develop individual education plans (IEPs) for children with identified needs and those who have not met acceptable standards.

The ongoing development of flexible scope and sequence documents contributes to effective teaching practices. Specific programs such as 10 a Day have been introduced to all classes in mathematics and English.
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A comprehensive handover procedure which involves all staff has been developed to ensure all staff coming into contact with students with special needs are familiar with those needs and practices which support the individual children.

Parent surveys and discussions confirmed a high level of parent satisfaction with the school. Parents believe the staff members are very approachable and have the best interests of the children at heart. School communication with the parents was considered to be of a high standard. Parents and staff agreed that parents were kept well informed of any issues involving students, and the school newsletter was effective in keeping parents informed about school events and general information.

The group of parents who met with the reviewers believed that the level of parent engagement with the school could be raised. The staff agreed that there was a small number of parents who were involved with the school at P&C and board level, however, they reported that the number of parents who were regularly in classrooms and supporting the education of their children was high.

The P&C has a close working relationship with the school. It manages the school canteen, which contributes significantly to P&C funding. The P&C also manages the uniform shop providing low cost uniforms to families.

Partnerships have also been formed with:

- City of Rockingham—conducts Junior Council with student councillors from schools within its boundaries
- Rockingham and Baldivis Libraries—share books and facilities
- Defence Services—provision of Defence Forces liaison and education assistant who works in the school two days a week to support Defence Force families.

The quality learning environment provided by the school community contributes significantly to the high regard in which the school is held within its own and the wider community.
School Performance—Sustainability

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

The school has established a range of self-review processes and practices and is well placed to sustain and improve student performance into the next planning cycle. Details of the self-review process were noted through discussions with staff, classroom visits and the viewing of planning and operational documents. For example, a detailed analysis of learning using NAPLAN data, yearly and more frequent assessments are undertaken at the school. The results are then used to plan and deliver teaching and learning sessions that target the areas identified for improvement at whole-school, class and individual levels. Despite major changes to school population numbers and staff over the past few years, the reviewers were able to confirm that the analysis process and the desire for continuous improvement are embedded in the school. Students of all abilities, including high achievers and those with learning or physical difficulties, are catered for through the use of diagnostic assessment and within class groupings, with extra support provided by highly skilled education assistants, most of whom have longevity at the school and know the pupils well. The processes have become established and are now part of the school culture such that they should be sustainable.

Governance of the school and processes that reflect on school performance were determined through discussions with the Leadership Team and board members and by reviewing documentation. The Board works closely with the Principal and school Leadership Team to provide oversight and critical reflection of the school’s performance in relation to improvement and meeting the Business Plan targets. The Board has also indicated that for the next Business Plan it will establish smarter targets with milestones and review progress towards them regularly.

It was also noted that the Board undertook a comprehensive self-review, and has decided to modify the self-review document to make it more context-appropriate for the next self-review. Following on from the Board’s self-review, an action plan was put in place. When expertise in a specific field was lacking, the Board was proactive in seeking out and recruiting a community member with specific knowledge and skills.
The Board has made links with the parent group, having a member of the P&C on the Board, and by sending home occasional newsletters to give parents information about the Board. The Board notes that it needs to make greater connections to the community and is investigating ways to do so.

The Board is commended on its leadership and the substantial contribution it has made to the school in the Board’s first years of operation. As noted above, the Board has established cyclical reviews of operational plans, school data and progress towards the Business Plan targets. The Board has worked to ensure that all members are committed and understand the governance role; for example, all except one new member have undertaken board training and the self-review process identifies any need for further training and expertise. The Board is in the process of establishing a succession plan so that the sound level of governance will continue.

There is strong leadership at the school. The Leadership Team is commended for embedding a whole-school approach to learning and improvement in the focus areas and for developing a culture of staff mentoring and development. Staff development and the embedding of programs were apparent through the distributed leadership model that the school has put in place. A range of learning-area, phase and year-group teams meet several times a term to cooperatively plan and share expertise, teacher-developed resources and, for some groups, lessons. The leadership group has also established an engagement and well-being committee and corresponding program. Its effectiveness was evident to the reviewers in the way students conducted themselves both inside classrooms and in the playground. Discussions with the student counsellors revealed that students care for and look after other students, particularly those younger than themselves. They described the atmosphere in the school as caring and supportive.

The culture of staff helping each other was evident through discussions with the literacy and numeracy committees and in the documented mentoring of other teachers in their phase and year teams. Professional learning and performance management have been linked to ensure teachers have the knowledge and skills for effective teaching in the key focus areas targeted for student improvement. The school’s performance management procedures are linked to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, as published by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL).
Although funding has ended for the LLNP programs, the reviewers are confident that the distributed leadership, mentoring and learning committees, along with the recognisable culture of support and continuous improvement for both teachers and students, means that the staff have the capacity to implement processes and procedures effectively and that current programs can be sustained into the future. For example, when new teachers arrive at the beginning of the year, there are established induction processes, however, through self-reflection, the Executive Team has recognised that those processes are not so well established for middle-of-the-year newcomers and are looking at ways to assist those teachers.

The staff are also in the process of updating all of the technology in the school and making sure all teachers are trained in its use for optimum student learning. The school will be well resourced into the future. Discussions with the Principal and Board Chair indicated that the school budget is controlled and that reviews of need and appropriate allocation of financial resources are in place.

The Business Plan, operational plans, reports to the Board and annual reports, along with monitoring of student performance, make it clear that the most important objective of the school is improvement in student learning with planning and targets set to achieve that outcome.
Conclusion

During the life of the current Business Plan, Settlers Primary School has undergone rapid growth in student numbers with a resultant growth and turnover in staff. Student numbers have marginally reduced at the school in 2015 and the construction of new neighbouring schools will see a period of plateaued enrolment or continuing marginal reduction.

A stabilisation of student and staff numbers will allow the staff to focus on monitoring and evaluating outcomes in the final year of the current Business Plan. It will also permit them to concentrate effort, which has understandably been spent on managing growth in the school, on designing appropriate but challenging targets for the next Business Plan.

The staff have developed an effective review cycle and through the monitoring of student achievement, detailed analysis of information, sound operational planning and the employment of appropriate teaching strategies, have improved student outcomes significantly during the period of the 2013–2015 Business Plan. Although the school did not achieve all targets set in the Business Plan, staff have a sound understanding of the reasons behind any shortfall and have applied appropriate strategies to address these areas of weakness.

The strong and distributive school leadership, the collaboration evident within the staff and the guidance and oversight of the Board will likely result in the next Business Plan targets being better owned and understood by all members of the school community. The staff have high expectations that the stability in student and staff numbers will result in further improvements in support of the educational outcomes for students at Settlers Primary School.
Commendations

The following areas are commended:

- the school community (parents, staff and students) for developing a safe and inclusive environment in which everyone is valued
- the collaborative meeting structure which supports staff in the analysis of classroom data and implementation of strategies to improve student learning
- the strong and effective distributive leadership model employed in the school
- the Board, on its leadership and the substantial contribution it has made to the school in its first years of operation.

Area for Improvement

The following area for improvement is identified:

- future targets need to be well researched and understood by the Board and all staff.
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 Settlers 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.

Mr David Carvosso, Lead Reviewer
10 August 2015
Date

Mr Noel Strickland, Reviewer
14 August 2015
Date

Dr Marion Milton, Reviewer
10 August 2015
Date

Mr Richard Strickland, Director General,
Department of Education Services
2/9/15
Date