Duncraig Primary School

2013
Independent Review Findings

Independent Review of Independent Public Schools
Contents

School and Review Details ........................................................................................................ 1
1. About the Independent Review ......................................................................................... 1
2. Summary .......................................................................................................................... 3
3. School Context .................................................................................................................. 5
4a. School Performance - Student Learning ...................................................................... 7
4b. School Performance - Quality of Learning Environment ........................................... 9
4c. School Performance – Sustainability ........................................................................... 10
Declaration .......................................................................................................................... 13

Disclaimer

This document has been based on the findings of the independent reviewers’ 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 Minister for Education, the Director General of Education, the Principal and the Board Chair.

The Department of Education Services does not endorse any commercial organisation, product or service mentioned in this report.

The Department of Education Services can only guarantee the authenticity of original documents. This document is uncontrolled once printed.

To help people with disabilities obtain access to information, this document can be provided in alternative format on request. Please contact ips@des.wa.gov.au with specific requests or telephone 08 9441 1900.
School and Review Details

Principal: Mr Gary Stenhouse
Board Chair: Dr Jeremy Shaw
School Location: 21 Roche Road, Duncraig WA 6023
School Classification: PS Class 5
Number of Students: 348
Reviewers: Mr John Iacomella (Lead) and Mr Keith Newton
Review Dates: Self-review presentation: 28 March 2013
Review visits: 17 and 18 April 2013

1. About the Independent Review

The purpose of the independent review of Duncraig Primary School is to provide an assurance to the Minister for Education, the Director General of Education and the school community 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 improved the standards of student learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students
- how well the school has created an environment that promotes student learning
- how well the school is placed to sustain and improve its performance.

The school has been required, under the DPA, to undertake regular self-assessment. The outcomes of these assessments formed the basis for the school’s self-review which was presented to the reviewers for verification at the commencement of the independent review.
Prior to the presentation of the school's self-review, reviewers were provided with information on the school's educational achievements, its processes and its student performance data from a number of sources which include, but are not limited to:

- the My School™ website
- the Department of Education School Performance Monitoring System
- Schools Online reports.

Reviewers visited the school for a half-day presentation of the school’s self-review by the Principal, the Board Chair and other key stakeholders chosen by the school. Subsequently the reviewers analysed the evidence presented in the school’s self-review documentation and developed lines of enquiry where further verification was required.

An agenda for a two-day review visit was then negotiated with the school to enable the gathering of further evidence to clarify or confirm the claims made in the school’s self-review. During these two days the reviewers sourced information and evidence to support the school’s self-review claims through observation and discussion with teaching and non-teaching staff, board members, parents, students and the school leadership team.

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

This document reports on the findings of the independent review.
Duncraig Primary School

2. Summary

Duncraig Primary School provides a caring and welcoming setting for its students. Discussions with staff and students and observations, including classroom visits, confirmed that the students are learning in a supportive and positive learning environment. Collaboration between staff enables the school to plan and implement appropriate strategies to ensure all students have the greatest opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.

Meetings with staff and parents confirm that there are high expectations for the students. The school has implemented policies and practices that enable the staff and parents to work together to provide an inclusive and challenging learning environment for all its students. Surveys indicate that 90% of parents believe the school values their role as parents supporting the school and 88% believe their children's interests and talents are being developed.

The school has demonstrated, through the review process, that planning decisions about the learning program are based on the analysis of student data. The school has acknowledged that some targets have not been met. It has shown its capacity to adjust the learning program to improve the learning outcomes for all students. It has allocated additional resources to improve learning outcomes.

The school has established governance processes, systematic plans, policies and collaborative teams with distributed leadership, characterised by a growing culture of teamwork and high expectations of student outcomes. As a consequence the school is well-placed to sustain a significant drive to improve student performance.

The following commendations support the school’s claims of significant strengths and areas of improvement:

- the positive relationships and interactions between students, staff and parents in both formal and informal settings
- the changes being made in the early years to ensure there is a consistent approach to literacy and numeracy across the whole school
- the shared commitment from staff in developing and implementing school-wide approaches to successful learning
- the establishing and embedding of school-wide expectations and a common language focused on individual student growth as well as whole of school improvement.
The following **affirmations** support continued implementation of strategies and initiatives or areas for improvement identified by the school:

- the appointment of the additional staff to improve the student literacy learning outcomes
- the school’s policies and procedures for improving the learning outcomes for students with specific learning needs
- the school’s approach to improvement noting that it has the potential to strengthen the sustainability of its agenda as expressed in its purpose.

The following **recommendations** are made to add value to the school’s improvement and review processes:

- prioritise its achievable targets for improved student learning in the Business Plan
- differentiate between targets and milestones in the Operational Plan
- operational plans for all year levels be completed
- closely monitor the appointment of additional staff by setting specific targets demonstrating improved student learning and an end date for review.
3. **School Context**

Duncraig Primary School opened in 1973. It was granted Independent Public School (IPS) status in 2011. The school has an enrolment of 358 students and an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of 1090. The majority of students are Australian with recent enrolments indicating students from more diverse backgrounds, including children of migrants with a 457 visa. About 12% of students have a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE). There are seven Aboriginal students at the school.

The school comprises three teaching blocks with a separate administration block. There is an offsite Kindergarten and the school has utilised Building the Education Revolution funding to provide a new library, undercover assembly area, music room and canteen.

**School Purpose:**

- To provide a safe, caring, stable and challenging learning environment for all children.
- To ensure the ongoing academic, physical, emotional and social development of the children attending the school.
- To ensure equitable and efficient use of resources.

The school has identified five focus areas which form the basis of the Business Plan.

1. **LEARNING:** Success for all
2. **TEACHING:** Sound Teaching
3. **LEADERSHIP:** A Shared Approach
4. **RELATIONSHIPS:** Safe and Caring Learning
5. **RESOURCES:** The Physical and Natural Environment.

Each of these focus areas provides the Milestones and Achievement Targets for the school’s learning program. The Milestones list the indicators and the important strategies of the learning program. The Achievement Targets indicate the expected student learning outcomes.

The school has an experienced staff with little turnover. There is one Deputy Principal and one Level Three teacher. Some teachers are nearing retirement. It is anticipated the flexibility of IPS will allow the school to gradually change the staff profile in terms of experience and background. Also, the school will
have a greater capacity to appoint staff to specifically focus on priority learning areas such as literacy, numeracy and staff to further develop the school’s values program including “Kids Matter”.

Teachers have, this year, become involved in a network group with neighbouring schools, including the local secondary school, Duncraig Senior High School. This group aims to assist teachers in enriching their pedagogies, share curriculum development and help moderate student assessment between schools.

The school has no formal partnerships with external agencies or institutions. However, there is abundant evidence of strong support and involvement from the parent group. There is evidence that the school provides parents with the opportunity to work together to improve the educational outcomes for their children. For example, the school worked with parents in helping introduce “Jolly Phonics”. Parents indicated they were always welcome in the school. They also indicated teachers valued their assistance in the classroom for example, in listening to children read. Parents were particularly pleased with the teachers’ feedback on their child’s progress, particularly if a child had a learning difficulty. This feedback was shared in written reports and during formal review meetings between parents and teachers. This communication enables the parents to work with the school to improve their child’s educational outcome.

School facilities are leased to a private group to provide out-of-school-hours care, giving the community daily access to its facilities beyond normal school hours and enhancing the school’s image as a community facility.

The School Board comprises parents, staff and community members, most of whom have attended training sessions provided by the Department of Education. Board members admit they are still learning how best to exercise their role and responsibilities. The members understand their key role in assisting the school in developing its direction and policies.

Duncraig Primary School provides a caring and welcoming setting for its students. Discussions with staff, students and observations, including classroom visits, confirm that the students are learning in a supportive and positive learning environment. Collaboration between staff enables the school to plan and implement appropriate strategies to ensure that all students have the greatest opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.
4a. School Performance - Student Learning

Classroom observations, discussions with teachers, curriculum team leaders, students and parents, all demonstrate that Duncraig Primary School provides its students with an engaging, relevant and inclusive curriculum. The structure of classes, using split-year levels and grouping students to match student achievement, complements the teaching program so that all students have increased opportunities to maximise their learning.

The learning focus area from the Business Plan details the milestones and achievement targets that assist teachers to improve student learning. The school uses National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results, Western Australian Monitoring Standards in Education (WAMSE) data and teacher assessment to adjust the learning program. The achievement targets are written in terms of the NAPLAN and WAMSE results. Data on student achievement is compared with national and state results as well as with like and local schools.

The school was able to demonstrate that it was making progress on some targets, including Years 3 and 7 Reading and in Year 7 Mathematics. By its own analysis, the school did not achieve its targets for Year 5 Reading, Year 3 and 5 Writing or in Years 3 and 5 Mathematics. The reviewers were able to confirm that the teaching staff responded by adjusting their learning programs accordingly.

The 2013 Operational Plan, when completed, is designed to complement the Business Plan and is used by teachers to prepare their teaching block and individual classroom plans. The school does acknowledge the Business Plan and Operational Plan are under constant review and refinement. Currently the Business Plan details 22 different targets and 34 milestones. The Operational Plan combines targets and milestones in the focus areas. Furthermore, not all targets in the Operational Plan are in the Business Plan. It is recommended the school continue its review of the Business and Operational Plans and:

- Prioritise its achievable targets for improved student learning
- Directly link targets from the Business Plan to the Operational Plan.

Teachers from all year levels at Duncraig Primary School are required to prepare classroom/block operational plans to ensure the whole school consistently strives to achieve improvement targets for all students as detailed
in the Business Plan. There did not appear to be such plans for the middle years. It is recommended that classroom/block operational plans be completed for all years.

The school has reallocated resources to address missed targets. An additional education assistant has been appointed to assist teachers in the classroom to deal with small groups of low-achieving students with literacy for 1.5 days per week. An additional teacher has been appointed for one day per week to provide remedial work with students in the junior primary area and another day to provide extension work for the more able students in Years 4-7. The appointment of the additional staff to improve the student literacy learning outcomes is affirmed. It is worth noting these appointments could continue indefinitely without any improved student learning. It is recommended the appointment of additional staff be closely monitored by setting specific targets demonstrating improved student learning and an end date for review.

The school has established an “Action Team” to coordinate the whole-school approach to student welfare, including mental health and wellbeing. The program “Kids Matter” has been adopted as a key strategy to achieve the milestone of having a values-based program in the school. The school is commended on the positive relationships between students and staff evident to the reviewers and supported by parent comment. The “Buddy Program”, whereby students from Years 6/7 buddy a student in pre-primary provides all students with the opportunity to develop empathy with fellow students. Discussions with students indicate they find this program beneficial in curbing aggressive or bullying behaviour in the school yard. Older students develop a sense of responsibility and the younger students a positive link to the senior part of the school.

The school has identified 70 students with specific learning needs in need of Individual Education Plans (IEP) or Group Education Plans (GEP). The identification of these students is based on information that includes classroom reports, NAPLAN data, South Australian Spelling Test results and teacher judgement. The plans are accessible to all staff via the school’s shared drive. The Deputy Principal and Learning Support Coordinator are responsible for the development of the plans and oversee their implementation. Parents are consulted throughout the process and are encouraged to take an active role in supporting their child’s learning. The
school's policies and procedures for improving the learning outcomes for students with specific learning needs are affirmed.

Duncraig Primary School has demonstrated, through the review process, that planning decisions about the learning program are based on the analysis of student data. The school has acknowledged that some targets have not been met. It has shown its capacity to adjust the learning program to improve the learning outcomes for all students. It has allocated additional resources to improve learning outcomes.

4b. School Performance - Quality of Learning Environment

The reviewers were able to verify that the school has a common vision that guides the day-to-day practices of the school including professional learning, which is related to contemporary pedagogy and the direction set by the Business Plan. This was established through extensive interviews with staff, the Board, parents and students, as well as first-hand observation of interactions between students and staff.

Evidence of inclusive practices and planning to meet the learning needs of all students was sighted. Students are expected to learn in a timely and individually-paced manner. Class work is purposeful with students engaged as far as possible in challenging and meaningful learning. There are few obvious behavioural, attendance or engagement problems requiring intervention by teachers or those in leadership positions.

The school is commended on the changes being made in the early years to ensure a consistent approach to literacy and numeracy prevails. There is evidence that this is making a positive difference to the standard of achievement being attained and when fully embedded will provide the foundation for continued improvement across all years.

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. Effective partnership with parents and the wider community are established on trust and mutual respect. This is evident in the culture of interaction that was reported by the parents and observed in the course of the site visit. For example, parents willingly accept teachers' invitations to help in classrooms.
The reviewers were able to verify students as being articulate, thoughtful and conscious of ‘doing their best to succeed’ with a positive attitude toward the school, teachers, and their learning. Students valued the efforts their teachers were making to provide a positive and challenging learning environment. Students take responsibility for their learning while acknowledging that teachers always expected high standards in learning outcomes and behaviours.

The staff are commended on their shared commitment to developing and implementing a school-wide approach to successful learning. Individual student progress and talents are valued and achievements are celebrated. Staff are encouraged and empowered to initiate evidence-based change on a whole-school basis to ensure teaching and learning practices are effective.

In meeting with parents and Board members the reviewers were able to verify the high regard in which the school was 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 to and genuine interest in the students.

The Parents and Citizens' Association actively supports the school in providing additional resources through its inclusive fundraising strategies and is instrumental in positioning the school in the community.

The positive reports across the school community affirm the mutually supportive manner in which the Principal, Board and staff work together to ensure a cooperative and successful learning environment. The school is commended on the way in which staff, students and parents interact and in the positive language they use in both formal and informal settings. Collaboration between staff and parents enables the school to plan and implement appropriate strategies to ensure all students have the greatest opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.

4c. School Performance – Sustainability

Duncraig Primary School has successfully positioned itself through its policies and practices to provide on an ongoing basis a safe, caring, stable and challenging learning environment for all students. The ongoing academic, physical, emotional and social development of the children attending the school and an equitable and efficient use of resources are stated as its
Duncraig Primary School

purpose. Teacher assessments, NAPLAN results and parent surveys confirm that the school is successfully achieving its purpose.

In the extensive contact with different groups and sub-groups within the school, the reviewers found the school values of ‘learning, excellence, equity and care’ were present and modelled by students, staff and parents. They provide a reference point for school and individual identity, individual responsibility and commitment to learning, and are reinforced continuously in various class activities and within the professional endeavours of the staff. For example, a parent of a child with a learning difficulty spoke very highly of the individual program the school developed and implemented for her child. The parent was also complimentary of the positive manner in which the school conducted all meetings and interactions with her and her child.

Common values and desired behaviours are embedded from Kindergarten to Year 7. Staff understands the commonality of expectations and appreciate that it serves as a platform for all to use in lifting standards. This was evident in the interactions observed between the Principal and students and the interactions between teachers and students.

Although the Principal and Deputy Principal share end-of-line responsibilities, distributed curriculum leadership ensures school-wide coherency. This is embedded in a series of staff committees that research and recommend changes and once consensus is achieved, initiate implementation. This enables staff to collaborate to enhance their individual instructional skills whilst at the same time addressing common student performance deficits. This is coupled with appropriate documentation and freely available performance information.

In addition, the formal leadership team is approachable and aware of the need to manage the dynamics of the committees to ensure their freshness, vitality and focus. The reviewers affirm the school’s approach to improvement noting that it has the potential to strengthen the sustainability of its agenda as expressed in its purpose.

The School Board demonstrated that it is fulfilling its governance role effectively and that it engages in self-review to improve its own practices. Its role is understood by the school community and it operates in harmony with a strong Parents and Citizens’ Association. Board minutes reveal that the Principal presents comprehensive student performance information as feedback on the achievement of targets. The Board acknowledges that it is in
Duncraig Primary School

a maturing phase and that its members should continue to seek deeper understanding and knowledge of the curriculum and data-analysis processes.

The school demonstrated that its resource management and workforce planning are appropriately and effectively targeted to align with the DPA and school priorities. Staff members have appropriate access to resources to sustain their roles within the school.

The school is commended on establishing and embedding school-wide expectations and a common language focused on individual student growth as well as school improvement. The school leadership is actively engaged in overseeing the performance of all staff and provides appropriate feedback as required.

The school has established governance processes, systematic plans, policies and collaborative teams with distributed leadership, characterised by a growing culture of collaboration and high expectation. As a consequence the school is well-placed to sustain a significant drive to improve student performance.
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 our assessment of the evidence provided by Duncraig 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.

(Signature of John Iacomella, Lead Reviewer)  
(Date)  

(Signature of Keith Newton, Reviewer)  
(Date)  

(Signature of Richard Strickland, CEO, Department of Education Services)  
(Date)