



ACT
Government
Education

Weetangera Primary School

Report of Review, 2019

Date of School Review: 13, 14 and 15 August 2019
Principal of Review School: James Barnett

National School Improvement Tool Review Report prepared by:

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Report of Review, 2019 prepared by:

ACT Government Education Directorate
Education Services Division, School Improvement Branch

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Overview of the School Review process

Approximately a fifth of all ACT public schools are reviewed each year. Reviews provide quality, independent, feedback tailored to individual school contexts. Findings from Review are considered alongside system and school level student achievement, perception and demographic data as the evidence base for development of the school's next 5-year School Improvement Plan.

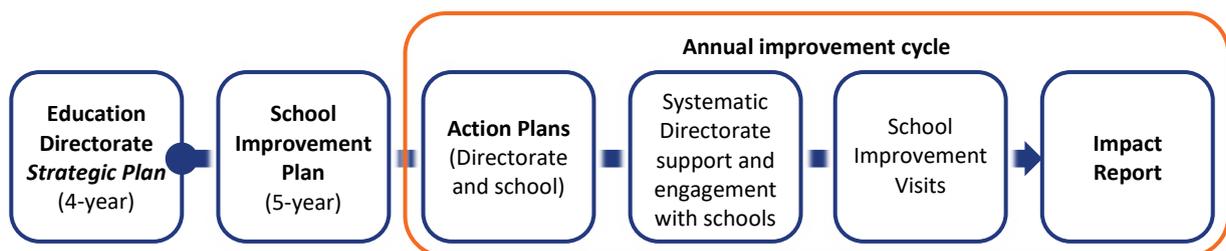
Reviews are undertaken by a team of experienced educators trained in the use of the *National School Improvement Tool (NSIT)* and are led by a Lead Reviewer from the Australian Council of Educational Research. Review Team size depends upon a range of factors, including the size and context of a school.

Through the lens of the NSIT, an internationally recognised framework for reviewing teaching and learning practices, reviewers gain an accurate picture of current school practices. During Review evidence provided by schools is considered alongside evidence gathered through consultation with staff, students, parents and community members.

Following Review, the school receives a planning report, which is used as an internal working document, outlining key findings and recommended strategies for continued school improvement. The Education Directorate uses this planning report as a basis for the final *Report of Review* provided to school communities.

The *Report of Review* includes detailed Review Team findings for each of the nine Domains of the National School Improvement Tool, and Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations for continued school improvement.

Where does School Review sit within the broader school improvement cycle?



ACT public schools utilise systematic integration of evidence and data collection, access and analysis to inform sharp and narrow 5-year School Improvement Plans. Annually, all schools utilise a suite of tools to expand, monitor and report on these priorities. School Improvement Visits (SIVs – which include School Review) provide differentiated support and feedback to schools through varying levels of in-school immersion. SIVs progress in relation to a school's needs and improvement cycle, with School Review typically occurring at the end of this cycle.

What are Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations?

Commendations

The commendations highlight positive actions the school has taken over its last improvement cycle. Typically these actions are either complete, or embedded in school practice.

Affirmations

The affirmations verify specific actions being undertaken by the school that are impacting positively on school improvement. These actions are typically either not yet complete and/or not yet embedded.

Recommendations

The recommendations provide the school with evidence-based advice regarding high-value areas for future school improvement efforts. Drawn from the NSIT, recommendations are key to the school developing a sharp and narrow improvement plan.

NSIT Domain 1: An explicit improvement agenda

Domain descriptor

The school leadership team and/or governing body have established and are driving a strong improvement agenda for the school, grounded in evidence from research and practice and expressed in terms of improvements in measurable student outcomes. Explicit and clear school-wide targets for improvement have been set and communicated to parents and families, teachers and students, with accompanying timelines.

Findings

- Weetangera Primary School's strategic plan for improvement is expressed through its three overarching priorities: maximise student achievement; enhance student wellbeing and engagement, and effectively promote community partnerships.
- Subsequent Annual Action Plans (AAPs) demonstrate a close alignment to the strategic plan.
- Having one whole-of-school goal for improvement each year in 2018 and 2019 narrowed the focus for staff. In 2018 the school focused its attention on the goal of developing each student as an independent and effective writer. In 2019 the focus is differentiated teaching and learning.
- These goals and subsequent strategies for improvement have been captured in team action plans. Teachers are aware of, and have contributed to, the development of these plans. School leaders monitor the implementation of team plans through regular 'check ins' at team meetings. Minutes of executive team meetings include regular reference to the school's AAP.
- Most teachers could identify differentiation and the teaching of writing as the two key areas for improvement and were able to describe some of the ways in which they had changed their practice as a result of this whole-of-school focus.
- In all classrooms there is evidence of the focus on writing. Examples include 'bump it up' and 'word' walls displays. Most students also have individual goals for writing.
- Targets for improvement are evident in AAPs and reported on in annual School Board Reports. Teachers were not familiar with school-wide targets but could describe the expectation of at least one year's growth for each student.
- School coaches encourage teachers to visit other schools and observe colleagues and leaders regularly distribute professional reading related to the school's priorities. The school has engaged a number of experts to support the areas of focus for improvement.
- Plans for improvement are available on the school website and school newsletters include some references to school priorities.
- Board members reported that regular reports about the progress of the school in implementing its strategic plan are provided. Parents and Board members had a general awareness of the school's performance data.

NSIT Domain 2: Analysis and discussion of data

Domain descriptor

A high priority is given to the school-wide analysis and discussion of systematically collected data on student outcomes, including academic, attendance and behavioural outcomes, and student wellbeing. Data analyses consider overall school performance as well as the performances of students from identified priority groups; evidence of improvement/ regression over time; performances in comparison with similar schools; and, in the case of data from standardised tests, measures of growth across the years of school.

Findings

- Over time, a very broad range of data sets have been collected, and these include standardised tests and surveys, as well as school-based surveys and assessment.
- Leaders have reflected on the range of data sets collected, refined these and developed a whole-of-school data plan. This plan clearly articulates the school's beliefs about evidence-based practices, the purpose of key data sets, and a schedule for collection and analysis.
- There is some evidence of the analysis of data sets and presentations to staff of school performance data, for example, NAPLAN. Minutes of executive and team meetings provide evidence of leaders discussing data.
- Regular routines of data analysis and discussion are emerging. In weekly team meetings, teachers are supported to engage in disciplined dialogue using the spiral of inquiry process to reflect on student progress. These teams have developed data plans aligned to the school's overarching plan. These strategies are supporting teachers to build their data literacy skills.
- Leaders monitor the effectiveness of the implementation of key initiatives, for example, the coaching program. Teachers have provided feedback about their experiences in coaching and this has resulted in a refined approach for 2019. Student perceptions of writing have also been collected through school-developed student surveys.
- In 2018, the school participated in the Early Years Literacy Initiative using a spiral of inquiry approach to interrogate a range of data sets.
- The school uses Excel spreadsheets, the 'Sentral' learning management platform, and online Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) to support data analysis. Teachers have ready access to this information.
- Teachers use a range of strategies to store their own evidence about student progress.
- School performance data are reported in annual School Board Reports and are available on the school's website.

NSIT Domain 3: A culture that promotes learning

Domain descriptor

The school is driven by a deep belief that every student is capable of successful learning. A high priority is given to building and maintaining positive and caring relationships between staff, students and parents. There is a strong collegial culture of mutual trust and support among teachers and school leaders and parents are treated as partners in the promotion of student learning and wellbeing. The school works to maintain a learning environment that is safe, respectful, tolerant, inclusive and that promotes intellectual rigour.

Findings

- The school's approach to managing student behaviour is underpinned by the ACT Directorate's Essential Skills for Teachers.
- The review team observed that classrooms are calm and productive and there are no obvious behavioural, attendance or engagement problems.
- Reviewers observed respectful and caring relationships throughout the school.
- Student wellbeing and engagement has been a priority for the school during the life of the current plan. A whole-of-school approach to social and emotional learning has been developed and teaching teams make decisions on how best to implement it in relation to student need.
- The school has implemented a school-wide approach to building a positive mindset towards learning.
- Communication with parents occurs through the school website, newsletters, social media pages and school-based digital applications.
- Parents and carers are welcomed into classrooms. This is evidenced by the number of parents participating in morning parent reading. School volunteers also assist in literacy intervention programs and maintaining the community garden.
- The school leadership team and staff are strengthening expectations in relation to learning and achievement. This is evidenced through the introduction of individual goal-setting and student conferencing.
- Stakeholder opinion survey data demonstrate high levels of satisfaction in most items, particularly for teachers and parents. Parents raised the positive and inclusive school culture as a reason for choosing Weetangera Primary School for their children.
- Some teachers reported that at times, classroom learning is interrupted due to other school programs and events, and that this provides challenge for teachers in delivering the curriculum.
- Students at Weetangera Primary School are given many opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities as evidenced by sporting, academic, and artistic endeavours.
- Parents expressed a high degree of confidence in the school. Teachers reported to reviewers that leaders provide extensive support.

NSIT Domain 4: Targeted use of school resources

Domain descriptor

The school applies its resources (staff time, expertise, funds, facilities, materials) in a targeted manner to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of all students. It has school-wide policies, practices and programs in place to assist in identifying and addressing student needs. Flexible structures and processes enable the school to respond appropriately to the needs of individual learners.

Findings

- Weetangera's approach to identifying and responding to student learning and wellbeing needs is underpinned by a Response to Intervention (RTI) framework. The School Wellbeing and Engagement Team (SWET) meets regularly and teachers can make referrals or attend these meetings to discuss particular students' needs.
- Team-level collaboration and termly planning days are resourced through the weekly PACT (planning, assessment and curriculum team) meetings. PACT meetings are scheduled to maximise collaboration, with additional time for release from face-to-face teaching. Teachers highlight the value of these meetings and appreciate this additional planning time, which is provided by prudent use of staffing allowances and allocations within the school budget.
- Evidence indicates that early intervention literacy programs are improving the reading outcomes of students who have been identified as below year-level expectations.
- Specialist teachers provide targeted intervention across the year cohorts to support classroom teachers in the first teaching session each day. This allows for flexible groupings of students to differentiate the learning needs of students.
- Resources have been allocated to provide a 1:1 ratio for digital devices in years 2-6. Technology is also accessible for students in the early years of schooling.
- The school has an attractive and engaging learning environment. Classrooms, specialist programs and the library are well resourced by the school and supported through the extensive fundraising initiatives of the P&C Association.
- An executive leadership structure has been resourced to enable all leaders to spend time in classrooms working with teachers.
- Learning support assistants have been allocated to classrooms to support students with additional needs.
- The school is currently exploring the most effective way of supporting its EAL/D¹ learners.
- Weetangera Primary School provides enrichment opportunities ('passion projects') for selected students.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students meet weekly and participate in a range of projects and events to promote intercultural understanding and celebrate cultural heritage. The Yirri dancers are a well-recognised and celebrated group in the school.
- Leaders have recognised the need to review current structures and resource allocations to respond to competing demands.

¹ English as an Additional Language or Dialogue

NSIT Domain 5: An expert teaching team

Domain descriptor

The school has found ways to build a school-wide, professional team of highly able teachers, including teachers who take an active leadership role beyond the classroom. Strong procedures are in place to encourage a school-wide, shared responsibility for student learning and success, and to encourage the development of a culture of continuous professional improvement that includes classroom-based learning, mentoring and coaching arrangements.

Findings

- The school has developed and documented a professional learning plan. This plan includes a statement of commitment to professional learning. It also includes criteria for excellence, as well as agreed rights and responsibilities which underpin the school's approach to professional learning.
- An annual schedule for professional learning has also been developed for weekly staff meetings and demonstrates alignment with school priorities.
- Teachers have access to professional learning within the school, and externally, and report that they have opportunities to pursue learning aligned to the goals identified in their Professional Development Plan and areas of interest.
- A school-wide model of coaching, focused on supporting teachers and teams to achieve their personal or collective goals, has been implemented. A coaching handbook articulates the school's belief about building a culture of continuous improvement through professional learning and regular coaching. Teachers reported that they value the opportunities for coaching and reflected on how this has strengthened an area of their practice.
- Weekly planning, assessment and curriculum team (PACT) meetings support teachers in sharing practice, reflecting on the progress of learners using data and collaboratively planning the curriculum.
- Some teaching teams are engaged in action research. Coaches support these teams to identify an area of focus, conduct research and reflect on their practice.
- Teachers report that all leaders are in classrooms regularly, and provide informal feedback on the student learning they observe. Coaches regularly work in classrooms modelling practice when requested, observing, and giving feedback.
- Teaching teams conduct learning walks from time-to-time to monitor the implementation of agreed strategies in classes. For example, teaching teams have gathered evidence about whether or not classrooms include expected displays ('bump it up' and 'word' walls).
- Teachers new to the school reported that they are well supported by leaders and their colleagues. Leaders express an intent to refine induction processes.
- Teachers develop Professional Development Plans that include a goal for all teachers linked to the strategic plan, a team goal, and a personal goal which is also linked to improvement plans.
- Leaders have recruited staff with specific skills to support the school-wide focus on building a professional learning community. Over time they have also ensured that teaching teams include a balance of experienced and new educators.

NSIT Domain 6: Systematic curriculum delivery

Domain descriptor

The school has a coherent, sequenced plan for curriculum delivery that ensures consistent teaching and learning expectations and a clear reference for monitoring learning across the year levels. The plan, within which evidence-based teaching practices are embedded, and to which assessment and reporting procedures are aligned, has been developed with reference to the Australian Curriculum or other approved curriculum and refined collaboratively to provide a shared vision for curriculum practice. This plan is shared with parents and families.

Findings

- Curriculum scope and sequence documents for every learning area have been created from Kindergarten to year 6 and these demonstrate a close alignment to the Australian Curriculum. How these are used to inform individual and team planning varies between teaching teams. The school reports against the Achievement Standards.
- Curriculum outlines are provided to parents at the beginning of each term to enable families to connect with their children's learning.
- Teams work collaboratively to develop planning documentation in weekly meetings. Once a term extended meetings also support long term planning. Teachers acknowledge how much they value the support they receive from leaders and the additional time allocated to collaborate on curriculum development.
- Leaders are aware of the need for further work to ensure a stronger alignment between short and long term planning.
- Extensive use is made of Google Apps for Education (GAfE) to enable teams to plan and share their instructional strategies.
- There was a clear narrative from teachers across the school on how they use assessment (pre-testing) to determine prior knowledge.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are planned and taught within the curriculum.
- The school timetable privileges the English and mathematics learning areas.
- Science, music, physical education, and French are taught by specialist teachers.
- While the school has developed curriculum documentation, teams are working towards understanding how to explicitly embed the General Capabilities in classroom programs.
- Teachers meet to moderate across year levels and there is some use of the Australian Curriculum work samples. There is variability across the school in how judgements are made against the Achievement Standards.

NSIT Domain 7: Differentiated teaching and learning

Domain descriptor

The school places a high priority on ensuring that, in their day-to-day teaching, classroom teachers identify and address the learning needs of individual students, including high-achieving students. Teachers are encouraged and supported to monitor closely the progress of individuals, identify learning difficulties and tailor classroom activities to levels of readiness and need.

Findings

- School-wide professional learning about differentiated teaching and learning has been provided and there is an expectation by the leadership team that individual needs of all students are met.
- Teaching teams are beginning to reflect more deeply on some student data sets during their PACT (planning, assessment, curriculum team) time. This is supporting teachers in making adjustments to their teaching program to better respond to need. Primarily the curriculum is delivered by year level.
- Most students have learning goals although how these are developed and used varies. Conferencing with individual students about these goals occurs, and approaches vary from classroom to classroom.
- Teachers are working towards developing differentiated tasks for assessment.
- The leadership team and staff are moving towards a more systematic approach in responding to student learning needs through curriculum differentiation. Their recent work using the spirals of inquiry and action learning projects in some parts of the school has shown positive impact.
- The school leadership team has engaged a number of experts to model best practice in differentiation, particularly for literacy and spelling.
- Staff are beginning to employ a variety of strategies to differentiate the learning for students and expressed an interest in learning more. In some areas of the school, students are given choice in the level of task difficulty during mathematics.
- An enrichment science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) group has been introduced. Selected students can focus on 'passion projects' and have the opportunity to interact with experts from various STEAM fields.
- Semester and end-of-year student reports demonstrate achievement and provide information about how parents and carers can support the learning at home. This reporting is complemented by parent teacher interviews and a learning journey. Parents are welcome to meet with teachers to discuss their child's progress outside of these planned sessions.
- Parents and students expressed to the review team during interviews, the desire for more challenge in learning tasks and greater pride in bookwork and work product. The review team noted variability in the quality of bookwork and written feedback to students.

NSIT Domain 8: Effective pedagogical practices

Domain descriptor

The school principal and other school leaders recognise that highly effective teaching is the key to improving student learning throughout the school. They take a strong leadership role, encouraging the use of research-based teaching practices in all classrooms to ensure that every student is engaged, challenged and learning successfully. All teachers understand and use effective teaching methods – including explicit instruction – to maximise student learning.

Findings

- Weetangera Primary School has developed a ‘pedagogical expectations’ booklet which includes school wide expectations for professional practice and learning, assessment and moderation, intervention, classroom learning environments and the use of ICT.
- Expected teaching strategies in all classrooms include learning intentions and success criteria, student conferencing, ‘bump it up’ walls, classroom discussions and the use of Growth Mindset strategies. The review team noted variation in how consistently these practices are implemented.
- The school leadership team has developed a strategy to provide consistency in research-based pedagogy across the school through coaching, mentoring and action learning. School leaders also spend time working with teachers in classrooms to provide feedback. Teachers generally felt well supported and were actively engaged in these initiatives.
- There has been a school-wide focus on supporting teachers to use environmental print in their classrooms to support learning.
- Reviewers noted that in addition to ‘bump it up’ walls, vocabulary word walls and anchor charts were being implemented to support the school’s focus on literacy.
- The school staff have been actively involved in a number of ACT Education Directorate initiatives including ‘The Writing Project’ and the ‘Early Years Literacy Project’.
- The approach to the teaching of literacy is underpinned by the ‘10 Essential Literacy Practices’². These practices are expected in all classrooms and this is monitored through walk throughs by leaders and colleagues.
- A whole-of-school approach to the teaching of spelling, entitled ‘word study’, has been implemented and underpinned by a core learning resource.
- A scaffolded play-based approach to the teaching of literacy and numeracy concepts for preschool has been implemented.
- Student conferencing is supporting the development of a school-wide approach to timely feedback to individual students about their learning.
- Learning intentions are highly visible in most classrooms and in some teaching resources. Reviewers noted some variability in how well students could describe what they were learning about, the importance of the learning and how to improve.

² The Early Literacy Taskforce in Michigan supported by Prof Nell Duke has identified 10 essential instructional practices in literacy, also see Christine Topfler.

NSIT Domain 9: School-community partnerships

Domain descriptor

The school actively seeks ways to enhance student learning and wellbeing by partnering with parents and families, other education and training institutions, local businesses and community organisations. Parents and families are recognised as integral members of the school community and partners in their children's education. Partnerships are strategically established to address identified student needs and operate by providing access to experiences, support and intellectual and/or physical resources not available within the school. All partners are committed to the common purposes and goals of partnership activities. Procedures are in place to ensure effective communications and to monitor and evaluate the intended impacts of the school's partnerships.

Findings

- A number of parent volunteers are regularly in the school, supporting fundraising and social events. These include working bees, assisting with the Ride and Walk to School Safely initiative, and the annual fete. Many parents attend classes to read with their children.
- The active P&C Association supports a range of school-wide events and raises funds to augment school resources and programs.
- The school maintains a register of parent volunteers to enrich the learning experiences of students. Volunteers often share their expertise and experiences in classes.
- The school has established a number of links with government agencies, businesses and organisations to enhance the learning program for students. These links include the Active Streets for Schools Program in partnership with Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) and ACT Health; and the 'fresh tastes' and safe bicycle riding programs.
- Weetangera Primary School is an active participant in the Belconnen Network Writing project and is involved in 'walk and talk' visits across the network of schools.
- Greening Australia supports the school's sustainability team to enact its carbon neutral school action plan.
- Connections with local high schools support transition as students commence their secondary school studies.
- Connections with the Pegasus riding school and Cranleigh Primary School involve students from Weetangera Primary School visiting and interacting with students in a range of activities.

Commendations

- At Weetangera Primary School there is a happy, optimistic feel and a strong sense of belonging, caring and connectedness for students, teachers and parents. The school presents as an inclusive and welcoming community.
- The school has established and maintains a supportive learning environment where students and teachers work cooperatively together in open plan classrooms. The school values of inclusion, honesty, respect, resilience and responsibility are evident in the way in which all members of the community treat each other with respect, consideration and care.
- The school places a very high priority on student wellbeing, evidenced by its commitment to social and emotional learning, students developing a positive mindset about their learning, and through the support provided by the School Wellbeing and Engagement Team (SWET).
- The principal and staff are held in high regard by the community and Weetangera Primary School is a school of choice in its community.
- The school Board and P&C Association contribute significant support and resources to positively enhance the school culture and learning programs.
- The whole-of-school coaching program has enabled teachers to work together, engage with research and reflect on practice. Through this initiative and the team meeting approach the school is building a professional learning community.
- High levels of professional trust and morale are apparent. Staff work collaboratively and cohesively to further improve the opportunities and learning experiences for students.

Affirmations

- The school has built collective ownership of its improvement agenda with staff.
- The recent development of a whole-of-school data plan is supporting leaders in building routines of data collection and analysis.
- Leaders have committed considerable resources to support the implementation of improvement priorities.
- Open plan learning spaces are utilised effectively to maximise student learning and support flexible groupings.
- Leaders have directed resources to support intervention programs across the school.
- The use of the spiral of inquiry process is building teacher capability in data literacy.
- Curriculum scoping documentation has built a firm foundation to support future work in consistent planning processes.
- The whole-of-school focus on student goal-setting and conferencing is supporting the journey towards personalised learning.
- There are many and varied opportunities provided to students to enrich their learning beyond the core curriculum.

Recommendations

- Continue to develop a whole-of-school curriculum plan underpinned by a clear vision for teaching and learning. Ensure that a strong alignment between whole-of-school scoping documents, team, and individual planning is achieved. Support teachers in embedding the General Capabilities in planning programs and explicitly developing these skills for all students.
- Implement the school's data plan to build consistent routines for the analysis, discussion and use of whole-school performance data. Ensure that teachers are provided with ongoing support in using data to effectively monitor student learning.
- Continue to support teachers in differentiating the learning to meet students' learning needs, levels of readiness, interests, aspirations, and motivations across all learning areas.
- Review how the school is sourcing and applying available resources to ensure that programs and strategies are in place to meet the needs of all learners.
- Refine and define the teaching strategies expected in every classroom, strengthening the capability of teachers to embed these practices by providing opportunities for the regular sharing of practice through modelling, classroom observations, feedback and coaching.
- Consider how school policies and procedures can be refined to strengthen a culture of learning, reflective of high expectations for every student's progress, particularly for high-achieving students.
- Intentionally build one or two partnerships that will strategically contribute to improved student achievement and/or wellbeing. Ensure that the outcomes to be achieved are identified and that partnerships are regularly monitored and refined as required.