ACT Government
Education

Gilmore Primary School

Report of Review, 2019

Date of School Review: 12 and 13 June 2019
Principal of Review School: Vicki Lucas

National School Improvement Tool Review Report prepared by:
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Report Date: 05 July 2019

Report of Review, 2019 prepared by:

ACT Government Education Directorate
Education Services Division, School Improvement Branch

Report Date: 26 August 2019

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?
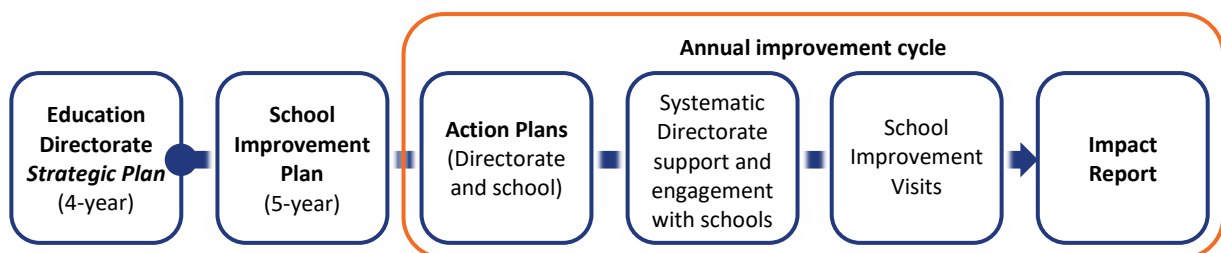
ACT public schools utilise systematic integration of evidence and data collection, access and analysis to inform sharp and narrow 5-year School Improvement Plans. Annually, all schools utilise a suite of tools to expand, monitor and report on these priorities. School Improvement Visits (SIVs – which 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
- The *Gilmore Primary School Strategic Plan 2016-2019* had two broad priorities: enhance the school's environment and culture to ensure the wellbeing of students, staff and families; and improve student learning outcomes for all students, Preschool to year 6. The priorities had four and five student outcomes with four and six targets respectively.

- Annual action plans (AAPs) maintained a focus on these priorities, outcomes and targets. AAP reports and board reports demonstrated a consistent focus and review of these priorities over the life of the plan.

- School-level performance data are shared with the School Board and made available on the school website but are not widely communicated to the community.

- Most staff were generally able to talk about the recent strategies implemented in the school but were less clear on school priorities and targets and the implications for classroom teaching and learning.

- The school has a process for students to provide ideas on how to improve the school.

- Staff and parents commented on the significant improvement in focus by all staff on student learning. Many staff described how recent strategies had allowed them to improve their teaching and were able to outline examples of significant improvement in learning outcomes by some students.

- In recent years, the school has engaged the services of ACT Education Directorate staff and benefited from their research, and that of contracted consultants, to implement improvement strategies.

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
- The school has analysed school level data compiled by the ACT Education Directorate, such as NAPLAN, Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS), and satisfaction surveys. The school leadership team was able to talk about data trends of whole cohorts, and this has been communicated to staff. The school is still considering the value of other standardised tests to broaden understanding of school, class and student-level performance and progress.

- Many parents interviewed had limited understanding of school performance data. One parent mentioned that she looked at the 'MySchool' website to gauge school performance.

- Some teachers talked about a need to get more diagnostic testing and the need for training to use this data to drive student improvement.

- The assessment schedule within the *Gilmore Primary School Guide for Teaching* document describes the tools classroom teachers should use for assessment to inform planning. Data included PIPS, PM Benchmarks for reading, and class assessments in mathematics.

- As part of a broader ACT Education Directorate 'Early Years Literacy Initiative' with Christine Topfer, the school participated in an analysis of NAPLAN, PIPS, PM Benchmarks for reading and demographic data in 2018. This work is continuing.

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
- Over the life of the plan the school has collaboratively developed the 'Gilmore Guidelines'. Teachers and parents have acknowledged that the implementation of the guidelines has made significant improvements in school culture.

- The staff handbook states the expectations of teachers in communicating with parents.

- The school has a focus on values that involve relationships and learning, courage, kindness and respect.

- The school is introducing the Positive Behaviours for Learning approach to complement the work on the 'Gilmore Guidelines'.

- The review team noted that classrooms visited were settled and calm, and expectations for behaviour were clear.

- Attendance data indicate concern for a minority of students. However, the review team noted that low student numbers impacted on these data.

- In interviews students stated that they felt safe and happy at school. Students felt valued and liked the sense of belonging in a small school. Students said, "everyone knows us and helps us".

- In interviews parents stated that they felt welcome in the school and had seen an improvement in the school's tone and their children's learning experiences. Parents mentioned that the school administration staff always say "come in and have a cuppa" when there may be a family issue to discuss.

- The review team noted that parents felt they could come and discuss their child's learning at any time and communication is open between staff and parents.

- The review team noted that there is a focus on teachers working collaboratively to improve student learning.

- Documentation, parents' comments, and discussions with staff demonstrate that cultural integrity underpins decisions and actions within the school. Artefacts around the school and school celebrations support this view.

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

- The *Gilmore Primary School Guide for Teaching* describes a 'response to need' model to meet student learning needs. Minutes, plans and 'data trackers' evidence the planning and review cycles of this process.

- The school leadership team has introduced programs and strategies to identify and address students' learning and developmental needs. They include:

  > weekly science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) enrichment groups

  > employing additional LSOs across the school

  > restructuring the daily timetable

  > expanding the lunchtime club's provision.

- A staffing structure prioritises weekly data meetings for teaching teams with a member of the leadership team. Within 'response to need' meetings, data are used to identify gaps in student learning, to monitor improvement over time, and enable planning for differentiated teaching and learning.

- The school has worked with the Network School Engagement Team to trial a 'Universal Speech Pilot Program'. Speech pathologists work shoulder-to-shoulder with teachers modelling and coaching speech and language supports.

- The school has repurposed physical spaces. This includes:

  > designated specialist areas for science and art

  > learning spaces organised for whole group work, small group work and individual work.

- The breakfast club is offered every day this year. This is facilitated by a full-time family engagement coordinator employed by the school.

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
- School leaders spend time working with teachers to improve their teaching practices, including observing and providing feedback on classroom teaching and modelling practices as needed. Teachers have said that this has increased significantly in the past two years.

- The *Guidelines for Staff Induction at Gilmore Primary School* document references the Directorate process. New educators say that they feel supported in their teaching and learning.

- The school leadership team has capitalised on the strengths of teachers across the school to allow for specialist provision in the curriculum areas of science, music, and physical education.

- The 2019 staff professional learning plan describes the research-based purpose and process around professional learning, a description of some interrelation of professional learning activities, and a schedule for whole-school 'professional learning communities' meetings.

- Professional learning has been focused on English, namely the '10 Essential Literacy Practices', and applying these to planning and teaching.

- The principal engages in professional discussions with staff on an annual basis.

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

- The school leadership team has recently focused on implementing the Australian Curriculum achievement standards. Teachers have been engaged in mapping and planning the Australian Curriculum to provide appropriate classroom experiences. The review team noted examples of term overviews and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) planning documents. Teachers are responding to student learning needs through weekly planning documents for English, mathematics and science. However, work is still in progress to align planning with the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.

- The school operates in a composite or multi-age class structure. Work is continuing to ensure that all students are accessing year level standards consistently as appropriate.

- Students with identified needs have an individual learning plan to augment the curriculum. These plans are monitored on a regular basis.

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
- There is an expectation by the leadership team that individual needs of all students are met.

- The school is proactive in its approach to raising student performance, with a strong focus on students with identified additional needs.

- An enrichment STEAM group has been recently introduced and is highly valued and regarded by the school community.

- Attempts are made by teachers to differentiate the curriculum with some staff indicating an interest in learning how to do this more effectively.

- Semester and end of year student reports demonstrate achievement and information about progress over time. This reporting is complemented by parent teacher interviews. Parents are welcome to meet with teachers to discuss their child's progress outside of these planned sessions.

- Most teachers are using 'FACES on the data' (Sherrat & Fullan) to identify starting points for teaching and to monitor progress.

- The review team noted the grouping of students and additional staff being available to support the learning needs of students.

- Some students had individual learning goals.

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

- The school leadership team is committed to ensuring high impact strategies are being used across the school to enhance student learning.

- The school leadership team developed the *Gilmore Guide for Teaching and Assessment.* It outlines agreed beliefs and strategies to cater for student learning. It also outlines the agreed assessment tasks for learning areas across the school and agreed teaching practices in mathematics and English. Reference is also made to the '10 Essential Literacy Practices'.

- The school leadership team works closely with teaching teams to improve planning practices and has developed mentoring processes across the school.

- Most teachers welcome feedback through classroom observations and visits. Classroom observations were based on general classroom practices, and at times, the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Teacher Standards.

- The review team noted learning intentions and success criteria in some classrooms.

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
- The school has recently engaged a full time Family Engagement Coordinator to strengthen school and family partnerships. Where the school itself cannot provide the services required by the family, the coordinator and/or the school leadership team has sought outside partnerships.

- Most of the partnerships have been formed without a specific statement of student outcomes or a review process. Examples of these partnerships include:
  > an expanded breakfast provision for students in kindergarten-year 6 each morning including support from Gilmore church volunteers on some mornings
  > the Learning for Life scholarships offered by the Smith Family
  > playgroup Fridays.

- Two partnerships were formed through a more rigorous negotiation between partners on the student outcomes sought. Both partnerships have been formed through the leadership team identifying a strategic need but lack formal agreements and review processes. These partnerships are:
  > the Bungee Youth Resilience Program (Belconnen Community Services) which is an inclusive resilience-building program that promotes emotional wellbeing through the arts. The program is designed to build resilience, enhance wellbeing and social and emotional health.
  > the volunteers ACT partnership that has provided volunteers to support students with individual learning needs.

Commendations

- The principal has made a significant investment in school staffing to support the strategic school improvement agenda.

- There are high levels of trust in the school community.

- Parents, staff and the leadership team are committed to ensuring all students are improving in their learning.

- There has been significant emphasis placed on developing positive relationships between parents, carers, staff and students. As a result, there is a welcoming and improved sense of calm in the school. Parents said, "the school is welcoming and supportive", and "they know who I am, and they know who my child is".

- The leadership team is establishing a productive mentoring program within the school to enhance teacher planning with the aim of improving student learning outcomes.

- Recently, there has been a strategic focus on curriculum implementation. This has resulted in significant improvement in how the curriculum is delivered at Gilmore Primary School.

- Parents acknowledged the success and value of the STEAM enrichment groups and science program.

Affirmations

- The school has introduced Positive Behaviours for Learning. Together with the 'Gilmore Guidelines' this will provide a framework to continue to develop and establish a positive learning environment and culture for learning.

- There is an emerging collaborative culture in the school. Staff feel that innovation is appreciated and risk-taking is supported.

- The school has started analysing data in 'response to need' meetings. Data Walls are used to identify learning needs, plan for improvement and monitor student progress. Staff are already seeing significant progress with some students.

- Mentoring of staff in effective teaching practices and examining data has enabled teachers to start differentiating their teaching programs during their planning.

- Teaching staff are planning curriculum using the achievement standards and are aligning these to assessment and reporting.

- The school has maintained a focus on the strategic agenda throughout the life of the strategic plan.

- The school has started the process of clarifying the teaching practices to be implemented consistently across the school.

- The school is developing school and community partnerships to complement the programs available in the school to improve student outcomes.

- The leadership team is embedding cultural integrity within the school.

Recommendations

- Collaboratively develop a *Gilmore Primary School Strategic Plan 2020-2024* that is aligned to the school vision and contains a narrow and sharp strategic agenda of specific improvements sought in student performance and has clear targets with accompanying timelines and strategies that are rigorously actioned and reviewed.

- Develop a data plan that encompasses an analysis of the full range of data to determine starting points for school improvement, and to monitor progress over time. Provide professional learning to support effective use of available data. Communicate analyses of school-level data to the school community.

- Continue to refine the school's professional learning plan to provide a comprehensive approach to building teacher understanding and skills, consistent with the strategic agenda, and include arrangements for ongoing feedback, mentoring and coaching.

- Further develop the school's plan for curriculum delivery that reflects the school's vision and ensures consistent teaching and learning expectations and a clear reference for monitoring learning across the years. The plan should include a strong focus on the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.

- Continue to build teacher understanding of how to use standardised assessments and quality classroom data to determine starting points for teaching and monitor progress over time, reflecting on effectiveness of teaching strategies used. Continue to explore teaching strategies to respond to differences in cultural knowledge and experiences and to cater for individual differences by offering multiple means of representation and engagement, and provide multiple opportunities to learn.

- Further develop and communicate a clear and precise set of evidenced-based teaching strategies that are expected to be consistently applied across the school.

- Continue to negotiate and refine strategic partnerships to clarify student outcomes, enable communication between partners and review outcomes on a regular basis.