



ACT
Government
Education

Forrest Primary School

Report of Review, 2020

Date of School Review: 19, 20, 21 and 22 October 2020
Principal of Review School: Christine Pilgrim

National School Improvement Tool Review Report prepared by:

- Lead Reviewer: Ron Bamford, *ACER Senior School Improvement Consultant*
- ACT Review Team members:
 1. Nicole Nicholson, *Principal of Charles Weston School*
 2. Danielle Porter, *Principal of Macquarie Primary School*
 3. Kerri Clark, *Senior Director Education Support Office*

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Report of Review, 2020 prepared by:

ACT Government Education Directorate
Education Services Division, School Improvement Branch

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Foreword

2020 has been characterised by extreme weather events and the COVID-19 pandemic. ACT public schools, as community hubs, have been greatly impacted by these events. Despite this, they have continued to deliver high quality education to all students whilst also supporting their communities.

As noted further in this document, school improvement in the ACT is based on a five-year cycle. School Review (Review) considers the entire journey a school has undertaken during this period.

Impact of COVID-19 on School Review

Findings from Review are based on what external and local experts read, see and hear in a school. In preparing findings from Review consideration has been given to the rapid response ACT public schools undertook for the COVID-19 home learning period, and the impact this had on observed practices and processes.

Additionally, due to travel restrictions some Lead Reviewers from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) were unable to lead Reviews on the ground. In these cases streaming technologies, and the support of experienced ACT reviewers, enabled the review to continue. Careful attention was given to ensuring the Review methodology and findings were not compromised.

This Review had an on-the-ground Lead Reviewer from [ACER](#).

OR

This Review had a Remote Lead Reviewer from [ACER](#).

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 support annual implementation of a school's 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.

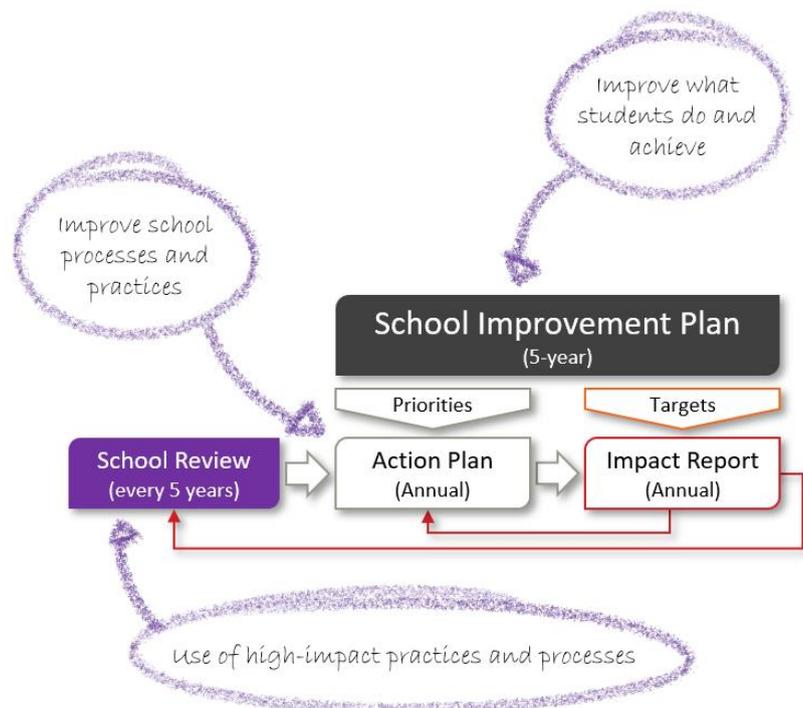
Through the lens of the NSIT, an internationally recognised framework for reviewing teaching and learning practices, reviewers gain an accurate picture of current school practices. During Review evidence provided by schools is considered alongside evidence gathered through consultation with staff, students, 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 findings for each of the nine Domains of the National School Improvement Tool, as well as Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations for continued school improvement.

Where does Review sit within the 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. Additionally, schools are provided differentiated support and feedback by internal and external experts. School Review is one way that this differentiated feedback is provided and typically occurs at the end of the 5-year school improvement cycle.



What are Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations?

Commendations

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

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

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 effectively implementing its 5-year School 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 Forrest Primary School Strategic Plan 2016-2019* outlines two strategic priorities: embed all elements of the Primary Years Programme (PYP) across the whole school community, and improve student outcomes in literacy and numeracy by embedding an explicit learning agenda driven by data analysis. In priority two, student outcome targets refer to year 3 students exceeding national standards in spelling, expected growth in students from year 3-5 in reading and numeracy, and PM Benchmark attainment.
- The 2016 annual Action Plan (AP) adds a priority of enhancing the school's environment and culture to promote success in learning while maintaining positive and caring relationships with all stakeholders.
- Detailed AAP reports describe annual target progress with a high focus on describing the implementation of planned strategies. The introduction of Impact Reports for 2019 allowed the school to report target achievement across the four planning years with some commentary on the trends. The target in numeracy was not reported on.
- Staff have been given regular opportunities to reflect on the progress in each priority. The school uses a Professional Learning Communities (PLC) model to drive the implementation of well researched evidence-based strategies within the annual action plans. Staff and Board members were given opportunities to learn from successful schools such as Positive Education at Geelong Grammar and from other successful International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP) schools.
- Staff are highly committed to the strategies implemented by the school, with implementation clearly evident in classroom practices. Clearly the most significant change over the last five years has been the implementation of the PYP. Teachers talked about how this strategy for curriculum delivery has helped them provide authentic and interdisciplinary learning experiences for their students.
- The Annual School Board reports convey the required reporting elements to the school community. Board members described their involvement in the planning processes of the school including the collaborative development of the school's mission statement.
- School priorities and a summary of the results are communicated to the broader community through the school newsletter. While parents were unable to clearly outline the priorities of the school, they discussed many linked examples of how opportunities were provided to understand new approaches to learning, such as mathematics inquiry.
- There is evidence, such as the establishment of a school improvement officer, that there are now processes in place to analyse data over time to inform for the next strategic plan.

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's data plan was drafted in 2017, redeveloped in 2018 and implemented in 2019. The school improvement officer oversees the data plan and communicates the data in a form useful for both teachers and the school's leadership team. The school uses Google documents and the ACT Education Directorate's SENTRAL system as software to support the data plan and other data.
- The data plan clearly outlines for each data set, the purpose, collection timelines and roles of various staff in collection and analysis.
- At the classroom level, a 'data tracker' is predominantly analysed by year level PLC. A 'disciplined dialogue' approach is used by PLCs for analysing data. This analysis not only allows teachers to discuss starting points for teaching but also enables teachers to evaluate teaching practices in preceding periods. Teachers talked about how they valued a shared view on data and the collegiate discussion on effective teaching. Discussions at this point focus on English, with work underway to establish similar data for mathematics, wellbeing, and other areas.
- Members of the school leadership team are able to confidently talk about trends in NAPLAN, PIPS, and school satisfaction survey data. They also talked about the need for other academic and student wellbeing data to drive school improvement. There is continued exploration on appropriate software to allow seamless analysis of data. Teachers talked about how their involvement in school-wide analysis of data has led to strategic actions in both English and mathematics. Teachers talked more about qualitative rather than quantitative data in determining the success of planned strategies.
- The school has developed a separate data tracker to identify and track students with particular needs. The main indicator of this tracker is student attainment/progress in English. Students are monitored until such time as they reach agreed literacy benchmarks.
- The school has also developed a data tracker for English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) students documenting their progress along the EAL/D continuum over time.
- Board reports on the website and the school newsletter are the main conduits for information on school performance to the school community. However, parents interviewed were unable to confidently talk about the academic and wellbeing performance across the school.

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

- Parents, students and staff use Restorative Practices (RP) to develop, maintain and restore relationships. Significant professional learning (PL) has been invested to embed this as a whole school practice. This strategic approach has built and maintained a high level of trust across the school community. This has resulted in, for example, students using this approach independently to resolve differences. The establishment of positive relationships between the school staff and P&C Association is ongoing.
- Parents are regarded as partners in learning. Families are invested in the work of the school and regularly support learning as classroom volunteers, experts sharing their skills, or through engagement in how students learn via workshops or the Seesaw app.
- English conversation groups for family members demonstrate respect for, and commitment to, the languages and cultures of the diverse school community.
- Through the Stronger Smarter program, staff have developed and grown respect and understanding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture. Culture Club, with community and students, is well established and acknowledged. For example, the children won a group entry of the ACT Threatened Species Competition with their artwork and reflection. A student-developed Acknowledgement of Country is used, there is a purpose-built Indigenous garden providing an accessible classroom on-country, and the school has a Reconciliation Action Plan 2019-20.
- Through the adoption of the PYP framework the school has cultivated a strong culture of collaboration, inquiry, student agency and challenge that reflects the philosophy of the school and its community. It was evident that classrooms were calm, and students engaged in purposeful and authentic learning.
- Students, staff and families spoke of their sense of belonging and pride in the school and the school's drive to address the needs of students.
- Teachers and students reported that there are high expectations for learning and that minimal disruptions occur. This was evident through school leaders being able to successfully balance their roles of classroom teaching, coaching and portfolio work.
- The PYP Learner Profile and Positive Education characteristics contribute to a culture of developing the whole child. The language and action of being caring, kind, a risk-taker in learning and using a growth mindset was evident in documentation, displays and student behaviours.
- High levels of staff morale are evident. There is an emphasis on wellbeing, which is

modelled and supported by the principal and leadership team. This has been supported by a dedicated staff wellbeing committee and funding.

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 school resources a Small Group Program (SGP) to further meet the needs of identified students. The disability education coordinator is responsible for the evolving inclusion model.
- A Response to Intervention (RTI) process has been formalised in a document that outlines the rationale and procedures involved. Students identified in this process are supported in classrooms by a RTI teacher.
- The school has resourced EAL/D teachers to work both shoulder to shoulder in classrooms and provide withdrawal for children with emerging English language proficiency.
- The leadership team has invested in the redevelopment of the school library and hallways to support an inquiry learning approach and the use of the environment as the third teacher.
- Classroom teachers are supported by specialist teachers in the areas of physical education, Japanese, library, and STEM.
- The release timetable enables teachers to collaboratively plan every week with their teaching team. This is supported by the PYP coordinators. A roster for collaborative planning focus areas enables teams to access curriculum experts or members of the leadership team to assist with data analysis, planning, moderation and reflection.
- The leadership team analyses whole school data sets to identify trends. Time and financial investment in professional learning aligned to strategic priorities is evident particularly in the areas of PYP, positive education, and literacy practices.
- Some teachers expressed a need for improved access to technology and training.

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

- All members of the leadership team are trained as coaches, either in GROWTH Coaching or Solutions Focus (some in both), and members use these skills when working with teachers.
- The school has a professional learning plan that targets the individual and collective needs of staff, this includes facilitating teachers to learn and develop through quality in-school and external experiences. The leadership team and expert staff lead and model professional learning for teachers in the school's priority areas to ensure the school's beliefs and practices are aligned.
- The leadership team assist teachers to continue to develop in a variety of ways including PLCs with a teacher identified focus using Timperley's (Helen Timperley, 2014) spiral of inquiry structure to conduct the appreciative inquiry, PYP coordinator involvement and support during weekly collaborative planning, and professional learning in play-based approaches for the kindergarten teachers and their team leaders.
- Many teachers commented on their participation in the 'teacher talk' observation process where verbal and written feedback is provided. Some commented on their desire for more systematic coaching.
- New educators to the school have an experienced teacher mentor for support.
- The school places a high priority on ensuring all staff have PYP qualifications and provide opportunities for staff to obtain these.
- The school attracts and retains quality practitioners with a focus on complementary skill sets. The school has a distributive leadership model which invests in capacity building of staff and promotes leadership beyond the classroom.
- The teachers at the school are highly committed to the continuous development of their own teaching and many teachers are undergoing post graduate study in related fields.
- The principal and other school leaders are active participants in networked relationships through the PYP network.
- The school uses a PLC structure for teachers to work together, explore evidence-based practice, reflect on data and collaboratively problem solve through a spiral of inquiry. PLCs operate at both the year level and whole school level. The teachers talked about how the PLCs provided a collaborative emphasis on improvement of practice.

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

- In 2016 the school was authorised as an IB World School delivering the PYP which serves as an inquiry-based transdisciplinary curriculum delivery framework for the Australian Curriculum.
- PYP coordinators work with teams to collaboratively write, reflect on, and evaluate curriculum. Transdisciplinary themes are developed, and planning documents identify key concepts, learner profiles, approaches to learning, central ideas, lines of inquiry and guiding questions.
- The school has mapped all of the Australian Curriculum achievement standards to the PYP transdisciplinary themes and the Programme of Inquiry documents when they have been addressed in the learning to ensure coverage. It was evident that all teachers have a strong understanding of the intended curriculum delivery approach.
- The Programme of Inquiry is highly visible and communicated to the community. Families have an understanding of how curriculum is delivered at Forrest Primary School and use the PYP language.
- The leadership team have recognised a need to map the general capabilities against the PYP approaches to learning to ensure that all aspects of the Australian Curriculum are delivered and assessed.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority is widely evidenced through units of inquiry.
- Planning documents have been developed to reflect an evidence-based inquiry mathematics approach. The PLC structure through the spiral of inquiry has strengthened the planned and enacted mathematics curriculum.
- Positive Education has been implemented to support social-emotional learning.
- The school reports against the Achievement Standards using the Australian Curriculum. Assessment and reporting processes identify what and when assessments are performed for each year level. There is some evidence of rubrics and checklists being used to guide assessment in a variety of learning areas.
- Students demonstrated that they have a strong voice in their learning. Action club provides an opportunity for students to apply their learning in authentic ways. Student exhibitions are an integral component of the learning.
- Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) are developed in consultation with all stakeholders for

students who have been identified as requiring adjustments in learning to access the curriculum.

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

- Teachers described how the units of inquiry provide multiple points of entry and exit to learning and opportunities for students to develop their conceptual understanding.
- Some teachers use pre-tests, post-tests and provocations to determine where students are in their knowledge, skills and understanding against the achievement standards and plan the units of inquiry with their learning needs in mind.
- Teachers identified the use of open-ended tasks and higher order questions as ways of catering for the diverse needs in their class. Teachers often group students according to need in English and mathematics.
- Individual student goal setting in reading, writing and mathematics and learner profile goals is evident in some classrooms. Some teachers speak of conferencing with students to set learning goals, providing feedback to students and identifying new goals when previous goals are successfully achieved.
- The school established a small group program to support students who require significant adjustments to their learning and intensive support. Students work on their individualised learning program and learning goals that have been collaboratively developed with families.
- Teachers developed a video on differentiation as a way of sharing practices.
- Teachers use the Seesaw app. to communicate and share learning with parents on a regular basis. Parents described how they appreciated the regular updates and snapshots of learning in the classroom.
- The school has developed ILPs for a broad range of students to support teachers in making appropriate adjustments to learning.
- The data plan drives discussions around the use of data to determine starting points for learning, particularly in English.

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

- Professional learning in a play-based approach for the kindergarten teaching team and supervisor, and associated budgetary support, enables implementation of this pedagogy.
- There is improved consistency in the teaching of spelling and a shared understanding of the principles outlined in *Guiding thinking for effective spelling* by Christine Topfer. This has included the creation of a 'Word Consciousness at Forrest Primary School' paper that outlines the school's approach to spelling.
- In some classrooms learning intentions and success criteria were visible.
- Staff have recently been focusing on giving effective feedback to students that is timely, specific and accessible.
- School leaders utilise a PYP consultant annually to maintain the ongoing inquiry pedagogical approach and remain up to date with IB research and practice.
- Staff use First Steps Reading with a focus on explicit teaching of reading strategies and use of the First Steps continuum.
- Inquiry mathematics is developing across the school and a parent presentation has been provided to enable families to understand the practice.
- The school applies a transdisciplinary focus where authentic links are evident and uses explicit teaching as appropriate to maximise student learning.
- Consistency of pedagogical approach is evident within teams, although these may differ across year levels.
- The junior school has reading, writing, mathematics, and learner profile goals evident in classrooms for each student. In other year levels checklists and rubrics may be used to articulate expectations of student learning.
- The school leadership team have prioritised the use of the 10 Essential Literacy Practices and staff are developing the implementation of these.

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 developed a strategic partnership with Community Services#1 (CS#1) to support students and families of the school's Indigenous Culture Club. Originally established as a homework club for students, the club evolved into cultural activities after school that parents could join with their children and then be taken home by a community services bus. This supported the strengthening of connection between school and families. The partnership also provides a bus to transport children from preschool to long day care.
- To strategically support the social and emotional wellbeing of identified groups of students the school has established a Memorandum of Understanding with CS#1. Noting the increase in mental health issues, high anxiety and trauma amongst students, a wellness hub was established. The partnership has identified the student wellbeing outcomes it is working towards, with regular check-ins, communication between partners and families, and reflection and review meetings to evaluate progress. As a relatively new initiative the partnership is yet to be evaluated.
- The school's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) was collaboratively established with school and community members with clear goals to support relationships, respect and opportunities in the classroom, around the school and in the community.
- An EAL/D parent group has been established to support parents in English conversation. Sessions include building an understanding of learning in an Australian school and how learning is taught at Forrest Primary School.
- Parent focus groups are held regularly for the purpose of collecting feedback on how the school is going.
- The school values the strengths of its community and parents are welcomed within the school to support learning through the sharing of expertise related to the school's Units of Inquiry. Parents are seen as partners in learning, supporting their child's learning in a variety of ways including the home reading program in the junior years.

Commendations

- The principal has led an evidence-based change management process which has resulted in a significant shift to a positive and productive school culture.
- All the staff are united in their commitment to the change agenda.
- The school uses a PLC model, based on the spiral of inquiry, to collaboratively use data to drive self-reflection.
- Aboriginal and Torres Islander histories and cultures are highly valued in the school and are an integral part of teaching, learning and life of the school.
- All parents, teachers and students have high expectations for learning.
- The school has used restorative practices to develop a high level of trust across the school community. Students demonstrate their capacity to be self-managers and independently resolve issues using restorative language.
- The school has developed a curriculum delivery approach that has raised the level of challenge for all students.
- There are high levels of pride in the school evident from staff, students and families.
- The school leadership team has actively built the collegiality of the staff using a distributive leadership model and a focus on building expertise. There is a strategic provision of leadership opportunities to staff and they are well supported to pursue further formal study.
- Student agency is highly valued and avenues for taking action are clearly evident through curriculum delivery and the whole-school Action club.
- The school has a strong focus on the Australian Curriculum and has strategically selected the PYP curriculum delivery framework to respond to the needs and aspirations of the school community.

Affirmations

- The leadership team have established a dedicated school improvement officer to support the improvement agenda.
- The school has an evolving data plan that is used to collect data informing both school and classroom planning.
- There is a genuine attempt by staff to encourage parents to engage in school life and student learning.
- The school is using existing data to resource areas of identified need within the school.
- The school has a professional learning plan, with a significant budget, linked to the school's strategic priorities.
- Teachers emphasise higher order thinking and other learner attributes in their planning to provide a focus on the whole child.

- The school is supporting teachers to develop differentiation strategies to cater for the wide range of student learning needs.
- There is a school-wide commitment to the use of the Seesaw app. which supports families to understand and continue learning beyond the classroom walls.
- Teachers are exploring checklists, rubrics, student goals, and visible thinking routines to provide clarity around learning.
- Teachers are adopting evidence-based pedagogical practices that align to the school's philosophical approach.
- The school is strategically developing partnerships to meet student needs.

Recommendations

- Collaboratively develop a Forrest Primary School Improvement Plan 2021-2025, which:
 - > is consistent with the school's mission and vision for teaching and learning
 - > provides a narrow and sharp agenda focused on student outcomes
 - > incorporates explicit targets; and
 - > is monitored over the life of the plan, with progress communicated.
- Further develop the school's data plan to incorporate a full range of school data (student achievement and wellbeing) to support both school improvement and classroom practices.
- Continue to develop systemic processes to identify, cater for and monitor students, or groups of students, with learning needs.
- Further develop the school's professional learning plan to cater for the individual needs of each staff member, particularly in respect to coaching.
- Further develop the plan for curriculum delivery to clearly articulate the vertical alignment of general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities with reference to critical and creative thinking and its links to assessment.
- Continue to develop an agreed school-wide understanding of differentiation and build teacher capacity to respond to student needs and readiness at all levels.
- Continue to define the school's common expectations of teaching and learning that are grounded in evidence-based research.