ACT Government
Education

Richardson Primary School

Report of Review, 2020

Date of School Review: 02, 03, 04 and 05 November 2020
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Report Date: 06 November 2020

Report of Review, 2020 prepared by:

ACT Government Education Directorate
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Report Date: 26 November 2020

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.
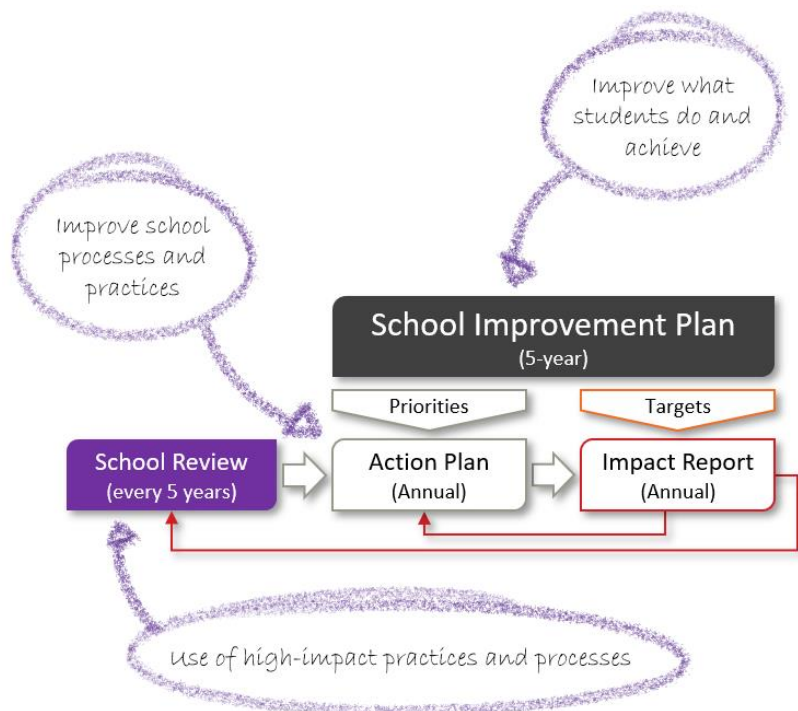
Through the lens of the NSIT, an internationally recognised framework for reviewing teaching and learning practices, reviewers gain an accurate picture of current school practices. During Review evidence provided by schools is considered alongside evidence gathered through consultation with staff, students, 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
- In 2017, the then newly appointed principal revised the R*ichardson Primary School Strategic Plan 2015-2020*, in collaboration with school parent groups, to complement the 2015 plan, and provide a greater focus on student outcome targets.

- The School Strategic Plan (as amended 2017) has three broad priorities: improve learning and achievement for all students; develop an expert teaching team; and provide a safe, inclusive and respectful school culture. The first priority outlines 17 student outcome targets in English and mathematics; this was later reduced to 12. The last priority lists several perception targets including student perception of safety and respect. Targets in general related to NAPLAN and school satisfaction surveys. However, analysis of NAPLAN data with such low student numbers makes it statistically unviable.

- In the implementation of the priorities, the school has used research from ACT Education Directorate professional learning programs, the visible learning framework and Christine Topfer's Ten Essential Literacy Practices.

- With the introduction of annual Impact Reports in 2018, the school provided some analysis of data in both 2018 and 2019. The school leadership team have identified a need to analyse other data sets for future plans.

- Newsletters and reports to the School Board and P&C are written using the three priorities within the strategic plan. Parents in general were unaware of the strategic aims of the school but talked about a significant improvement in home school partnerships. Board members were generally aware of the priorities and could recall presentations on the progress of the school. In general, families were unaware of the success of planned interventions.

- School Board reports outline the areas the Board is required to report to the school community.

- Staff talked about workshops where the vision and strategic plan were discussed. Staff were able to confidently talk about the vision of 'success for every student' and 'high expectations for learning' and there was a high commitment to that agenda. In general, staff were less able to articulate the progress on planned targets but were able to talk about the need to achieve at least one year's growth every year.

- During the planning cycle the school has formed Assessment, Mentoring and Coaching, and Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) committees to drive implementation. Several staff felt the committees gave them a voice in the planning process.

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

- In 2018, the school's assessment committee developed a cohort data tracking tool to store information about student learning. The data tracker includes First Steps, the Victoria Essential Learning Standards in Writing, PM Benchmarks, BEE Spelling, Schedule for Early Number Assessment, PAT-M (Maths) and PAT-R (writing). An annual data schedule has been created for the collection of some or all of this data by each classroom teacher. Some teachers talked about the need for more training in analysing some data sets.

- Throughout the year each teacher adds to a learner profile document to communicate student achievement and progress for the students' following teachers.

- Teachers use the Neil Dempster 'Disciplined Dialogue' approach to analyse data in the data tracker and in-classroom assessments. Much of the analysis is in teaching team Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). This is reflected in a PLC planning tool that asks: What does the data tells us? How do we know if we are being successful? What was the impact? What actions will we take? Teachers talked about the recent focus of the weekly PLC meetings being PM Benchmark data. Staff also talked about exploring student reading and writing growth and turning that into an 'effect size'. Each executive teacher leads the weekly PLC.

- At the whole school level, to identify the success of planned interventions, the leadership team analyses NAPLAN data against statistically similar schools over time, growth data, and trends in school satisfaction data.

- Whole-of-school student engagement data are collected and entered on the school's SENTRAL database. Tallies for whole-school positive and negative behaviour data are displayed on the staffroom PBL noticeboard as an ongoing reminder to staff and a celebration of the positive nature of the interactions.

- While there has been communication in school newsletters and reports on the website, parents and Board members were unable to confidently talk about school performance data.

- A member of the leadership team is responsible for the creation of the data tracker and makes this data available for teachers to use. The data analysis includes the analysis of student growth.

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 School Strategic Plan the school leadership team has had a deliberate and focused goal to further develop a culture of high expectations for learning. Staff talked about a vision of "success for every child every day". PLC documentation clearly outlines the type of positive, learning-focused conversations that are expected of all teachers. The review team, in discussions with staff, noted that they were positive about students and their learning, and believed challenges were opportunities for improvement. Students said, "the staff are the best thing about this school".

- The school began to implement the PBL framework in 2018. A school committee has worked to establish a common set of values (Respectful, Safe, Positive Learner), an expectations matrix, a decision-making framework, and posters across the school. Students 'displaying amazing behaviour' are recognised with a tangible reward and success is celebrated at school assemblies. Where there are breakdowns in relationships the school uses a restorative practices approach. The committee is about to work on implementing classroom systems. Behaviour sometimes disrupts student learning however staff and students say, and data suggests, that while behaviour takes up some time, overall, behaviour is well managed.

- The school has been working on increasing parent engagement with the school during the planning period. Parent partnerships in learning is now through 'getting to know you' meetings, three-way interviews, community breakfasts, school assemblies, parent volunteers, information sessions, learning journeys, the Richardson Interest and Passions Program (RIPP), the Seesaw app. and Facebook. Parent-school communication processes are described in parent and staff handbooks and some parents talked about a need to clarify the purpose of each form of communication. Parent attendance numbers are monitored to gauge parent engagement. Parents interviewed were extremely positive about the school, and its leadership, and they feel that they are a truly valued part of the school.

- The school is actively engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, for example, through the Koori preschool, developing murals in association with local families, and 'The Clubhouse' staff who are working with students to compose a song for NAIDOC Week, incorporating many indigenous languages.

- Staff talked about and appreciated the high level of support they receive from the school leadership team. Staff spoke highly about the collegiality amongst staff and would appreciate opportunities to collaborate across year levels.

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 senior leadership have strategically resourced school needs through employing additional executive staff with complementary skillsets to broaden their impact.

- The executive teachers have been physically located with their teaching teams to provide on the ground, targeted support to staff and students.

- The school has a Learning Support Unit (LSU) which includes an outdoor sensory space. The staff support the integration of students into mainstream classes where appropriate.

- The LSU staff use Ability Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES) to assess learning readiness of the students and devise learning programs relevant to the individual levels of need.

- Furniture, technology, and classroom spaces are used flexibly to support the academic and social emotional learning needs of classes, small groups, and individual students.

- To support learning and communication a range of digital technologies and applications are accessible to students and staff.

- The leadership team has invested in the upgrade of the exterior of the school, enhancing the appearance and connection to country.

- School-based data are regularly collected to monitor student growth and to develop Response to Intervention (RTI) groups. Identified students are supported by the executive teachers who run small group and 1:1 support for students via MiniLit, Guided Reading, and Reading Recovery.

- Referral processes have been established to ensure students who require additional levels of support are identified and supported. There is a student engagement team who analyse data, make recommendations for further assessment, develop and review individualised plans, and engage with external agencies.

- The school has employed learning support assistants (LSAs) who work with teachers to cater for the individual needs of specific students within the classroom and LSU as identified through Individual Learning Plans (ILPs).

- The senior leadership team have worked with the Education Directorate to resource highly skilled staff to provide intensive, flexible learning options for specific students with complex needs.

- The school has established spaces as alternate learning environments for students who have specific sensory and wellbeing needs.

- The release timetable enables teachers to collaboratively plan every week with their executive teacher. Time is also prioritised for teaching teams to meet as PLCs.
- The school has used Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) School Profile Data to ensure early intervention processes are implemented.

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
- Professional learning is linked to the strategic plan and is delivered at point of need for the staff and to address student needs.

- The school has developed a coaching model (Instructional Coaching to Lead - IC2L) whereby the deputy principal coaches the three executive teachers and business manager.

- The Richardson Mentoring and Coaching model documents the support provided through formal observation and feedback, collaborative planning, experienced teachers supporting early career teachers, peer to peer feedback and reflective practice. It is underpinned by the teacher's professional development plan and the yearly School Impact Report. Teachers talked of their desire for more formalised coaching and observation opportunities.

- The business manager role has been repositioned as one of the leaders in the school to provide a strong mentoring culture for non-teaching staff to assist them to support individual students and small groups with complex needs. Non-teaching staff feel supported, valued and an integral part of the school.

- Early career teachers feel supported by mentoring processes and the executive staff provide mentoring around the strategic priorities to their teams.

- Collaborative planning between the team and executive team leader occurs on a weekly basis with written agendas and minutes to guide student progression.

- The school has repositioned a teacher, due to their passion for art, into the specialist visual arts and drama role to provide release for teachers from face to face teaching.

- Executive staff support teachers through mentoring linked to professional development plans, goal setting, in-class modelling, team teaching and collaborative planning sessions. Teachers are observed and provided with feedback to identity areas for further development and celebrate growth.

- The principal has an annual formal process to support teachers with their career progression.

- Assessment, Mentoring, and Coaching, and PBL committees have been formed to build capacity in teachers through sharing ideas, and to provide a whole school approach to these priorities.

- Success in capacity building can be seen through the proportionally high number of staff who have been promoted in recent years.

- As a small school, strategic recruitment has been a priority for the school leadership team.

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

- Richardson Primary School has developed a sequenced curriculum for a set of inquiry units for each cohort with a three-year rotation. This Program of Inquiry incorporates elements of history and social sciences, science, technology, physical education and health, and some aspects of the arts and English. There is some indirect reference to the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. The review team acknowledges the breadth of this work over the last three years.

- Kath Murdoch's inquiry framework is used to inform, plan and deliver inquiry lessons.

- A two-year cycle for social and emotional learning involving PBL and Friendly Schools Plus accommodates the needs of multi-age classes.

- Team leaders use the Richardson Programming Expectations document and Australian Curriculum to create termly English and mathematics planners and units.

- Physical education is taught by class teachers and visual arts and drama are taught by an arts specialist.

- The leadership team recognises the need to develop curriculum overviews horizontally and vertically for all of their curriculum delivery models.

- Learning intentions are a feature across the school. The school is developing consistency in implementing success criteria to accompany these.

- There is a collaborative planning structure across the school where the executive team leader plans with teachers in their team. The school is working on progressing this structure to ensure staff have a comprehensive understanding of the programs and curriculum delivery across the school.

- The school has received professional learning in using the Australian Curriculum Learning Progressions and General Capabilities. The review team noted there was variability in their systematic use across the school.

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 use a range of formative assessment to inform teaching. This includes PM benchmarking, BEE Spelling, writing samples, literacy and numeracy progressions, observations, anecdotal notes, and student conferencing. This data allows teachers to implement differentiated practices to promote learning and monitor growth.

- A student profile that includes previous achievement levels enables teachers to know student progress across the year and exact point of need.

- Staff use Fountas and Pinnell to track progress for students who reach and exceed PM benchmark reading level of 30.

- PLC documentation evidenced how staff are discussing practice and using data to identify effective strategies and next steps. The Spiral of Inquiry and Disciplined Dialogue questions guide PLC conversations. Teachers spoke of using this data to inform the support for all students in their class.

- The school has a reporting process where goals are discussed with families and students through three-way interviews. Parents appreciated Seesaw as a communication tool for demonstrating student learning and how they can discuss learning at home.

- Parents and carers of students with specific learning needs indicated high levels of communication and feedback from the school staff about student progress.

- Families indicated they know where their children are at in their learning and how they can support learning at home.

- Allied health professionals are welcomed into the school to both support students and build capacity of staff to implement individual strategies and work on common goals.

- Learning intentions are evident in many programs and visible in a range of classrooms. Some teachers are using success criteria to help students understand what they need to learn and how they can demonstrate success.

- In the LSU all learning is differentiated and reasonable adjustments are planned for and delivered each session to meet the varying needs of students.

- Teachers often group students according to need in reading.

- Individual student goals are established in some classes linked to reading, writing, mathematics, and social learning areas. Some teachers speak of conferencing with students to set learning goals.

- The school has developed ILPs for a large proportion of students to support teachers in making appropriate adjustments to learning.

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 implementation of Christine Topfer's Ten Essential Literacy Practices is a feature across the school from preschool to year 6. All staff spoke highly of this program and the positive outcomes it was having on their skills to teach a comprehensive, balanced literacy program.

- The school has participated in the writing inquiry project to support teachers improve the delivery of their writing program.

- There is a strong focus on improving English outcomes through all lessons and time is privileged daily for the teaching of literacy skills and understandings. The review team observed there was a tendency to teach skills to the whole class followed by individual instruction to support the range of students' needs.

- Kath Murdoch's inquiry framework is being explored to guide the implementation of units of inquiry and engage students.

- School leaders spend time working with teachers in classrooms to provide feedback. Teachers felt well supported to continually improve their pedagogy.

- Learning intentions and success criteria are visible across the school although there is some variability across teams. Feedback to students and goal setting is another area the school is developing as a whole-of-school approach.

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 a long-standing partnership with YWCA Canberra and provides a clubhouse space where children aged 10-18 from the Tuggeranong Valley have access to STEAM resources and expertise. The school has strategically built upon this partnership to provide expertise and mentorship to the staff and students at Richardson through engagement in a Reconciliation Action Challenge and the Richardson Interests and Pursuits Program (RIPP). This partnership has obvious benefits for student wellbeing and academic outcomes. These benefits were articulated by the leadership team, although not well documented.

- The school uses mentors from the Australian Business Community Network to deliver the Spark Reading program. The school leadership team is looking to strategically enhance this partnership.

- The school has accessed the UR FaB (Understanding and Responding to Feelings and Behaviours) program delivered by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). This provides early intervention support to students, families and staff focused on mental health and supporting the emotional and social needs of children. This program enables education for staff and families and promotes stronger home school partnerships.

- The RIPP provides children opportunities to work in multi age groupings with peers who have similar passion areas. This is led by teachers, parents, community members and organisations who have particular areas of expertise.

- The school collaborates with other organisations such as Menslink and the School Volunteers Program to provide support to selected students and groups of students.

Commendations

- At Richardson 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 a very inclusive and welcoming community.

- Families expressed the high level of trust they have for the school ("they're amazing!") and appreciated the high level of communication they receive.

- Students voiced they felt "the best thing about the school is the staff".

- The school's vision is there will be 'success for every student every day' and this is clearly evident across the school. Staff measure and celebrate progress.

- The school has a data culture to support learning.

- Children with additional, complex and diverse needs are well catered for in this school. Parents collectively stated "the staff go above and beyond" in supporting the needs of children and families.

- External spaces are used creatively to both enhance the school and honour the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

- Administration and support staff are a highly valued group who are recognised for the relationships they build with students and families.

- All staff expressed the high levels of support they receive from the leadership team.

Affirmations

- Richardson Primary School is implementing the PBL framework and this has significantly contributed to a positive school culture.

- The leadership team established teams that include staff from all year levels and across the school to collaboratively engage all staff in the strategic agenda.

- Learning environments are used creatively across the school to support student engagement and participation in learning.

- Teachers have made a positive step forward in their curriculum journey through mapping their inquiry programs.

- Teachers are developing their understanding in evidenced based teaching strategies such as using the National Literacy Learning Progressions and Christine Topfer's Ten Essential Literacy Practices.

- The school is exploring how partnerships can add value to the work of the school and support student learning outcomes.

Recommendations

- Collaboratively develop a Richardson Primary School Improvement Plan 2021-2025 with the wider school community, that:

- > is consistent with the school's vision for teaching and learning
- > provides a narrow and sharp agenda focused on student outcomes, and
- > incorporates explicit targets that are monitored over the life of the plan.

- Develop a data plan that incorporates a full range of school data (student achievement and wellbeing) that:
  - > clearly outlines the purpose of data at each level of the school as appropriate
  - > clarifies roles and responsibilities for the leaders and teachers, in their use of data, and
  - > provides opportunities for increasing the data literacy of school leaders and teachers, as appropriate.

- Continue to develop systematic processes for identifying and meeting the full breadth of student needs.

- Collaboratively develop a whole-of-school professional learning plan that takes account of all modes of professional learning, especially those opportunities within the school. This should include a consistent approach to observation, feedback, mentoring and coaching of staff.

- Continue to develop teacher understanding of the Australian Curriculum to allow further development of an explicit, coherent and sequenced plan for the delivery that incorporates all aspects of the curriculum including Achievement Standards, General Capabilities, and Cross-Curriculum Priorities.

- Develop an agreed understanding of differentiated teaching and learning and continue to support teachers to develop their capacity to cater for their diverse learning needs.

- Continue to refine and document common expectations of teaching and learning that are grounded in evidence-based research.

- Continue to develop or refine partnerships, particularly to support the strategic intent of the school.