



ACT
Government
Education

Curtin Primary School

Report of Review, 2023

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Publication and independent Review Team details

Date of School Review: 24, 25, 26 and 27 July 2023

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National School Improvement Tool Review Report prepared by:

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Report Date: 27 July 2023

Report of Review, 2023 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 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.

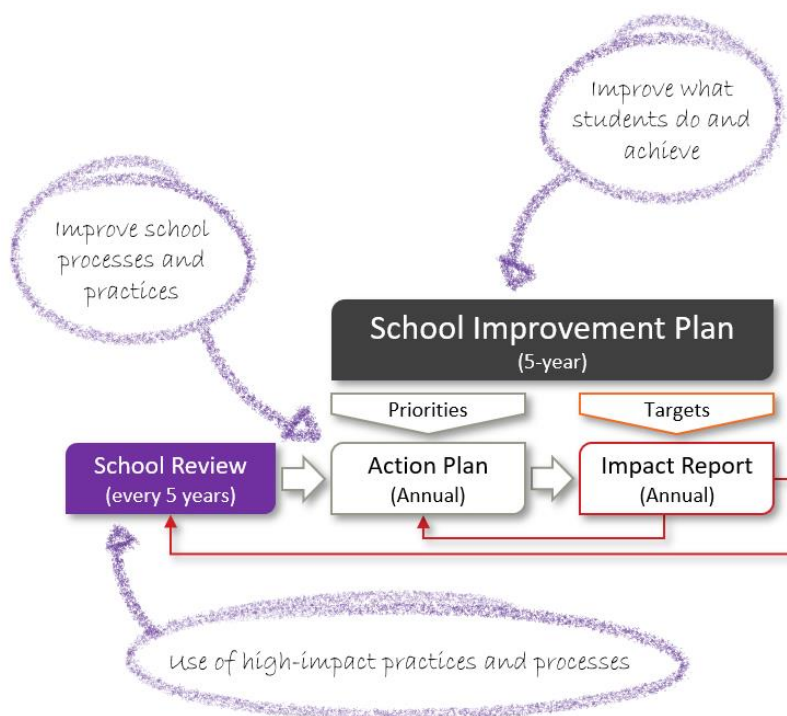
Following Review, the school receives a planning report, which is used as an internal working document, outlining key findings and recommended strategies for continued school improvement. The Education Directorate uses this planning report as a basis for the final *Report of Review* provided to school 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 Curtin Primary School Strategic Improvement Plan and associated Annual Action Plans clearly outline goals and approaches for teaching and learning, identifying priority focus areas in literacy, numeracy, and wellbeing.
- There are links between the Strategic Improvement Plan and the School Board Reports.
- The annual Impact Reports show achievement of targets across these priority areas with detailed successes and challenges.
- A 2023 Action Plan has been developed and discussed. It identifies focus areas, actions, and responsibilities for the year.
- Staff members articulated their awareness and understanding of the current school priorities.
- Significant work has been undertaken by implementation teams in executing school improvement initiatives however it is evident that work has been slowed by the COVID pandemic and changes in the leadership team.
- There is evidence of core values in school planning and publications, but it is not clear how these are embedded across the school and community.
- The current principal, leadership team, and the School Board have a clear mandate to lead the development of the next strategic direction of the school, in collaboration with the staff, parents, and the wider community. The consultation and decision-making processes are intended to be open and transparent, and responsibility for final determination of the improvement agenda will lie with the school leadership team and School Board.
- Members of the school community, including some teachers and parents, described a sense of 'change fatigue.'
- The leadership team has encouraged the staff to reference the priority areas in their professional development plans and professional learning requests.

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

- Curtin Primary School has developed a comprehensive and extensive schedule of assessment across all year levels to monitor school-wide achievement and progress. In discussions with members of the staff, it is not clear why these data are being collected, how data are analysed, or used to inform teaching and learning. There is evidence of some data-driven discussions within the leadership team and some Professional Learning Teams (PLTs). There is also evidence of the use of disciplined dialogue questions to guide conversations in team meetings.
- A key action in the 2023 Action Plan highlighted the need to review, refine, develop, and implement a data plan and assessment and reporting overview.
- There is not yet evidence of a planned approach to building capability in using data effectively through professional learning.
- School data have been presented at staff meetings. For example, National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data have been examined with some consideration of the implications for teaching and learning.
- At the team and year level, teachers indicated that classroom data are used to monitor progress and achievement and support differentiated teaching and learning, for example, through student grouping and program adjustments.
- The EAL/D and Response to Intervention (RTI) teacher interventions are informed by data sets.
- Wellbeing data are used to inform the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) approach to building and maintaining an orderly learning environment.
- Some school data are centrally located in Markbook¹. This is used by intervention and support teachers to identify and respond to students with additional needs.
- Communication to, and discussion with, parents about school data has been limited. There is evidence of discussion at School Board level.

¹ Markbook is an online program that allows for cohort assessment through tasks, calculations, and rubrics to align with learning outcomes and aggregate data. Teachers can evaluate work of evidence-based student learning.

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

- Curtin Primary School has a robust approach to wellbeing for both staff and students. A key driver for the wellbeing strategy is the appointment of a dedicated teacher who supporting teachers to implement initiatives in the classroom. The impact of initiatives is visible in classrooms.
- Parents and carers have been introduced to the wellbeing program entitled 'Mind Frames' through articles in the school newsletter and on a parent website.
- Staff members are committed to the welfare and learning of their students and demonstrate an understanding of the importance of positive and caring relationships to successful learning.
- Members of the leadership team are committed to promoting a whole-of-school culture of high expectations for all students.
- An orderly tone is evident throughout the school, with students engaged in learning activities. Most students report that their classrooms are settled and learning is important. This perception was confirmed by the review team during classroom visits, walk throughs, interviews, and generally around the school. Some evidence of interruption to teaching time was observed.
- Morale is varied but generally satisfactory. Continued work is being undertaken in re-building whole-school professional relationships through the use of Engoori² practices following a number of changes to the leadership team over time.
- Aligned whole-school approaches to the teaching of reading, spelling, and numeracy have been developed but not clearly evident in teacher practice. There have been limited opportunities for school leaders to ensure that practices are embedded consistently across the school.
- The Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) approach is embedded across the school. The PBL reward system through Curtin Coins, acknowledgement, school rewards, and positive incentives have contributed to the tone of the school.
- The staff handbook outlines the school procedures, practices and expectations for

² Engoori is an Aboriginal framework, originating from the Mithaka people of the channel country in the far south-west of Queensland, which adopts a strength-based conversational process to address complex challenges. The process involves dealing with difference without conflict. The approach uses three phases when dealing with challenges: (1) remembering and reconnecting, (2) re-examining and re-learning, and (3) recreating and renewing. See: <https://murrimatters.com/what-we-do/>

teachers and school leaders.

- A range of opportunities are made available for feedback to parents about how their child is progressing includes aspirational goal setting twice a year and semester reports.
- Members of staff highlighted the strategies and efforts being undertaken to rebuild respectful professional relationships including use of gratitude and appreciation in conversations.
- Evidence of the success of the Passion Projects³ program was noted and willingness of the staff and students to re-engage in 2023 was expressed.
- Students highlighted the commitment of the staff to their wellbeing and learning as well as the provision of positive and caring relationships.

³ The Passion Projects program is a student-centred approach to learning. The inquiry learning approach encourages students to make decisions about their own learning, where they become more engaged and can gain a deeper understanding of information. In past years, students at Curtin Primary School have immersed themselves in activities which include cooking, astronomy, gardening, woodworking, and photography.

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

- Students and staff members have access to a range of technology to support learning. The school has a BYOD program for years 4-6, provision of Chromebooks for year 3 and iPads for K-2. Processes are in place to ensure all students have access to a device. The review team observed several forms of technology in use through most classrooms to support teaching and learning.
- The school effectively utilises its physical environment and facilities to maximise student learning for example in the kindergarten, Patterson Wing, library, courtyards, and through the provision of interactive playground equipment. The development of a five-year master plan for further development was highlighted. Learning spaces are used with flexibility to support different kinds of learners and learning.
- The current development of the small group program space was observed and discussed with the leadership team. It was highlighted that the opening of the new space would lead to a review of inclusive practices at Curtin Primary School.
- Resources have been dedicated to appoint a small group program (SGP) teacher to provide additional support for learning.
- There is also a range of school-wide programs and approaches in place for students requiring additional or specialist support (disability education, EAL/D, RTI).
- There is evidence of processes in place to support teachers in accessing resources to support learning across curriculum areas.
- Learning support assistants (LSA) are used through the school to support students. LSAs work collaboratively with classroom teachers and have a shared responsibility for resources to support student learning.
- Sporting schools grants are used to support the physical education program and the purchase of equipment and specialist coaches.

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 leadership team is committed to the ongoing professional growth of staff members and sees this as an enabler for improving student learning outcomes. Leaders also speak of learning together as a means of building staff cohesion.
- A whole-of-school staff professional learning plan to support the school strategic plan in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and wellbeing is not yet evident. Approaches appear to be inconsistent rather than systematic and tailored to the specific needs of staff members.
- The school has made a commitment to provide collaborative planning time for PLT's each week. PLT's are an established structure to support teacher collaboration across the school.
- Reviewers noted from conversations with members of staff that professional learning team meetings do not always focus on discussions about student learning, using a range of evidence, or result in the sharing of practices and therefore learning from each other.
- School leaders express their intent to supporting teams in engaging in rich discussions using an inquiry approach, adopting a specific strategy referred to as a 'sprint'.
- The use of Quality Teacher Rounds⁴ to provide feedback to staff members through classroom observations was evident in early stages of the current strategic plan but have not been able to be maintained because of staffing changes. Staff members commented positively about the impact of this initiative.
- A specific approach to coaching has been introduced to support identified leadership, classroom, and community members, with planning underway to implement broadly.
- Members of the school leadership team spoke of intentional staff recruitment to address areas of identified needs.
- Teachers expressed support for opportunities to share practice and learn from others beyond their existing teams.
- Staff members indicated they had limited opportunities to reflect on their practice, set goals for professional growth and receive genuine feedback on teaching impact. Teachers expressed a willingness to engage in feedback conversations.

⁴ Quality Teaching Rounds are used to enhance teaching practice through systematic observation and feedback on teaching. A number of teachers, working in a professional learning community, observe and analyse each other's lessons where they provide feedback on the intellectual demands of the lesson, the quality of the learning environment, and the extent to which learning is made meaningful for students.

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 Australian Curriculum guides curriculum delivery at Curtin Primary School. Planning for Version 9 of Australian Curriculum is underway, and this includes the development of scoping and sequencing documentation to support continuity of learning across the years of school. A whole-of-school approach to implementing the curriculum, underpinned by a clear vision for teaching and learning is not yet evident.
- Curriculum information has been shared with the community through year level overviews and weekly learning updates. A strategic approach to improve strategies in relation to parent communication is being undertaken.
- The specialist program at the school includes provision of teaching in physical education, wellbeing, and Indonesian. As well as providing curriculum expertise in each curriculum area, student wellbeing, self-esteem, and confidence are enhanced through opportunities in each area.
- Following reduced reporting during the pandemic, a more robust reporting approach is currently being implemented. Reporting processes are aligned to the Australian Curriculum achievement standards and provide parents with information about learning achievements.
- Evidence and discussions demonstrate an inquiry-based approach to curriculum implementation which is embedded across the school. The curriculum is organised by concept, and these are mapped in an overview document which guides teacher planning. Members of staff noted the approach requires flexibility to ensure student agency including accommodating student interest.
- There is not yet evidence of a consistent approach to collaborative curriculum planning 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

- There is evidence of teachers using data to identify where students are up to in their learning. There is also some evidence of differentiated teaching aligned to student needs. The differentiation approaches are varied across year levels with impactful practices noted. A whole-school agreed approach to differentiation aligned to the diverse needs of students is evolving.
- At the team and year level, some teachers indicated that classroom data are used to monitor progress and achievement, support differentiation, student grouping, and program adjustments.
- The school has established a rigorous EAL/D and RTI program informed by data. Parents are provided with feedback through semester EAL/D reports.
- Aspirational goal setting for students involving a three-way conversation – between each student, their family member/s, and class teacher – occurs twice a year.
- The small group program (SGP) teacher works closely with mainstream teachers in supporting students to access the curriculum. The leadership team is working with the staff to review the current model with the expected opening of the new small group space. The SGP teacher also works closely with parents.
- The disability education contact officer (DECO) has led staff members through a rigorous process of reviewing and setting up Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for identified students. ILPs show evidence of SMART⁵ goals and use the Australian Curriculum or pre-foundation goals through Ability Spaced Learning and Education Support (ABLES)⁶.
- All students in year 1 and new students in years 2, 3, and 4 are assessed using the Cognitive Abilities Test⁷ (CogAT). Approaches to meeting the needs of identified gifted and talented students is through discussions at PLT meetings and is predominantly classroom based. A range of opportunities through the Australian Maths Trust and International Competitions and Assessments for Schools (ICAS) are made available to all students. Support for students and teachers accessing these initiatives is provided by school leaders.

⁵ Setting SMART goals is a way for teachers to improve performance. SMART is an acronym for specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound [goals].

⁶ Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES) is a suite of resources to help teachers plan for students with disabilities and those with individualised learning needs so that they can employ effective, appropriate, and personalised teaching strategies; track student progress/achievements; assess across learning areas; and prepare individualised reports.

⁷ CogAT is a research-based and proven test that measures abilities across K-12 in areas such as fluid reasoning, problem solving, and success in school. It has separate measures for verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal reasoning. See: <https://shop.acer.org/online-cognitive-abilities-test-cogat-cognitive-abilities-test-cogat-screening-form.html>

- Opportunities for student enrichment are also provided through the Tournament of Minds competition. This engages multiple student teams, and they focus on real-life problem-solving activities. Other opportunities are provided through the Maths Olympiad and Passion Projects.

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

- School leaders indicated that agreed expectations in relation to pedagogy have not yet been identified and acknowledge that a consistent approach across the school is desirable. However there is evidence that discussions and professional learning opportunities provided are building a whole-school approach to teaching and learning.
- Teachers describe some of the pedagogical practices they employ, and reviewers noted some of these evidence-informed practices during time spent in classes.
- A whole-school approach to providing clarity for students about what they are learning and what success looks like in relation to learning goals is not yet evident.
- A variety of prescribed commercial programs purchased in the areas of literacy and numeracy – including Seven Steps to Writing⁸ and Get Reading Right⁹ – are evident and utilised in different ways. The rationale for the use of this wide range of programs based on analyses of student needs and the effectiveness of such approaches is not clear.
- Some members of staff articulated that these commercial programs limited teacher creativity, innovation, and efficacy. They also indicated that the felt that authentic learning, student agency, and student-directed learning including students working at their own pace is also restricted.
- Staff members also commented on the absence of whole-school planning days with the opportunity for whole-school and PLT long-term planning including the construction of semester and year curriculum overviews.

⁸ The Seven Steps are taught to students as building blocks to good writing. Each step allows students to gain confidence in their writing, so they do not become overwhelmed with the process. The seven steps are: plan for success; sizzling starts; tightening tension; dynamic dialogue; show, don't tell; ban the boring; and exciting endings. See: <https://www.sevenstepswriting.com/>

⁹ Get Reading Right is a literacy program that uses "synthetic phonics" for improving reading and writing. It employs multi-sensory reading and spelling resources. For more information, visit: <https://www.getreadingright.com.au/>

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

- Parent interaction with the school has been impacted upon by the recent pandemic as well as a period of unsettled school leadership. The school is taking key steps in re-establishing vital links with parents. The school clearly values families as integral members of the school community and partners in student learning and is trying to build to levels of engagement reached pre-pandemic.
- Although parent survey data for 2022 indicate low approval levels of the approaches of the school, teachers indicated strong parental links at the classroom level.
- The aspirational goal setting with parents and students is seen as a valuable approach for agreed understanding and commitment to student learning through the year.
- The Parents and Citizens (P&C) Association conduct well-supported social events to raise funds to support the school. The P&C also held a highly successful community open barbeque at the beginning of 2023. Discussions noted the re-establishment of improved relationships between the school and parent body.
- The presence of the school volunteer program to support literacy and numeracy learning was noted. This is a formal partnership as part of a focus for the ACT Education Directorate.
- Partnerships have been established and maintained with community organisations such as the Menslink program. These opportunities have enabled students to further receive specific areas of support.
- The use of private tutors to provide individual instruction to students in piano, violin, and guitar were observed.
- The school has had a long-term relationship with a Wiradjuri artist providing school projects to acknowledge the school community's connection to country.
- Curtin Primary School has a partnership with Woden Community Services to provide before- and after-school care. Service agreements are in place and reviewed regularly.

Commendations

Curtin Primary School is commended for:

- The implementation of whole-of-school improvement planning processes including the development of the *Strategic Plan 2019–2023*, *Annual Action Plans* and Impact Reports. These planning processes have guided the school through turbulent and challenging circumstances, including COVID 19 pandemic.
- The dedicated efforts of the implementation teams in executing school improvement initiatives over a number of years throughout the last improvement cycle.
- The innovative and collegial approach to timetabling to allow for collaborative time for PLT discussions.
- The well-established, innovative, and valued specialist program at Curtin Primary including physical education, wellbeing, and Indonesian.
- The strong school-wide understanding of the Positive Behaviours for Learning program. The impact of this work is evident in the engaged, safe, and learning focused classrooms.
- Staff members have expressed a willingness to engage in school improvement strategies with a view to improving student learning.
- All members of staff are committed to the learning and wellbeing of their students and demonstrate an understanding of the importance of positive and caring relationships to successful learning. Classrooms were welcoming and displays show connection to learning.
- Students articulated close connection, a sense of trust, and high level of value in their teachers.

Affirmations

Curtin Primary School is affirmed for:

- The strategic consultation practices with the community, including parents and students about the design and maintenance of the playground and to develop a five-year master plan to upgrade playground spaces.
- The review of the communication strategy to parents and carers to ensure that parents are receiving relevant information about their children's learning.
- The introduction of a coaching model which provides a solid foundation for further teacher engagement in coaching and professional development for all staff members.
- The leadership team's modelling and building of a culture of appreciation, empathy, kindness, and respectful professional partnerships through Engoori practices.
- Staff members and parents express optimism and confidence in the principal who they see as open, approachable, and who has a visible presence in the school.
- Development and planning in relation to the new SGP space including reviewing inclusion practices at Curtin Primary School.

Recommendations

- Collaboratively develop a whole-school plan for curriculum delivery which includes clear expectations in relation to teaching and learning. Embed agreed evidence-based teaching practices that support differentiated teaching and learning. Implement approaches to monitoring learning across all year levels to support continuity in learning.
- Implement a school-wide approach to data analysis and discussion. This approach should enable staff members to identify areas where the school is doing well and areas of concern and this should inform the design and implementation of whole-school improvement strategies. Continue to build the staff's capability to effectively use a range of data to identify and address learning needs as well as monitoring progress over time to better target teaching.
- Evaluate major initiatives that have received priority resourcing (for example, the provision time for teacher collaboration and smaller class sizes in years 4 to 6) to determine their impact. Develop systematic processes that support evidence-based decision making in relation to the acquisition of resources.
- Develop a whole-school evidence-informed approach to teacher collaboration which includes opportunities for teachers to learn from each other through strategies such as walk-throughs, classroom observations, and constructive feedback. Consider how feedback, including feedback from students about teaching and learning, can support the building of a self-reflective culture.
- Review the current communication strategy to the staff to ensure improved levels of awareness, understanding and commitment, and to continue to build professional relationships.