ACT Government
Education

Gowrie Primary School

Report of Review, 2020

Date of School Review: 01, 02, and 03 September 2020
Principal of Review School: Simon Smith

National School Improvement Tool Review Report prepared by:
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Report Date: 03 September 2020

Report of Review, 2020 prepared by:

ACT Government Education Directorate
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Report Date: 29 October 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.
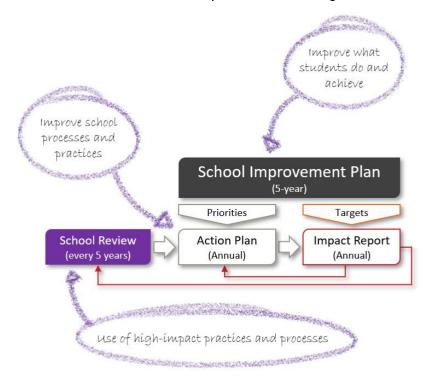
Through the lens of the NSIT, an internationally recognised framework for reviewing teaching and learning practices, reviewers gain an accurate picture of current school practices. During Review evidence provided by schools is considered alongside evidence gathered through consultation with staff, students, 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

- The *Gowrie Primary School Strategic Plan 2015-2020* has the broad priorities of: improve student learning outcomes P-6; and embed a whole-school culture that supports learning and promotes wellbeing. The first priority describes general student outcome targets in NAPLAN and PIPS, and achievement of student learning goals. The second priority is not explicitly focused on student outcomes. There is some anecdotal evidence to support the conclusion that staff, and the wider community were consulted in the formulation of the plan. There was no evidence that targets were derived from an analysis of trends in student data over time.

- Annual Action Plans (APs) from 2015 to 2019 follow the intentions of the strategic plan, however there is some change in focus and targets over time.

- The 2015 and 2016 School Board Reports provide some commentary of the progress towards planned targets. The 2017 to 2019 School Board Reports provide a required description of school achievements, such as in NAPLAN, attendance and school surveys. The *Gowrie Primary School Impact Report 2019* on the school's website outlines the latest public statement on achievement of planned targets, over the planning period, without analysis.

- School newsletters have described, at times, the improvement agenda and school achievement in areas such as NAPLAN.

- The school's leadership team described some analysis of data at the whole school level. There was a particular focus in staff meetings on student growth in NAPLAN from years 3 to 5 with some staff talking about this prompting a priority in mathematics in following years. Some leaders have a better understanding of data and have led discussions in this area. School level data are not yet available for all aspects of schooling.

- Parents and staff interviewed reported that the school was focused during the planning period on improvement strategies such as school data, curriculum planning, Positive Behaviours for Learning (PBL) and inclusion. Staff and parents were unaware of the student outcomes sought or the associated targets.

- School Board members receive annual reports of progress of the school in relation to NAPLAN.

- All school staff interviewed demonstrated a strong desire for improved student outcomes through implementing planned strategies. The school values of 'Everyone COUNTS' is expressed by the school in all that it does.

- The school leadership team has engaged with expertise through ACT Education Directorate sponsored system initiatives.

NSIT Domain 2: Analysis and discussion of data

Domain descriptor

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

Findings

- The school has developed an annual data collection schedule.

- A key strategy in the *Gowrie Primary School Strategic Plan 2015-2020* is to "develop and deliver to staff a common whole of school data collection tool that links to our planning documents and assessment and reporting plans". In response, the school has developed an online English Progress Record. This contains the individual data for students as they progress through the years. These data refer to reading, writing, word knowledge, and speaking.

- Teachers interviewed reported that the online English Progress Record (EPR) has enabled them to have a single point of entry for school-level English data. The EPR then provides them with some analysis tools they can use in discussions with team members on individual student achievement and progress. Teachers were less clear about how they used the data system to analyse the success of planned strategies in achieving desired outcomes.

- System data such as NAPLAN, PIPS, and attendance is recorded in the Directorate's School Administration System (SAS). One member of the school's leadership team has a role of analysing system data and communicating this analysis, particularly to the leadership team.

- The school has a schedule for the collection of data with a particular focus on classroom data.

- The school is in the initial phase of implementing PBL and is currently collecting baseline wellbeing data.

- The school leadership team has described a plan to establish an online mathematics data tool, similar to the online English Progress Record, as its next step towards developing a full range of data on student achievement.

- The school fulfils its requirements for reporting school progress to the school community. This is predominantly through the reports located on the school website. Staff talked about annual discussions on data such as NAPLAN and were aware of general trends including a need for more work in mathematics. While there is evidence that system-level data has been shared with staff and the community, neither group could confidently talk about school achievement, particularly over a number of years. Some staff mentioned that they would like more training in the use of data.

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

- Gowrie Primary School's positive school culture is characterised by great interactions between all stakeholders. Students commented that they "belong" and "teachers are the best thing about Gowrie Primary School". Staff commented on the "comradery within the staff" and the "inclusive culture". Parents commented that "staff members know the children's names and greet them warmly", "the school is welcoming to new families," and "the school encourages volunteering."

- Student engagement is evident in all learning areas. The review team observed quality learning in most areas across the school.

- Some behavioural issues impact on learning however every teacher, without exception, feels supported by the school leaders in managing this.

- The classrooms and hallways of the school are vibrant celebrations of student learning. Care is taken to present student learning in a stimulating manner. Students and parents were involved in the creation of murals that enhance the physical environment.

- Staff interviews and classroom observations demonstrate the belief that all students will learn.

- Year 5 and year 6 students articulated that learning is tailored to their interests. They are open to being challenged and extended in the senior years.

- Teachers who started using the Seesaw app. in 2020 articulated that it is an efficient way of increasing communication with parents. Many parents commented that they appreciate the way Seesaw keeps them up to date with their child's learning even when they are not able to attend the school.

- PBL was introduced last year, when it became a requirement by the Directorate. The school is teaching the existing school values of 'Everyone COUNTS' and students relate to the acronym. Students described the stages of behaviour management.

- Year 5 and year 6 students have the opportunity to participate in the school's Student Parliament.

  Other students have the opportunity to participate in the Student Representative Council.

- The school has self-evaluated its progress along the Cultural Integrity continuum. A few teachers are making efforts to include the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority into their planning. There is ongoing support from an Indigenous family through working with parents and students.

- Staff believe that their wellbeing is a priority along with student wellbeing.
- Staff morale is high. Teachers reported feeling very supported. Staff are collaborative and keen to stay and teach at Gowrie Primary School.

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 are identified for the Inclusion Support Program (ISP) and the Learning Support Unit - Autism (LSUA) program through Directorate processes.

- The school responds to student needs through the allocation of staff and resources. Some teachers can articulate a process for identifying students for referral to the Student Wellbeing support team. The team meets regularly and is responsible for progress monitoring and data-based decision making to identify and support all students. This team includes the leadership team, teachers, and the expertise of a school psychologist (currently absent), the Network Student Engagement Team (NSET), and outside agencies as required.

- The school deploys staff strategically to address the learning needs of many students in the school, including specific groups of students, making use of available staff expertise and interests. All teachers are provided with collaborative planning time with a teaching partner. Team leaders are available to provide in-class support such as lesson modelling. Some teachers reported participating in a coaching cycle.

- The school gives priority to funding initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for students. For example, the school has established an additional LSUA; executive teachers have minimal teaching loads; and 11 support staff are employed as paraprofessionals across the school. Two learning support assistants (LSAs) have 'off-class' roles as library support and to provide program support.

- Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) are developed for students with identified needs. 'SMART' goals are written in collaboration with parents/carers and support staff.

- In senior classes, flexible curriculum delivery arrangements have been established to enable staff to better address the needs of individual learners. Some physical spaces have been modified to better support student learning.

- There is alignment of the school budget with school priorities. The school has made significant investment in Chromebooks, interactive whiteboards, iPads and STEM learning tools. This includes the purchase of digital literacy and numeracy resources and subscriptions including Sunshine Online, Pearsons and Mathletics. A supply of iPads to the preschool enabled the successful implementation of the Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) program. Professional learning for staff included the effective use of online platforms such as Google Classrooms, G-Suite apps, Seesaw and Storypark (a parental involvement program)

- Extension programs have included: Ignite/PRIME, Namadgi Writing Workshops, Early Years Extension Program, Senior Years Extension Program, Academy for Future Skills, Limelight, Parliament, and the senior writing group.

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

- Executive teachers have been released to support, build capacity and capabilities in others.

- The junior team within the school has begun to use the 'Lesson Study' process to improve practice.

- School leaders from across the system annually visit the school (immersion visits), observing teaching in action and providing feedback to achieve focused improvement.

- The model of coaching and mentoring has changed over the past five years based on needs and resourcing. In 2015-2016 all teaching staff were engaged and trained in peer observations, visiting each other's classrooms, engaging in professional discussions and providing timely feedback. Written feedback was provided using a template based on the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the Quality Teaching Model.

- In 2017, the school funded one hour per week for all teachers to engage in coaching sessions with executive staff over a semester. Staff identified their goals using the Teacher Performance and Development Plan (TPDP) and were supported to achieve their professional learning goals using the GROWTH Coaching Model.

- In 2018, experienced teachers were provided with training in Mentoring Matters to mentor and team teach with new educators. This has built capacity and skills in mentoring and coaching across the school.

- During staff meetings staff participated in walk-throughs with a focus on writing, providing feedback to colleagues. Currently, experienced teachers provide coaching and mentoring particularly to early career teachers.

- The school has attracted and retained teachers that best meet the school's needs. Many teachers have elected to stay at the school beyond five years.

- Some of the teachers work with the leadership team to develop and share understandings of how students learn.

- Some of the teachers in the school are experts in the fields in which they teach and have high levels of confidence in teaching in those fields.

- The school expects teachers to be highly committed to continuous improvement of their own teaching.

- School leaders provide opportunities for teachers to work together during co-planning time.

- The school uses the TPDPs to manage performance and identify growth.
- The leadership team has strategically provided leadership opportunities for experienced teachers and teachers with particular skills to support and develop others.

NSIT Domain 6: Systematic curriculum delivery

Domain descriptor

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

Findings

- The school has well documented year and term curriculum maps for English, mathematics, humanities and social science, science, Japanese and visual arts that describe what teachers should teach.

- There is variance in the approaches taken by teams to document the curriculum delivery from scope and sequence documents. Some teachers asked for a more common approach to planning.

- The school has specialist programs in Japanese, visual arts, and health and physical education.

- Class timetables support the priorities of English, mathematics and science.

- Preschool uses the ELLA digital, play-based learning program.

- In the senior school the Australian Curriculum is delivered using online technology.

- There are some pockets of inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in the curriculum.

- Social skills strategies are implemented to support the wellbeing of students such as the Salvation Army Red Cap, Girls' Leadership and Clybucca Dreaming programs.

- The staff of the school is familiar with and work within the school's curriculum delivery expectations for English. English assessment processes are aligned with the curriculum and are designed to clarify learning intentions, identify details of student learning and gaps in knowledge.

- The review team observed learning experiences that are accessible and engaging for students, including those with particular needs.

- Reporting processes are aligned with curriculum and provide information about achievement and progress over time.

- Teams are moderating student work using the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) achievement standards and work samples.

- The leadership team have implemented a team structure to allow for collaborative curriculum development.

- ILPs document the curriculum adjustments for students with particular learning needs.

- There is a strong plan for the transition from preschool to kindergarten.

NSIT Domain 7: Differentiated teaching and learning

Domain descriptor

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

Findings

- School leaders promote differentiation and have set up team structures and a database in English for teachers to have conversations about where students are at in their learning and what they need to do to promote learning.

- Most of the preschool to year 2 teachers intentionally plan differentiated activities to cater to students who are struggling, the core group and those that need extending in both English and mathematics. Lessons are structured with clearly identified learning intentions, warm-up activities, explicit teaching, shared learning with the whole group, independent tasks, and a reflection.

- All teachers identified grouping as their main form of differentiation. The more experienced teachers can then differentiate within those groupings, especially in English.

- Through interviews, it is evident that the school holds the belief that all students can learn, and every child should have the opportunity to learn. The school supports this by funding human resources (three school leader Cs off class, additional LSAs and a part-time teacher providing support, enrichment and extension to K-2 students this year) and investing in technology.

- Teachers consult with parents to make reasonable adjustments to a student's learning through ILPs. All ISP students have ILPs. Some of these have attachments and some have been reviewed. Students have individual reading, writing, social, behavioural or mathematics goals written in consultation with their teacher, or by their teacher. Some teachers expect students to demonstrate they have met their goal during conferencing before writing new goals. Other teachers change the goals each term.

- Teachers use a selection of formative assessment strategies from the 'Gowrie Site'.

- Years 5 and 6 teachers prepare activity lists called 'Open Learning' to practise what is explicitly taught. Many activities allow for differentiation within the single task.

- LSAs work alongside teachers to meet individual student needs. LSAs also help implement the school's Response to Need (RTN) model by working with individuals or small withdrawal groups.

- Many parents talked about school reports and online platforms as ways of providing them with sufficient knowledge of where their child is at in their learning. Remote teaching and learning has provided parents of senior students more insights into their learning this year.

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 leadership team has prioritised whole-of-school and team structures to explore pedagogical practices.

- The school uses a range of technologies such as Google Classrooms to support learning.

- 'WALT/WILF' are used in many classrooms as a form of learning intentions and success criteria to provide some clarity for learning. In senior classes students talked about rubrics as a way of understanding the expectations of each task.

- Student learning goals and Comprehension, Accuracy, Fluency and Expand vocabulary (CAFÉ) strategies were consistently evidenced across the school.

- Teachers are working with the experts at the Academy for Future Skills to engage in professional learning and mentoring and coaching. The goal is to enhance the delivery of high-quality science inquiry units through the collaborative planning and modelling of lessons by the expert team. They are working shoulder-to-shoulder with teachers in their classrooms to enhance the structure of science lessons and higher order thinking skills.

- The Daily 5 literacy framework has been embedded into practice in junior years.

- The 'Traits of Writing' were evident in many classrooms.

- School leaders work with teachers to develop their pedagogical practices. For example, modelling effective teaching strategies, including (in English) connecting new material to past learning, and building independence through 'Open Learning'.

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

- Gowrie Primary School actively seeks ways to enhance student learning and wellbeing by 'partnering' with community organisations. The school has strong links with the Academy for Future Skills to facilitate professional learning and provide mentoring and coaching for staff in order to enhance the delivery of high-quality science inquiry units. While at times the outcomes to be achieved are not explicitly stated, the leadership team is confident the arrangement has improved student outcomes as the purpose.

- The school has worked with the YMCA Before and After School Care to introduce PBL in their setting; this promotes consistency in behavioural expectations.

- The school has implemented various online communication platforms to support effective school-home links during the remote learning period and beyond.

- The school has 'partnered' with organisations such as The Salvation Army, Volunteers in Schools Program, Clybucca Dreaming, Sport Clinics, Bunnings, and The Lions Club.

- Gowrie Parents and Citizens (P&C) Association members value their collaborative partnership with the school. The P&C is committed to supporting the school by providing funding for resources that support student learning across the school.

- Many teachers were able to describe links between their individual class and community volunteers such as parents or grandparents, who regularly provide in-class support. Teachers value these links and the positive impact they have on student outcomes.

- The preschool team actively support links to their community. Planning documents and weekly reviews of learning are developed in a format that is easily accessible for families to regularly review. Space and time are allocated to families to review the documents with their child and celebrate learning in preschool.

Commendations

- There is a strong sense of pride and belonging across Gowrie Primary School. Staff speak with pride about the school and the school community. Parents talk about a welcoming environment and the engaged and respectful leadership team. Students describe the school as a fun place where everyone is accepted.

- The school values of 'Everyone COUNTS' are expressed by the school in all that it does.

- The school has developed a suite of online resources that support teachers' easy access to the school's knowledge base.

- There is a strong intention from the leadership team to use data to support differentiated learning across the school. The online English Progress Record provides a comprehensive data system to support differentiation.

- The school has detailed curriculum overviews for teachers to use in their planning.

- Inclusive practices are a strength of Gowrie Primary School. Staff all feel as one.

- The leadership team is committed to continuous school improvement. They have strategically positioned experienced and knowledgeable teachers in all areas to support the development of pedagogical practices.

- There has been careful thought about enhancing the physical environment for learning.

- The leadership team recognises the value of strong community partnerships.

- Staff feel supported.

Affirmations

- Gowrie Primary School has maintained focus on key strategies of the Strategic Plan 2015-2020 over the life of the plan.

- The school is using PBL to establish common behaviour expectations and language across all settings.

- The school and the P&C are making significant investments in technology to support student learning. There has been a concerted effort to improve the skills of staff.

- Resources are prioritised to allow the leadership team and LSAs to support curriculum delivery.

- Each year-level team is developing processes to constantly improve curriculum delivery to meet individual student needs and interests.

- The school has introduced online applications (Storypark, Seesaw and Google Classrooms) to communicate student learning to parents. This and other innovations, such as virtual assemblies, are appreciated by parents.

- There are pockets of excellence in differentiation practices.

- The senior team is designing the curriculum to cater for interests and to develop independent learners.

- Several key strategies for English are consistently applied across the school.
- WALTs, WILFs and personalised learning goals are being used in many classrooms to clarify learning.

Recommendations

- Develop a Gowrie Primary School Improvement Plan 2021-2025 that is consistent with the school's vision for teaching and learning, based on an analysis of school performance over time, and provides a narrow and sharp agenda focused on student outcomes, incorporating explicit targets for student achievement.
- Develop a school data plan that encompasses a full range of school data and incorporates building staff skills in the analysis, interpretation and use of school, team, and classroom data.
- Continue to develop a professional learning plan that incorporates further teacher reflection on practice, with coaching and mentoring to drive improvement.
- Continue to refine the school's plan for curriculum delivery that reflects a shared vision for curriculum practice and aligns to expectations of the Australian Curriculum including achievement standards, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.
- Continue to develop staff capacity to cater for individual learning needs by offering multiple ways for students to engage with, and express, their learning.
- Continue to refine 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.