

# **The Department for Education**

## **External School Review**

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

**Report for Errington Special Education Centre**

Conducted in April 2018



## Review details

A priority for the Department for Education is to improve the educational attainment and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

The purpose of the External School Review is to support schools to raise achievement, sustain high performance and to provide quality assurance to build and sustain public confidence in government schools.

The external school review framework underpinning the review identifies the key levers for school improvement and has been shaped and informed by research.

The overarching review question is "how well does this school improve student achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity?"

This report outlines aspects of the school's performance verified through the review process according to the framework. It does not document every aspect of the school's processes, programs and outcomes.

We acknowledge the support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community. While, not all review processes, artefacts and comments are documented, they all have been considered and contributed to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Tony Sullivan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Cam Wright, Review Principal.

## School context

Errington Special Education Centre is located in the suburb of Plympton approximately 7km from the Adelaide CBD. The school caters for students with intellectual disability (some with other additional impairments) from reception to year 12. Approximately 44% of the students travel over 10km to attend the school.

Errington Special Education Centre has a current enrolment of 121 students. There are 77 students in the primary and 44 students in the secondary section of the school. School enrolment has been increasing over the past few years.

The school is classified as Category 4 on the department's Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school profile indicates that student population has a broad cultural diversity, approximately 80% experience communication difficulties, and 33% of families receive School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a seconded principal in her 2<sup>nd</sup> year and deputy principal in his 4<sup>th</sup> year at the school.

## Lines of inquiry

In considering the data summary in the school performance overview (Appendix 2) and the principal's presentation, the review panel explored the following lines of inquiry to evaluate the school's effectiveness towards raising student achievement and sustaining high performance.

During the external review process, the panel focused on 3 key areas from the External School Review framework:

- Effective leadership:** To what extent is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change evident?
- Improvement Agenda:** How effectively do teachers use school-based data and evidence to plan, track and report the growth of individual students across the school?
- Effective Teaching:** To what extent are the agreed pedagogical practices (Errington Identity) being implemented coherently across the school to raise levels of student engagement?

### To what extent is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change evident?

School-based demographic data was the basis for the change process over the past 18 months. Datasets included student communication complexities, student behaviour and staff wellbeing. The review panel sighted the datasets used as the basis for change. Analysis of this data confirmed a need for a strategic approach to build staff capacity to address these identified issues. The panel sought to evaluate the extent of implementation and impact in this early phase of improvement work, and acknowledged that sustained whole-school improvement takes time.

The leadership team and staff developed and implemented a site improvement plan with interconnected strategies:

- improve communication and literacy
- assess and report using system initiatives, and

- deliver an evidence-based approach to teaching and learning to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of students and staff.

Implementation of these priorities is driven by staff teams (focus groups). Awareness of these strategies was verified through interviews with the vast majority of staff, parents and students throughout the review.

Communication skills are critical for student success in learning, wellbeing and life. All staff are trained in the use of Proloquo2go (P2G), a communication system used in classrooms and outside, and classes have student and teacher iPads to support the implementation of this whole-school strategy. The panel observed the use of low technology boards and iPads by some staff and students in communicating about learning and behaviour. Older students who are verbal maintain their current system of cues and prompts in communicating. Over time, as the training and technology access allows, P2G will become the dominant platform for communication across the school. The panel confirmed through class observations variation in levels of take-up and implementation across the school.

The principal's knowledge of alternative approaches and the professional influence of an external consultant has resulted in the establishment of 'structured teaching', and a positive behaviour support framework called the 'Errington Identity', to support the presenting needs of students through a three-tiered approach to learning. A small number of staff underwent coaching with the consultant to implement an agreed set of teaching approaches to impact all students at a 'tier 1' (base) level of classroom support. The role of these staff members is to influence teaching practices of staff across the school. One teacher described the 'tier 1' practices as: "The 'gold standard' for 80% of our students".

The panel interviewed the 4 sub-teams, and each described their teamwork as highly effective. Consistent messages confirmed "it was important to discuss teaching and behavioural approaches being implemented so that we all get on the same page". Teachers cited the importance of using a common language across the school to build a safe school culture, with a teacher saying "there is enthusiasm for change across the school and, most certainly, for the development of student communications skills". The panel saw evidence of consistent use of visual schedules, workstations and classroom structures across the school. Specialist teachers are adapting changes to their program delivery to ensure consistency for students.

Unpredictable student behaviour often manifests from students' inability to express frustration or communicate feelings to others as a result of sensory overload. This is particularly prevalent for students diagnosed with autism, and for those who may be on the autism spectrum. In 2016, staff identified that approximately 20% of students required 'tier 3' intervention involving significant curriculum adjustments and behaviour support plans. The normal range should be approximately 10% of students.

Staff training was conducted on 'Managing of Actual or Potential Aggression' (MAPA), and staff confirmed they are gradually building up their confidence in averting 'meltdowns' and intervening in non-invasive ways. Some staff voiced a need to allow time and support to implement the changes being sought across the school. Strong evidence is present on MAPA consolidating the requirement to use a common language and approach with students when addressing behavioural incidents. Student and staff wellbeing is a high priority for the school.

Whilst each of the sub-teams acknowledged they functioned effectively as separate entities, there was no strong whole-school identity apparent. In many ways, the physical layout of the school and deployment of personnel is counter-intuitive to this end-goal. However, the panel believes the relentless focus on a coherent teaching and learning pathway across the school will overcome these surmountable barriers. Obvious staff strengths in each of the sub-schools, when strategically connected, have capacity to support and deliver the documented improvement agenda with connectivity and precision. Student success will be achieved through the seamless delivery of approaches between classes and sub-schools.

School council acknowledged the challenges of leading change during a recent period of school distress. Interactions between council and the leadership team are positive and proactive. They appreciate the transparency and accountability in relation to delivering the change priorities on the improvement plan. Council members perceive the school operating as 1 school, and not 4 sub-schools, with 1 parent reflecting on the principal's work: "She's re-built the staff community in a relatively short period of time". This insight is an acknowledgement of the strategic processes used in driving positive change.

In her presentation to the review panel the principal stated: "A whole-school approach means it won't matter what class the students are in, who their teacher is, or what sub-school they are in, the message and understanding will be the same".

#### **Direction 1**

**Continue to build a solid foundation of 'predictability' in support of student engagement, learning and wellbeing as they transition between classes from reception to year 12.**

### **How effectively do teachers use school-based data and evidence to plan, track and report the growth of individual students across the school?**

Early years teachers use information from preschool reports and transition teacher/parent meetings to develop a baseline for students coming to the school. Entry assessments are done to determine the SMARTAR goals for discussion with parents in term 2 of the school year. Evidence of assessments, information and data from all year levels was provided to the review panel, and included:

- reading records
- Running Records
- observation records
- communication records
- class goal achievement graphs per semester
- PE assessment rubrics, and
- student profile folders.

Discrete teaching trials (an aspect of MTSS) are conducted by some teachers to map student growth over time on specific identified needs. This tool will require further time for successful implementation across the school.

Many teachers valued the student profile folders as important starting points in referencing student achievement and needs. Other teachers cited peer discussions held at the start of the year as being insightful to their planning. Most teachers indicated that negotiated education plans/One Child One Plans and student reports are also useful access points for them to determine student progress and support planning.

The leadership team has taken a sound decision to gradually implement the use of Abilities Based Learning and Educational Support (ABLES) as a monitoring, tracking and reporting tool in the area of English Communication, particularly through the lower and middle levels of schooling. Strategically, this links soundly with the focus on communication and literacy improvement across the school. A teacher commented that this tool: "confirmed I was on the right track with my judgement". Another had moderated their judgement with a peer and an SSO to inform an accurate assessment, which is an example of very effective practice.

Specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound, agreed and reviewed (SMARTAR) goals are developed for inclusion in student NEPs/One Child One Plans (OCOP). The OCOP is being gradually implemented across each of the classes in a phased manner. There was evidence of rigorous goals set.



One teaching team confirmed that the principal read the goals to assure quality and rigour. School council parents confirmed that teachers accessed service providers prior to establishing the goals for student progress. Other parents commented on the pronounced rigour now being applied in the goal-setting process.

Planning in reception to year 10 is undertaken against the Australian Curriculum, with semester overviews developed for each class. Samples of planning documentation from across the school were provided to the panel. These were comprehensive and referenced to all learning areas, standards and general capabilities with clear outcomes described. Class contexts and individual student needs are important aspects of these planning documents.

Student pathways toward successful achievement of the modified SACE are mapped and tracked by staff in the senior years subschool. A SACE delivery plan year 10 to 12 ensures individual students are 'on-track' for successful completion. Evidence of personalised learning and assessment plans were sighted by the panel. The modified SACE results indicate high levels of success in graduating from the school and entering various pathways. Students interviewed were positive and enjoy schooling. Students in the senior years enjoy the hands-on approaches (enterprise and community access) to learning and a focus on developing their independence as learners.

Apart from SACE data, limited school datasets were aggregated and analysed consistently over time to inform sub-school/school decisions, and measure and report school performance improvement, particularly in the priority areas identified.

#### **Direction 2**

**Continue to expand whole-school, sub-school and class-based datasets with teachers to inform planning and report on success in student engagement, growth and achievement in learning.**

### **To what extent are the agreed pedagogical practices being implemented coherently across the school to raise levels of student engagement?**

With approximately 80% of students diagnosed with autism, the agreed teaching practices to be implemented across the school include:

- visual schedules
- transitional cues
- systematic instruction
- 'tell, show, help'
- discrete teaching trials, and
- a system of least prompts.

The review panel confirmed a focus on student 'safety' as an initial theme implemented from the 'Errington Identity'. This was evident in documentation, and through staff and student interviews. Other aspects for implementation in 2018 (respect, responsibility and resilience) were verified in planning documentation.

The panel considers the work of building and delivering 'structured teaching', with all of its essential elements, to be the most influential factor in raising student engagement and learning across the school. There are, however, variations in extent and depth of understanding and engagement amongst staff. This is understandable, and will take time and support for staff to deliver all elements with confidence and skill.

The panel heard from some teachers and SSOs during interview that 'structured teaching was not new, and some of these strategies were implemented before'. Staff also mentioned that 'structured teaching' does not work for all students. These positions are acknowledged as valid by the review panel and the

leadership team. Referencing the demographic of the school student population, the 'suite' of evidence-based strategies is appropriate for the presenting needs of the vast majority of students. Adjustments for other students apply normally through the School NEP/OCOP process implemented at the school.

Several teacher and SSO comments led the panel to conclude that there was some misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the need to implement 'structured teaching' as a consolidated approach across the school. These included difficulty for older students to adapt to a new approach, and structures that do not help successful student transition into post-school options. There were other teachers who held the view that 'structured teaching' worked with all students regardless of a diagnosis of ASD. All teachers were united in their view that communication skills and use of schedules were keys to building independence in students – a systematic approach to reducing levels of adult prompting over time.

The evidence of various visual schedules and cues was abundant in all classrooms visited by the review panel. These were adapted based on age and needs of students. The majority of classes have clear workstations set for independent learning, whilst supported learning (with teacher or SSO) was delivered in others. Transitional cues such as 'first – next – then' created clarity for students.

An approach that positively influenced student behaviour stated in 3 independent examples by teachers and parents throughout the review was 'video self-modelling'. Significant change in different aspects of student behaviour was enabled through this strategy. The school is commended on its approach to raising levels of productive school engagement, particularly in its partner approach with parents in the examples presented to the panel.

As stated earlier, the school has embarked on a significant change process that, if delivered well, has the potential to improve student engagement, learning and wellbeing. Staff are dedicated and committed professionals who are adjusting to the many changes required. Whilst some staff are further progressed than others, it is incumbent upon all staff to support each other in this endeavour. Staff and parents acknowledge that improvement is occurring. High-level consistency across the school in how learning occurs will create certainty for students, particularly as they move between sub-schools. As 1 teacher said: "if you're part of the process you're part of the progress".

### **Direction 3**


**Embed all aspects of the multi-tiered systems of support in every class in a highly coherent and seamless manner to ensure continuity of learning for all students.**

## **What is the school doing particularly well and why is this effective?**

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practices that are contributing significantly to school improvement at Errington Special Education Centre.

**Communication to Parents:** Communication between school and home is highly valued by the parents and school council members. As many students are driven to school by bus or taxi, parents are unable to engage with their childrens' learning in a direct way. The school has recently introduced the SeeSaw app, which has enabled both spontaneous and planned 'snapshots' of learning to be shared with parents. One parent said: "The use of the app allows me a window into part of my child's day". This communication helped create parents' 'peace of mind', and supported transparency and connection with the school.

**Modified SACE:** The school's SACE achievement data has been exceptionally successful over many years. In the last 4 years, 100% (19 of 19) of students have successfully completed their modified SACE. Learning and assessment plans are clearly detailed and personalised. Learning activities are engaging for the students and internal moderation is efficient and accurate.



**Personalising Learning:** The school-wide implementation of SMARTAR goals has added rigour and transparency to the tracking of educational progress as students move across the school. Connected learning is the shared responsibility of all staff at Errington Special Education Centre. Data is collected against each of the goals set, and the implementation of discrete teaching trials across the school will further enhance the objectivity in evaluating student success in goal attainment. Parents are highly satisfied with the quality and rigour of the goals set across all sub-teams of the school.



## Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

Errington Special Education Centre is demonstrating a positive culture of optimism and improvement characterised by having realistic and achievable expectations for students with complex needs. The school leadership is setting a clear agenda for improvement and is working diligently at developing individual and whole-staff capacity to deliver positive change across the school. Changes are in the early phases of implementation and generally staff are committed and on-board, although at different levels. Parents are proud of their school and the opportunities afforded their children to 'ready' them for learning and life.

The principal will work with the education director to implement the following directions:

1. Continue to build a solid foundation of 'predictability' in support of student engagement, learning and wellbeing as they transition between classes from reception to year 12.
2. Continue to expand whole-school, sub-school and class-based datasets with teachers to inform planning and report on success in student engagement, growth and achievement in learning.
3. Embed all aspects of the multi-tiered systems of support in every class in a highly coherent and seamless manner to ensure continuity of learning for all students.

Based on the school's current performance, Errington Special Education Centre will be externally reviewed again in 2022.



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
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The school will provide an implementation plan to the education director and community within 3 months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's annual report.



Niki Takos  
PRINCIPAL  
ERRINGTON SPECIAL EDUCATION  
CENTRE



Governing Council Chairperson

## Appendix 1

### Attendance policy compliance

Implementation of the Education Department student attendance policy was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2017 was 89.5%.

## Appendix 2

### School performance overview

#### One Child One Plan Goals

All students who attend Errington Special Education Centre are verified under the department's Students with Disability Policy. Based on the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), every student has entitlement to the provision of the Australian Curriculum and appropriate adjustments to support each student. These adjustments can include: Educational (curriculum, assessment and reporting); Instructional (individual teaching programs and strategies); and Environmental (space, equipment and support). Each student at the school has goals that they are working towards over the academic year.

The review panel was able to verify that students have appropriate and agreed learning goals based on their 2018 One Child One Plan and NEPs. The goals established are specific and targeted. The panel verified these through a sample of documented plans provided during review.

The school uses the following school-wide assessment tools that enable students to be assessed on the basis of their abilities: OCOP and NEP goals, Abilities Based Learning and Educational Support (ABLES) and Modified SACE.

#### SACE

From 2014 to 2017, 19 Stage 2 students, who were potential completers, successfully completed the requirements of the Modified SACE. A letter sent from the SACE, Curriculum and Assessment Officer, to the school in May 2018 commends: "...higher order understanding of Modified SACE by your teachers in relation to setting SMART goals, developing assessment activities, providing individualised learning and collection of evidence...".