

External School Review

Berri Primary School

Final School Summary Report

March 2024



External School Review details

Public education is for every child and young person in every community across our state. Educators and staff work in partnership with families and communities to nurture, develop and empower all South Australian children and young people with the knowledge, skills and capabilities they need to become fulfilled individuals, active, compassionate citizens and lifelong learners.

External School Review teams work in schools with school leaders and staff to enable in-depth evidence-based reflection on their recent improvement journey and their current strengths and challenges, in the areas of expert teaching, school leadership, and conditions for optimal learning.

Round table participants

Brenda Pfitzner	Principal
Brenton Chapman	Education Director
Jo Everett	Review Officer

Review team

Jo Everett	Review Officer
Rob Smyth	Review Principal

Post review meeting participants

Brenda Pfitzner	Principal
Brenton Chapman	Education Director
Jo Everett	Review Officer

Expert teaching line of inquiry: To what extent does the school promote the learning culture as an enabler for high expectations and achievement for all learners?

Strengths and challenges

- School values and learning dispositions are visible in learning spaces and displayed in some classrooms. Students could identify some school values but were not able to say how they help them with their learning. Parents knew of the school values but were not able to name them. An opportunity exists for the staff to work with students and parents to redesign and refresh the school vision and values, to ensure there is strong ownership by all.
- Parents report that the school fosters a positive learning culture and teachers prioritise student achievement and success. Some reading and maths data, and how it has improved over time, is regularly shared at Governing Council meetings. Parents suggested that if this could be communicated more broadly to the parent community, it would further enhance partnerships with families.
- School improvement plans and group discussions confirmed the strong school focus on student wellbeing. During classroom walkthroughs students spoke very positively about the school. They stated that their teachers are very helpful, that learning is fun and they appreciate the range of ways to be involved including sports, choir and drum beat lessons. The Wellbeing and Engagement Collection (WEC) data indicates connectedness to school at 59%, rating more highly than the other dimensions of the survey.
- In group discussions, teachers consistently emphasised the importance of maintaining high expectations for student learning. Examples they gave for how they do this included setting the bar for achievement at a challenging level, supporting all students to reach their full potential and providing the necessary resources for learning. Students associated high expectations with positive behaviour and attitudes such as kindness, tidiness and respect. Opportunity exists for staff, students and parents to define clear, high expectations for all learners, ensuring alignment with the school culture.
- Teachers describe strategies such as building strong relationships with all students, individual sensory support, targeted reading and phonics instruction and intervention, as ways they foster inclusivity in classrooms. Classroom walkthroughs confirmed scaffolds like 'I do, we do, you do' in use to support students. In group discussions, students stated that everyone is included in classrooms, especially students who need help.
- A culture of collaboration is nurtured through teacher participation and decision-making in whole-school improvement planning. Staff members affirm their active engagement in the school's improvement initiatives. Whole staff and professional learning team (PLT) meetings often focus on whole school data analysis, reflection on past improvement goals and individual self-review, promoting broad ownership of the priorities.
- During the staff meeting the review team observed teachers working collaboratively in teams. Teachers describe the learning culture as supportive and respectful. They appreciate the focus on taking time to embed priorities, reporting that this is enabling them to consolidate their learning, be more impactful in their teaching to meet the needs of all learners and to build a cohesive team. There are agreed norms of honesty and kindness, to guide staff behaviour and general conduct.
- Parents stated that students are deeply engaged with the school, showing pride in wearing uniforms and actively joining activities such as sports and choir. They acknowledged the amount of information, including regular updates on school events and policies provided through the newsletter, SeeSaw and Facebook. They said that receiving information from teachers about their child's progress varies. Some parents suggested that encouraging stronger relationships between families, would help to create a more robust, united culture within the school.
- An Aboriginal Cultural Centre of Excellence has been established to enhance visibility and transparency of the Aboriginal Education Team's efforts. The team, consisting of an Aboriginal Education Teacher and two Aboriginal Community Education Officers, closely monitor and promote the learning progress of all Aboriginal students. Strategies include daily check-ins, targeted support and extension, particularly focusing on spelling mastery for students in years 3 to 6, along with on-call assistance.
- Wave 2 learning intervention for individuals and groups is embedded across the school. Programs are derived from Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) data, One Plan goals, and reception speech screeners. SSOs are supported by regular meetings with teachers to plan learning, review and adjust goals to design next steps for learning as required.
- Common approaches, including phonics and spelling instruction, the Resilience Project, Explicit Direct Instruction pedagogy, maths chats and daily review and engagement norms are embedded. PLT and pupil free day agendas and minutes contain frequent references to these, allowing teachers to make changes and improvements as needed.

Potential next steps

- Redesign and refresh the school vision and values with all stakeholders to ensure greater collective ownership.
- Deepen the understanding of high expectations for learning and ensure they are clearly communicated to students and parents.

Opportunity for improvement 1

Redesign and refresh the school vision and values with all stakeholders to ensure greater collective ownership.

Expert Teaching line of inquiry: How effectively are teachers using evidence-based pedagogies to create a classroom culture that supports all students to be challenged in their learning?

Strengths and challenges

- For the past three years, the school has received support from a Literacy Guarantee Unit (LGU) Coach. All Reception to year 2 teachers use a common phonics routine, daily review, decodable readers, progress monitoring tools, Heggerty and DIBELS assessments. Phonics data indicates a consistent improvement trend from 46% in 2020 to 67% in 2023, of students achieving the benchmark in the phonics screen test. Teachers have noted increasing student engagement in response to these routines.
- Spelling Mastery is taught across the primary years. Students are placed in smaller ability groups for explicit teaching. Teachers monitor progress, groups are reviewed every five weeks and changes are implemented as students increase competency.
- Common pedagogical approaches were observed across the school including phonics instructional routine, daily maths chats and reviews, fluency pairs and close reading. Explicit direct instruction supports teachers to deliver structured lessons. During classroom walkthroughs the review team saw evidence of teachers using engagement norms such as tracking the speaker, checking for understanding and pair share.
- There are some examples of differentiation in classrooms for students below standard, especially during phonics instruction and Spelling Mastery, however, evidence of high achieving students being stretched in their learning is limited. Students described the learning in classrooms as easy or just right and that everyone gets the same work. This was confirmed by the review team observing the common use of worksheets in classrooms. There was some evidence of scaffolds to support students, such as small group work and pair share in some classes. There is potential for teachers to build on current differentiation practices to include challenge and stretch for all learners in an intentional manner.
- The use of data including DIBELS, essential assessments and phonics progress monitoring informs teaching, focuses on next steps for learning and identifies students requiring intervention. The Orton-Gillingham program is used as a small group wave 2 intervention.
- During classroom visits, the review team noticed teachers presenting whole class learning goals such as 'today we are working on'. Most teachers indicated that they use learning intentions when introducing a topic or task, however, setting individual learning goals is an area for growth. In conversations during classroom walkthroughs students reported they are unaware of their learning goals. Parents also expressed a lack of awareness regarding their child's learning goals and next steps, however, they did report learning about them during parent-teacher interviews.
- During classroom walkthroughs most students were engaged in learning. The review team noted teachers actively checking-in with students and giving some verbal feedback about their work. Strategies for checking for understanding were seen in some classrooms including thumbs up and down and mini whiteboard sharing. There was some evidence of teachers sharing individual learning data with students using essential assessments in maths. An opportunity exists for teachers to expand the use of these practices to enhance student ownership of the learning.
- Some peer feedback opportunities, such as 'tickled pink', 'green for growth' and 'pair share' were observed. Students identified recognition and praise from teachers as forms of feedback, however, they struggled to articulate the impact of teacher feedback on their improvement. Students are not confident in knowing where they are at with their learning and how they can improve. There is an opportunity for the school to develop a common approach to purposeful feedback for students to move their learning forward.
- Specialist teachers use learning intentions for each lesson. Strategies such as exit slips, verbal check-ins, whiteboards and thumbs up to check for understanding during learning were all observed by the review team. A focus on the engagement norms, open ended tasks and hands on learning were used to keep students engaged.
- A special options class, catering to the learning and wellbeing needs of Reception to year 6 students, is integrated into the school. Students are supported with explicit instruction in literacy and maths, personalised social and life skill development programs and access to Inclusive Education Support Program (IESP) funding. One Plan goals are reviewed adjusted regularly with parent input.

Potential next steps

- Enhance the co-design, use, review and communication of learning goals.
- Scaffolded practices to include opportunities for stretch and challenge in learning.
- Develop a common approach to providing purposeful feedback to students that moves their learning forward.

Opportunity for improvement 2

Enhance the co-design, use, review and communication of learning goals.

Quality Leadership line of inquiry: How effectively does the school leadership ensure a clear focus on developing an inclusive culture to improve the quality of teaching and learning?

Strengths and challenges

- Leaders work with staff to implement inclusive classroom behaviour management approaches. During classroom walkthroughs there was clear evidence that a range of systems such as A and B choices and tiers of behaviour are used by teachers Reception to year 6. Zones of Regulation, sensory tools, Play is the Way strategies and ready to learn scales are also in place to support students to engage in their learning. There is potential for staff to develop clarity and a school-wide behaviour approach that supports all students and aligns all teacher practice.
- The wellbeing leader collaborates with staff, students and families to integrate inclusive practices into the school culture. Student leadership opportunities include Student Representative Council and the year 6 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership team. The Drum Beat program supports primary students with self-regulation and social connections with peers. The implementation of the Resilience Project involves teachers explicitly teaching gratitude, mindfulness and empathy. In group discussions students shared how this teaching has benefited them in classroom and playground settings.
- All teachers are aligned to a PLT. They meet regularly in staff meeting and release times to focus on learning and wellbeing priorities. Each PLT has a playbook outlining the common approaches and routines for English and maths used in those year levels. Some teachers discussed that more regular time to focus on moderation in PLT time would be beneficial to targeted teaching and support consistency of teacher judgment across year levels.
- Attendance, wellbeing and resilience data is monitored and reviewed regularly and responded to by leaders and key staff. PLT meetings support teachers to analyse the impact at class and individual levels and plan next steps for learning of individual and groups of students.
- Leaders have implemented team around the child (TAC) meetings for students with IESP funding. Teachers noted that these meetings help them to be more inclusive and responsive to students' learning needs. Parents reported that TAC meetings have a significant impact on their child's learning achievement and school connection, while also increasing their own understanding of support agencies and funding processes.
- SSOs support in classrooms to administer targeted wave 2 intervention. They are released to meet with teachers twice per term to set goals and plan learning for the students they work with. Goals are developed from One Plans and are reviewed at each meeting. SSOs highly value this time and stated as a result they receive clear direction and feel confident in their role.
- Leaders create an extensive professional development program to support improvement in whole school and PLT priorities. Teachers stated that reducing the amount of focus areas has enabled them to be more targeted in their teaching and develop stronger common approaches across year levels. A potential next step is for leaders to work with staff to ensure the professional learning program maintains a clear focus on a small number of priorities and is aligned to high impact teaching strategies.
- Leaders work with the Aboriginal education team to monitor learning and wellbeing data for Aboriginal students. A range of strategies including before school reading, a homework program and the year 6 Aboriginal student leadership team supports a sense of belonging and connection to school and engagement in learning. Leaders shared that the establishment of a regional network of Aboriginal students connecting once per term, has led to improved attendance for identified students.
- Leaders have clear roles and responsibilities that align to the school improvement directions. Leaders stated that meeting regularly with the Aboriginal education, intervention and wellbeing teams as well as the autism inclusion teacher to monitor data, set directions and plan staff learning ensures that the whole school strategic plan is clear and precise.
- The coordinator of teaching, learning and intervention analyses phonics, DIBELS and Spelling Mastery data. One-on-one teacher meetings occur to assist teachers to understand the data and plan learning accordingly. Teachers have opportunities to observe modelled lessons provided by the coordinator.
- Leaders provide written and verbal feedback to teachers about classroom practice informally through walkthroughs and performance and development plan meetings. Teaching staff indicated a growth point for the school was to ensure leadership observations occur in all classrooms, to enable targeted feedback to further build their capability.
- Graduate and early career teachers are supported with mentor teachers. They reported that the supportive relationships that develop have been instrumental in building their professional capability. Teachers also mentor preservice teachers. There are opportunities for high performing teachers to share exemplary practice with colleagues.

Potential next steps

- Align the agreed behaviour education approach and language to ensure it is cohesive practice across the school.
- Refine the professional learning program to maintain a clear focus on agreed, high impact, priorities.
- Include time for moderation of student work to increase the depth of inclusive practices in professional learning teams.

Opportunity for improvement 3

Align the agreed behaviour education approach and language to ensure it is cohesive practice.

Review Summary

Berri Primary School has a warm, positive culture. Students, teachers and parents describe it as a collaborative, caring and friendly environment in which to learn and work. Staff members place a strong emphasis on their position in the school and community, with many having lived and worked in the Riverland for several years. Parents' commitment to the school is demonstrated by their high attendance at school events and meetings. The Governing Council is deeply invested in the school and welcome the quality of communication from school to home.

The principal works with the leadership team and staff to drive continual development in the school's priorities of maths, reading and wellbeing. Teachers highly value professional growth and expressed appreciation for shared learning with peers. Research based, explicit direct instruction teaching is common practice across the school and supports the diverse student population. Leaders clearly understand and are committed to their role in the improvement journey.

The school fosters and promotes high levels of student and staff wellbeing. The wellbeing leader develops and oversees programs that encourage student resilience, belonging and leadership opportunities. Leaders and staff are preparing to work with the community to further develop the school vision and values.

The Opportunities for improvement provided by the ESR Report process are intended to provide practical next steps for expert teaching, school leadership, and conditions for optimal learning.

Opportunity for improvement 1	Redesign and refresh the school values and vision with staff, parents, and students to ensure a greater collective ownership.
Opportunity for improvement 2	Enhance the co-design, use, review and communication of learning goals.
Opportunity for improvement 3	Align inclusive behaviour education approaches and language to ensure it is cohesive practice.

Jo Everett

Review Officer

Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate

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