EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT 2013

for

GARRAN PRIMARY SCHOOL
Record of Validation Process

The following people were members of the external validation panel for Garran Primary School conducted on Tuesday 20 and Wednesday 21 August 2013.

Name: Phil Gray  
School: Aranda Primary School  

Name: Felicity Levett  
School: Mount Rogers Primary School  

Name: Tim McNevin  
School: Education and Training Directorate  

As chair of the panel I endorse that this is a true and accurate record of the findings from the external validation process.

Name: Phil Gray  
Signature:  
Date: 11/9/2013  

As principal of Garran Primary School I accept the Validation Report on behalf of the school community.

Name: Jennifer Hall  
Signature:  
Date: 23-9-13  

As co-director of Quality Learning Australia, external validators for the conduct of validation process in ACT public schools, I concur that the panel acted within the guidelines set by the ACT Education and Training Directorate.

Name: Michael King  
Signature:  
Date: 23-9-13
Section A: School context

Opened in 1967, Garran Primary School caters for students from Preschool to year 6. The school, located adjacent to the Canberra Hospital and the National Capital Private Hospital, has two preschools, seventeen mainstream and three accelerated learning classes as well as a Learning Support Unit.

Enrolments at the school have grown over the life of the School Plan with the school now operating at capacity. As of 2012, the student population was 576, comprising 50 preschool students and 526 from kindergarten to year 6. In 2010, the school had a total enrolment of 535 (preschool 49, K-6 486).

A unique feature of the school is the high proportion of students who have English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD). Over thirty-five different nationalities make up the student population with 38 percent of students coming from families classified as EALD. These students, from diverse cultural backgrounds, enrich the student body and make Garran Primary School a truly multicultural community. The number of students with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background has been between two and three students enrolled each year over the life of the current School Plan. The school enrolled seven short term international fee paying students during the life of the school plan.

In recent times, the majority of students attending Garran Primary School reside within the school’s Priority Placement Area (PPA) however, out of area students are offered a place if spaces are available. At the start of this plan (2010) the school offered 22 kindergarten out of area places and in 2013 this number was limited to six placements. The school draws students from the local PPA suburbs of Garran, sections of O’Malley and Philip. The burgeoning student numbers and creation of a specialist Indonesian room have resulted in limited teaching spaces throughout the school.

The panel acknowledges that relative consistency of the teaching staff at the school with some renewal each year. The school executive staff team for the period of the School Plan has included the Principal, two Deputy Principals and two Executive Teachers. Over the period of this School Plan there have been some changes in the executive team, including two changes of substantive Principal with the Deputy Principals both having opportunities to act as principal for periods of six months or more.

The Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) provides for the needs of identified gifted students. The program has evolved since 1997 and supports the education of 108 students in 2013.

The panel also congratulates the school on the outstanding work done by the parent community through the school’s Parents and Citizens Association (P&C). They actively support the school through fundraising and over the life of this school plan have donated more than $100,000 which has been used to purchase notebook computers, iPads, playground equipment, literacy resources, physical education equipment and to set up alternative play spaces for students.
**Section B: School performance**

Academic achievements, as measured by National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS), have been outstanding. Over the period of the School Plan, NAPLAN and PIPS data showed that students in years K, 3 and 5 regularly exceed the ACT mean scores for all areas of testing. The panel commends the school for these outstanding results.

In 2012, the year 3 NAPLAN performance in Reading, Writing, Spelling, and Grammar and Punctuation was described as “well above Territory mean”. Year 5 mean scores for Reading, Writing and Spelling were also in this top category, with results being “well above Territory mean”. Grammar and Punctuation performance achieved the second top category, “above Territory mean”.

Garran year 3 students have consistently performed above the ACT public system and national means in numeracy since 2008. From 2008 to 2010 mean scores continued to rise. Although this trajectory dipped slightly in 2011-2012, the school’s performance is still strong. In 2012 the school mean stands 34.9 points above the system mean and 49.9 points above the national mean. Garran year 5 students have consistently performed above the system and national means in numeracy. In 2012, Garran’s year 5 students are 33.8 points above the system mean and 50.3 points above the national mean.

Year 3 and Year 5 English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) students have been performing strongly in all aspects of NAPLAN over the last four years.

Kindergarten literacy results, over the life of the plan have been equally impressive. Students enter kindergarten either at or slightly above system level. At the end of each year students have performed significantly above the system means over the past three years. The analysis of the PIPS raw score numeracy data demonstrates that both boys and girls have entered and exited Kindergarten with very similar scores. Entry and exit scores in numeracy are very similar to system outcomes. For a high performing school that Garran PS is, the growth in numeracy is noticeably less than the corresponding growth in reading. An area for investigation for the school in the future will be closer analysis of start and finish PIPS scores to determine performance of the Kindergarten children in Numeracy.

Satisfaction survey data for the life of the School Plan indicates Garran Primary is a high performing school. In terms of overall satisfaction with the school, 94% of staff and 93% of parents and 85% of students indicate that they strongly agree or agree they are satisfied with the school. Survey responses from teaching staff indicate strong satisfaction with their workplace. Eighty-eight percent of students indicated that they get along well with their teachers, and the average attendance for semester one of 2012 for years K to 6 was 95.4%.

Enrolment data indicates that the school has grown to reach capacity. This trend highlights the perception in the community of the outstanding programs offered at the school (including the Accelerated Learning Program, Science curriculum, language emphasis etc.).

**Evidence cited and its validation**

- Annual School Board Reports 2010 – 2012
  - Enrolment Data 2010 – 2012
  - Attendance Data 2010 - 2012
• Annual Operating Plans 201 – 2012
• System Satisfaction Survey 2009 – 2012
• NAPLAN and PIPS Data 2010 – 2012
• Garran Primary School Assessment Framework
• GradeXpert data 2012.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 1: Improvement planning

Garran Primary School implemented a whole school approach to school improvement during the life of the school plan. The staff were divided into four groups, each with a strategic priority to consider. The process was led by the executive team and each group considered progress towards the targets and collected evidence for validation.

Information was collected from a wide range of sources (parents, previous validation report, students, staff, the Directorate and the wider community) to develop the strategic priorities for the 2010 – 2012 school plan. Evidence was gathered from school and system student performance data, System satisfaction survey results, community consultation, staff forums and a wide range of school based documents including programs, timetables and teaching frameworks.

In 2009, at the end of the previous cycle of school improvement, Garran staff and the wider school community identified the following seven priority areas for the 2010-2012 School Plan:

• Continue to develop students’ numeracy skills through a whole school approach to the explicit teaching of numeracy
• Continue to develop students’ literacy skills through a whole school approach to the explicit teaching of literacy
• Further develop whole school embedding of targeted pedagogy in literacy and numeracy for ESL students
• Implement a whole school approach to promote effective use of data to inform teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy
• Whole school commitment to collegial leadership and capacity building through a focus on sharing best practice
• Whole school implementation of Circle Time throughout the curriculum
• Foster quality community partnerships throughout the school to enhance students’ learning.

In 2011, the school reduced the number of school plan priorities from seven to three. This was in response to changes across the Directorate designed to make the cycle of school improvement more achievable and meaningful and in line national and international best practice. A fourth priority relating to preschool and the NQS was added in 2012.

This validation report is in relation to the four priorities established since 2011.
Evidence cited and its validation

- Annual School Board Reports 2010 – 2012
- Enrolment Data 2010 – 2012
- Attendance Data 2010 - 2012
- Annual Operating Plans 2010 – 2012
- System Satisfaction Survey 2009 – 2012
- NAPLAN and PIPS Data 2010 – 2012
- Garran PS Assessment Framework
- GradeXpert data 2012.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 2: Improvement actions

Priority 1: Continue to develop students’ Literacy skills through a whole school approach to the explicit teaching of literacy

In 2010, in consultation with the Directorate, targets were established for Garran PS. These targets were based on NAPLAN mean scores for years 3 and 5 and required four point annual mean score improvements. Garran’s focus in Literacy was specifically on writing and reading.

Garran has taken significant action to build curriculum knowledge and teacher capacity in the teaching of literacy and English. This action has included: targeted professional learning (including First Steps Reading, PM Reading Benchmarks, Criterion Referenced Writing Assessment, Guided Reading and Cooperative Reading); the creation of a second deputy principal position (Literacy and Numeracy) with a focus on coaching and mentoring; the establishment of Literacy Links positions within the school and greater emphasis on the use of data.

As a result of the actions taken, the school has established:

- a whole school approach to the planning, teaching, monitoring, assessment and moderation of writing and reading
- a focus on every teacher being accountable for improving individual student outcomes in writing and reading through a differentiated literacy program across the school
- improved practice in the capturing and analysis of data to enhance teaching and learning.

The school identified that the transition from existing school-based English scope and sequence documents (based on Every Chance to Learn), and corresponding assessments, to the Australian English Curriculum and the achievement standards was a potential disruption to learning programs. The panel commends the school for taking the initiative to become a trial school for Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and providing staff with additional team planning time to manage this transition.
The panel validated that Garran has successfully achieved all 11 of the targets\(^1\) set for the period within the confidence intervals defined.

**Evidence cited and its validation**

- School Plan 2010 – 2012
- Annual Operating Plans 2010 to 2012
- Whole school English programming and assessment practices
- Guided reading program
- NAPLAN data years 3 and 5 2010 to 2012
- PIPS data 2010 to 2012.

**Priority 2: Continue to develop students’ numeracy skills through a whole school approach to the explicit teaching of numeracy**

Similar targets were established for numeracy based on NAPLAN mean scores for years 3 and 5, and requiring four point annual mean score improvements.

Garran has been deliberate in building curriculum knowledge and teacher capacity in the teaching of Mathematics. During the life of the plan the school progressively audited Maths practices and programs being used across the school.

Resulting from the audit process, further action was taken including: the creation of a second Deputy Principal position (Literacy and Numeracy) with a focus on coaching and mentoring; the establishment of Numeracy Links positions; targeted professional learning in mental computation; aligning programming documents with the Australian Curriculum; collecting data using Progressive Achievement Tests in Mathematics (PAT Maths) and school-based assessments and the development of the whole school assessment framework.

As a result of the actions taken, the school has established:

- a whole school approach to the planning, teaching, monitoring, assessment and moderation of numeracy. A whole school approach was also applied to differentiation and the introduction of flexible streamed Maths groups
- the development of a mental computation scope and sequence, including a shared language between teachers and students
- improved practice in the capturing and analysis of data to enhance teaching and learning
- more feedback for teachers on their numeracy teaching, specifically through ‘snapshots’; (instructional rounds), and informative practice discussions at team meetings.

The school identified that the transition from existing school-based Mathematics scope and sequence documents (based on Every Chance to Learn), and corresponding assessments, to the

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\(^1\) The 11 targets relate to Reading and Writing 2010 to 2012 noting that in 2010 there was no target set for Year 3 writing across the system due to a change in writing social purpose.
Australian Curriculum and the achievement standards was a potential disruption to learning programs. The school responded by providing additional planning time for teachers.

Garran achieved five out of six of its targets (with the exception of year 3 numeracy target in 2012). The panel recommends ongoing awareness and monitoring of year 3 numeracy performance.

**Evidence cited and its validation**

- School Plan 2010 – 2012
- Annual Operating Plans 2010 to 2012
- K-6 Maths assessments
- Mental Computation scope and sequence
- Whole school assessment framework
- GradeXpert
- programming documents
- NAPLAN data years 3 and 5 2010 to 2012
- PIPS data 2010 to 2012.

**Priority 3: Develop a P to 6 program that fosters student self-awareness (of learning, school participation and relationships)**

The school established targets based on the annual student perception surveys. In particular the school was seeking a ten percentage point increase (over the life of the plan) to survey questions that indicate resilience and social connection. For example: “having a say in the things they learn”, “At this school I feel supported if I am bullied or harassed.”, “At this school I know an adult I can talk to if I have a problem”,, and “I get along with my teachers.”

Garran Primary school committed to be part of the KidsMatter program. KidsMatter is a mental health initiative developed for Australian Primary schools designed to support student wellbeing. After extensively reviewing a number of social skills programs using the KidsMatter evidence based criteria, the Bounce Back program was chosen for the explicit teaching of social and emotional learning throughout the school.

The school now has weekly Bounce Back lessons to support social and emotional learning skills for the children. A strong connection has been developed with the parent body through parent effectiveness training workshops.

The school identified that a lack of clarity around the roles and responsibilities was a barrier to teachers when discussing issues to do with students’ mental health. The nature of the BounceBack program provided teachers with a clear and defined approach that helped overcome these concerns. The school also reviewed and improved its referral processes for students with special needs.

The school achieved three of the four targets for the specific student perception survey statements. The fourth measure showed steady progress over the life the plan.
Evidence cited and its validation

- BounceBack program
- Student perception survey data 2009 – 2012
- Common language of BounceBack
- Additional Needs Team referral
- Semester one school report
- School Plan 2010 – 2012
- Annual Operating Plans 2010 to 2012.

Priority 4: Develop our preschool systems and resources towards the National Quality Standard.

The school sought to make progress toward achieving the requirements for NQS accreditation. Since the introduction of Priority 4 to the School Plan in 2012 the school has been proactive in building teacher capacity and developing the required documentation to meet the NQS requirements. Actions to date include:

- completion of the self-assessment tool
- completion of the handbook and philosophy statement
- completion of the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education by all preschool assistants
- the executive teacher of the P-2 area commenced teaching in the school on a weekly basis
- enhanced communication with parents through overviews, newsletters, reports, and a day book.

While the school is yet to be assessed and rated the panel notes the extensive work that has been done in preparation for the NQS assessment. The panel also recognises that this work will continue to ensure an ongoing focus upon providing high quality early childhood education that meets national standards.

Evidence cited and its validation

- NQS Self-assessment tool
- Preschool handbook and philosophy
- Annotated work samples
- Term overviews and fortnightly newsletters
- Annual Operating Plan 2012
Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 3: Reflection

Garran PS has undertaken ongoing school improvement since it was last validated and over the three years of its School Plan. This External Validation is timely given the appointment of a new school principal as it provides an opportunity to draw upon the learning of those past three years and synthesise that learning into new directions for the 2015 – 2018 School Plan.

As mentioned elsewhere in this report the panel commends the school on its responsiveness to the previous External Validation report. The recommendations at the end of this report provide a catalyst for continued improvement.

In developing the summative report, all staff convened to workshop the school’s recommendations. That process generated a range of responses from staff some of which were not captured in the recommendations put forward. Included in these were commentary around the position of creative arts and ICT in the school curriculum. The new Principal in the process of consultation with the school community recognised the need to further develop the creative arts curriculum at the school. The inclusion of ICT in the recommendations evolved through the validation panels interpretation of the student and parent responses to the system satisfaction surveys over the life of the school plan. The data relates to the statement: “The use of learning technologies at this school is an integral part of learning and teaching. (e.g., computers, internet, digital cameras). /Computer technology is an integral part of learning and teaching at my child’s school”. Responses to this statement from students and parents at Garran have been below system means throughout the life of the school plan.

Garran Primary School highlighted how the validation process had helped it to pause and analyse how they were going in relation to meeting the needs of the diverse range of students and families that make up the school community.

The school indicated that the validation process has allowed them the opportunity to reflect upon why and how the school is going about applying and analysing data and has given them the opportunity to think about where and how they can do this better. In particular, the school has striven toward a greater evidence base, tightening the whole school assessment framework and utilising a school wide database to track student growth.

Teacher planning days were emphasised in the school summative report as being effective in improving planning and collaboration. The panel supports this reflection and encourages these days to be incorporated into a comprehensive approach to planning that supports teachers.

The panel agrees with the school’s belief in the need to further refine and develop their processes and skills in regards to how this evidence is used to inform practice on a regular basis.

The leadership team and staff at Garran PS can now build on the reflections around sharing practice and extend this to the establishment of effective professional learning communities, school-wide. Teachers have been supported to reflect upon and identify ‘problems of practice’ and then utilise support mechanisms to assist them to further develop their professional knowledge, skills and understandings.

Evidence cited and its validation

- Garran PS Summative EV Report
• Annual School Board Reports 2010 – 2012
• AOP 2010 – 2012
• Discussions with the newly appointed principal, School Board Chair and P&C President.

Section D: Commendations and recommendations

Commendations

Garran Primary School is to be commended for:

1. The outstanding results achieved in Years 3 and 5 NAPLAN over the life of the School Plan. In numeracy and literacy the school performs well above state and national mean scores.

2. The school’s strategic planning response to the 2008 External Validation report and through the school’s ongoing continuous improvement approach which involves community consultation, data collection and responding to student need.

3. The increased use and collection of data. GradeXpert and whole school assessment framework have broadened the approach taken by the school in monitoring student learning. Data is now available K to 6 and informs the programs and targeted support offered to students.

4. Its innovation and boldness in establishing the upgraded DP position and the establishment of Literacy and Numeracy Link positions. These positions have resulted in increased leadership opportunities in the school and support the coaching and mentoring model. The collegial culture is developing through team planning days and guidance from the executive team and in particular the Deputy Principal Literacy and Numeracy.

5. An effective P&C Association who provide significant resources to enhance the learning environment of the school and support effective teaching and learning. In particular, we commend the P&C for its support of the canteen which provides outstanding service to the school community.

Recommendations

1. Over the life of the plan the school has significantly increased its collection of data and the school has refined its assessment schedules and tools and its evidence based practice. These improvements can be further enhanced by ensuring the validity and reliability of data collected and the application of the data to inform improved teaching and learning. The panel recommends training and professional learning in the delivery of assessment tasks to ensure consistency across the school.

2. While Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was not a defined priority in the school plan the panel observed an opportunity to develop a more cohesive embedded approach to the application of ICT to student learning. The panel recommends that Garran Primary School commits to carefully planning how resources are allocated to ensure timely access for all students to technology. ICT will be a necessary future support for Garran’s ongoing efforts to promote quality teaching and learning.
3. Improving teacher capacity is among the most effective means of improving student outcomes. The panel acknowledges the capability that exists in the school with the Executive Teacher Professional Practice and the Deputy Principal Literacy and Numeracy to further develop a school-wide system and process for sharing of practice supported by coaching and mentoring. To make the most of this opportunity the panel recommends the further development of the systems and processes to engage all teachers in the sharing of practice.

4. Student perception data indicates that the vast majority (9 percentage points higher than system average) of students believe that they receive useful feedback from their teachers. The same instrument indicates there are opportunities for teachers to encourage students to have an increased say in their learning, including providing feedback to the teachers on things that help them learn and get in the way of their learning.

5. A strong contributor to the culture of the school is the significant English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) population. The panel observed opportunities to strengthen the relationship between EALD families and the school. In order to capitalise on the significant contribution that these families can make to the life of the school the panel recommends the school to consider ways in which these families can be supported to engage more fully in school life.

6. The school’s performance in NAPLAN is by and large, strong. The panel noted however that PIPS results for mathematic were not showing the same growth as literacy. The panel recommends that the school examines the junior primary mathematics program with a view to identifying and addressing any systemic issues that may account for these results.

7. The panel notes the understandable emphasis on Literacy and Numeracy in the evidence provided in the validation report. The panel identified an opportunity to explore and develop the creative arts curriculum to support current programs. This work can coincide with the new Australian curriculum initiatives that focus on the Arts.

The validation team members participated on the panel with a range of perspectives – one as a previous panel chair, one as a member of a school that had previously been validated and one as first time panel member. This diversity of experience was very valuable in drafting the report. The panel also appreciated the presence of a lead external validator to assist in the drafting of the report.