



ACT
Government
Education and Training

EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT 2015

for

RED HILL SCHOOL



Introduction: Overview of the Validation process

As part of the Territory's school improvement approach, public schools and colleges in the Australian Capital Territory are required to participate in an External Validation process every four years. This document captures the findings of the panel during this cycle of validation.

In broad terms, the panel sought to determine, through evaluation and validation, the extent to which the school is meeting its agreements, achieving its priorities, and addressing its challenges: in the context of a continuously improving educational environment.

External Validation was conducted over three days and involved a wide variety of data gathering approaches including observations, interviews and documentation. This approach provided evidence for the panel to consider against the nine inter-related domains in the National School Improvement Tool that informed our commendations and recommendations.

Section A: School context

Red Hill School is a long-standing ACT public school, located in inner south Canberra. The school includes two preschool units – one on the main school site and another, Griffith Preschool, located in Griffith. The school's location significantly influences its character, drawing heavily from defence force families, government, diplomat and academic families. It is comprised of students of families within the priority enrolment zone as well as from across Canberra. As an accredited International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, Red Hill School offers a Primary Years Program (PYP) for students aged 3 to 12 years, which is designed to foster the development of the whole child, focusing on social, physical, emotional and cultural needs in addition to academic welfare.

Red Hill School operates within a community that values its work. The panel heard from many students and parents about the variety of school programs on offer. These programs included the PYP program, the Red Hill Interests and Pursuits Program (RHIPP), a range of musical ensembles including the Wassa Wassa drumming program, the year 5 and 6 band and choir and the specialist Fine Arts program. Stakeholders reported that these programs aid students in seeing themselves as competent, life-long learners in a wide range of areas.

The number of students enrolled in the school has remained relatively stable over the past four years, with slight increases most recently. Current enrolments total 581 students. The Priority Enrolment Area (PEA) for the school includes shared suburbs including Fyshwick, Harman, Kingston, Oaks Estate and some sections of the suburbs of Symonston, Griffith, Red Hill and Narrabundah. The PEA has remained constant throughout the life of the School Plan with the exception to changes within the suburb of Narrabundah after the Early Childhood School was opened.

The school student demographic has remained constant: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students represent less than one per cent of the population and students from an English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) range from between 30 and 34 per cent of all students enrolled.

In 2014 the school Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage (ICSEA) was 1163 which is 163 points above the national average. The panel notes that the ICSEA value can have an effect on school resources and performance and indicates a level of educational advantage based on the educational and occupational indicators of parents. This makes it important that Red Hill School's performance is compared with other similar schools.

Red Hill School experiences significant levels of student transience largely due to the nature of family employment. Over the life of the plan, students in year 3 who moved on to year 5 averaged 44 percent of enrolments. The school also experiences increased enrolments annually in year 3 due to students transitioning from Narrabundah Early Childhood School.

The culture at Red Hill School actively and positively supports new students and families. Staff actions result in new families feeling welcome and genuinely part of the school. The school ensures that each family's cultural heritage is represented on a world map to develop a sense of belonging to the school. The philosophy of the school assists greatly in this, as does the work of personnel such as the Defence Schools Transition Aide (DSTA). Staff also feel welcome and supported at Red Hill School, with many teachers reporting that school leadership are accessible, supportive and encouraging of staff.

There has been instability of personnel at the senior leadership levels with changes to almost all school leader roles across the four years. There has also been significant staff turnover throughout the same period. In these circumstances, the school has at times found it challenging to implement and embed practices in order to meet some of its targets. The school actively seeks to employ teachers who reflect the needs of the community; including those who are from overseas or interstate as well as beginning teachers who have a broad set of experiences and cultural diversity. The school strategically structures teaching teams to ensure the continuity of programs and ongoing professional learning support.

During the life of the school plan, significant building works have occurred including; new classroom blocks; upgrade to the north wing; new playground spaces; car park upgrade; new executive offices and front of school; the creation of an indoor/outdoor art studio, an extension at Griffith Preschool; the creation of a bike track; and significant painting and carpeting works.

The panel recognises the challenges experienced by the school over the course of the previous four years, particularly during building works, and affirms the work of the school community in maintaining a positive school culture. Numerous comments from parents, staff and students have spoken of the caring, positive approach to both learning and social support delivered at Red Hill School.

Section B: School performance

During the four year improvement cycle, the panel found that Red Hill School has allocated resources to developing school systems and improving teacher practice. It has begun to invest in whole-of-school practices including the adoption of teaching programs across English and mathematics and has expanded the use of assessment practices. The School has, in particular, worked on the connection between the Australian Curriculum and the PYP Curriculum, and has adopted Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as a school improvement vehicle. It is too early at this point for the school to ascertain the impact of the introduction of PLCs on student achievement, although they do provide opportunities for staff to collaboratively share planning and curriculum responsibilities, as well as an opportunity for Quality Teaching Model observation rounds.

The panel noted that the school has used a combination of standardised system data – that is, Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) and National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) – and school-based results to monitor overall student performance over the past four years.

The PIPS data suggests that the school is performing on par with ACT averages in reading and mathematics, with minor variation in the number of students reaching expected growth during their first year of school.

NAPLAN results for years 3 and 5 in both literacy and numeracy have largely remained constant over the past four years, with only minor variation over time. The school's scores across the five areas of testing have remained close to or above Australian schools' average for those students who sat NAPLAN at the school in both years 3 and 5. Students who identify as EALD have generally shown stronger results within spelling, reading, writing and numeracy.

The school targets set in literacy and numeracy have been met in all year levels for writing, and for most year levels in reading, when confidence levels are taken into consideration. Targets in numeracy have not been met consistently and the school acknowledges this as an area for future development.

School-based data shows that the school has successfully achieved its target of a 6 percent increase in students achieving year level reading benchmarks as assessed through PM Benchmarking in kindergarten between 2013 and 2014. The target was not achieved for year 1 and 2 students between 2013 and 2014 and this is acknowledged as an area for future focus.

The school has a comparatively small number of students on Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and several students with Gifted and Talented Learning Plans. A further group of students have been supported with a Targeted Intervention Plan (TIP). Identification processes in relation to individual student learning needs are an area for future focus as there is anecdotal evidence and feedback from stakeholder surveys to suggest greater numbers of students would benefit from ILP support. The panel also recommends that the school strengthen processes and staff are given further training in the reporting of achievement of ILP goals.

A challenge for the school has been working with multiple data sets and finding more meaningful ways to analyse learning data. Careful analysis of student achievement data would allow the school to analyse the impact of current programs and better inform future improvement strategies, both for individual students and wider cohorts. The panel can see value in using the current data tracking tool within the classroom to strengthen formative assessment and inform classroom teaching practice. The school has developed an assessment schedule to aid the routine collection of quantitative student data, however staff reported inconsistent use of the data sets to inform their future teaching.

Attendance rates for the school have remained constant and very high across the four years of the School Plan. Suspension rates and behavioural incidents have remained low.

Stakeholder satisfaction levels, as reported by national survey instruments, reflect high levels of overall satisfaction in the school by staff, with student satisfaction at about the ACT average, and parent satisfaction increasing to be on par with the ACT average over the four years of the School Plan.

Students consistently reported moderate levels of personal safety both through stakeholder surveys and through interviews with the SRC. Students indicated a strong awareness of the school behaviour management approach and were able to articulate principles of restorative practice. Parents reported improved levels of satisfaction with the way the school manages student behaviour and in particular, the way bullying is addressed. Interviews with parents, staff and students indicate that this perception may be attributed to a small number of students with complex behavioural needs.

Parents are, however, seeking higher academic achievement from the school and greater differentiation of the learning; the panel concurs these are areas of focus for the next School Plan. Parents and carers reported a desire to increase their understanding of school priorities. To this end the school reports against key priorities in regular newsletters, the School Board Report and at each P&C meeting throughout the year.

Teachers reported very high levels of satisfaction from their teaching at Red Hill School, as well as a high level of enjoyment in teaching within the PYP framework. The only area for improvement identified in teacher satisfaction data is in the area of Information Technology. Parent satisfaction mirrors the concerns of teachers in this area. The panel believes the school is well aware of the challenges faced in this area, and has already identified this opportunity for continued development.

Evidence cited and its validation

- NAPLAN and PIPS data 2011-14
- Enrolment data 2010-14
- Stakeholder perception data
- ILPs
- School data tracking system.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

The 2011 to 2015 School Plan was developed in response to the 2011 external validation process. In 2013 the school evaluated their progress and noted that some of the performance measures needed to change to more effectively measure improvement. The school plan was subsequently amended. The three strategic priorities remained the same, except for a change to the wording of priority three with the addition of the word 'engaging' to the focus on curriculum development. The priorities were determined by the 2011 leadership team, and performance measures added by the 2014 leadership team.

Priority Area One: A positive, inclusive school culture

Over the four years of the plan, Red Hill School identified several strategies to realise their priority area of a positive, inclusive school culture:

- develop a relational approach to student welfare
- develop student social and emotional skills
- strengthen parental engagement in PYP education.

Programs implemented over the four years include Restorative Practices, Circle Time, Kidsmatter Framework, Relational Practices Policy, Friendly Schools Plus, FISH philosophy, Peer Mediators, positive playground rewards program, Alternate Play Action Research Project, Red Hill Interests and Pursuits Program (RHIPP), Class Contact Representative Initiatives, Mentoring Program for Focus Schools Action Research, and the opening of a Parent/Community Hub.

The performance measures identified by Red Hill School were the satisfaction of parents and students in areas of student welfare. The targets set in each Annual Operating Plan for increases in the number of students who report feeling safe at school were not achieved. However, the parent satisfaction goals set in Annual Operating Plans for 2014 including:

- My child feels safe at this school

- Student behavior is well managed
- I can talk to my child's teacher about my concerns
- My child likes being at this school

In 2014, significant increases of between five and 14 percent were recorded in the parent satisfaction surveys. The panel noted that, while it is still below ACT average, there has been a notable improvement in parents' views on behavior management at the school.

Priority Area Two: A capable, sustainable school

Over the four years of the plan, Red Hill School identified several key strategies in this priority area:

- develop the school's physical resources
- build staff capacity through professional learning and collegial sharing of pedagogy and professional practice
- develop an environmental management plan to direct future sustainability action
- prepare the preschool to successfully comply with the National Quality Standards and the school to complete external validation and IBO Evaluation.

During the life of the plan, Red Hill School has created or upgraded both internal and external learning areas, most notable according to students being new outdoor equipment, netball court and artificial turf area. The impact has been to allow students more places to play, more choice of activity, and the opportunity to have their voice heard. Several of these initiatives began with the school Student Representative Council.

From 2013, the school has invested in two Executive Teacher Professional Practice positions in order to build staff capacity. The focus has been on building capacity in beginning teachers and those new to the school. A wide range of professional learning opportunities have been available to and attended by staff over the four years, including Response to Intervention, PYP (International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program), formative assessment, Count Me in Too, Middle Years Mental Computation, Coaching Essentials, Principals as Literacy Leaders, and many more. The result has been the implementation of a number of initiatives over the life of the plan. The impact of such programs on student outcomes has yet to be undertaken.

A number of sustainability initiatives have been implemented throughout the life of the plan, including registration as an Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AUSSI) school. A Sustainability Committee has been established to drive improvement in this area, but as yet the Environmental Management Plan has not been written.

The panel noted that the preschool ratings and assessment process are to occur in early August. The preschools have completed their self assessment and quality improvement plan in preparation for this process.

Priority Area Three: A relevant, challenging, engaging curriculum

Red Hill School has taken action to build curriculum knowledge and teacher capacity in the teaching of literacy and English and numeracy. This included:

- the implementation of targeted professional learning in the areas of First Steps Reading and Writing, BEE spelling and writing, Rob Vingerhoets inquiry maths, differentiation and the Australian Curriculum content, Four Forms of Spelling Knowledge

- the appointment of coordinators including Gifted and Talented Liaison Officer (GaTLO), specialist teachers for PYP planners
- developing English and mathematics curriculum mapped to the Program of Inquiry (PoI)
- the introduction of a Response to Intervention model kindergarten to year 6
- the introduction of Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards and moderation processes to assist with reporting under the Common Assessment Scale in line with the school assessment schedule
- the implementation of a case management approach to improving student learning through the introduction of Targeted Intervention Planning (TIPs) involving the teachers and members of the school executive
- greater emphasis on the use of data through the introduction of a data tracker.

The school has been working to establish a whole school approach to the planning, teaching, assessment of English and mathematics, in order to achieve consistency of practice. Every teacher is increasingly being made accountable for improving individual student outcomes in literacy and numeracy through a whole school approach to formative and summative assessment and intervention regimes.

The panel validated that Red Hill School has successfully achieved all four of the writing targets set for the period, within designated confidence intervals. The school achieved six out of eight of its reading targets (with the exception of the year 5 reading target in 2013 and year 3 reading target in 2012). The numeracy targets were met in 2014 for year 3 and 2011 for year 5, but were not met for either year level in 2013.

The panel validated that Red Hill School successfully achieved its target of a 6 percent increase in students reading at year level in kindergarten between 2013 and 2014. The target was not achieved for year 1 and 2 between 2013 and 2014.

The school sought to align 100 percent of teaching programs with the Australian Curriculum. While a numerical value has not been reported, the panel sighted evidence that teaching programs showed connection with the Australian Curriculum outcomes and achievement standards.

The panel validated that the school met each of their three targets of a 2 percent increase in students scoring at or above the expected year level achievement from 2014 in PAT Maths, Reading and Spelling. Improvement ranged from five to thirty-three percent. Data was not reported across all grades in years 2 to 6.

Reflections

During the life of the plan, Red Hill School trialed or implemented many programs in an effort to achieve the priority area targets. The panel recommends a review of the programs running at the school with a view to carefully evaluating their effectiveness, refining approaches and focusing on student outcomes.

At the end of each year the school reflected on their strategies and targets for the upcoming year. The panel found that the school leadership team maintained focus on the improvement agenda, and amended the plan to include more accurate performance measures.

It is important that the school carefully reflect upon the analysis of data and its impact on the school improvement agenda in relation to achievement, wellbeing and differentiation of

teaching. Key initiatives and programs can be continually improved if regularly evaluated for their effectiveness in producing desired improvements in student learning and performance.

Evidence cited and its validation

- Parent and student satisfaction survey data, 2012-2015
- School Plan 2011-2015
- School Board Reports 2011-2015
- School Annual Operating Plans 2011-2015
- Sustainability Committee Action Plan 2011-2014
- Sustainability Committee Priorities 2015
- Relational Committee Notes
- Classroom Management Photos
- Relational Policy
- RHIPP Organising Materials
- Behaviour Management Spreadsheet
- Teacher Interviews
- School Executive Interview
- SRC Interview
- Whole school English and mathematics programming and assessment practices
- NAPLAN data years 3 and 5 2011-2014
- CMIT planners in action
- Balanced literacy planners in action
- Data sets taken from the school data tracker
- PAT Reading and Spelling data 2014.

Section D: National tools self-evaluation results

National School Improvement Tool (NSIT)

Red Hill School ran three consultation stages in 2013 around the NSIT. The first was the Principal and Executive team, who rated the school against each domain. These ratings were then taken to subsequent leadership meetings for discussion and evidence gathering until consensus was reached. The tool was then taken to staff meetings, where discussions were led by the Deputy Principal for Curriculum. In the Red Hill School context, this also involved a compare and contrast exercise using the PYP Self-Study and Standards and Practices. Teachers then worked together to study domains and highlighted their responses on the matrix. Responses were collated and examined and ratings were eventually agreed upon. No rating was confirmed without reaching full consensus amongst staff. Findings were presented to the school board, where the Board's input was sought. These ratings aligned with staff results.

In validating the school's self-assessment using the NSIT, the panel noted the following in relation to each domain:

Domain 1: An Explicit Improvement Agenda

- *The school leadership team is clearly committed to finding ways to improve on current student outcomes.*
- *The principal and other school leaders articulate a shared commitment to improvement but limited attention has been given to specifying detail or to developing a school-wide approach.*

- *Some, but not all, targets for improvement are specific.*
- *There is evidence of a school-wide commitment to every student's success.*

The school's four year plan has evolved with the changes in leadership, with measurable targets added to some priority areas, and expansion of strategies being implemented to better reflect the school context. Staff committees have worked to progress strategies in the three areas of curriculum, sustainability and inclusive school culture. The panel noted a large number of programs in various stages of implementation against the three priorities. However, the impact of these programs is difficult to evaluate at this point. The panel recommends narrowing and sharpening of the number of programs aimed at progressing the core priorities.

Domain 2: Analysis and Discussion of Data

- *School leaders pay close attention to data provided to them about the performance of the school.*
- *One or more members of staff have been assigned responsibility for implementing the annual plan. The school has ensured that appropriate software is available. Staff have been trained to enter data.*
- *Time is set aside for the discussion at team level, but analyses do not generally extend to studies of improvement or growth.*
- *A limited approach exists to building staff skills in the analysis, interpretation and use of classroom data.*
- *Teachers do not systematically analyse test and other data for their classes.*

Red Hill School has made a positive start on their journey toward comprehensive and effective use of data. This was evident in the panel sighting a range of diagnostic and standardised testing instruments across the school. These are completed at specific junctures in accordance with a schedule, by both classroom teachers and the learning support team. Data is accessible to all teachers through a data tracker. It is not apparent at this point that analysis of the data is routinely applied to determining the impact of programs on student achievement.

Domain 3: A Culture that Promotes Learning

- *The tone of the school reflects a school-wide commitment to purposeful, successful learning.*
- *There is a strong focus on quality learning, and on the creation of a culture in which all students are expected to learn successfully. An attempt is made to ensure that all students are engaged in challenging, meaningful learning.*
- *Respectful and caring relationships are reflected in the ways in which staff, students and parents interact and in the language they use in both formal and informal settings.*
- *Parents are encouraged to take a genuine and close interest in the work of the school.*
- *Staff morale is generally high.*

The panel heard from key stakeholder groups, who regularly reported that teachers have great rapport with students and parents. Parents used words like, 'inclusive', 'friendly', 'warm', and 'engaging' to describe the culture of the school. Students and parents were conversant in the language of learning of the PYP program, regularly talking to the panel about the learner profiles. PYP Inquiry Lines are displayed for parents in the school foyer, shared each term

through term overviews, through parent information nights and through school reports and portfolios. The school's efforts in maintaining a learning environment that is safe, respectful, tolerant, and promotes both student learning and well-being were evident to the panel. Initiatives including Response to Intervention, Individual Learning Plans, Targeted Intervention Plans and the implementation of KidsMatter have contributed positively to the culture of Red Hill School.

Domain 4: Targeted Use of School Resources

- *The school uses its human and physical resources to address the needs of students.*
- *The school has developed some processes for identifying student learning needs.*
- *Programs to meet individual learning needs are prioritised, where possible in the school budget.*
- *Physical spaces are used effectively to maximize student learning. Learning spaces are organised for whole group work, small group work and individual work.*

Evidence sighted by the panel included Response to Intervention records of achievement, Targeted Intervention Plans and Individual Learning Plans. Building improvements have also support individual needs with the inclusion of a school lift to ensure learning spaces are accessible for all families. ICT trolleys with netbooks and iPads have also been a priority for the allocation of resources.

Domain 5: An Expert Teaching Team

- *The school undertakes a variety of professional learning activities each school year.*
- *Teachers visit each other's classrooms and welcome opportunities to have principals and other school leaders observe and discuss their work with them.*
- *Strategies are in place to recruit staff with particular expertise, to train staff to meet particular needs.*
- *The principal and leadership team are seen as supportive of the day to day practice and learning of teachers.*
- *The school provides opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles outside the classroom.*

Strong procedures are in place for the implementation of PYP. New staff to the school report that they are well supported at team level in the planning and implementation of activities related to PYP. An Executive Teacher Professional Practice works with beginning teachers to develop classroom teaching skills. A Quality Teaching Rounds model is used for peer mentoring, and is scheduled for twice a term. Teachers reported that coding of the elements of the Quality Teaching Model is done by the Professional Learning Community group, and feedback is made available in verbal and written form. The panel noted that in 2014 alone, 23 different Professional Learning programs were made available to staff, and recommends narrowing and sharpening the focus of professional learning to concentrate on improving classroom teaching in key priority areas and to agree a school-wide approach to pedagogy.

Domain 6: Systematic Curriculum Delivery

- *The school's curriculum delivery plan identifies curriculum, teaching and learning priorities and requirements. The curriculum delivery plan reflects a shared vision for the*

school and provides a context for delivering the curriculum as detailed in the Australian or other approved curriculum.

- *A strong alignment has been achieved between the overall curriculum delivery plan and term and unit plans.*
- *The school curriculum plan gives priority to higher order thinking skills.*
- *The school leadership team ensures that the enacted curriculum remains a focus for discussion among and collaboration between teachers.*
- *The school makes a priority of making the curriculum locally relevant and accessible to all students.*
- *A high priority in curriculum planning is given to the progressive development of students' deep understanding of concepts, principles and big ideas within learning areas as well as to the ongoing development of cross curricular skills and attributes, including team work, critical thinking, problem solving and the evaluation of information and evidence.*

Red Hill School has worked hard to align their curriculum both vertically and horizontally through the lines of the inquiry of PYP. They have also made significant progress with the alignment of the 5 essential elements of the PYP and Australian Curriculum outcomes and achievements. PYP's emphasis on higher order thinking skills has contributed to Red Hill's high achievement in this area. This is supported by parents who reported in overwhelming numbers that the school promotes student development of critical thinking skills. The panel sighted evidence of team planning based on student inquiry. Students have the opportunity to share their work with the community through regular learning journeys, assemblies, newsletters, portfolios and the year 6 Exhibition.

Domain 7: Differentiated Teaching and Learning

- *School leaders explicitly encourage teachers to tailor their teaching to student needs and readiness.*
- *Some use is made of assessment instruments to identify individual strengths and weaknesses.*
- *Some use is made of differentiated teaching.*
- *Regular assessments of students learning are undertaken. Planning shows how the different needs of students are addressed, and how multiple opportunities to learn are provided.*
- *Reports to parents show progress over time and include suggestions for ways in which parents can support their children's learning.*

Interviews with teachers in this area indicate that practice is inconsistent most notably in literacy and numeracy. While Individual Learning Plans and Targeted Improvement Plans were evident, the process around identification of students and mapping of goals and strategies was inconsistent across the school. The panel acknowledges that the original Targeted Improvement Plan process was focused on building teacher capacity in differentiation and has significant merit. The panel recommends that the original process be revisited and the impact of the model evaluated to ensure maximum effect for students. In interviews with staff the panel came to the view that while significant data is collected, it is not necessarily used by all classroom teachers.

All teachers should be encouraged and supported to monitor closely the progress of individuals, identify learning difficulties and tailor classroom activities to levels of readiness and need.

Domain 8: Effective Pedagogical Practices

- *School leaders are committed to continuous improvement in teaching practices throughout the school and expect team leaders and teachers to identify ways of doing this.*
- *There is clarity about what students are expected to learn, but a lack of balance in teaching methods exists.*
- *There is a particular focus on improved teaching methods in reading, writing, mathematics and science, and professional learning activities are focused on building teachers' understandings of highly effective teaching strategies in these areas.*

There is an emphasis on developing pedagogical practice for new teachers through the Executive Teacher Professional Practice. Teachers meet in teaching teams, PLCs to progress the goals in the Annual Operating Plan and in teams to conduct Quality Teaching rounds where they support each other's practice. Team level decisions are made about pedagogy in planning meetings. The school subscribes to a volume of teaching programs including First Steps, David Hornsby, Writers Notebook, Count Me In Too, BEE Spelling, PAT (maths, reading, spelling), Rob Vingerhoets inquiry maths and Middle Years Mental Computation all within an inquiry pedagogical framework. Decisions regarding the implementation of these programs is made at the team level. The panel sighted limited evidence of minimum standards or benchmarks in relation to these tools.

Domain 9: School-Community Partnerships

- *The school has established one or more partnerships with families, local businesses and/or community organisations.*
- *Each partnership brings staff and students of the school together with external partners such as families, other education or training institutions, local businesses and/or community organisations.*
- *Attention has been given to communication and to the sharing of experiences within the partnership; however, there may be no formal plan for reviewing the partnership's outcomes and effectiveness.*
- *There may be limited evidence of improved student outcomes as a result of partnership activities – possibly because there has been insufficient time for them to demonstrate an effect.*

The panel sighted evidence of partnerships with guest speakers, the scientists in schools program and parents who volunteer in the school. RHIPP is a highly valued program as reported by both parents and students. Limited evidence has been provided to quantify the impact on student outcomes.

National Safe Schools Audit Tool

As was the case with the NSIT, all staff at Red Hill School had opportunity to review and consider the *National Safe Schools Framework* before giving a personal and honest appraisal of the school's progress across the nine elements. The information gathered was collated by the school leadership team in order to arrive at a set of focus areas for future planning.

According to this tool, the key strengths determined as a result of the reflection were:

- leadership commitment to a safe school
- positive behaviour management
- early intervention and targeted support.

According to this tool, areas for improvement determined as a result of the reflection were:

- professional learning
- a supportive and connected culture
- partnerships with families and community.

While there were some consistencies between the school's findings from this instrument and those reported in system satisfaction surveys, the panel concurs with the majority of findings of the school self-assessment. The panel found the following discrepancies which provide opportunities for further investigation:

- A supportive and connected school culture and partnerships with family and community - in conversations with all stakeholders and in system satisfaction data, these areas consistently scored very highly. Working closely with school staff to unpack the views presented may provide useful in understanding this feedback from staff.
- Positive behaviour management - the panel noted evidence that the behaviour incidents at the school are rare and of a relatively low level, with on average 10 suspensions per year involving a limited number of students. There is a perception amongst community members that behaviour management is a concern and the school will need to find effective ways to deal with this perception. Delving deeper into these perceptions could assist the school to find ways to address stakeholder concerns and move towards a more positive perception.

Section E: Commendations and recommendations

Commendations

Red Hill School is commended for the following:

1. **Promoting a culture of learning.** The principal and staff of Red Hill School have promoted a culture where there is a strong focus on quality learning through the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program. The school's culture is one in which high expectations of all learners is the key focus. Parents are encouraged to take a genuine and close interest in the work of the school and become part of the learning process. The highly successful strategies in place to engage and challenge all learners in the school community have resulted in strong student, staff and parent satisfaction.
2. **Developing and maintaining a positive and inclusive school.** Red Hill School is to be congratulated on having created an environment in which staff, students and their families feel welcomed in spite of a highly mobile student population. There is a very positive, caring and optimistic feel throughout the school. The highly successful strategies in place to support, welcome (and then, farewell) transitioning students is to be commended. Students are well supported in their emotional development, through the school's use of mental health and wellbeing frameworks. The school motto of "Open Hearts, Inquiring Minds" is reflected in the wellbeing of students, the satisfaction of parents and the enthusiasm of

staff.

3. **Aligning the Australian Curriculum with PYP to facilitate systematic curriculum delivery.** The vertical and horizontal alignment of the combined PYP and Australian curriculum achieved by staff at Red Hill School is impressive. Furthermore, the connections made between the PYP and the Early Years Learning Framework was visible in the preschool classrooms. The consistency of the inquiry pedagogy across the school from preschool to year 6 is well-embedded. A high priority in curriculum planning is given to the progressive development of student's understanding of concepts, essential elements and big ideas within learning areas.
4. **Establishing a culture of collaboration and distributed leadership in order to develop an expert teaching team.** The school is commended for providing the staff with opportunities to take on responsibility for improving teacher practice, and share planning and curriculum development responsibilities. In a school that has experienced high levels of staff turnover, this is supporting new educators as well as providing more experienced staff with opportunities for leadership. The leadership team and staff see the development of an expert and coherent school wide teaching team as central to improving outcomes for all students. The calm and considered functioning of the school is a direct result of the collegial and positive relationships amongst the school community.
5. **Creating enrichment opportunities.** Red Hill School caters for student passions and interests through the Red Hill Interests and Pursuits Program (RHIPP), the Wassa Wassa drumming program and the specialist Fine Arts programs. Such programs encourage students to become active, compassionate, life-long learners in a wide range of areas.
6. **Partnering with the community on physical improvements to the school.** The school has worked with parents and students to improve the physical environment. Of particular note are the new playground equipment, artificial grassed area and netball court as well classroom upgrades to create flexible learning spaces suitable for group work to support enquiry based learning. The P&C has been heavily involved in fundraising for some of these projects.

Recommendations

The panel recommends Red Hill School pay attention to the following opportunities for improvement during the next planning cycle.

1. **Develop a strong culture of analysis, discussion and action on data.** The panel noted that Red Hill School has begun the journey toward effective use of data, with a system and schedule in place for the collection of data across the school. The panel recommends that the school now develop a systematic approach to access, analyse, discuss and apply data. This will allow the school to identify gaps in student learning and special needs, to monitor improvement over time, and to monitor growth across the years of school. This will require further development of data literacy skills through targeted professional learning. The in-depth interrogation of data will identify areas for further improvement, both in terms of achievement and wellbeing and allow to teachers to meaningfully differentiate in the classroom.
2. **Strengthen the teaching of literacy and numeracy.** The panel recommends that the school further develop strategies to ensure consistency of practice across the school in literacy and numeracy. School data for within school matched students attending Red Hill between kindergarten and year 5 shows improvement. The panel now encourages the school to

capitalise on these achievements to improve value added learning outcomes for all students. The panel suggests that the school closely monitor and review the effectiveness of programs. These evaluations can be used to make adjustments and so continually improve agreed practices to increase their effectiveness in raising student results.

- 3. Build teacher and student capacity to use Information and Communication Technology tools to enhance learning.** The panel recognised that major investments have been made in this area over the life of the plan, and recommends that the school enhance the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the school curriculum. ICT capabilities are essential literacy and problem solving skills of the 21st century and the school is encouraged to grow staff and student capacity in this area to allow them to adapt to a rapidly evolving, technologically sophisticated society now and into the future.

Record of Validation Process

The following people were members of the external validation panel for Red Hill School conducted on 21-23 July 2015.

Name: Jennifer Howard

School: Maribyrnong Primary School

Name: Felicity Levett

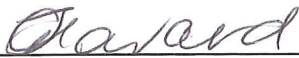
School: Mount Rogers Primary School

Name: Rachel McClure

School: Emmaus Christian School

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

Name: Jennifer Howard

Signature:  Date: 31-8-15

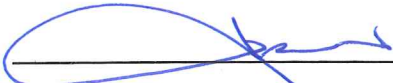
As principal of **Red Hill School** I accept the Validation Report on behalf of the school community.

Name: Kate McMahon *Acting Principal*

Signature: *Anna Wilson* Date: 2/9/15
A.

As co-director of Quality Learning Australasia, external lead 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: Jane Kovacs

Signature:  Date: 2/-/15