EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT 2013

for

TORRENS PRIMARY SCHOOL
Record of Validation Process

The following people were members of the external validation panel for Torrens Primary School conducted on Friday 2 August and Monday 5 August 2013

Name: Matthew Holdway  School: Theodore Primary School
Name: Carmel Maguire  School: St Monica’s Primary School
Name: Barbara Monsma  School: Lyneham High 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: Matthew Holdway
Signature: [Signature]
Date: 6.9.13

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

Name: Sue Mueller
Signature: [Signature]
Date: 6.9.13

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: [Signature]
Date: 6.9.13
Section A: School context

Torrens Primary School is located in the suburb of Torrens in central Canberra. Three preschools at Pearce, Chifley and Torrens are attached to Torrens Primary School. They are all located off site. An early intervention unit is also attached to the school.

At August Census in 2013 there are 504 students enrolled, 14 in the Early Intervention Unit. Over the life of the school plan, enrolments have increased by 21 students. There have been between 12 and 16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled during this period. The proportion of students from language backgrounds other than English has declined from 23 percent in 2010 to sixteen percent in 2012.

Thirty-five percent of students attending Torrens Primary School come from areas out of the priority placement area. This has dropped significantly from around seventy to seventy-five percent in previous years.

The explicit understanding of parents and students is that students come to school with the goal of learning. A large proportion of the parent community are professionals. Most parents support their children through extra-curricular activities and have high expectations of their children. Students leaving the school before completing year 6 generally do so because of the transient family occupations (e.g. defence, diplomatic) and students rarely move to other ACT schools.

In 2011 all three preschools offered sessions of 30 hours per fortnight. Torrens Preschool runs a full time program with two sessions; Chifley Preschool and Pearce Preschool are both part time with one session each. An early intervention unit began operating at Pearce Preschool in 2013 offering developmental support for students three to four years of age.

Academic areas of focus include literacy and numeracy with special emphasis on explicit and guided teaching and curriculum based units of work from P-6, with a school wide focus on quality teaching and learning. Specialist programs offered at Torrens include Mandarin, Science, performing arts, and library.

Throughout the scope of the School Plan (2009–13) the school has undergone a large change to its staff profile including members of the executive and other staff. The deputy principal spent a significant amount of time throughout 2009-10 in higher duties positions across other ACT schools. A new substantive deputy principal was appointed term 4 2012. This has meant the school has been in a constant state of induction, which presented some challenges to the implementation of the plan. The principal has been at the school since term two 2009.

A number of changes have occurred to the physical structures and environment of the school since 2009.

- A new building was constructed that includes a hall, music room, Mandarin room, art room, office space and a kitchen.
- Fourteen (of 19) classrooms have been renovated and refurbished.
- Some toilets were refurbished whilst others were removed.
- A Literacy and Numeracy hub was created.
- The front foyer, front office and staffroom were redesigned and renovated.
- A fence was installed to enclose the entire school grounds.
• Two new sets of playground equipment were installed along with artificial turf and shade structures.
• The gardens are being renewed.

As part of the refurbishment, interactive white boards were installed into all classrooms, wi-fi was installed, which has allowed for the integration of a new set of class laptops and ipads. These improvement of the physical environment has been a tangible demonstration that the school community values staff and students and respects everyone’s right to work in a quality environment.

**Section B: School performance**

The panel recognises and acknowledges that Torrens Primary School is a high performing school that is able to demonstrate growth in student learning from kindergarten to year 6.

Torrens Primary School’s year 3 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data from 2009–12 shows that the school consistently performed above the ACT average in reading. Year 3 students in 2009, 2010 and 2012 performed above ACT average in writing and in 2012 performed above the ACT average in numeracy.

Torrens Primary School’s year 5 NAPLAN data from 2009 -2012 shows that the school consistently performed above the ACT average in reading, writing and numeracy. 2011 NAPLAN growth data from year 3 to year 5 shows 67 percent of students made at or above expected growth in reading and likewise 63 percent of students made at or above expected growth in numeracy. 2012 growth data from year 3 to year 5 shows 75 percent of students making at or above average growth in reading and 78 percent making at or above average growth in numeracy.

The panel congratulates Torrens Primary School on its Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) results from 2009–12. Results consistently show that the school’s kindergarten students perform above the age equivalent territory cohort in reading and mathematics. The data also showed a significant proportion of the kindergarten cohort made average or above average growth throughout their year in kindergarten.

The panel commends the school for its high level of student engagement and attendance rates, which have remained steady across the timeframe of the plan at between 90 percent and 95 percent, with little variation between calendar years or academic years. There were no recorded suspensions. Satisfaction survey results show 90 percent of teachers and parents agree with statements regarding Student Management being effective at the school. Student responses in this area were at 90 percent agreement in 2009-10 and 80 percent agreement in 2011-12. Students’ engagement is reflected in a variety of activities such as assemblies, class meetings and SRC representatives from each class, as well as various extra-curricular activities, such as clubs.

Staff results relating to their satisfaction with the school, their work and their ability to provide a good education for students were consistently high (at or above 90 percent) throughout the period being validated. There has been significant improvement in the level of communication and collaborative decision making within the school. This has shown steady, significant improvement to around 90 percent.
Evidence cited and its validation

School Satisfaction Surveys
School Board reports
Operational plans
NAPLAN results
PIPS reports
List of SRC representatives 2013.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 1: Improvement planning

At the beginning of the process in 2009 Torrens Primary School identified 11 priorities across all four domains of:
  - Teaching and Learning
  - Leading and Managing
  - Student Environment
  - Community Environment

The school’s Annual Operating Plans were structured for the next four years using these domains. However, various changes within the school context over this time frame meant that the priorities within the Annual Operating Plans were adjusted each year. This was done to focus on the immediate imperatives including staff changes, building works and system wide initiatives. As a result of focusing on these immediate imperatives, considered adjustments were made to the plans in order to achieve longer term, strategic priorities and the actions necessary to address them.

Over the life of the School Plan 2010–13, there have been four key priority areas, one for each domain.

  • Commitment to quality teaching underpins professional expertise.
  • Productive school cultures are built on high expectation, collegiality and mutual trust.
  • Foster resilience, responsibility and self-discipline amongst students.
  • Foster close community partnerships with all sites of Torrens Primary School and celebrate the achievements.

Within each of the four priority areas, specific priorities and targets were developed and these have been the subject of validation by the panel.

Evidence cited and its validation

Year program overviews, scope and sequence samples
Staff committee direction documents
Operational plans
Board reports.
Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 2: Improvement actions

Priority area one: Teaching and Learning – Commitment to quality teaching underpins professional expertise

In seeking to address this priority area, the following indicators of success were defined:

- Curriculum reflective system goals.
- Improved literacy and numeracy results throughout school.
- Increase the year three and year five mean scale scores in the NAPLAN tests by four points annually.

The panel validates that staff created scope and sequence documents aligned with the Australian Curriculum and were presented to the wider school community (2011-12). The staff engaged with a wide variety of professional learning in areas of literacy, numeracy, science and cross-curriculum priorities. In response to identified barriers of inconsistent practice, staff started to develop a more consistent approach to collecting whole school student performance data and analysing this data through the trial of the Gradexpert software. Staff are also in the beginning stages of using their analysis of data to inform planning and programming. There has been a strategic approach to developing and fostering more collaboration in teaching and learning through the development of professional learning communities and staff working in teams.

The panel validated that whole school approaches to curriculum have been developed with the introduction of aligned scope and sequence documents. Primary Connections (science program) was introduced in 2011 and all staff taught two units per year in 2011 increasing to four by 2013. There has been a variety of activities and resources developed to assist students in their engagement with the Cross Curriculum priorities of Australian Curriculum, which has led to increased teacher skill and confidence to meet Australian Curriculum standards.

Torrens Primary School has shown achievements as measured by NAPLAN. Torrens Primary School met their year three 2011 and 2012 targets for reading and numeracy when taking into consideration the confidence intervals. The school also met their year five 2011 targets in reading, writing and numeracy when taking into consideration the confidence intervals. Similarly, Torrens also met its year five targets for 2012 in reading and numeracy when taking into consideration the confidence intervals.

The school identified inconsistency of processes and procedures relating to collection and use of data as barriers to the achievement of their targets and success indicators.

Evidence cited and its validation

Scope and Sequence documents
Roles and Responsibilities
Focus Committees
E3Learning
For example - Learning Journey Quest
External Validation Report 2013: Torrens Primary School

NAPLAN Folder
MySchool data
For example – School Assessment Tool
Professional reading – Establishing professional learning communities.

Priority area two: Leading and Managing -
Productive school cultures are built on high expectation, collegiality and mutual trust.

In seeking to address this priority area, the following indicators of success were defined:

- Target groups are identified and provision is made for individual requirements within classes.
- A culture of improvement is established collaboratively.
- Staff communicate well and work professionally as a committed whole.

The validation panel recognises that Torrens Primary School has had significant change to both its school executive and teaching staff from 2009 -2013. This change initially impacted on the staff’s ability to effectively communicate and work collaboratively. The panel recognises the hard work by the Torrens Primary School’s executive team and staff to improve communication between staff members as well as their ability to become more collaborative in their approach to continuous school improvement.

There has been a significant positive change in school culture with a focus on staff working collaboratively to achieve a shared vision. This was achieved by working in a united manner and regularly programming together using agreed documents e.g. year level overviews, and scope and sequence documents.

Whole school expectations of involvement in professional learning teams and focus committees are embedded in Torrens’ procedures and expectations. All teachers are engaged in Quality Teaching (QT) rounds, all teachers belong to a focus/planning committee linked to a goal of school improvement and all teachers are invited to represent their team at executive meetings. The timing of staff meetings was changed to enable more extensive, collaborative professional development. Discussions of roles and responsibilities, lead to all staff being committed to taking on extra responsibilities outside of the classroom.

Individual requirements within classes for students identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students or having English as an Additional Language or Dialect or special needs have had provision made within the classroom for their learning through:

- implementation of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)
- professional learning in 2013 that has focused on differentiation
- implementation of ‘Make it Count’ numeracy program for Indigenous students.

One hundred percent of staff agree that “I cater for different needs of all students”. The culture of collaboration between staff has improved significantly as evidenced by the answer to the School Survey question “I have opportunities to participate in decision making” from 64 percent to 86 percent over the four years. Also, staff communication has improved significantly from 36 percent to 86 percent in answer to the question “There is effective communication amongst staff”.

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To some degree the school exhibited a culture that was change resistant due to high turnover of staff and executive. This was addressed progressively by:

- strategically planning of the staffing profile
- clearly defining and documenting staff roles and responsibilities
- involving staff in the school improvement process and making clear links between the annual operating plans and their work through the use of annual professional discussions and pathways
- staff involvement in executive meetings
- sharing of classroom practice.

**Evidence cited and its validation**

- Satisfaction survey data
- Staff meeting minutes
- Pathways and annual professional discussion documents
- Executive meeting minutes
- QT round timetable
- Staff Roles and Responsibilities
- ILPs
- Annual Operating Plans.

**Priority area three: Student Environment – Foster resilience, responsibility and self-discipline amongst students.**

In seeking to address this priority area, the following indicators of success were defined:

- Build a student body that is interested in learning, takes pride in work and behaviour and is keen to take leadership roles within the school.
- All students feel safe and have someone to talk to at school.
- Foster stronger links for students in their own learning.

Torrens Primary School has developed a wide range of activities and established student roles to develop the Student Environment such as SRC, School and Sports captains, various extra-curricular clubs and activities/events. Regular weekly meetings with the SRC provide opportunities for students to have a voice regarding decision making and these students were instrumental in decisions made regarding the construction of new playgrounds. Torrens Primary School’s promotion of active citizenship is also demonstrated through the support of various local charities. The school has also shown a commitment to engaging with the Bounce Back program with a view to continued development of resilience within the student body.

Student Satisfaction Survey results for the question “I have a say in the things I learn” was consistent over the timeframe of the School Improvement Plan and close to the System average. Students’ responses to the question “I feel safe at this school” were above the System average at 89 percent. Student participation in discussions about engagement in learning is evident in that 75 percent agree with the question “I am regularly asked to assess the quality of my own school work” and this value is close to the System average. Furthermore, there have been no student suspensions throughout this school improvement cycle.
Frequent change of personnel in School Counsellor position and the fact that the funded model for a Chaplain was no longer provided by external agency were identified as barriers to the school’ progress towards the achievement of all desired outcomes.

**Evidence cited and its validation**

Satisfaction Survey results
SRC Representation
Examples of club activity, Robotics and Djembe
Captains Wall in front foyer of school
Trophy Cabinet in front foyer of school.

**Priority area four: Community Involvement –**

To foster close community partnerships with all sites of Torrens Primary School and celebrate the achievements.

In seeking to address this priority area, the following indicators of success were defined:

- Communication and promotion of activities is shared amongst all sites of Torrens PS.
- School and community work together to improve outcomes for students.

Torrens Primary School actively engages with its parents and community members via a variety of school wide programs such as participation in carnivals, attendance at and assistance with the canteen, the Twilight Fair, Wakakirri, the interschool billeting program and school assemblies. These events have provided an opportunity for informal communication and collaboration. More formal communication is facilitated through the School Board, P&C meetings and Learning Journeys. Parents and community members contribute to the learning of students through literacy support, e.g. Mystery Readers, and the provision of tutoring in the area of the Arts. Communication between the pre-schools, primary school and the community is promoted through the school website, newsletters, unit overviews, class programs and a term-by-term calendar.

The school established a Communication committee to oversee the improvement of communication practices between the school and the community with a view to improving student outcomes. Clear communication from the school is evidenced by:

- unit overviews and term calendars being sent home each term
- newsletters and notes being published, including the preschools
- whole school information sessions and parent workshops being held as well as class information evenings to inform parents of school programs and initiative
- parent attendance at special functions
- parent involvement in supporting student learning
- written reports, interviews and parent participation in learning journeys.

The school identified three barriers to the successful outcome of this priority:

- Changes in staff and executive
- Parents struggling with normal staff turn over
- Aligning multiple site Parents and Citizens committees.
Evidence cited and its validation

Observed in corridors and Photos
Unit overviews
Reporting schedule
PLC Schedule of Meetings
Examples of TPS newsletters
Preschool newsletters
Communication Improvement at TPS
Example – TPS Athletic Carnival
Information packs/sessions
Sample Calendars
Sample overview
Review of Learning Journey
Torrens Primary Website.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 3: Reflection

The panel concurs that there is a lot to celebrate at Torrens Primary School. The last four years have seen a lot of changes to the physical structure of the school buildings and the staffing profile. The school community has demonstrated resilience in not only coping with these changes but also maintaining high expectations of the performance of all members of the school community.

The school’s reflection that a culture of change has produced more effective communication and expectations of higher standards amongst all staff has been validated by the panel. The panel recognises that this has been achieved through a more collaborative style, allowing all staff to contribute their ideas, provide feedback and refine and reflect on new directions. The panel noted that all teachers are engaged with QT rounds and that conversations regarding pedagogy are becoming more frequent and expectations for team work have become embedded.

The panel found it difficult to validate the impacts of Torrens Primary School’s 2009-13 School Plan and each of the Annual Operating Plans. Staff changes, building works and system wide initiatives needed to be addressed and this is evident through each of the Annual Operating Plans. In order to achieve the desired impacts outlined in the School Plan Torrens will benefit from carefully aligning their Annual Operating Plans with the new School Plan.

The panel agrees with the school’s analysis that the school requires further developing in the collection, collation, analysis and reporting of all forms of data. The panel agrees that the school achieves excellent results in both PIPS and NAPLAN. The challenge is to ensure that these excellent results continue and further improve. The 2014-17 School Plan will be a valuable tool in ensuring that continued improvement occurs and that the impact of improvement strategies can be recorded and evaluated.
Evidence cited and its validation

School Summative Evaluation report.

Section D: Commendations and recommendations

Commendations

The panel commends Torrens Primary School for the following:

- Its strategic approach to developing and fostering collaboration in teaching and learning, which has resulted in high levels of staff satisfaction. This has been achieved through the development of professional learning communities and staff working in teams.
- High overall levels of student performance
- For embracing Quality Teaching principles to improve teacher performance and providing opportunities for mentoring and coaching.
- Maintaining effective teaching and learning programs during a major physical restoration of the school environment and significant staff changes.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Torrens Primary School:

- Aligns future Annual Operating Plans to the 2014-17 School Plan through the entire School Improvement cycle ensuring clearly identified performance measures in the School Plan are used as the basis for targets in each Annual Operating Plan. These performance measures can then be monitored and reported regularly.
- Establish an effective whole school data collection, collation, analysis and reporting system, communicate this to all staff and support it through ongoing professional learning.
- Reaffirm commitment to working collaboratively through continued participation in professional learning teams, focusing on improved student outcomes
- Build upon and enhance the focus on improving teacher quality and teacher standards by embedding clear feedback procedures for teachers into their Quality Teaching rounds and professional learning.