



ACT
Government
Education

ISABELLA PLAINS EARLY CHILDHOOD SCHOOL

Review Report 2017

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Introduction: Overview of the External School Review process

As part of the Australian Capital Territory's school improvement approach, public schools and colleges in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) are required to participate in an External School Review every five years. This document captures the findings of the External Review Panel during this cycle of school review.

In broad terms, the panel sought to determine, through evaluation against the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT), 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.

The External School Review was conducted over three days and involved a wide variety of data gathering approaches including desktop review, observations, interviews and documentation. This approach provided evidence for the panel to consider against the nine inter-related domains in the NSIT to inform the affirmations, commendations and recommendations for this school improvement cycle.

Section A: School context

Isabella Plains Early Childhood School (IPECS) is a birth to eight years school in Tuggeranong that operates under an integrated service delivery model. The core elements of the IPECS service delivery model are collaborative high-quality learning, integrated services, family support and participation for children from birth to year 2 and their families.

Services include on site childcare, before and after school care, vacation care, seamless transitions between service providers, playgroups, connections with local community groups, and rich and diverse learning experiences delivered through a pedagogy of play-based learning.

IPECS is an inclusive school, offering a holistic program addressing the five domains of early childhood development (cognitive, social, emotional, physical and language). The school uses the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum to guide teaching and learning. Specialist teaching areas include sustainability, music and the arts, library, information and communication technology, physical education and Spanish. On completing year 2, children transition to their local primary school. The priority enrolment schools for children residing in Isabella Plains are Richardson Primary School, Monash Primary School and Bonython Primary School. The school maintains close collaborative partnerships with all schools in the immediate vicinity to support student transitions

Throughout the life of the strategic plan there has been a large turnover of staff, most notably the introduction of an entirely new leadership team. A new principal was appointed in 2016 and a new deputy principal and school leader C were appointed in 2017. The directorship of the childcare component of the school has changed four times in four years. A consistent community coordinator and business manager has supported the transition of new people into their roles and protected against the loss of corporate knowledge.

The school enrolment has increased from 176 in 2014 to 201 in 2017. While the number of students with Language Background Other Than English has fluctuated over the past four years, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the number of students with a disability accessing the Integration Support Program have remained fairly stable throughout the life of the plan. The school Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage is 1047, ranking 94th out of all schools in the ACT.

Section B: School performance

National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

The virtual National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data represents the attainment of past Isabella Plains Early Childhood School (IPECS) students enrolled in public schools for year 3. Year 3 data is available from 2014.

In 2014, students performed significantly below the ACT average across all areas and outside of the confidence intervals for reading and numeracy.

In 2015, students performed within the confidence intervals for reading and within or above the confidence intervals for numeracy in year 3. Year 3 students also exceeded the ACT mean in reading, grammar, punctuation and numeracy.

In 2015, the school was also provided with NAPLAN data to year 5. Analysis of the NAPLAN data collected for this cohort of students (who formed the inaugural preschool year) demonstrates sustained growth and performed above the year 5 ACT mean scores in all areas.

In 2016, students performed within the confidence intervals for reading and within or above the confidence intervals for numeracy. In 2016, students performed below the ACT average in reading, grammar, punctuation and once again exceeded in numeracy.

Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS)

Over the life of the plan, the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) data demonstrate that the school's kindergarten cohorts have scored marginally higher results in reading and similar to that of ACT student average in mathematics.

Reading (expected and better than expected) growth in 2014 was 48%. Growth was higher in 2015 (67%) and even higher in 2016 (81%).

The expected growth in mathematics mirrors that of the ACT average. Mathematics (expected and better than expected) growth in 2014 was 57%. Growth was higher in 2015 (64%) and even higher in 2016 (71%).

The percentage of students reading at ACT benchmarks at the end of year 2 decreased significantly from 91 percent in 2014 to 68 percent in 2016.

School perception data

School satisfaction survey data from 2013 to 2016 indicates that parents are highly satisfied with their child's education at this school. All survey items indicated increased parental satisfaction levels with the exception of 'student behaviour is well managed at this school'.

The proportion of parents who agreed with 'student behaviour is well managed at this school' decreased from 95 percent in 2015 to 81 percent in 2016.

Staff perception data indicates that staff are generally satisfied working at IPECS, though in 2016, staff identified areas for improvement including the school environment, support for staff and taking their opinions seriously.

Attendance data

Over the life of the plan, attendance was consistently at 94 percent, and children attending more than 90 percent of the time was consistently at 80%.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

Priority areas

The Isabella Plains Early Childhood School (IPECS) 2014–17 Strategic Plan was developed in consultation with staff representatives from IPECS, Communities@Work and members of the parent and wider school community. The priorities have remained unchanged for the life of the plan:

- improve student outcomes in literacy, numeracy and science
- enhance the wellbeing of students, staff and community
- enhance collaborative partnerships with families and the wider community.

Strategic Priority 1: Improve student learning in literacy, numeracy and science

Achievements

The school's key focus in improving student outcomes was to develop an expert teaching team to implement high quality literacy and numeracy programs across the school. There has been an emphasis on a range of coaching strategies to build teacher capacity. In 2014, the coaching model was initiated and supported by the then deputy principal with a focus on determining the needs of the children to improve reading and writing. This program has been formalised over time.

The review panel was provided with evidence of an emerging whole-school mentoring and coaching program, processes and procedures for guided walk-throughs and collegial and interschool observations. From 2016, all teachers at IPECS have received targeted written feedback on their practice at least four times a year. Teachers confirmed that this was an effective method to assist in improving practice and some have identified that they would like further opportunities to participate in coaching.

Targeted professional learning and an analysis of school-based and system evidence over the life of this plan has supported the school's improvement agenda. To ensure all staff are using consistent approaches and hold consistent expectations for student outcomes as part of a balanced educational program, staff have participated in a range of professional learning opportunities. These include First Steps Writing, spelling strategies (Christine Topfler), the Principals as Literacy Leaders program, Readers Workshops (Debbie Miller), and contemporary pedagogy and practice for 21st-century learners.

Organisational structures, including the establishment of professional learning communities, have been redefined. Roles and responsibilities were changed to release all staff within a teaching team at the same time. This provided opportunities for professional learning communities to focus on data with deeper understandings of 'where to next?' Disciplined

dialogue questions were utilised by the deputy principal to lead staff to interrogate the data and to ensure that teaching and learning is evidence informed. Qualitative data from teachers has demonstrated the impact of data analysis sessions on improved planning and programming to improved outcomes in literacy, numeracy and science.

Targets

The performance measures for this strategic priority were the:

- proportion of families who agree or strongly agree that their child is making good progress at our school
- proportion of year 2 children reading at level 24 in the PM (Progress with Meaning) Benchmark kit
- proportion of kindergarten children achieving average, or above, value added in end of year data PIPS
- proportion of years 1 and 2 children achieving at C grade or above in A–E reporting for science
- proportion of teachers who satisfied with professional learning opportunities in the school satisfaction survey.

Over the life of the plan the specific annual targets for this priority have changed.

Results from the School Satisfaction Survey 2013–16 indicate the percentage of families stating that ‘my child is making good progress at this school’ consistently sits above the ACT average. 2016 data indicates a decrease in satisfaction from 98 percent in 2015 to 91 percent, with median agreement of 95 percent over four years.

In 2016, the target of 97 percent for year 2 students meeting PM reading benchmarks was not met. In that year only 67 percent of year 2 students reached benchmark.

2015 PIPS reading progress was 61 as opposed to an average of 76 and as such the target was not met. In 2016, the target was exceeded by 3 points.

Over the life of the plan the percentage of years 1 and 2 children achieving at C grade or above in A–E reporting for science increased from 26 percent to 61 percent for year 1 and from 32 percent to 38 percent for year 2.

There were no data available for the target on the proportion of teachers who satisfied with professional learning opportunities.

Strategic Priority 2: Enhance the wellbeing of children, staff and community

Achievements

This priority aimed to provide a safe and supportive school for all stakeholders and to deliver a school wide social and emotional learning program.

A key improvement strategy was to utilise the KidsMatter program as a framework for embedding a sustainable social and emotional learning program. KidsMatter had been partially implemented in 2014–15 at the school, with implementation stalling midway through the component training due to staff changes and competing priorities. In 2016, a KidsMatter action team was selected to lead the KidsMatter professional learning across the school and implement an action plan. This work is continuing in 2017.

The introduction of staff-led school improvement action learning teams in the areas of student engagement and wellbeing, staff engagement and wellbeing, and parent engagement has contributed to a focus on inclusion and diversity and children's mental health and wellbeing.

Professional learning communities inquire into school practice across each of these areas and are involved in the design and development of targeted learning goals and strategies. The Response to Intervention model enables staff to articulate actions for differentiated learning and provided a whole-school focus for meeting the needs of individual students.

The leadership team and staff continue to work on the implementation of guidelines within the ACT Education Directorate's Safe and Supportive Schools' policy focusing on the establishment of safe and supportive learning areas.

Targets

The performance measures for this priority were the:

- proportion of families who indicate satisfaction that the school provides a safe and caring environment for their children in the KidsMatter parent surveys
- proportion of families who indicate satisfaction that their child's teacher cares about their child in the KidsMatter parent surveys
- proportion of staff who indicate that the school works effectively with families and professionals in caring for children with mental health and learning needs in the KidsMatter staff surveys.

The review panel could not access the KidsMatter data and relied on evidence from school board reports from 2014 to 2016. This evidence indicates that targets were met in all years.

Strategic Priority 3: Enhance collaborative partnerships with families and the wider community

Achievements

Over the life of the plan the school has engaged with a range of partners to meet family needs and strengthen parental engagement. The school has conducted a review of school communication methods, with a focus on parental engagement and teacher workload. A communications procedures document was developed in consultation with staff and community members. In 2016, the school introduced digital forms of communication with parents to increase engagement with learning for all families, with a particular emphasis on those that are rarely able to attend the school. The Seesaw app and School Stream have complemented the use of the school Facebook page, and given parents access to real time engagement with their child's learning.

The Class Connect program, focusing on communication with families, was developed to build capacity and involvement of a greater number of families in their child's learning. Since its implementation the program has facilitated a variety of whole-school and class-based events, teacher support and a growing sense of community across the school.

The panel were provided with strong evidence of other partnerships, which have included:

- the school's Genuine Engagement Mutual Support (GEMS) Parents and Citizens group and school board
- Growing with Isabella Grands
- family playgroup
- Move and Groove
- Backyard and Urban Rangers
- Isabella Plains Community Connections Group
- Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre
- ACT Health Fresh Tastes
- C3 Church Monash – Kids Hope
- Australian Red Cross Good Start Breakfast Club.

As an integrated service, the school works closely with the long day care provider and Communities@Work to develop consistent and sustainable pedagogical and philosophical practices across the two services. A memorandum of understanding was developed collaboratively between the leadership team, and co-constructed by staff from both services. The school also cites the Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre as an important partner in providing relevant and supportive services to families and young children from the school.

The collaboration between Growing with Isabella Grands and the school, to establish and maintain vegetable gardens, has seen the development of a partnership that enables real-life experiences for the children. The panel observed the positive interactions between Grands and the children.

During 2016, an audit of partnerships was undertaken using Domain 9 of the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) with the view to ensuring that all partnerships were meeting their intended outcome and were tailored to the needs of our families. The decision was made to discontinue the community program, Move and Groove, as a result of the audit. The cost-benefit analysis determined that the proportion of school community, children and families directly benefitting from the program was minimal and the resources injected into the program could be used in different ways to provide maximum benefit to the school and a growing sense of community.

Targets

The performance measures for this priority were the:

- proportion of families who are satisfied that community programs are tailored to their family's need in satisfaction survey data
- proportion of families who indicate satisfaction with the way the school communicates with them in the KidsMatter parent surveys
- number of community organisations engaged in ongoing partnerships with the school.

Whilst the targets were inconsistent over the life of the plan. Parent school satisfaction survey data indicates the school's commitment to collaborate with parents. The targets of three survey items, 'I can talk to teachers about my concerns', 'this school works with me to support my child's learning', and 'community partnerships are valued and maintained', which were consistent across 2015–17, were above the ACT average and were met by the school.

Reflections

Changes to both teaching staff and the leadership team over the life of the plan, inconsistency in target setting and a substantial number of key improvement strategies, impacted on the delivery of the school's strategic plan. Some of the performance measures impeded the school's ability to collect evidence sets that demonstrated student growth. However, targets were generally met.

The panel were provided with evidence that the work of the leadership team is focused on creating an expert teacher team, developing a strong focus on quality learning and on the creation of a culture in which all students are expected to learn successfully.

The school's focus on transparency of practice, genuine parental engagement, developing the whole child and supporting families combine to create a connected community of common purpose, which is to be celebrated. Evidence from the school satisfaction survey, discussions with staff, parents, children and partners in IPECS indicated to the panel that the nurturing environments is inclusive of all members of the community. Families and staff attested to feeling comfortable working with one another and are confident that children are receiving a quality education combined with a focus on purposeful and high expectations. A new leadership team is leading staff to become active and involved participants with the school improvement journey.

The implementation of the recommendations contained in this report will enable further school improvement.

Evidence cited

- IPECS Annual Action Plans and Reports 2014–16
- IPECS Annual School Board Reports 2014–16
- 2017 Summative Report
- School Satisfaction and School Climate surveys 2014–16
- 2017 School Summative Report
- My Schools website
- Annual Action Plans 2014–17
- School Strategic Plan 2014–17
- Parent, student and staff interviews with the panel
- Key school policy and program documentation including curriculum planning
- IPECS and GEMS newsletters
- IPECS website
- Communities@Work memorandum of understanding (MOU) .

Section D: National tools self-evaluation results

National School Improvement Tool (NSIT)

DOMAIN 1: An explicit improvement agenda

- *The school has developed an agenda for improvement in partnership with parents and the community and school leaders can describe the improvements they wish to see in student behaviours and outcomes. This agenda is communicated in staff meetings, school newsletters, parent-teacher meetings and on the school website using a variety of formats to suit local needs.*
- *The leadership team has analysed school performance data over a number of years and is aware of trends in student achievement levels.*
- *The school leadership team is clearly committed to finding ways to improve on current student outcomes. This is reflected in an eagerness to learn from research evidence, international experience and from other schools that have achieved significant improvements.*
- *There is evidence of a school-wide commitment to every student's success and staff of the school tell stories of significant student improvement.*
- *Targets for improvement are not specific (e.g. not accompanied by timelines).*

Comments and findings

- The Isabella Plains Early Childhood School (IPECS) Strategic Plan 2014–17, outlined three strategic priorities: improve student learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy and science; enhance the wellbeing of children, staff and the community; and enhance collaborative partnerships with families and the wider community. These priorities remained consistent throughout the planning period. As per ACT planning guidelines, targets were introduced in 2014 and new targets were issued each year, however, the original targets and strategies changed over time. The planned strategies over the four years were, in general, having a positive effect on student outcomes. This was demonstrated in the board reports and annual action plans over the life of the plan.
- The strategic agenda for the school has been communicated through the GEMS Parents Association, staff induction booklet, school board and staff meetings, and newsletters. Staff were able to talk about the improvement agenda in interviews and described examples of significant individual student progress. Staff and parents were not able to talk about the impact of targets on student learning.
- The school leadership uses a variety of research sources such as Harvard University (Observation), Reggio Emilio (play-based learning), Educating Ruby, Dylan Williams, Clare Warden's Nature Pedagogy and other schools.
- School board reports demonstrate that the leadership team has analysed performance in each year of the plan.

DOMAIN 2: Analysis and discussion of data

- *There is evidence that the principal and other school leaders view reliable and timely student data as essential to their effective leadership of the school. There is a timetable for the annual collection of data on student achievement and wellbeing.*
- *One or more members of staff have been assigned responsibility for implementing the annual plan, analysing the full range of school data, and summarising, displaying and communicating student outcome data for the school.*
- *Time is set aside (e.g. on pupil free days and in staff meetings) for the discussion of data and the implications of data for school policies and classroom practices. These discussions occur at whole-school and team levels.*
- *Software may be used for the analysis of school results, including the performances of priority groups, but analyses generally do not extend to studies of improvement or growth.*
- *Information about the school's performance is communicated to the school community, but may lack explanation or analysis. There is limited engagement with parents and families around school data.*

Comments and findings

- The school has a schedule for assessment for data items such as PIPS, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), PM Benchmark, SENA, Oxford sight words, learning journals, BEE spelling, A–E grades, Gowrie writing tool, Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) and tracking sheets.
- The assessment schedule does not include a focus on teacher assessment and how diagnostic and standardised tests support teacher assessment. Achievement standards in years K to 2 are not being used yet to support teacher judgements. The school's assessment schedule does not yet represent a systematic plan for the collection, analysis and use of a range of student wellbeing and achievement data.
- A data wall has been established for PM Benchmark Reading and Oral Language. PIPS reading and mathematics growth is put on a spreadsheet. Professional learning community (PLC) meeting agendas indicate teachers collectively discuss a wide range of data on individual students and plan accordingly.
- A spreadsheet on students with special needs and behaviours, is regularly updated.
- Some teachers have described how they used PM Benchmarks and SENA to sort students into groups for direct instruction or differentiated learning activities, however, follow-up assessment to gauge growth was not evident. Some teachers have used only teacher judgements to differentiate.
- The principal has shared school data with the board. The GEMS Parents and Citizens (P&C) group has been informed about the school-wide data sets each year, with limited follow-up analysis yet evident. Parents were aware of the academic data but were more interested in other aspects of the school.
- Staff use the Disciplined Dialogue approach to interrogate data sets.

DOMAIN 3: A culture that promotes learning

- *The 'tone' of the school reflects a school-wide commitment to purposeful, successful learning. There are very few obvious behavioural, attendance or engagement problems and behaviour management takes up very little, if any, time of school leaders and classroom teachers.*
- *There is a strong focus on quality learning and on the creation of a culture in which all students are expected to learn successfully, in their own ways and at their own pace. Individual talents are valued. Class 'busy work' is kept to a minimum, and 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 and families are encouraged to take a genuine and close interest in the work of the school and are welcomed as partners in their children's learning. There are agreed guidelines on such matters as greeting visitors, taking messages, and responding to queries promptly and respectfully.*
- *Staff morale is generally high.*

Comments and findings

- Staff (100%) and Parents (98%) state that 'teachers at this school expect my child to do their best'. Parents (91%) state that 'my child is making good progress'. Staff (100%) and Parents (81%) report 'behaviour is well managed'.
- KidsMatter is used in the school as a framework to improve staff and student engagement and well-being while fostering parent engagement.
- The GEMS P&C group has a parent communication and engagement strategy.
- The school has a policy on a safe and supportive learning environment.
- The school has a scope and sequence for the social and emotional learning of students documented within the Bounce Back program.
- There is an IPECS Positive Partnerships statement that encourages parent participation.
- Online communication with parents is predominantly through Facebook and Seesaw.
- Regular class newsletters illustrate that parents are invited at times to do set exercises at home with their child. There is an opportunity through the Seesaw app to provide further help for parents.
- The school has documented communication guidelines.
- Classroom visits confirm there is a strong focus on student learning with little 'busy work' in evidence.
- Parents appreciate the strong communication links between teachers and home and the way teachers go out of their way to provide support for learning at home.
- Classroom visits and observations outside the classroom indicate that there is a culture of mutual respect between teachers, students, and parents.

DOMAIN 4: Targeted use of school resources

- *The principal and other school leaders have introduced programs and strategies to identify and address the needs of students in the school and are sourcing and applying available resources to meet those needs.*
- *The school has developed processes (e.g. systematic testing and assessment) for identifying student learning needs, although there may not always be good school records of student achievement and progress.*
- *Programs to meet individual learning needs (e.g. students for whom English is a second language) are prioritised, where possible, in the school budget.*
- *Physical spaces are used effectively to maximise student learning. Learning spaces are organised for whole group work, small group work and individual work.*
- *Technology is accessible to the majority of staff and students.*

Comments and findings

- The school uses the Response to Intervention (RTI) model and the IPECS special needs referral process has as one of its outcomes, consideration of deploying internal or external resourcing.
- Leaders supply in-class literacy and numeracy support.
- The Communities@Work partnership is used to support teachers in the school.
- Learning support assistant (LSA) and administrative staff timetables demonstrate flexible use to maximise effectiveness.
- The school budget reflects current priorities.
- The school's workforce plan demonstrates strategic thinking around human resource planning to meet current and future needs.
- Time is allocated to enable STEM (science, technology, engineering, maths) to enrich student learning experiences.
- Teachers report that they would like more use of iPads to support learning.
- The teaching spaces are print-rich environments and enable a variety of learning opportunities.
- Work has already taken place to enhance external learning spaces. A master plan is in place for further improvement.

DOMAIN 5: An expert teaching team

- *There is evidence that the principal and other school leaders see the development of staff into an expert and coherent school-wide teaching team as central to improving outcomes for all students.*
- *The school has arrangements in place for mentoring and coaching. Teachers visit each other's classrooms and welcome opportunities to have principals and other school leaders observe and discuss their work with them.*
- *Attention is paid to strengths and weaknesses in the school-wide team, with strategies in place to recruit staff with particular expertise, to train staff to address particular needs, and to support staff who find it difficult to commit to the school's improvement agenda.*
- *The school provides opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles outside the classroom.*

Comments and findings

- Collaborative team meetings are held to share practice, discuss data, and plan for individual student needs.
- Walk-throughs commenced in 2017 and are conducted by the leadership team (and staff) using the Harvard University Open Observational Model. This model is still in an implementation phase with only some teachers experiencing the opportunity to observe or be observed. Those teachers who have participated in both leadership and peer observations spoke very positively about the experience.
- The school does not have a documented professional learning plan.
- Each term, written feedback is given to teachers based on the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.
- Spreadsheets detailing teacher professional learning and teacher skills have been constructed.
- While the school does not have a documented professional learning plan, there is a 'teaching and learning' statement that supports the development of an expert teaching team.
- Staff are allocated leadership roles in school improvement action learning teams.
- Some teachers cannot recall being formally observed in the classroom and are not clear on coaching but are aware of the intent of the program in the future. Coaching to embed practice is only relatively new in the school.
- All staff permanent and contract; teaching, administrative and learning support assistants, have an annual professional discussion with the principal and receive feedback. New educators have observation, feedback and goal setting processes in place.
- The schools workforce plan demonstrates strategic thinking around appointing staff with appropriate skills and experience to team vacancies and positions.

- Most teachers felt supported, some would appreciate more observation and coaching and time to debrief after modelling sessions.

DOMAIN 6: Systematic curriculum delivery

- *The school curriculum delivery (including the time allocated to particular learning) balance requirements to address all learning areas, to give priority to English, Mathematics and Science.*
- *The school leadership team ensures that the enacted curriculum remains a focus for discussion among, and collaboration between, teachers and that the curriculum plan is the reference against which flexible delivery is designed, assessment tasks are developed and student learning is reported. Curriculum delivery is designed to meet the needs of the range of students within each year level as well as those with disabilities and other particular needs.*
- *The school has a plan for curriculum delivery that includes year level and term plans, but the progression of learning from year to year is not always obvious and the relationship between the pieces of the plan (the year, term and unit plans) would benefit from further clarification.*
- *School leaders talk about embedding fundamental cross-curricular skills such as literacy, numeracy and higher order thinking within all subjects, but there is little evidence that school-wide strategies are in place to drive a consistent approach.*

Comments and findings

- The school has K–2 curriculum overviews in English, mathematics, humanities and social sciences (HASS) and science. Term planners are based on these overviews. Curriculum planning in the other curriculum areas is not as clear.
- The school does not yet have a documented curriculum delivery plan.
- Planning in preschool is consistent with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and is based on the ‘Big Ideas’.
- Inquiry learning as a curriculum delivery model for predominantly HASS and science is not well understood or implemented by teaching staff.
- The school has a scope and sequence for the social and emotional learning Bounce Back program. The program has been implemented across the school.
- The classroom timetables indicate that sufficient time allocations are given to all curriculum areas.
- Teaching programs do not explicitly address general capabilities or learning priorities.
- There are transitions from one year to the next to ensure information on students is passed on.
- Some teachers are embedding the ‘7 characteristics of a learner’ into the curriculum.

DOMAIN 7: Differentiated teaching and learning

- *School leaders explicitly encourage teachers to tailor their teaching to student needs and readiness. This includes the systematic use of assessment instruments (standardised assessment tasks and teacher developed assessment tools) to establish where individuals are in their learning and to identify skill gaps and misunderstandings.*
- *Planning shows how the different needs of students are addressed.*
- *Reports to parents show progress over time and include suggestions for ways in which parents can support their children's learning.*
- *Some use is made of assessment instruments to identify individual strengths and weaknesses and starting points for teaching, but this appears to be at the initiative of individual teachers rather than a school-wide expectation.*
- *Some use is made of differentiated teaching (e.g. differentiated reading groups in the early primary years).*

Comments and findings

- The school has a Response to Intervention (RTI) model that encourages explicit teaching and individualised instruction. Students are allocated to an RTI tier in each of their classes
- IPECS special needs referral process leads to support for students with special needs. Leaders provide extra support in classes in literacy and numeracy.
- Student reports demonstrate that parents get timely feedback and appropriate improvement strategies.
- Some classes use groupings to support differentiation in mathematics and reading.
- Writing goals are displayed on classroom walls and individual goals are visible on each student's desk. Students were able to talk about these goals.
- Professional learning community (PLC) meetings are used to discuss data and planning for individual students.
- Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) are in place for individual students with special needs or talents.
- Class teachers differentiate through grouping or learning activities. Teachers expressed a view that professional learning on differentiation would assist their teaching.

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, although the principal and other senior leaders may not themselves have clear positions on the kinds of teaching they wish to see occurring across the school.*
- *There is a particular focus on improved teaching methods in reading, writing, and mathematics, and professional learning activities are focused on building teachers' understandings of highly effective teaching strategies in these areas.*
- *Clarity about what students are expected to learn and be able to do, high expectations of every student's learning, explicit teaching of skills and content, individualised attention as required, and timely feedback to guide student action are key elements of the school's push for improved teaching and learning.*

Comments and findings

- Minutes indicate that staff meetings are scheduled regularly to facilitate whole-school professional learning with a focus on strategic priorities.
- The school has in recent years participated in workshops conducted by, or in, Principals as Numeracy Leaders (PANL), Nature Pedagogy, Reggio Emilia, Count Me In Too (CMIT), Google Summit, Arts Up Front, Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA) Literacy Learning, MiniLit, Deb Miller.
- There is a school statement on 'pedagogy and practice in literacy and numeracy' and 'teaching and learning'. Explicit clarity about the types of teaching required across the school is not yet evident.
- Learning intentions and success criteria are used in every classroom and children can articulate these.
- Teachers and children were able to describe how timely feedback is given on learning. Feedback is not fully related to agreed assessment standards.

DOMAIN 9: School-community partnerships

- *The school leadership team makes deliberate and strategic use of partnerships with families, local businesses and community organisations to access intellectual, physical and/or other resources not available within the school for the purposes of improving student outcomes. There is a range of currently operating partnerships, each carefully planned and designed to enhance student outcomes (for example, to broaden student knowledge, build new skills, develop more positive attitudes, increase engagement levels, create applied learning opportunities for students, or facilitate successful transitions to work or further education or training).*
- *Each partnership has been established in response to an identified need. Considerable effort has been put into understanding students' needs, identifying appropriate partners to address those needs, planning the details of partnership programs and clarifying partner roles and responsibilities.*
- *Careful consideration has been given to the benefits of the partnership to each participating partner. Explicit processes are in place to ensure ongoing and effective communication – sometimes across networks of partners – and there are documented plans for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of each partnership.*
- *The school's partnerships are being successfully implemented and appear to be adequately resourced and sustainable.*

Comments and findings

- IPECS has an ongoing partnership with Communities@Work and its focus of providing a birth to year 2 educational and care environment for children and their families. The partnership has a focus on decreasing the percentage of vulnerable students entering preschool (as defined by the AECD data).
- IPECS also has partnerships with C3 Church Monash (Kids Hope mentoring), Australian Red Cross (Good Start Breakfast Club), ACT Paint and Play Playgroup Association (Backyard Rangers), Health (Move and Groove), Isabella Gardens Residents (Growing with Isabella Grands), Communities@Work (family day care playgroup), Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre Service, Parents (Class Connect), Queensland Scripture Union (chaplain), Nursing Mothers Association (breastfeeding room), ACT Health (Fresh Tastes) and Principals Australia Institute (KidsMatter).
- There is an audit process for each partnership that has resulted in partnerships being discontinued where the intended outcomes were not being realised. While partnerships have had student outcomes as a focus, the definition of their exact nature and their effective measures is still developing.
- New partnerships are being considered as a result of changing student demographic.
- The school has a Positive Partnerships statement.

National Safe Schools Framework: School Audit Tool

The results from the survey of staff demonstrates that the school leadership is committed to a safe, connected and supportive school culture. The staff have implemented a Safe Schools Curriculum.

Areas for further improvement include professional learning, policy development, early intervention and developing partnerships.

Section E: Affirmations, commendations and recommendations

Affirmations

The External Review Panel offers the following affirmations for Isabella Plains Early Childhood School.

- The leadership team has actively worked over the last two years to build an effective and cohesive team with a strong focus on school improvement.
- The school has begun to rollout an observational/feedback model grounded in research and coaching to embed agreed practices in classrooms.
- The school has developed a workforce plan to fill perceived skill gaps in the school staffing and avoid potential shortfalls due to staff transferring or being promoted.
- Parents appreciate that the school uses the Seesaw app to communicate about their child's learning.
- Parents appreciate the strong communication links between teachers and home and the way teachers go out of their way to provide support for learning at home.
- The school continues to embrace significant partnerships with the wider community. Growing with Isabella Grands, for example is 'growing' with the introduction of mentorship, the men's shed and craft classes.
- There has been significant work to develop staff and student capability in using 21st-century learning pedagogy and practice, and this is exemplified through the information and communication technology showcase.

Commendations

Isabella Plains Early Childhood School is commended for the following.

- The partnership and collaboration between the birth to five years setting and the five to eight years setting supports children in building strong friendships and transition between settings. Open Wednesdays and guided walk-throughs are an example of this collaboration in action.
- The commitment of the school community to establishing and maintaining a physical environment, including the Isabella Plains farm, supports purposeful play and exploration and inquiry learning.
- The data wall has placed a face on multiple data sets to assist in planning.
- The staff demonstrate a willingness and commitment to develop a strong focus on quality learning and on the creation of a culture in which all students are expected to learn successfully.

Recommendations

The External Review Panel recommends Isabella Plains Early Childhood School pays attention to the following opportunities for school improvement during the next planning cycle.

- Develop and implement the new five-year strategic plan for the school, in the context of the school vision, expressed in terms of specific improvements sought in student performance, aligned with national and/or system-wide improvement priorities and include clear targets with accompanying timelines, which are rigorously actioned.
- Refine the data (schedule) plan to include teacher judgements on achievement standards and how these moderated judgements can be used for individualised planning, teaching and assessment as well as school-wide planning.
- Document a professional learning plan and continue to encourage the development of a culture of continuous professional improvement that includes classroom-based learning, mentoring and coaching. As part of the plan, the school leadership should work with staff to develop an explicit agreed statement on the kinds of teaching that are to be used across the school.
- Develop a coherent, sequenced plan for curriculum delivery that ensures consistent teaching and learning expectations and clear reference for monitoring learning across the year levels. The plan should develop further clarity around the school's direction on inquiry learning.
- Build upon the successful implementation of Seesaw, to regularly provide parents with learning intentions and ways parents can assist their child's learning.
- Continue to work at understanding where students are at in their learning process to determine next starting points for teaching.

Section F: Record of school review process

The following people were members of the External Review Panel for Isabella Plains Early Childhood School conducted on 13–14 September 2017.

Name: Ron Bamford External Review Panel – Chair

Name: Anne Simpson External Review Panel – Principal Member
Chapman Primary School

I, Ron Bamford, as External Review Panel Chair, endorse that this is a true and accurate record of the findings from the External School Review process.

Signature: 

Date: 16/10/2017

I, Kate Wood, as Principal of Isabella Plains Early Childhood School, accept this Review Report on behalf of the school community.

Signature: 

Date: 16/10/2017