



**ACT**  
Government  
Education

# **NAMADGI SCHOOL**

Review Report 2017

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## Introduction: Overview of the External School Review process

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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 four 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

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Namadgi School is a preschool to year 10 school located in the suburb of Kambah in the Tuggeranong Network. The school was established in 2011 and has a current enrolment of 685 students, supported by a staff of 87. The school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) has dropped slightly each year across the life of the strategic plan and in 2017 is calculated at 977.

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and English as an Additional Language or Dialect students has gradually increased since the first year (2013) of this planning cycle. Fifty-seven students have Individual Learning Plans and the school has three Learning Support Units.

The school is structured in sub-schools: two preschools (one of which is off-site), kindergarten to year 5, a year 6 to 8 middle school, and years 9 and 10, referred to as the high school. The current school leadership team has been structured to reflect this organisational arrangement. Through a specialist facility, the Urambi Environmental Centre, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program is available to students in the early years and the centre also offers rich learning opportunities linked to a number of Key Learning Areas, which students can access beyond their regular classroom.

Over the life of the plan, there have been considerable changes to the senior leadership team. Due to retirements and short-term acting arrangements, the school has experienced five principal changes. The current principal and two deputy principals were appointed in the first half of 2017 and new senior leader C positions were being finalised at the time of the school's review. The teacher profile is characterised by a high proportion of new educators and those in the early stages of their career. The school hosts Teach for Australia associates, predominantly in secondary specialist teaching areas.

## Section B: School performance

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### **National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)**

Local student learning data has only recently been corralled into centralised and agreed systems, and therefore, NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) and similar cohort assessments dominate the documented data set. There is evidence of local target-setting year-on-year at the sector level, although the panel could not see a clear line of sight from classroom teacher to strategic targets.

Analyses of NAPLAN student learning data for the review period suggest Namadgi School is performing below the national average across all domains and points along the learner experience, although the school is within the confidence range of jurisdictional targets. This paradox provides scope for the school to build in aspirational and locally-generated targets in the next strategic cycle.

Compared to national mean scores and when controlled for ICSEA value, Namadgi students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are almost exclusively achieving below or substantially below their peers in all NAPLAN domains. Exceptions to this occurred in 2014 in year 9 reading, and in 2015 in year 7 reading, where the cohort performed close to the national mean.

In like-schools, Namadgi student performance in 2014 in year 7 is slightly closer to mean scores for reading and spelling; year 9 students were close to the mean in reading, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy. In 2015, year 3 numeracy was close to the mean of like schools, as was year 7 reading and numeracy and year 9 numeracy. In 2016, all average school results in NAPLAN were below, or substantially below, national mean scores but there was stronger growth in years 7 and 9 when compared to Tuggeranong Network school results. The panel noted that, across the life of the plan, in years 3 and 5, Namadgi student performance has been up to 70 points below the national mean.

The proportion of Namadgi students located in proficient bands is significantly below those of the ACT in all NAPLAN domains and for all year groups tested.

The proportion of Namadgi students reaching expected growth in NAPLAN domains has fluctuated over the period of this school plan. The lowest growth rates are occurring in writing, numeracy and reading between years 3 to 5, with as few as one-fifth of students meeting expected growth (as was the case in the 2015 writing results for year 5). The strongest growth performance occurred in the 2014 year 7 cohort in relation to spelling, where almost three-quarters of students met growth targets. All other growth rates sit between these two proportions. No obvious pattern of performance is evident for boys or girls, with wide-ranging fluctuations year-on-year in all domains. Overall, student growth is present, but not always as accelerated as would be expected for schools with similar academic starting points and ICSEA values.

Over extended periods of time, there are instances of students below the national minimum standard in literacy and numeracy, achieving nil or negative growth.

### **Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS)**

Entry-level student performance data described in Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) suggests that students are beginning their formal education journey below

the ACT average for both reading and mathematics. Since 2014, approximately one-quarter of students experienced less than expected growth in reading during their respective year of measurement, and each year one-third of students experienced less than expected growth in maths.

Much of the commentary about the academic progress of students takes the form of teacher recordings of episodic assessment against the curriculum outcomes. In the absence of a coordinated student learning data regime throughout the school, the panel found it challenging to describe student progress against the Australian Curriculum achievement standards – for example, the lack of a data wall or ‘faces on the data’ representation in the primary sector, and no systematic representation of A–E grades in subject areas in the secondary sector. The panel noted individual teachers and teaching teams are developing their own ways of reporting student achievement as part of assessment for learning. There has been recent work on building whole of school student learning data processes.

### **Stakeholder perception data**

The primary source of stakeholder perception data used at Namadgi School is the annual stakeholder satisfaction surveys.

Namadgi School students tend to have lower than ACT levels of satisfaction when commenting on student safety and the way the school manages student behaviour. Likewise, staff satisfaction with the behaviour management of students is well below ACT rates. Staff also report lower than ACT satisfaction rates in relation to staff having a voice and the feedback they receive on their work. Namadgi parents and carers would like the school to work on student behaviour management.

Over the life of this school plan, Namadgi school stakeholders reported close to or higher than ACT satisfaction levels in the following areas: ‘students feel their school is a place where they can talk about their concerns’ and that ‘these concerns are taken seriously’. They also feel that the school provides them with opportunities to do interesting things. Staff at the school believe they expect students to do their best, and that parents and students are able to talk to them about any concerns they have. Namadgi parents and carers report high levels of satisfaction in relation to the maintenance of school facilities, and being supported to assist their children in their learning. These results align with those presented in the 2016 Australian School Climate and School Identification Measurement Tool.

The panel noted that this school places a premium on how it works with its students and families in order to better understand their respective needs. These stakeholder data sets reflect that priority and the effort over the life of this school plan.

### **Process data**

The panel supports the current school leadership team’s intent to develop meaningful processes that capture local improvement. There are a number of locally-implemented programs and processes from which such data could be extracted to allow triangulation with systemic data sets.

*Evidence cited*

- School Satisfaction Survey 2014–16 and School Climate Survey 2016
- 2017 School Summative Report
- My Schools website
- Annual Action Plans 2014–17
- School Strategic Plan 2014–17
- Annual School Board Reports 2014–16
- parent, student and staff interviews with the panel.

## Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

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The Namadgi School Strategic Plan 2014–17 coincided with its first full range of year groups (P–10), having opened in 2011. It underwent external review in 2013, and the current school plan captures the relatively early recommendations and direction-setting from the school community.

The school identified four priorities, which it believed would deliver on its targets for improvement. The priorities focused on:

- literacy and numeracy improvements (enacted via six key improvement strategies)
- teacher capacity-building (enacted via four key improvement strategies)
- student connectedness and wellbeing (enacted via four key improvement strategies)
- partnerships with parents and community (enacted via four key improvement strategies).

At the start of 2016, the school reduced the number of priorities to three, and focused subsequent energy on students and the community. There is documented consistency of reference to the key improvement strategies each year, noting the decision to not proceed or report on the teacher capacity-building priority for the past two years.

Targets, year-on-year, are a mix of static and incremental aspiration. When looked at it globally, many of the targets were not met, although the school could articulate the challenges faced and the extent to which it was able to reflect upon its improvement journey. As the next strategic cycle begins, the school is encouraged to identify sharp targets allowing for the building of a story of improvement over time.

### Priority areas

Year-on-year action plan reports show patchy performance in relation to the school meeting its targets for improvement across the priorities identified in the school plan.

### Strategic Priority 1: To improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students

The performance measures for this priority were:

- the proportion of students achieving reading benchmark levels for years K to 6
- the proportion of students achieving expected or better growth in PIPS results
- scaled score growth relative to Tuggeranong Network mean growth in NAPLAN results for years 5, 7 and 9.

Reading results, as described in year 3 and 5 NAPLAN, is the basis upon which commentary is provided for the first performance measure. There is some growth in attainment over the life of the school plan, approaching the targets set, although there is considerable variation in attainment year-on-year. There is closer target attainment in relation to literacy (reading in particular) than in numeracy. This is true for all year levels from K–6. PIPS results consistently came in beneath the targets set. In 2016, the school did achieve pleasing growth in years 7 and 9 when compared to other Tuggeranong schools, with up to 12 points difference in one domain (all students reading for the year 9 cohort).

During the life of this school plan, there is evidence of a multitude of locally developed and off-the-shelf programs being brought into the school in support of literacy and numeracy performance. For example, in primary, programs like Namadgi Writes and Namadgi Reads, Words Their Way, Minilit and MacqLit, Middle Years Mental Computation, and Count Me In Too; in secondary, the introduction of Learning Opportunity Time and dedicated literacy and numeracy teaching lines. Most recently, the school has entered into the Visible Learning Plus initiative as a means to positively affect pedagogical practices.

## **Strategic Priority 2: To develop a whole-school collaborative culture of professional learning communities and build teacher capacity through a coaching and mentoring framework**

This priority was only activated in 2014 and 2015. The performance measures were:

- the proportion of teaching staff satisfied they get constructive feedback about their practice
- the proportion of teaching staff who are satisfied there are processes in place to support their practice
- the proportion of staff receiving coaching feedback.

For the two years of the school plan where this priority was actioned, the proportion of teaching staff who reported satisfaction with the feedback they received was 68 percent. In 2015, this effort focused on new educators. A school-developed survey of this group reported high levels of satisfaction, although staff noted that getting sufficient time with mentors was a challenge. From perception survey data, 89 percent of staff reported positively in relation to the informal discussion and sharing of teaching methods and strategies.

The school identified the need to attract and retain staff, given relatively high levels of staff turnover and the preponderance of new educators within the staffing profile. Work began in the key areas of staff induction and mentoring (including, for example, the Namadgi Mentor Executive), although there is evidence of a loss of traction over time. The school's decision to narrow its improvement focus at the start of 2016 saw this priority removed from subsequent action plans.

## **Strategic Priority 3: Improve student connectedness and the safety and wellbeing of the school community**

The performance measures for this priority were:

- the increase in responses of agree/strongly agree to school system survey questions on high expectations and safe schools
- the proportion of student and parent satisfaction related to feeling safe and the school has high expectations
- the proportion of student satisfaction related to engagement in learning in the wellbeing and school climate survey
- the proportion of student attendance by year level/by school
- the number of suspensions per year.

Over the life of this plan, Namadgi School has worked intensively in support of this priority. Artefacts of this effort include improved levels of student identity with their school and alignment with the school's values (up to 95 percent in 2016). The school is yet to affect significant improvement in relation to student safety and behavioural engagement, and systemic survey results for these aspects of the student experience are well below targets and ACT averages. Small gains have been made in relation to attendance targets (for example, there was a two percent increase between 2014 and 2015), although suspension rates have increased, nullifying the target set.

The school has enacted a number of locally developed strategies in support of student connectedness and safety. The year 9/10 leadership group, the Kids Council, house captains, primary electives, and the inquiry line in secondary, are all examples of building student voice and connections. The school has also created a pastoral care program including breakfast and homework clubs and peer support. The secondary sector has a physical pastoral care centre with access to a range of support personnel. This has been well received by staff and students. The panel noted the pleasing shift evident throughout the school away from that of harm reduction in behaviour management and towards positive student engagement. The recent adoption of the Positive Behaviour for Learning program is providing a consistent whole-school approach to student wellbeing.

#### **Strategic Priority 4: To build stronger parent community partnerships in learning and communications**

The performance measures for this priority were:

- the proportion of parent satisfaction data (agree/strongly agree) relating to home-school partnerships and communication
- the proportion of parent attendance at key school community events
- the number of opportunities for parents and staff to communicate effectively about learning.

Across the life of the plan, targets were set in relation to the percentage of parents satisfied with the way the school develops and maintains community partnerships and communications. The target set was met in both 2014 and 2015 although satisfaction levels were well below target in 2016. The school also set targets in relation to the number of parents attending key school community events. The school was unable to track its performance against this measure or report against the targets other than to provide feedback to the school community about attendance rates at some school events. Targets for the school's third performance measure in relation to the number of opportunities for parents and staff to communicate effectively about learning were not set across the life of the plan.

Over the life of the plan there has been a focus on strengthening parent engagement in education. Given that the first group of year 10 students graduated in 2014, particular attention was paid to transition experiences and advice to students and parents about career education and work experience. Parent learning forums supported family engagement in the early education years and the school leadership team responded to feedback from parents about the content of information nights.

Improving the clarity, consistency and timeliness of communication with families was a key improvement strategy and an attendant action was to increase classroom teacher communication with families. The emphasis here was to ensure that teachers shared positive feedback with families as well as communicating in a timely manner when concerns were raised about student welfare, engagement and performance. The panel noted in conversations with classroom teachers that this continues to remain a priority for them when initiating and maintaining contact. The school uses regular newsletters, Facebook page, information evenings and forums to connect with parents, share information and celebrate student and school successes.

The panel noted that the school has worked to forge strong links and pathways allowing connections with families and community through a number of school events that bring families to the school and this is highly valued by parents. Major school events, for example, Namadgi, Namadgi's Got Talent and the school fete, draw the community together and provide a shared sense of identity.

## **Reflections**

Namadgi's school improvement journey suggests a series of episodic and short-lived initiatives designed to deliver against priority areas. There is visible busyness in the school through the number and range of programs operating, further complicated by existing school structures. Commentary with school staff during the review reflected a recognition of the need to articulate greater clarity in relation to how these initiatives contribute to overall school improvement.

Constant changes in leadership positions, coupled with high turnover of staff across the life of the plan, has had considerable negative impact on the ability of the school to gain significant traction against its key priorities. Change fatigue is evident and as a result there has been little shared understanding of, and therefore commitment to, the documented improvement agenda.

During the period 2014–17, there has been a centring of effort in relation to student management and community engagement; this has provided fertile ground for improvement in student wellbeing, but has potentially detracted from the school's ability to focus on improved student learning outcomes. The school recognises this and is actively positioning itself to redirect future focus.

### *Evidence cited*

- Annual Action Plans 2014–17
- School Strategic Plan 2014–17
- School Satisfaction Survey 2014–16 and School Climate survey 2016
- 2017 School Summative Report
- Annual School Board Reports 2014–16
- parent, student and staff interviews with the panel.

## Section D: National tools self-evaluation results

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The Namadgi School leadership team led a self-evaluation in consultation with staff and members of the Parents and Citizens Association and the school board using the National School Improvement Tool. Focused discussions occurred at key meetings and feedback was collated to form a whole of school reflection for each of the nine domains. The school identified two domains, 'a culture that promotes learning' and 'targeted use of resources' as strengths, signalling areas for further development in the other seven domains.

### National School Improvement Tool (NSIT)

#### *DOMAIN 1: An explicit improvement agenda*

- *The communication of performance data to the school community tends to be sporadic and/or is limited only to information that the school is required to report.*
- *There is no obvious plan for improving on current achievement levels. School leaders appear to be more focused on day-to-day operational matters than on analysing and understanding school data, setting targets for whole-school improvement or communicating an improvement agenda to the school community.*
- *Minimal attention is paid to data. The communication of performance data to the school community tends to be sporadic and/or is limited only to information that the school is required to report.*
- *Expectations for significant school improvement are low and staff tend to 'explain' current achievement levels in terms of students' socioeconomic backgrounds and/or geographical location. There is little evidence that the staff of the school have a shared commitment to improving outcomes for every student, and this appears to be contributing to a culture of underperformance. There is little evidence that the school is looking to external sources to identify evidence-based strategies for improvement.*

#### **Comments and findings**

- The Namadgi School's Strategic Plan 2014–17 identifies four priorities: improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students; develop a whole-school collaborative culture of professional learning communities and build teacher capacity through a coaching and mentoring framework; improve student connectedness and the safety and wellbeing of the school community; and build stronger parent community partnerships in learning and communications. The panel observed that there were changes to the priorities, the key improvement strategies and the targets across the life of the plan, resulting in a loss of alignment and momentum.
- The improvement agenda as described in the strategic plan and subsequent action plans has not permeated the school. Teachers are unable to describe the improvement journey and cite regular changes in leadership as having impact on clarity about key priorities. Many have therefore lost faith in some of the initiatives.

- Strategic planning documents have been shared with the board.
- Whole-school targets have been set, with some achieved. A significant number of targets related to improving literacy and numeracy were not met in some years, with the exception of 2016.
- Ad hoc approaches to the analyses of whole of school data performance has been a barrier in monitoring growth/regression over time and improvement.
- Staff are often operating in isolation (or in small isolated teams) and report there is a lack of clarity in policy and process and what is expected of them.

### *DOMAIN 2: Analysis and discussion of data*

- *There is very little evidence of school leaders' practical use of school-wide student outcome data. There is either no annual data collection plan for the school or the plan is being implemented in a minimalist fashion. The school makes little or no use of tests beyond those that the school is required to use.*
- *Tests (e.g. commercially available reading tests) may be used by some teachers, but generally are not used as part of a whole-school assessment strategy.*
- *An ad hoc approach exists to building staff skills in the analysis, interpretation and use of classroom data.*
- *The school is not able to demonstrate how data have been used in meetings, nor able to discuss student achievement levels and strategies for improvement with parents.*

### **Comments and findings**

- Approaches to collecting, storing and analysing data are emerging. There is episodic use of data throughout the school.
- A tracking tool for the primary school has recently been developed to collate individual student diagnostic and system test data. Staff have received this positively.
- The newly established leadership team has not been able to retrieve historical school-based data records.
- The school's NAPLAN results are predominantly within the confidence range of Directorate-set targets, although mean scores remain well below ACT means. The percentage of students achieving expected or better than expected growth in PIPS data has been variable across the life of the plan. NAPLAN data has been discussed at staff meetings although there is little evidence of in-depth discussions to inform the school's improvement agenda or classroom practices.
- Data walls were established in the school but discontinued.
- Some professional learning has been provided to support teachers in understanding NAPLAN and PAT data sets and in some aspects of literacy development.
- Some teachers, particularly in primary classrooms, make use of diagnostic test instruments and specialist advisers to inform teaching. Teachers do not use system data sets in their planning.

### *DOMAIN 3: A culture that promotes learning*

- *Classrooms are generally orderly, although some are more so than others.*
- *In a number of classrooms, students are clearly not engaged in productive learning activities.*
- *The school may have policies and agreed procedures relating to student behaviour but these appear to have had little impact in practice. Much of the time of school leaders and teachers is taken up dealing with inappropriate behaviour. Interactions between staff and students are not always productive and respectful.*
- *Some teachers appear to work in isolation from colleagues. Staff morale is low and staff turnover is high.*
- *Most parents take an obvious interest in their children's learning. Engagement is primarily through regularly scheduled parent-teacher interviews.*

### **Comments and findings**

- The values of the school are explicitly stated and celebrated at school events; however, students, particularly those in the secondary sector, are often disrespectful to staff.
- Staff are actively building caring relationships with students and families.
- Observational and systemic data suggest that student disengagement and inappropriate behaviour occupies significant teacher and school leader time. Lessons are affected by negative student behaviours and the large size and the complex needs of the cohort.
- Namadgi School is in the early phases of implementing the Positive Behaviour for Learning program.
- There are documented processes for responding to inappropriate behaviours and some students have Individual Behaviour Plans.
- The school has adopted a range of initiatives designed to provide a balance between academic and non-academic needs. These include inquiry studies, cohort and whole-school assemblies, musters, and a pastoral care space.
- Programs such as Mind Matters, Bounce Back and Sensibility all aim to support student emotional wellbeing.
- An active student leadership group exists in the secondary sector.
- There is evidence of team-based collaboration among staff, but this is limited to specific teams. Across the school there is evidence of teachers working in isolation.
- The school timetable (particularly in the secondary sector) contains significant amounts of time away from core learning. When this is coupled with lateness to class and delays in commencing learning, there is not a strong signalling that the school's focus is on learning.
- Attendance rates are below ACT benchmarks, close to for some year levels in the primary school, but lower in the secondary years.
- Many teachers reported that the new leadership team is setting clear directions and this is improving staff morale.

#### *DOMAIN 4: Targeted use of school resources*

- *There are very few school-wide programs or policies designed to address the learning needs of particular student groups (e.g. gifted students, students for whom English is a second language). School leaders encourage teachers to address individual learning needs in classrooms, but there are very few agreed school-wide strategies for doing this.*
- *The improvement of student outcomes does not appear to be the driving consideration in the allocation of school resources (e.g. the use of discretionary school funds).*
- *There is very little, if any, systematic testing of students to identify individual learning needs.*
- *School learning spaces tend to be used traditionally, with limited flexibility to support different kinds of learners and learning.*

#### **Comments and findings**

- There is some evidence of direct linking of student learner need with discretionary resourcing, although this is ad hoc across the school. The clearest line of sight between student identified need and responsive resourcing is in the various Learning Support Units (LSUs) where student needs are being well addressed.
- Deployment of learning support assistants and other support staff is ad hoc and is not always solely based on identified expertise or skills sets most aligned to student needs.
- There is no evidence of systematic analysis of student performance data from instruments such as NAPLAN, nor a school-wide set of policies in support of identified learner groups within the school.
- Some work has occurred to address global student needs, for example, the establishment of a literacy and numeracy teaching line in secondary, and the adoption of MultiLit (for literacy and numeracy recovery) in primary.
- The school's budget generally reflects systemic and local priorities and a strategic finance plan has recently been developed.
- The school's Parents and Citizens Association is a highly visible and active resource-generating body on behalf of school priorities, however, it is currently awaiting a clear signalling of future priority areas by the school.
- The physical environment is a resource at this school with specialist learning areas throughout. Some use is being made of facilities to enhance the learning of students, for example, the Urambi Environmental Centre (primary science) and Victorian Performing Arts Challenge (performing arts). Breakout areas in villas are occasionally used.
- There is variability in the information teachers receive or can access year to year about the students in their classes. The school is working towards processes to ensure that records of student achievement and progress are held centrally and shared across year levels and transition points.
- Students with an English as Additional Language or Dialect background are provided with additional support. Some students report that they struggle with assignment work that is not accessible.

### *DOMAIN 5: An expert teaching team*

- *The development of a professional school-wide team does not appear to be a driving consideration of the principal or other school leaders (e.g. no reference is made to the National Professional Standards for Teachers, there are no mentoring arrangements in place, teachers work largely in isolation from one another 'behind closed doors').*
- *There is little sense of a whole-school coordinated approach to professional learning and a low priority is given to enhancing staff performance.*
- *Teachers are open to constructive feedback.*
- *The school is implementing a formal process for conducting professional discussions with staff.*

### **Comments and findings**

- Anecdotal and qualitative evidence suggests that the school is attempting to coordinate professional learning/sharing and the coaching or mentoring of teaching staff, although this is in its infancy. Staff members have experienced a number of previous 'start-and-stop' attempts in this area. For example, collaborative learning teams were established to support teachers in sharing and learning from each other's practices although these are no longer operating.
- A coherent, documented learning plan for staff has not yet been developed.
- Artefacts, such as the staff handbook, suggest a focus on operational rather than strategic or developmental actions in support of professional growth.
- There is an absence of reference to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers except in the teacher professional pathway discussions and documents, and staff have been largely accountable to themselves.
- System surveys and teacher feedback during review suggests that teaching staff receive little constructive feedback on their practice. Attempts to formalise lesson observations or to de-privatise practice have not been successful to date.
- The school has not been able to consistently recruit or retain staff in order to gain a balanced staffing profile in terms of experience and expertise. The school teaching staff profile is largely made up of new educators or educators in their first five years of the profession. Induction processes are uncoordinated and rely upon pairing up with colleagues in the proximal teaching area – often in their early career themselves. Informal mentoring of colleagues is visible in the school.
- In the secondary school, the scheduling of curriculum areas in the timetable (and in some instances the staffroom location of teachers) present challenges to professional sharing and collaboration.

### *DOMAIN 6: Systematic curriculum delivery*

- *The school may have a documented plan for curriculum delivery but there is little evidence that the whole-school plan drives the lesson plans of individual teachers.*
- *The enacted school curriculum is not seen as a central concern of all teachers.*
- *Discussions about curriculum delivery tend to be sporadic and reactive with a year level focus rather than being driven by a leadership team with a whole-school approach.*

### **Comments and findings**

- Some long-term planning documents (scope and sequences) aligned to the Australian Curriculum have been developed/revised recently.
- A whole of school approach to curriculum planning and documentation is not yet evident, impacting on continuity and progression of learning across the years. School leaders are currently working to develop detailed and explicit planning documents using a common approach and intend to capture the planning through centralised storage.
- In the absence of whole of school planning documentation, a number of teachers have taken the initiative, and worked in teams or individually, to develop planning documents aligned to the Australian Curriculum for their year level/subject.
- Some planning documentation is aligned to the former ACT Curriculum.
- The inclusion of additional school-based programs, for example, inquiry electives, literacy and numeracy classes, weekly assemblies and daily musters, places pressure on the school's ability to balance requirements to address all learning areas.
- Reporting is aligned to the Australian Curriculum achievement standards.
- A range of co-curricular opportunities supports learning.

## *DOMAIN 7: Differentiated teaching and learning*

- *School leaders are committed to success for all, but do not drive a strong classroom agenda to assess and identify individual learning needs or to differentiate teaching according to students' needs.*
- *Some use is made of differentiated teaching (e.g. differentiated reading groups in the early primary years), but in most classes teachers teach the same curriculum to all students with similar levels of individual support.*
- *Little classroom use is made of assessment instruments to establish starting points for teaching. Assessments tend to be used only to establish summatively how much of the taught content students have learnt.*
- *Reports to parents tend to be summative reports of how students have performed, with little guidance on what parents might do to assist in their children's learning.*

### **Comments and findings**

- In P to 5, some teachers use standardised and individually developed assessment tools to establish where individual students are at, identify and respond to gaps and personalise the learning. There is variability in the types and frequency of diagnostic assessment tools used across classes and year levels. Predominantly assessments are summative tasks.
- Individual Learning Plans and Personalised Learning Plans have been developed for identified students including some with gifts and talents. The visibility of these plans in the secondary sector is less clear.
- Some differentiated literacy and numeracy groups are evident in the early primary years to support the varying needs of learners. Students in years 6 to 10 are organised in literacy and numeracy focus groups where they are working to develop improved literacy and numeracy skills to support their learning across all subjects. No data have been collected yet as evidence that these intervention strategies are making a difference. Students interviewed expressed a range of views on how well these classes support their needs.
- Teachers attempt to understand the learning needs of students. However, their ability to do so is impacted upon by the variability of information accessible to them about students' prior progress and needs.
- Some teachers reported that providing high-quality differentiated learning experiences for their students was difficult because of the large number of students in their classes with complex learning needs.
- Reports to parents provide information about where students are at in their learning but do not articulate what parents can do to support their child's further learning.

## *DOMAIN 8: Effective pedagogical practices*

- *School leaders do not appear to have strong views on the characteristics of highly effective teaching. There is little evidence that they are driving an agenda to change or enhance teaching practices across the school.*
- *The principal and other school leaders spend very little time on issues related to teaching. Questions of pedagogy appear to be viewed solely as the responsibility of teachers. There is little obvious school-wide discussion or consideration of highly effective teaching methods.*
- *There may be low expectations on the part of teachers that all students in the room will master the content of lessons. Classroom activities frequently have the appearance of 'busy work'.*
- *There is some clarity about what students are expected to learn, but a lack of balance in teaching methods (e.g. over-reliance on whole-group teaching or very little explicit teaching).*

## **Comments and findings**

- The leadership team has been restructured to support a more coordinated approach to building teacher capacity in highly effective pedagogical practices through coaching and mentoring. Informal modelling and mentoring through co-teaching and discussion is evident in teaching teams.
- A clear definition of the expected pedagogical approaches at Namadgi School is yet to be developed, although plans are being drafted to consult with teachers to establish agreed practices.
- Attempts at different approaches using a number of commercial and Directorate-recommended programs to the teaching of literacy is evident. Recently professional learning has taken place for primary teachers in effective reading strategies.
- Students reported that there is some clarity about what they are expected to learn and be able to do thorough course outlines and the use of learning intentions by some of their teachers. Feedback processes, as described by interviewed students, predominantly involved the use of rubrics for assessment tasks.
- Teachers are encouraged to use inquiry-based learning for the inquiry line electives although a deep understanding of this pedagogical approach was not always evident.
- The review team noted that in some classes, learner activity was performing the role of classroom management.

### *DOMAIN 9: School-community partnerships*

- *There is no evidence of planned, deliberate partnerships with other institutions or organisations. Contacts with families, other education and training institutions, local businesses and community organisations, when they occur, are limited to isolated events. Although references may be made to ‘partnerships’, these partnerships are not based on collaboratively planned programs of activities with clear goals, roles and responsibilities.*

### **Comments and findings**

- The involvement of external agencies is largely driven by the initiative or network of individual staff members.
- The Urambi Environmental Centre delivers the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program accessed by years 1–4. This is well integrated into the primary curriculum with highly engaging activities. The program has not been formally evaluated and this resource is minimally connected to community.
- The secondary sector offers Australian Business Week as part of the humanities curriculum, involving point-in-time connections with local businesses.
- The school hosts visits from guest speakers and guest presenters (for example, dance troupes, and members from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community) as part of curriculum enhancement and excursions operate to broaden student experiences.
- Recently, the school has embarked on the Visible Learning Plus initiative in partnership with Corwin Australia.
- The school actively encourages involvement of families. School events are well patronised and valued.

## National Safe Schools Framework: School Audit Tool

The panel noted that the school has not recently used the National Safe Schools Framework: School Audit Tool. The current leadership team was unable to find historical data in the school about the use of this audit tool.

## Section E: Affirmations, commendations and recommendations

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### **Affirmations**

The External Review Panel offers the following affirmations for Namadgi School.

- Staff have worked to maintain the day-to-day operations in the midst of considerable changes in leadership teams.
- The current leadership team has initiated a number of processes designed to create cohesive and whole of school practices. Examples include tracking tools in primary; long-term curriculum planning documentation, a whole of school approach to managing behaviour and the beginnings of a coordinated professional learning approach.
- Staff members provide collegial support to one another to ensure the wellbeing of those around them.
- Facilities are well maintained, attractive and conducive to creative learning experiences. Students and staff speak favourably of their school environment. Specialist facilities, for example, the Urambi Environmental Centre, offer rich learning opportunities linked to a number of Key Learning Areas, which students can access beyond their regular classroom.
- The school is implementing the Positive Behaviour for Learning program. This signals a move towards a coordinated and sustainable model for promoting appropriate behaviours in the school. The school community endorses this move.
- Student achievement is celebrated and is aligned to the values of the school.
- Students embrace difference and as a result there is an inclusive culture.

## Commendations

Namadgi School is commended for the following.

- Staff genuinely care for and support student wellbeing. Over the short life of this school, a number of responsive initiatives have been built and there are stories of student enrichment as a result of their participation in these. The pastoral care program, links to agencies to support wellbeing, co-curricular programs, the Urambi Environmental Centre, school events and wellbeing activities are supporting a climate where students feel that their needs are being met. Staff speak of a pleasing shift from a focus on harm reduction in student behaviour (deficit) to student engagement (affirmative).
- The school has forged strong links and pathways allowing connections with families and community. The school places a premium on events that bring families to the school and this is highly valued by parents. Teachers actively seek to regularly connect with families through emails, corridor conversations, and more formal parent/teacher meetings. Major school events, for example, Namadgical, Namadgi's Got Talent and the school fete, draw the community together and provide a shared sense of identity. This has been, and will continue to be, critical in a relatively new school.
- High levels of student engagement and growth against individual learning goals reflect the commitment to supporting the needs of students with disabilities and learning difficulties in the Learning Support Units.
- The Parents and Citizens Association actively works to connect its wider school community. It does so through a strategic fundraising plan, which generates significant additional funds to support learning. Activities sponsored by the association add richness to the life of the school.
- The school's deliberate efforts to build a leadership profile among its students is to be commended. The student leadership program is highly valued by students and provides opportunities for culture building and student identification with their school.

## Recommendations

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

- Determine which range of systematic data sets will best inform the school about student outcomes in academic performance, attendance, behaviour and student wellbeing. Document this in a P–10 plan to:
  - clearly articulate when data sets will be collected and who will be responsible for collecting, analysing, discussing and publishing them
  - give consideration to overall school performance as well as the performance of identified priority groups, cohorts, classes and individuals
  - ensure that these data sets are systematically analysed and regularly monitored with teachers in focused, whole of school and team meetings to consider the implications for classroom practices
  - build the capacity of teachers and leaders to use data to differentiate effectively.
  
- Use the analysis of these data sets to inform the development of a narrow and sharp improvement agenda, with associated meaningful targets for this strategic planning cycle. Ensure that:
  - this improvement agenda is developed in collaboration with all stakeholders
  - the plan is focused on core learning priorities, articulated in terms of key improvement actions, timelines and responsibilities that lead to measurable improvement
  - school performance is widely communicated to parents, families, staff and students, including progress towards targets
  - multiple accountability layers linked to the improvement plan are established.
  
- Develop a shared coherent, sequenced plan for curriculum delivery within which evidence-based teaching practices are embedded and to which assessment and reporting procedures are closely aligned. Document this in a plan to:
  - develop a whole of school approach to curriculum planning (consider common school templates that enable explicit and detailed planning)
  - scope and sequence all Key Learning Areas from preschool to year 10
  - map all current planning documents to identify gaps in content and skills
  - ensure leaders support teaching teams in developing quality short-term planning documents, such as unit plans
  - review the curriculum program (including time allocated to school-based programs) to balance the requirements of addressing all Key Learning Areas
  - introduce accountability processes to ensure quality planning
  - ensure that all short- and long-term plans are stored centrally
  - provide opportunities for professional learning about the use of work samples from the Australian Curriculum in making informed judgements and how to embed the general capabilities.

- Build a school culture that is reflective of high expectations for learning and behavior through:
  - prioritising and building a sense of urgency around learning by maximising available time and refining programs and processes in the school so that every minute counts
  - the implementation of a transparent school-wide approach to managing behaviour
  - supporting teachers in catering for the complex needs of students
  - improving student engagement through challenging, authentic, purposeful learning.
  
- Develop a school-wide process for identifying specific student learning needs. Ensure that:
  - systematic testing is used to identify learning gaps and special needs
  - a whole of school intervention model is identified and embedded
  - there are school-wide programs and approaches for students requiring additional or specialist support particularly for English as an Additional Language or Dialect, gifted and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
  - records of individual student progress, needs and interventions are stored electronically and shared across year levels and transition points
  - resources are deployed in a way that follows individual student needs.
  
- Develop a whole of school recruitment and professional learning plan and associated budget that aligns with improvement plan priorities and agreed pedagogies. Build the capacity of teachers through:
  - the introduction of formalised observation, feedback, modelling and coaching linked to the agreed pedagogical practices
  - a formalised induction and mentoring program for early educators and teachers new to the school
  - principals and leaders working in classrooms with teachers
  - anchoring teacher professional growth and development in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.
  
- Invest in strategic partnerships in order to enhance student learning outcomes. Ensure that:
  - these partnerships have a strong link to school improvement priorities
  - the school works with educational researchers/experts to support the improvement agenda
  - the effectiveness of these partnerships is evaluated regularly.

## Section F: Record of school review process

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The following people were members of the External Review Panel for Namadgi School conducted on 7, 8, 11 and 12 September 2017.

**Name:** Christina Rogers External Review Panel – Chair

**Name:** Julie Murkins External Review Panel – Principal Member  
Lake Tuggeranong College

I, Christina Rogers, 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:** 03/11/2017

I, Gareth Richards, as Principal of Namadgi School accept this Review Report on behalf of the school community.

**Signature:** 

**Date:** 03/11/2017