



ACT
Government
Education

Charles Weston School

Report of Review, 2019

Date of School Review: 27, 28 and 29 August 2019
Principal of Review School: Nicole Nicholson

National School Improvement Tool Review Report prepared by:

- Lead Reviewer: Ron Bamford, *ACER Senior School Improvement Consultant*
- ACT Review Team members: 1. Chris Jones, *Principal of Miles Franklin Primary School*
2. Kerri Clark, *Director of Curriculum*

Report Date: 20 September 2019

Report of Review, 2019 prepared by:

ACT Government Education Directorate
Education Services Division, School Improvement Branch

Report Date: 26 September 2019

Overview of the School Review process

Approximately a fifth of all ACT public schools are reviewed each year. Reviews provide quality, independent, feedback tailored to individual school contexts. Findings from Review are considered alongside system and school level student achievement, perception and demographic data as the evidence base for development of the school's next 5-year School Improvement Plan.

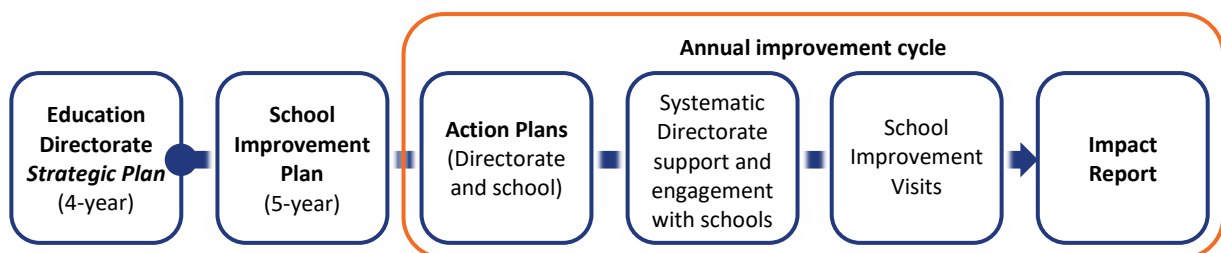
Reviews are undertaken by a team of experienced educators trained in the use of the *National School Improvement Tool (NSIT)* and are led by a Lead Reviewer from the Australian Council of Educational Research. Review Team size depends upon a range of factors, including the size and context of a school.

Through the lens of the NSIT, an internationally recognised framework for reviewing teaching and learning practices, reviewers gain an accurate picture of current school practices. During Review evidence provided by schools is considered alongside evidence gathered through consultation with staff, students, parents and community members.

Following Review, the school receives a planning report, which is used as an internal working document, outlining key findings and recommended strategies for continued school improvement. The Education Directorate uses this planning report as a basis for the final *Report of Review* provided to school communities.

The *Report of Review* includes detailed Review Team findings for each of the nine Domains of the National School Improvement Tool, and Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations for continued school improvement.

Where does School Review sit within the broader school improvement cycle?



ACT public schools utilise systematic integration of evidence and data collection, access and analysis to inform sharp and narrow 5-year School Improvement Plans. Annually, all schools utilise a suite of tools to expand, monitor and report on these priorities. School Improvement Visits (SIVs – which include School Review) provide differentiated support and feedback to schools through varying levels of in-school immersion. SIVs progress in relation to a school's needs and improvement cycle, with School Review typically occurring at the end of this cycle.

What are Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations?

Commendations

The commendations highlight positive actions the school has taken over its last improvement cycle. Typically these actions are either complete, or embedded in school practice.

Affirmations

The affirmations verify specific actions being undertaken by the school that are impacting positively on school improvement. These actions are typically either not yet complete and/or not yet embedded.

Recommendations

The recommendations provide the school with evidence-based advice regarding high-value areas for future school improvement efforts. Drawn from the NSIT, recommendations are key to the school developing a sharp and narrow improvement plan.

NSIT Domain 1: An explicit improvement agenda

Domain descriptor

The school leadership team and/or governing body have established and are driving a strong improvement agenda for the school, grounded in evidence from research and practice and expressed in terms of improvements in measurable student outcomes. Explicit and clear school-wide targets for improvement have been set and communicated to parents and families, teachers and students, with accompanying timelines.

Findings

- Across the school it was evident that there was a high degree of enthusiasm to adopt the planned strategies to improve student outcomes.
- The *Charles Weston School 2017-2019 Strategic Plan* describes two strategic priorities: Develop and sustain a collaborative teaching and learning culture with high expectations of success for all students, and create and foster a positive and welcoming school culture. A significant student outcome listed in the first priority is increased growth in students' performance in literacy and numeracy over time. Targets include NAPLAN performance in reading and numeracy, and PIPS reading growth.
- Being a new school, it was not possible to develop a strategic plan through an analysis of data trends. The school leadership team, however, has been cognisant of available data in action planning over the three years.
- The strategic plan, annual action plans (AAPs), Board reports and AAP reports are available on the school website. Newsletters use the two priorities as organisers of information. A school Board member confirmed that the board is a valued part of school decision making. Parents were unsure about the performance of the school against the stated targets.
- The school has developed School Improvement Teams (SITs) for mathematics, literacy, inquiry, community engagement and Positive Behaviours for Learning (PBL). While each team should include one teacher from each collaborative planning team, this is not always practical, however the membership profile's aim is to provide a communication conduit from SIT groups back to each team. Each SIT uses a spiral of inquiry process to develop strategies using research and system-endorsed strategies to inform and/or respond to key improvement strategies in AAPs. Staff displayed strong ownership of strategies developed in their SIT. SIT updates, and as appropriate, professional learning, are shared with staff in staff meetings.
- Annually, the school leadership team facilitates staff discussion on school performance of planned interventions using available data sets.

NSIT Domain 2: Analysis and discussion of data

Domain descriptor

A high priority is given to the school-wide analysis and discussion of systematically collected data on student outcomes, including academic, attendance and behavioural outcomes, and student wellbeing. Data analyses consider overall school performance as well as the performances of students from identified priority groups; evidence of improvement/regression over time; performances in comparison with similar schools; and, in the case of data from standardised tests, measures of growth across the years of school.

Findings

- The *2019 Assessment Schedule and Assessment Tools* document outlines many of the assessment and reporting processes within the school. For each assessment item, a detailed purpose statement clarifies roles in using the data. Assessment tools focused on academic data, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Wellbeing data are stored on the school administration system or are available from surveys such as KidsMatter and Positive Behaviours for Learning (PBL).
- The school has a created Data Walls of student achievement in PM Benchmark and in a school developed writing assessment rubric, based on ACARA Literacy Learning Progressions. A data tracker (spreadsheet) to monitor growth in PM Benchmark testing is in use, with work continuing on developing a writing tracker.
- A mathematics data tracker has been established this year. PAT-M is undertaken once per year to triangulate with other mathematics assessments.
- Collaborative planning teams use a 'Disciplined Dialogue' approach to analyse diagnostic and quality classroom assessments to inform planning. Teacher skill in using data varied across the school.
- Cognitive abilities testing is used to screen for gifted students and those who may be underperforming. Information is used in Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for gifted students and collaborative planning teams.
- School improvement teams use a process which is also used by the PBL team to analyse the implementation of agreed strategies. This includes the use of classroom observations.
- English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) student progress is monitored at both the whole-school level and at the year level to prompt various levels of interventions.
- Staff are generally aware of the performance of the school through a discussion of whole school data. As the school is in its foundation years, analysis of trends over time is in a formative stage.
- Parents were generally unaware of the whole-school performance despite it being made available through various channels.

NSIT Domain 3: A culture that promotes learning

Domain descriptor

The school is driven by a deep belief that every student is capable of successful learning. A high priority is given to building and maintaining positive and caring relationships between staff, students and parents. There is a strong collegial culture of mutual trust and support among teachers and school leaders and parents are treated as partners in the promotion of student learning and wellbeing. The school works to maintain a learning environment that is safe, respectful, tolerant, inclusive and that promotes intellectual rigour.

Findings

- The school values of Growth mindset, Respect, Organisation, Wellbeing (GROW) are embedded across the school. Respectful and caring relationships are exemplified by parents who said they feel 'welcomed' into the school and 'the best thing about the school was its staff'. Students said, 'students are friendly, and teachers are always there for them'.
- As a new school, in a new community, the school is a community hub. Parents said that days such as 'Neighbours' Day' has developed a strong sense of community. The community coordinator further strengthens these connections with parents and the broader community.
- The school embraces its multicultural community. The entry of the school includes a community welcome wall and heritage map. An Aboriginal Elder is supervising a planned Indigenous garden. An Aboriginal educator has been appointed to assist students and their families. The community coordinator runs EAL/D parent classes.
- Parents are regarded as partners in learning and this is shown by the whole-school adoption of the Seesaw online application as a learning communication tool.
- The school has developed staff communication protocols to promote positive and productive communication within the school community. The school has established strong communication by using systems such as Google Drive and Google Classrooms.
- It was evident that classrooms were calm with little disruption. Students were engaged in purposeful learning. Teachers reported that student behaviour took some of their time, but this has reduced over the year. Students felt they could learn without disruption.
- There are high expectations for learning across the school. However, some students felt that they could be more challenged in some areas of the curriculum. Teachers felt that embedding inquiry learning across the curriculum will cater for the needs of all students.
- The school has been an early adopter of the PBL framework with implementation nearing completion. The language of staff and students reflected a common understanding. An e-praise website is used to actively promote the positive behavioural expectations of the school in relation to the GROW values.
- The student parliament provides students with the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and functioning of the school.
- There is a strong staff well-being focus in the school with workload being constantly assessed to avoid burnout.

NSIT Domain 4: Targeted use of school resources

Domain descriptor

The school applies its resources (staff time, expertise, funds, facilities, materials) in a targeted manner to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of all students. It has school-wide policies, practices and programs in place to assist in identifying and addressing student needs. Flexible structures and processes enable the school to respond appropriately to the needs of individual learners.

Findings

- The school leadership team collaboratively analyses available data to prioritise school resourcing. An example of this is a recent collaborative decision to extend the leadership team to provide further support for teachers.
- A Student Achievement Team (SAT) consists of the school psychologist, disability education contact officer and the community coordinator. Classroom teachers and Response to Intervention (RTI) teachers attend when necessary. The SAT meets once a fortnight to analyse student data trends and discuss individual student needs and strategies. Classroom teachers are required to use an agreed process to case conference students with peers and the school psychologist before making a referral to the SAT. Students who have complex needs, inclusion support program students and gifted and talented students have independent learning plans negotiated with parents that are monitored on a regular basis. Other students with identified learning needs requiring interventions outside usual classroom practice have Targeted Intervention Plans.
- Students identified with reading difficulties (including many EAL/D students) receive a focused intervention program and in-class support. RTI teachers provide support to classroom teachers as required.
- A youth worker and an Aboriginal educator have been resourced to support students and their families. A community coordinator is resourced in part to liaise with the culturally and linguistically diverse school community and to support parents of students who have special needs.
- An administration officer supports community use of school facilities.
- Cognitive abilities testing is undertaken by all students to indicate special needs, including giftedness. The school's expert in gifted and talented education is the point of contact for teachers and parents needing assistance in gifted education. There are many provisions available for gifted students across the school, such as the Australian Mathematics Trust (AMT), Australian Mathematics Competition, the Australian Problem Solving Mathematical Olympiads (APSMO), International Competitions and Assessments for Schools (ICAS) assessments, the robotics club, Passions and Pursuits, and the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Competition. The school groups gifted students in year levels where practical to maximise peer support.
- Quality classroom furniture supports the high-quality class spaces and surrounds. The school has been built on quality access to technology.

NSIT Domain 5: An expert teaching team

Domain descriptor

The school has found ways to build a school-wide, professional team of highly able teachers, including teachers who take an active leadership role beyond the classroom. Strong procedures are in place to encourage a school-wide, shared responsibility for student learning and success, and to encourage the development of a culture of continuous professional improvement that includes classroom-based learning, mentoring and coaching arrangements.

Findings

- The 'Important Book' outlines school beliefs and practices including team norms and expectations. The book is a valuable resource in the attracting and then inducting appropriate staff.
- The school uses the ACT's annual professional discussion process using the Australian Institute for Teaching and Learning (AITSL) self-assessment tool. Staff are required to develop at least four goals, including one personal and three school goals. Staff may choose to have a mentor. Teachers use team teaching across the school and this enables strong discussion on professional practice. This year, the principal is observing all teachers with a focus on each teacher's goals. Feedback from staff about these observations is very positive.
- New staff have a buddy teacher to provide insight about school operations and culture. There is an extensive staff handbook. New staff have said that they felt the induction process was very thorough.
- Staff are regularly surveyed or participate in targeted 'learning walks' to gauge understanding and use of agreed practices emanating from school improvement teams. This information informs the professional learning agenda run by teachers where school leaders are often participants.
- Over the life of the plan, many teaching and non-teaching staff have continued with formal study to improve practice. This voluntary work is supported and celebrated by the school.
- The design of the school facilitates team teaching. Staff in each collaborative planning team plan together, leveraging off individual team member expertise. It was evident that all teachers in the team had personal ownership of the students in that cohort and reflected on their practice to best meet student needs.
- Staff willingly participate in roles outside the classroom at varying levels of complexity. Opportunities for leadership are numerous. Staff have commended the distributive leadership model adopted by the school.
- The review team evidenced strategic employment and deployment of staff to meet the needs of the school. Adjustments to the staffing model are made as the school grows.

NSIT Domain 6: Systematic curriculum delivery

Domain descriptor

The school has a coherent, sequenced plan for curriculum delivery that ensures consistent teaching and learning expectations and a clear reference for monitoring learning across the year levels. The plan, within which evidence-based teaching practices are embedded, and to which assessment and reporting procedures are aligned, has been developed with reference to the Australian Curriculum or other approved curriculum and refined collaboratively to provide a shared vision for curriculum practice. This plan is shared with parents and families.

Findings

- At Charles Weston School, an inquiry approach surrounds all elements of learning. Through integrated units of inquiry, students study the key learning areas of science, humanities and social sciences, technology, and health and physical education. They demonstrate their learning and understandings through the use of 'rich' assessment tasks.
- The school has developed programs of inquiry across each year level. The SIT inquiry team has led this development in consultation with all staff.
- The school has a documented curriculum plan, including year, term and unit plans, digitally stored on the online platform, Rubicon Atlas.
- In collaborative planning meetings, teaching teams plan their units of inquiry. This includes planned teaching and learning, mapping coverage of the curriculum, and monitoring assessment. English and mathematics teaching and learning is linked to inquiry where there is a natural fit and documented independently in Atlas when it is appropriate to store all learning in one central portal.
- Teachers plan using a backwards by design approach, starting with the Achievement Standards to determine what needs to be assessed and then consider the content that will allow students to achieve the standard. Cross-Curriculum Priorities are considered when planning units of inquiry; however, the General Capabilities are less visible.
- Charles Weston School has become a candidate school for the *International Baccalaureate Primary Years' Program* (IB PYP) and is working to align its current inquiry approach to the IB program. The school leadership team promotes the IB PYP as a rigorous and robust curriculum delivery process to further improved student outcomes.
- The school's social and emotional learning is resourced through *Friendly Schools Plus*. Focus lessons are identified by the PBL school improvement team, after an analysis of data from the school's administration system.
- The school uses the 'Be You' framework to promote mental health and wellbeing.
- The Victorian 'ABLES' curriculum is accessed to support students who are at pre-foundation stages of learning. This is documented in individualised learning plans for the identified students.

NSIT Domain 7: Differentiated teaching and learning

Domain descriptor

The school places a high priority on ensuring that, in their day-to-day teaching, classroom teachers identify and address the learning needs of individual students, including high-achieving students. Teachers are encouraged and supported to monitor closely the progress of individuals, identify learning difficulties and tailor classroom activities to levels of readiness and need.

Findings

- The school values and practices inclusion with the belief that all students can learn successfully.
- The school leadership team and experts within the school assist teachers to develop their teaching to cater for the diverse needs of students in their classes. Teachers plan enabling, core and extending learning opportunities to ensure equitable access for all students.
- Teachers use a range of data in their collaborative planning teams to inform teaching and learning. Data Walls and trackers have been established for teachers to discuss and plan adjustments in teaching and learning for the broad range of abilities of students.
- Teachers identified that students are dynamically grouped according to need. There are several examples of subject acceleration and year-level acceleration to cater for the specific needs of gifted students.
- The process for identifying gifted students, including underperforming high achievers, includes an analysis of data, cognitive ability testing, and student, family, and teacher voice. The Gifted and Talented Liaison Officer in the school maintains comprehensive data sets and works with teaching teams in collaborative planning.
- Interventions are tailored to specific student needs. ILPs and Targeted Intervention Plans (TIPs) are in place for identified students. The SAT and classroom teachers consult with parents to make reasonable adjustments to a student's learning through planning and review meetings.
- The Charles Weston School Community *Dynamic English as Additional Language/Dialect Support Model* articulates the levels of support provided to students and classroom teachers in differentiating for the specific language needs of students.
- Learning support assistants work with individual students according to their resource allocation. Additional support is provided as required by the school.
- The school's RTI teacher provides specialist reading programs for students.
- Students set individual goals. These include goals identified by students in consultation with their parent(s) and teacher(s) each semester, and they are regularly reviewed and adjusted as required. Student progress, goal adjustments and updates are reported to parents through the Seesaw online application.

NSIT Domain 8: Effective pedagogical practices

Domain descriptor

The school principal and other school leaders recognise that highly effective teaching is the key to improving student learning throughout the school. They take a strong leadership role, encouraging the use of research-based teaching practices in all classrooms to ensure that every student is engaged, challenged and learning successfully. All teachers understand and use effective teaching methods – including explicit instruction – to maximise student learning.

Findings

- In recognising the importance of a shared understanding of high-quality pedagogy, the school leadership team facilitates a variety of professional learning opportunities to support teachers in developing effective pedagogical practices in the classroom. This includes targeted professional learning, both in-house and from external experts, in line with the school's strategic agenda.
- Classroom practice identifies opportunities to build consistency in pedagogical practices through workshops with staff.
- The school has developed a writing Data Wall based on the *ACARA National Literacy Learning Progression* and *First Steps* pedagogical resources to support teacher moderation and on-balance assessment of student work.
- The school has a strong focus on writing and mathematics as identified in its strategic plan. There is evidence of pedagogical practices highlighted in professional learning being implemented within the classroom. Many of these practices are classroom-based rather than whole-of-school agreed, consistently used, and embedded practices.
- Teachers have attended professional learning in the *10 Essential Literacy Practices* by Christine Topfer and are developing these practices in their classrooms. An observation checklist has been designed to audit classroom literacy practices to inform future work by the literacy school improvement team.
- The school has engaged in professional learning with Anita Chin, Peter Sullivan, and the 'reSolve-Mathematics by Inquiry project' to develop its inquiry approach. The mathematics school improvement team has completed classroom observations to determine current practices and in-class trial strategies to be developed for whole-of-school consistency of practice.
- Teachers use the CAFÉ¹ reading program to develop comprehension, accuracy, fluency and expand vocabulary through a gradual release of responsibility model. The *Daily 5* strategies of the program - Read to Self, Read to Someone, Listen to Reading, Work on Writing and Word Work – are used consistently across the school to support student learning.
- Students have opportunity to conference with the teacher to support their individual goals. There is some emerging work around the use of the National Literacy Progressions to support students in knowing where they are in their learning and what the next step

¹ See: <https://www.thedailycafe.com/cafe>

might be.

- Students talked about the feedback that teachers provided to them and how this understanding helped them to improve.

NSIT Domain 9: School-community partnerships

Domain descriptor

The school actively seeks ways to enhance student learning and wellbeing by partnering with parents and families, other education and training institutions, local businesses and community organisations. Parents and families are recognised as integral members of the school community and partners in their children's education. Partnerships are strategically established to address identified student needs and operate by providing access to experiences, support and intellectual and/or physical resources not available within the school. All partners are committed to the common purposes and goals of partnership activities. Procedures are in place to ensure effective communications and to monitor and evaluate the intended impacts of the school's partnerships.

Findings

- As a major focal point in a new community suburb, the school has prioritised the establishment of partnerships with families, businesses, and community organisations to build a strong sense of community.
- The school has developed a mutually beneficial partnership with the Suburban Land Development Agency through its community development program named 'Mingle' and its subcontracted partner Communities at Work. The partnership provides opportunities to build a connected community by bringing community members together into the school. Parents commented that the school is the only community space to come together.
- In partnership with Mingle, the school co-ordinated 'Neighbours' Day' to build community fabric and cultural connection by bringing together the diverse community groups and celebrate the range of cultures in the suburb. Parents reported making new connections with other community members. As a direct result of 'Neighbours' Day' the school has reported increased membership of its Parents and Citizens (P&C) association, and parent groups coming together in the school. There has also been an increase in the number of parents attending the Woden Community Services (WCS) playgroups and the English language conversation class held in the school.
- Through Mingle, the school engaged Menslink² to support six students who display significant challenging behaviours both at home and at school. Students attended Stromlo Cottage to paint shipping containers and build connections with high school students from Mt Stromlo for the purpose of transitions. Parents observed improvements at home. Some improvement in behaviour was also noted at school for some students. The success of the partnership is also celebrated through parents engaging in parenting programs.
- The school encourages and values parental and family involvement and the school has established processes to enhance parents as partners in their child's education. Processes include reporting, three-way interviews, and the comprehensive use of the Seesaw online application.
- Charles Weston School welcomes volunteers from the School Volunteer Program ACT

² a mentoring support program

(SVPACT) in supporting students in their learning on a weekly basis.

- While all partnerships are aimed at enhancing student achievement or wellbeing, the outcomes were generally not explicit enough to allow for monitoring of student progress over time to determine success.

Commendations

- There is a high degree of enthusiasm and personal commitment to continuously improving whole-school and personal practice to maximise student outcomes.
- The school has developed SITs to capture the expertise within the school and to provide many school leadership opportunities within this distributive leadership model.
- Collaborative planning teams are using cognitive abilities testing, diagnostic data sets and quality classroom assessments to determine where each child is in their learning and gauge student potential. The teams use individual staff talents to develop teaching and learning programs, using an inquiry approach, to meet the needs of each and every student in their learning area.
- The school values and practises inclusion with the belief that all students can learn successfully.
- Across the school community there is a strong ownership of the GROW values. The value, respect, is demonstrated by parents who said they feel 'welcomed' into the school and 'the best thing about the school was its staff'. Students said, 'students are friendly, and teachers are always there for them'.
- From this school's foundation, staff have developed strong administrative and communication platforms to support the work of the school.
- The 'Important Book' is a valuable resource in the attracting and then inducting appropriate staff and then reminding current staff of how this school is unique in the education of children.
- Staff professional learning including professional studies is encouraged and celebrated across the school. School leaders participate with teachers to ensure that everyone is on the same journey.
- As a community hub of a new and growing area the school has focused on developing many community partnerships. The partnership with Mingle for 'Neighbours' Day' is just one example of how the school has embraced its cultural diversity.
- The use of the Seesaw app. as a communication tool is one example of staff valuing parents as partners in the education process.

Affirmations

- The school has high expectations for learning and the focus on inquiry learning is a driving force in the pursuit of this goal.
- The school clearly articulates its assessment tools and processes with particular emphasis on clarifying why and how data are used throughout the school.
- The school leadership team collaboratively analyses data to ensure resourcing decisions, including staffing, are strategic in supporting students and families in a diverse school community. This includes the appointments of a youth worker, community coordinator, and an Aboriginal educator.

- The school has a documented curriculum plan stored on the online platform, Rubicon Atlas. Teachers use this platform to flexibly plan according to the needs of students.
- Under the expertise and guidance of the mathematics SIT, the school is strengthening its whole-school pedagogical practices in the delivery of mathematics by inquiry.
- The Australian Curriculum National Literacy Learning Progressions are emerging as a resource to support students in goal setting, identifying where they are in the learning, and what the next steps might be.

Recommendations

- Develop a Charles Weston School Improvement Plan 2020-2024 that is consistent with the school's vision for teaching and learning and provides a narrow and sharp agenda focused on student outcomes. It should incorporate explicit targets for student achievement that are effectively communicated to the school community. Progress towards targets should be monitored and strategies systematically evaluated for their effectiveness in achieving outcomes.
- Continue to develop a systematic plan for the collection, analysis and use of a full range of student achievement and wellbeing data.
- Develop a professional learning plan that provides a coordinated approach to staff development that includes mentoring and coaching.
- Continue to develop a coherent sequenced plan for curriculum delivery across the school to enable teachers to effectively manage the wide range of curriculum expectations and the transitioning to an International Baccalaureate School. This should include a strong focus on the General Capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.
- Continue to develop teacher practice to meet the needs of individual students.
- Continue to provide teachers with opportunities for deep learning of evidenced-based teaching pedagogical practices that are to be consistently applied across the school.
- Continue to develop or refine partnerships, particularly to support the strategic intent. Ensure there is a clear understanding of the purpose of each partnership, expressed in terms of improved outcomes for students, and that these outcomes are regularly evaluated.