EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT 2014

for

ARAWANG PRIMARY SCHOOL
Record of Validation Process

The following people were members of the external validation panel for Arawang Primary School conducted from 11 – 13 August 2014.

Name: Grace Dunlop  School: Education and Training Directorate
Name: John Alston-Campbell  School: Gungahlin College
Name: Craig Donaldson  School: Canberra Grammar School

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

Name: Grace Dunlop
Signature: [Signature]  Date: 25/9/2014

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

Name: Jeni Page
Signature: [Signature]  Date: 25/09/2014

As co-director of Quality Learning Australia, external validators for the conduct of validation process in ACT public schools, I concur that the panel acted within the guidelines set by the ACT Education and Training Directorate.

Name: Michael King
Signature: [Signature]  Date: 26 Sep '14
Section A: School context

Arawang Primary School was opened in 1989. It was formed through the amalgamation of Fisher Primary School and Waramanga Primary School. There are currently two school sites, one which includes the primary school and the Arawang preschool-Warmanga Campus in Nemarang Crescent and the other, located approximately five kilometres away, Arawang preschool-Weston Campus.

The school has seen a gradual increase in its Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) from 1104 in 2011 to 1124 in 2013. This represents a change in the socio-economic and educational background of the families in the school community and is consistent with the changing nature of Weston Creek.

Student enrolments have increased from 447 in 2011 to 491 in 2014. In response to parental concerns about large class sizes, an extra year 3 class has been added in 2014. The average class size is currently 23 students. The school has seen a significant increase in its population of families with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) over recent years from 51 in 2011 to 104 in 2014. The large multicultural mix of students at Arawang Primary School, from 31 different nationalities, creates a rich formal and informal learning environment in the school. The numbers of students on Individual Learning Plans has ranged from 16 in 2011 to a high of 23 in 2012. Students on Personal Learning Plans have ranged from 5 in 2012 to a high of 14 in 2013.

Prior to 2012, all classes in the school were composite across two year levels. In 2012, classes were consolidated into whole year groups and this has remained so since. The school reports this has enhanced their ability to implement the Australian Curriculum. Parents surveyed and interviewed mentioned significant increases in satisfaction as a result of this major structural change.

The current principal commenced in 2013. The Deputy and executive teachers have been consistent throughout the life of the plan. Twenty percent of the current teaching staff are new educators who have been recruitment since 2011.

The school is renowned for its music program and other specialist offerings. In 2014, Japanese was introduced to replace the Italian program, which coincided with the retirement of the Italian teacher. Staff, students and parents highly endorse the specialist offerings of the school and report choosing the school on this basis.

There has been a noticeable enhancement of Arawang Primary School’s public image over the life of the plan. From 2011 until the present, extensive work has been occurring in the school in the form of significant renovations. These have been vast in nature and include administration, teaching spaces and playgrounds. Further work on the presentation of the school has been managed through the redesign of the school report to parents on student progress, the development of new handbooks, an upgrade of the school website and newsletter, as well as a renewed focus on excellence in customer service through the front office.

Section B: School performance

Arawang Primary School achieved above average National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results in year 3 across most measures and in most areas when compared to all schools over the life of the plan. There has been a significant proportion of students performing within the upper two band levels of most measures of NAPLAN in year 3 and year 5 over the life of the plan. Broadly, this proportion has increased over time. Correspondingly, the
proportions of students in the lower two bands of NAPLAN have broadly decreased over the same periods. This has been more pronounced in Reading than in Numeracy.

In NAPLAN, results in the key areas of Reading and Numeracy, also reveal averages that vary over the life of the plan. When examining growth, the reading from year 3 to year 5 from 2011 to 2013 was well above what was expected from similar schools and students with the same starting scores. Likewise, the reading gain results from year 3 to year 5 from 2009 to 2011 were similarly strong. However, the reading gain results in the years 2010 to 2012 were below what would be expected against both measures. The Numeracy results, in terms of gain, for the same periods reveal similar results, with perhaps the exception of 2010 to 2012 where growth of student performance in the school matched both those of similar schools and students with the same starting scores.

When examining growth with respect to ACT and network averages, Arawang Primary School has had years where their performance was above average and in other years growth has been below average. This is true of most measures. The External Validation Panel had difficulty discerning consistent trends in school performance over time.

The panel acknowledges outstanding growth in writing results from year 3 in 2011 to year 5 in 2013. These were well above system and network averages. The school recognises that while this growth has been pleasing, a continued focus on the explicit teaching of writing should be maintained.

In terms of kindergarten, and Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) reading results, Arawang has seen a year of greater than average growth (2012), a year of less than average growth (2013) and a year of average growth (2011). The External Validation panel could see no obvious trend in these results. The PIPS maths results tell a similar story with 2012 being an outstanding year in terms of student growth by comparison to the ACT System results.

With respect to school based reading assessment using PM Benchmarks, Arawang Primary School achieved significant proportions (80 percent or above in most cases) of students performing at or above target benchmarks in all primary years. One standout year is year 3 in 2013 where more than 90 percent of students achieved at or above the target benchmark.

Using School Satisfaction Data as a measure of school performance reveals extraordinary improvements over the life of the plan, especially pertaining to parents’ satisfaction. Results in 2010, the final year of the previous School Plan were well below system averages in all measures for parents and many for staff. In the years 2011 -2014 there has been a steady improvement in satisfaction with the operation of the school, as indicated by the survey, especially with regard to parent’s satisfaction.

Students’ perceptions, generally, have remained close to system averages over the life of the plan, with the exception of 2011 where results slipped a little below averages. A notable result in 2012 was that 10 percent more students in the school when compared to the system reported that they were doing work that interested them.

The school has no reported suspensions in 2013 or 2014.

Evidence cited and its validation

NAPLAN 2011 – 2013
MySchool 2011 – 2013
PIPS 2011 – 2013
PM Benchmarks 2011 – 2013
School Satisfaction Data 2011 – 2013
Panel conversations with stakeholder representatives.

**Section C: School improvement planning and implementation**

**PART 1: Improvement planning**

The 2011–2014 School Plan for Arawang Primary School was developed following community consultation, feedback from the previous validation report in 2010 and from an examination of a variety of data including information from the School Satisfaction Surveys. The school plan proposed two goals:

1. **To achieve improved learning outcomes for our students**
2. **To enhance communication across the school community.**

In early 2012 the changed national agenda around preschool education required all schools to focus on providing preschool education benchmarked to the new National Quality Standard. As a consequence the 2013 and 2014 Arawang Primary School’s Annual Operating Plans have included a third priority area with key actions to meet this new agenda.

3. **To provide early childhood services that meet the needs of our clients and national services**

Each year for the duration of the four year School Plan 2011-2014, Arawang Primary School has dedicated time at executive and staff meetings, induction programs and during professional learning sessions to focus on each of the key priorities areas specified in the Annual Operating Plans (AOP). Goals from the School Plan have been displayed in each classroom and staff room. Professional Pathways discussions have focused on personal contributions to the achievement of the school goals. Some staff, in interviews with the panel, expressed a desire to have greater involvement in setting school directions.

**Evidence cited and its validation**

School Plan 2011-2014
Staff Meeting Agendas
School Satisfaction Surveys 2011 - 2013
Student reports
NAPLAN Data 2011 – 2013
PM Benchmarks 2011 – 2013
Annual Operating Plans 2011 - 2014
Staff Capacity Matrices
Panel Conversations with stakeholders.

**PART 2: Improvement actions**

**Priority # 1: To achieve improved learning outcomes for our students**

Arawang Primary School set the following performance measures in pursuit of their intended outcomes for this priority:

- Increase in the percentage of students achieving the school’s reading benchmark for their respective year.
- Increase in NAPLAN mean scores in literacy and numeracy.
A common goal across the life of the plan was to achieve a consistent whole school approach to literacy and numeracy. A critical strategy in pursuit of this was a dedicated and uninterrupted literacy and numeracy block as part of a balanced literacy and numeracy program. Professional learning was targeted at improving staff and parent expertise in teaching and supporting students’ learning of literacy and numeracy. Staff professional pathways goals were aligned to Annual Operating Plans.

In 2013, an updated and improved program template was designed and introduced. This enabled effective balanced literacy and numeracy programs, strongly linked to the Australian Curriculum, Schedule for Early Number Assessment (SENA), Count me in Too (CMIT), Middle Years Mental Computations (MYMC), First Steps Strategies, differentiation and assessment. In support of moderation, the school also introduced reading and writing assessment logs. Further, assessment occurred according to a detailed assessment schedule detailing the type of data used and the timing of its collection.

Implementing mentoring and coaching in a systematic way across the school was a significant strategy established in 2011. This involved team teaching, classroom observations and debriefing sessions designed to enhance the pedagogy. Not all staff have yet been involved in the mentoring and coaching process and some reported to the panel that opportunities to be involved were limited due to other strategic priorities.

In most year groups from kindergarten to year 3, 2013 reading PM benchmarks show increases over and above the 2011 starting points. In AOPs from 2011 to 2014, specific and increasing NAPLAN mean score targets were established for literacy and numeracy and were all achieved within or beyond the confidence interval specified.

Evidence cited and its validation

NAPLAN 2011 to 2013
PM Benchmarks 2011 to 2013
Staff capacity matrices
Panel conversations with stakeholders
Whole school assessment schedule
Assessment logs
First Steps Strategies
Teacher programs.

Priority # 2: To enhance communication across the school community

Arawang Primary School set the following performance measures in pursuit of their intended outcomes:

- Increase parent satisfaction related to communication
- Increase staff satisfaction related to communication within the school.

In 2011, the School Board and Parents and Citizens Association (P & C) introduced a communications policy that set out the roles of all parties involved with the school. A communications committee was set up to analyse the effectiveness of new technologies including the redevelopment of the school website. Parents were regularly invited into the school to attend curriculum information evenings, reading and writing workshops, transition evenings, welcome sessions and three-way interviews. The parent curriculum evening was cited as a notable success with over 300 parents attending.
The executive emphasised the need to contact parents regularly and a script was developed to assist staff with phone calls to parents. Staff introduced themselves to parents and made personal invitations to school community events.

Students led their own market research project to assess community views on communication in the community. This included training for students in questioning techniques and market research strategies. The resulting uptake from the community was high and the information garnered informed decisions about newsletters, website, and introduction iCal function, notes from home and school assemblies. Increased engagement of the community has been achieved through student produced invitations to parents and this is cited as one of the most effective strategies employed over the life of the plan.

Another significant strategy was renewed focus on customer service in the front office. Follow-up phone calls, immediate response to parent requests and a warm, engaging front office service has been promoted and acknowledged by the school community.

Parent satisfaction survey data revealed a significant upward trend over the life of the plan pertaining not just to communication but to all areas of school business. The panel commends the school for its achievements in this regard.

The Staff Satisfaction Survey data in 2010 was 44 percent below the system average on the question of “There is effective communication between teachers and executive staff.” In 2013, the school recorded 7 percent above system averages on the same question. Results fluctuated in the intervening years and were always well above the original 2010 results. The school performed similarly on related questions pertaining to communication within the school.

**Evidence cited and its validation**

School Satisfaction Data 2009 – 2013
School Communication Policy
Student Communication Survey
Principals Reports to P and C and School Board
Newsletters
Panel Conversations with Stakeholders
School Website.

**Priority # 3: To provide early childhood services that meets the needs of our clients and National Quality Standard**

Arawang Primary School set the following performance measures in pursuit of their intended outcomes:

- In 2013, the National Quality Standards (NQS) requirements for accreditation in “Educational programs and practice” and “Collaborative partnerships with families and communities” is achieved at Arawang Preschool – Waramanga and Weston campuses

- In 2014, the requirements for accreditation in Quality Area 1 and 7 of the National Quality Standards have been met at both Arawang Preschool - Waramanga and Weston campuses

The school developed a quality improvement plan (QIP) and a new preschool philosophy in consultation and collaboration with staff and their families. Further, professional learning was undertaken to enhance understanding of planning, programming, assessment and reporting linked to Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and NQS. In 2012 and 2013 a range of
assessment tools were introduced. The school developed a comprehensive handbook for both Waramanga and Weston campuses of Arawang Preschool.

In 2013, the ACT Regulatory Authority visited Arawang Preschool - Weston campus and undertook an assessment of the service against the National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care (NQS) and the Education and Care Services National Regulations. The ACT Regulatory Authority provided the school with the final report including the final ratings in term 4. They either met or exceeded all Quality Areas with the exception of Quality Area 1 where they were rated as ‘working towards.’

The Waramanga campus has shown evidence of significant progress in providing early childhood services which meet the NQS requirements for accreditation.

Evidence cited and its validation

7 NQS folders
Board reports.

PART 3: Reflection

The documentation provided for the External Validation panel demonstrated deep reflection on the priorities, targets and actions undertaken in the life of the Arawang Primary School’s Plan. The school reflected on aspects of the school plan that were successful. The school identified that having a School Plan with a small number of priorities assisted with maintaining focus on agreed goals over the life of the plan. The panel noted that the first priority, “To achieve improved learning outcomes for all students”, was broad and all-encompassing.

The school also reflected upon the drivers of change and correctly identified building staff capacity as a critical overall strategy. Formalising and embedding the coaching and mentoring in the school was critical in this regard. The school reports increased staff confidence and a heightened level of sustainability into the future. Staff confirmed these assessments in panel interviews.

The school identified aspects that could be done differently in the next school plan. Some targets, especially those pertaining to PM benchmarks, could have been more achievable by using the Directorate Benchmarks Guidelines. The panel endorses the school’s suggestion about making time for broad and consultative community reflection at the conclusion of each year’s Annual Operating Plan. Further, the panel concurred with the idea of sustained focus on data accumulated over time, its collection and analysis to inform teaching and learning.

Section D: National tools self-evaluation results

PART 1 – National School Improvement Tool

All staff were involved in three assessment sessions which consisted of working with all nine domains in mixed P-6 groupings. In each session, staff were given time to read and unpack the description of the domains. Staff then brainstormed school based evidence that met the domains description. This evidence was placed on each sheet for further reference. All descriptors ranging from outstanding to low were read in small groups and once an agreed consensus was made that part was highlighted. The responses from the National Improvement Tool by staff, parent and executive were analysed and graphed. This data was presented to staff at two different meetings.

Arawang Primary School used the results to identify areas of strength and areas of for further development according to the lists below.
Areas of strength

- A culture that promotes learning
- Expert teaching teams
- System curriculum delivery
- Effective pedagogical practices.

Areas for further development

- Analysis of data
- Targeted use of resources
- Differentiated teaching and learning
- School based partnerships.

The panel commends the executive team for its authentic reflections on the process and broadly concurs with its conclusions.

PART 2: National Safe Schools Framework Audit Tool (NSSFAT)

Staff were introduced to the NSSFAT early in term 2, 2014 and were given the opportunity to undertake an online assessment. Using a think, pair, share approach, staff identified the following strengths:

- A supportive and connected school culture
- Positive behaviour management
- Early intervention and targeted support.

Further work was done with respect to recommended actions and collectively the school identified three priority areas. These included:

- Whole school, collaboratively developed policies, plans and structures for supporting safety and wellbeing
- Teaching skills and understandings to promote cyber safety and for countering harassment, aggression, violence and bullying
- Teaching skills and understandings related to personal safety and protective behaviours.

The panel observed strong links between the KidsMatter program and strengths identified in the NSSFAT. Parents and students, in discussion, affirmed the results of the audit tool.
Section E: Commendations and recommendations

Commendations

The panel commends Arawang Primary School for its efforts and achievements in the following areas.

1. **The development of systematic and effective coaching and mentoring processes operating within the school.** The panel noted that these were embedded and participating staff reported high levels of support and efficacy.

2. **The improvement in the partnerships between the school and families, particularly with respect to communication.** Efforts in this area have led to substantial and measurable improvements in school satisfaction data.

3. **Arawang Primary School has a vibrant, diverse and welcoming school culture.** All stakeholders comment on the positive spirit throughout the school. A contributing factor is the visible excellence in specialist offerings.

4. **The transformation of Arawang Primary School’s facilities and learning environments.** The enhanced professional image of the school gives visitors the sense that the community is proud of its achievements and physical environment.

Recommendations

The panel recommends Arawang Primary School takes action in the following areas.

1. **Continue developments towards a whole school, systematic approach to the collection analysis and use of data to inform decisions about teaching and learning in the classroom.** Expand access to school and system data including SMART data to all staff and ensure they benefit from its potential to address strengths and weaknesses of student cohorts.

2. **Maintain a strong focus on literacy and numeracy improvement in the school throughout the next planning cycle.** The panel recommends focusing particularly on improving mathematics and spelling learning outcomes.

3. **Enrich the curriculum by encouraging the school community to play a more active role in student learning.** Further capitalising on the rich cultural and vocational backgrounds of the community can lead to greater interconnectedness between the school and its community as well as deeper relevance of the curriculum for students.

4. **Explore opportunities for distributed leadership in partnership with teaching staff.** Empower staff with potential for leadership as well as those who have experimented with new ideas. This will continue to build capacity for educational leadership in the school.