EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT 2014

for

WEENANGERA PRIMARY SCHOOL
Record of Validation Process

The following people were members of the external validation panel for Weetangera Primary School conducted on 7th, 8th and 11th August 2014.

Name: Sue Mueller          School: Torrens Primary School
Name: Sheila Brice         School: Namadgi School
Name: Dee Whitby           School: Orana Steiner 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: Sue Mueller
Signature: [Signature] Date: 21 Aug 2014

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

Name: James Barnett
Signature: [Signature] Date: 5 Sept 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: 5 Sept 2014
Section A: School context

Weetangera Primary School is situated in Belconnen with a student population of approximately 424 students preschool to year 6. Enrolments steadily increased from 417 in 2011, 428 in 2012 to 435 in 2013. There was a slight drop to 424 students in 2014 attributed to change in demographic within the priority enrolment area of Weetangera and the shared enrolment areas of Page and Scullin. The preschool gains children from the priority enrolment area, runs two sessions and is at capacity in 2014. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is 1134.

Throughout the school improvement cycle there has been an average of 2 percent Indigenous and 17 percent English as an Additional Language and Dialect (EALD) students enrolled at the school. Each of these students has an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) developed in consultation with parents.

The staff consists of a principal, deputy principal, two School Leader Cs (SLC) and 24 teachers. The staff profile has remained similar throughout the 2011-2014 review cycle although there were significant changes in 2013 with the appointment of a new principal and deputy principal as well as end of appointment dates for numerous teachers.

The school vision states that “Our students will learn and achieve to their potential. They will acquire skills that allow them to lead productive and responsible lives.” The values of respect, responsibility, resilience, honesty, inclusion and doing your best are evident throughout the school and are explicitly taught in classes.

The students at Weetangera continue to achieve high standards through strong literacy and numeracy programs as well as through arts, special needs, Science, cultural and sporting programs. The partnership between home and school is important and nurtured by school leadership and staff, who maintain a focus on high quality educational programs for all students. In 2012 the school received Territory funding for an all-weather pitch to be installed contributing to strong community ties within the North Belconnen area. This pitch has enhanced the resources used in the school through formal programs and clubs.

Section B: School performance

All documentation on school performance provided to the panel was extremely well organised and available to all staff.

Reading and numeracy skills of kindergarten students are assessed on entry and at the end of the year using Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS). Students’ entry raw mean scores are consistently above ACT average and end of year scores in reading and mathematics have both shown a steady and progressive year to year improvement from 2011 to 2013.

Weetangera has consistently demonstrated greater student gain in reading and numeracy as measured by NAPLAN and reported on Myschool website than students with the same starting scores at other Australian schools.

Weetangera Primary School has regularly analysed NAPLAN data and have presented findings to staff. The panel observed the quality and quantity of data available for teachers to use in planning for future priorities. Leadership was able to articulate the implications for teaching taken from this data. Gender and cohort performance as well as whole school trends were included in the data.
Teachers consistently implement assessment tools across the school including:

- PM Benchmarks
- Middle Years Mental Computations Tool (MYMC)
- Progressive Achievement Test in Mathematics (PAT Maths)
- anecdotal evidence, and
- teacher observations.

Perception survey data at Weetangera Primary School was very high in relation to all ACT schools and other Belconnen Schools over the life of the plan.

Results of the Student Survey carried out in 2013 included questions about motivation to learn and whether students felt they were receiving useful feedback. This survey generated a satisfaction rate of 90 percent for students. The parents satisfaction surveys overall result was 88 percent, with particularly high results at 91 percent in response to the question ‘teachers at this school expect my child to do his or her best’ and a 95 percent result for ‘my child likes being at this school’. 80 percent of parents report satisfaction with the school working with them to support their child’s learning. Staff surveys show consistently high rates of satisfaction and includes 100 percent of staff believe their professional achievements are celebrated and 100 percent of staff believe they are supported with the management of student behaviour.

The panel interviewed staff, parents and students whose responses validated the high satisfaction levels at the school over the course of the planning cycle.

Student attendance has remained consistently high over the life of the plan with attendance rates being typically between 90% and 95% across all year levels.

In 2012 Weetangera adopted the use of a school-developed excel database, Data Tracker, to inform progress across the whole school. The focus for this change is to enhance teacher knowledge of formative assessment which is also driving their professional learning programs. The panel observed this focus in classrooms, teacher planning and professional learning. This has enabled the whole school to track changes in student performance and to use this information to collaboratively foster ongoing improvement.

Weetangera has been involved in action learning on formative assessment allowing the development of a strong professional learning community. This project was teacher led and aligned with school goals. The school has begun to share this work with other network schools.

Teacher expertise has been captured on a Weetangera staff experience register and it facilitates the sharing of expertise across the staff. The teacher register is evidence of teachers improving skills through professional learning.

School improvement matrixes were completed each year of the cycle demonstrating a commitment to school improvement by the leadership team and teachers that is informed by capturing and using school self-assessment data.

**Evidence cited and its validation**

The panel cited the following evidence that demonstrated school performance.

- NAPLAN data
- Weetangera Data Tracker
• Minutes to executive meetings
• Classroom observations
• Professional learning plans
• School Board Reports
• Satisfaction survey data
• Annual Operating Plans (AOPs)
• PAT maths data
• National Quality Framework (NQF) review
• Formative assessment professional learning plan
• MySchool Website
• Interviews with staff, students and parents
• Behaviour support plans
• Attendance Data
• School app
• Weetangera Staff Experience Register, and
• Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 1: Improvement planning

The current school improvement plan 2011-2014 was informed by the external validation process of 2010, ACT Directorate plan and the School Improvement Framework. The priorities for Weetangera Primary School are:

• to maximise literacy and numeracy achievements for all students
• to promote student connectedness to school and enhance student well-being
• to effectively implement the Australian Curriculum, and
• to maximize literacy and numeracy achievements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Each year Annual Operating Plans (AOP) are written and reviews of the AOPs are undertaken. This information is used to inform future planning. The panel cited evidence of these reviews.

The Weetangera Primary School Plan 2011-2014 was articulated regularly with staff and the community resulting in a shared vision and understanding of the school improvement journey. The panel validated this during discussions with staff members and members of the parent community. Staff participate in authentic action research to provide a collection of evidence to measure progress against priorities.
Evidence cited and its validation

The external validation panel cited the following evidence regarding school improvement planning at Weetangera Primary School.

- AOP’s 2011 -2014
- Board Reports 2011 – 2014
- NAPLAN results
- School Improvement Matrix, and
- Recommendations from the 2010 external validation report.

PART 2: Improvement actions

Priority 1 To maximise literacy and numeracy achievements for all students

The targets set for this priority include:

- an increase in the reading, writing and number mean scores for all students in successive years of schooling in NAPLAN
- consistent sustained writing time across the school, and
- data base established to collect information on student learning from a variety of sources.

The panel validates that maximising literacy and numeracy achievements for all students has been a key priority at Weetangera Primary School over the school improvement cycle. This was identified as a strategic priority in the 2011-2014 School Plan. Strategies, targets, and the implementation process included regular process reviews. The reviews were documented and any amendments to strategies and/or targets noted in subsequent AOPs and AOP reports.

Specific targets were set in relation to growth in reading, writing and numeracy for years three and five students. Key improvement strategies were clearly defined and focused on improving teacher capacity, differentiating curriculum and monitoring and tracking student progress.

Over the school improvement cycle Weetangera has:

- developed literacy and numeracy planners
- timetabled consistent literacy and numeracy blocks across the school
- consulted critical friends
- employed specialist teachers to provide release time to enable professional development and to mentor staff
- implemented a model of Professional Learning Communities
- focussed on embedding formative assessment strategies
- implemented a variety of assessment measures such as PAT Maths tests and Middle Years Mental Computation, and
• established systems for data collection and analysis and tracking of student progress using a whole school Data Tracker and individual class student achievement venn diagrams.

School data collected and analysed indicates success of key improvement strategies that the panel noted had, to different degrees, become embedded into practices at Weetangera. The school’s NAPLAN mean score results in 2013 at year 3 were within the target range for both reading and maths. In 2011 -2012 writing, spelling, punctuation and grammar target means were consistently met in year 3, however, targets were not always met in year 5. By 2013 at year 5 the mean score was above the target and year 5 met the numeracy target.

**Priority 2**  To promote student connectedness to school and enhance student well-being

Targets set for this priority

• increased school satisfaction data on students having an opportunity to have input into their learning and feel safe in the school environment

• improvement in student well-being through the use of the Victorian well-being survey and the Quality Learning Australia (QLA) reflective resources, and

• improvement through MAZE behavioural records in suspension data.

Weetangera School’s priority has been to promote student connectedness and enhance student well-being with the expected outcome of strong positive relationships across the school. 2013 satisfaction survey results show that 93 percent of students feel safe at school.

Strategies include circle time, class meetings, corridor conferences, sharing of best practice and information sessions for parents. Peer support and student leadership are planned for and supported by teachers. Special days such as 'rock and water' and 'bubbles day' focus on specific themes such as tolerance and empathy.

There has been a whole school approach to the embedding of restorative practices. Social skills are explicitly taught and addressed through weekly, timetabled class meetings as well as in the playground.

Strengthening student leadership is a focus and the Peer Support Leadership program operates across the school. All year 6 students have participated in a Kidfit leaders workshop and there are plans in place for these students to peer coach younger students. The Student Representative Council (SRC) is an active group in the school. Students are chosen by their classes each term to represent their views on the SRC. A weekly meeting is led by senior students. Student voice was clearly evident across a range of issues important to the children and general well-being of the school.

A key improvement strategy has been to enhance the opportunity for children to have an input into a negotiated curriculum. Strategies in place and evident to the panel include explicit inclusion of the students in understanding the learning intentions for their lessons. Local systems and Directorate annual surveys are in place to track student satisfaction with their learning. The leadership team and teachers have goals in place to expand student voice by connecting their focus on formative assessment to include student participation in assessment of their own learning.

Year 6 children are rostered to gain work experience in the canteen. Student support of each other is encouraged and is evident in activities such as opening the preschool playground once a week for the junior primary students and anti-bullying forums. Close attention has been paid to
the changing needs of the playground and to student feedback about their experience of safety. Changes to the playground setting include a new artificial oval which has generated increased opportunity for sports and play for the children and for developing community partnerships. Other factors directing change to playground well-being management include an increase in student numbers and the focus on consistency of outside behaviour. The school has put in place positive strategies for supporting student well-being in the playground through increased, targeted supervision and programmes for improving the environment, e.g. the pumpkin patch and the circle of rocks. Members of the community have been involved in a tree planting program to enhance the environment for the children. Lunch time clubs run by teachers in addition to their duties provide students with choices at play time.

Interactions between students and teachers are positive within an environment focussed on learning and a shared understanding that everyone is on a journey to improve. The general school tone is harmonious and positive interactions were observed in classrooms between the staff and students.

**Priority 3** To effectively implement the Australian Curriculum

The panel commends Weetangera Primary School for its commitment to developing school documents reflecting the Australian Curriculum. Implementation of the Australian Curriculum is validated through teacher’s planning, school reports, classroom observations and professional development planning. Teachers are planning, reporting and assessing for the English, Mathematics and Science curricula. Planning pro formas are used across the school. Integrated units of work were planned in teams or grade levels to ensure all curriculum requirements are introduced to students. Primary Connections Science Program K-6 is used for teaching the Science program and this is endorsed by parents with support for resources from the P&C.

Teachers engaged in professional learning through 2013 stand down period around the general capabilities in the curriculum. Programs and reports reflect the achievement standards of the Australian Curriculum.

Professional learning was undertaken by teachers addressing the provision and analysis of rich tasks for students in numeracy and spelling. The panel observed teachers engaging students in interesting and relevant lessons.

Weetangera preschool has developed programs, assessment and reporting against the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). Parents have access to programs and planning and are encouraged and welcome to take an active role in their children’s learning both at the preschool and through the Weetangera P&C.

Targets for implementation of the Australian Curriculum have been met and are evidenced through 100 percent of English, Maths and Science showing clear links to the Australian Curriculum.

**Priority 4** To maximize literacy and numeracy achievements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

The targets for this priority were:

- increase the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who made growth in NAPLAN from the 2010 figures by one percentage point, and
- 100 percent of Aboriginal student to reach reading benchmarks.
All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Weetangera have a Personalised Learning Plan (PLP). Parents join teachers to develop goals in conjunction with the learning assistance teacher. Being a Focus School from 2011 to 2013, the school was able to access additional resources to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Teachers addressed the cross curricula priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture. They identified alternative ways to teach and assess these students.

Professional learning on formative assessment, goal setting and classroom visits by executive have maintained a focus on literacy, numeracy and assessment practices in classrooms. Teachers and learning assistants engage in regular and timetabled professional learning to improve skills. The school has valued this program by enabling grade teams to be released together, for longer periods so that learning is across the whole team.

While Weetangera did not achieve the targets a clear plan has been developed for closing the gap and improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In 2013 there were 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending Weetangera Primary School. Fifty-seven percent of these students achieved their year level reading benchmark.

**PART 3: Reflection**

The panel commends Weetangera Primary School for the reflective processes used throughout the school improvement cycle. Staff members regularly reflect on performance in delivering quality learning outcomes for students. As part of this process the leadership of the school constantly reflect on the process of school improvement, its success, sustainability and lessons for future growth. The leadership structure supports a process of considered planning, systematic professional learning, implementation and constant reflection. As such, the school is well placed to manage and maximise outcomes for students. This reflection extends to consideration of the assessment tools and identified school practices for all staff.

The leadership team is reflective and strategic in their planning and encourage emerging leaders to be part of the process. Leaders are afforded the time to focus on coaching and mentoring of teachers and the effective and successful implementation of the school goals. This structure then extends into teaching teams’ planning, reflection and professional learning. The leadership team at Weetangera Primary has provided an opportunity to build on the previous work of the school and reflect on new directions.

The leadership team and teaching staff are clearly focused on improving student outcomes through formative assessment and building the capacity of teachers. The coaching and mentoring focus for teachers is strategically planned. Support for early career teachers and planning for emerging leaders is also strategic.

Staff are valued by the leadership team. Extra time and care to release all staff in grade level teams allows team planning and professional learning to occur. Strategic planning around staff offices and withdrawal rooms has also allowed regular collaborative work.

AOPs and the school strategic plan are means for the school to organise their work. Reflection of this work is evident in the School Improvement Matrix, used across the school improvement cycle to engage staff and to assess achievement of goals.
The panel cited a number of assessment tools utilised by Weetangera Primary School to track student achievement. NAPLAN data indicates growth in student outcomes over time and school survey data indicates high satisfaction with the school by parents, students and staff.

Weetangera Primary School is working closely with their cluster schools ensuring strong links are made for student transitions. Network links ensure practices are shared with other schools and with the network leader.

The school board is reflective about setting the strategic directions of the school with the staff. Barriers that impacted on school improvement were identified and strategies implemented to address these. These barriers include issues with IT networking, change of leadership and teacher turnover. The new staff joining the school have been inducted and well supported which can promote staff stability into the future.

**Evidence cited and its validation**

The external validation panel cited the following evidence related to the school plan.

- AOPs
- School Board Reports 2011, 2012 and 2013
- teacher planning
- AOP reviews 2011 - 2013
- school evaluation matrices 2011 - 2014
- executive meeting
- executive meeting minutes, and
- National School Improvement Tool self-assessment results.

**Section D: National tools self-evaluation results**

Weetangera Primary School conducted a self-assessment using the National School Improvement Tool in 2014. This process involved staff, the School Board and P&C. Areas for further development identified by the school and validated by the panel were in the domain of analysis and discussion of data. The panel supports the school’s recommendation to increase the sophistication with which it regularly gathers data on student learning, interrogates data and utilizes the knowledge gained in designing further learning.

Weetangera community indicated results showing strength in the area of a culture that promotes learning. This was clearly evident to the panel in their observations of classrooms and discussions with staff and community members. Areas of particular strength are the establishment of professional learning throughout the school and in individual teams. Executive supported this strength through coaching and mentoring of teachers. A shared commitment across the school is the result with obvious indications to the panel of improved pedagogy and collegial support.

The panel validated strength in the areas of:

- A culture that promotes learning
- An expert teaching team
• Effective pedagogical practices
• Systematic curriculum deliver, and
• Differentiated teaching and learning.

The National Safe Schools Framework Audit Tool was completed in 2014 and involved all staff, the School Board and P&C. The focus on student well-being and student ownership was identified as a strength.

The panel saw evidence of this across the school some of which include:
• assemblies that were run by students
• buddies such as year 6 with kindergarten and year 5 with preschool
• clubs undertaken by students in their own time
• clubs run by students
• professional learning by staff with a focus on student management, engagement and well-being
• students rostered to work in the canteen
• the induction of new teachers, and
• classroom practice.

The panel also cited evidence supporting early intervention and targeted support. Teachers are engaged with formative assessment and are tracking student outcomes on the school Data Tracker. All classes displayed the commitment and priority given to literacy and numeracy. Extra support was provided to all staff to enable collegial planning in teams.

The panel was able to see professional learning communities in action where teachers, executive and learning assistants were engaged in sharing skills and information. Through the audit the priority area of engagement, skill development and safe school curriculum was identified to review. In particular the area of teaching social and emotional skills in all subjects and across all year levels.

The Weetangera Preschool achieved the rating of meeting the National Quality Standard in 2013 across all quality areas.

Section E: Commendations and recommendations

Commendations

Weetangera Primary School is to be commended for the following.

• There is a strong commitment to learning for staff and students. Teachers create classroom environments with a focus on literacy and numeracy that is evident throughout the school. Staff have developed a professional learning community and it is valued and resourced.

• Science is a focus within the curriculum. The school models explicit inquiry teaching and share with network and system schools. Science is a community supported curriculum area.
• Action research in formative assessment has been a focus for staff. All staff are engaged in action research and professional learning in formative assessment that is improving teacher practice and student outcomes across the school.

• Professional learning communities and the staff expertise register have been developed. This has promoted trust and professional collaboration amongst staff and executives.

• Strategic planning for the cycle of school improvement provides clear and concise information to staff and School Board. This allows for informed decision making and a focus on school improvement.

• There is a culture of respectful relationships and of support amongst students and staff. The values of respect, resilience, doing your best and inclusion are clearly articulated to students and explicitly taught in classes. The student voice is valued.

Recommendations

The panel recommends Weetangera Primary School pay attention to the following opportunities for improvement in the next planning cycle.

• **Extend work with data analysis.** The school has built a unique and valuable foundation for capturing and monitoring student performance with their Data Tracker. The true value of the Data Tracker in driving improvements in student learning outcomes will be realised when it is used by all staff across all areas.

• **Foster community engagement through communication.** The school is encouraged to develop a communication strategy, in conjunction with the parents, with the view to improving the learning of all children.

• **Develop a school wide framework for student well-being.** The school has had a strong focus on student well-being and has made good progress over the planning cycle however there are still pockets of identified need.

• **Build upon the solid foundations of work with cluster, network and system schools to provide further opportunities to improve learning for staff and students.** Opportunities could include:
  o Sharing Weetangera’s exemplary practice
  o Combined resourcing across schools, and
  o Strengthening transitions for students to high school and college.