EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT 2014

for

AINSLIE SCHOOL
Record of Validation Process

The following people were members of the external validation panel for Ainslie Primary School conducted on Tuesday 19 August to Thursday 21 August.

Name: Sue Mueller  School: Torrens Primary School
Name: Sheila Brice  School: Namadgi 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: 19 Sep '14

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

Name: Kate Chapman
Signature: [Signature]  Date: 19 Sep '14

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: 19 Sep '14
Section A: School context

Ainslie School was established in 1927 and currently has an enrolment of 422 students, preschool to year 6. Ainslie’s student population is diverse with 21 percent of students speaking English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) representing speakers of up to 40 languages. The school’s Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value is 1163, above the average of 1000. There are a number of students on temporary visas because their parents are studying at Australian National University. This results in significant transience in the student population. In 2013, for example, 40 students left the school during the year and another 40 enrolled. In 2014 there are 13 students who identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander which is almost double the previous two years. The Learning Support Centre ceased to operate during the school improvement cycle and there are currently eight students receiving support for an identified disability.

Since the 2011-2014 School Plan was developed the school has seen significant changes in the school leadership and staff composition: there have been four principals, four deputy principals and nine School Leader C (SLC)s. Only nine members of the original 28 teaching staff are still at the school. This has presented challenges in maintaining consistency in school approaches and programs over the past four years.

Ainslie School has a strong commitment to providing extra curricula opportunities to students and is assisted in this by the Parents and Citizens Association (P&C). For example, the school’s music programs are recognised widely as strengths of the school and are offered through band programs, strings and piano tutors, recorder groups, choir and opportunities for performing beyond the school. Another key area is social justice with commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families.

The commitment to community is very important at Ainslie. There is an active and effective P&C involved in promoting events and gaining the involvement of the local community. There is a strong attachment to the school by teachers, students, past students and their families.

Section B: School performance

Ainslie School’s Performance Indicators in Primary School (PIPS) results in reading and mathematics indicate the students were at or above system results at the beginning of each year of the school improvement cycle. In 2013, the growth for Ainslie kindergarten students was 14 points for mathematics and 62 points for reading. This compares to system results of 15 points for mathematics and 75 points for reading. The results for Mathematics in PIPS have been declining over the school improvement cycle and this is an area the school has identified for continued review.

Ainslie School’s National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results indicate growth from 2011-2013 in numeracy that is above that for all schools. When comparing the results in year 5 of students with the same starting point in year 3 in 2011 showed Ainslie students outperformed these students when they reached year 5 in reading, writing and numeracy.

In 2013 year 3 achieved an average score of 433 in numeracy which was above that of the all schools’ average of 415. Year 5 achieved 534 which was close to the average of similar schools at 536 and substantially above the all schools average of 486 in numeracy. Students achieved above the average of 410 in 2011 when the children were in year 3 which was above the all schools’ average of 396, however this score was below the average of similar schools of 439.
In 2011-2013 Ainslie showed NAPLAN growth in writing that was above the growth of all schools. In 2011, Ainslie students in year 3 achieved 415 which was below the average of all schools of 416 and substantially lower than similar schools of 445. The same students in 2013 in year 5 achieved 514 which was substantially above the all schools average of 478 and the equal to that for similar schools.

Reading showed growth from 2011-2013 however was below the growth of students in similar schools. The growth was consistently above the averages of all schools. Year 3 students at Ainslie School achieved an average score of 452 in 2011 which was above the average of all schools at 416 and below the average of similar schools at 467. Year 5 students achieved an average score of 529 in 2013, above the average for all schools at 502 and below that of similar schools of 548.

Overall performance in NAPLAN in 2013 shows that performance over the school improvement cycle for Ainslie students is as good as or above that of all schools for years 3 and 5.

Student perception data indicators for Ainslie School are strong. For example, in 2013, 79 percent of students agree or strongly agreed with the statement I can talk to my teachers about my concerns, and 86 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement I like being at my school. These results are above the ACT means for primary schools, which were 73 percent and 79 percent respectively. This also compares with 77 percent of students in 2011 agreed that At this school I know an adult I can talk to if I have a problem compared to 82 percent for all ACT schools and in 2012, 64 percent of Ainslie students agreed, compared to 82 percent for all ACT schools. In 2011, 81 percent of students at Ainslie agreed that I enjoy learning at this school compared to 83 percent in all ACT schools and in 2012, 76 percent of students agreed with this statement compared to all ACT schools at 84 percent.

In the 2014 School Climate survey, 99 percent of students agreed their school was safe, supportive and nurturing which is above the ACT average of 95 percent. The School Climate data also revealed 99 percent of students at Ainslie have a sense of the school’s shared values and cohesion in answers to the question around school spirit and pride. This is above that of the ACT which was 97 percent.

In 2013 parent perception data suggest opportunities for improvement in the overall satisfaction of parents with their children’s education and learning needs. Over the life of the plan, the percentage of parents agreeing with the statement Overall I am satisfied with my child’s education at this school as remained fairly stable at approximately 74 percent, which is below that for other ACT P-6 schools. Similarly, responses to the statement My child’s learning needs are being met at this school have varied from 67 percent to 78 percent, again below that for other ACT P-6 schools. The panel acknowledges that the voluntary nature of responses to these surveys and the low response rates mean that these data may not be reliable.

Similarly there was a slight dip in staff overall satisfaction from 2011 to 2013. In 2011, 97 percent of staff agreed overall I am satisfied with this school, in 2012, 91 percent agreed and in 2013, 88 percent.

100 percent of staff have completed their professional pathways plans and value the professional learning arranged at the school. Professional learning has targeted specific areas of the school plan to build teacher capacity and to embed the school vision and plans. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been introduced to enable team planning. 100 percent of staff in the School Climate survey agreed that there are excellent relationships between staff and that there are shared goals and values.
Evidence cited and its validation

- NAPLAN data
- PIPS data
- School survey data
- School climate data
- Ainslie School survey of staff.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 1: Improvement planning

The strategic priorities of the Ainslie School Plan 2011-2014 were:

1. Build teacher capacity to deliver quality curriculum
2. Improve student outcomes in literacy and numeracy
3. Build successful collaborative relationships and partnerships.

No members of the current leadership team were at the school at the time the School Plan was written and therefore are unaware of the strategic thinking behind the selection of these priorities.

Each year of the school improvement cycle, Annual Operating Plans (AOPs) were written. The priorities were chosen through consultation with the community and staff.

Executive staff were responsible for operationalising the strategies in priorities 1 and 2, and the School Board was instrumental in achieving priority 3. With the support of the leadership team, classroom teachers took ownership of the actions towards achievement of the school’s targets relating to student learning through the collaborative setting of SMART goals in teams and for the monitoring of relevant data.

Evidence cited and its validation

The external validation panel reviewed the following evidence related to establishment of the school priorities and their implementation.

- School Strategic Plan 2011 - 2014
- Interview with school principal.

PART 2: Improvement actions

Priority 1  Build teacher capacity to deliver quality curriculum

The targets and measures for this priority included:

- Alignment of the delivered curriculum to the new Australian Curriculum (target: the proportion of teacher programs that reflect the national curriculum)
- Coherence and quality of assessments of/for/as learning
- The effectiveness of the coaching/resourcing model.
The key improvement strategies associated with this priority were:

- Implement phase 1 of the new Australian Curriculum according to the Education and Training Directorate schedule
- Implement in-class coaching and resourcing model with a focus on feedback
- Improve consistency of assessment and monitoring.

The key improvement strategy of implementation of the Australian Curriculum, phase one, was revised in 2012 to include science, history and mathematics. The panel examined the documentation available to all teachers and the resource room used for team planning. Moderation and rubrics development have been a focus in Professional Learning Teams (PLTs). Ainslie School has identified moderation and rubric development as an area of focus for the next school improvement cycle to ensure consistency across year levels and inform teams of student progress. The structure for building capacity of teachers has been built by executive in the following ways:

- timetabling to allow all year level teachers to be available at the same time while classes are taught by specialist teachers
- providing a resource room that contains Australian Curriculum documentation and student information, and
- team planning and professional conversation around the key questions of the PLT. These are, what do we want students to learn, how do we know they have learnt it, how do we respond when they do not learn, and how do we respond when they have learnt?

The panel witnessed evidence of teamwork in a PLT, in classrooms, the staffroom, school documents and during discussions with teachers. Staff work in teams to plan units of work and agree on essential learning. Since 2012 this process has also included preschool staff across the two preschool sites allowing them to program consistently using the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). Teachers work together to develop common assessment tools and to moderate across year levels. There is school wide monitoring of students through the collection of data such as PM Benchmarks and the Middle Years Mental Computation (MYMC) that is kept in a central place. Teachers also provide handover folders to the next year level teachers to inform them of social, academic and special needs of each student. This assists building the capacity to deliver quality curriculum, particularly for new teachers to the school and teachers working in new year levels.

There are comprehensive documents for teachers articulating the school values, principles, curriculum planning, formative assessment, ‘I can’ statements, pacing guides, curriculum guides, rubrics and mentor agreements. These also assist building capacity of all teachers and provide a common, consistent message to all staff.

Ainslie School successfully achieved its targets of implementing the Australian Curriculum. There has been work completed on the alignment of assessment across year levels and across the school. The school did not reach its targets relating to staff receiving quality feedback on their practice and this has been identified by the school as an area of focus for the next improvement cycle.

In 2014 an Executive Teacher Professional Practice was appointed to Ainslie School to support the school’s efforts in this priority area. This presents a consistent and sustained opportunity to
develop capacity building programs that supported teachers during this school improvement cycle.

The more recent stability of the leadership team has contributed to the process of building capacity of staff through consistent professional learning and the embedding of teacher practices that directly support the school’s vision and plans. The ability of the school to offer leadership opportunities through committee work, PLTs and higher duties is strategically planned.

Executive staff provide formal feedback to teachers about their practice. The panel noted classroom visits are arranged, and observed feedback processes and the protocols supporting class observations. The panel noted evidence of mentoring of teachers. This is an area where further investigation and practice will contribute to the professional development of teachers. When executive are actively involved in team planning, curriculum development and assessment planning, the effectiveness of PLTs is ensured.

Whole school assessment data is collected and available to all teachers. The school executive analyses and discusses this data with teaching teams. It has been identified by the school, and confirmed by the panel, that moderation across year levels and teacher use of data to inform programs and planning should remain a focus for the next planning cycle.

Priority 2 Improve student outcomes in literacy and numeracy

The targets and measures for this priority related to improving:

- The performance of all students in reading, writing and number
  - The proficiency of all students in reading
  - The proficiency of all students in writing
  - The performance of all students in number
  - The performance of year 5 students relative to their year 3 performance
- The attendance of Indigenous students.

The key strategies associated with this priority were:

- Implement professional learning to address teacher knowledge of English and mathematics and of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum and related assessments
- Implement practices to address differentiation of teaching and learning
- Implement feedback structures and strategies.

Once a week, teams meet for 60-75 minutes to plan collaboratively, examine data and assist with strategies to meet the needs of individual students and groups of students. Teachers use SMART goals to improve individual student’s outcomes. It is the school’s intention that the improvement of English teaching, especially in kindergarten will be realised in the next school improvement cycle. The panel observed the staff addressing individual student needs as well as the needs of grade level groups in staff meetings. The continued strategic use of School Leader Cs (SLCs) and the deputy principal will continue to improve both the adoption and effectiveness of these interventions.

Professional learning is an important part in upskilling teachers and providing timely and current research and best practice. Mandatory professional learning is undertaken by teachers at Ainslie
School who also engage in the professional pathways planning process with executive. Professional learning related to this priority included areas of differentiation in the classroom, IWBs, The Daily Five to improve reading, and bump it up writing walls.

Students with special needs are provided with an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) or a Personalised Learning Plan (PLP). These programs are developed according to the Education and Training Directorate directions, are developed in partnership with parents and implemented each year. The My Tracks process has been particularly valuable for Indigenous students involving them in personalised learning and peer development programs. Students have gained confidence and are engaged in their learning. Parents of children who have an ILP or a PLP have appreciated the friendlier approach that clearly outlines student goals and how they can assist their children.

The panel saw evidence of intervention programs for students performing below benchmark across year levels in PLT and staff meetings. This work is completed over five week periods by executive and other teachers. Small group and individual work is undertaken with students identified by the teams.

Expected growth for literacy in the junior school was not achieved across the improvement cycle. However, better than expected NAPLAN growth was achieved between year 3 and year 5 over time from 2011-2013, especially in the areas of writing. The panel noted that spelling was a particular area for intervention in the next school improvement cycle as results have been below the ACT mean for year 3 and year 5 over the life of the school plan. However, reading and numeracy results were pleasing. In 2013 the year 3 school mean for reading was 463 which was above the ACT mean of 444. The year 5 school reading mean in 2013 was 529 above the ACT mean of 520. The school mean for numeracy in year 3 was 433 above the ACT mean of 415 and year 5 achieved good results with a school mean of 534 substantially above the ACT mean of 500.

**Priority 3 Build successful collaborative relationships and partnerships**

The targets and measures for this priority included:

- staff satisfaction
- student satisfaction
- parent satisfaction.

The key strategy related to this priority was:

- Review and implement feedback and communication protocols, structures and strategies with and between all school stakeholders.

In response to requests from the community for better communication, Ainslie School has implemented a number of successful programs:

- Facebook and twitter profiles
- review of the school values, vision and principles
- development of a system map along with posters, newsletter articles and documents outlining the important foci of the school
- information sessions for parents, for example, literacy evening for parents, the school website, library support and parent/teacher interviews
• revised protocols for communication with parents, for example, parent/teacher interviews and phone contact with parents that do not engage with this process.

Community consultation was demonstrated through the proposal to install a fence around Ainslie School. Community members were opposed to the fencing of the school due to the high regard and the high usage by the community of the resources at the school. Due to community opposition, the fence will not be erected. The importance of the facilities for community has seen the development of gardens around the school for everyone’s community use.

The School Board and the Ainslie P&C design events to engage the entire community. For example, the ‘Down the Garden Path’ initiative is highly prized and engages the local community beyond Ainslie School. This initiative raises money for Ainslie as well as providing a supportive and engaging activity for the community. It is anticipated with enthusiasm each year and includes both primary and preschool sites, as well as community members’ opening their gardens.

The Ainslie canteen is another example of a successful community partnership. It is operating at a profit and incorporating the Ainslie School gardens. After School Care (ASC) and Before School Care are also very important to the school. The panel has observed the operation of the ASC and the success of the program.

The panel also noted the many other organisations and volunteers providing programs and activities for Ainslie School. These programs ranged through arts programs to volunteering in classrooms and providing extra curricula activities such as chess and science lessons.

Students are encouraged to take up leadership roles within the school through programs such as buddy arrangements with junior classes, sports programs, sustainable programs and school captains. Student involvement and engagement are the goals of these programs.

EALD families make up a significant percentage of the school community and require special attention when looking at parental involvement in school activities. Ainslie School has included a Google Translate application on their website to assist these families to understand school processes and opportunities.

School Climate data from 2014 has shown significant achievements in response to the school focus on building successful relationships and partnerships. 100 percent of students reported excellent or adequate staff student/relationships compared to 97 percent in all ACT schools. Ninety-six percent of students responded that relationships with other students were mostly characterised by respect, understanding, support and acceptance. This was above the ACT average of 92 percent. The School Climate survey indicated one hundred percent of Ainslie teachers responded that relations between staff were excellent or adequate compared to 96 percent in the ACT.

Parent Satisfaction Survey data shows that perceptions about community partnerships are valued and maintained, improved over the cycle from 82 percent in 2011, 90 percent in 2012 to 93 percent in 2013. The preschools at Baker Gardens and Reid were assessed as Exceeding the National Quality standard in 2013.

PART 3: Reflection

Ainslie School has been working with a united community and a number of clear priorities. Initially there were too many strategies identified to be successful. Fewer strategies, clearly articulated with closer attention and focus, has been identified by the school and the panel as an area for the next school improvement cycle. Professional learning, PLTs and the leadership
action plan will promote a united team and provide a professional and focused staff dedicated to continued improvement of student outcomes using current school and system data.

The stability of the school leadership team will maintain a consistent approach to improvement. It will also add to the very rich character of the school and community developed over many years. Ainslie is embedded in tradition and has a community with strong feelings about how the school functions and progresses in the future. Positive combination of all of these elements will ensure Ainslie School remains a very popular and historically significant institution of quality education.

Evidence cited and its validation

- School Board reports
- discussions with staff, students and parents
- school documents and photos
- classroom displays
- assemblies.

Section D: National tools self-evaluation results

The school senior leadership team undertook reflection of the National School Improvement Tool. The panel supports their main findings in the following four domains.

1. The culture at Ainslie promotes a strong sense of pride and belonging in the school. Parents are encouraged to take a genuine interest in their children’s learning and are active participants.

2. Ainslie School has developed supportive school-community partnerships. The school makes strategic use of partnerships with families and community organisations for the purpose of improving students’ access to experiences. The school and its partners are committed to providing different ways to enhance student learning, engagement and well being.

3. The school applies its resources in a targeted and strategic manner to meet the learning needs of all students. The principal and other school leaders have introduced processes to identify and address the needs of students in the school and are applying available resources.

4. Effective pedagogical practices are evident by the principal and other school leaders recognising that highly effective teaching is the key to improving student learning throughout the school. The school has found ways to build professional learning teams to encourage the development of a culture of continuous professional improvement.

A Social and Emotional Taskforce was formed to determine the school’s performance in regard to student wellbeing including the National Safe Schools Framework and to implement KidsMatter. The Task Force includes the Deputy Principal, members of the leadership team, classroom teachers and a parent. They found there was a need to establish a consistent approach across the school for student wellbeing and positive behaviour support processes. There is also a need to build capacity in teaching staff in establishing quality relationships with students as best practice. The panel supports this evaluation.
Section E: Commendations and recommendations

Commendations

Ainslie School is to be commended for the following.

- Parents and the broader community are recognised as integral members of the school community. Working together has enabled the school to enhance student well being and the access to experiences by partnering with parents, families and the wider community. This is reflected in highly valued and strong community partnerships such as the After School Care, canteen and volunteer programs.

- The school values of respect, excellence and community are embedded in practice. The vision and values of the school are clearly articulated and practised by students, staff and parents.

- Ainslie School has two excellent preschool sites. These provide the first strong links with the Ainslie community who value the traditions and the early childhood experience.

- Professional Learning Communities are improving teacher capacity. The establishment of Professional Learning Community approach has provided a strong process for teachers to work together to learning, solve problems and reflect on their practice.

- Ainslie School encourages and welcomes past students and teachers to share their stories and celebrate the past and ongoing achievements of this historic school. There is a strong sense of ownership amongst members of the broader community that ensures traditions are maintained and that past staff and students and their families return to reminisce and celebrate.

Recommendations

The panel recommends Ainslie School considers the following.

- Development of a school wide systematic student performance data collection and analysis processes. This can provide a precise picture of student performance along with evidence of improvement at the individual, class and whole school levels. This will also enable the school to carefully monitor progress of students from identified priority groups.

- Further strengthen the emphasis placed on improved student learning outcomes and well being. Build on the PLT practices, with support of executive team leaders, to strengthen the school wide shared responsibility for student learning and achievement.

- Implementation of the Australian Curriculum. Continue the development of curriculum documents that embed evidence-based teaching practices across the school and reflect the requirements of the Australian Curriculum. This can ensure the alignment of expectations and best practices as students progress through the school.

- Review systems and processes used to develop staff capacity with a view to developing a robust whole school approach. This could include strengthening the PLT process providing opportunities for staff to share best practices in other schools and refine the coaching and mentoring processes that support professional practice.