



**ACT**  
Government  
Education

# **GOLD CREEK SCHOOL**

Review Report 2017

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## Introduction: Overview of the External School Review process

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As part of the Australian Capital Territory's school improvement approach, public schools and colleges in the Australian Capital Territory are required to participate in an External School Review every five years. This document captures the findings of the External Review Panel during this cycle of school review.

In broad terms, the panel sought to determine, through evaluation against the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT), the extent to which the school is meeting its agreements, achieving its priorities, and addressing its challenges in the context of a continuously improving educational environment.

The External School Review was conducted over four days and involved a wide variety of data gathering approaches including desktop review, observations, interviews and documentation. This approach provided evidence for the panel to consider against the nine inter-related domains in the NSIT to inform the affirmations, commendations and recommendations for this school improvement cycle.

## Section A: School context

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Gold Creek School was established in 1998 through the amalgamation of Nicholls Primary School and the newly constructed secondary school in 1998. The school now consists of three campuses: Junior (P–6), Senior (7–10) and a preschool facility located in the nearby suburb Hall.

The junior site shares facilities with a co-located Catholic primary school, Holy Spirit School, the only such arrangement in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The schools share a library, gymnasium, canteen, out of school hours care service and a synthetic sports field. This joint facility has been in operation since the inception of both schools in 1996. A memorandum of understanding supports the operations and strategic management of this site.

The school enrolls students from a broad geographical area. In addition to its own P–6 cohort, students from two feeder primary schools join the senior site in year 7. Across the life of the plan, student enrolment numbers have remained relatively stable, increasing in 2016 after a small decrease in 2015. Increased enrolments in kindergarten would suggest that the school will increase in enrolments in this next strategic planning cycle. The school currently attracts enrolment of 81.13 percent from within the priority area. Cultural and linguistic diversity is a feature of Gold Creek School, with the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and students who bring English as an additional language increasing over the last four years.

Students from Gold Creek School's preschool groups generally transition to the school's kindergarten classes or Holy Spirit School. The continuation of enrolment from preschool to kindergarten has risen from 36 percent in 2015 to 63 percent in 2016. While the opening of the Catholic secondary school in 2013 was expected to have some impact on enrolments, the number of students transitioning to this school from years 6 to 7 remains relatively small.

Student attendance rates have remained relatively constant across years P–7 with a decrease in 2016 for years 5, 8, 9 and 10.

The number of teachers at Gold Creek School has increased from 92 in 2016 to 115 in 2017 to meet recent growing enrolment demands. While the number of permanently employed teaching staff remains relatively constant, the number of temporary teaching staff has increased. There have been some changes to the leadership team during this planning cycle. A new principal commenced duties in 2017.

The school received authorisation to implement the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary and Middle Years Programmes in May 2016. The International Baccalaureate attracts interest from families beyond the priority enrolment area.

## Section B: School performance data

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### **A: Student learning data**

Student learning data is captured through Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS), and the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

While kindergarten students at Gold Creek School consistently commence at or below ACT average mean raw scores for reading and mathematics in PIPS, end of year data demonstrate performance that is consistently above the ACT mean score. 2016 reflects an exception to this trend, as the end of year school mean was slightly below that of the ACT for mathematics. Growth trends for PIPS in reading increased between 2013 and 2015 but this was not maintained in 2016. Growth trends in mathematics showed variable growth rates across the life of the plan.

#### *Performance against like schools and all Australian schools*

The performance of Gold Creek School for year 3 in NAPLAN has remained close to or above like and all schools across the life of the plan for all testing. Similarly, in year 5, with the exception of reading in 2014, which was below like schools, Gold Creek results were substantially above or close to like schools and all schools.

In year 7, the school was below like schools in all testing in 2013 and 2014 but similar to all schools. In 2015, the school performed below similar schools in all testing with the exception of grammar and punctuation but close to all schools. In 2016, the school performed below like and all schools with the exception of writing.

In 2014, the school was below in all testing for similar schools in year 9, with the exception of spelling, but close to all schools for all tests except writing. In 2015, the school was close to like and all schools in reading, and grammar and punctuation, but below like schools in writing, spelling and numeracy. In 2016, results indicate that the school performed close to all schools with the exception of writing, above all schools in grammar and punctuation, and close to similar schools with the exception of writing and numeracy.

### *Performance against ACT targets and mean results*

Mean scores in NAPLAN compared to state means reflect varied results throughout the school's current strategic improvement cycle. Consistently the school is above the mean in year 3 and at times in year 5, however the school performs consistently below ACT means in years 7 and 9 across the life of the plan.

During the period from 2013 to 2016, the school mean scores against targets for reading were variable. Year 9 students in numeracy achieved, for two years, at or above ACT targets. Most year groups performed within the ACT target spread, except years 3, 5 and 7 for reading in 2016 and year 5 for numeracy in 2014. In 2015 and 2016, reading for year 5 was also below the ACT target spread.

An area for future development is the extension and sustainability of students achieving within the top two bands of NAPLAN, particularly for years 7 and 9. Trend data indicates that although year 3 students begin at the top bands, this does not continue across all cohorts over time.

2016 NAPLAN data reflects that students in year 7 and 9 at Gold Creek School demonstrate greater average scaled score growth than students across ACT schools in some areas. Reading and grammar reflect this strength in both cohorts although not every year, and numeracy is an additional highlight in year 7. However, NAPLAN growth data overall reveals that a high proportion of students at Gold Creek School have not met expected growth in reading, writing, spelling, grammar or numeracy during the life of the current school plan.

In year 5, every year, from 2013–2016, 38 to 64 percent of students were not achieving expected growth in each area. Exceptions were in grammar in 2014 (where 65.4 percent achieved greater than or equal to expected growth), and reading and numeracy in 2015, where expected growth was greater than or equal to 68 percent and 66.7 percent respectively.

In year 7, numeracy and grammar growth is stronger than in other areas. The 2016 cohort has shown an increase in achievement of expected growth in this area. Spelling growth is trending to an increase in students who do not show expected growth from 2013–2016.

In 2016, 75 percent of year 9 students achieved expected growth in grammar. The cohort demonstrated improved growth in reading from 2014–2016.

### **B: Stakeholder perception data**

#### *Student perception data*

Student perception data indicates that high teacher expectations have been a strength for students in years 5–10 during 2013, 2014 and 2016 (with all being 90 percent or greater). Safety and student behaviour management are perceived weaknesses. Over the 2013–2016 period, there is a widening gap between the percentages of students from the school and ACT who perceive their opinions to be taken seriously.

### *Parent perception data*

Parent perception data has improved since 2015 with a high degree of consistency with ACT perception data for 2016. The school has also made significant ground with respect to management of student behaviour. There has been growth in the percentage of positive perception, bringing opinions close to the ACT average after two consecutive years well below.

### *Staff perception data*

Staff perception data is consistent with student perceptions indicating that high expectations are a strength of the school. The positive response rate to the item 'students like being at this school' has increased from 2015–2016, and is above the ACT percentage. Staff perceive a higher level of support from 2015–2016 although the response continues to be below the average across ACT schools. Staff data reflects that the school looks for ways to improve, with the favourable response rate to this item increasing by 10 percent between 2015 and 2016. This response is above the ACT percentage.

### *Evidence cited*

- NAPLAN data
- PIPS data
- student satisfaction surveys
- staff satisfaction surveys
- parent satisfaction surveys
- interviews with leadership team
- interviews with the school board and parent groups.

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

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### **Priority areas**

Gold Creek School identified three key improvement priorities for the 2014–2017 Strategic Planning cycle:

- Maximise learning outcomes for students
- Increase student engagement and leadership
- Increase key stakeholder involvement in the school.

These remained the priorities for the school for the life of the plan. In support of these priorities, the school leadership team identified a number of key improvement strategies and attendant actions for each of the priorities. In consultation with the Director of School Improvement and the school community, some adjustments were made to the key improvement strategies in 2015. Targets for each of the three priorities were set each year, although these targets did not remain consistent across the life of the plan.

## Achievements

### Priority Area 1 – Maximise learning outcomes for students

The consistent implementation of the National Quality Standard for preschools was identified as a key improvement strategy for this priority for the early years of the plan. Ensuring that inquiry-based learning was embedded in all preschool classrooms and that the school enacted the Quality Improvement Plan were two key actions. Both of the school's preschools exceeded standards in the National Quality Standard for preschools assessment.

Systematic curriculum delivery was also an area of focus. The aligning of the school curriculum to the Australian Curriculum and Early Years Learning Framework was prioritised. The school was assessed and accredited in 2016 for the implementation of the Primary Years Programme (PYP) and the Middle Years Programme (MYP) of the International Baccalaureate (IB). In order to achieve accreditation as an IB school, a coherent sequenced plan for curriculum delivery according to explicit criteria must be developed and implemented. The panel found evidence of short- and long-term detailed planning documentation as required by IB. The school leadership team also highlighted a need for consistent, rigorous formative and summative assessment and moderation practices. The panel found evidence of ongoing professional learning for teachers in this area.

Improved analysis and discussion of data in the school was identified as a key strategy to maximise learning outcomes for students. The panel found intentional improvement in this focus area including the development of site-based data plans, tracking mechanisms to monitor student learning and professional learning to build data literacy skills. A Response to Intervention (RTI) approach to identifying and addressing student need has been implemented and teachers in teams analyse and discuss literacy, numeracy and wellbeing data using the RTI model.

Across the life of the plan, the building of an expert teaching team was also identified as a key strategy for this priority. The school has committed significant resources to support professional learning aligned to its improvement agenda. The use of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers as a focus for building the professional capacity of staff is evident. Staff are formally observed by an executive teacher and plotted on the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Classroom Practice Continuum to provide starting points for discussion about practice and the setting of goals for targeted areas for professional learning. Ongoing feedback is aligned to the standards, and teachers are encouraged to become accredited as Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher. The school leadership team has development Essential Agreement documentation, which articulates the expected practice of staff. The panel found evidence of teacher observations and feedback, learning walks and three-minute classroom walk-throughs as strategies to support the building of a self-reflective culture.

The key performance measures for this school priority included: NAPLAN means, the top two bands of NAPLAN, the percentage of students with more than expected growth in PIPs and school satisfaction survey data. The school set a target of achieving the NAPLAN reading and numeracy targets as set by the Directorate. Across the life of the plan the NAPLAN mean score demonstrates varied results. The panel could not find evidence of targets set in relation to the number of students in the top two bands. Performance data indicates that the number of students in the top two bands has been inconsistent over the years of the strategic plan and consistently below the ACT in years 7 and 9. Targets were also set in

relation to the number of students in kindergarten reaching level eight in reading benchmarks. These targets were adjusted each year but not achieved across the life of the plan. Early in the plan, targets were set in relation to teacher satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning but were discontinued.

The panel found that this priority was broad in its intent. Gold Creek School notes that the NAPLAN data does not indicate a significant impact of the key improvement strategies during the life of the plan. There is not a strong story of student learning outcome improvement year on year in the targets set.

### **Priority Area 2 – Increase student engagement and leadership**

Over the life of the plan, the school leadership team has worked to improve student voice in the school. A student leadership structure is evident at each site and the panel noted during discussions with student leaders that they have several opportunities to contribute to school life. These students shared with the panel some of the initiatives they had been encouraged to pursue, for example, supporting structured play at the junior site. At the senior site, the student leadership team engage in and lead a number of co-curricular activities. The Student Leadership Councils work closely with the leadership team on whole-school projects and initiatives.

In response to perception survey data over time about students liking school, and the perception of parents about how much their child/children enjoy school, the leadership team identified student engagement as a key focus area for improvement. The strategic intent in implementing IB in the school was to deliver a teaching and learning program that was highly engaging through a more student-driven, inquiry-based approach to learning. Some students who had experienced learning at the school before the implementation of IB reflected that, since its implementation, learning experiences were more relevant, interesting and challenging. The leadership team has recognised that critical work needs to continue in the future to ensure that staff have a deep understanding of inquiry-based learning. The panel noted that a number of co-curricular activities both onsite and through key organisations were available to students to support their learning.

The school has placed a very high priority on the social and emotional wellbeing of students. Across both sites, a targeted social and emotional wellbeing program is in place and programs introduced to support this focus include MindMatters, KidsMatter and Growth Mindset. These programs also draw on the IB Learner Profile attributes to build internal resources for students. A holistic approach to identifying and addressing student need, through focused discussions at each site using data, is evident. The student engagement team has clear processes and programs in place to identify and respond to the individual social and emotional needs of students. This team has built links with a range of external agencies to provide additional focused support.

For this priority, Gold Creek School set targets in relation to two stakeholder perception data: the number of students who indicated that they liked being at school and felt safe and the number who were satisfied that there are opportunities to do interesting things. The targets in relation to the number of students who like being at school varied across the life of the plan with the target reached in 2015. The target was reached in 2016, however the panel noted that this was a school-based survey. Results would indicate that whilst the school has made progress this data needs to remain a focus for the school. Targets for students who feel safe were set in the early years of the plan but not continued. Feedback

provided by teachers and students indicates that the management of student behaviour will need to remain a focus for the school. The panel noted that in the main, classes were calm learning spaces and stakeholders felt that progress in this area had been made during this improvement cycle. In 2016, the school exceeded their target of engaging students in learning, increasing from 80 to 93 percent.

### **Priority Area 3 – Increase key stakeholder involvement in the school**

Improving communication between the school and families and building a stronger partnership between home and school were identified as two key strategies for this priority area. The panel noted that the school has explored a range of multi-modal communication strategies and has expanded its digital footprint. The school uses a Facebook page, Twitter and its website, and is trialling live feeds and recordings of presentations of key information at Parents and Citizens (P&C) meetings to reach a broader number of parents. At the primary site, three-way conferences are now established practice to support learning as a partnership between school and family. Celebrating the cultural diversity of the school through celebration of Mother Tongue and the establishment of a multicultural centre are two strategies the school has employed to connect with the many families with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D).

The school is trialling strategies for sharing student learning with parents through technology. Digital applications and programs (Google Classroom and Seesaw for Schools) are being used in some classrooms to share student work samples and connect with parents. Staff are encouraged to make regular use of email as a communication channel.

During the life of the plan there has been a stronger focus on acknowledging and celebrating achievement across the school. Awards are presented at regular school assemblies to students who demonstrate the IB Learner Profile attributes. The House system at the senior site is being used as a vehicle for increasing school pride and recognising students who are contributing to school culture.

The panel noted that targets were set in the early years of the plan in relation to the number of parents who attended parent–teacher interviews. The school found it difficult to collect data to measure progress towards this target. Targets set in relation to communication between teachers and parents were exceeded in 2014 and 2015. The parent satisfaction data in response to the statement ‘I can talk to my child’s teachers about my concerns’ has risen from 88 percent in 2013 to 94 percent in 2016 and is 7 points higher than the ACT P–10 average. The school has experienced significant growth in enrolments in kindergarten and the targets set in relation to growth in both kindergarten and year 7 were reached or exceeded across the life of the plan.

## **Reflections**

Across the life of the plan the school has experienced considerable change both in structure and approaches to teaching and learning. This has included disbanding the middle school model and restructuring into a P–6 and 7–10 model across two sites. This required a number of staffing changes. The school implemented the PYP and MYP of the IB. This has resulted in significant change in programs, processes and systems across the school. The school was assessed and accredited in 2016 as an IB school.

The panel reflected with the school leadership team during the review process on the school's improvement journey across the four years. The panel noted that the improvement plan was broad in its intent and characterised by a suite of key actions for improvement. While the three core priorities remained consistent throughout the life of the plan, a very broad range of initiatives and new programs emerged in subsequent annual action plans, and a clear alignment between each of these actions, the three priorities and the targets set was not always obvious. This made it difficult for the school to have a sharp focus on improving student learning outcomes and to monitor improvement against relevant targets over time. The challenge for the school leadership team in the development of the next strategic plan and subsequent plans will be to narrow and sharpen the focus for improvement.

#### *Evidence cited*

- Gold Creek School Organisational Chart
- annual school board reports
- annual action plans
- leadership team role descriptions
- PYP and MYP action plans
- staff Essential Agreements
- classroom Essential Agreements
- student awards lists
- lesson observation forms
- Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)
- unit planners
- RTI meeting records
- Bump Positive Engagement Continuum
- interviews with staff, students and parents
- classroom observations.

## Section D: National tools self-evaluation results

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The school has reflected using the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) since 2015. School reflection has been addressed annually using a layered approach and this immersion has resulted in deeper understanding of each of the domains. The school has reflected using the tool in small groups and then with all staff in cross-campus groups. Staff focused on specific evidence for each descriptor to inform the self-evaluation as well as identifying ideas for further exploration. The assessments were collated as one reflection to give a broad picture of the improvement journey from differing perspectives. The school has used these reflections to inform the key improvement strategies in annual action plans.

### National School Improvement Tool (NSIT)

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

- *The school has developed an agenda for improvement in partnership with parents and the community and school leaders can describe the improvements they wish to see in student behaviours and outcomes. This agenda is communicated in staff meetings, school newsletters, parent–teacher meetings and on the school website using a variety of formats to suit local needs.*
- *The leadership team has analysed school performance data over a number of years and is aware of trends in student achievement levels.*
- *Targets for improvement are not specific (e.g. not accompanied by timelines).*
- *The school’s focus on data is driven more by external requirements (e.g. NAPLAN, My School) than by an internal desire for good information to guide school decision making and to monitor progress.*
- *Although there is an expressed commitment to improvement, this is not reflected in a high level of enthusiasm for personal change on the part of staff. The communication of performance data to the school community tends to be sporadic and/or is limited only to information that the school is required to report.*

#### **Comments and findings**

- The school’s Strategic Plan (2013–2017) identifies three key strategic priorities: maximise learning outcomes for students; increase student engagement and leadership and increase key stakeholder involvement in the school. These priorities have remained the focus across the life of the plan, evidenced in annual action plans. Plans contain targets for improvement, although the alignment of these to the key improvement strategies is not always clear.
- Teachers identified a number of the key improvement strategies, including: the implementation of the IB program; formative/summative assessment; curriculum implementation; data analysis and discussion; and building of a culture that promotes learning.
- Teachers do not readily identify targets for improvement and these targets are not influencing their teaching.

- The school leadership team has analysed school performance data over time, evident in school board reports, tracking documents and staff discussions. The improvement agenda has been shared in reports to staff, newsletters and in live streams on social media school sites.

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

- *One or more members of staff have been assigned responsibility for analysing the full range of school data, and summarising, displaying and communicating student outcome data for the school.*
- *Time is set aside (e.g. on student-free days and in staff meetings) for the discussion of data and the implications of data for school policies and classroom practices. These discussions occur at whole-school and team levels. The school can illustrate through case studies, meeting minutes and project plans how data have been used to identify priorities, take action and monitor progress.*
- *School leaders pay close attention to data provided to them about the performance of the school (e.g. NAPLAN results; year 12 results) and identify areas in which the school is performing relatively poorly or well.*
- *Software may be used for the analysis of school results, including the performances of priority groups, but analyses generally do not extend to studies of improvement or growth.*
- *Information about the school's performance is communicated to the school community, but may lack explanation or analysis. There is limited engagement with parents and families around school data.*

### **Comments and findings**

- Improved teaching and learning through data analysis and discussion has been a focus across the life of the plan.
- A number of tracking spreadsheets are being used to record and monitor the progress of students.
- The school has collected a wide range of data sets including NAPLAN, PIPS, student perception surveys, attendance, behaviour, welfare, diagnostic tests and A to E academic performance.
- Data action teams at the junior site analyse and discuss whole of school performance data and make presentations to staff about their findings. Through these action teams, the school is actively building the capacity of staff to analyse data sets.
- On the junior site, cohort teams discuss the progress of students for their year level, analysing data at regular intervals. Tutor group teachers at the senior site have responsibility for collecting data, and discussing and monitoring the progress of their student group.
- NAPLAN mean scores demonstrate varied results over the life of the plan. Raw scores for PIPS are predominantly above ACT mean scores at end measure despite commencing slightly below ACT averages.
- A school-wide plan for the annual collection of data on student achievement is yet to be developed.

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

- *Class 'busy work' is kept to a minimum, and an attempt is made to ensure that all students are engaged in challenging, meaningful learning.*
- *Parents and families are encouraged to take a genuine and close interest in the work of the school and are welcomed as partners in their children's learning.*
- *Classrooms are generally orderly, although some are more so than others. Non-attendance is an issue for a small minority of students.*
- *The school effectively implements its policies, for example, by ensuring that disruptive behaviour, bullying and harassment are dealt with promptly. The school has clear expectations for how students should behave and interact with one another, and in the main, relationships are caring and respectful. Some staff time is taken up dealing with behaviour problems.*
- *Staff morale is satisfactory.*

### **Comments and findings**

- There is a strong focus on building a common language about learning through the IB Learner Profile attributes and attitudes. This is evidenced in teaching programs and the way in which students describe these.
- Parents express a high degree of confidence in the school leadership team and teachers.
- Gold Creek School has implemented a restorative justice and 'bump' approach (junior site) to managing behaviour. Staff perception survey data results and reports from some teachers interviewed by the review team indicate that there is some concern about how behaviour is managed in the school. The review team observed that some classes are more orderly than others.
- A high priority is placed on social and emotional wellbeing. A student wellbeing team systematically identifies and responds to student needs. This team connects to a range of agencies to support student wellbeing. A social and emotional wellbeing program supports the personal development of students.
- Tutor teachers on the senior site have responsibility for monitoring the academic progress and wellbeing of students.
- Staff has engaged in professional learning in Growth Mindset to support a whole of school approach to positive learning.
- The school has implemented the three-way conference model on the junior site when providing feedback to families to support learning as a partnership between student, teacher and parent.
- Student leadership opportunities have been formalised and extended across the years of schooling.
- Cultural diversity is foregrounded and recognised through initiatives including Mother Tongue and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.
- Formalised and documented communication protocols are not evident.

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

- *The principal and other school leaders have introduced programs and strategies to identify and address the needs of students in the school and are sourcing and applying available resources to meet those needs.*
- *The school has developed processes (e.g. systematic testing and assessment) for identifying student learning needs, although there may not always be good school records of student achievement and progress.*
- *Programs to meet individual learning needs (e.g. programs for gifted students, students with learning difficulties, students for whom English is a second language, Indigenous students, refugees) are prioritised, where possible, in the school budget.*
- *Physical learning spaces are used creatively and technology is accessible to the majority of staff and students.*

#### **Comments and findings**

- On the junior site, teachers meet fortnightly in cohort teams to discuss student progress, moderate and adjust teaching plans. Teachers maintain profiles of their class that are used to inform discussions once a term with key staff. Through these meetings individual student progress is monitored and students with additional learning or social and emotional needs are identified and addressed.
- On the senior site, tutor teachers have responsibility for monitoring student progress and identifying students for potential additional support.
- ILPs for students identified as gifted, Indigenous, EAL/D are collaboratively developed and implemented. A Gifted and Talented Policy has been developed.
- The newly developed school leadership structure aligns to priority areas for improvement and harnesses expertise.
- Significant resources have been allocated to support formalised collaborative work between teachers evidenced in scheduled common times throughout the week for teachers to meet.
- Students are identified, through formative assessment and discussion of data during planning and RTI meetings, for targeted support through reading and maths groups (What I Need (WIN) groups).
- The school has prioritised funding to support the IB program.
- There has been a significant investment in technology recently to increase its accessibility across the school.
- There has been a deliberate intent to recruit staff to achieve a balance across curriculum requirements and to implement IB in the school.
- The school has invested in building the capability and capacity of its administrative team to share experiences and dialogue across sites.

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

- *There is evidence that the principal and other school leaders see the development of staff into an expert and coherent school-wide teaching team as central to improving outcomes for all students.*
- *The school has arrangements in place for mentoring and coaching. Teachers visit each other's classrooms and welcome opportunities to have principals and other school leaders observe and discuss their work with them.*
- *Attention is paid to strengths and weaknesses in the school-wide team, with strategies in place to recruit staff with particular expertise, to train staff to address particular needs, and to support staff who find it difficult to commit to the school's improvement agenda.*
- *The school provides opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles outside the classroom.*
- *The school is implementing a formal process for conducting professional discussions with staff.*

### **Comments and findings**

- The school has invested in professional learning around the PYP and MYP within the IB program, and a strategy is in place for continuous development of the inquiry based approach. The executive staff engage in virtual and live IB networks.
- There are systems, protocols and routines for mentoring and coaching across the school.
- Shared whole-school observation, feedback and coaching practice is evident. Directors of Teaching and Learning lead and coordinate observation and feedback strategies, although the expression of the practice is different for each site.
- Data are collected and reflected upon through learning walks and three-minute classroom walk-throughs.
- Teachers reflect on their practice using the AITSIL Classroom Practice Continuum. Observations and feedback inform professional pathways documents and walk-through focii. Teachers report that they receive valuable feedback from observations and believe that this could be furthered strengthened by ensuring that some of these observations are by staff who have high levels of pedagogical content skill in their Key Learning Area.
- The School's recruitment of six Teach For Australia Associates has led to a focus on teacher induction and beginning teachers support through formalised mentoring relationships on the senior site. Mentees and mentors participate in workshops and relevant conversations, focused on areas such as behaviour management and digital efficiency.
- There are processes to ensure all teachers, irrespective of their pathway into the profession or the school, receive feedback routinely. Staff have engaged in professional learning to build knowledge, skills and whole-school approaches to promote social and emotional wellbeing including programs like Restorative Practices, KidsMatter, MindMatters and Understanding Trauma.

### *DOMAIN 6: Systematic curriculum delivery*

- *The school's curriculum delivery plan identifies curriculum, teaching and learning priorities and requirements. The curriculum delivery plan reflects a shared vision (by the school's governing body, principal, school leadership team, and teachers) for the school, and provides a context for delivering the curriculum as detailed in the Australian or other approved curriculum and, where relevant, system curriculum documents.*
- *The school curriculum plan and curriculum delivery (including the time allocated to particular learning) balance requirements to address all learning areas, to give priority to English, mathematics and science.*
- *The school leadership team ensures that the enacted curriculum remains a focus for discussion among, and collaboration between, teachers and that the curriculum plan is the reference against which flexible delivery is designed, assessment tasks are developed and student learning is reported. Curriculum delivery is designed to meet the needs of the range of students within each year level as well as those with disabilities and other particular needs.*

### **Comments and findings**

- IB accreditation and early implementation has anchored the school's curriculum and broader improvement journey.
- Layers of planning (long- and short-term) are evident, including scope and sequence, unit and lesson plans.
- Considerable attention has been paid to ensure that the Australian Curriculum is being fully implemented. The ManageBac software supports the school in aligning the IB curriculum to the Australian Curriculum.
- There are processes in place to review vertical and horizontal alignment every three years on the junior site. On the senior site, more formalised processes to reflect and review are being established.
- Team planning sessions on the junior site enable teachers to adjust planning based on data, student interest and student needs (collaboration, remaining a focus).
- The approach to learning through IB supports a focus on the progressive development of skills and attributes.
- Embedded approaches to the teaching of literacy and numeracy and higher order thinking across all subjects and year levels are not yet evident.

### *DOMAIN 7: Differentiated teaching and learning*

- *School leaders explicitly encourage teachers to tailor their teaching to student needs and readiness.*
- *Planning shows how the different needs of students are addressed, and how multiple opportunities to learn are provided, including multiple pathways for transition to external studies (e.g. apprenticeships) for students in years 10 to 12.*

- *Some use is made of assessment instruments to identify individual strengths and weaknesses and starting points for teaching, but this appears to be at the initiative of individual teachers rather than a school-wide expectation.*
- *Some use is made of differentiated teaching (e.g. differentiated reading groups in the early primary years).*
- *Reports to parents generally do not show progress or provide guidance to parents on actions they might take.*

## **Comments and findings**

- At the junior site, there is systematic use of assessment instruments to establish where individuals are at and to inform further teaching.
- Data literacy has developed across the education team during the improvement cycle, and is informing ILPs.
- Formative assessment has been a focus for staff during the life of the current strategic plan.
- Interventions are in place for students identified as requiring additional support.
- The school has appointed staff at each site with responsibility for gifted and talented programs. The school's approach to identification and support of students with gifts and talents has shifted during the life of the current strategic plan.
- There is some evidence of learning intentions being framed as questions on the senior site, to encourage multiple student responses and engagement.
- The RTI approach and fortnightly data meetings on the junior site are providing contexts for developing teacher pedagogical repertoires that support differentiated practice. There is evidence of teachers building their capabilities for differentiation.
- There is evidence of adjustments within assessments to support learners.
- In IB planning documentation, strategies to differentiate the learning are evident although the execution of these are not always clear.

## ***DOMAIN 8: Effective pedagogical practices***

- *School leaders are committed to continuous improvement in teaching practices throughout the school and expect team leaders and teachers to identify ways of doing this, although the principal and other senior leaders may not themselves have clear positions on the kinds of teaching they wish to see occurring across the school or be 'hands on' in driving improved teaching practices.*
- *Clarity about what students are expected to learn and be able to do explicit teaching of skills and content and individualised attention as required are key elements of the school's push for improved teaching and learning.*
- *There may be a lack of explicitness about what students are expected to know and be able to do as a result of classroom activities, very little explicit teaching, limited attention to individual learning needs, or low expectations on the part of teachers that all students in the room will master the content of lessons. Classroom activities frequently have the appearance of 'busy work'.*

## Comments and findings

- While inquiry-based pedagogy underpins the IB approach, some teachers are at an early stage of translating the philosophy into practice.
- Initial Teacher Education (ITE) primary graduates at Gold Creek Primary School bring sophisticated understanding of inquiry pedagogy, as do members of the preschool education team.
- Junior site teachers recognise that students are also transitioning into different ways of learning.
- The Director of Curriculum and the Director of Teaching and Learning have acknowledged there is progress to be made in interdisciplinary curriculum design across the senior site.
- Essential Agreements around teaching and learning have been developed with teachers.
- A whole of site approach to the teaching of spelling is evident at the junior site. Clear and well known positions about the teaching of reading, writing, mathematics and science is not yet evident.
- Teachers frame learning intentions and success criteria that are informed by the IB and Australian Curriculum. Students describe how these support them in understanding what they are expected to learn and be able to do.
- Students receive feedback on their learning and the school's strong focus on formative assessment has supported this. On the junior site, students set SMART goals and there has been a strong focus on providing feedback. Some students at the senior site found it difficult to describe in specific detail what they need to do to improve.
- A range of literacy programs are embedded across the junior site, including THRASS (Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills), Jolly Phonics, and Words Their Way as early intervention strategies. The school's emerging focus on inquiry-based practice is opening reflection on how, when and for whom these approaches are most appropriate.

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

- *The school has established one or more partnerships with families, local businesses and/or community organisations with the express purpose of improving outcomes for students.*
- *Each partnership brings staff and students of the school together with external partners such as families, other education or training institutions, local businesses and/or community organisations. All partners have a high level of understanding of, and commitment to, the purposes of the partnership and clear objectives have been set, expressed in terms of improved outcomes for students.*
- *Attention has been given to communication and to the sharing of experiences within the partnership.*
- *There is evidence that the school's partnerships are being implemented as intended. However, there may be limited evidence of improved student outcomes as a result of partnership activities.*

## Comments and findings

- A formalised and sustained partnership is in place between Gold Creek School and Holy Spirit School. There is a high level understanding of the purpose of the partnership and this has been refined since its inception. Currently Holy Spirit School is the school's partner in extended professional learning opportunities.
- Extensive links to agencies (for example, Menslink, Salvation Army, SmArts, Anglicare, Alan Tongue Aspire program, Tuggeranong Arts Centre, Belconnen Community Services and Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience) are evident to support the social and emotional wellbeing of students.
- A formal partnership with the Australian National University (ANU) to deliver the Sources of Strength program with clear processes for evaluation of its effectiveness is evident. The school also accesses this university for language and arts programs.
- The school is exploring and implementing innovative approaches to connecting with parents and sharing key information (e.g. live feeds on school social media sites). There is a deliberate and critical lens on the quality of information provided to the wider community.
- Expanded channels of communication are supporting the flow of information and engagement of parents as partners.

## National Safe Schools Framework: School Audit Tool

Teaching staff from preschool to year 10 completed the National Safe Schools Framework School Audit in Term 2, 2017. Data revealed that teacher perceptions across the eight priority areas were mostly and/or definitely true. The exception was the area of leadership commitment to a safe school culture. A small number of teachers (approximately 10 percent) perceived this as partially true.

The school's supportive and connected school culture was identified as a strength, with staff acknowledging the school's work in supporting the specific needs of groups including Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, refugee and immigrant communities, and people with a disability. Articulated policies and procedures, and positive behaviour management were also recognised as strengths.

The school's strong focus on social and emotional wellbeing has supported the identification of key staff with specific responsibilities around student safety and wellbeing throughout the life of the plan, with further progress since the survey was administered.

The following priority areas for continuing action and review have been identified through the School Audit Tool:

- the continuing development and communication of a clear vision for a safe, supportive and respectful school
- planning for sustaining the vision
- facilitation of access to resources to support the implementation of the vision for a safe and supportive school.

## Section E: Affirmations, commendations and recommendations

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### Affirmations

The External Review Panel offers the following affirmations for Gold Creek School.

1. The school is well served by a highly committed and professional staff, who bring a wealth of experience and expertise in a wide range of professional and academic fields.
2. A collegial culture is evident through teachers supporting each other professionally and personally. Teachers value the opportunity to meet regularly, plan together, reflect and learn from each other's practice.
3. The school is affirmed for encouraging and enabling teachers and teams to explore the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance the inquiry approach and differentiated learning experiences. There has been considerable investment in this professional learning.
4. Extensive work has been undertaken to engage staff regularly in data-driven discussions, (underpinned by the Response to Intervention model) to inform their teaching, identify and address individual student needs.
5. Mentoring relationships are respectful of the knowledge and experience of teachers at all career stages and actively draws upon these.
6. The fluidity with which teachers align the IB with the Australian Curriculum and Early Years Learning Frameworks is acknowledged.

### Commendations

Gold Creek School is commended for the following.

1. The school has both a commitment to, and defined practices to develop the whole child as informed and socially skilled citizens.
2. There has been considerable investment in supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of students. Parents and students value the high level of support and care provided by staff and the school. This care and support is responsive and seamless. Students have access to a suite of support services enabled by a whole-team approach to the identification and response to needs.
3. The school's identification and investment in IB accreditation and implementation has been strategic and well informed. This framework has served as a productive means to unify thought and provide structure for learning. It is supporting pedagogical transformation, whilst strengthening community confidence in the school.

### Recommendations

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

1. Determine and document which range of systematic data sets will best inform the school about student outcomes in academic performance, attendance, behaviour and student wellbeing. Give consideration to overall school performance as well as the

performance of identified priority groups, cohorts, classes and individuals. Use the analysis of these data sets to inform the development of a more narrow and sharp improvement agenda. Agree on the associated meaningful targets for this strategic planning cycle. Ensure that school performance is widely communicated to parents, families, staff and students including progress towards targets.

2. Continue to promote and maintain a safe and respectful learning environment that reflects high expectations of behaviour. Ensure that expected responses for inappropriate behaviour are widely understood and consistently implemented.
3. Consider how opportunities for teachers to work together and learn from each other can be facilitated across the sites, harnessing the extensive experience of staff from preschool to year 10. Continue to support the professional learning of staff through observation, walk-throughs and associated feedback, using this harvested data to identify coaching needs and to inform professional learning pathways and opportunities.
4. Develop a Professional Learning Plan (PLP) each year, reflective of the explicit improvement agenda and linked to teacher goals, which makes clear whole-school, teacher cohort and individual teacher professional learning. Ensure the plan is adequately resourced.
5. Continue to deepen the understanding of and approaches to inquiry-based learning as the school's signature pedagogical foundation. Position teachers as inquiry learners as they reflect on their practice and identify professional learning that best meets their needs.
6. Build a shared understanding of differentiation and ensure that it is a feature of every teacher's classroom practice, characterised by the regular use of data to determine the strengths and weaknesses of individual students and as starting points for teaching.

## Section F: Record of school review process

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The following people were members of the External Review Panel for Gold Creek School conducted on 31 July–3 August.

<b>Name:</b> Christina Rogers	External Review Panel – Chair
<b>Name:</b> Wendy Cave	External Review Panel – Principal Member Macquarie School
<b>Name:</b> Bruce McCourt	External Review Panel – Principal Observer Calwell High School

I, Christina Rogers, as External Review Panel Chair endorse that this is a true and accurate record of the findings from the External School Review process.

**Signature:** 

**Date:** 29/08/2017

I, Angela Spence, as Principal of Gold Creek School accept this Review Report on behalf of the school community.

**Signature:** 

**Date:** 29/08/2017