



ACT
Government

Education and Training

EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT 2015

for

LATHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL



Introduction: Overview of the Validation process

As part of the Territory's school improvement approach, public schools and colleges in the Australian Capital Territory are required to participate in an External Validation process every four years. This document captures the findings of the panel during this cycle of validation.

In broad terms, the panel sought to determine, through evaluation and validation, 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.

External Validation was conducted over three days and involved a wide variety of data gathering approaches including observations, interviews and documentation. This approach provided evidence for the panel to consider against the nine inter-related domains in the National School Improvement Tool that informed our commendations and recommendations.

Section A: School context

Latham Primary School is a P – 6 school located in Belconnen. It has a diverse population of students including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) and students with a range of special learning needs incorporated into Learning Support Units (LSUA's). The school's enrolments have grown from 259 in 2012 to approximately 335 students in 2015. The 2014 data identifies 54.8 percent of their students come from their Priority Enrolment Area.

The school has been classed as a low SES school with an ICSEA value that has grown from 1008 to 1032 for the duration of the School Plan and as part of the National Partnership Initiative Latham Primary School was awarded a Literacy and Numeracy Field Officer. This position remained in place for three years until there was a significant improvement in the NAPLAN results. The Field Officer was responsible for driving many initiatives. It became evident, following the departure of the Field Officer that many of these initiatives had not resulted in sustained changes in teacher practice.

Furthermore, there have been two principals during this school improvement cycle and have been other significant change that included a new Deputy Principal and two new Executive Teachers mid-way through the school improvement cycle. This change has resulted in a clearer explicit improvement agenda throughout the school. The number of staff has increased with a significant increase in the number of part time staff. The panel noted this may have had an adverse effect on communication and consistency of teaching and learning. The experience of staff has also decreased with the loss of more experienced staff. As the school has grown, so has the number of executive staff, which currently works extremely successfully.

Latham Primary School is committed to the development of the whole individual. The emphasis in the preschool and primary programs is to ensure students develop a strong sense of morality, integrity and care towards others. Everyone in the school community honours and practises the shared values of Respect, Motivation, Collaboration, Resilience and Positivity. The vision is the school supports global citizens to belong, embrace learning and enjoy a quality education.

Section B: School performance

Latham Primary School have utilised system data, National Assessment Program- Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and Performance Indicators in Primary School (PIPS) to evaluate school performance. The school is beginning to use school based data such as reading benchmarks, Brains Ears Eyes (BEE) spelling, Progressive Achievement Tests in Mathematics (PAT Maths) and

Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) to monitor student performance and identify individual needs. The school has developed a system to collect and track school-wide learning data. It has been aligned to an Assessment and Reporting Schedule developed in 2014, which has been refined in 2015. Latham Primary School has articulated through its School Plan a commitment to improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students.

The panel reviewed longitudinal PIPS Reading and Mathematics data that illustrated a trend since 2012 of increased numbers of students making less than expected growth, and decreasing numbers of students making expected or better than expected growth through to 2014. In particular, the results for reading show that over the past three years students have declined from 80 percent in 2012 to 49 percent in 2014 reaching expected or better than expected growth.

As a result of analysis of the PIPS data at the end of 2014, teachers liaised with the Learning Support teacher to develop an explicit literacy program from the very beginning of 2015. This has led to data being collected and analysed throughout the year and differentiated groups being formed based on phonemic development.

PIPS mathematics data shows that from 2011 to 2014 there was a substantial decrease in the number of students making expected or better than expected growth. This decreased from 93 percent in 2011 to 76 percent in 2014. The panel noted the need to develop an analysis of kindergarten mathematics data to inform strategic direction for teaching and learning in numeracy.

School reading data shows a high majority of students meeting ACT Education and Training Directorate (the Directorate) reading benchmark targets across the years. The panel reviewed the inconsistency within reading benchmark data makes it difficult to highlight school wide trends, which suggests the need for agreed practice for reading across all year levels. In 2015 Latham Primary School has participated in the Principals as Literacy Leaders in Schools (PALLs) program, and has recently established a Literacy Leadership Team to take carriage of school wide literacy philosophy, analysis of data and practice.

The panel noted the decline in writing results from 2012 – 2014. This was highlighted in the continued lack of growth of students from year 3, 2012 to year 5, 2014 whereby the school average declined dramatically. The panel highly recommends the school investigates whole school writing practices with a particular emphasis on years 3 to 6.

The percentage of students making expected growth in NAPLAN reading over time shows a decline for whole school and within school match data which tracks progress between year 3 and year 5 at Latham. The panel suggests the school requires an investigation into an early intervention model as a strategy to improve reading outcomes for students from K - 2.

The panel noted the school has utilised the PAT Maths as a standardised assessment tool to track students during their time at Latham Primary School. While there has been an increase in growth data from years 3 to 5 compared to schools with similar starting scores, this growth is less than expected for Latham Primary School.

The panel suggests the leadership team interrogate the teaching and learning practices in the K to 2 team compared with the 3 to 6 team. This will enable the school to develop professional dialogue and a consistent approach to the teaching of literacy across the school.

Evidence has been collated from School Satisfaction Surveys in regards to the school's priority to improve communication between all stakeholders. The panel noted that from 2011 – 2014 there

has been a consistent trend of ineffective communication between vital stakeholders in the school.

- The perceived effective communication between the school and parents has declined from 83 percent to 59 percent
- The perceived effective communication between teachers and executive has declined from 90 percent to 62 percent
- The perceived effective communication amongst all staff has declined from 82 percent to 63 percent.

The panel recommends the leadership team continue to work with staff to further improve the communication processes enabling a consistent approach to the sharing of expectations and information.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

Priority Areas

The school improvement priorities were selected following the 2011 validation cycle. Although the detail behind the rationale and approach to developing the plan was lost due to the many changes in executive staff, data indicated that the three priority areas were identified needs of the school. The three key improvement priorities for the 2012-2015 Strategic School Plan were as follows.

- Highly effective teaching and learning is evident throughout the school with improved student outcomes through the effective use of data.
- Highly effective communication between all key stakeholders (students, staff and parents) is apparent throughout the school.
- Improve student engagement.

At the end of each year the staff undertook the self-assessment process against the Annual Operating Plan (AOP), and the new year's AOP was developed in consultation, first with the executive and then the whole staff. Since 2013 the National School Improvement Tool was also used as a method of self-assessment. In regard to parents and students the main source of data has been through the School Satisfaction Surveys, and in 2014 the school also used the Australian School Climate Survey to elicit a sense of parent and student satisfaction with the school.

Achievements

Priority Area 1: Highly effective teaching and learning is evident throughout the school with improved student outcomes through the effective use of data

The performance measures set for this priority included: -

- proportion of students in NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation and numeracy in years 3 and 5 by 5 percentage points
- proportion of students in Kindergarten to year 3 achieving the system recommended End of Year Benchmarks for reading.

The panel noted since 2014 the school has placed an emphasis on professional learning in literacy and numeracy. This includes an involvement in the Principal's as Literacy Leaders

program (PALLs) which has built capacity of the leadership team to facilitate more informed teaching and learning. In term 2, 2015 staff committed to a model of collaborative coaching to enhance the reflective practice of teaching.

Data discussions with the principal have allowed staff to develop a deeper understanding of the purpose of the assessment tools reflected in the school's assessment schedule.

Strategic Priority 2: Highly effective communication between all key stakeholders (students, staff and parents) is apparent throughout the school

The performance measures set for this priority included: -

- percentage of parents, carers and staff who rate communication as highly effective through the National Survey.
- parent satisfaction related to 'Communication between parents and the school is both regular and effective'
- parent satisfaction related to 'There is effective communication between teachers and their supervisors'
- proportion of students who rate communication as successful through the National Survey

The school has improved the method of delivery for communication to reach a greater audience in a timely manner. The panel noted that term overviews were developed by each team and sent to parents in week 1 each term as a way to communicate learning with parents. In addition, the panel notes the successful work of the leadership team and preschool community becoming more involved as a whole school with effective communication and improved involvement from preschool parents in whole school decision making. This is reflected in the recent Nation Quality Standards assessment and the excellent retention of preschool to kindergarten students.

While the data represents a decrease in staff satisfaction, presently the leadership team is working with staff on a code of cooperation, in order to improve communication between staff and the leadership team.

Strategic Priority 3: Improve student engagement

Within this priority the following measures were identified to gauge their success:

- The percentage of students who respond they agree or strongly agree to:
 - 'Teachers at this school make me feel valued and included'
 - 'Students at this school make me feel valued and included'
 - 'Teachers motivate me to learn'
- attendance
- percentage of students reporting to parents on their achievements in meeting their learning goals

The panel reviewed the establishment of the Latham Primary School's Vision and Values to be a catalyst for improved motivation for learning. The school has worked collaboratively with staff, students and the wider community to communicate clearly a culture in which all students are expected to learn successfully.

The parent satisfaction survey has indicated that the vast majority of parents, agree and strongly agree that Latham Primary School 'works with me to support my child's learning'. The panel

notes that this was reinforced by the School Board chair and Parents and Citizens members during the validation visit.

The panel notes that the formation of a highly motivated and articulate Student Leadership Team who promote school wide, global and community initiatives is evident at Latham.

Reflections

The panel noted the progressive work that has been undertaken with the development of the assessment schedule and data tracker to better inform opportunities for differentiation. The panel recommends this remain a focus, enabling this process to better inform individual teacher's planning, while allowing a systematic approach for staff to interrogate data and inform teaching and learning practices.

In response to the decline in reading data the panel suggests the school establish: clarity about what students are expected to learn and be able to do; high expectations of every student's learning; explicit teaching of skills and content; individualised attention as required; and timely feedback to guide student action. These can become key elements of the school's push for improved teaching and learning.

The panel recommends the school ensures regular use of reliable processes to collect and analyse community perception and student well-being in order to measure the impact of current practices in the school.

The panel noted the school has established high expectations for student behaviour and this is reflected in the consistent and effective approach to behaviour management policies and procedures. This is evident in the increased student suspension numbers in 2014. This increase coincides with the implementation of the school vision, values and the development of a more consistent approach from the leadership team.

Evidence cited and its validation

School satisfaction data

Annual Operating Plan 2014 and 2015

ASBR 2014

NAPLAN data.

Section D: National tools self-evaluation results

National School Improvement Tool

Latham Primary School examined the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) in 2013 and 2014 and made determinations as to where the school is placed in each of the nine domains. The staff was given the opportunity to comment and be involved in discussion of the nine NSIT domains, provide evidence and suggest ways to move forward during a staff meeting. The panel reviewed responses from the leadership team as well as the collated staff members' responses and evidence was recorded to support decisions as to where the school was placed in the various performance levels. Self-assessment had not been undertaken in 2015 at the time of validation.

After examining Latham Primary School documents and interviewing members of the leadership team, teaching staff and parent representatives, the validation panel has determined responses to the NSIT for Latham Primary School. These responses were aligned with the school's own determinations of how the school is placed with regard to each of the nine NSIT domains.

It was noted by the panel that there is improvement taking place in various aspects of the school and that it is foreseeable that these improvements will further enhance the school's position on the NSIT in the near future.

In validating the school's journey against the National School Improvement Tool the panel noted the following in relation to the **Explicit improvement agenda** domain.

- *The principal and other school leaders articulate a shared commitment to improvement.*
- *Plans for improvement do not appear to have been clearly communicated, widely implemented or to have impacted significantly on teachers' day-to-day work. Targets for improvement are not specific (e.g., not accompanied by timelines).*
- *The school leadership team is clearly committed to finding ways to improve on current student outcomes.*

At Latham Primary School staff and parents have articulated that there has been a clear improvement in the re-engagement of students back into learning in classrooms.

An example of the school leadership team's commitment to finding ways to improve on current student outcomes is through their current engagement in the Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALLs) professional learning. Through interviews and classroom observations the panel found evidence of staff implementing improved literacy practices they have gained from participating in Reading Institute and PALLs workshops.

Within the **Analysis and discussion of data** domain, the panel verified the following.

- *One or more members of staff have been assigned responsibility for implementing the annual plan, analysing the full range of school data, and summarising, displaying and communicating student outcome data for the school.*
- *The school has ensured that appropriate software is available and that at least these assigned staff have been trained to undertake data analyses.*
- *An ad hoc approach exists to building staff skills in the analysis, interpretation and use of classroom data.*
- *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.*
- *School data are presented to staff in meetings, but presentations tend to be 'for information' rather than a trigger for in-depth discussions of teaching practices and school processes.*

It was noted by the panel that staff are collecting a range of literacy and numeracy data across the school. Recently the leadership team have begun sharing with staff the purpose of many of the literacy and numeracy assessment tools and this has enabled staff to develop an increased understanding of why the data is collected and the implications for their classroom teaching.

The panel reviewed evidence that some members of the leadership team analyse and share aspects of data collected with teachers or teams of teachers throughout the school. Further work is needed to strengthen the processes for the analysis of data, studies of growth and to ensure that there is consistency across the school in the way teachers respond to the data collected.

For continued growth it will be important for the leadership team to be clear about the purpose for data collection and analysis and to articulate this vision to staff. The panel recommends that the collection and systematic analysis of data be built into regular team meetings through a structure such as a PLC.

Within the **Culture that promotes learning** domain, the panel verified the following.

- *Classrooms are generally orderly, although some are more so than others.*
- *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.*
- *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.*
- *Staff morale is satisfactory.*

The panel commends the school for work done in re-engaging students back in classrooms and establishing this expectation of learning across the school. Classrooms are generally orderly, although this varies across the school. Parents and families are encouraged to take a close interest in the work of the school and are welcomed as partners in their children's learning. Many parents are engaged in partnerships throughout the school. This is particularly evident in the early childhood section of the school, where a range of parents assist in classrooms.

The collaborative development of the Latham Primary School values has had a positive impact on the school community and the values are evident and visible throughout the school. The panel commends the collaborative manner in which the values were developed and communicated to the wider school community.

Within the **Targeted use of school resources** domain, the panel verified the following.

- *The school uses its human and physical resources to address the needs of students, although this may not be preceded by a systematic analysis of those needs.*
- *Specialist diagnostic testing is organised for a small number of students with special needs, but teachers do not routinely administer tests to better understand specific learning difficulties (eg, problems in learning to read) or individual learning needs (eg, LBOTE, gifted).*
- *School leaders encourage teachers to address individual learning needs in classrooms, but there are very few agreed school-wide strategies for doing this.*
- *Physical learning spaces are used creatively and technology is accessible to the majority of staff and students.*

Latham Primary School has specialist teachers to help address the diverse learning needs of the student population. Through an interview conducted with the Learning Assistance teacher the panel learned that some diagnostic testing is undertaken in order to plan learning to target student's identified needs. This support is provided to both underachieving students and students that require extension. Through classroom observations the panel saw evidence of differentiation in some classrooms, particularly in the areas of reading and mathematics.

The panel noted that the school has directed money towards improving the physical environment of the school over the past few years in order to improve the look and feel of the school. A number of courtyards have been revamped and the school has been recarpeted.

Within the **Expert Teaching Team** domain, the panel verified the following.

- *The principal and leadership team are seen as supportive of, but not generally involved in, the day-to-day practice and learning of teachers.*
- *Teachers are open to constructive feedback and provide feedback to colleagues, although there may not be formal mentoring or coaching arrangements in place.*
- *The school is implementing a formal process for conducting professional discussions with staff.*

The principal and Leadership Team have implemented a process for engaging teachers in discussion focussing on student data twice yearly. This has provided an avenue for providing teachers with constructive feedback and the principal has acknowledged the benefits of ensuring the sustainability of this process for ongoing teacher development and feedback. Teachers at Latham Primary School are generally open to constructive feedback and provide feedback to colleagues. Through the Collaborative Coaching model teachers have the opportunity to visit each other's classrooms to observe and discuss their work. The panel suggests that the school formalise the coaching and mentoring process for staff in order to help develop a culture of continuous professional improvement.

Within the **Systematic curriculum delivery** domain, the panel verified the following.

- *The school has a documented plan for curriculum delivery that includes year level and term plans.*
- *School leaders talk about embedding fundamental cross-curricular skills such as literacy, numeracy and higher order thinking within all subjects, but there is little evidence that school-wide strategies are in place to drive a consistent approach.*
- *Discussions about curriculum delivery tend to be sporadic and reactive with a year level focus rather than being driven by a leadership team with a whole-school approach.*

The panel observed variation across the school in the way certain aspects of curriculum is delivered. As a result of some observed inconsistencies the panel recommends that the leadership team clearly defines and communicates initiatives based on educational research with a clear timeline for implementation. At Latham discussions about curriculum delivery tend to occur sporadically at team meetings. The panel recommends that the leadership team analyse current school practice and make a strategic decision in order to implement a whole school approach to the systematic delivery of the curriculum at Latham Primary School.

Within the **Differentiated teaching and learning** domain, the panel verified the following.

- *School leaders are committed to success for all, but do not drive a strong classroom agenda to assess and identify individual learning needs or to differentiate teaching according to students' needs.*
- *Some use is made of differentiated teaching (eg, differentiated reading groups in the early primary years), but in most classes teachers teach the same curriculum to all students with similar levels of individual support.*
- *Regular assessments of student learning are undertaken, but these often are summative and disconnected (e.g. relating to different topics) rather than exploring long-term progress in students' knowledge, skills and understandings over time.*

- *Reports to parents show progress over time and include suggestions for ways in which parents can support their children's learning.*

The panel observed variation in differentiation across the classrooms visited. Some use is made of differentiated teaching, in particular through the reading groups in the early primary years, and in the upper years through the teaching of mathematics. The panel recommends the school develop a more systematic and cohesive approach to addressing individual learning needs in the classrooms across the school. Latham Primary School written reports to parents are detailed and include clear suggestions to parents for ways in which they can support their children's learning. The panel noted that reports were written in parent friendly language and addressed both student achievement and effort.

Within the **Effective pedagogical practices** domain, the panel verified the following.

- *School leaders are explicit about their desire to see effective teaching occurring throughout the school, but are less clear about what this might look like.*
- *School leaders take a close interest in the school's literacy and numeracy results, but generally do not engage in discussions with staff about effective teaching strategies.*
- *Discussions of specific teaching practices are rare.*
- *There is some clarity about what students are expected to learn, but a lack of balance in teaching methods (e.g. over-reliance on whole-group teaching or very little explicit teaching).*

The leadership team has begun to introduce staff to the process of reflecting on their practice and articulating their beliefs about teaching. This is beginning to drive the agenda to improve and enhance consistent teaching practices across the school. The school could benefit from implementing a process to help facilitate discussions with staff about effective teaching strategies on a regular basis. Teachers have benefited from participation in PALLs in 2015, this has helped staff to develop a common purpose and language for the teaching of reading at Latham Primary School. The panel encourages the leadership team to continue working on developing school specific beliefs and practices related to the school vision.

Within the **School-community partnerships** domain, the panel verified the following.

- *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.*
- *Communications between partners are largely unplanned.*
- *Attention has been given to communication and to the sharing of experiences within the partnership; however, there may be no formal plan for reviewing the partnership's outcomes and effectiveness.*
- *There is evidence that the school's partnerships are being implemented as intended.*

Latham Primary School has fostered a number of positive partnerships with the school community. This is evidenced through the active Parents and Citizen's Association, involvement of the School Board and the significant number of volunteers across the school. The School

Board is involved in the selection of students for the Student Leadership Team. Parents are regularly involved both in supporting learning in the classrooms and are integral to the running of whole school events. Through a range of interactions and interviews with parents the panel noted that the school community feels welcome and is highly involved at Latham Primary School.

National Safe Schools Audit Tool

The National Safe Schools Framework Audit Tool (NSSFAT) was provided to all staff members, a focus group of year 5/6 students and a focus group of parents. The staff and parents were asked to fill out an individual 'School Audit Tool', whilst the students discussed their decision, formed a consensus which was then recorded by a member of staff. The results were collated and analysed by the leadership team.

The school determined it has established a supportive and connected school culture. The panel's observations and interviews with staff, students and parents, supported this view. One area for improvement noted by staff was in professional development of a safe and supportive learning environment. The collaborative development of the Latham Primary School Values has assisted all stakeholders to better understand the expectations for students at Latham. Reference is made to the values in classrooms, newsletters and assemblies.

Section E: Commendations and recommendations

Commendations

Latham Primary School is commended for the following.

1. **The culture of the school has been transformed through re-engaging students and developing clear expectations and strategies to promote positive student behaviour.** This is clearly evident through the Student Leadership Team and the implementation of the Latham School Values. These initiatives have assisted to improve student engagement and provide a common language.
2. **The staff have made deliberate use of partnerships with families for the purpose of improving student outcomes.** This is evident through positive relationships and the continued participation of all stakeholders to support student education. The high level of volunteers indicates that the school community is welcomed and valued at Latham Primary School.
3. **The school has developed a school wide assessment schedule and data tracker.** This has promoted professional dialogue to address data analysis and implications for teaching and learning. The data tracker provides the solid foundation for the on-going collections, collation, analysis and discussion of student progress at the individual and collective levels.
4. **Positive connections have been established between the preschool and the primary school.** This has assisted the transition with improved communication and partnerships resulting in improved retention from preschool to kindergarten.

Recommendations

The panel recommends Latham Primary School pays attention to the following opportunities for improvement during the next planning cycle.

1. **Embed and commit to a whole school explicit improvement agenda developing a shared responsibility with all stakeholders.** This can enable the leadership team to make strategic decisions in order to facilitate whole school change. The panel strongly recommends that the school improvement priorities are clear, specific and enacted with defined timelines.
2. **Build staff capacity through an evidenced-based approach and further develop a consistent, sustainable and collaborative coaching model.** This can: help develop a culture of continuous professional improvement; build a collective responsibility for improving student learning and well-being; and facilitate working together and learning from each other's practices.
3. **Define relevant and measurable targets in literacy and numeracy to monitor growth school-wide, identify gaps in student learning and monitor improvement over time.** This can inform individual teacher's planning, while allowing a systematic approach for staff to interrogate data and inform teaching and learning practices. The school is encouraged to further develop a comprehensive set of agreed school targets to explicitly include writing, reading and mathematics, which are clearly communicated among all stakeholders.
4. **Develop clarity and consistency in agreed beliefs and practices to the teaching of writing.** This can enable the school to develop and implement a writing framework based on evidence based research, which supports the ongoing analysis and use of writing data to assist teachers to address students' point of need.

Record of Validation Process

The following people were members of the external validation panel for Latham Primary school conducted on 29-31 July 2015.

Name: Jason Walmsley

School: Charles Conder Primary School

Name: Julie Dixon

School: Isabella Plains Early Childhood Centre

Name: Craig Hart

School: Mother Teresa 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: Jason Walmsley

Signature: _____



Date: _____

1/9/15

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

Name: Liz Bobos

Signature: _____



Date: _____

1.9.15

As co-director of Quality Learning Australasia, external lead 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: _____



Date: _____

1.9.15