



**ACT**  
Government  
Education and Training

# EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT 2015

for

## KINGSFORD SMITH 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

Kingsford Smith School was established as a new school in 2009 with a view to have it as a safe and caring place to learn. It is a P-10 school that caters predominantly for students from the Priority Enrolment Area (PEA). There has been an increase in overall enrolments from 847 to 916 during the last four years. The school currently employs just over 100 staff.

During the life of the current strategic plan the Index of Socio Community Education Advantage (ICSEA) has increased from 1003 to 1013. The panel notes that the ICSEA value can have an effect on school resources and performance as it indicates a level of educational advantage based on the educational and occupational indicators of parents. This makes it important that Kingsford Smith School's performance is compared with similar schools.

During this time there was a significant increase in English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) students in 2013 and 2014. The panel noted there was also a significant increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students over the life of the school plan.

Kingsford Smith School (KSS) reviewed and revised its motto, vision and values in 2013 to reflect a relatively new schools increased enrolments and expanded year cohorts. Over the life of the current school plan, Kingsford Smith School has focused on building positive relationships and communication within the school community and strengthening community partnerships. The panel noted the school's achievements in this area. Kingsford Smith School developed HERO values to reflect their current practices and aspirations: Harmony, Excellence, Respect and Optimism. At Kingsford Smith School students are encouraged to learn in a positive and engaging environment. The community supports these values through partnerships and positive parent engagement.

The school was supported in its opening years by an executive team comprising one principal, two deputy principals and five School Leaders (SLCs). Under the leadership of four substantive principals (and three acting principals) in seven years, and an additional deputy principal for four years, the staff have variously comprised of 30% New Educators (2009), 10 highly proficient and experienced SLCs including specially placed Literacy and Numeracy Field Officers and a Pastoral Care SLC (2015). Changes in leadership over the life of the school plan created challenges for the school to maintain a consistent focus on improving student outcomes.

There was a growth in the number of specialist teachers and administrative staff who support P-10 as the year cohorts expanded to accommodate senior students to year 10. Supporting the students is a team of learning support assistants, a youth worker, counsellors and volunteers.

Since 2014 the administration team is spread across two office areas (the HUB and the Front Office) and assistants are placed to work with the Technology and Science teams and an Information Technology Officer (ITO).

## **Section B: School performance**

The academic achievement of the students of Kingsford Smith School, as measured by the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), has been varied. The school's mean scores in literacy and numeracy have been substantially below the ACT system average. The school's growth in literacy and numeracy has been comparable in years 3-5 and years 7-9 with schools that have similar ICSEA scores. In years 5-7 this growth has been below expected when compared to schools with similar ICSEA scores.

In 2012 and 2013 Kingsford Smith School noted growth in kindergarten reading and mathematics as measured by Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS). The panel noted the growth, but identified that the students were below ACT mean at the end of each year and in 2013, Kingsford Smith School students started above ACT mean. In 2014, their results were substantially below ACT mean and the Early Childhood Professional Learning Team reflected on programs and practices. Their reflections led to the professional learning team initiating literacy programs such as the CAFÉ and Daily 5 programs approach to literacy.

Kingsford Smith School built positive relationships and successful communication between the school and its community and within the school. Over the life of the school plan, the school achieved a 10 percentage points growth in overall satisfaction from key stakeholders in the whole school community. The panel commends the school on their growth in positive school climate and student engagement. There is a positive narrative for stakeholder perceptions from students, staff and parents/carers. The School Climate and School Identification Survey was conducted with students from years 7-10. The results indicated that 96 percent of students mostly perceived teachers as emphasizing and supporting the academic achievement of students. This was above the ACT average. This is consistent with the panel's perceptions of the student satisfaction following interviews and classroom observations.

The panel observed that attendance rates have remained consistent and the school has developed an attendance policy in 2012. The school indicates through anecdotal evidence that attendance is more regular across the school in 2015.

### **Evidence cited and its validation**

- Interview with parents, staff and students
- NAPLAN growth data
- NAPLAN like school comparison results
- PIPS data
- School satisfaction data
- Classroom visits
- Kingsford Smith School policies and procedures
- Accepting the Challenge Action Inquiry Program 2013
- Kingsford Smith School Climate Report
- PALLs video production.

## Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

### Priority Areas

In its school plan, Kingsford Smith School identified four priorities for improvements. These remained consistent for the life of the plan.

**Strategic Priority 1: Build positive relationships and successful communication between the school and its community and within the school**

**Strategic Priority 2: Improved literacy outcomes for Kingsford Smith students with a focus on writing and spelling**

**Strategic Priority 3: Improved numeracy outcomes for Kingsford Smith students**

**Strategic Priority 4: Provide educational preschool programs that meet the needs of students, families and community**

The panel found that the priorities were linked to the recommendations of the 2011 External Validation Report.

### Achievements

**Strategic Priority 1: Build positive relationships and successful communication between the school and its community and within the school.**

In determining progress against this priority Kingsford Smith School used system survey results for students, staff and parents. Specific targets were established against each survey each year. Over the life of the plan initial responses were very successful averaging over 10 percent improvement for partnerships, communication and staff. Student targets in the communication area were not set.

The panel recognizes that this school has made significant progress in its priority area to build positive relationships and successful communication within the school and its community.

**Strategic Priority 2: Improved literacy outcomes for Kingsford Smith students with a focus on writing and spelling**

The performance measures used by Kingsford Smith School to measure Priority Area 2 were NAPLAN (years 3,5,7 and 9 Education and Training Directorate targets, NAPLAN Growth Charts), PIPS (Kindergarten) and a range of school based data (including PM Reading). Targets were established each year that included performance against NAPLAN, staff satisfaction responses and PM Benchmarks.

The executive re-structure in 2012 has been strategic in strengthening their Professional Learning Plans to include skilled professional teachers working in teams in a common curriculum focus (P-10) and in productive year cohorts in the primary area. This was evidenced by the Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALLs) video production, the class displays and student information and assessment documentation.

Kingsford Smith School staff have conducted action inquiry projects throughout the school. A particular project focused on the learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students. The project demonstrated the willingness and professional manner of the staff of Kingsford Smith School towards improving student outcomes and seeking out strategies which best suit their individual student's needs.

On analyzing the NAPLAN data, the panel found that the school did not meet all targets set in literacy across the life of the plan. The panel recommends all key initiatives and programs be individually and regularly evaluated for their effectiveness in producing desired improvements in student learning. It is also recommended that school performance data be regularly compared with the data from similar schools and students with the same starting scores.

### **Strategic Priority 3: Improved numeracy outcomes for Kingsford Smith students.**

The performance measures used by Kingsford Smith School to measure Priority Area 3 were NAPLAN (years 3,5,7 and 9 Education and Training Directorate targets, NAPLAN Growth Charts), PIPS (Kindergarten).

On analyzing the NAPLAN data, the panel found that the school generally met their targets when targets were set in numeracy across the life of the plan. In 2012, 2013, and 2014, year 3 and 5 numeracy targets were achieved. In 2013, year 7 numeracy targets were achieved. The panel suggests the percentage of students achieving expected growth remain a focus for the school and that the school also consider examining other data on a range of student performances and achievements. Investigation into the year 5-7 growth data is highly recommended.

### **Strategic Priority 4: Provide educational preschool programs that meet the needs of students, families and community**

Kingsford Smith Preschool was assessed for registration at the beginning of 2013 and again in 2015. In 2013 three out of seven standards were assessed as meeting National Quality Standards and in 2015 five out of seven standards were assessed as exceeding. The panel undertook observations in the preschool and discussed the programming and planning with teachers. The panel acknowledges the achievements of the teachers and community.

### **Reflections**

The panel notes that the school leadership team has maintained focus on the improvement agenda over the improvement cycle, however, the focus and effort on priority one overshadowed efforts and results in the other priority areas.

The panel suggests the school systematically collect and interrogate available evidence to determine future improvements.

Though they were guided by survey results and student outcomes data, literacy and numeracy priorities were not fulfilled. The move to a Professional Learning Community model has started to address these concerns.

This is an opportunity to strengthen existing academic and social approaches, across the whole school. This could include a review of student services structures, pastoral care for middle and senior school students and behaviour management procedures across the school.

The school executive has identified the need to remain strongly focused on its improvement agenda throughout the next cycle.

### **Evidence cited and its validation**

- School Board Reports 2012-2014 and Annual Operating Plans 2012-2015
- Interviews with parents, staff and students
- NAPLAN growth data
- NAPLAN like school comparison results

- PIPS data
- School satisfaction data
- Classroom visits
- Kingsford Smith School policies and procedures
- Accepting the Challenge Action Inquiry Program 2013
- Kingsford Smith School Climate Report
- PALLs video production.

## Section D: National tools self-evaluation results

### National School Improvement Tool

Self-evaluations using the National School Improvement Tool and the Safe School Audit Tool were undertaken for the first time in 2015. The Kingsford Smith School senior executive team used the tools in a collaborative partnership with their professional learning team leaders in an extended workshop.

Evidence for each domain was also identified as the workshop took place and in post workshop discussions. The collation of all reflections was disseminated to the executive Professional Learning Team who gave feedback on common areas of reflection and areas where differing opinions were evident.

Each executive then ran a similar process with their own Professional Learning Team and these reflections were also collated.

Separately, the acting principal canvassed parent views at a Parents & Citizens meeting following an explanation of the External Valuation process and using the general descriptors from the National School Improvement Tool.

Comparisons were then made to find common outcomes from the reflective process and to identify the reason for different outcomes using evidence.

The panel reviewed the self-evaluation results and found evidence to support their findings. The panel mostly agreed with the findings of the school self-assessment. The panel encourages the school to self-evaluate on an annual basis, ensuring all staff and other key stakeholders engage in this process.

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 but limited attention has been given to specifying detail or to developing a school-wide approach.*
- *The school leadership team is clearly committed to finding ways to improve on current student outcomes.*
- *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.*
- *Although there is an expressed commitment, 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.*

It was highly evident the school had focused on an explicit improvement agenda. This was identified in the priority of building positive relationships and successful communication throughout the school, the community and within the school. Teachers were aware of the broad directions of the strategic plan but have not been generally able to identify how their own professional learning is linked to those directions or how it is represented in targets and learning plans for their own students.

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

- *School leaders pay close attention to data provided to them about the performance of the school and identify areas in which the school is performing relatively poorly or well.*
- *An ad hoc approach exists to building staff skills in the analysis interpretation and use of classroom data.*
- *Teachers do not systematically analyse test and other data for their classes and teachers make little use of data to reflect on their teaching. The school is unable to demonstrate how data have been used in meetings or with parents to analyse and discuss current achievement levels and strategies for improvement.*
- *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. 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.*

The school recognizes the variety in level and consistency of data collection and analysis. The panel suggests professional learning on the design and development of data implementation and collection plans would be beneficial to ensure a whole school approach.

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

- *Classrooms are generally orderly, although some are more so than others. Non-attendance is an issue for a small minority of students.*
- *Respectful and caring relationships are reflected in the ways in which staff, students and parents interact and in the language they use in both formal and informal settings.*
- *Staff morale is satisfactory.*
- *There is a strong sense of belonging and pride in the school.*

It was evident Kingsford Smith School has embarked on creating a culture that promotes learning. The introductions of the Kingsford Smith School HERO values and Kingsford Smith School Beliefs have supported this change in culture. Staff and executive have commented on a reduction of problematic behavior across the school. The school recognizes that relationship building and teacher resilience are areas for development through targeted professional learning.

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.*



- *Physical spaces and technology are used effectively to maximize student learning. Learning spaces are organized for whole group work, small group work and individual work.*
- *Specialist diagnostic testing is organized for a small number of students with special needs.*

The targeted use of school resources was highlighted by evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the early years achieved significant gains in reading through the action inquiry program. A school initiative of deploying staff to cater for the Link Program across the high school and Wink Program in the primary years was implemented in 2015 to address literacy needs. Individual Learning Plans are instigated and regularly reviewed to address the needs of Inclusion Support students.

Within the domain **an expert teaching team**, the panel verified the following.

- *The school undertakes professional learning activities although these may not always focus on the development of knowledge and skills required to improve student learning and there may not be a coherent, documented learning plan.*
- *School leaders participate in professional learning activities, learning alongside teachers.*
- *The school provides opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles outside the classroom.*
- *The school's professional learning agenda is made explicit to staff at induction, and in staff handbooks.*

It was evident that the school has focused on developing expert teaching teams. Professional learning communities and teams meet regularly to undertake professional conversations on pedagogy, planning and programming. There are examples of collaborative practice and expert teachers who share knowledge and expertise. The school recognizes that staff performance needs a boost with more explicit coaching and mentoring practices that are consistent across the whole school.

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

- *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 school has a documented plan for curriculum delivery that includes year level and term plans, but the progression of learning from year to year is not always obvious and the relationship between the pieces of the plan would benefit from further clarification.*

Kingsford Smith School emphasizes systematic curriculum delivery as a goal. The curriculum was locally relevant and accessible to all students. The school recognizes that curriculum delivery could be better across the school. The embedded approach to professional learning teams has created an environment that supports discussion about curriculum. All teachers are aware of the Australian Curriculum requirements and areas of learning. These are clearly outlined and overviewed in the professional learning teams.

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

- *School leaders are committed to success for all.*



- *Some use is made of assessment instruments to identify individual strengths and weaknesses and starting points for teaching.*
- *Some use is made of differentiated teaching.*
- *Reports to parents show progress over time and include suggestions for ways in which parents can support their children's learning.*

Kingsford Smith School has recognized the need to focus on differentiated teaching and learning. The staff at Kingsford Smith School have very different opinions across P-10 on their ability to identify and address the learning needs of individual students. The teachers are encouraged and supported to monitor closely the progress of individual students. Individual Learning Plans are acknowledged across the school as being well written and reviewed regularly.

Teachers in the Middle School feel that differentiation is at a low level but otherwise the executive team feel that this is an outstanding area of achievement. It is evident that differentiation is addressed well through Individual Learning Plans for Inclusion Support students. An area for future consideration may be a greater focus on identifying and addressing individual learning needs of all students and providing individual learning plans where appropriate. Reporting at Kingsford Smith School is well managed.

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

- *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.*
- *Professional learning activities are focused on building teachers' understandings of highly effective teaching strategies in these areas.*
- *There is some clarity about what students are expected to learn, but a lack of balance in teaching methods.*

It was evident that Kingsford Smith School has committed to implementing curriculum and changing pedagogical direction to meet the requirements of the Australian Curriculum. Pedagogy and curriculum has been a whole school focus throughout the current strategic plan. This has been evident in Response to Intervention, Visible Learning and Collaborative Classrooms. The leadership team acknowledges that the three approaches to learning have meant that many teachers were dealing with quite rapid changes in pedagogical practice and direction. This has impacted on the consistency of practices across the school.

Within the **School-community partnerships** domain,

The panel verified the following.

- *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.*
- *No plans exist to systematically review the effectiveness of partnerships, which typically are very dependent on the efforts of a small number of individuals and so have limited sustainability.*

It is evident that Kingsford Smith School has strong school-community partnerships. From discussion with Kingsford Smith School staff there may be opportunities to formalise arrangements with programs such as: JETS, ANU Homework Club, Wirrapanga, partnerships with Michigan University, USA, Rotary and other forms of sponsorship.

### **National Safe Schools Audit Tool**

Staff completed the National Safe Schools Audit Tool. A small team was trained to lead a whole-school reflective process, to discuss perspectives and to articulate evidence and recommendations for improvement. The External Validation Leadership team at Kingsford Smith School collated the responses. The panel's observations and interviews with staff, students and parents supported the following findings as described by the school's External Validation Team. However, in the student wellbeing and ownership area, the panel found it difficult to find evidence to support the findings of the school teams on Pastoral Care.

Kingsford Smith School identified a convincing level of trust in senior executive in providing measures to ensure a safe school. Kingsford Smith School staff believe that there is room for improvement in the consistency of data collected about negative behaviours on a regular basis to inform decision-making about the safety of the school and the learning context.

Kingsford Smith School identified the policies and procedures for mandatory reporting and student well-being are in place. Staff believe that a responsible technology agreement is in place at the school.

An area for review and improvement is in the induction of new staff, students and families on safety and well-being policies, programs and procedures.

The majority of staff are confident that relevant professional learning is provided for whole school staff on a regular basis. They acknowledge that they cater well for non-teacher and casual staff in these professional learning opportunities. Staff would like more professional learning to increase knowledge and skills taught on student safety and wellbeing.

The data indicates that staff at Kingsford Smith School feel that positive behaviour management is supported and processes are in place. Of particular note are the approaches the school uses to promote and recognize positive student behaviour.

Responses from Professional Learning Teams indicate that staff believe there is a strong focus on student engagement and that teachers act as positive role models for safe online behaviour. The school is currently further embedding a comprehensive and emotional learning curriculum in all subjects.

The whole school introduction of Response to Intervention has improved early intervention and targeted support for the students.

The school has developed school partnerships with family and community and acknowledges that one area for improvement is to provide opportunities for parent and carer education around issues related to safety and wellbeing.

## Section E: Commendations and recommendations

### Commendations

Kingsford Smith School is commended for the following.

1. **Creation of a culture that is centered on the values of Harmony, Excellence, Respect, and Optimism.** Over the life of the last school plan, this school has made significant progress in its priority area to build positive relationships and successful communication within the school and its community.
2. **The developing approach to literacy and numeracy with Response to Intervention.** The school has developed a Response to Intervention strategy for the 2015 Annual Operating Plan to address increasing student outcomes in literacy and numeracy. This shared vision for teaching has been embraced by all staff and evidenced through the LINK and WINK program timetabled across the school.
3. **Creation of Professional Learning Teams across the school.** The 2011 External Validation Panel recommended the need to address consistency in practice. The creation, development and maintaining of professional learning teams is addressing the consistency of practice.
4. **The systematic work in meeting the National Quality Standards.** In 2015 the Kingsford Smith School gained exceeding in five areas of the seven in the National Quality Standards. They implemented the continuous cycle of improvement with the Quality Improvement Plan running alongside the Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic and Timebound (SMART) goals set by the preschool team members.
5. **Consistent focus on building positive relationships with parents/carers.** The work within the life of the school plan to develop positive parents/carers engagement. There was a ten percentage point increase in parent satisfaction in school/community relationships during the school plan cycle. The panel observed and interviewed a range of parents who were highly appreciative and supportive of the school's improvement efforts.

### Recommendations

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

1. **Ensure the improvements in literacy and numeracy is a prime focus in the next school plan.** As the school has made significant progress in climate, building relationships and student wellbeing it is now a great time to ensure that literacy and numeracy outcomes are the number one improvement priority. This priority will be reflected in the school plan, each annual operating plan as well as individual teacher pathways plans.
2. **Develop and implement a school wide data collection, collation, analysis and reporting system.** Build upon the existing assessment schedule to ensure that the collection, analysis and use of data sets across the school are integrated, coordinated and systematic. Development of a school wide Data Implementation Plan is recommended to inform teacher practice and ensure improvements in literacy and numeracy.
3. **Ensure systematic delivery of the Australian Curriculum from preschool to year 10.** Develop school wide framework documents and processes for the delivery of the

Australian Curriculum promoting year to year progression of learning and the implementation of the best practice in pedagogy.

- 4. Review the whole school approach to student wellbeing with a view to optimising student learning outcomes with a consistency of practice.** This is an opportunity to strengthen the existing approach particularly in the middle and senior school. This could include a review of student services structures, pastoral care for middle and senior school students and behaviour management procedures across the school.
- 5. Strengthen induction processes for new staff, students and families.** Ensure school policies, procedures and supporting documents are current and readily available and provided to those who need them. Review induction processes to ensure consistency across the school.

## Record of Validation Process

The following people were members of the external validation panel for Kingsford Smith School conducted on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> July to Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

Name: Melissa Travers


School: Palmerston District Primary School

Name: Tom Kobal

School: Telopea Park 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: Melissa Travers

Signature:  Date: 31/8/15


As principal of **Kingsford Smith School** I accept the Validation Report on behalf of the school community.

Name: Paul Branson

Signature:  Date: 2/9/15.

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: 2.9.15