



ACT
Government
Education and Training

EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT 2013

FOR

O'CONNOR COOPERATIVE SCHOOL



Record of Validation Process

The following people were members of the external validation panel for **O'Connor Cooperative School** conducted on 2nd and 5th August 2013.

Name Jack Rice School: Montessori Canberra School

Name Brenda Ryan School: Gold Creek School

Name Kate McMahon School: Red Hill 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: **Kate McMahon**

Signature:  Date: 23/8/13

As principal of **O'Connor Cooperative School** I accept the Validation Report on behalf of the school community.

Name: **Lyndall Read**

Signature:  Date: 23/8/13

As co-director of Quality Learning Australia, external validators for the conduct of validation process in ACT public schools, I concur that the panel acted within the guidelines set by the ACT Education and Training Directorate.

Name: **Jane Kovacs**

Signature:  Date: 23.8.13.

Section A: School context

O'Connor Cooperative School is an early childhood school located in the inner north of Canberra. Established in the early 1980s as a cooperative of parents, the school has retained its small size and community feel. The school has 75 students from preschool to year 2 with one class at each year level. The staffing team of 10 is made up of the Principal, the Executive Teacher, five classroom teachers and one each of the business manager, building services officer and preschool assistant. The school is committed to providing excellence in early childhood education through evidence based practices in a play based learning approach.

The staff of the school has recently undergone substantial changes including the leadership team. Lyndall Read was appointed as principal during the 2012 school year. The executive teacher is currently on maternity leave and filling this role is an acting executive teacher who was an external appointment. There have been a number of classroom teacher changes in 2012 and 2013. All classroom teachers and executive staff have early childhood qualifications.

The introduction of the National Quality Standards (NQS) in Early Childhood Education and Care has affected the schools population reducing the number of preschool enrolments the school can provide for from 25 to 21.7, this will impact on the size of classes throughout the school due to natural attrition.

The school benefitted from the Building the Education Revolution funding and a new classroom block was built. The introduction of the Australian Curriculum and Early Years Learning Framework has necessitated changes to curriculum planning and delivery.

The school has an engaged and dedicated parent community. The majority of families come from O'Connor and surrounding suburbs. There is a high level of participation in school satisfaction surveys and more recently the National School Improvement Tool. The parents are committed and active in assisting the school with numerous well attended and successful fundraising and community events throughout the years. An example of this commitment is the creation of a new outdoor learning space including a sandpit and vegetable gardens.

The school has mechanisms in place that allow parents to meet and know the teachers well and changes that will be made in staffing are effectively communicated to parents.

Section B: School performance

The data presented to the panel was well organised and lended itself to analysis. Analysis of Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPs) reading data has shown that the school end score is lower than system average and they have made attempts to address this through the Annual Operating Plans. It has been indicated that this is a matter to be address in the next phase of improvement. The panel recommends that the school indicate targets for improvement that are measureable and appropriate in this setting.

PIPs results show that the school is consistently reaching the system average for numeracy. A breakdown of numeracy data shows that girls are making less progress than boys in mathematics. Analysis for PIPs results show that reading results the school is not seeing the expected growth compared to the system average. The results in reading indicate that girls are making more progress than the boys. This has been identified as an issue for further investigation in the next school improvement cycle. The panel notes that the data set is small and thus it is difficult to determine trends.

The school is provided with year 3 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data for their graduates. Comparative data to PIPs and NAPLAN in reading has been included in the summative report. Further item analysis could be useful for the school to inform practice and further investigation to develop meaningful targets related to relevant data could also be developed.

School satisfaction data indicates a satisfaction rate greater than system average for early childhood schools for both staff and parents in the year 2010 and 2011. A slight decline of satisfaction rates is noted for the year 2012 possibly as a result of staffing changes at the school.

The panel observed that changes have been made in 2013 to align professional pathways goals to the annual operating plan.

The panel noted difficulties with the availability and accessibility of data over time, due to ICT issues and staffing changes. The school has plans to establish a new approach to the collection of data which will allow for a systematic sustainable approach to succession.

Evidence cited and its validation

School Board Reports 2010, 2011, 2012

School Plan 2010 - 2013

Annual Operating Plans 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013

National Quality Standards Quality Improvement Plan 2012

PIPs data 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 1: Improvement planning

The school commenced the school improvement cycle with 12 priorities, informed by self-assessment, consultation with staff and community and consideration for the recommendations from external validation 2008. No further adaptations were made to the School Plan however; the number of priorities has recently been reduced to three overarching priorities which reflects the new Directorate approach to school improvement. This change has been reflected in the 2013 Annual Operating Plan, the priorities for the school are now as follows:

Improve literacy and numeracy results for all students.

Provide a diverse learning environment.

Improve communication within school and community.

All staff members are collaboratively involved in the school improvement process and take on a wide range of responsibilities to meet the school improvement plan. There are high levels of ownership of the school improvement process by all sections of the school community. The community has been involved in a number of activities including; prioritisation (hot dotting), meetings, surveys, committee work, circle time, audits school events, correspondence and day to day discussions.

The school has used the Annual Operating Plan as a vehicle to address the priorities, making numerous adjustments to the focus priorities each year. A variety of approaches were adopted and adjustments made after an annual reflective process.

The panel recognises that the school community has recently completed the National School Improvement Tool and the NQS Quality Improvement Plan and encourages the school to plan for and act on the findings of these processes. The panel suggests that the school adopts this process on an ongoing basis to support the improvement cycle.

Evidence cited and its validation

Annual Operating Plans 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013

School Board Reports 2010-2012

NQS Quality Improvement Plan.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 2: Improvement actions

The panel recognises that the number of priorities has been reduced by a process of aligning like goals into three priorities.

Priority Area 1: Improve literacy and numeracy results for all students

The panel confirms that improved literacy and numeracy results have been a prime focus at O'Connor Cooperative School between the years 2010-2013. Specific targets were set to measure performance based on NAPLAN data including:

To move more students into the top two bands for their year 3 NAPLAN writing so that 60 per cent are achieving in the top two bands

To improve Year 3 NAPLAN maths results by four mean scale points

Stronger focus on Literacy and Numeracy explicit teaching times

The school has not been able to provide data that supports the first two targets. The panel acknowledges the difficulty that the school faces in setting and reflecting on data that is accessed through other schools. The school has compiled data that demonstrates progress in NAPLAN reading showing the numbers of students reaching band three or above. The panel notes that a range of improvement strategies has been employed to support the teaching of literacy and numeracy.

The school has been able to demonstrate progress towards more explicit teaching in literacy and numeracy through the implementation of the following strategies:

- data conversations
- targeted professional learning
- assessment schedule developed
- coaching and mentoring.

These actions have resulted in a common approach to teaching literacy and numeracy across the school. A reading recovery teacher was employed to work with students requiring extra support and to build capacity for the teachers. Professional learning provided by David Hornsby on "The Daily Five" approach was attended by staff. This has been adopted across the school. The school has also adopted BEE spelling as a school wide approach to teaching spelling. This aligns

with the approach that both Turner School and Lyneham Primary School uses which provides support for students transitioning through to their new school.

A writing moderation folder is being used in by classroom teachers to ensure the consistency of assessment in writing samples occurs. The moderation folder was developed by a cluster group of teachers.

Barriers to improvement included; the challenge of changing to a new instructional model for teaching literacy, time constraints, unreliable technology and lost data. Despite these barriers attempts were made to reduce the impact on progress towards targets.

Priority Area 2: Provide a diverse learning environment

The panel noted that the performance measures for this priority were diverse and numerous. Measures had not been changed when the priorities were combined and some measures had reduced emphasis due to these changes. The measures included:

- To move all students to engage in learning and minimise behaviour management issues.
- Improve PIPs results when measured against system results.
- To move reporting and assessment to reflect system requirements and student achievement that is highly valued by staff, parents and students.
- School rated higher on the self-assessment matrix.
- Students and staff established in new building to support improved learning and teaching outcomes.
- BER works (secure fencing, restoration of play area and car park, modify and progress playground master plan) completed.
- Dedicated play based learning times.

Staff members have commenced the KidsMatter training and are currently reviewing the 'working together- promoting positive relationships' policy.

There have been no suspensions during the periods 2010 – 2012.

The panel noted focus to develop resiliency strategies for students to ensure that they are able to engage in learning.

The reporting format has been modified to reflect system requirements of reporting student achievements. These reports have incorporated the Australian Curriculum, Early Years Learning Framework and NQS. The new reporting format was well received by the community. The new report format has been able to address the needs of the system and reflect the philosophy of the school with respect to individualising learning.

School satisfaction data has consistently shown high levels of satisfaction from all members of the school community. Areas of concern are addressed in Annual Operating Plans and strategies are developed to address these, i.e. the use of ICT.

The new classroom building has been completed and years 1 and 2 occupy this purpose built classroom facility. The two rooms are connected and the classes can easily work together during *Investigations* times. The outdoor environment has also been improved and aligns to the school's philosophy of play based and sustainable education. The new sandpit was a joint construction between the school and the parent community as was the construction of the

vegetable garden and chook yard. The school has an encompassing fence and a reinstated parking area facilitating greater levels of security and safety for all students.

An audit was conducted of resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and English as an Additional Language or Dialect books and resource suitable for the balanced literacy approach. Purchasing is now targeted to fill any determined needs.

Professional learning logs have been established by all teachers. The logs provide evidence of the professional learning undertaken by the staff, and include a reflection on how the new learning will impact their teaching.

The executive team has compiled an overall database of professional learning conducted by staff.

Growth coaching is conducted by the executive team with each staff member on a weekly basis.

The staff of the school attended a half-day professional learning workshop presented by Kath Walker in February 2011. This was designed to build capacity in play based learning. The school's timetable shows 20 per cent of teaching time is devoted to play based learning (*Investigations*).

Primary Connections have been sourced as the vehicle for teaching science, and programming of history content linked to external resources has commenced.

Laptops and iPads have been purchased and students are using these resources as part of their daily learning activities. Students are able to choose ICT tools for learning, resulting in greater levels of differentiation.

Barriers to improvement included the a complicated process for the development of the Writing Moderation Folder, consistency of reporting processes and templates, especially considering the complexity of working with both National Quality Standards and National Curriculum. In addition, the lack of consistent ICT access across the school.

Priority Area 3: Improved communication with school and community

Performance measures for this priority included:

- A shared school vision which is purposeful, realistic, challenging and future orientated.
- Less management time on sorting out preschool enrolment.
- Parents and community consulted and involved in decision making whenever possible.
- Satisfaction survey shows improved outcomes for onsite YWCA school aged care program.
- Increased attendance at playgroup.
- Strengthen the partnership with parents maintaining their input whilst capitilising on the professional strengths, skills and knowledge of school staff and directorate support resources.
- School survey results improved.

Staff members from cluster schools have worked together for professional learning and cluster initiatives i.e. writing moderation. Students are involved with cluster schools for sporting events and transition activities.

The school's vision statement is clearly displayed throughout the school and is present in numerous documents. The panel noted that there was significant community input into the development of the vision and this was reaffirmed at the commencement of this improvement cycle School Plan.

The school staff have developed a new school handbook which is provided to families on commencement at the school. The handbook provides comprehensive information about the school, highlighting the importance placed on parent contributions to decision making at the school. Additionally, a new website has been developed and information is easily accessible for families and potential families.

Barriers to success included: parental understanding and expectations of Priority Enrolment Areas and the subsequent impact on transitions and enrolment. Enrolment policy and process information is now provided to all families to support successful transitions. In addition, transition guidelines have been developed and communicated with families ensuring clear communication and expectations. Time spent sorting out enrolments has been reduced due to increased understandings for parents.

Parents and school staff have worked together successfully on improvements to the school premises including the construction of a new sandpit. They have also assisted with the application for installation of solar panels. Many opportunities are provided for families to join with the school; parents are regularly involved in the classroom, excursions and whole school events.

The school satisfaction data from parents and staff are consistently positive with levels above system averages over the three year period. There has been a slight dip in satisfaction rates in 2012 data possibly resulting from a change in staffing at the school after a long time of limited change. The panel notes the effective work of the new leadership team in addressing concerns. The leadership team has worked to overcome a barrier regarding parental expectations on staffing issues and concerns and the limitations of the industrial processes that must be followed by leadership.

The panel noted that the school has taken steps to reestablish a self-assessment process to inform future planning using the National School Improvement Tool. The School Board and P&C are involved in conducting this self-assessment.

Evidence cited and its validation

NAPLAN results

School Board Reports 2010 – 2012

Samples of programs

Assessment schedule

Reporting templates

Data conversations

Professional learning logs

Writing moderation folders

NQS Quality Improvement Plan

National School Improvement Tool self-assessment.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 3: Reflection

The panel notes the difficulty that the school has faced in determining school performance due to the lack of suitable data available currently in early childhood settings. Overall however the panel has observed that the school is operating as a cohesive and close knit community with the interests of the children at the core.

The leadership team is aware of the need to document processes that support teaching and learning at the school, to sustain the improvements made to date.

The appointment of the new principal has led to high levels of staff and community engagement.

The panel agrees with the school in their reflection that documentation and collection of appropriate data is important for school development cycle in the future. The process for collection, analysis and use of the data needs to be understood by all stakeholders and with the constraints of being a small school, not remain the responsibility of one or two people.

The panel notes that the setting of appropriate, reasonable and measurable targets and measures of success is also important.

Section D: Commendations and recommendations

The school leadership team is to be congratulated for the quality of the validation documentation. The panel found that the documentation was thorough and well constructed. It was an honest and true overview of O'Connor Cooperative School from 2010 to present. There was alignment between what was provided as evidence and the discussions the panel had with the school principal, school board chair and deputy principal.

Commendations

O'Connor Cooperative School is to be commended for the following:

1. Community engagement and embracing of the parents' needs to be involved in the life of the school is supported by the teaching staff.
2. The school demonstrates clearly the commitment to quality early childhood pedagogy and practice. Students are safe and happy and relationships are well formed and maintained.
3. A consistency of approach to teaching and learning throughout the year levels is evident. Differentiation is used to personalise teaching and learning activities that ensures all students are engaged in their learning.
4. The schools commitment to involving the school community in the process of school improvement through the use of the National School Improvement Tool.

Recommendations

The panel recommends that O'Connor Cooperative School:

1. Further develop the capacity of all staff through networking with other early childhood schools, coaching and mentoring, utilising the National Professional Standards for Teachers and high quality aligned professional learning opportunities.

2. Use a range of student achievement and well-being data to enable the school to better monitor progress, set targets, develop plans for school improvement and inform teaching practice to improve learning outcomes. Continue to focus on a small number of priorities with appropriate measures of success.
3. Develop an explicit process of documenting and monitoring school processes, reducing the impact of staff changes in the future.
4. Further establish through professional learning and implementation the KidsMatter program to promote student wellbeing across the school and community.
5. Develop high level competence in teaching and learning using ICT to grow as a community of connected learners.