



**ACT**  
Government  
Education and Training

# EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT 2015

for

## GOWRIE 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

Established in 1983, Gowrie Primary School is a small, but growing school situated within the Chisholm cluster, in Tuggeranong. The school has experienced some significant changes during the four years covered by the School Plan (2012-15). Key changes include:

- a steady increase in the number of students
- significant rates of leadership turnover (including five principals in substantive or acting capacity)
- significant increase in the number of students with diagnosed disabilities, and requiring Individual Learning Plans.

The school motto, adopted at the time the school was established, "*Today Prepares Tomorrow*" is just as relevant for the community now as it was in the foundation years. The school vision focuses on excellence, innovation and inclusivity and the staff strive to create learning environments where academic excellence is valued and encouraged. A personalised approach to teaching and learning is used both in the mainstream and special needs classrooms. There are three learning support units and one learning support centre at the school.

There are currently 268 students enrolled from Preschool to year 6 at Gowrie. This represents a 46 percent increase in enrolments since 2012. The increase in student numbers is anecdotally attributed to a number of factors, including the regeneration of the suburb (generally) with many young families moving into the suburb in recent years, an increase in positive perception of the school by the local community, increased enrolments at year 3 from the Isabella Plains Early Childhood School, and an increase in retention of preschool students transitioning into the primary school.

Significantly, the panel noted a large increase in the number of students with diagnosed disabilities in mainstream classes, who require Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). Numbers have increased from eight in 2012, to 27 in 2015. A proportion of these students have enrolled from outside of the Priority Enrolment Area. This increase has had implications for the school with regard to the professional learning needs of staff, to effectively cater for the diverse needs of students.

The school demography information also indicated an increase in the bottom quartile of students by Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value of 9 percent during the 2012–14 period. This increase in low Socio-economic status (SES) students is an interesting

statistic, as the top quartile distribution has fallen by eight percent. This would indicate a decrease in student enrolments from higher SES backgrounds and an increase in student enrolments from lower SES backgrounds. The two middle quartiles have remained roughly the same over this time. The percentage of students from English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) background and also of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds has remained similar over the four year period, as has the ICSEA.

Whilst there have been significant changes in the senior leadership team, the consistency of teaching staff has been remarkably stable, with minimal turnover recorded. In spite of leadership changes, staff morale and satisfaction levels have remained high and there is a strong sense of connectedness to the school, as indicated in system satisfaction and school climate survey data. The panel noted student learning outcomes also appear to be largely unaffected by the leadership instability and this is anecdotally attributed to the consistency of teaching staff and their practice.

Of particular note is the increase in parent satisfaction data, with engagement levels rising over the period of this school planning cycle. The positive community vibe was a highlight of the panel's interviews with members of the Parents and Citizens (P&C) and School Board as was the outstanding practice observed in the Learning Support Centre and Unit.

## **Section B: School performance**

The academic achievement of the students at Gowrie Primary School has been varied over the past four years. The school used National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS), Performance Maintenance Benchmarks (PM Benchmarks) in reading and student reports to evaluate student progress and performance through annual board reports. The school has met eleven out of the twelve targets set by the ACT Education and Training Directorate (the Directorate) in both literacy and numeracy.

The panel commends the excellent results when considering the number of kindergarten students achieving expected (or greater) growth in PIPS reading and mathematics results. For each of the past three years, Gowrie students began their kindergarten year at (or just below) system average raw scores, yet ended equal to, or above system raw scores. For the last four years the percentage of students achieving expected growth in PIPS reading has risen and in three of the four years it rose in PIPS Maths assessment. In addition, the panel notes that 100 percent of kindergarten student reached expected reading benchmarks (PM) in 2014.

There is a wide range of anecdotal, local and system-collected evidence of a positive and highly inclusive school culture. Attendance rates have been consistently high over four years and satisfaction data indicates that Gowrie Primary School is a high performing school in these areas.

Student, parent and staff satisfaction in the school is above the overall satisfaction for all schools in the ACT and have remained strong over time. Students consistently report high levels of satisfaction with liking to be at the school and also that 'teachers motivate them to learn' and 'expect them to do their best'. Parents reported a consistently high level of satisfaction with the way the school is maintained and also in their belief that the school takes parents' opinions seriously. Parents similarly reported that school partnerships with parents were highly valued and maintained.

Staff members have maintained extremely high satisfaction levels across time, with 100 percent of staff agreeing that they are satisfied with their work at this school and that they enjoy teaching.

Retention rates from Gowrie preschool to the primary school have increased markedly for the past three years. At the end of 2014 Gowrie Primary School transitioned 95 percent of their preschool enrolments into kindergarten classes. This is an increase from just 50 percent at the end of 2013. (2012 preschool enrolment figures were not available.) Early indicators from parents (this year) show that between 80 and 90 percent are planning to transition to the kindergarten for 2016.

Student attendance rates have been consistently strong, averaging ninety-two point five percent over the past four years and school leaders reported that student management takes up very little of their time.

The school has recently developed processes to collect and analyse student learning outcomes regularly (as formative assessment) to inform planning for teachers. Students are also involved in the discussion of learning outcomes, setting of personal goals and determining strategies to achieve intended outcomes.

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

Annual operating plans and school board reports 2012-14

System satisfaction survey data

NAPLAN data 2012-14

PIPS data 2012-14

PM Benchmark data 2012-14.

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

The panel validated that the 2012-2015 School Plan was developed as a result of collaboration with the School Board, staff and students. The school arrived at the following four strategic priorities:

Improved literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students

Enrich student learning through strengthening community partnerships

Promote the health and wellbeing of all students through an inclusive school culture

Strengthen the partnership with the preschool and promote its inclusion in the school community.

Following a change in leadership and a review of the current four year School Plan, modification to the performance measures and key improvement strategies occurred. An amended plan was developed and endorsed by the School Board in 2014. The panel found that the priorities aligned with system and Tuggeranong Network priorities.

The panel examined a range of thoughtful strategies in the Annual Operating Plans that had been implemented over the four year period. The panel noted that the original seventeen key improvement strategies, across the four priorities, which were endorsed in 2012 had been revised to ten key improvement strategies in 2014. While the priorities remained constant, the specific actions themselves were modified on a year-to-year basis by a series of school leaders.

## Achievements

### **Strategic Priority 1: Improved Literacy and Numeracy outcomes for all students**

Gowrie Primary School expressed some consistent targets for improvement across the life of the four year plan. These included student literacy and numeracy outcomes in terms of increases in mean performance on NAPLAN over time and incorporated targets set by the Directorate and increasing the expected reading benchmark growth for students from K-6. In addition, specific targets were established against the student satisfaction survey each year.

Intended strategies for this strategic priority over the life of the plan included embedding whole school approaches, embedding a consistent approach to personalised learning and developing processes to embed the Australian Curriculum and associated documentation. Significant and substantial best practices in quality teaching and pedagogy to enable personalised learning was observed by the panel in many mainstream, specialist and learning support classrooms across the school, as well as demonstrated in a range of documents.

In conversations with staff and within the documentation, the panel also confirmed that a range of specific actions had been initiated throughout the life of the plan including the following: the development of a Gowrie Coaching and Mentoring Model and Professional Learning Community culture, whole staff involvement in the Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALLS) Institute, significant teacher attendance at targeted professional learning like Langford Tools and Dylan William formative assessment practices, embedding of Quality Teaching Instructional Rounds, establishment of informal mentoring and GROWTH Coaching agreements, training in the Teacher Mentor Program (UCAN), commitment to Action Learning Projects and the appointment of an Executive Teacher Professional Practice (ETPP) for coaching purposes across the school.

On examining the NAPLAN targets, the panel established that system performance targets for the school in reading were met or exceeded during the improvement cycle. These targets are based on a four year average and include a 4 mean point loading for improvement. Performance against NAPLAN targets in writing is more difficult to ascertain given the change in NAPLAN writing genre and no system targets were set. When compared against national means and similar schools, literacy performance over time is more variable. With the exception of 2014 (year 3), performance in reading confirms the effectiveness of the sustained focus on improving reading instruction, in particular the prioritising of reading comprehension in years 3 to 6.

Numeracy performance for students in years 3 and 5, both against the Directorate numeracy targets and national means / similar schools, did not maintain the high level of achievement demonstrated in 2012 across the improvement cycle. A particular imperative for strategic action has been the decrease in expected growth during 2013-14. The panel recommends the school uses gain score and growth data, as well as specific data sets for gender, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and EALD students, to monitor student learning progress in the future.

### **Strategic Priority 2: Enrich student learning through strengthening community partnerships**

In determining progress against this priority, Gowrie Primary School used system stakeholder perception survey results for parents as well as identifying baseline data of parent participation in school activities then working towards a ten percent increase over the following two years. In 2012, procedures were established to accurately collect information regarding community attendance at whole school events.

The school established a parent partnership committee with teachers from K-6 resulting in regular meetings and an action plan developing. Recommendations included the development of a timeline of community events, innovative methods to engage the community in literacy and numeracy activities, the celebration of a specialised Arts program, changes in operational procedures for several whole school events and the development of a facility called the 'Community Hub'. In addition, the school's website and social media pages were complemented with the development of a 'school app'.

The total number of adults attending community events increased by twenty-eight percent from the start of the 2012 school plan. The 2014 parent's satisfaction survey results showed 88 percent of parents and carers believed that 'community partnerships are valued and maintained.' Although the target of ninety-four percent was not reached, the increase in the level of participation in community events demonstrated the school commitment to community engagement and building social capital.

The school is to be commended for the high level of student satisfaction with programs and practices at the school. The data demonstrates an endorsement of the current school directions and maps the journey of the school improvement process. Since 2012, the school results have been higher than the ACT average in many areas. A sense of professional community has been enhanced through the school's participation in cluster initiatives around literacy, curriculum enrichment and promoting supportive transitions within the preschool sector.

### **Strategic Priority 3: Promote the health and wellbeing of all students through an inclusive school culture**

The performance used to measure achievement by Gowrie Primary School in this priority included student and parent satisfaction data, school based student surveys and the development of student learning goals for literacy and numeracy.

During the life of this plan, a focus on student wellbeing and an inclusive school culture has seen the development of a number of key strategies in this priority. In conversations with staff and within the documentation, the panel confirmed that a student relationship policy was implemented through workshops relating to restorative practices and reflection room procedures. In addition, a new school values program called 'Everyone Counts' was launched with support materials to facilitate classroom instruction. This was a school wide approach and taught as an integrated inquiry unit across all year levels.

The KidsMatter program was also initiated to promote student wellbeing, along with enhancing leadership programs and expectations of students. A Student Representative Council was redesigned with student leaders also trained as peer mediators. Community members, staff and students all spoke highly of the focus on child-centred, orderly learning environments. The school has placed a strong emphasis on building a connected learning community underpinned by building quality relationships and KidsMatter initiatives. The co-development of short-term goals being linked to personal learning paths and recorded in student Personalised Learning Portfolios and celebration books is an inclusive practice that is being used across the school to promote all children being invested in their learning.

Student satisfaction survey data reflected some highly scored responses above the system average but not yet meeting targets. The KidsMatter data collected from 2012 and 2013 showed a significant decrease in the number of bullying incidences reported by students; while a similar amount of students identified the frequency of incidents reduced by seventy percent. In addition, the panel saw and heard strong evidence regarding the deep commitment to, and

strong understanding of, the belief that student wellbeing is critical to enhanced student engagement. The panel was moved by personal stories shared by staff, students and community members about the value and positive impact of inclusive practices across the whole school community.

#### **Strategic Priority 4: To strengthen the partnership with the preschool and promote its inclusion in the school community**

The performance measure used by Gowrie Primary School to measure their effectiveness in achieving Priority Area 4 related to the retention of enrolments moving from preschool into the kindergarten setting.

While not specifically identified, the panel noted a commitment from the leadership team to building strong engagement with and across the school community. This can be particularly demonstrated with the initiatives used to build connectedness with the preschool children and their families, including: early links to the kindergarten teachers and kindergarten learning environments, use of the school newsletter and social media to promote preschool programs, frequent visits to preschool and across to the primary site for events, facilitating buddy programs and attendance of preschool children at assemblies, supportive transition processes as well as the development of a whole of school staff culture. These initiatives have contributed to increased enrolments and positive community relations.

The panel noted that Gowrie Primary School has received a preschool program assessment and rating from Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) as '*Exceeding National Quality Standard*'. The preschool and leadership teams were acknowledged for their achievements in the provision of a quality early childhood education service which provides a welcoming, stimulating and supportive environment for the children and families who attend.

#### **Reflections**

The school has a wide range of reflective opportunities in place. For example, members of the leadership team have specific and articulated responsibilities for improvement strategies within the School Plan, teachers and members of staff contribute to specific actions, students are surveyed and invited to provide feedback on their school experience and parents are invited to participate in a range of feedback opportunities and decision making processes. The leadership team reflects every term on progress made against the Annual Operating Plan targets. This was evidenced through reflections written into the Annual Operating Plan template to track progress.

Gowrie Primary School has been working with a cohesive community on a number of priorities. The stability of the school leadership team can maintain a consistent approach to improvement and also add to the very rich personality of the school and community. The panel also agrees with the school's assessment of the impact of changes to leadership over the period of the plan. However, the stability and continuity of teaching staff during this time may have lessened the extent of the possible impact.

The panel concurs with the school's reflection on restricting the number of strategies within a strategic cycle and the need for these to be clearly articulated in the next planning cycle. Consistent measures can then be put in place to track related targets over successive years. Gowrie Primary School set out on its 2012-2015 improvement journey with a strong sense of direction and shared purpose. The school attributes a lot of its success in meeting goals to staff

skill and the staff stability that exists in the school – stability of personnel and stability of purpose.

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

Annual Operating Plans and Annual School Board Reports 2012-14

System satisfaction survey data

NAPLAN data 2012-14

PIPS data 2012-14

PM Benchmark data 2012-14.

### **Section D: National tools self-evaluation results**

#### **National School Improvement Tool**

Self-evaluation of Gowrie Primary School involved three separate consultation stages in term 2 of 2015 by P – year 6 teachers, leadership team and parents.

In the first phase, the School Improvement Team met weekly to consider and discuss each of the domains in the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) until consensus was reached. This team consisted of the leadership team and the School Improvement Coordinator (Deputy Principal).

In the second phase, two staff meetings were dedicated to self-evaluation. Teachers participated, working in mixed year level teams to examine the domains, discussing them in detail and highlighting their responses on the matrix. Executive staff were asked to facilitate the process, rather than contribute responses, and groups contributed to every domain in a 'hot potato' process.

In phase three, the executive team facilitated a P&C self-assessment process which involved the parent representatives. Executive staff answered any questions that P&C members had about particular domains and discussion continued until consensus was reached.

The responses from all three consultation processes were then collated and examined to identify key areas of strength and the most significant areas for further development or improvement.

The panel reviewed the self-evaluation results and found evidence to support the school's findings. The panel mostly agreed with the findings of the school self-assessment.

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

- *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 clear and accompanied by timelines.*



- *The school leadership team is clearly committed to finding ways to improve on current student outcomes. This is reflected in an eagerness to learn from research evidence, international experience and from other schools that have achieved significant improvements.*
- *There is evidence of a school- wide commitment to every student's success and staff of the school tell stories of significant student improvement.*
- *There is a strong and optimistic commitment by all staff to the school improvement strategy and a clear belief that further improvement is possible.*

The school's four year plan has evolved with the changes in leadership, with measurable targets included in most priority areas. Adjustments have been made to the implementation of some priority areas to better reflect the school context.

The next school plan could involve the school leadership team driving an explicit and detailed school improvement agenda with parent and wider school community involvement. This agenda could be expressed in terms of specific improvements sought in student performance that includes targets with accompanying timelines which are rigorously actioned and followed through. Teachers and the wider school could use data on a regular basis to monitor the effectiveness of their efforts to meet those targets.

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

- *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.*
- *There is a documented school plan and timetable for the annual collection of data on student achievement and wellbeing.*
- *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 the assigned staff have been trained to undertake data analyses.*
- *The principal and other school leaders clearly articulate their belief that reliable data on student outcomes are crucial to the school's improvement agenda.*

Gowrie Primary School has made a positive start in their journey towards the comprehensive and effective use of data. This was evident in the panel sighting a range of diagnostic and standardised testing instruments across the school. These are completed at specific times in accordance with a schedule, by both classroom teachers and the learning support team.

The school could consider establishing and implementing a systematic plan for the collection, analysis and use of student achievement data. This would enable the school to use the data throughout the school to identify gaps in student learning, to accurately monitor improvement over time and to monitor growth across the years of school.

A high priority should be given to professional development aimed at building teachers' and leaders' data literacy skills. Teachers could then be provided with software to analyse, display and communicate data on individual and class performances and progress. This would enable

teachers to routinely use objective data on student achievement as evidence of successful teaching.

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

- *The 'tone' of the school reflects a school-wide commitment to purposeful, successful learning. There are very few obvious behavioural, attendance or engagement problems.*
- *The school effectively implements its policies, for example, by ensuring that disruptive behaviour, bullying and harassment are dealt with promptly. Some staff time is taken up dealing with behaviour problems.*
- *There is a strong focus on quality learning and on the creation of a culture in which all students are expected to learn successfully, in their own ways and at their own pace. Individual talents are valued. Class 'busy work' is kept to a minimum, and an attempt is made to ensure that all students are engaged in challenging, meaningful learning.*
- *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.*
- *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. There are agreed guidelines on such matters as greeting visitors, taking messages, and responding to queries promptly and respectfully.*
- *Staff morale is generally high.*

The panel acknowledges areas of excellent practice in this domain and as programs and practices are embedded over the next few years the panel anticipates the schools efforts in this area could be rated as outstanding.

The panel heard from key stakeholder groups, who reported that teachers have a great rapport with students and parents. Parents used words such as, 'inclusive', 'warm' and 'engaging' to describe the culture of the school. The panel felt there is a happy, optimistic feel to the school.

The school's efforts in maintaining a learning environment that is safe, respectful, tolerant, and promotes both student learning and wellbeing were evident to the panel. Initiatives including Response to Intervention, Individual Learning Plans, Personalised Learning Portfolios, and the implementation of KidsMatter have contributed positively to the culture of Gowrie Primary School.

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

- *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, and refugees) are prioritised, where possible, in the school budget.*

- *Learning spaces are organised for whole group work, small group work and individual work.*
- *Technology is accessible to the majority of staff and students.*

In this domain the panel noted there were some excellent examples of good practice, such as the use of specialist teachers to address the diverse learning needs of the student population and the Learning Support teachers who were planning their teaching to target identified student needs.

The panel noted the programs were not embedded over time, however, with a stable leadership team now in place at the school the criteria for the Outstanding performance level of this domain could well be met in the future.

The panel recommends the school develop a five year strategic plan for finances in consultation with the school community that is linked to the overall financial management and major works of the school and to the educational outcomes of students.

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

- *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.*
- *There is a documented professional learning plan and 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.*
- *Teachers collaboratively plan, deliver and review the effectiveness of lessons.*
- *School leaders participate in professional learning activities, learning alongside teachers, and the school supports teachers to continue formal study and celebrates professional success.*
- *The school provides opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles outside the classroom.*

Established procedures are in place for the professional learning and coaching and mentoring of staff in the school. The panel noted school teams met regularly to undertake professional conversations on pedagogy, planning and programming. There were also many examples of collaborative practice with expert teachers sharing knowledge and expertise as part of the coaching and mentoring program.

The next steps could include the frequent sharing and showcasing of the school's best practice with the network and system and ensure the coaching and mentoring practices are implemented consistently school wide.

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, but the progression of learning from year to year is not always obvious and*

*the relationship between the pieces of the plan (the year, term and unit plans) would benefit from further clarification.*

- *The school curriculum plan and curriculum delivery balance requirements to address all learning areas, to give priority to English, mathematics and science, and to embed the fundamental skills of literacy and numeracy.*
- *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.*

The panel noted the work being done on the development of explicit and detailed curriculum documents however there is further work to be done on this. The school leadership team should ensure that the enacted curriculum remains a focus. A whole school curriculum delivery plan could be developed that reflects a shared vision for the school and provides curriculum and assessment tasks that are linked to the Australian Curriculum. Attention could be given to ensuring 'vertical' alignment of the curriculum so that there is continuity and progression of learning across the school. Consideration could also be given to including higher order thinking skills in all subject areas.

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

- *School leaders explicitly encourage teachers to tailor their teaching to student needs and readiness. This includes the systematic use of assessment instruments (standardised assessment tasks and teacher developed assessment tools) to establish where individuals are in their learning and to identify skill gaps and misunderstandings.*
- *Planning shows how the different needs of students are addressed.*
- *It is recognised throughout the school that some students require significant adjustments to their learning programs (e.g., accelerated programs, special support) if they are to be optimally engaged and challenged, and individual learning plans have been developed for those students requiring them.*
- *Reports to parents generally do not show progress but include suggestions for ways in which parents can support their children's learning.*

It is evident the school has developed a strong differentiated approach to teaching and learning to cater for the variety of student learning needs. The panel noted that reports to parents could address student progress and achievement clearly and explicitly in addition to addressing the ways parents can support their child's learning.

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. They demonstrate a strong conviction that improved teaching is the key to improved student learning and have clear and well-known positions on the kinds of teaching that they wish to see occurring.*
- *There is a particular focus on improved teaching methods in reading, writing, mathematics and science, and professional learning activities are focused on building teachers' understandings of highly effective teaching strategies in these areas.*
- *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 are key elements of the school's push for improved teaching and learning.*

It was evident the school has committed to implementing curriculum and pedagogical directions to meet the requirements of the Australian Curriculum. The commitment to continuous improvement in teaching practices was evident in the work program of the Executive Teacher Professional Practice (ETPP) and the school leadership team. They are driving a strong agenda to enhance teaching practices across the school. The next important step is for those practices to be embedded across the school accompanied by a focus on improving school literacy and numeracy results and achieving targets.

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

- *The school has established one or more partnerships with families, local businesses and community organisations with the express purpose of improving outcomes for students. Partnerships have generally been initiated by the senior leadership team and have their support.*
- *Each partnership brings staff and students of the school together with external partners such as families, other education or training institutions, local businesses and community organisations.*
- *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.*

It was evident that community partnerships are valued at Gowrie Primary School. The school has actively sought ways to enhance student learning and wellbeing by partnering with parents, carers and families, education and training institutions, ADFA, local businesses and community organisations.

The school is on track to make a formal connection with the Blinky Bill Childcare Centre. Consideration could be given to setting an action research project on developing the literacy/numeracy skills of child care centre children prior to them entering Gowrie Primary School.

Further steps to strengthen the partnerships could be taken by setting clear objectives in terms of improved outcomes for students and the development of a formal plan for reviewing the partnership's effectiveness.

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

The National Safe Schools Framework Audit Tool was completed by staff in term 2, 2015. The process of auditing current practice and identifying areas for improvement was facilitated by the school leadership team, and involved all staff. The self-evaluation process consisted of three phases.

In the first phase, staff were provided with an introduction to the issue of safety in the school and the National Safe Schools Framework Audit Tool. The purpose of the online School Audit Tool was explained to staff.

In the second phase, staff were briefed on how to complete the tool then provided with instructions on how to follow the explanatory notes to make an informed judgement about the current status of their school's safety. Staff completed the tool individually in hard copy. These were collated by the executive and the School Audit Tool was completed online to represent the whole school and the School Audit Tool Results Summary sheet was printed.

In the third phase the staff in the self-evaluation process discussed in small groups and determined that the school has a safe and supportive learning environment. Areas for improvement include establishing ongoing data collection for incidence and frequency of harassment, aggression, violence and bullying, to inform decision-making and evaluate effectiveness of policies, programs and procedures. The school will also develop a representative group responsible for overseeing the school's safety and wellbeing initiatives; this group will include parent and community representation. The panel generally agreed with the school self-evaluation, using the tools; they had collectively reached consensus in most areas and used valid evidence to support their agreed position.

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

Completed self-evaluation matrix and evidence list, May - June 2015 (All staff)

Completed self-evaluation matrix and evidence list, May - June 2015 (P&C)

Completed self-evaluation matrix and evidence list, May - June 2015 (Overall).

### **Section E: Commendations and recommendations**

#### **Commendations**

Gowrie Primary School is commended for the following.

- 1. An inclusive and positive school culture.** The principal, school leaders, staff, students and community are to be commended on the development of a positive and inclusive school culture. There is an overwhelmingly calm, caring, optimistic and friendly tone throughout the school, which is difficult to capture effectively, with only words. Community consultation, staff collaboration, collective responsibility for the success of all students and the embedding of the 'everyone counts' values are evident at every level.
- 2. High satisfaction levels.** The panel commends the consistently high results attained in system surveys about students, parents and staff perceptions. The staff results in 2014, which show ten items with 100 percent of staff highly satisfied, are particularly impressive. Parents strongly believe that community partnerships are valued and maintained and that their voices are taken seriously. Extremely high levels of students responded that teachers have high expectations of them and motivate them to learn.
- 3. Embedded personalised learning across the school.** A striking feature of the school is the success of the personalised learning approaches. The panel heard from students, parents and teachers who described the overall effect of this practice as having had a significant positive impact on the culture and the tone of the school as well as student outcomes. The panel noted a variety of strategies being used across the school including personal goal setting, visible learning, clear use of learning intentions and success criteria, capacity matrices, student conferencing and many more. The panel observed outstanding teaching practices in the Learning Support Units and Centres.

4. **Coaching, mentoring and associated professional learning.** Since 2012, the panel noted a strong and consistent focus on coaching and mentoring, using a variety of models, including the GROWTH model and use of teacher observation and feedback aimed at continual professional improvement. This is undoubtedly linked to the high levels of effective pedagogical practice observed across the school. Professional learning has been strategically targeted to meet the needs of all staff.
5. **Early childhood programs and practices.** Early childhood staff and the leadership team are commended for demonstrating best practice and providing supportive, child-centred learning environments where children are seen to be successful, competent and capable learners. This has resulted in above ACT system-level results in PIPS raw data, outstanding achievement of PM benchmarks in 2014 and an 'exceeding national quality standard' assessment and rating for the preschool.

### **Recommendations**

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

1. **Establish and implement a systematic plan for the collection, analysis and use of a range of student achievement data.** Build upon the existing assessment schedule to ensure 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.
2. **Ensure systematic delivery of the Australian Curriculum from kindergarten to Year 6.** Develop school-wide framework documents and processes to ensure alignment of the Australian Curriculum with teacher programs, assessment and reporting practices. Develop clear programming documentation for differentiation which is consistent across the school. Build teacher and student capacity to use information communication technology tools to enhance learning.
3. **Enhance the coaching and mentoring model.** Continue to strengthen coaching and mentoring models across the school, using an agreed framework and utilising the skills and expertise of the ETTP and leadership team as well as experienced staff within the school and across the local network.
4. **Develop a response to intervention model.** Develop a research-based model to identify and provide intervention for students across the school, inclusive of students with special needs. This can include a dedicated intervention team, strategic resource allocation, explicit data collection and professional learning as required.
5. **Further strengthen community engagement levels and partnerships.** Facilitate broader parent and community involvement and explore ways to engage the community members in improving student outcomes. Other community connections and partnerships could include local businesses and community organisations, resulting in mutually beneficial relationships with the express purpose of improving outcomes for students. This work could be followed by an evaluation of the effectiveness of the strengthened community involvement.

## Record of Validation Process

The following people were members of the external validation panel for Gowrie Primary School conducted on 4-6 August 2015.


Name: Lana Read                      School: Macgregor Primary School

Name: Catherine Dillon              School: Ainslie School

Name: Robyn MacMillan              School: ETD Central Office


As chair of the panel I endorse that this is a true and accurate record of the findings from the external validation process.

Name: Lana Read

Signature:               Date: 17 August 2015


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

Name: Gareth Richards

Signature:               Date: 1 / 9 / 2015

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