



ACT
Government
Education and Training

EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT 2013

for

CURTIN PRIMARY SCHOOL



Record of Validation Process

The following people were members of the external validation panel for Curtin Primary School conducted on 29 and 30 July 2013.

Name Wendy Cave

School: Macquarie Primary School

Name Kathy Dawson

School: Chapman Primary School

Name Sandra Hall

School: Miles Franklin Primary 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: **Wendy Cave**

Signature:  Date: 5 September '13

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

Name: **Lindsay Musto**

Signature:  Date: 5 Sept 2013

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: 5/9/13.

Section A: School context

Curtin Primary School is a preschool to year 6 school, including Curtin North and Curtin South Preschools. The current enrolment is 495 students from P-6. Curtin Primary School prides itself on being an inclusive community that aims to provide for the needs of each individual student.

The school includes:

- 17 mainstream classes
- two preschool programs which are located off site
- a Language Intervention Preschool
- a Learning Support Centre (LSC)
- a gifted and talented education program from years 1-6, known as PALs (Pathways to Accelerated Learning), which is delivered by teachers who have attained qualifications in gifted education.

The student population is diverse and cultural diversity has grown significantly since 2010. Thirty nine languages are spoken by students at the school. Targeted support is provided to:

- students who are identified as speakers of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (nine percent)
- students who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians (1.8 percent)
- students with identified disabilities (five percent).

The school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value for 2012 is above the national average at 1110. The school uses student assistance funding to support all students to participate in the curriculum and special programs. The amount of assistance provided has increased each year from 2011.

Teaching teams have been refined so that Early Childhood (Preschool and Kindergarten), Junior Primary (1/2), Middle Primary (2/3 and 3/4) and Senior Primary (5/6 and 4/5) teachers each work with an executive member of staff to plan and implement learning programs. Classes are predominantly multiage and participate in specialist programs, including, Physical Education, Library, Arts and Indonesian. The Indonesian program has expanded since 2010 as a result of the specialist teacher's participation in the Federal Government's *Asian Languages Scholarship Program*.

In 2012 there were 23 teaching and five executive staff at Curtin Primary School. The community has enjoyed stability in its staffing during the last four years and the panel found the staff to be positive and cohesive. The professionalism of staff is demonstrated in their commitment to further learning. Sixty percent of staff have postgraduate qualifications and four teachers are completing additional study in 2013.

The school has managed significant and sensitive change within the leadership team throughout this school improvement cycle. The school community was deeply saddened by the sudden illness and passing of the Deputy Principal, Mr Damon Patterson in 2010. To ensure his memory will live on, the new hall and a student citizenship award have been named in his honour.

In May 2011, a substantive Deputy Principal joined the leadership team to progress the work of school improvement. Two new executive teachers were also welcomed to Curtin during this validation cycle.

During the period 2010-2013, the school maintained strong enrolments and grew in numbers at several year levels, particularly in the early years. Recent variation to enrolment trends include students commencing in year 3 from Lyons Early Childhood School, which has also brought some siblings in earlier years. Transition programs have been developed to support this cohort.

In 2012, the school's Priority Placement Area (PPA) extended to include the suburbs of Coombs and Wright. Currently, sixty three percent of the full school cohort, including the Learning Support Centre and Language Intervention Preschool, is from within the PPA. The panel recognises that the increased PPA may create future complexities for the school. Historically, *Pathways to Accelerated Learning* program has played a role in attracting students from outside of the PPA.

The school population has experienced change through attrition and new enrolments to each year level through this school improvement cycle. For example, in 2013 the year 6 cohort of 62 students is made up of only 16 students (25 percent) who commenced at Curtin Primary School in Kindergarten. Student attendance patterns are strong across the school.

Curtin Primary School enjoys a strong relationship with the school community. This is reflected in the 4500 volunteer hours that were donated to the school in 2012 by over 100 individuals. The level of voluntary contributions is indicative of community support of the school and its programs.

Physical changes to the school have been significant and impacted positively on the school. The completion of the school's Building the Education Revolution (BER) project included the renovation of the library as well as the construction of a new building containing a hall, specialist art and music rooms. These facilities have broadened opportunities for school programs and wider community engagement.

The replacement of the roof in the main building brought about temporary relocation of classes to the Patterson Hall. A positive outcome of this experience was the exploration of team teaching approaches. Consequently two traditional classrooms in the main building have now been combined to give a permanent team teaching space.

School funding has been accessed to enhance the physical learning environment. Solar panels are being installed during 2013 through the Federal Government's *Solar Panels in Schools* grants program. The Parents and Citizens' Association (P&C) has supported these school enhancement projects and has also contributed funds to develop areas of the playground. Currently, a joint initiative between the school and its P&C is the construction of an outdoor classroom that is also useful as a play space in the senior playground.

Section B: School performance

The panel acknowledges the gains made in performance by Curtin Primary School in all areas identified within its School Improvement Plan.

The school's data shows an upward trend in the distribution of A-E grades. National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) Reading improvement targets were achieved in 2012 in year 3 and 5 with most students are achieving expected growth in Reading, Spelling and Grammar and Punctuation. The value added is evident the longer a child is at the school. This is reflected in the number of students achieving expected growth. Overall there is a large percentage of students achieving in the top two bands for Reading, Spelling and Numeracy at each year level.

Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) Reading data indicates successful teaching and learning in the Kindergarten year, with cohorts typically commencing the year above the system average, and achieving growth throughout the year.

For Numeracy the data shows lower than system average growth in PIPS Mathematics data, and year 3 NAPLAN targets were not met. Further analysis of individual student performance data over the last two years means this area will remain a focus for the school into the next improvement cycle. The panel noted a positive pattern of growth in the school's tracking of students' mental computation strategies in the senior years.

Students are positive about their school with perception data reflecting they feel supported in their learning. The focus throughout the plan has been on empowering students to take increased responsibility for their learning. This is an area where improvement is yet to be realised, as teachers deepen their understandings and application of the introduced strategies and explore other approaches.

Parent satisfaction within the school is improving. The data confirms there is an opportunity to explore the wider use of technology for learning with the community, as the school continues to invest in technologies for teaching and learning.

Generally there is a high level of staff satisfaction with the school. Further opportunities for improvement exist in the areas of communication, decision-making and leadership.

Throughout this school improvement cycle enrolments have remained strong. The panel acknowledges the addition of the Early Intervention Language Preschool, PALS and other programs focussing on catering for different needs, has contributed to the school's recent enrolment growth.

The school has maintained positive attendance patterns, and implements strategies to monitor absences and work with families in this area. Processes have been implemented in the school to monitor and track student behaviour. Tracking now shows that 95 percent of students feel safe in the playground.

Evidence cited and its validation

- School Board reports
- playground surveys
- NAPLAN data
- PIPs data
- Stakeholder perception data
- A-E grade assessment data
- staff, parent and student interviews.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 1: Improvement planning

The panel acknowledges that the priorities of the School Plan 2010-2013 were condensed from a set of eleven to five in response to the ACT Education and Training Directorate's School Improvement planning and reporting requirements.

The school initially identified areas for development through analysis of the School Self Assessment Matrix and School Stakeholder Satisfaction Surveys as well as recommendations made in the 2008 School Validation Report. The adjusted priorities reflect the national education agenda including the early implementation of the Australian Curriculum, the Quality Teaching model and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. The initial intent of the priorities has been maintained through this rationalisation.

The School Plan was developed along with complementary Annual Operating Plans. The leadership team was responsive to data, particularly NAPLAN data, in identifying varying needs and refining the plans through this school improvement cycle.

The five priorities are:

Linked Priority 1 (Teaching and Learning/Leading and Managing)

- Improve the Reading results for all students
- Improve Numeracy results for all students
- Involve all staff in sustained continuous improvement through regular collection, analysis and sharing of a range of reliable data.

Linked Priority 2(Teaching and Learning/ Student Environment)

- Increase students' capacity to reflect on their own learning needs and progress by provision of explicit learning criteria
- Cater for individual student needs with high expectations of learning for all
- Empower students by increasing student responsibility for their own learning.

Linked Priority 3 (Leading and Managing/ Community Involvement)

- Expand all stakeholders' understanding of the school vision in light of current educational trends
- Use modern technologies to allow parents to regularly participate in and monitor childrens' learning
- Promote the school and its achievements across the wider community.

Linked Priority 4 (Leadership and Management)

- Increase staff participation in decision making.

Linked Priority 5 (Leading and Managing/ Student Environment)

- Involve all staff in sustained continuous improvement through regular collection, analysis and sharing of a range of reliable data
- Maintain a safe, supportive and culturally inclusive school climate.

Evidence cited and its validation

- Annual Operating Plans
- School Board Reports (2010, 2011, 2012)
- 2008 School Validation Report
- Stakeholder Survey data.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 2: Improvement actions

Linked Priority 1 (Teaching and Learning/Leading and Managing)

- Improve the Reading results for all students
- Improve Numeracy results for all students
- Involve all staff in sustained continuous improvement through regular collection, analysis and sharing of a range of reliable data.

Literacy and Numeracy Coordinator and coaching roles were established as part of the executive structure. These roles have evolved through staff consultation to support improvements to student learning outcomes. There have been focused efforts to build teacher capacity to explore new practices, improve data gathering systems and increase analysis of data. Case management for identified students has promoted targeted intervention strategies.

First Steps has been used to support teacher development, curriculum planning and evaluation of student progress in Literacy.

The school has developed systems for monitoring and tracking student progress. The introduction of *GradeExpert* has facilitated the systematic collation of agreed data sets. The use of the *Comprehensive Assessment of Reading Strategies* (CARS) program has provided a shared approach to identify students' strengths and support the implementation of a needs based program in aspects of Literacy.

The targeted use of the *Middle Years Mental Computation* program has strengthened the range and complexity of strategies students employ in problem solving. A range of programs have been explored to move students beyond basic strategies in other aspects of Mathematics, and the *Stepping Stones* resource has been identified for trialing in 2013 to create a whole school approach to the teaching of Mathematics.

The Quality Teaching model has provided the school with a framework to guide professional observation and reflective conversations.

Most students are achieving expected growth in Reading, Spelling and Grammar and Punctuation. The panel feels that the full extent of the school's improvement actions have yet to be demonstrated in learning outcome data (that is NAPLAN, PIPS and PM Benchmark data), however progress is reflected in other data collected using other systems that relate to the programs introduced, including *Hattie Effect Size* analysis. NAPLAN Reading improvement targets were achieved in 2012 in Year 3 and 5. All students made positive growth in Numeracy although the data shows lower than system average growth in PIPS Mathematics data, and Year 3 NAPLAN targets were not met.

The most significant challenge encountered with this priority has been the increased amount of data capture which requires additional teacher administration time. Also, to analyse this data and subsequently use it to inform teaching and learning requires increased professional conversations during team planning. This area remains an opportunity for the next planning cycle.

Evidence cited and its validation

- NAPLAN data

- PIPS data
- the Grade Expert interface
- School Assessment Schedule
- interviews with the Literacy Coordinator and resource staff
- Comprehensive Assessment of Reading Strategies (CARS) records
- Mental Computation 'Before and After' progress table
- Annual School Board Reports
- Quality Teaching Coding records
- Quality Teaching Rounds End of Year Survey.

Linked Priority 2 (Teaching and Learning/ Student Environment)

- Increase students' capacity to reflect on their own learning needs and progress by provision of explicit learning criteria
- Cater for individual student needs with high expectations of learning for all
- Empower students by increasing student responsibility for their own learning.

The School Assessment Program has been developed and systems for ready access to comprehensive data have been created. Concurrently, teachers have used the Quality Teaching model and teacher feedback mechanisms to support the work of generating and providing explicit success criteria for students through rubrics.

The Australian Curriculum has been a vehicle to engage staff in the design and use of rich tasks to form a basis of performance assessment. The panel recognises the school's leading contribution with respect to the implementation of the Australian Curriculum.

The more recent introduction of the *Backwards by Design* approach has also underpinned inquiry planning and facilitated increased opportunities for peer and self-assessment and negotiated learning. The school allows team planning time to build consistency and deepen this approach. Student folders containing work samples and other assessment data, and a data summary are also available. The panel sighted evidence of student goal setting towards differentiated approaches to learning.

The measures used to inform improvement in Annual Operating Plans in relation to student empowerment and learning outcome data have yet to reflect improvement. Continuing use of the Quality Teaching model for teacher observation and reflection is supporting the school's efforts towards this priority.

Evidence cited and its validation

- School Satisfaction Surveys (Students)
- School Assessment Program Requirements Timeline
- school tour
- interviews with Deputy Principal
- interviews with students

- student self assessment documents
- 2012 Quality Teaching Survey (teachers)
- *Rich Task* samples
- rubrics in classrooms
- Peer Assessment rubric.

Linked Priority 3 (Leading and Managing/ Community Involvement)

- Expand all stakeholders' understanding of the school vision in light of current educational trends
- Use modern technologies to allow parents to regularly participate in and monitor children's learning
- Promote the school and its achievements across the wider community.

The staff has engaged in a collaborative process to articulate a shared vision. The vision of a supportive learning community has been enacted through the establishment of parent representatives for each class, community discussion forums around educational practices, and through the active involvement of the P&C. The panel noted the success of a range of celebrations and community building activities that this group coordinates.

Communication with the parent community has increased through the improved use of information technology. Almost half of the parent community accesses the newsletter electronically. Access to the Connected Learning Community (cLc) previously provided opportunities for increasing parent understanding and connection to the school and its programs. There has been a shift from this online environment within the broader context of the Directorate, and the school community is eagerly anticipating its next iteration and other technological possibilities. Enhancement of the school website is increasingly recognised as the next step in developing improved online communication.

A survey conducted by the school in 2013 on parent awareness and understanding of the school vision showed that 62 percent of parents acknowledged an awareness of the vision. The panel believes there is further opportunity to build on this area, creating a shared approach to school improvement with the parent and student community.

Parent satisfaction data shows improvement in communication between home and the school.

Promotion of the school across the educational community has been successful through its engagement in curriculum development with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Curtin was a lead school in the implementation of the Australian Curriculum in two subject areas and also a trial school. Productive partnerships with the University of Newcastle around the Quality Teaching model, and work with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers reflects the teachers' commitment to improvement in pedagogical knowledge, student engagement and teaching practices.

Student and staff participation across a wide range of educational and community events has showcased learning programs and provided opportunities to celebrate the school's achievements. Staff have used media coverage to profile these events and highlight the school's success in the wider community.

Evidence cited and its validation

- school displays
- certificate of appreciation for involvement in Australia Curriculum
- School Satisfaction Data
- School Vision Statement
- Curtin Primary Parent Feedback Survey 2013
- School Board Reports.

Linked Priority 4 (Leadership and Management)

- Increase staff participation in decision making.

School leadership and staff brought differing perceptions of the opportunities for leadership and participation in decision-making. In response, staff engaged in collaborative learning processes to deepen and build a shared understanding of these concepts. Structures have been trialed and established to ensure more voices contribute to and inform strategic decision making. The panel noted the process through which modifications were made to the selection of students to the PALS program as a strong example of this work.

Staff satisfaction surveys and school data reflect a positive shift in teachers' perceptions and increased engagement of staff as leaders.

Evidence cited and its validation

- Staff Participation Survey
- 2012 Staff PMI Reflection (School programs and practices)
- interviews with staff.

Linked Priority 5 (Leading and Managing/ Student Environment)

- Involve all staff in sustained continuous improvement through regular collection, analysis and sharing of a range of reliable data
- Maintain a safe, supportive and culturally inclusive school climate.

With the renewed articulation of the school's philosophy towards student management, there has been notable success in strengthening the inclusive and supportive school culture experienced by students. The improvement actions towards this priority involved thorough exploration and collation of evidence from students, staff and parents. This included examination of school satisfaction surveys, student playground surveys, and the analysis of the incidents recorded on the Student Incident Tracker. Gathering ongoing data remains a challenge in terms of the increased demands it places on staff.

Another barrier in this area of improvement involved the sensitive management of complex behaviours. This has been overcome through staff working with the Directorate and external professionals to embed positive relationships in the playground and classrooms.

A range of programs have been introduced to build social skills including *Friendly Schools Plus*, *Restorative Practices*, and lunch clubs. A set of dispositions and values has been created, communicated and embedded into the culture of the school. These are known as Curtin's 6 Cs. This work, along with structural changes to resourcing has promoted teacher collaboration and consistency in the approach to managing and supporting student connections and safety.

Survey data reflects increasing satisfaction of students, parents and staff in this area.

Evidence cited and its validation

- School Satisfaction Surveys
- 2012 Pink Slip Tracker
- Playground Survey data
- suspension data
- Friendly Schools Plus Scope and Sequence
- parent interviews
- student interviews.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

PART 3: Reflection

The school has engaged in considered reflection throughout its improvement journey in the context of changing requirements for school plans and developments in the national agenda. The school's original priorities have been honored, and the leadership team has used emerging initiatives such as the Quality Teaching model and the Australian Curriculum to drive their work strategically. The school's reflections on the process were honest and forward looking, with areas of strength and those requiring further development identified.

In the area of school performance, there has been an increasing amount of data collection to inform progress and planning. The school recognises a need to develop systems for analysing relevant data, identifying trends and to support student need. The two curriculum areas identified by the school for continuing work are Numeracy and Writing.

There was recognition that Curtin's diversity and variation in student enrolments require a more substantial system of data collection and analysis to support staff planning and perceptions about student achievement.

The panel concurs that the school's achievements towards their priorities have been the result of strong professional trust. The school acknowledged the importance of ongoing communication. This is pertinent to identifying and working towards shared goals to support its commitment to distributive leadership. The leadership team has also reflected on the need to provide opportunities for input, through a range of forums, from the community and students as the school moves beyond this improvement cycle.

The importance of reiterating focused goals, targets and measures with staff was also recognised as a key to aligning work and sustaining momentum towards continuous school improvement. There is an opportunity at this phase in the planning cycle for the school to pause, capture, and celebrate the school's journey.

Evidence cited and its validation

- interviews with teacher
- discussions with members of the school's leadership team
- interviews with parents

- school tours.

Section D: Commendations and recommendations

The panel acknowledged Curtin Primary School's commitment to sustaining their improvement journey in a context of significant change and complexity.

Commendations

The panel wishes to commend Curtin Primary School for the following initiatives:

1. The increased collection of data to inform programs and practices. The school has prioritised the collection of assessment data, and formalised whole school assessment practices for capturing and tracking student progress and program effectiveness. The educators have proceeded to establish mechanisms to collect, collate and record agreed learning data sets and apply the use of rubrics to inform moderation processes.
2. Building professional capital through a focus on the Quality Teaching model. Increased teacher reflection, self and peer assessment and feedback is contributing to systematically strengthening the school's professional culture. There is recognition of the critical role teachers play in improving student learning outcomes and concerted effort to strengthen teacher efficacy.
3. Human resource management and allocation of resources to maximise targeted support for students and teachers. This has supported case management, teacher coaching, the collaborative analysis of data, and focused student monitoring, and is enhancing teacher capacity to facilitate personalised learning.
4. The high level of engagement by the school in the national agenda and networks through piloting the Australian Curriculum, participating in research with the University of Newcastle, and work with the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership.
5. Building and promoting a safe school culture within classrooms and the playground.

Recommendations

The panel recommends that Curtin Primary School:

1. Use the next improvement cycle to focus on fewer priorities with predetermined measures. This will support the school's achievement of its vision through quality and accountability.
2. To support the formal assessment processes already developed, investigate assessment strategies that inform teacher practice and involve students in monitoring their learning. Formative assessment, work sample analysis and team moderation as well as regular student self and peer assessment will further inform the personalising of and differentiation of learning particularly in numeracy and writing.
3. Enhance the positive student environment through furthering the use of strategies that increase student voice and empower students to take increased responsibility for their learning.
4. Further develop technology as a tool for learning, assessment and to showcase achievement within and beyond the school. This could involve the ongoing development of the website and intranet.

5. Through documentation, capture and celebrate with the school community those practices that have contributed to the improvements achieved to date. This will promote shared commitment and enable continuous improvement.