Disclaimer

This document reports the findings of the Department of Education Services' review and verification of the school's self-review. The school's self-review has been complemented by information provided by the Department of Education and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

The findings of the independent review are forwarded to the School Principal, the Board Chair, the Director General of Education and the Minister for Education.

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School and Review Details

Principal: Mrs Narelle Ward
Board Chair: Mr Harry Taylor
School Location: 16 Boronia Close, South Hedland WA 6722
School Classification: PS Class 5
Number of Students: 403
Reviewers: Mr Bill Gibson (Lead)
Mr Michael Duncan
Review Dates: 26 and 27 August 2015

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the independent review is to provide assurance to the school and its community, the Director General of Education and the Minister for Education on the extent to which the school has met its commitments as outlined in its Delivery and Performance Agreement (DPA) and associated Business Plan.

The focus of the review is on:

- how well the school has implemented self-review
- how well the school has improved student learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students
- how well the school has created an environment that promotes learning and student well-being
- how well the school is placed to sustain and improve its performance.
Review Methodology

The school has been required, under the DPA, to undertake annual self-assessments of its performance. The outcome of these assessments formed the basis for the school's self-review. The school sent its self-review documentation to the IPS Review Team, Department of Education Services one month prior to the commencement of the review.

The IPS reviewers supplemented the information provided by the school with information on the school's achievements, its processes and its student performance data from a number of sources which included:

- the My School® website
- the Department of Education School Performance Monitoring System
- Schools Online reports.

Reviewers analysed the evidence presented in the school's self-review documentation and developed lines of inquiry where further verification was required.

An agenda for the two review visit days was subsequently negotiated with the school to enable the gathering of evidence to verify claims made by the school. During these two days the reviewers sourced evidence to support the school's self-review claims through observation and discussion with leaders, teaching and support staff, board members, parents and students.

The evidence provided by the school, along with information gathered by the reviewers prior to and during the review visits, was used as the basis for the verification of how well the school has met its commitments as outlined in the DPA and Business Plan.

This document reports on the findings of the independent review.
School Context

What are the important features of this school’s context that have an impact on student learning?

Cassia Primary School is located in South Hedland within the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Established in 1981, the School of the Year (2013) shares the site with Cassia Education Support Centre. Following community and staff consultation, the school became an Independent Public School in 2013.

Recent adjustments to the local intake area have created a more varied socio-economic demographic. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) data supports the observations of the Principal and the Board Chair that, through the duration of the DPA, while there has been a shift in student distribution with 69% of students now falling in the bottom two socio-economic quartiles compared to 51% in 2012, the school continues to enrol students across all quartiles. Both believe the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of 912 accurately reflects the diverse student population.

After a period of stable enrolment, an adjustment to the local intake area in 2012 resulted in a rapid increase to peak in 2014 before settling to an enrolment of 403 Kindergarten to Year 6 students at the time of the review.

The enrolment includes 135 (33.4%) Aboriginal students, 10% students with a language background other than English, 12 (2.9%) students receiving Disability Resourcing Services support and 12 (2.9%) students in the care of the Department of Child Protection and Family Services. Significantly, according to the Department of Education School Performance Monitoring System (SPMS), the transiency rate is very high at 48.9% and presents an ongoing contextual challenge.

In 2014, the attendance rate (87.9%) was well below both like schools (90.4%) and WA Public Schools (92.1%). The Aboriginal attendance rate (81.6%) was above both like schools and WA Public Schools (80.4%). A continuing challenge is to reduce the number of students identified as at risk with all categories well above State averages.

In March 2015, the Workforce Profile included a Principal and two Level 3 deputy principals in the Leadership Team, 22 (20.8 Full-Time Equivalent [FTE]) teachers and 13 (11.7 FTE) support staff.
The profile includes nine full-time and three part-time permanent teachers and 10 fixed-term teachers. The Workforce Plan 2013–2015 has identified age and gender profiles together with potential workforce adjustments by major employers in the region as impacting on teaching and learning.

The nine-member Board includes three parents, three community members, two staff and the Principal. Under the leadership of a community representative chairperson, the Board fulfils its obligations as outlined in the DPA.

The adequately resourced school enjoys the support of its parent community and proactive Parents and Citizens’ Association (P&C) to continually enhance the teaching and learning environment.

Partnerships with regional industry, local businesses, the Hedland Network of Schools, external agencies, service providers and the on-site Cassia Education Support Centre contribute to a strong community connection.

The school continues to develop and embed contextually appropriate teaching pedagogy and learning strategies in response to demographic, industrial and social changes within its community.
The School’s Self-Review Process

How effective was the school’s self-review in accounting for its performance during the period of the DPA and Business Plan?

Collaborative whole-school, learning-phase and individual class teacher reviews are conducted on a wide range of valid data including National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), On-Entry Assessment and Year 1 retesting, West Australian Monitoring Standards in Education (WAMSE) testing, moderated teacher judgements, PM Benchmarks, Australian Council for Educational Research—Progressive Assessment Test—Science, surveys and school-based standardised testing. The comprehensive process includes a detailed analysis of evidence, a summary of progress and recommendations for future improvement.

The whole-school review of the Business Plan detailed in the IPS Review Statement summarised progress against all targets in each key focus area and facilitated informed comparisons against like and State schools.

The critical approach to self-assessment is demonstrated by the timely response to evidence indicating many students were struggling to comprehend the language of mathematics. Following a careful examination of a comprehensive set of data, the Mathematics Committee resolved to establish a scope and sequence statement to guide the development of an understanding of mathematical language.

Reviewers commend the consistency evident in the Business Plan, Annual Report and internal operational statements. The Board endorsed 2015 Annual Report is indicative of the alignment. The report provides a comprehensive account of the school performance in all focus areas and outlines recommendations to guide future improvement.

Meetings with the Leadership Team, the Board, key committees and phase-of-learning representatives confirm documentation and enabled reviewers to verify a rigorous data-driven review process was utilised to analyse and report performance in the three focus areas.
School Performance—Student Learning

How well has the school performed in improving learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students?

The Business Plan 2013–2015 describes the school’s focus for an improvement agenda based on an analysis of 2012 data. The three focus areas are: Enhanced Student Achievement; Inspired and Capable Staff; and Enriched Community Partnerships. Key strategies, targets and future directions support each focus area. The Business Plan was reviewed in 2014 and amended to suit the changing context of the school. This approach will continue as the school staff are determined to be responsive to the changing needs of the school community.

School improvement targets were set based on measuring identified cohort performance and progress. Cohort performance improvement in literacy and numeracy areas was assessed as performing above or equal to WA like-school student distributions in NAPLAN by 2015. Other targets related to Aboriginal students performing above the national minimum standard (NMS) and also reducing the overall number of students at or below the NMS. Attendance targets were set to exceed 90%.

Reviewers were able to verify the staff’s assessment of progress towards the achievement of the targets from NAPLAN data and the self-review analysis. The analysis of NAPLAN performance, as reported in SPMS, noted both 2014 Overall Relative Achievement and Overall Progress were ‘within the expected performance range’. Student Progress and Achievement for 2012–2014 compared with like schools indicates that Year 3–5 students demonstrated higher progress/higher achievement in numeracy, writing, reading and grammar and punctuation and higher progress/lower achievement in spelling. Year 5–7 students demonstrated higher progress/higher achievement in reading, spelling and grammar and punctuation, lower progress in writing and lower progress/lower achievement in numeracy. Typically, results were in the top right quadrant. The attendance rate was 87.9% compared to WA Public Schools 92.1% and like schools 90.4%.

Conclusions indicated most targets had been met. The conclusions also considered the targets were aspirational and the staff should continue to aim for high standards. Reviewers affirm the analysis, conclusions and actions drawn from the 2015 self-review.
Student achievement in non-academic areas is very good and a result of the great number of courses and pathways provided by the school.

From the commencement of 2014, and with the appointment of the incoming Principal, a further review was conducted to re-vision the school to focus on issues that directly impacted on student learning. Issues identified for action included establishing a culture based on student learning improvement using the Gradual Release Model. Initiatives developed from the review included:

- a focus on learning rather than explicit teaching
- collaboration including developing leadership capabilities and forming teams
- targeted professional learning for staff
- an increased role and engagement of parents and the community
- increased staff accountability for engagement in data analysis for classroom planning
- developing teacher leaders.

The reviewers affirm the focus on student learning and strategies to engage staff in best practice in teaching, collaborative decision-making and leadership development through coaching. Staff indicated their support and have embraced the new school vision. Staff members are commended for the renewed focus on success for students; for taking ownership of strategies and monitoring; and, embracing teacher leader opportunities.

Of further note, is the quality of the self-review process that highlighted the performance of particular groups of students identified for additional support (case managed students and extension group). Sub-groups based on gender, language background and ethnicity were also analysed both on a group and individual basis. The analysis identified improvement in learning for these particular groups or made recommendations for further action to improve performance.

The review conducted in 2014 has also identified areas of concern and future directions for the next Business Plan. These include changes to targets to develop an aspirational and measurable focus; consideration to evaluating progress and achievement in other learning areas; the continuing development of best practice strategies in teaching and learning; maintaining a strong focus on individual, group and cohort progress; and, even greater engagement of staff, students and parents in decisions.
The reviewers commend the Principal and staff on developing a school improvement agenda through the development of realistic school-wide expectations, a focus on individual student growth and productive collaboration between staff members.

The staff is also commended for the school-wide practices of recording and monitoring students' work and progress. They are comprehensive and of a high quality. This data comprises academic, social and emotional records, and information.
School Performance—Quality of the Learning Environment

*How well has the school performed in creating an environment that promotes learning and well-being for all students and the attainment of the school vision?*

The staff has commenced a number of initiatives designed to develop a learning environment that is characterised as a Professional Learning Community. Staff have been engaged in a review process that was meaningful and highly effective. The Principal has initiated a change management process that supports staff to focus on learning, their own, as well as that of the students. This will continue into 2016 and beyond, reinforced by the establishment of a coaching and teams structure to support collaboration and improved pedagogy. Students indicated to reviewers their classrooms are safe, inclusive and happy places where they are known and treated as an individual. Students are engaged in meaningful learning activities with every opportunity to target their learning, develop their skills and achieve success. Parents have been involved through improved communication strategies and are well informed and engaged.

It was evident through extensive interviews with staff, parents and students, as well as first-hand observation of interactions between students, between staff and students and between staff, the staff are well positioned to continue to focus on the collaboratively developed motto of ‘Inspire-Believe-Achieve’. Staff have provided a positive learning environment with a culture of improvement and care.

Coaching and collaborative planning to support curriculum delivery and monitoring of student performance processes are embedded across the school. This is enabled by the formation of phase-of-learning teams, the allocation of common release time and a focus on professional learning related to contemporary pedagogy and the direction set by the Business Plan. For 2015, there is a clear focus on developing whole-school approaches to the teaching of literacy, numeracy and science. In accordance with the school’s own self review findings and Business Plan it is recommended that all staff engage in external moderation activities in 2016 to further complement the strong internal moderation provided by curriculum leaders and experienced staff.
The school has a strong collegiate ‘tone’ and a school-wide commitment to purposeful teaching and successful learning. The use of appropriate technologies is developing. There is a strong focus on the creation of a culture in which all students are engaged in challenging, meaningful learning and that their achievements are celebrated.

Associated with the collegiate tone is a developing culture of high expectation and continuous improvement. The school has initiated a case management approach to support students identified as requiring a differentiated learning program. This initiative, when combined with an extension program for students who are achieving above expectations, ensures the needs of all students are being addressed.

The school has adopted inclusive practices to meet the learning needs of all students. This begins with the pre-Kindergarten induction program and continues throughout the child’s time at the school. The Kindergarten induction program is highly organised and providing an excellent introduction to the school for all students and their parents. The school is recognised as a core school by the Department of Education to provide support to other schools across the region to implement the National Quality Standard (NQS) in Early Childhood Education. Constant reassessment and adjustment to the learning program and support on offer to families ensures each child achieves to the best of their ability. Parents spoke highly of the individual attention they receive from the school including the highly focused learning program and the professional and positive manner in which the staff conduct all meetings and interactions with them and their children. There are clear expectations for all—students, staff and parents—to support the educational process.

The positive reports across the school community affirm the manner in which the Principal, Board and staff work together in a supportive way with a strong sense of belonging, respect and approval of the school. The Leadership Team and staff work together in a caring way to ensure a supportive and successful learning environment.

Staff, students and parents interact in a constructive manner using positive language in both formal and informal settings. Collaboration between staff and parents enables the staff to plan and implement appropriate strategies to ensure all students have the greatest opportunity to achieve their maximum potential. The development of a positive and supportive learning environment for students, as evidenced by overall attendance rates and a focus on positive student behaviour, is a credit to the school community and is commended.
The school is developing an inclusive, student needs-centred culture that characterises the school’s ethos and manifests itself in pastoral care strategies, including breakfasts, lunches, uniforms and transport that create a positive social-emotional setting conducive to a productive learning environment for all students. There are several activities conducted by staff with a focus on science, the Stephanie Alexander Garden Project, visual arts and physical education that strongly contribute to the learning environment.

In meeting with parents and members of the Board, the reviewers were able to verify the high regard for the school. Parents in particular, expressed their increased involvement in school events and decision-making. Parents were very positive about the school and expressed their appreciation of the Principal and staff and affirmed the provision of an environment where students were able to build their confidence and social skills. The Principal and staff are commended for promoting productive engagement of parents in the education of their students. Effective partnerships with parents and the wider community are established on trust and mutual respect and students were thoughtful and conscious of ‘doing their best to succeed’ with a positive attitude toward the school, teachers and their learning. Parents felt that Cassia Primary School was a true 'school of choice' in the Hedland area.
School Performance—Sustainability

How well placed is the school to sustain and improve its performance into the next planning cycle?

An embedded systematic review of academic and non-academic performance guides the improvement agenda. The robust self-review process includes the leadership team, focus committees, whole staff, learning phases, classroom teachers and the Board interrogating performance data. Documentation provided evidence the staff regularly review progress against Business Plan targets and strategies. The ongoing refinement of reporting is evident in the Board endorsed 2014 Annual Report that includes relevant data, a clear summary and recommendations for further improvement in each target.

The cycle of reflection and forward planning is demonstrated by the work of the Early-Phase team in developing an Early-Years Improvement Plan (2016–2018). In addition to reviewing student performance, members are exploring all key documents including the NQS and the WA Curriculum and Assessment Outline (K–10) to ensure alignment.

The capacity of the Board has developed over the three-year period of the DPA. Active parent and community representation, participation in Department of Education training sessions and ongoing guidance by the Leadership Team, support and enhance the Board’s oversight of school improvement. This was evidenced through Board minutes, the Board Overview Statement and a meeting with Board members. Members articulated an understanding of contextual factors that influence teaching and learning. The IPS Processes and Board Meetings 2013–2015 Overview document indicated the Board is well prepared to fulfil its governance obligations. The Board is aware of the need to further develop community understanding of both its role and responsibilities.

To support continuous improvement, the Principal has implemented a distributed leadership structure with roles and responsibilities to empower staff members to deliver improved outcomes and engage with the expectations of the DPA and the Business Plan. Staff are actively encouraged and supported to aspire to leadership positions and Level 3 status.
Professional learning continues to enhance teacher capacity to deliver contextually appropriate teaching and learning for all students. Staff development is enhanced by participation in the local network and online learning opportunities. In the pursuit of professional excellence, leaders receive Full-Circle feedback, teachers use the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership Teaching standards and non-teaching staff participate in structured performance management. Targeted collaborative mentoring is provided by the ‘Coaching, Observation and Feedback’ model to ensure whole-school and phase strategies and programs are consistently delivered.

A meeting with the members of the Finance Committee indicated that with stable enrolment, the ongoing support of major regional companies, local businesses and the P&C, together with continuing high level of parent voluntary contributions (currently in excess of 80%), the school is well positioned to sustain key initiatives.

The school community is commended for its ongoing contribution to the development of the physical environment. The level of community engagement is evidenced by the response to recent ‘Busy Bees’ with in excess of 70 community members in attendance across both gatherings.

The school is well placed to sustain and improve its performance. Staff have implemented structures and processes to achieve sustainability. Teachers and leaders are involved in data-driven review of school practice and quality planning strategies. Implementation of pedagogical change is well underway. The Board is actively engaged in providing oversight of the school’s strategic planning, monitoring and review processes. The next Business Plan will seek to build on initiatives while continuing to give primacy to student engagement and the provision of a comprehensive education for all students.
Conclusion

Cassia Primary School enjoys a positive standing in the community for both the quality of student learning and its ethos. A comprehensive pastoral care program underpins an environment in which students feel valued and are confident to engage in learning.

The staff has responded to recent contextual changes to deliver student performance consistent with Western Australian like schools. While some challenging targets remain unachieved, student performance continues to improve in both academic and non-academic areas.

Effective self-review processes examine a comprehensive set of evidence to determine student achievement and engagement standards in and beyond targeted areas and to guide adjustments.

An insightful, strategic and professional leadership team, effective Board, supportive community and enthusiastic, collaborative staff should ensure the school continues to achieve improving outcomes.

Commendations

The following areas are commended:

- the consistency evident in the Business Plan, Annual Report and internal operational statements
- the Principal and staff on developing a school improvement agenda through the development of realistic school-wide expectations, a focus on individual student growth and productive collaboration between staff members
- school-wide practices for recording and monitoring each student’s work and progress
- the development of a positive and supportive learning environment for students as evidenced by overall attendance rates and a focus on positive student behaviour
- staff members for the renewed focus on success for students, taking ownership of strategies and monitoring, and embracing teacher leader opportunities
- the school community for its ongoing contribution to the development of the physical environment.
Area for Improvement

*The following area for improvement is identified:*

all staff engage in external moderation activities to further complement the strong internal moderation provided by curriculum leaders and experienced staff.
Declaration

We, the undersigned, hereby confirm that the information provided in this findings document is to the best of our knowledge true and correct and is based on the verification of the evidence provided by Cassia Primary School as part of the Department of Education Services’ independent review process. The Principal and Board Chair have had an opportunity to comment on any matters of fact contained within this document.

Mr Bill Gibson, Lead Reviewer

14 October 2015

Date

Mr Michael Duncan, Reviewer

14 October 2015

Date

Mr Richard Strickland, Director General,
Department of Education Services

29/10/15

Date