



Government of Western Australia
Department of Education Services

Comet Bay Primary School

2016

Independent Review Findings



Independent Review of
Independent Public Schools

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 the Department of Education and the Minister for Education.

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School and Review Details

Principal:	Mr Matthew Osborne
Board Chair:	Mr Russell Trowbridge
School Location:	85 Miltona Drive Secret Harbour WA 6173
Number of Students:	904
Reviewers:	Ms Kerry Usher (Lead) and Ms Janine Milton
Review Dates:	22 and 23 March 2016
Initial Review	2012

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the independent review is to provide assurance to the school and its community, the Director General of the Department 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 wellbeing
- 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 to verify achievement and developed lines of inquiry where further verification was required.

An agenda for the review visit was subsequently negotiated with the Principal to enable the gathering of evidence to verify claims made by the school. During the review visit 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?

Comet Bay Primary School is located in the suburb of Secret Harbour 55km south of Perth between the regional centres of Rockingham and Mandurah. The school was opened in 2007 to serve an urban population that has shown rapid growth over the past nine years and over the period of the Delivery and Performance Agreement. The impact of increased population has meant that the school has always been in a growth mode. In response to demand, the school has been provided with temporary classrooms and, to ease pressure on the main campus, an off-site early childhood annexe was established.

The school's demography has remained a mix of local and overseas-born students mainly from the United Kingdom, South Africa and New Zealand. The school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is 1019, consistent with nearby schools. Students born in the United Kingdom constitute 21% of the population (down from 23% in 2012) with Australian-born students making up 71% of the total (up from 62% in 2012). The presence of the defence facilities at Garden Island means that a number of naval families have their children enrolled at the school who are supported by a Defence Liaison Officer.

The building of a new school nearby and the transfer of Year 7 students to secondary education in 2015 has had a limited impact on the school's enrolment. The current enrolment of 904, although below its peak of 1070 in 2014, remains high, with a projected reduction of enrolment to 800 students by 2020. School data indicates 17% of students live outside the school's boundary with analysis demonstrating that when parents shift to nearby suburbs they maintain their children's enrolment at Comet Bay Primary School.

The student profile demonstrates there is a significant group of students with a disability (10.2%) and a small Aboriginal population (1.4%). Student transiency is high at 16.6% which has been attributed in part to the changing parent workforce with the downturn in mining and reduced employment opportunities for fly-in fly-out work. Attendance rates remain above State averages at 95% with 86% regular attendance of 90% and above.

Workforce planning in a school with an enrolment projected to decrease to around 800 over the next four years, along with budget changes and the necessity for temporary teaching contracts, presents challenges for the Principal in maintaining the programs that support teaching and learning. Planning has identified present and future challenges faced in managing a relatively young staff (teaching staff average age is 37.9 years) and in maintaining key programs and teacher development as high priorities.

Consistent with this planning, partnerships have been developed with the school community to enhance program delivery and community connections to the school. Collaborative relationships have been established with the Comet Bay Professional Learning Community and the South Peron Network of 20 local schools to support professional learning and leadership development. Positive relationships with external agencies support the diverse learning needs of students.

The School Board provides oversight of the key responsibilities and accountabilities associated with approving the budget, providing feedback and endorsement on the analysis of student performance and engaging in the process to develop the Business Plan. The school's resourcing is a key element of board considerations with one-line budget projections and evidence provided by school leadership to ensure that members are engaged in decisions about future needs and available resources.

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?

The leadership team and staff conducted an extensive and robust school self-review of the school's performance in terms of achieving the stated outcomes of the Business Plan April 2013–April 2016 and meeting the commitments as agreed through the DPA.

The school self-review process was conducted in an inclusive and collaborative way, with performance data analysed at the class, phase-of-learning team, whole-school focus group, curriculum management team, leadership team and board levels. Rigour in analysis was achieved through triangulation of data and the use of disciplined dialogue, resulting in excellent recording of findings and recommendations for future action and plans.

Collaborative review and assessment of the school's performance in the areas of teaching, learning environment, leadership, relationships and resources was also conducted, enabling a view of school effectiveness to be collaboratively formed. The leadership team then synthesised this information together with the performance data analysis into a succinct and coherent document identifying strengths and areas for improvement, an overall conclusion of school performance and recommendations for the next Business Plan.

Reviewers verify that there is a high level of staff collective ownership of the school's self-review process. This translates into a shared commitment to maintain gains made and develop more effective strategies to address areas of identified need. Board members were well assured through this rigorous self-review process that the school was performing well and areas identified for improvement were being identified for the next planning cycle.

School Performance—Student Learning

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

The Business Plan articulates the school's vision: to inspire life-long learning through providing a safe environment where students are given the opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge they require to become resilient, well-balanced, successful individuals who function positively in society throughout life.

The Business Plan uses the Health Promoting Schools Framework to describe the interconnectedness of ethos, curriculum and partnerships. Performance targets or objectives have been set in each area, followed by implementation strategies documented under headings of teaching, learning environment, relationships and leadership. This scaffold ensures alignment between expected improvement in student performance and strategic use of appropriate school improvement enablers.

The 2013–2016 Business Plan was primarily focused on improving student performance in literacy, numeracy and science. It built upon the recommendations of the school self-review and those of the independent review conducted in 2012.

The 2016 school self-review concluded that the standards of student achievement in literacy and numeracy were being maintained with the gap closing progressively in comparison to like schools. Writing continues to be a strength, whilst reading and spelling require a more intensive focus. Student performance in science was more difficult to assess due to a lack of normative data; however, the staff is working very proactively to establish a sound baseline and ongoing testing regime using PAT Science and other school-based assessments. The development of science as a specialist area with two dedicated teachers has greatly enhanced curriculum planning and program delivery and this in itself has positioned the school for improved learning outcomes in science.

Curriculum targets in the Business Plan are predominantly based on data from annual National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing using comparison with like schools in the Western Australian public education system. The school uses 2013 performance as a baseline so that progress and improvement over time can be measured.

Achievement of targets aimed at reducing the percentages of students below the National Minimum Standard was generally limited, although this was made difficult by strong baseline performance in 2013. Student performance is generally in line with like-school comparisons.

Targets to increase the percentage of students in the top bands were reached for Year 3 reading and numeracy in 2014 and 2015, demonstrating good progress. There is acknowledgement that there is still more work to do to reach like-school parity in top band achievement in Year 5.

Targets to close the performance gap between Comet Bay Primary School and like-school average scores were predominantly achieved in reading, writing and numeracy in Years 3 and 5 in both 2014 and 2015. Staff acknowledge this achievement but the extent of the improvement remains below expectation.

While NAPLAN results do enable the school to conduct a comparative and longitudinal review of student performance in literacy and numeracy, the school also has a comprehensive testing and assessment program used predominantly in formative assessment for teaching and in operational planning. Year-level expectations have been developed in literacy and numeracy and there is an expectation that 75% of students will achieve these milestones. Use of this data, together with on-entry assessment, attendance and behaviour records provide a rich source of information that could be considered when creating targets.

The school self-review also includes a review of the five key enabler areas (teaching, learning environment, leadership, relationships and resources) and is conducted through collaborative consultation and analysis of evidence with staff. Examples of evidence cited are school-based assessments, attendance registers, minutes of meetings, policy development, coaching notes and planning documentation.

The summarised conclusion containing key achievements and recommendations for improvement for each of the five areas identifies that much progress had been made and the Business Plan has been highly successful in achieving its intent. The document has been 'alive' for its duration, driving and leading improvement in a coherent yet flexible way, enabling small changes to be made to maximise impact whilst steering a steady course.

Reviewers verify this assessment, as all staff show understanding and commitment to achieving the targets and goals and working collaboratively to implement agreed strategies and processes.

An identified strength of the school is the successful embedding of a focus on standards and high expectations in classrooms through instructional coaching. The development of a performance and development process for all teachers based on implementation of the Business Plan, classroom observation and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers has ensured strong coherence and focus on the things that matter most to improve performance.

Developments at Comet Bay Primary School show a clear focus on evidence-based research into effective instructional practice across all curriculum areas and this underpins the operational and strategic plans.

The whole-school agreement for the implementation of models of practice such as gradual release (e.g., *I do, we do, you do*); explicit warm-up sessions to introduce learning; the structured support strategies (such as classroom walk throughs, co-coaching, fishing trips, peer mentors, Classroom Management Strategies (CMS) and phase-of-learning teams) have all been successful in developing a very professional culture in the school.

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 leadership and staff have a comprehensive self-review process that is used to great effect in determining the quality of the learning environment. Non-academic areas are regularly reviewed to identify successful implementation of whole-school strategies to improve the social and emotional well-being of students and ensure a cohesive school community. Discussions with review participants provided verification of the successful outcomes of the *Tribes* social model and the impact of the Health Promoting Schools Framework.

The Business Plan outlines the strategic intent in the area of promoting the ethos of the school and in enhancing the learning environment *to ensure that all students feel safe, cared for, valued and promote resilient young individuals*. Considerable progress has been made in developing shared beliefs across all staff and instilling in them the focus on the development of the whole child where students gain the skills knowledge and resilience to succeed in society. The leadership team continue to focus on high professional standards for staff supported by accredited instructional strategy coaches selected and trained by them. Reviewers were able to verify the embedded values and practices that support the school vision of inspiring life-long learning. Discussions with staff, parents, board members and students, and classroom visits affirmed the school ethos as being evident, continually practised and promoted throughout the school.

Throughout the review process, it was evident that all staff promoted a safe, challenging and inclusive learning environment with a whole-school focus and sustained emphasis on *Tribes* strategies. It was clear that the long-term use and belief in the success of these strategies promote a positive school and classroom environment enabling effective teaching and engagement to occur. All classes being involved in the *Tribes* program, with its emphasis on values and behaviours that support learning, is a significant strategy to ensure sustainability and consistency of practice is maintained. Staff also utilise these strategies in activities such as collaboration in staff meetings and professional learning sessions.

Staff new to the school are inducted through training sessions delivered by trained staff facilitators and a *Tribes* leader who coordinates the whole-school program. In addition, every class engages in a buddy class system where older students work with and mentor younger students. It was evident to reviewers through school and classroom observation and discussions with staff that this is an embedded process and continues to be at the heart of the school's ethos.

The school has also successfully continued to implement a whole-school approach to CMS with a consistent methodology and language demonstrated by staff and understood by students.

As a part of the Health Promoting Schools Framework, staff nurture the social, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being as well as cognitive development of its students. The whole school functions through the Health Promoting Schools Framework model, where the domains of curriculum, ethos and partnerships are interconnected. This is well understood by staff and community and is evident in all aspects of planning and school operations. Staff training has a focus to build professional standards to support student learning, engagement and well-being. This includes professional learning in CMS and Growth Coaching which provides the platform to support all students in a classroom environment.

School leaders place significant emphasis on teachers gaining additional knowledge and training to enable differentiation in classroom practice to meet the diverse needs of all students. Whole-school assessments occur to ensure that students with specific areas of need are identified and assistance is provided for academic extension and remediation. Students may be placed on a targeted plan to engage in curriculum at their level. Early screening has also been extended to kindergarten students to enable appropriate interventions to support learning at an individual level.

The leadership team has demonstrated strong support for improving the learning of students with differentiated needs by funding two learning support coordinators. The coordinators have leadership roles to support teachers in the delivery and management of learning programs for students at educational risk. All students are monitored and tracked to demonstrate progress. The role education assistants play in supporting learning is acknowledged by school leaders and staff as important in supporting the progress of identified students. The learning support team and student services focus group engage outside agencies and professionals to assist where necessary.

Additional support for students and their parents is offered by the Chaplain, Defence Transition Aide (Navy) and the School Psychologist, who provide expertise to a very strong student support team.

School leaders and staff have developed positive relationships with the school community and engage with as many parents as possible. Parents on the School Board contribute to policy and planning with the Parents and Citizens' Association taking on responsibility for fundraising and building connections with the community. Parents who met with reviewers affirmed their high level of involvement in the school and the opportunities provided to learn more about school programs. They are also recognised at the annual 'Growing Together Day'. Parents believe the school has 'a sense of family' and that it actively builds community capacity. During discussions with reviewers they highlighted the inclusive environment and acknowledged the positive impact of the *Tribes* program on the school community and students.

An effective Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden project is in operation with all classes involved in the harvesting and cooking cycle. Students are engaged in hands-on, practical experiences and gain a greater understanding of sustainable practices. This project, while providing learning experiences for students, has been successful in generating the highest level of parent involvement in the school and also attracts local business support.

Successful partnerships have been developed to support student learning. The leadership team plays a major role in building positive relationships in the Comet Bay Professional Learning Community which consists of staff from Comet Bay College, Secret Harbour Primary School, Singleton Primary School and Golden Bay Primary School. The collaborative relationships with member schools promote and engage staff in high-level professional learning that has the potential to have a positive impact on classroom practice.

School Performance—Sustainability

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

The school's leadership team has established excellent structures and processes that enable the School Board and the reviewers to have a high degree of confidence that performance and outcomes at the school will be sustained and most likely improved. Leadership is effective, supportive and focused on raising standards of instructional practice and student learning in the school.

An embedded culture centred on high expectations exists at the school, resulting in strong and shared commitment by students, staff and parents to make the school the best it can be. Staff members display vitality and interest in professional improvement on a personal, team and whole-school level as displayed by their active involvement in performance development processes, induction, coaching and mentoring.

The interlocking framework of team structures across phases-of-learning and key Business Plan focus areas provide a sound platform for development, self-review and planning. Teams are well supported by an effective distributed leadership structure creating alignment and coherence across the school. This model facilitates shared ownership and communication throughout the school.

Processes for Business Plan development, implementation, monitoring and review are sound and well embedded. Setting realistic, aspirational, yet achievable performance, remains a challenge, especially in regard to student engagement, achievement and progress in areas other than literacy and numeracy.

The school's administrative staff are highly skilled in ensuring physical, human and financial resources are well managed to support current and future initiatives. The approaches are well researched and innovative to ensure the school maximises opportunities within its autonomous context as an Independent Public School.

The staff acknowledge that one of the greatest innovations and achievements within the current Business Plan has been laying the foundations of the Comet Bay Professional Learning Community. The focus of the learning community has been to build teacher capacity, lift expectations and standards, and

streamline the implementation of the Western Australian Curriculum for students from Kindergarten to Year 12 within the region. Reviewers verify that staff refer to this partnership as a valued and valuable relationship that has enhanced their access to quality professional learning, moderation and collaboration. Comet Bay Primary School has been a pivotal partner in this development, with many staff members taking lead roles in executive and learning area committees. This strong commitment to sharing knowledge and expertise greatly enhances their sustainability of quality educational provision into the future.

The School Board is active and interested, with good representation from parents, businesses and community. Members are well prepared, with information made available before meetings, explanation provided by the Principal and induction and training sessions provided. Reviewers felt the profile of the Board could be enhanced through more visibility and commentary in key official documents, events and on-line platforms. Seeking opportunities for the Board Chair and members to converse with others in similar roles through the Comet Bay Professional Learning Community could enhance the profile and governance capabilities of the Board in line with the expectations of a high functioning Independent Public School.

Conclusion

The Principal and leadership team of Comet Bay Primary School have demonstrated a strategic vision for the education of students. A culture of continual self-assessment and questioning of the effectiveness of practice demonstrates a whole-school determination to improve student learning (achievement, progress, engagement). Staff are guided by reflective practice and participation in decision-making that consistently reinforces shared beliefs about teaching and learning and the development of the whole child.

The whole-school approach to developing effective, consistent practice and shared commitment also recognises the critical partnership with the school community. The building of strong relationships with parents through collaboration, engagement in school activities and parent education programs is recognised as a feature of the school that contributes to its success and good community standing.

Commendations

The following areas are commended:

- leadership and staff for quality, collaborative self-review processes that are used to inform decisions on planning for improvement at an individual, group, class and school level
- leadership and staff for the embedded focus on high expectations and maintaining standards of student performance
- the use of research and evidence-based planning to support the development of effective instructional practice and collaborative team structures
- the leadership team and staff for their endeavours to sustain and develop an environment that engages all students in their learning
- the staff commitment to ensuring all students are supported in their learning by ensuring a consistent and positive learning environment is in place across the school
- the student service team members for their dedication and continuing efforts to ensure that the needs of individual students at risk are supported to achieve success in their learning

- the Principal and leadership team for engaging in collaborative relationships within the Comet Bay Professional Learning Community to improve teacher curriculum delivery, staff connectedness, transitions and supporting the learning needs of students
- the Principal for strong, supportive leadership over time that is responsible for a staff culture of expectations of high standards, commitment to improving student learning and developing instructional practice with staff through access to quality professional learning and support
- the Principal for developing the long-term vision for the school through planning that drives and leads improvement while being responsive to changing circumstances to maximise teaching and learning opportunities.

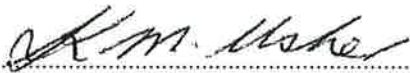
Areas for Improvement

The following areas for improvement are identified:

- the setting of realistic, achievable targets in academic and non-academic areas to determine student achievement and progress
- the School Board to raise its profile to demonstrate its representation of the community in carrying out its governance roles and responsibilities on the community's behalf.

Declaration

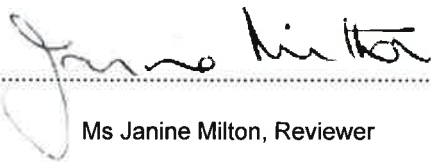
We, the undersigned, hereby confirm that the information provided in this findings document is to the best of our knowledge true and correct and is based on the verification of the evidence provided by Comet Bay Primary School as part of the Department of Education Services' independent review process.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



Mrs Kerry Usher, Lead Reviewer

2 May 2016

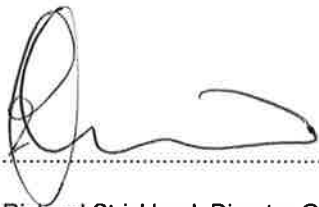
Date



Ms Janine Milton, Reviewer

2 May 2016

Date



Mr Richard Strickland, Director General,
Department of Education Services

2/6/2016

Date