Donnybrook District High School

2013

Independent Review Findings
Donnybrook District High School

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Disclaimer

This document has been based on the findings of the independent reviewers' verification of the school's self-review. The school's self-review has been complemented by information provided by the Department of Education, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

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

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1. About the Independent Review

The purpose of the independent review of Donnybrook District High School is to provide an assurance to the Minister for Education, the Director General of Education and the school community 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 improved the standards of student learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students
- how well the school has created an environment that promotes student learning
- how well the school is placed to sustain and improve its performance.

The school has been required, under the DPA, to undertake regular self-assessment. The outcomes of these assessments formed the basis for the school’s self-review which was presented to the reviewers for verification at the commencement of the independent review.
Prior to the presentation of the school’s self-review, reviewers were provided with information on the school’s educational achievements, its processes and its student performance data from a number of sources which include, but are not limited to:

- the MySchool™ website
- the Department of Education School Performance Monitoring System
- Schools Online reports.

Reviewers visited the school for a half-day presentation of the school’s self-review by the Principal, the Board Chair and other key stakeholders chosen by the school. Subsequently the reviewers analysed the evidence presented in the school’s self-review documentation and developed lines of enquiry where further verification was required.

An agenda for a two-day review visit was then negotiated with the school to enable the gathering of further evidence to clarify or confirm the claims made in the school’s self-review. During these two days the reviewers sourced information and evidence to support the school’s self-review claims through observation and discussion with teaching and non-teaching staff, board members, parents, students and the school leadership team.

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

This document reports on the findings of the independent review.
2. Summary

Donnybrook District High School provides unique educational opportunities to the community it serves. The dual campus structure (K–Year 5 and Year 6–Year 10) allows for specific learning environments tailored to the needs of students on each campus. It celebrates a stable and cohesive staff which is supported by an effective Board and small town community in providing a very nurturing environment where the needs of each student are known and addressed.

The school demonstrates integrity and honesty in the interrogation of its performance data. In a desire to improve outcomes for students the school is undertaking to review its performance targets and associated milestones and strategies in the next Business Plan 2014–2016. A focus on each student as an individual and a desire to support that student and his/her family in helping the student reach their potential is evident in philosophy and practice within the school.

The school has developed a number of strategies to foster communication and partnership with parents and the school community in supporting its ethos to develop students as ‘independent, creative learners who are cooperative and strive to maximise their potential’. Review of practices indicates the school has created an environment that promotes student learning where all students are encouraged and supported in their learning in both academic and non-academic areas. Of particular note is the high quality of its design and technology and annual arts festival programs and the opportunities they offer students. Expectations in student outcomes and behaviour are continually monitored to determine the effectiveness of the strategies.

The sustainability of the school’s performance is achievable through its open approach to curriculum and analysis of data together with teachers committed to their work and to the improvement of learning outcomes for students. A committed and informed Board, which reflects on student performance and focuses deliberations on future targets and strategies for improvement, will support the school in achieving its goals.

The following commendations support the school’s claims of significant strengths and areas of improvement:

- the innovative structure that allows access by Year 6 and 7 students to electives and teacher expertise through the high school facilities
the high quality of its design and technology and annual arts festival programs and the opportunities they offer students.

The following affirmations support continued implementation of strategies and initiatives or areas for improvement identified by the school:

- interrogation of available data regarding student performance and the reviewing of its targets for the 2014–2016 Business Plan
- the practice of establishing the individual and group education plans (IEPs and GEPs) as an effective means of improving student outcomes
- the appropriate curriculum offerings which focus on the learning and social needs of every student
- the comprehensive analysis of data and comparison of performance in relation to national and state standards undertaken by teachers and Board
- a learning environment where students are encouraged to develop their knowledge and skills and participate in a range of activities
- the practice of focused fortnightly meetings for the whole staff as a key process for continuous improvement and review.

The following recommendations are made to add value to the school's improvement and review processes:

- in constructing the new Business Plan for 2014–2016, the targets be relevant, specific, measurable and include a time frame
- regular review of clearly articulated goals and updating of each IEP to be conducted by appropriate personnel
- the leadership team considers ways of building stronger whole-school links, promotion of whole-school events and activities, and ways of strengthening shared culture
- the school actively supports networking for its secondary teachers outside of the school and sourcing more extensive mentoring and modelling opportunities for newer, less experienced staff members
- the Board actively seek membership from the wider community and with a new Business Plan and DPA to be devised for 2014 the Board undertake a review of the following:
  - induction training
  - identification of required expertise of members
  - self-evaluation and assessment of its own effectiveness.
3. **School Context**

Donnybrook District High School is located in the Preston Valley 215 kilometres from Perth and 35 kilometres south-east of Bunbury. It services the Shire of Donnybrook/Balingup catering for students in Kindergarten to Year 10. The primary students are drawn principally from the town of Donnybrook and close by farm-based families. Year 8–10 classes incorporate students from Donnybrook and satellite communities of Kirup and Balingup. The destination of most students beyond Year 10 is to a wide choice of schools in Bunbury although the majority of Donnybrook students attend Manea College. Purpose-provided buses enable students to access senior schooling in Bunbury.

The school operates on two sites within Donnybrook which provide different contexts for learning. The Mead Street site provides for Kindergarten to Year 5 in modern buildings in a forest setting. The Bentley Street site provides for Years 6–10 in an older, more traditional setting but boasting recent refurbishment and new buildings through the BER program and a State-funded capital works program. Both sites underwent significant upgrades which were completed in 2012. These sites are 1.5 kilometres apart on the same side of town. Transitioning to the high school setting at Year 6 provides unique opportunities to the upper primary students in accessing facilities, curriculum and expert teachers not normally available to primary students.

Donnybrook District High School states its purpose is ‘to develop our students, over time, as creative, independent learners, who are co-operative and expressive individuals with a positive self-image, who strive to maximise their full potential through the challenges of the curriculum and interaction with peers’. The values and structure of the school underpin the achievement of this goal.

Enrolment trends indicate stability over time. Minor dips in numbers in Years 8–10 were experienced between 2009 and 2012 but have increased in 2013 to 130. Primary school numbers have increased steadily over recent years but have now settled at just over 350. Total current enrolment is 513 students representing 480 full-time equivalents which is evidence of the school’s strong standing within a community undergoing change. Indigenous
students comprise 4% of the student population and 4% of students have English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D).

The school has an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value of 982 with 57% of families comprising the bottom two quartiles and 15% in the top quartile. Attendance for primary students at 92.9% sits above the State mean of 92.3% and of note is the Indigenous attendance rate of 90.4% which is 9.3% above State mean. Secondary students’ attendance is slightly above State mean at 88.6% in comparison to 87.7% for the State. Once again the Indigenous student attendance rate is noteworthy at 84.5% in comparison to the State mean of 67.9%. The school commenced as an Independent Public School in 2011.

The local community is a mixture of those traditionally connected to farming and associated industries and a more recent trend to ‘life-stylers’ who choose to live in a semi-rural village and work elsewhere. These include ‘fly in/fly out’ workers from the North West, and other workers connected to Collie, Capel, Greenbushes, Worsley and Bunbury. In addition, there has been a significant influx of families seeking lower rent than available in Bunbury or Collie.

The school has attracted and retained high-quality staff in both the teaching and support roles. Succession planning is evident and the distribution and opportunity for leadership is widespread. The staff has an appropriate blend of early, mid and experienced career teachers who complement each other and work together to foster the unique nature of the school. Described to the reviewers by one teacher as a ‘small school but a big family’ the supportive environment is evident in discussion with students, parents and teachers. The stability of the staff allows it to develop and embed long-term programs of improvement and to build effective relationships with the families.

Funding was presented as an ongoing concern for the school as the cost of running and maintaining two separate campuses is significant. Recent announcements to funding arrangements into 2015 are of concern to the Board and the school. The school personnel indicated a reduction of $20 000 (i.e. from $68 000 to $48 000) in funding through the Supplementary Schools Program Resource Allocation (SSPRA) in 2014 will have a significant impact. This funding allows the school through its one-line budget to purchase extra FTE, run smaller classes and run special programs.
Donnybrook District High School

The school has fostered partnerships with the community to support it in the delivery of programs and improvement of outcomes for students. Examples include the Collie Preston Alliance of schools to improve networking and curriculum development, various businesses in Donnybrook and surrounding areas that provide opportunity for school-based traineeships and work experience placements, community members participating in sharing their expertise through leading groups of students on Friday afternoon activity sessions (GROW) and welcoming parent involvement.

The transition of the Council to the Board has been a difficult path. As acknowledged by the Board Chair and the Principal, the change process required strong debate and took some time before the roles and responsibilities of the Board were understood and applied by each member. The Board has now reached a point of stability and effective working relationships exist between all members. The Board has appropriate membership and skill sets to carry out its functions. Some members have attended the Department of Education training. It has conducted annual self-reviews of its performance and taken steps to address any issues arising from the self-review.

Donnybrook District High School is unique in its dual-campus structure which allows for specific learning environments tailored to the needs of its students on each campus. The stable and cohesive staff is supported by an effective Board and community in providing a nurturing environment where the needs of each student are known and addressed.
4a. School Performance—Student Learning

The Business Plan is a comprehensive document developed in consultation with the school community. Targets relating to student learning and improvement have remained unchanged through the first three years of the plan but will be reviewed for the next triennium. While the targets have remained unchanged the school has constantly reviewed performance through effective analysis of available data and adjusted strategies accordingly.

Improvement targets are based around comparison of the growth rate of the stable cohort of students against the national growth rate Years 3–5, 5–7 and 7–9 in literacy (NAPLAN), numeracy (NAPLAN) and State growth rate in science (WAMSE). There is no timeline or expected degree of improvement stated. The results over the last three years indicate that on average the school is comparable to national growth rates with a couple of notable exceptions. The 2013 NAPLAN results indicate poor performance for the Year 7 cohort falling below expected performance levels in writing and numeracy, as was the case for Year 9 in 2012. Science results in Years 5–9 (WAMSE) are strong across all years.

It is noted that these results are not the only measures taken by the school to make judgement about student performance. Triangulation of all data from external assessment, teacher judgements, internal moderation activities and benchmark testing in the early years provide the basis for judgement about individual, group, cohort and whole-of-school performance. The school has questioned the authenticity of the Business Plan targets in its Annual Report 2012 and is looking to improve both its targets and measurement of improvement. The reviewers affirm the school’s interrogation of available data regarding student performance and the reviewing of its targets for the 2014–2016 Business Plan. In constructing the new Business Plan the reviewers recommend that the targets be relevant, specific, and measurable and include a time frame. Underpinned by milestones and strategies that are constantly reviewed for effectiveness as in the current Business Plan the school will be in a more informed position to make accurate judgements about student performance.

Anecdotal evidence from discussion with school leaders, teachers, parents and students is that Donnybrook District High School students enjoy success
in senior schooling and feel well prepared, if a little nervous, for the transition to Year 11 at another school.

A comprehensive suite of electives and a streamed Year 10 structure are factors supporting students (Years 6–10) in engagement and achieving success. In Year 10, students choose to pursue an academically-oriented course in preparation for an ATAR course in senior school or a vocational program that prepares them for the WACE with a workforce/TAFE orientation. Many of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) students complete the Certificate I in Hospitality while in Year 10. Opportunity for student leadership for older students is available through participation in the student council, peer mentoring program and a perceptual motor program (PMP) visitation to the junior campus when the Year 10s work with the Year 2s on gross motor skills. The reviewers affirm the curriculum structure and offerings are designed to meet the needs of the students. The reviewers commend the school on its innovative structure that allows access by Year 6 and 7 students to electives and teacher expertise through the high school facilities.

Donnybrook District High School has meeting the needs of each individual student as a focus. Its smaller size allows for this to be a reality. The school is inclusive and accepting of difference. Individual student performance is monitored particularly well in mathematics Pre-Primary to Year 7, and when appropriate IEPs or GEPs are developed. A differentiated curriculum is planned in collaboration with appropriate personnel and implemented by the classroom teacher. Inspection of several IEPs indicated that timely review and adjustments of goals and strategies had not been carried out. Ideally, each IEP or GEP should be regularly monitored and reviewed each semester at least. The reviewers affirm the practice of establishing the IEPs and GEPs as an effective means of improving student outcomes. It is recommended that regular review of clearly articulated goals and updating of each IEP is conducted by appropriate personnel.

The curriculum focus of the school extends beyond literacy, numeracy and science. A well-established values system based upon ‘Choose Respect’ has been embedded in the school and was initially also extended into the broader Donnybrook community. The values system encourages the development of the whole individual. The extended curriculum is enhanced by a physical education specialist, mathematics Teacher Development School, music program and visual arts. In the secondary school the GROW program (Getting Ready for the Outside World), which involves students in pursuing
recreational interests on a Friday afternoon, allows for community involvement and develops the whole child.

The curriculum offerings of the school are affirmed as being appropriate, focusing on the learning and social needs of every student.

The school is comprehensive in its analysis of data and comparison of performance in relation to national and State standards. Evidence gathered and its interrogation by teachers and the Board is affirmed.

Donnybrook District High School demonstrates integrity and honesty in the interrogation of its performance data. In a desire to improve outcomes for students the school is undertaking to review its performance targets and associated milestones and strategies in the next Business Plan 2014–2016. A focus on each student as an individual and a desire to support that student and his/her family in helping the student reach their potential is evident in philosophy and practice within the school.

4b. School Performance—Quality of the Learning Environment

The reviewers’ discussions with students, staff, parents and community members confirm Donnybrook District High School provides a learning environment that is inclusive of all students and adapted to meet the needs of its students on each campus. The Mead Street site provides for Kindergarten to Year 5. The forest setting gives a real link to the natural surroundings and the campus has developed its own shared ethos and culture. The Bentley Street site provides for Years 6–10 in an order, more traditional setting which has been refurbished and includes new buildings and playground equipment.

The distance between campuses results in logistical and financial difficulties with regard to interactions between the sites and the building of a whole-school shared ethos and culture. Parents and students from the Mead Street campus reported some disconnect with the Bentley Street Campus, including limited whole-school activities and communication. It was noted that parents, staff and students of both campuses referred to the other as if to a separate school. The reviewers recommend that the leadership team consider ways of building stronger whole-school links, promotion of whole-school events and activities, and ways of strengthening a shared culture.
Classroom visits and stakeholder comments confirm an inclusive and quality learning environment. The reviewers affirm there is evidence of commitment to a learning environment where students are encouraged to develop their knowledge and skills and participate in a range of activities.

The learning areas are well resourced with classrooms reporting sufficient resources to offer a curriculum that is stimulating to the students and also meet the requirements of the Australian Curriculum. There is a clear focus on teaching and learning in the primary classes which is well documented but there is less evidence of a strategic approach to cross-instructional pedagogy and standards for Years 8–10.

A shared understanding of curriculum is articulated well in the primary years led by the associate principal and supported by the collaboration of teachers around phases of schooling: K–2 and Years 3–5. High school deputies lead the secondary teachers in this area but due to time constraints and the small number of faculty (only one teacher for each learning area), the refinement of curriculum provision is not as well expressed and documented. There was evidence of collaboration and sharing of expectations at the transition to high school and cross-curriculum understanding across subject areas. It is recommended that the school actively support networking for its secondary teachers outside of the school and source more extensive mentoring and modelling opportunities for newer, less experienced staff members.

Donnybrook District High School has developed a number of strategies to foster communication and partnership with parents and the school community in supporting its ethos to develop students as independent, creative learners who are cooperative and strive to maximise their potential. There is evidence the school has created an environment that promotes student learning where all students are encouraged and supported in their learning in both academic and non-academic areas. The school is commended for the high quality of its design and technology and annual Arts Festival programs and the opportunities it offers students. Staff members provide a differentiated curriculum and through their operational plans, use strategies that cater for the diverse needs of the students. Expectations in student outcomes and behaviour are continually monitored to determine the effectiveness of the strategies.
4c. School Performance—Sustainability

The administration team at the school is experienced, providing stable and valuable leadership. The reviewers affirm the practice of focused fortnightly meetings for the whole staff as a key process for continuous improvement and review.

Staff professional learning, while more difficult to access in the South West, is adequately resourced and consistent with whole-of-school curriculum directions. The Principal, associate principal and two deputy principals provide leadership that assists knowledge and expertise being further developed in the school, particularly through the appointment of curriculum leaders.

Reviewers were able to confirm evidence-based self-review practices in academic and non-academic areas. The focus areas have been: curriculum improvement in literacy, numeracy, science, ICT and cross-curriculum perspectives; personal and social development; attendance and behaviour; marketing and promotion.

Academic school-based data is analysed under the school’s self-reflection cycle. Assessments, programs and strategies are reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure their effectiveness. The identification of areas of concern is supported by the provision of learning support teachers and mentor teachers. A review of targets in the next Business Plan informed by consultation with all staff and the cycle of review should drive future directions and assist the ongoing sustainability of school programs and student learning.

The meeting with the current School Board members indicated that they were very supportive of the school and keen to contribute to school improvement. Members are applauded for their commitment to the ongoing sustainability and development of the school. However, although data is presented regularly to the Board there appears to be very little ongoing discussion of the Business Plan or analysis of student achievement as evidenced in board minutes.

Board development would be enhanced by members regularly participating in training specifically designed for school boards. The longer-term development of the Board will assist in maintaining a sustainable school environment.

It was apparent to the reviewers that the Board would benefit from wider community input, expertise and perspectives. It is recommended that the
Board actively seek membership from the wider community and with a new Business Plan and DPA to be devised for 2014 the Board undertake a review of the following:

- induction training
- identification of required expertise of members
- self-evaluation and assessment of its own effectiveness.

Data on staff and parent satisfaction was collected and results provided showed generally positive responses with regard to the educational standards and professional ability of teachers. There was high correlation between the groups. Interviews with parents and staff indicate the marketing of the school needs to focus on what makes Donnybrook unique and highlight the positives of the opportunities for students. Information on parent and student satisfaction has not been provided in recent annual reports. It is recommended that parent and student satisfaction data is presented in the Annual Report in line with the school’s DPA.

The sustainability of the school’s performance is achievable through its open approach to curriculum and analysis of data together with teachers committed to their work and to the improvement of learning outcomes for students. The school should improve its performance over the long term with determined leadership, supportive parents, and a committed and informed Board, which reflects on student performance and focuses deliberations on future targets and strategies for improvement.
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 Donnybrook District High 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.

Kevin Pilkington, Lead Reviewer

10 December 2013

Dr Lesley Payne, Reviewer

12 December 2013

Richard Strickland, CEO, Department of Education Services

16/12/13