



Government of Western Australia  
Department of Education

# Spencer Park Education Support Centre

2017

Review Findings



Independent Public School Review

### Disclaimer

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## School and Review Details

<b>Principal:</b>	Ms Diane Edwards
<b>Board Chair:</b>	Ms Lara Eyles
<b>School Address:</b>	26 Hardie Road, Albany WA 6330
<b>Number of Students:</b>	36
<b>Reviewers:</b>	Professor Chris Forlin (Lead) Ms Joy Shepherd
<b>Review Dates:</b>	12 and 13 September 2017

## Purpose of the Review

The purpose of this review is to provide assurance to the principal and school community, the board and the Director General of the Department of Education of the extent to which the school staff and board have met the commitments of the Delivery and Performance Agreement (DPA). The review verifies the degree to which there are effective processes in place bringing about improved student learning.

## Review Methodology

Underpinning the review methodology is the understanding that the principal is required to ensure the roles and responsibilities of the DPA are met; school performance and student improvement targets and priorities, as detailed in the school's business plan, are assessed, reviewed annually and an annual report made publicly available. The review seeks to determine the extent to which these commitments have been met.

The principal provided the school self-review conclusions to the reviewers one month prior to the commencement of the review.

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

- the *My School*<sup>®</sup> website
- School Performance Monitoring
- Schools Online reports.

Reviewers analysed the evidence presented in the school self-review documentation to verify achievement of the DPA and business plan commitments, and developed lines of inquiry where further in-school verification was required.

An agenda for the site visit was negotiated with the principal to enable the gathering of evidence to verify claims made in the school self-review statements. During the review visit the reviewers sourced evidence to support the claims through observation and discussion with leaders, teaching and support staff, board members, parents and students where required. Where the school belongs to an Independent Public School (IPS) cluster of schools the review considers whether the purpose of the cluster has been met and the benefits to the school.

The evidence provided by the principal, along with information gathered by the reviewers prior to and during the review visit, was used as the basis for judgements made in verifying how well the school staff and board have met the commitments of the DPA and business plan.

## Business Plan

### *How effective was the business plan in responding to the school's context and improving student learning (progress, achievement and engagement)?*

Spencer Park Education Support Centre is co-located on the Spencer Park Primary School campus in Albany. It was established in 1993 and became an IPS in 2015.

The centre caters for students with intellectual disabilities, global developmental delay and Autism from Kindergarten to Year 6. An early intervention program provides intensive intervention for students with Autism in Kindergarten and Pre-primary with the intention of preparing these students to enrol in their local primary school in Year 1.

Increasing numbers across the centre has put pressure on the facilities, especially the limited outdoor play areas. Recently, the centre has been able to use two additional classrooms in the primary school and this has provided some much-needed additional space.

The centre has a stable staff of eight teachers and 29 education assistants (EAs) with most of them having part-time positions. The current principal is retiring at the end of 2017 and processes are in place to ensure a cohesive handover.

## Findings

- The Business Plan 2015–17 outlines the centre's vision, values and priorities in four major sections: "success for all students", "staff", "community" and "environment". The business plan was discussed at several board meetings early in 2015 and the board endorsed the final iteration in September of that year.
- Each of the four major sections of the business plan contains a series of focus areas and detailed strategies for achieving them. No operational plans were available to inform how these were implemented or achieved.
- The final part of the business plan outlines targets under three headings: Interim targets to be achieved by the end of 2016, achievement targets to be achieved by the end of 2017 and aspirational targets. Most of these are strategies with very few measurable targets.
- Two priority strategies underpin the drive to enhance student outcomes. The ongoing development of Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) framework and the introduction of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). At the time of the review, these approaches were clearly embedded throughout the centre.

- Annual reports for 2015 and 2016 refer to the business plan and priorities for the year, although they are very repetitive. Staff may wish to consider opportunities to present the information in a way that is more meaningful and useful to the school community. These reports are on the centre's website although the full business plan is not.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Develop strategic, measurable targets for the next business plan.
- Develop annual operational plans to support whole-school planning and the achievement of targets.

## Teaching and Learning

*How has the quality of teaching improved and sustained student learning (progress, achievement and engagement)?*

### Findings

- All students at the centre require teaching and learning adjustments; however, a lack of measurable targets in the business plan have made it difficult to assess progress at a whole-school level based on the existing three-year business plan. Within individual classes it was evident that teachers monitor student performance against a range of individualised goals. Meetings with teachers allowed the reviewers to confirm that student performance has lifted. The use of some consistent data collection or a consolidation of the wide range of ways in which teachers record data would provide greater clarity regarding student progress and enable effective whole-school dialogue regarding student performance resulting in better informed evidence-based decision-making.
- Teachers are highly effective in monitoring student achievement within their classrooms. This is individualised and case-based with ongoing and consistent feedback to students. At this stage, there is no whole-school approach to instructional decisions or data collection, resulting in difficulty in demonstrating student learning across the centre from Years K–6.
- The centre offers a range of programs to cater for the diverse needs of the students. There is strong evidence of effective engagement of staff with students as they focus on achieving the very best outcomes for each child. Each student has an individual education plan (IEP) in which goals are set to meet each child's specific needs. The IEPs are developed by the class teacher and reviewed biannually with input from parents and other staff. The teachers acknowledge that targets set in the business plan for 90% of students to achieve at least 90% of their IEP goals were not achieved. The reviewers confirmed that consideration is being given by the teachers as to how to better identify appropriate targets to measure progress against the IEPs during the next review cycle.
- A focus of the Business Plan 2015–17 was on the use of AAC, an intense communication program for non-verbal children. The teachers concluded that the target for “100% of students whose speech does not meet their functional communication to use a form of AAC” was being accomplished. The reviewers noted the widespread use of pragmatic organisation display devices across the centre and the staff confirmed they had all received training in these. The use of data to identify improvement in learning will enable staff to confirm the effectiveness of AAC for the children.

- Several different programs were being used by teachers in literacy including Making Up for Lost Time in Literacy (MultiLit) and Meeting Initial Needs in Literacy (MiniLit). Some teachers are implementing a four-block literacy program with an emphasis on reading, writing, working with words and self-selected reading; however, there is no overarching approach to these strategies, and a lack of collated data made it difficult to confirm their effectiveness. Similarly, there was no consistent approach to numeracy with a lack of targets in the business plan related to this area. While the reviewers concur with the teachers that all programs should be individualised to meet student needs, a more cohesive whole-school approach to identifying relevant goals in literacy and numeracy would enable teachers to work collaboratively to ensure a stronger interconnected focus across the years.
- The centre offers a range of additional curricula depending upon access and the child's individual needs. Programs have included cooking, fishing, art, fundamental movement skills, hydrotherapy, Riding for the Disabled, drumming, Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies, and information and communications technology with iPads. A small number of children participate in home room and some option classes with Spencer Park Primary School one or two afternoons per week. They are supported by EAs who attend with them, closely monitoring for signs of anxiety.
- In 2017, each teacher and EA undertook an individual review against the National Quality Standard (NQS). The centre intends to implement the NQS across the whole school, but at the moment the focus is on early childhood education only. From the internal review, concern was raised by the staff that they might not be able to meet Quality Area 3 (physical environment) in relation to outdoor spaces. An external review is therefore advisable to assist the centre to meet all quality areas of the standard. Collation of these documents to provide a whole-school response together with an external review process will assist the centre in working towards meeting the standard by the end of 2017.
- All staff participate in regular staff meetings and there is a range of committees designed to allow staff to focus on specific areas of school need. Although one meeting per term is designated for collaboration among staff, this appeared to be happening in an ad hoc way with teachers collaborating informally regarding curriculum and pedagogy. A formalised collaborative structure might assist with more consistent approaches to developing curriculum and provide opportunities for teachers to engage in regular professional dialogue regarding quality evidence-based practice.

- Performance management processes are now in place for teachers to review the EAs they work with. The principal confirmed that performance management for teachers was yet to be fully established, although it was evident that some progress is being made towards this. Planned observations by peers against the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers would be stronger if they were more focused and allowed time for discussion and reflection. The principal is aware that this is an area that requires a structured formalised approach with review timetables being established and implemented.
- The early years' staff work very closely with the School of Special Education Needs: Disability to review the early intensive intervention program for children with Autism that is offered at the centre. Extensive data is collected to monitor and demonstrate student progress. The focus in this program is on life skills, social skills and self-regulation to prepare students to attend Year 1 at their local school. Parents confirm that this is highly valued, although the reviewers concluded that while the centre is actively promoting the program, it still appears potentially underutilised across the region.
- The staff can participate in a range of professional learning opportunities each year depending upon the needs of their students. Some whole-school training has occurred with Team Teach and the use of AAC. The centre utilises the annual Albany Show day as a professional learning day for all staff including teachers and EAs, and as an opportunity to review and plan adjustments to the business plan as a whole school.
- All teachers are fairly insulated in their classroom practice. A whole-school approach to reviewing research to inform classroom pedagogy would enable a more cohesive and sustainable means of adopting evidence-based pedagogies that would best meet the needs of all students in a more consistent way.

### **Area of strength**

- Effective engagement of staff with students focusing on achieving the very best outcomes for every child.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Implement fully the processes for performance management of teachers.
- Collate the individual NQS reviews together with an external review process to ensure the centre can assess and report on the standard.

- Implement a whole-school approach to evidence-based decision-making for curriculum and pedagogy that can be differentiated according to individual student need.

## Student Performance Monitoring

*How well established are the school's self-assessment practices in accounting for school improvement?*

### Findings

- The staff acknowledged that the Business Plan 2015–17 provided few targets; therefore, assessment against them was minimal. Individual goals are included in each child's IEP and assessed and monitored by the class teacher. The centre has one dedicated professional learning day each year when all staff focus on the key priorities as outlined in the business plan. Ongoing review of projects and aspects of the business plan occurs during regular staff meetings.
- Teachers employ a wide range of measures to inform their classroom practice providing continual feedback within classrooms. Reference is made by some teachers to the Special Education Needs Assessment Tool to assist in developing and monitoring IEP goals; however, there is enormous variety between classes as to how student performance is monitored. Consolidation across the centre should provide a more consistent and stronger strategic whole-school approach to enable effective monitoring from K–6. The centre has begun trialling ABLEWA in 2017 with the aim of providing a whole-school approach from 2018.
- Teachers report to parents using the online Special Education Needs reporting to parents function. Parents are fully involved with reviewing student progress against IEPs at the beginning of the two semesters. Case conferences are held when requested by staff or parents, particularly when the need arises to review or create individual behaviour management plans.
- The staff acknowledged that whole-school approaches for verifying the performance of the school are minimal. There is a very strong reliance on individual teachers working within their own classrooms where assessment is intensive and decision-making based on individual evidence. The establishment of an effective whole-school approach to monitor the performance of the centre will ensure a cohesive direction.
- Annual reports are available which outline learning programs and priorities. A highlights section shares some of the key activities of the centre during the year. Results of school surveys are included with selected comments. A brief summary of the priorities and targets in the business plan are included but no analysis of achievements against these is provided. The development of annual operational

plans from the business plan might enable each annual report to be more distinctive as outcomes could be reported against these plans.

- Satisfaction surveys are completed annually by staff, parents and Year 5–6 students. The board has identified the need to increase the number of parental responses and it was made clear during discussions that appropriate strategies are in progress to achieve this.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Include in annual reports a review of school improvements against targets in the business plan.
- Develop a more consistent and stronger strategic whole-school approach to enable effective monitoring of student learning.
- Establish an effective whole-school approach to monitoring the performance of the centre.

## Program Delivery

*How well has the school performed in providing education programs that promote learning and wellbeing for all students?*

### Findings

- The principal, through the teacher/EA teams in each classroom, ensures that education programs are designed and delivered in accordance with the relevant legislation.
- Each student has an IEP ensuring that the complex needs of individual students are met. The education programs are mapped to the Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline.
- Providing a safe, caring environment for students is a priority. All necessary policies and procedures, including an excursions policy, are in place.
- There is a school-wide focus on PBS through a rewards system, the virtues program, zones of regulation and individual behaviour management plans. The routines are well established and all staff understand their responsibilities. Reviewers observed several instances of students responding positively to these routines. The staff are currently preparing an action plan based on PBS.
- Professional learning in programs such as Team Teach and manual handling equip staff with the skills to maintain a safe environment for students and staff.
- Parents speak highly of the level of care provided by the centre. They expressed gratitude to the staff for establishing and maintaining a safe environment for their children.
- A protective behaviours curriculum is delivered as appropriate to each group of students. The centre's behaviour management policy should include a section on exclusion as per Department of Education policy.
- The centre has a 0.4 full-time equivalent chaplain who works across the whole centre. The chaplain's work is clearly providing an important service to the centre and it was evident that it was able to enhance the PBS and the Rock and Water resilience programs. The centre also has a part-time Aboriginal and Islander education officer who supports the Aboriginal families when there are attendance and other issues.

- The reviewers are confident that by focusing on a whole-school approach and harnessing the fine work of individual teachers, program delivery practices are sustainable.

### **Areas of strength**

- The dedication of teachers and EAs in providing a safe, caring environment for their students.
- The extent to which PBS strategies are embedded and understood by students and staff.

### **Area for improvement**

- Develop a policy for exclusion to add to the behaviour management policy.

## Resourcing and Support

*How well has the school established systems to monitor and review the allocation of resources to meet strategic and operational priorities?*

### Findings

- School leaders acknowledge there is not currently a documented cycle of self-assessment and targeted planning; however, a series of regular staff meetings addresses short-term planning issues. Classroom teachers meet with their EAs fortnightly for 15 minutes to outline plans for the week ahead. Fortnightly staff meetings review various programs. There is a whole-school review day each November.
- Parents have several avenues of access to information about the centre and their child's progress. Informal contact with teachers is available via email, communication books, Facebook or requested meetings. There are parent/teacher meetings each semester to review IEPs and to discuss the formal report. Five newsletters per term are published in conjunction with Spencer Park Primary School and contain information about events, special programs and 'snippets' from teachers. Allocation of students to classes based on academic achievement and potential and the nature of educational adjustments required, enables the strategic deployment of teachers and EAs.
- The workforce plan for 2017 identifies three areas of concern: reducing leave, managing long service leave and staff succession planning through managing the number of fixed-term contracts for 2017. Strategies to deal with each concern are listed. At the time of the review several strategies have been acted upon:
  - establishment of a staff health and wellbeing program
  - the provision of additional administration time to ensure the smooth transfer of information to the new principal
  - an information day was held for the recruitment of new EAs.

The workforce plan also outlines future planning needs.

- Allocation of resources according to centre priorities is efficiently overseen by the business manager and the principal in conjunction with the finance committee.

## Spencer Park Education Support Centre

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- The centre has a well-established occupational, health and safety policy which is closely monitored and adhered to. Practices are firmly embedded across the whole school and the reviewers could confirm that policy is being addressed extremely effectively.
- A generous professional learning budget for teachers and EAs supports knowledge and skill development linked to centre priorities.
- Three factors will influence the sustainability of resourcing and support:
  - adequacy of a documented cycle of self-assessment and targeted planning linked to the new business plan
  - the extent to which the centre can manage fluctuating student numbers
  - ongoing availability of additional classrooms at Spencer Park Primary School.

### **Areas of strength**

- The dedication and long-term commitment of staff.
- Availability of professional learning opportunities to support centre priorities.

## School Board

*How effective has the board been in carrying out its functions, roles and responsibilities?*

### Findings

- Board members bring a wide range of skills and expertise to the governance of the centre. They are representative of the community and membership categories comply with legislative requirements. The current board is committed to and highly supportive of the centre.
- Board minutes demonstrate that meeting procedures are understood and implemented. A training course is available for new board members.
- The board participated in the endorsement of the DPA and the Business Plan 2015–17. They have been made aware of the centre's progress towards the business plan targets.
- Board minutes record the board's role in the endorsement and review of the centre budget including fees and charges.
- The board endorsed the process for surveying parents, students and staff to determine satisfaction levels. Board members discussed strategies to increase parental participation in the surveys. Despite the consistently low parental response rate, the board noted the high levels of satisfaction recorded for each group.
- The board receives financial reports at each meeting. The principal reports to each meeting, bringing new policies for endorsement, updating members on progress towards business plan targets and initiating discussion of school issues such as how to get more parents to IEP meetings.
- Board members complete meeting evaluation surveys at the end of each meeting.
- At present a staff member chairs the board. This is considered an interim measure. It is anticipated that once the new members have gained some governance experience, it will be possible for a new chair to be elected from community members.

- During interviews with board members it was acknowledged that the board at present does not communicate with the school community about its role and responsibilities. Members are actively pursuing ways to raise their profile in the community and are discussing strategies to achieve this. It became clear through the board minutes and in interviews with board members that vital aspects of the governance role are not yet being undertaken. Board members need increased knowledge of, and participation in, reviewing student learning. They need to be involved in a systematic review of centre-wide performance against the business plan targets and to fulfil all functions as prescribed in the DPA.
- There is an energy and commitment to improving the board's functioning and reviewers have confidence that this will be achieved during the cycle of the next business plan.

### **Areas of strength**

- The commitment and support of board members.
- Appropriate community membership on the board.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Increase board members' awareness of their governance role and develop processes to enable these functions to be fulfilled.
- Develop strategies to communicate the board's functions and activities to the broader school community.

### Conclusion

Spencer Park Education Support Centre provides a caring and safe environment for children requiring high levels of teaching and learning adjustments. Evidence provided throughout the review demonstrates that effective programs are in place and individualised to meet the diverse needs of each child. The centre's reputation was confirmed as a supportive and committed school with high expectations for all students.

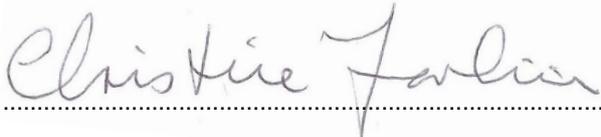
The centre's vision is evident across the school with professional staff dedicated to supporting all students. With a stronger focus on whole-school planning and target setting the reviewers are confident that this will result in more effective and systematic ways to measure improved student learning.

Parental engagement is varied but a range of communication strategies are in place to ensure they are kept abreast of their child's learning. The staff aim to regularly involve parents and carers in decision-making through the IEP process. Parents were very positive about the support provided to their children.

## Declaration

We confirm the information in this document is, to the best of our knowledge and based on the verification of the evidence provided by Spencer Park Education Support Centre, true and correct.

The principal and board chair have had an opportunity to comment on any matters of fact contained within this document.



Professor Chris Forlin, Lead Reviewer

13 October 2017

Date



Mrs Joy Shepherd, Reviewer

13 October 2017

Date



Mr Ken Perris, Director  
Independent Public School Review

18 October 2017

Date