



Government of Western Australia  
Department of Education Services

# Challis Community 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

<b>Principal:</b>	Mrs Lee Musumeci
<b>Board Chair:</b>	Mr Keith Newton
<b>School Location:</b>	40 Braemore Street, Armadale WA 6112
<b>Number of Students:</b>	875 (Semester 1, 2016)
<b>Reviewers:</b>	Mr Greg Clune (Lead) Professor Chris Forlin
<b>Review Dates:</b>	10 and 11 March 2016
<b>Initial Review:</b>	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 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 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 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?***

Challis Community Primary School, located in Armadale, commenced in 2015 following the amalgamation of the Challis Early Childhood Education Centre and the Challis Primary School. In 2010, the two schools were granted Independent Public School (IPS) status as a cluster of schools and were reviewed both separately and as members of a cluster in 2012. Both schools had separate DPAs and Business Plans. Prior to the amalgamation, the schools shared a common Board which supported the amalgamation; the same Board continued in 2015 with the commencement of the new school structure. The Principal of the Challis Early Childhood Education Centre was appointed as the Principal of the new school. The Principal identified that 2014 and 2015 were challenging and complex years during which the two schools were brought together to share a common vision, establish a common and shared culture and an agreed strategic intent. Establishing a shared culture of high expectation, agreement about a common pedagogy and management of student behaviour were key focus issues in establishing the new school.

The City of Armadale is located in the south-eastern outer metropolitan region of Perth, 30 kilometres from the CBD at the end of the Perth-Armadale suburban rail line. Armadale has a high proportion of young people and children with large numbers of one and two parent families. Unemployment (over 9%) is relatively high.

The school is located in a low socio-economic area. The school's Index of Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is 924: data shows 80% of enrolments are in the bottom 50% with only 4% in the top quartile. Close links have been established with local community support agencies to develop programs and services which support the needs of children and families.

Enrolments have increased by 7.5% in 2016 with 875 students enrolled. Demographic projections indicate there will be increasing demand for places at the school—there are 13 births per month in the school's enrolment zone. Five additional classes were provided for 2016.

Student diversity is reflected in increasing English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) enrolments (currently 12%), Aboriginal enrolments (11%) and students with identified learning disabilities (23 students are formally identified, while the staff identify a further 53 to be at educational risk). Student transiency is nearly 20%, although there are many families which have been with the school for all of their children's education.

Teaching staff reflect a mix of experienced and early career teachers. Following a period of high turnover in 2014–2015, there is a sense of strong staff stability in 2016. It is noted there are 12 males on staff including junior primary teachers. Thirteen new full-time teachers and four part-time teachers were employed for 2016. There are a number of teaching staff who have been at the school for 20 or more years.

Strong links have been established between the school and external agencies which provide resources and student and family support. This is particularly evident in the Challis Parenting and Early Learning Centre through the provision of significant support from the Mindaroo Foundation, the Telethon Institute and Save the Children Australia organisation. Additional partnerships have been established with Curtin University (provision of professional support for occupational and speech therapy), health agencies, Cecil Andrews Senior High School (*Follow the Dream* program) and Yanchep Primary School (*Talk 4 Writing* program). The school operates successful pre-compulsory programs through the parenting centre, playgroup and pre-kindergarten program which are designed to establish links with the school and facilitate early intervention.

The Board brings a range of expertise and backgrounds to the school. It was pivotal in the amalgamation process. Board members are engaged and have a clear understanding of their role and are knowledgeable and strategic in their involvement with the school.



## 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?***

Following amalgamation of the two cluster schools in 2015, the new leadership team of Challis Community Primary School determined the existing separate Business Plans for 2013–2015 comprised targets that were difficult to measure and did not adequately reflect the changed direction to meet the identified and urgent needs of the new school.

To measure outcomes, with School Board approval, the school adopted the nine domains of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership National School Improvement Tool (NSIT). Hence, the school's triennial review is not explicitly linked to the original business plans or the DPA. The school's self-review has, nonetheless, utilised a range of data sources to record progress against key performance indicators including the NSIT domains and measurement of student achievement using National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data.

In 2014 and 2015, new targets were developed and embedded within the annual 'Challis in Focus' documents. Performance was measured against these using a range of assessments. A Strategic Direction plan for 2015 was produced based on results of surveys, attendance and behavioural data, analysis of NSIT and the Diagnostic Inventory School Alignment (DISA) data.

Prior to the school visit, the reviewers were not provided with self-review documentation or evidence of the school having reviewed its performance against the Business Plan targets or evidence of student achievement and progress. However, it was evident, from discussion at the school and through the provision of further detailed documented information that the staff had undertaken continuous and rigorous interrogation of data at the classroom, year and whole-school levels. It was manifest to the reviewers that a highly structured and effective review process was employed for reviewing student achievement in literacy and numeracy. Data were used to drive planning and to develop improvement plans. The team leaders at all year levels supported a well-established cycle of assessment, review, and target setting. The staff applied the Assess, Analyse and Act model for interrogating reading, numeracy and NAPLAN data and for formulating implementation strategies. Year-level teams undertook 'disciplined dialogues' to reflect on data and plan new targets.

No details of self-review of other curriculum areas were presented, other than that these areas are under development by team leaders, for completion in 2016. The detail provided during the school visit provided assurance the elements of the DPA are successfully implemented.

The Board Chair provided a comprehensive summary of the Board's role with a focus on direction setting, policy development and accountability and indicated to the reviewers the Board is 'comfortable with the progress of the school'.



## School Performance—Student Learning

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

The 2013–2015 Business Plans of the two Challis schools set out an ambitious strategy to align practices of the two schools which were underpinned by five strategic intents of excellence in teaching, excellence in leadership, provision of extended school services, meaningful engagement with parents and carers and provision of learning environments that cater for the social, emotional, academic and physical needs of all students. Specific targets were related to literacy and numeracy, attendance and behaviour. The previous IPS review in 2012 recommended a much greater emphasis on whole-school planning and student monitoring. In addition, a whole-school approach to pedagogy and curriculum development was required based on best practice research.

It was apparent the amalgamated school has focused considerable effort on an urgent need to establish a leadership model which would focus on improved teacher quality and student behaviour. Together with a highly specific staff employment strategy, the school has undertaken a major structural reorganisation which was reported as being challenging to implement. It was evident this had been progressing gradually over the past two years and the new structure, founded upon a distributed leadership model involving dedicated year level team leaders, appears to be effectively implemented and working well. There is a strong and devolved leadership team consisting of the Principal, a Deputy Principal and Associate Principal. This team oversees year-level and specialist team leaders and coordinators of specific services such as student services, Aboriginal education, health and well-being, curriculum and teaching and the unique Challis Parenting Early Childhood Centre.

During the visit, evidence was provided to the reviewers regarding the school's claims about student achievement in literacy and numeracy. The staff analysed NAPLAN data in detail by using 'Best Performance' records. The NAPLAN data for Years 3 and 5 were within or above expected levels of the predicted school mean from 2013 to 2015. While above expected levels were recorded for Year 5 in 2013 for reading, and in both years 2013 and 2014 for spelling, these were not maintained for 2015.

Improvement from Years 3 to 5 for 2013 to 2015 has been in the higher progress/higher achievement quadrant for numeracy, reading and spelling although in the lower progress/lower achievement quadrant for writing and grammar and punctuation. The percentage of Year 3 students in the top 20% has gradually increased over the triennium for all aspects of literacy and numeracy. Likewise, with the exception of spelling, which has fluctuated across the three years, the percentage of Year 3 students in the bottom 20% has decreased. For Year 5, an increase in the percentage of students in the top 20% is evident for all aspects of literacy and in numeracy. While the percentage of Year 5 students in the bottom 20% has decreased for numeracy, conversely, it has increased for literacy.

At both Year 3 and Year 5 levels, there are a significant number of students below or just reaching national minimum standards in literacy and numeracy. Compared to like schools, in 2015 the number of Year 3 students at or below minimum standards has decreased for reading, writing, and grammar and punctuation compared to 2014 data. The same was not evident for Year 5: in writing, spelling and grammar and punctuation for Year 5, there has been a significant increase in the number of students at national minimum standard from 2014 to 2015.

For numeracy, compared to like schools, NAPLAN data records a steady improvement for both Years 3 and 5 over the triennium. Some cross-grading teaching, based on assessment, was implemented in the upper years for numeracy.

It is evident the school employs an evidence-based, data-driven approach to reflect upon and record student achievement. A whole-school approach has been fully implemented for measuring and recording reading achievement and is being introduced for numeracy and writing. Year-level planning for curriculum targets is based on backward mapping using NAPLAN data. Pacing calendars are used to detail learning objectives on a weekly basis to ensure all teachers are able to achieve planned outcomes.

Annual 'Challis in Focus' operational and improvement plans have been developed to map the school's direction. A range of specialist subjects is available including music, art, physical education, health and science. Whole-school planning against the Western Australian Curriculum in English and mathematics was implemented in 2014 and is in the process of being implemented for all other subject areas. Specialist staff are working to prepare whole-school planning documents for each specialist area during 2016.

The school has implemented a very strong Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI) teaching model with robust commitment by all staff to use EDI to provide a consistent pedagogy and quality teaching from K–6. This was instigated, initially, within the early years for literacy and is now offered across all years in literacy and numeracy. Supported closely by the year-level team leaders, all teachers engage in fortnightly target-setting sessions and collaborative bi-termly year-level meetings on curriculum planning. Classroom observation showed strong evidence of the high quality of planning, preparation of teaching materials and consistency of pedagogy using the EDI model. Classes use technology effectively with interactive whiteboards used extensively to support the EDI approach. This was maintained by regular year-level and whole-school professional learning opportunities for all staff in effective use of EDI.

Based on the declining NAPLAN results for Year 5, the need for a more consistent approach to teaching writing across the school was identified. As a result, the *Talk4Writing (T4W)* program was implemented in 2015 in some years and has been adopted as a common methodology for all years in 2016. The *T4W* program is an innovative, structured and systematic approach to developing literacy skills. It involves the use of a text and story-mapping model by applying an oral language approach. Implementation has been supported by staff professional learning across all year levels. From observation of *T4W* sessions in classrooms, it was clear this is a very motivating and engaging strategy for students and staff alike. A range of other daily and weekly activities has been introduced across the school to support literacy learning including the development of the 'Challis Literacy Spine' suggested reading list (targeted essential reading for every year), literacy block (dedicated daily time for reading) daily guided reading programs and dedicated reading times involving parent support.

In addition to end-of-year generic targets, individual progress targets are established for specific students. Individual education plans (IEPs) and group education plans (GEPs) (n=59) and individual behaviour management plans (n=22) are used when required. A purposeful and focused student services team case manages students identified with special learning needs who are supported by eight special and 17 regular education assistants with additional support from external providers. Extension programs are offered in some curriculum areas and early intervention programs with small groups are provided for literacy and numeracy.

There are strong links to external services including the School for Special Educational Needs and a range of providers to support students with vision, hearing or health issues. Teacher referral of students requiring further assessment and support occurs through a comprehensive referral process. In 2016, there had already been 78 referrals to the Student Services team with 57 students receiving active support. Staff awareness and training mean they are well equipped to recognise possible need so intervention is prompt. Eighty per cent of referrals are new (rather than repeat) which indicates the services provided are effective.

A coordinator (0.4FTE) of Aboriginal Health and Well-being is supported by three (2.0FTE) Aboriginal and Indigenous education officers (AIEOs) who provide daily assistance for Aboriginal students in academic achievement and attendance and liaise with parents. Attendance data is monitored weekly. Academic progress is closely monitored and intervention strategies are implemented through IEPs and individual behaviour monitoring plans. A weekly homework class is well attended (45 students regularly attending) and supported by Cecil Andrews Senior High School. Year 5 and 6 students, who are at or above the minimum standard in NAPLAN, are identified as potential candidates for the *Follow the Dream* program and are able to access *Follow the Dream* tutoring assistance as a strategy for supporting their transition to secondary school. Save The Children funding enables provision of tutors for homework assistance and provides access to home referral services.

School attendance was a key target for 2013–2015 and continues as such in 2016. Overall attendance in 2015 was 92.2% (better than like schools and slightly lower than WA public schools) with regular attendance of 70.5% (below WA public schools). Aboriginal attendance rates were 88.4% (better than both like schools and WA public schools). The school has concerns for a small number of students who habitually truant. It was evident a strategic process has been established to monitor attendance with a number of intervention strategies employed to improve this. These include articles in the newsletter, attendance prizes, breakfast club, early identification and parental contact, home visits and follow-up for students whose attendance falls below 90%.

In 2014, 9.4% of students were suspended: anecdotal evidence was provided which indicates there has been a reduction in all forms of suspension (Temporary Adjustment Placements [TAPS], Majors and Suspensions) and achievement of the Business Plan target.

## 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?***

There is a strong sense of an embedded culture focused on high expectations which is actively espoused by staff, students, parents and the Board. There is a common language which reflects commitment to the school's RISE values (Respect, Responsibility, Safety, Excellence) and a strong sense of commitment to 'the Challis Way' evident throughout the school. Improvement focus areas are clearly identified with specific initiatives, milestones and measurements to implement these and to inform the school of progress. The devolved leadership team promotes the school's culture of high expectations, high-quality teaching, collaborative planning, data gathering and analysis and high accountability for student outcomes. There is a strong sense of collaboration to ensure programs are effective and there is a cohesive approach to curriculum, pedagogy and behaviour management from Kindergarten to Year 6. Currently, the emphasis is on whole-school approaches to literacy, numeracy and behaviour management.

All respondents verified the school provides an inclusive and safe environment. The reviewers observed there are harmonious and respectful relationships across the school through classroom interactions and an enthusiastic environment. Implementation of the Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) plan has been effective and provides a school-wide template through which students are valued; there is positive reinforcement of values (RISE) and acceptable behaviour skills and attitude development. The reviewers were informed the school has shown significant improvement in the last triennium in the provision of a safe and caring environment for students and staff. There is a common language, approach, understanding and consistent practice to ensure appropriate behaviour and social skills across all year levels. A focus on staff professional learning and train-the-teachers has ensured there is strong staff consensus and systematic implementation of the PBS. The result is a very positive school culture.

Individual student needs are provided for through a range of well-structured support processes and personnel. A comprehensive student services team monitors the socio-emotional well-being of students.



The team includes a psychologist, chaplain, nurse and family support workers: staffing flexibility has been used to fund additional psychologist and chaplain support. The Student Services Coordinator ensures access to external therapy services and providers. An example of the holistic support services available is the OneSight (Australia) vision testing provided for all students with free vouchers provided for children who need spectacles. A breakfast club serves over 100 students, some of whom are provided, also, with lunch. Uniforms are provided as required.

Data indicated the need for the school to focus on literacy, numeracy and student behaviour. The PBS is a strategic framework to provide a structured, systematic and managed approach to student behaviour to promote classrooms where learning can take place. With the EDI and *T4W* strategies, these frameworks provide consistency in methodology. The investment in extensive and ongoing professional learning for staff has been essential for successful implementation which ensures quality instruction and an engaging, motivating and well-managed learning environment. Cumulative comparison with baseline data will provide longitudinal evidence of the extent of success of these consistent processes: anecdotal evidence indicates positive results in both attitude and progress.

Discussion with parents indicated a high degree of satisfaction. These parents indicated that the school has made significant progress in all areas since the amalgamation. They recognise the school is making important improvements and have confidence in the school's leadership to maintain the outcomes and services provided. They value the teachers and administrators who are 'welcoming, open and available'. There is regular communication with the parents via a newsletter and various electronic formats such as class *Dojo* and apps. There is a strong parental involvement in the classroom with parents encouraged to spend the first 15 minutes of every day in the classrooms to assist students.

It is evident that the school staff is dedicated to eliminating factors which may impede student learning.

## School Performance—Sustainability

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

Challis Community Primary School is strongly and soundly led. The leadership has enlisted staff commitment for the vision and direction established by the Board. There appears to be a determined expectation from the Board and the Principal which focuses on a systematic improvement agenda. Consolidation of the new structures and processes will enable considered analysis of the intentions and targets established for the next phase of planning. Staff acceptance of 'the Challis Way' is universal. The distributed leadership model ensures close gathering and analysis of data and a consistent approach to informed decision-making and target-setting. Senior staff demonstrate improved and systematic data analysis and sharing through the leadership team and, in turn, to all classroom teachers. The distributed leadership model brings clear direction, cohesion of planning, quality teaching and a focus on improvement.

The structures and strategies, while new in 2015, are coordinated and appear to be embedded and will promote achievement of the school's improvement focus. Processes for thoroughly reviewing outcomes are well-established. Continuation and consolidation of the collaborative processes in teams will inform best responses to outcomes and the issues to be addressed. It will be essential for all staff to continue to support these processes through mutual support and dialogue and collaborative cross-school planning to reinforce common approaches and agreed standards, pedagogy and strategies.

Leadership and staff stability will be critical in sustaining the school's improvement agenda. Having established an equilibrium, staff stability and continued professional learning will be vital in providing consistent planning, review and delivery of programs to meet the improvement intentions. Maintenance of the student services team and the provision of services will be required to sustain the socio-welfare support for students and families.

The Board has a sound understanding of its strategic role and is able to provide direction and critical accountability for the school's outcomes. Some Board members have undertaken professional training to accompany a systematic induction process for new members.



It will be important the Board monitors its succession planning, particularly in terms of leadership and the skills required to sustain its strategic effectiveness and its support for the school's improvement agenda. Board members identified their strategic role in supporting the school to continue to work on goal and target achievement, enhancing student learning, particularly to improve Year 5 NAPLAN results, supporting new initiatives and staff sustainability. Strategically, the Board has identified key issues of managing the size (enrolments) of the school, resourcing, maintaining strategic partnerships and securing funding for programs.

Resourcing and infrastructure are sufficient to complement the improvement agenda. There is reliance on substantial support from various agencies (such as Minderoo and Save the Children) which will be important for the sustainability of programs. However, there is a high degree of confidence the school will be able to sustain its improvements and work consistently towards further improvement in student learning outcomes.

## Conclusion

Although the staff apparently abandoned the 2013–2015 Business Plans established for the cluster, it became evident to the reviewers there has been thorough analysis of the extent to which the individual targets and strategic intentions for the two schools were met. Evidence of progress was provided for the strategic intent domains of the 2013–2015 Business Plan with continuation of these into the next Business Plan.

No conclusions were provided by either the Board or the school of the extent to which the commitments of the DPA had been met. However, the reviewers observed, through documentation and dialogue with school staff and Board members, the roles and responsibilities of the DPA have been well addressed, particularly with regard to teaching and learning, student performance monitoring, program delivery and School Board.

In sometimes challenging socio-economic circumstances, the staff strives to provide teaching, learning and services which overcome disadvantage and promote student learning and opportunity in both academic and non-academic domains.

Challis Community Primary School demonstrated a focus on improvement which is being addressed through a developing culture of review within structures designed to enhance staff distributed leadership, collaborative processes and shared accountability. There is a strong sense of a self-reviewing, self-evaluating and self-directing school.

## Commendations

***The following areas are commended:***

- the successful school amalgamation and establishment of a strong school culture of collaboration, reflection and purposeful action
- the whole-school staff commitment, understanding and knowledge of expectations and outcomes for teaching and learning and behaviour
- the significant commitment to staff professional learning
- the astute use of staffing flexibility to implement the distributed leadership model and to provide additional services
- the systematic implementation of consistent whole-school processes through the Positive Behaviour Support framework, Explicit Direct Instruction model and *Talk4Writing* program
- the provision of holistic support services from pre-compulsory ages to Year 6.

## Areas for Improvement

***The following areas for improvement are identified:***

- alignment and consolidation of a Business Plan to incorporate and link Challis in Focus (Focus Areas, Initiatives), Achievement Targets and National School Improvement Tool
- determine consistent, specific, realistic and achievable targets for all dimensions of the next Business Plan
- establishment of K–6 plans in all curriculum areas
- ensure systematic and consistent annual self-review are undertaken for all curriculum areas and linked to guide the development of annual operational plans
- address how the commitments of the DPA are implemented and assessed.

## 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 Challis Community 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 Greg Clune, Lead Reviewer

18 April 2016

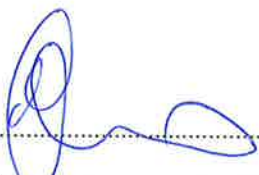
Date



Professor Chris Forlin, Reviewer

18 April 2016

Date



Mr Richard Strickland, Director General,  
Department of Education Services

27/4/16

Date

