School Improvement Unit
Report

Mount Garnet State School
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This report is a product of a review carried out at Mount Garnet State School from 14 to 16 March 2016. It provides an evaluation of the school’s performance against the nine domains of the National School Improvement Tool. It also recommends improvement strategies for the school to consider in consultation with its regional office and school community.

The review and report were completed by a review team from the School Improvement Unit (SIU). For more information about the SIU and the new reviews for Queensland state schools please visit the Department of Education and Training (DET) website.

1.2 School context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location:</th>
<th>Garnet Street, Mount Garnet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education region:</td>
<td>Far North Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school opened in:</td>
<td>1901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year levels:</td>
<td>Prep to Year 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current school enrolment:</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous enrolments:</td>
<td>67 per cent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students with disability enrolments:</td>
<td>5 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value:</td>
<td>739</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year principal appointed:</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of teachers:</td>
<td>3.61 (full-time equivalent)</td>
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<td>Nearby schools:</td>
<td>Ravenshoe State School (P-12) - (30 mins travel), Mount Surprise State School - (2 hrs 30 mins travel)</td>
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<td>Significant community partnerships:</td>
<td>Families as First Teachers, Playgroup, Mount Garnet Blue Light Committee, Mount Garnet ANZAC Committee, Youth Justice Team, Mount Garnet QPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique school programs:</td>
<td>Swimming Program Terms 1 &amp; 4, Families as First Teachers, Community Playgroup</td>
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1.3 Review methodology

The review was conducted by a team of two reviewers.

The review consisted of:

- a pre-review audit of the school’s performance data and other school information
- consultation with the school’s Assistant Regional Director, Shirlee Gallo
- a school visit of three days
- interviews with staff, students, parents and community representatives, including:
  - Principal
  - Three teachers, three teacher aides
  - Business Service Manager (HUB), administration officer
  - Head of Special Education Services (HOSES), guidance officer, chaplain
  - Families as First Teachers (FAFT) coordinator
  - Two community volunteers, two community Indigenous elders, 12 parents
  - Tuckshop convenor
  - Youth Justice worker, local Queensland Police Service Officer
  - 29 students

1.4 Review team

Stephen Bobby Internal reviewer, SIU (review chair)
Lee Gerchow Internal reviewer, SIU

1.5 Reading the report

The executive summary outlines key findings from the review. The key improvement strategies prioritise future direction for improvement. The executive summary should be read along with the findings and improvement strategies outlined in the nine domains which provide a strategic view for improvement.
2. Executive summary

2.1 Key findings

- The school has a positive tone and a sense of community.

  There is an expectation that every student will learn and achieve positive outcomes. Classrooms are orderly and inviting. Displays in classrooms reflect the school’s expectations of pride, professionalism, consistency and presentation.

- The principal and staff are committed to driving a school improvement agenda focused on improving reading and attendance.

  School documents pertaining to reading articulate strategies to improve decoding and these are implemented in daily reading group activities across the school. Currently the explicit teaching of comprehension is not a strong focus and community understanding of the school’s improvement agenda is yet to be addressed.

- The school uses systemic data that is provided in order to make decisions about areas for improvement.

  The school has developed and is implementing a plan for the collection of a limited range of student assessment data. A documented schedule of data collection has been developed by the school. This is yet to be implemented or communicated to the whole school community.

- The school introduced the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) framework in 2015.

  Staff and students are able to articulate known consequences for inappropriate behaviour. Most parents speak highly of the school and noted there has been an improvement in student behaviour.

- The school is currently documenting a whole-school plan for curriculum delivery.

  This includes a draft whole-school literacy plan which articulates evidence-based approaches to modelled, shared, guided and independent reading and the setting of individual reading goals for students. A common language of the teaching of reading is yet to be articulated. Little focus appears to have been given to the explicit teaching of reading comprehension or the development of higher order thinking skills.

- Various teaching practices across the school reflect the belief that while students may be progressing at different levels, all students are capable of learning if given appropriate learning opportunities.

  There is no process by which the school ensures that students with significant learning delays or acceleration needs are provided with appropriate curriculum adjustments. Currently the process for referral and support for students with learning difficulties is not documented in a central location.
2.2 Key improvement strategies

- Review evidence-based and culturally appropriate strategies for the teaching of reading and establish an agreed upon framework for the teaching of reading across all year levels.

- Implement evidence-based strategies for the explicit teaching of reading comprehension and higher order thinking in reading.

- Widely communicate and implement the assessment and targets schedule and formalise processes for the regular analysis and discussion of data.

- Establish a whole-school process for referral, documentation and alignment of support provisions and adjustments as well as the tracking of student progress towards the achievement and reporting of learning goals.
3. Findings and improvement strategies against the domains

3.1 An explicit improvement agenda

Findings

There is a documented Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) 2016 which describes school priorities as improving teaching, refining and improving data-based decision making, refining and embedding planning and accountability systems at all leadership levels, connecting parents/caregivers with their children’s learning and improving student attendance.

The principal and staff are committed to driving a school improvement agenda focused on improving reading and attendance. School documents pertaining to reading articulate strategies to improve decoding and these are implemented in daily reading group activities across the school. Currently the explicit teaching of comprehension is not a strong focus.

It is unclear how the reading agenda relates to the documented AIP. Community understanding of the school’s improvement agenda is yet to be addressed.

The AIP includes specific targets and timelines which the school has defined as aspirational and are based on regional targets.

The staff has made some progress in understanding current student achievement levels for the priority group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who make up 67 per cent of the school’s enrolment. The school is using units developed by the Indigenous Schooling Support Unit (ISSU) which are based on the Australian Curriculum (AC) to embed Indigenous perspectives within the teaching and learning.

The principal is paying close attention to student reading benchmark data. Monitoring processes and timelines are not yet understood by staff or the school community.

Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) was introduced as a school focus in 2015 to address the needs of children at risk of disengaging due to inappropriate behaviour, learning barriers or cultural disadvantage, and to ensure that students who engage appropriately are rewarded and recognised as role models. The school also reintroduced the You Can Do It (YCDI) framework to address student social and emotional wellbeing.

Staff are united in their commitment to high quality teaching and learning and have high expectations for student attendance.

Supporting data

Annual Implementation Plan 2016, Investing for Success 2016, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, assessment and targets schedule, whole-school teaching and learning handbook, school newsletters, staff, student, and staff and parent interviews.
Improvement strategies

Narrow and sharpen the agenda for school improvement in reading.

Review evidence-based and culturally appropriate strategies for the teaching of reading and establish an agreed upon framework for the teaching of reading across all year levels.

Build broad community and parent engagement with and ownership of the school's improvement agenda in reading.
3.2 Analysis and discussion of data

Findings

The school uses systemic data that is provided to the school in order to make decisions regarding areas for improvement.

The school has developed and is implementing a plan for the collection of a limited range of student assessment data.

A documented schedule of data collection has been developed which is yet to be implemented or communicated to the whole school community. The schedule highlights the collection of literacy and numeracy data and targets for student achievement.

Reading data is collected each term and collated by the principal. There is limited evidence that this data is systematically analysed by teams of teachers to inform pedagogical practice. No other data from the assessment schedule is analysed to inform teaching. Levels of staff data literacy are unclear.

OneSchool is utilised for documenting student reading data, recording foremost behaviour incidents and some parent contacts. Teachers indicate additional student data is stored in class mark books.

There is some evidence that the school uses the data collected as starting points for learning. Classrooms have a variety of displays illustrating a range of academic and attendance data.

The school collects behaviour data through OneSchool. Analysis of this data to inform school process is yet to be established. No student wellbeing data is collected at this stage.

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data indicates the school’s 2015 Mean Scale Score (MSS), compared with Similar Queensland State Schools (SQSS), was below in Years 3 and 5 in the priority area of reading in 2015.

The percentage of students performing in the Upper Two Bands in 2015 is below that of SQSS in Year Three reading and above in Year Five.

The percentage of students performing above the National Minimum Standard (NMS) compared to Queensland State Schools is lower in Years 3 and 5 in reading.

Supporting data

Annual Implementation Plan 2016, Investing for Success 2016, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, assessment and targets schedule, whole-school teaching and learning handbook, school newsletters, staff, student, and staff and parent interviews.
Improvement strategies

Widely communicate and implement the assessment and targets schedule.

Formalise processes for the regular analysis and discussion of data.

Ensure that staff have adequate professional development in data literacy.

Ensure all relevant academic and school wellbeing data is stored centrally and is readily available for analysis.
3.3 A culture that promotes learning

Findings

The school has a positive tone and a sense of community. There is an expectation that every student will learn and achieve positive outcomes. Classrooms are orderly and inviting. Displays in classrooms reflect the school’s expectations of pride, professionalism, consistency and presentation.

Classroom behaviour is calm; however, there is evidence of some student disengagement. Teachers articulate a varying level of local cultural awareness.

Classroom expectations and rules are prominently on display and are reinforced by visual social stories featuring photographs of current students exhibiting positive behaviours for learning.

Students articulate that the quality of relationships and trust between students and teachers is a particularly positive aspect of the school’s culture.

The school introduced the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) framework in 2015. PB4L underpins the development of positive student behaviours. The school identifies being a safe and responsible learner as essential to the program. Staff members, parents and students are able to articulate these maxims.

Parents and students articulate that the PB4L message is a consistent message delivered by the whole staff on regular occasions. The principal and school leaders promote PB4L messages through drama presentations at weekly parades. Professional banners and signage are evident across the school, reinforcing these messages. Staff members and students are able to articulate known consequences for inappropriate behaviour.

Most parents speak highly of the school and note there has been an improvement in student behaviour. Some staff and parents have indicated a desire to engage with the community more meaningfully and to encourage greater parent involvement in their child’s education.

The school grounds are generally tidy and well kept. Some students and parents noted that some areas of the school could do with rejuvenation. School community members have identified maintenance issues that require addressing, including a decommissioned playground. The Parents and Citizens’ Association (P&C) is collaborating with the school and has applied for grants to replace this facility.

The student attendance rate for 2015 was 83.2 per cent. 28 per cent of students attended less than 85 per cent of the school year.
**Supporting data**

Annual Implementation Plan 2016, Investing for Success 2016, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, assessment and targets schedule, whole-school teaching and learning handbook, school newsletters, staff, student, and staff and parent interviews.

**Improvement strategies**

Maintain the school focus on Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L), including building staff cultural awareness of induction.

Continue to enforce the compulsory attendance policy and maintain promotion of *Everyday Counts*.

Develop a deliberate and planned community engagement strategy.
3.4 Targeted use of school resources

Findings

The school allocates resources to best support student learning outcomes.

The school has used the Investing for Success (I4S) funding to create an additional class group to give the Prep students an opportunity to have their first year of formal education in a non-composite Prep class. This decision was taken in consideration that the majority of Prep students entering the school attend no transition to Prep programs and typically have significant language development delays.

Teacher aides are significant partners in the teaching-learning programs delivered in classrooms. Full-time teacher aides have been allocated to all classes to address significant developmental delays in many students.

Teachers indicate a high regard for the roles of the teacher aides for the support they provide to students.

School staff are deployed in ways to support the learning needs of all students, including using internal staff to provide music and physical education lessons for students.

The school employs a number of Indigenous education workers to maintain strong links with the community. Strong links are also maintained with community Elders who often volunteer at the school to support teaching and learning programs.

The school has a current bank balance of $161,088. This includes current targeted funds for asset replacement and Investing for Success (I4S) funds.

The final drafting of the school budget is formulated by the principal and the Hub Business Services Manager (BSM). The school budget is endorsed by the Parents and Citizens’ Association (P&C).

The school has not yet documented a professional development program to support the implementation of the school’s key strategic priorities.

The community and local business are very supportive of the school and contribute financial and in-kind support towards the programs and facilities. The P&C contributes financial support towards the school camping program to ensure these opportunities are affordable for families.

Supporting data

Improvement strategies

Align the school budget and professional development plan with the school's explicit improvement agenda.
3.5 An expert teaching team

Findings

The principal and staff members see the development of their capability as central to improving outcomes for students.

Some teachers have attended professional development in the explicit instruction model facilitated by the region. It is intended that all teachers will be trained in this model by the end of 2016.

The principal has been trained as a coach and is working with all staff in the implementation of the explicit instruction model. Teachers and teacher aides are able to speak about their knowledge of the model. Classroom artefacts are prominent in all classrooms to support this approach.

There is an expectation that all staff continue to develop their skills in using the explicit instruction model; this is supported by observation and feedback conducted by the principal.

The principal conducts classroom walkthroughs and is visible across the school. This is appreciated and valued by staff and students.

Teachers are encouraged and are comfortable with the sharing of expertise across the school. There are informal opportunities for this to occur within the whole-school teaching team.

The teacher aides are highly valued members of the teaching team and provide vital links to the local Indigenous community.

Staff members have numerous opportunities for professional development. The school does not currently have a formal plan for staff professional development. The alignment between staff professional development and the improvement agenda for reading is unclear.

Most teachers and all teacher aides have a current professional development plan linked to the AIP 2015. The school intends to review these plans to align with the reading improvement agenda in Term 2, 2016.

Currently there are no moderation practices or protocols in place.

Supporting data

Annual Implementation Plan 2016, Investing for Success 2016, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, assessment and targets schedule, whole-school teaching and learning handbook, curriculum overview documents, school newsletters, staff, student, and staff and parent interviews.
Improvement strategies

Formulate a school-wide professional learning plan to provide alignment between professional learning and the school’s improvement agenda.

Develop staff professional development plans explicitly linked to the school improvement agenda.

Develop school moderation practices and protocols across and between schools.
3.6 Systematic curriculum delivery

Findings

The school is currently documenting a whole-school plan for curriculum delivery. This includes a draft whole-school literacy plan which articulates evidence-based approaches to modelled, shared, guided and independent reading and the setting of individual reading goals for students.

Reading scripts to assist staff members to use these strategies have been developed. Implementation of the literacy plan is in the initial stages and staff understanding of the school's reading framework is developing.

The school is implementing units for English prepared by the Indigenous Schooling Support Unit (ISSU). These materials are designed to break language down to its simplest form and build it up using different oral and visual strategies, and include strong reference to Indigenous perspectives.

A four-year cyclic overview of the ISSU units has been developed to cater for multi-age classes and to ensure that all core content is covered.

Overviews for history and geography based on the Curriculum into the Classroom materials (C2C) are being developed. The school implements Primary Connections units for science. Other subject areas are covered in individual teacher programs.

General capabilities and cross curriculum priorities are not overtly addressed in the overviews and there is currently no overarching pedagogical framework unifying these documents. The current documented pedagogical framework is based on an explicit instruction model of gradual release of responsibility and some teachers have engaged in professional development in relation to this model.

A detailed teaching and learning handbook is being developed by the school which articulates ‘non-negotiables’ and desired pedagogical approaches expected by the school. Beginning teachers speak highly of the handbook in assisting them in being inducted into the school and ongoing professional development is assisting in the implementation of the strategies described.

There is a documented assessment and reporting schedule. This is in the early stages of implementation and is not currently understood by all staff members. There is not currently a school policy regarding the moderation of assessment.

Supporting data

Annual Implementation Plan 2016, Investing for Success 2016, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, assessment and targets schedule, whole-school teaching and learning handbook, curriculum overview documents, school newsletters, staff, student, and staff and parent interviews.
**Improvement strategies**

Collaboratively review the school’s approach to the teaching of reading to ensure consistent understanding and implementation.

Fully implement the school’s assessment and reporting schedule including the planned moderation of assessment.

Ensure general capabilities and cross curriculum priorities are understood and addressed in curriculum planning processes.

Document a pedagogical framework.
3.7 Differentiated teaching and learning

Findings

Various teaching practices across the school reflect the belief that while students may be progressing at different rates, all students are capable of learning if given appropriate learning opportunities.

Teachers talk confidently about where students are on the continuum of learning. There is recognition by staff that students are at different stages in the learning process and some resultant use of differentiated teaching is apparent.

There is no process by which the school ensures that students with significant learning delay or acceleration needs are provided appropriate curriculum adjustments. Currently the process for referral and support for students with learning difficulties is not documented in a central location.

The school teaching and learning handbook makes reference to providing students with feedback and the setting and reviewing of learning goals. This is not described in detail. No reference has been made to the teaching of higher order thinking skills.

Classrooms have artefacts which suggest WALT (What are we learning today) and WILF (What I'm looking for) are used in lesson delivery. The extent to which this practice is embedded as part of the explicit instruction lesson structure is unclear.

The process of feedback to students to assist them to understand their own learning varies from class to class and the setting of individual learning goals is ad hoc. Most students interviewed could identify their reading level. Teachers demonstrate a varying degree of knowledge about giving effective feedback to inform students of their next steps in learning.

Teachers use scheduled testing of reading to identify students’ current knowledge, skills and understanding to identify starting points for teaching. The school intends to collect a greater breadth of achievement data to inform this process.

There is currently no documented school policy on differentiation. A consistent agreed-upon approach to documenting teaching adjustments is developing with the use of a common planning template.

The school is serviced by a visiting guidance officer and has access to a Head of Special Education Services (HOSES) based at another school. Students with a disability are identified and referred for support by the guidance officer. Referral processes for students with learning difficulties are currently undertaken informally through the principal.

Supporting data

Annual Implementation Plan 2016, Investing for Success 2016, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, assessment and targets schedule, whole-school teaching and
learning handbook, curriculum overview documents, school newsletters, staff, student, and staff and parent interviews.

**Improvement strategies**

Establish a whole-school process for referral, documentation and alignment of support provisions and adjustments for students with additional needs.

Review the whole-school approach to establishing the lesson intent and success criteria.

Implement a school-wide approach to the development of student learning goals and the teaching of higher order thinking skills.
3.8 Effective pedagogical practices

Findings

School staff are explicit in their desire to see effective teaching occurring across the school.

The emerging pedagogical framework is underpinned by the explicit instruction model\(^1\) and some teachers have engaged in regionally provided professional development and coaching in relation to this model.

A range of teaching practices are being implemented across the school and lesson design and delivery is guided by yearly curriculum overviews which are being developed. The principal and a regional coach have engaged in formal observations and feedback to teachers in regards to the explicit teaching model.

A common language of the teaching of reading is yet to be articulated. A whole-school literacy plan is being documented and the draft contains a broad range of recommended teaching strategies including the *Reading Beanie* decoding strategies, the Comprehension, Accuracy, Fluency and Expanded Vocabulary (CAFÉ) model and the work of Sheena Cameron\(^2\).

Most of the recent work in reading groups across the school appears to have been focused primarily on decoding. Little focus appears to have been given to the explicit teaching of reading comprehension or the development of higher order thinking.

Staff members take a strong interest in students' literacy results, specifically reading benchmark data. The principal has conducted some quality assurance and professional development around the consistency of the administration of running records.

Some classes have started processes for students setting learning goals and displaying progress towards targets on class displays.

Some students interviewed felt that the reading instruction they received was not sufficiently challenging.

Supporting data

Annual Implementation Plan 2016, Investing for Success 2016, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, assessment and targets schedule, whole-school teaching and learning handbook, curriculum overview documents, school newsletters, staff, student, and staff and parent interviews.

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Improvement strategies

Implement evidence-based strategies for the explicit teaching of reading comprehension and higher order thinking in reading.

Collaboratively review the school’s approach to reading groups, identifying the specific evidence-based strategies to be implemented across the whole school.

Continue staff professional development in the explicit teaching of reading.
3.9 School and community partnerships

Findings

The school seeks ways to enhance student learning and wellbeing by partnering with parents, caregivers and other schools by creating positive opportunities for engagement.

The school recently conducted a parent education workshop aimed at upskilling parents to help their child’s reading at home. Several parents attended and provided positive feedback to the school.

A local community member who holds a blue card volunteers to support reading groups at the school twice a week. The school is also supported by a chaplain who visits weekly and helps with learning support programs and mentors the senior boys.

The school is located within a town with a declining population and employment prospects. Most opportunities for external partnerships exist at a prohibitive distance from the school.

The P&C is a dedicated group committed to the school and its place as an important hub of community activity. They raise funds to support school priorities such as the improvement of school facilities and the purchase of reading resources, sports trophies and senior uniform shirts.

Recently the P&C contributed funds to provide a free camp to all Years 4 to 6 students at the school. Parents in the P&C speak of the importance of them engaging regularly with the school as being pivotal in their children’s success. They speak of the importance of adults and Elders in the community providing examples of good role models to the students.

Parents speak highly of the school and say they feel welcomed and valued as partners in their child’s education.

Fundraising activities include a biannual fete held at the school and a catering stall at the annual town rodeo.

A new local police officer appointed to the town has been working with the school. The school intends to formalise his role as the Adopt-a-Cop. The officer has supported the school’s Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students (RBPS) through accompanying the principal on school and home visits for students requiring additional support. Plans exist for the officer to assist the school in organising blue light discos in the school hall.

A youth justice worker visits the school to build relationships with students at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

The closest early childhood provider to the school is in a neighbouring town an hour’s drive away, resulting in few children from the school catchment attending any transition to Prep programs. The school has an established Families as First Teachers (FAFT) kindergarten program and a playgroup, both of which operate weekly from the former
A preschool building adjacent to the school. These programs attract a small number of families.

A transition program has existed in partnership with the closest secondary school; however, this is also hindered by distance. Staff members at the secondary school indicate that attendance of students from the school after transition to junior secondary is of concern.

Parents and community Elders articulated great concern regarding their children’s ability to transition to junior secondary effectively, citing a lack of connection and belonging at the secondary school which leads to non-attendance, disengagement and lack of aspiration.

**Supporting data**

Annual Implementation Plan 2016, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, school website, school newsletters, staff, student, parent, and community interviews.

**Improvement strategies**

Seek ways to increase the interface between the playgroup and Families as First Teachers kindergarten programs to seamlessly transition children to Prep and to maximise the use of available expertise and resources.

Strengthen the transition program to junior secondary and establish connections for students preparing to transition.

Continue to seek support from external agencies such as the Queensland Police Service and Youth Justice to support students who may require additional support to prevent disengaging from their education.
4. Follow-up timelines

- School to publish the executive summary on their website within two weeks.
- School to meet with Assistant Regional Director – Shirlee Gallo – to discuss review findings and improvement strategies.
- Action plan to be developed and submitted to the SIU and region within six weeks of the completion of the review.