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PERFORMANCE ENQUIRY REPORT

August 2014



Department of
Education

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE ENQUIRY

BACKGROUND

The Expert Review Group (ERG) has been established to strengthen the Department of Education's accountability processes. As an independent body, the ERG provides authoritative interpretations of aspects of a school's performance.

On 8 August 2014, the Regional Executive Director notified the East Kalgoorlie Primary School Principal of the enquiry and provided an overview of the intended process.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed by the ERG for this enquiry was:

- a thorough and rigorous desktop examination of the data related to the aspect of the school's performance being considered;
- the co-option of additional review team members with specialist knowledge or skills relevant to the aspect of school performance being reviewed; and
- a school visit of three days' duration.

Interviewees included the Principal; the deputy principal; eight teachers; six education assistants; the registrar; two Health and Family support coordinators; three Aboriginal and Islander educational officers; two school officers; the gardener; a cross-section of students; parents representing the School Council and Parents and Citizens' Association (P&C); the Chief Executive Officer, Earbus Foundation of WA; a group representing allied health and community support agencies and the Regional Executive Director.

The Expert Review Group team

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SCHOOL PERFORMANCE ENQUIRY

East Kalgoorlie Primary School

Focus of Enquiry – RELATIONSHIPS and LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

East Kalgoorlie Primary School is located on the periphery of the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder. Originally servicing the Williamstown community and the Ninga Mia community to the east, the school has evolved over time as mining operations expanded and the community diminished. At present, the school educates students from the entire city with an average enrolment of 135 (128 at the time of the enquiry), 98 per cent of whom are Aboriginal.

The school-community relationships that exist at East Kalgoorlie Primary School have had a positive influence on school-wide processes implemented to support improved attendance, student behaviour and students at educational risk.

A strong sense of pride is expressed by staff, students and community members in relation to many aspects of East Kalgoorlie Primary School. This is a strong endorsement of the interdependence of relationships that have been strategically shaped by the school's leadership.

FINDINGS

1. Strong staff collaboration has contributed to a culture of sharing, accountability and responsibility. Relationships between staff have strengthened over time through the persistent application of a set of beliefs about creating the best conditions for students to learn. Staff morale is high.
2. A positive school climate, good relations and strong endorsement from a wide network of community health support agencies are compelling factors in the school's success. The School Council shares the school's vision and determination to make a sustainable difference to the educational future of all students at East Kalgoorlie Primary School.
3. The school's leadership is defined by an expert blend of relational leadership skills and a highly developed instinct for giving instructional and collegial feedback to build staff capacity both professionally and personally. Authentic relationships between parents, carers and the school have been built on trust and mutual respect.
4. Highly respected teachers and support staff focus on individual approaches to student learning needs. With the support of specialist personnel, a range of attendance strategies is augmented by a sophisticated student information tracking system to ensure intervention is timely and targeted.
5. The actions of the staff promote and support a safe, fair, friendly and caring school environment. Improved student engagement in learning has been achieved by developing welcoming and inclusive classroom environments. Classes are orderly and attractive with learning programs based on the Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline achievement standards.
6. Effective behaviour management processes are consistent and reviewed regularly. The social and emotional wellbeing of the students is central to the work of staff, and as such, understanding the whole-child and his or her context underpins all decisions relating to staff interactions with students.

RELATIONSHIPS

- 1. Strong staff collaboration has contributed to a culture of sharing, accountability and responsibility. Relationships between staff have strengthened over time through the persistent application of a set of beliefs about creating the best conditions for students to learn. Staff morale is high.**

Effective internal relationships between staff, students and parents at East Kalgoorlie Primary School underpin their improved student achievement. The alignment of school goals and the capacity to enact a school-wide ethos is driven by an unrelenting commitment to ensuring students have access to every learning opportunity.

"This means removing whatever obstacles are in the path of a student and having a 'can-do' approach."¹

A strong and supportive professional culture exists at East Kalgoorlie Primary School. Teaching and support staff willingly share with colleagues and support one another to enhance the engagement and learning of students. A number of staff report that their colleagues are like family to them.

The school promotes opportunities for high levels of collaboration that contribute to more effective curriculum planning, implementation of targeted strategies for students at educational risk and maximising available resources and expertise for their professional learning. These opportunities, both formal and informal, are significantly developed and valued by staff.

The school's leaders have been relentless in building a team of experienced teachers across all phases of schooling to create this highly effective learning community approach. The focus on building a strong professional culture has created a sustainable approach to achieving clearly defined targets through authentic, collaborative processes.

Central to the consistent high levels of engagement in these collaborative processes across the school has been the purposeful support and high degrees of trust exhibited by school leaders. This support is underpinned by the ability of school leaders to apply sophisticated management techniques to maximise the deployment of resources.

The school's leadership is to be acknowledged for its contemporary attitudes and approaches towards building capacity, trust and confidence.

There is a strong sense of loyalty and a very optimistic interpretation of future possibilities for the school's ongoing growth and development. The announcement that the school had been successful in achieving Independent Public School status was made during the performance enquiry process and was greeted with enthusiasm.

The capacity of staff to self-reflect and develop a rich understanding of common agreements with students is compelling. There is a high level of morale amongst staff in the school as a result of authentic collaborative practices and common beliefs about how children learn best.

¹ East Kalgoorlie Primary School, Annual Report 2013, Department of Education, 2.

- 2. A positive school climate, good relations and strong endorsement from a wide network of community health support agencies are compelling factors in the school's success. The School Council**

shares the school's vision and determination to make a sustainable difference to the educational future of all students at East Kalgoorlie Primary School.

East Kalgoorlie Primary School is committed to developing innovative strategies to address disadvantage and the poor academic outcomes of Aboriginal students. It is proactive in the community, having created a dedicated Health and Family Support (Extended Services) program focusing on targeted early intervention in the Prekindergarten, Kindergarten and Pre-primary classes.

This wide ranging intervention is supported by local government and non-government agencies. The school team embraces a very strong student and family advocacy role, accessing health and support services on behalf of the students and their families. This is reiterated by the school's posture when establishing a partnership relationship with support agencies. This posture is based on the theory of mutual obligation between the school and the agency.

The school negotiates for the required quality and standard of service from the agency in return for a school commitment to following through on all actions and communication requirements agreed to with the agency. All agencies were full of praise for the manner in which the school followed up and followed through on the advice and actions negotiated during their school visits.

The School Council shares the school's vision and supported its application to become an Independent Public School. A comprehensive school-community partnership agreement has been built into the accountability framework of the school. The agreement was endorsed by the School Council in 2013 and is structured around four key areas: cultural connections, working together, learning and engaged students.

A comprehensive monitoring tool has been developed which outlines commitments, activities and progress indicators in these four areas. The School Council regularly monitors and reviews the outcomes of the agreement.

With the support of the School Council, the school has embarked on a rebranding strategy to further enhance and renovate the school's image and reputation in the community. The school ethos is an integral part of the rebranding process and is appropriately reflected in the school's updated logo, 'Nurture, Grow, Fly' which features a newly emerged butterfly taking flight. This logo is now on school uniforms and is well known in the community.

The Early Years Plus and Health and Family Support (Extended Services) programs provide a comprehensive wrap around service. It is staffed by a dedicated Health and Family Support Coordinator who accesses and brokers support to students and their families. A Health and Family Support Officer assists the Coordinator in delivering these services, which are provided by key community agencies and businesses who work in partnership with the school.

The extended services at East Kalgoorlie Primary School are focused on student health, emotional wellbeing and learning support. Health and wellbeing data is collected and entered into the student information management system. This data can be analysed and added to by school administration and staff as well as community health support agencies such as occupational therapists and speech therapists. This allows for the continuous, holistic case management of students by the administration. The breadth of the health and family support network the school engages with is extensive and complex. The level of engagement is exceptional and two-way, with allied agencies being strategically targeted to draw together an array of relevant and meaningful services. The school has made significant student academic progress and

improvement in ear health, vision, paediatric care, occupational therapy, speech therapy and dental services.

These programs have become widely known and respected in the community, which has encouraged parents to become willing partners, working with the school in the education of students. East Kalgoorlie Primary School is not a school that acts on the basis of entitlement; it pursues what it needs, when it needs it, with a sense of purpose and self-fulfilling destiny.

The relationship between the parents and the school is strong, powerful and supportive, being valued by both parties. Together they are facing challenges and making the most of the opportunities that come their way. An incentives program is in place to attract community engagement. It is a refreshing, innovative and non-judgemental way of 'getting people in the door'.

The deputy principal has fostered strong community links by organising local sporting teams to visit the school and provide sport clinics. Staff display commitment to the students of East Kalgoorlie Primary School and are involved in extra-curricular sporting activities with students outside of school hours.

Links are made by the staff with other schools in the Kalgoorlie and Boulder communities to promote collegiality and develop consistent judgement across schools. Through the school choir and its involvement in community events, there is a deliberate attempt to showcase student achievement within the Kalgoorlie community.

The choir has become well known and respected and is sought out to participate in community events, admirably representing the school on these occasions.

The aim of school is to build cultural understanding. To this end, they have actively trained support staff to not only supervise students but to build relationships and interact with them. Cultural awareness is embedded throughout the school. Aboriginal languages are valued and taught through music and languages other than English classes.

As stated by the Principal, "It is not East Kalgoorlie Primary School's role to educate parents. We are not here to judge or assume, we know better, but to be empathetic and walk in their shoes".

3. The school's leadership is defined by an expert blend of relational leadership skills and a highly developed instinct for giving instructional and collegial feedback to build staff capacity both professionally and personally. Authentic relationships between parents, carers and the school have been built on trust and mutual respect.

There is a systematic, vibrant process for building the professional skills and deep knowledge base of all staff, where formal and informal meetings are used to share expectations and applicable skills and knowledge. The leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff contribute equally to the knowledge bank of the school. Many nonteaching staff are studying to be teachers or aspire to improve their qualifications in their field. Staff education is strongly promoted and supported. The Principal is strategic in the provision of feedback which perpetuates an intelligence culture. Feedback is well accepted because of the high level of professional trust between all who contribute to the school.

Collaboration and sharing take place routinely between all staff and practical solutions, such as a dedicated preparation space in the administration area, facilitate this to a large degree. The Principal and deputy principal set the agenda for a system of

instructional excellence with a research focus to embrace and implement effective, contemporary teaching and learning strategies that are pertinent to the East Kalgoorlie Primary School setting.

Staff learning is clearly focussed on continuous improvement in the provision of targeted learning for students. All staff are valued for their specific strengths and these are used cleverly to build whole-staff capacity.

A deep sense of 'collective mission' is documented and universally voiced by all staff and it is this mission that evokes the trusting and truly respectful relationships to meet the needs of each student and the significant educational challenges. There is a mantra of 'we are all in this together' and an understanding that by working together the outcome is greater than any individual effort.

The Early Years of Schooling document which forms part of the Director General's Classroom First Strategy promotes teachers establishing positive and collaborative relationships with families. It states that information sharing is more likely to happen when teachers have built respectful, trusting and friendly relationships with families of children in their classes.

At East Kalgoorlie Primary School, powerful, supportive relationships have been developed over time between the school and the parents and carers of its students resulting in an excellent exchange of information and a high level of active support for families. Parents describe staff as caring of their children. This is complemented by a strong sense that the school has an explicit learning focus.

A mix of local staff with strong cultural links and their willingness to share their knowledge with new staff ensures the best possible conditions for cultural expression. This local knowledge has also meant that some very vulnerable families are holistically supported by the health and wellbeing team.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

4. Highly respected teachers and support staff focus on individual approaches to student learning needs. With the support of specialist personnel, a range of attendance strategies is augmented by a sophisticated student information tracking system to ensure intervention is timely and targeted.

East Kalgoorlie Primary School recognises that children cannot learn unless the optimal conditions for learning are met. To achieve this, staff work tirelessly with the community to raise the standard of health for all students so they are able to focus on learning and education.

In 2011, East Kalgoorlie Primary School became an Aboriginal Innovation School and set up a Health and Family Support (Extended Services) program within the school. Individual students and their families are assessed to determine, 'what is the problem, why is there a problem and what support is required?'

The Health and Family Support (Extended Services) program liaises with specialist agencies to provide speech therapy, occupational therapy, medical and dental services on the school site.

School staff are trained by specialists to undertake general hygiene activities with students. The same staff assess and screen students' health and academic needs, uploading information to a data management system. This is then analysed by specialist agencies in the community, the school administration team and a designated

Early Years Coordinator. This collection of student information drives future, strategic decision making. Student progress is monitored and discussed twice per term with the school management team to ensure progress is being made.

The Pre-kindergarten (3-4 year olds) and Kindergarten (4-5 year olds) classes operate full-time, five days per week to maximise opportunities for learning and the provision of learning support programs. The Early Years Plus staff employ a holistic approach to learning, which has seen an improvement in literacy and numeracy skills. The Early Years Plus program is a developmental learning framework to build skills and conceptual knowledge mapped along a developmental continuum.

"Our flagship early years programme is founded on the philosophy that targeted teaching strategies that are matched to the specific needs of our students are imperative to ensure our children receive the best possible start to their education journey."²

The Whole Child Learning Sequence documentation provides for curriculum differentiation throughout the school. Individual student adjustments are made through the Early Years Plus program. The program encompasses six phases of development. The Teacher Assessment of Communication diagnostic tools are effectively used to target oral literacy in the early years.

The effectiveness of this program is seen in the improved sub-test averages in comprehension and expressive language. Support has been provided in these areas by employing a 0.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) support teacher to deliver language programs to identified students and employing an additional 1.0 FTE education assistant to implement small group and individual programs with training from both speech and occupational therapists. The South East Metropolitan Language Development Centre is also utilised to develop classroom teacher expertise.

Whole-school On-entry Assessment Program tests are conducted in Term 1 and Term 4 of Pre-primary and once each year in Years 1 and 2. These assessments are analysed and early years focus areas developed as well as target groups of students. Many of the students are predominantly visual learners, so appropriate resources and strategies are employed to support this learning style.

Whole-school student resilience is developed through the implementation of the You Can Do It – How Bad Is It program. Staff actively seek to make connections and develop positive relationships with students.

² *East Kalgoorlie Primary School (2013), 7.*

The average attendance at East Kalgoorlie Primary School is in the moderately at-risk range (74 – 77 per cent). Student attendance is monitored and tracked on the student information system.

The impact of an individual case management approach and family support provided by the Health and Family Support (Extended Services) program has shown significant improvement in attendance rates. Dedicated staff follow up on absences, contacting parents daily to check on students and providing transport to personally ensure students get to school.

A local bus service has also been contracted to transport students to and from school. This ensures students are attending school for a full day with students arriving between 8.00 am and 8.30 am. Together with home and family support, the bus service is seen as augmenting improved attendance.

Staff actively encourage students to attend school by providing breakfast, lunch and showers and ensure that any medical requirements are scrupulously followed. The Family and Support Coordinator's knowledge of the East Kalgoorlie Primary School community is comprehensive and compelling.

Transient students are very well accommodated at the school with students accepted into classes, assessments conducted and support programs implemented in a non-judgemental environment.

The key attendance message is 'no excuses – no blame'.

Parents know that their child's needs will be met and students respond positively to the motivating and engaging curriculum programs that have been implemented. The flow on effect of positive community, student and staff relationships is that students want to go to school.

5. The actions of the staff promote and support a safe, fair, friendly and caring school environment. Improved student engagement in learning has been achieved by developing welcoming and inclusive classroom environments. Classes are orderly and attractive with learning programs based on the Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline achievement standards.

East Kalgoorlie Primary School has a buoyant, welcoming and affirmative climate, which is focused on providing constructive solutions to social issues and is restorative to the benefit of relationships between all members of the school community.

Each classroom is an inviting, student-centred space where appropriate tools of technology have enhanced the learning and engagement. Classroom arrangements are created to best meet student's developmental needs.

Staff are expert at providing the scaffolding to give every student the opportunity to reach high standards of behaviour and achievement and these high standards are clearly articulated. From the beginning of the full-time three year old program, the learning experiences are academically robust, authentic and have the right amount of built-in challenge to ensure success and a sense of pride in achievement.

Whilst the Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline underpins the planning there has been a considerable body of innovative work to create learning sequences that are developmentally sensible and appropriate to the context of the school. This work has a sound research base and is dynamic in its application.

Highly effective processes are in place to ensure staff and student safety. Roles and responsibilities are very well understood and carried out in a low key, capable manner with staff working together to ensure that the needs of the students are addressed.

The values expressed in the You Can Do It program have been woven into the fabric of daily learning and play. It helps to instill confidence, building resilient learners who show respect for each other at school.

6. Effective behaviour management processes are consistent and reviewed regularly. The social and emotional wellbeing of the students is central to the work of staff, and as such, understanding the whole-child and his or her context underpins all decisions relating to staff interactions with students.

Behaviour management processes are fortified by the level of consistency of the implementation and the values staff use to anchor their relationships with students. The school's emphasis on understanding the causal factors likely to be at the heart of behaviours exhibited by students is fundamental to the emphatic belief that it is more productive to treat the cause rather than the symptom.

For example, the school has recognised that if the students have difficulty in hearing, they are likely to become agitated because they cannot follow what the teacher is saying. This inevitably leads to disengagement, which can result in classroom disruptions. Apart from every effort being made to medically treat forms of hearing loss for individual students, classrooms noise levels are monitored to ensure 'background noise' is kept to a minimum.

Targeted programs for students in need of intensive speech and language therapy as well as group strategies to improve phonological awareness are seen as crucial in the school's approach to ensure students 'feel they can learn'. The view of the school is that success in learning is proportional to positive student engagement, which in turn leads to fewer behavioural problems.

On occasion, behavioural issues of varying degrees of concern arise. Staff spoke appreciatively of the support provided by the school's leadership. First, in terms of their efforts to build staff capacity to manage extreme behavioural episodes and second, to be available if direct intervention is required at the time of an incident.

The extensive range of integrated services made available to assist the health and wellbeing of students is a model for other schools to consider. These services are managed by a full-time Health and Family Support Coordinator who reports directly to the Principal.

Health and wellbeing data is collected by the Coordinator and is matched with observations and anecdotal notes made by the classroom teacher. Information from therapy staff and external provider specialists is included in the same data management system.

Instant access to this data allows the school administration to respond in a holistic and timely way to both the individual and collective needs of students. The mobility of the data through 'digital tablet access' is impressive.

The school recognises that students with sensory deficits cannot rely on their senses to give them an accurate picture of the world in which they need to learn. Learning difficulties can quickly translate into behavioural problems.

Skills including reflex integration, balance, strength, bilateral integration, body awareness, motor planning, fine motor grasps and pencil skills are part of a student screening process used to build a picture about the student and their readiness for learning.

It is clear to the enquiry team that all members of staff genuinely care for the students and exhibit a professional and supportive approach in their interactions in and out of the classroom. The teachers have an in-depth knowledge of each student and a commitment to help them progress. There is a strong sense of shared responsibility for each child throughout the school.

CONCLUSION

The school leaders at East Kalgoorlie Primary School are to be applauded for their strong commitment to empowering staff and students, the embedding of engagement approaches with parents and establishing highly effective collaborative processes with allied health and community support agencies.

The approach they have adopted has been to set the conditions for student learning and building staff capacity through the application of a 21st century interpretation of school leadership. This approach is an astute blend of strategy and tactics and is most evident in the intelligent, if not shrewd, deployment of resources.

Staff are to be commended for their commitment to a strong service ethos. They have ensured a student focus on participation, self-management and values with an emphasis on striving for high standards. There is clear direction and a common language that supports an effective learning environment.

Parents are meaningfully engaged with their children's educational program through the innovative Health and Family Support program. The School Council is an excellent blend of expertise including parents and local community leaders who have a passion for supporting the school.

The Expert Review Group endorses East Kalgoorlie Primary School's status as a school that has a high quality learning environment augmented by productive internal and external relationships. These two domains combine to have an extremely positive influence on building sustainable student learning.