

WONGAN HILLS DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

D15/0565107

PERFORMANCE ENQUIRY REPORT

November 2015



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 an aspect of a school's performance, followed by a set of recommendations for improvement to be implemented with the support of the Regional Executive Director or, as in the case of Wongan Hills District High School, suggestions for sustainability.

On 4 November 2015, the Regional Executive Director notified the Wongan Hills District High School Principal of the enquiry and provided an overview of the intended process.

The school has a National Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage value of 945.00, placing it in the State decile rank of 8.

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;
- a discussion with Mr Kim Guelfi, Regional Executive Director;
- 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 approximately two days duration.

Interviewees included; the Principal; the previous substantive Principal; one deputy principal; six teachers; three education assistants (EAs); the Aboriginal and Islander educational officer (AIEO) and five parents representing the Parents and Citizens' Association (P&C) and School Council.

THE EXPERT REVIEW GROUP TEAM

Neil Darby	Director, Schools Review, Expert Review Group
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SCHOOL PERFORMANCE ENQUIRY

Wongan Hills District High School

Focus of Enquiry – **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION** Emphasis on consistent high standards of student achievement

Wongan Hills District High School is situated 190 kilometres north-east of Perth. The school caters for a range of students from Kindergarten to Year 12 attending from communities in the Shire of Wongan-Ballidu and surrounding areas.

The Wongan Hills name originates from the Aboriginal name 'Wongan Katta', which translates to 'Talking Hills'.

In 2015, there are 254 students enrolled from Kindergarten to Year 12. Of these, the Kindergarten to Year 2 enrolment consists of 54 students.

The sustained high level of student achievement evident in the early years at Wongan Hills District High School reflects the high level of teachers' commitment, quality of leadership, intentional teaching methodology and reflective practice. Students and staff in the early childhood program are strongly supported by parents, volunteers and the wider community.

The school has maintained regular upgrades to buildings over the years including two purpose-built Early Learning Centres, which provide large spaces for indoor and outdoor learning and play. Wongan Hills District High School has well maintained grounds and stimulating early childhood play areas.

Figure 1 shows assessments for Wongan Hills District High School using standardised residuals from National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing from 2010 to 2015.

Of the 20 areas assessed for Year 3 students since 2012, performance in 17 areas was above or well above expected when compared to like schools.

The performance of the Year 3 students in writing, spelling and grammar and punctuation from 2012 was consistently at least one standard deviation above the expected mean.

Figure 1: Year 3 like school residuals for Wongan Hills District High School, NAPLAN 2010-15

Year 3	Performance			
	2012	2013	2014	2015
Numeracy	2.7	1.3	0.6	0.8
Reading	1.5	1.6	1.2	0.8
Writing	3.1	2.4	2.3	1.5
Spelling	1.3	2.4	2.3	2.2
Grammar & Punctuation	1.7	2.5	2.0	1.9

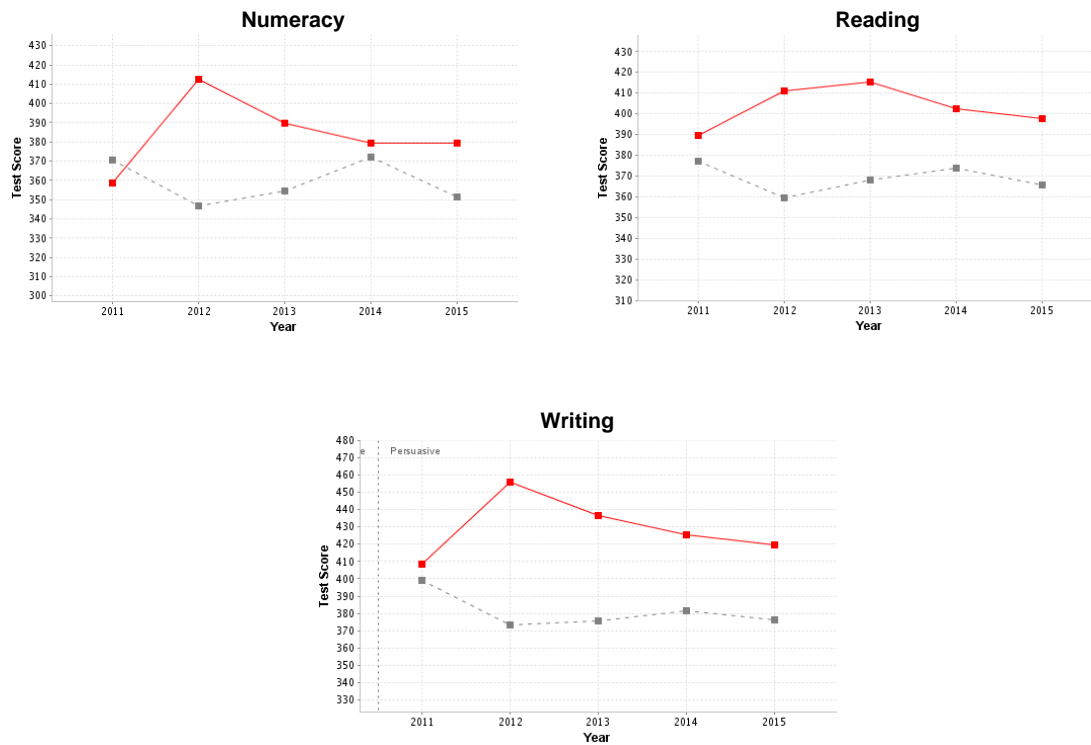
Key

	Above Expected - more than one standard deviation above the predicted school mean
	Expected - within one standard deviation of the predicted school mean
	Below Expected - more than one standard deviation below the predicted school mean
	If blank, then no data available or number of students is less than 6

Figure 2 provides a longitudinal summary of standardised results from NAPLAN testing in 2011-15.

The mean results of Year 3 students at Wongan Hills District High School in have been consistently above to well above those of students from like schools over the last five years, with the exception of numeracy in 2011.

Figure 2: Mean scores in numeracy, reading and writing of Year 3 students, Wongan Hills District High School and like schools, NAPLAN 2011-15



Key

- Year 3 School
- Year 3 Like Schools

Longitudinal relative residual data also provides information on student performance over time. The analysis uses the school's mean and the National Index of Community Socio Educational Advantage to calculate expected performance and the school's variation from expected performance, called a residual score.

As shown in Figure 3, apart from numeracy there has been a stable to upward trend in most areas assessed since 2010. These results are highly commendable given the fact that on more than one occasion, results in most areas assessed have been more than one standard deviation above the mean.

Figure 3: Longitudinal relative residuals in Year 3 numeracy, writing, reading, spelling and grammar and punctuation, Wongan Hills District High School, NAPLAN 2010-15

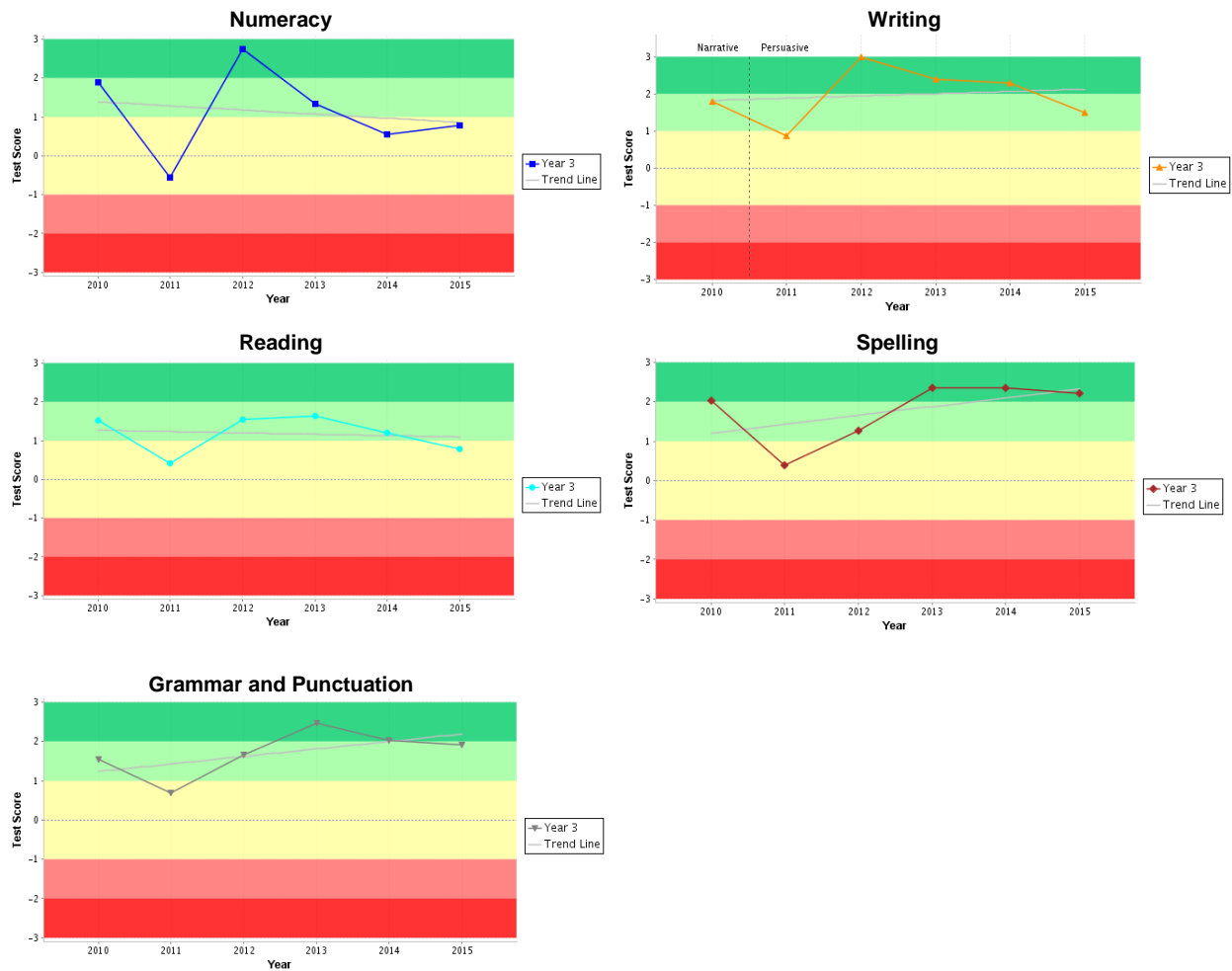


Table 1 compares the scores of Pre-primary students at Wongan Hills District High School in Module 1 of the On-entry Assessment Program with the mean scores for all public schools in Western Australia for each test in 2015.

The proportion of students at Wongan Hills District High School performing across all progression points was similar to the average for all other Western Australian public schools. In reading, more than 9 per cent more students from Wongan Hills District High School were at progression points in the 0.0 to 0.1 range. However, 12 per cent less students at Wongan Hills District High School were in the same progression point range for speaking and listening.

Significant value adding is evident when On-entry Assessment Program data is compared to NAPLAN relative residuals.

Table 1: Percentages of Pre-primary students at Wongan Hills District High School and Western Australian public schools performing at progression and development points, Module 1, On-entry Assessment Program, 2015

Progression/ Development Points	Speaking and Listening		Reading		Writing		Numeracy	
	Wongan Hills District High School	WA public schools	Wongan Hills District High School	WA public schools	Wongan Hills District High School	WA public schools	Wongan Hills District High School	WA public schools
0.0 - 0.1	12	24	26	15	17	44	0	2
0.2 - 0.3	31	17	12	18	77	47	3	5
0.4 - 0.5	20	19	25	25	0	4	15	6
0.6 - 0.7	23	22	26	22	6	4	14	13
0.8 - 0.9	14	9	9	12	0	0	22	21
1.0 - 3.3	0	9	3	7	0	1	47	53

FINDINGS

- 1 A sustained, passionate commitment to reflective practice and well developed intentional teaching has positioned the staff in the early years to enable high levels of student achievement.
- 2 In the early childhood phase of learning, teachers demonstrate high expectations. Every child is expected and encouraged to do their best academically and behaviourally as part of the 'Wongan Way' ethos.
- 3 Early childhood staff are empowered through clear direction and respect from the leadership team and their colleagues. Teachers, as leaders, provide a relentless focus on success for all. Support staff are highly effective and integral to the sustained success of students.
- 4 Staff demonstrate their skills to backward map effectively using systemic data and school generated assessments to inform teaching practice and quality. Sustained assessment practices are reflective, targeting the individual child's point of need.
- 5 Leaders identify and support student needs in early childhood through effective deployment of staff. Leaders support the establishment of clear and connected strategies in all English strands by facilitating formal and informal staff communications that focus on teaching practice and individual student needs.
- 6 The school has a strong, respectful partnership with the community. All early childhood staff are proactive in supporting students from diverse backgrounds. Parents and extended family play a vital role in supporting children's learning both in the classroom and at home.
- 7 Early childhood staff embed the Early Years Learning Framework within learning programs to support the whole child.

COMMENTS

1 **A sustained, passionate commitment to reflective practice and well developed intentional teaching has positioned the staff in the early years to enable high levels of student achievement.**

Effective schools have teachers who hold high expectations for all of their students and demonstrate a strong sense of moral purpose where every child matters. Such teachers apply themselves to thorough planning, are reflective of their practice and persist when faced with challenges.

At Wongan Hills District High School, the early childhood teachers and their leaders believe they can make a difference to every student and are passionate about promoting high quality teaching.

Their passion is evident in the learning environments they create and in the purposeful teaching approaches developed in recent years. These approaches have been informed by professional learning including First Steps and the North East Metropolitan Language Development Centre holistic literacy program based on synthetic phonics. Early childhood staff have a clear understanding of the importance of a robust oral language program as a basis for strong literacy skills.

Oral language is intentionally integrated throughout all learning opportunities across the curriculum. There are strong links between the oral language program and the phonological awareness scope and sequence. Staff are aware of developmental needs and the readiness to hear sounds and introduce formal phonics when appropriate.

Play-based learning is directed, intentional and results in rich discussions amongst students and staff. Questions are both scaffolded and open-ended to support students and encourage diverse thinking.

An evidence-based approach, relentless focus on oral language, structured and sequenced approach to phonological awareness together with the intentional teaching of writing genre, have all contributed to the early years students achieving significant success.

Reflective practice is organised through formal phase of learning discussions, however, there is clear evidence that this collaboration occurs continuously across year levels and with the leadership.

The sharing of information relating to expected standards and informed by system and school assessments generates new ideas, which in turn influence current quality practice. Teachers have demonstrated a capacity for accurate judgements about student achievement through internal collaborative discussions using work samples and online exemplars.

The strong sense of trust between colleagues enables open discussions about student achievement. The leaders are viewed as approachable and as having knowledge and expertise which enhances the facilitation and oversight of the moderation process in the early childhood classes.

2 **In the early childhood phase of learning, teachers demonstrate high expectations. Every child is expected and encouraged to do their best academically and behaviourally as part of the 'Wongan Way' ethos.**

An essential pre-condition for effective teaching and learning to occur and for teachers to achieve a common goal of success is the presence of a sense of order and high

expectations. This occurs when the students are well known and when a strong connection with at least one teacher is evident.

Staff at Wongan Hills District High School express the belief in the need to cater to all levels of student ability and interest. They consider that the school-wide response to behaviour management through the Positive Behaviour Support approach assists in not only uniting expectations for all students but also enables a greater understanding of a common purpose for staff.

The development of school-wide expectations at Wongan Hills District High School is evident in the 'Wongan Way' which is a collaboratively developed matrix for student behaviour. Apart from agreed behaviours, the matrix describes the behaviour of 'active learners'. These behaviours form the basis of positive and encouraging interactions for students and are effectively implemented and encouraged by all early years' staff. Clear interactions set the conditions for teachers to act on behaviour and learning decisions and approaches which make a difference.

The 'Wongan Way' provides consistency for students and is the basis for relationships which enable well organised delivery of lessons. It has provided a positive tone and each teacher has utilised their skills within the matrix recognising the need for a mix of play-based learning, intentional teaching strategies and some semi-structured learning environments.

The school chaplaincy program is another successful element of the pastoral care program, with links to the wider community. Staff recognise that students learn best when they feel safe, secure and included. The chaplain is energetic, caring and a well-respected staff member who engages well with students in need socially and emotionally.

It was recognised by leaders and staff during this review that new staff to the school need to understand the ethos of the 'Wongan Way' and the conditions that have contributed to high levels of achievement. An induction program is currently being developed to inform staff.

3 Early childhood staff are empowered through clear direction and respect from the leadership team and their colleagues. Teachers, as leaders, provide a relentless focus on success for all. Support staff are highly effective and integral to the sustained success of students.

The clarity and stability of the school's approach to curriculum has been enhanced in recent years through the leaders' and key teachers' facilitation of the sequencing of literacy plans and thorough implementation of classroom plans. This has resulted in the development of a clear direction built on shared trust and respect of expertise leading to a cohesive early childhood ethos.

The common beliefs and values of staff and the community ensure that there is a collective focus and responsibility for all on the development of individual students.

Staff regard the formal and informal classroom visits by leaders as supportive. They provide additional opportunities to observe peer teaching practice, receive feedback and assist with the monitoring of the performance of students.

Staff have high expectations of themselves and there is a strong sense of accountability to each other. High levels of competency among both teaching and support staff are evident. Support from EAs, the AIEO and regular volunteers contribute significantly to student progress. This is enriched by intensive delivery of classroom programs based on tried and tested approaches in literacy and numeracy.

Expectations are articulated clearly and often. Decision making is shared and, by being visible and undertaking regular and positive interactions, the leaders have fostered a spirit of commitment that has empowered staff.

Staff are practiced at providing the scaffolding to give every student the opportunity to reach high standards of achievement in literacy and numeracy and these high standards are clearly expressed. Within the Kindergarten program, the learning experiences are responsive to individual need. There is an unrelenting focus on revision of key concepts which provides a strong basis for new content taught.

4 Staff demonstrate their skills to backward map effectively using systemic data and school generated assessments to inform teaching practice and quality. Sustained assessment practices are reflective, targeting the individual child's point of need.

Reflective practice is one of the five key principles that the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) states as underpinning effective early childhood pedagogy. For this practice to be effective, each educator involved in children's learning should regularly and carefully engage in reflective examination to inform decision making processes and future planning for children's learning and development.

Year 3 NAPLAN data is reflective of successful and engaging early years' programs. Scope and sequence documents developed by staff ensure breadth and depth of curriculum knowledge.

The process of backward mapping and analysis of Year 3 NAPLAN data at Wongan Hills District High School informs teachers about how they can attune their teaching. Learning outcomes, targets and goals support planning of direct and intentional teaching and strategies, with students aware of expected outcomes.

There is a concentrated effort to support and improve students with lower academic achievement, whilst students with the potential for high academic achievement are identified to further extend their knowledge and skills. The school reported, however, that they have future plans to more effectively challenge students requiring extension.

On-entry Assessment Program results are interrogated to discover the areas in which students performed well and to identify areas for improvement. This informs targeted, intentional teaching to support students at the point of need.

Staff are aware of their collective responsibility. They are reflective practitioners, will reteach concepts, try different strategies and ask colleagues for advice and assistance. Early intervention is essential and the staff have established Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to differentiate learning programs.

The early childhood teachers from Pre-primary indicated that part of their planning includes backward chaining. By clearly linking assessment to learning outcomes of individual students as well as each class, and identifying skills required, teaching has been informed and explicit.

Reflective practice is part of this process with feedback for the teacher and student both timely and informative.

Other data provided by school-based assessments (including IEPs) includes that of formative and summative assessments, and formal and informal processes. Effective communication and strong and stable teacher-leadership supporting the early childhood team has been integral to this process.

A strong and united focus on oral language and phonemic awareness foundations is evident across the early years. This united and systematic approach supports learning outcomes that include curriculum led, explicit teaching of phonics, reading and the teaching of the writing genres (such as narrative and persuasive texts). The teaching of age appropriate language syntax and spelling rules is purposefully integrated into learning programs across all early years. A range of literacy and numeracy programs are used, underpinned by EYLF practices, the Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline (WACAO) and First Steps strategies.

The educators of the early years' students at Wongan Hills District High School generally demonstrate a collaborative approach to improving student learning outcomes. They also share a focus on learning and development targets determined by the curriculum together with maximising learning through child and teacher feedback and reflection.

The capacity to reflect on one's learning is a skill that needs to be taught: through demonstration, modelling, support, and consistent practices over time. This approach is evidenced at Wongan Hills District High School.

5 Leaders identify and support student needs in early childhood through effective deployment of staff. Leaders support the establishment of clear and connected strategies in all English strands by facilitating formal and informal staff communications that focus on teaching practice and individual student needs.

"Managing resources effectively and efficiently as well as meeting public sector requirements are core responsibilities of all public school principals."¹

A strength of the leadership at Wongan Hills District High School is the willingness to consider the relevant needs of all students and deploy staff appropriately. The school is careful when targeting resources in a Kindergarten to Year 12 environment to ensure the most positive effect for students.

The leaders have established systematic processes for the collection and analysis of data. Using inclusive, evidence-based decision making processes they research and identify quality teaching. Consequently, they have shared and resourced these methods as they are implemented or refined in classrooms. They provide formal support for teacher-leaders who mentor colleagues and encourage staff engagement in networks. Staff are actively involved in the local Inland Lighthouse Early Childhood Network and have fostered a professional approach to sharing and mentoring.

The decision of the leaders and early childhood staff to persist with high levels of revision and exposure to oral and written language has led to the additional deployment of support staff to provide individualised revision processes in literacy and numeracy before the start of the school day and during sessions. This is complemented by parent and volunteer support which has been a sustained and successful part of the school's approach to literacy and numeracy support over recent years.

All staff regularly monitor and review student progress. The provision of individual learning programs is supported by effective, documented plans and explicit use of mastery folders along with other personalised interventions. These include inter agency partners from the Western Australian Country Health Service and local community organisations.

The leaders have designated time for formal phase of learning meetings where teachers review literacy plans, scope and sequence documents and share successful practice.

¹ O'Neill, Sharyn (2012). *Public School Leadership: An Initiative of the Director General's Classroom First Strategy*. Perth: Department of Education, 4.

The school has had professional learning related to the National Quality Standard (NQS), however, the leaders believe that further work is required to embed a thorough understanding and implementation of the NQS.

6 The school has a strong, respectful partnership with the community. All early childhood staff are proactive in supporting students from diverse backgrounds. Parents and extended family play a vital role in supporting children's learning both in the classroom and at home.

Highly effective schools have an orderly learning environment as a precondition for improvement. While the school leaders and staff have created high expectations and a positive culture and tone, they have also strived to deliver a sustained partnership approach with families and the wider community. Community members celebrate long serving teacher-leaders and the efforts of all staff. Staff combine their efforts to support individualised learning by utilising parents and volunteers to complement student work at school and at home. This dedication to the support of students generates high levels of respect from all parties and enables the effective development of a partnership approach when developing documented plans.

Several years ago, the school leaders acknowledged a changing demographic in the local intake area and embarked on a strategy to build a welcoming and responsive environment for all families. The staff work in an authentic way to welcome new students and their families and follow up with frequent communication.

Family engagement is evident at Wongan Hills District High School with every early childhood class having an 'open door policy'. Partnerships with families are actively supported as integral to their child's learning both at school and at home. Parents, extended family and community members are encouraged to volunteer in an informed and supported capacity, and demonstrate a clear understanding of their roles. This practice has enabled lower child to adult ratios and resulted in daily participation by each child in one-on-one targeted tasks that include oral language activities, phonological awareness, numeracy activities, modelled writing and oral reading. The lower adult to child ratio maximises engaging face to face interaction.

The 'family' is valued in the ongoing revision and assessment process which informs intervention planning and is evidenced in communication with families. This includes a weekly update email from each early year's teacher with clearly defined learning goals, celebrations of the past week and planned outcomes for the next week. This level of communication is thorough and supports each child's learning at home through family engagement.

The use of daily diaries to record literacy and numeracy and the use of targeted mastery folders further inform parents of effective revision practices and model the unrelenting support of staff and parents to the students.

The Kindergarten provides a 'Stay and Play' transition program in term four of each year to familiarise pre-Kindergarten students with the Centres' routines and environment. This is welcomed by parents and builds early relationship opportunities for the parents, children and staff.

The school has responded effectively to the requirements of students with special needs and has engaged positively with community and parent organisations to provide a variety of therapy options for students. This level of support adds significantly to the respectful relationships evident across the school community.

7 Early childhood staff embed the Early Years Learning Framework within learning programs to support the whole child.

The EYLF provides the foundation for educators to ensure that children in the early years of schooling experience quality teaching and learning. With an emphasis on play-based, intentional learning and promoting the importance of communication, language (including early literacy and numeracy) and social and emotional development, the Framework supports children to experience Belonging, Being and Becoming².

The elements of the Framework include Learning Outcomes, Principles and Practice, with each element required to support the development of the child and their learning. The early years' learning program at Wongan Hills District High School focuses on the whole-child, with every child's interests, strengths and identified areas of need supported.

Communication practices are strongly and passionately led by senior teachers. These teachers have been teaching at the same year level for a number of years and play a pivotal leadership role in ensuring that staff are supported, mentored as necessary, and articulate expectations throughout year levels. They lead the sharing of strategies and sound pedagogy by example, and provide a driving force in the unwavering focus of a strong oral language and phonological awareness program underpinning every child's learning.

As previously referenced, regular communication, professional dialogue and support for and between early learning colleagues is an established practice at Wongan Hills District High School. Explicit learning and behavioural expectations are articulated between teachers at each year level, and in turn articulated between each teacher and their students. This firmly embedded school practice supports the Framework's promotion of each child's success at school being significantly affected by the relationship between the educator, child and family.

In every early year's class, children are confident and actively engaged in a range of activities provided through individual, pair, group and class structures with both child and teacher directed play-based learning observed. Education assistants and AIEOs are valued as professional colleagues supporting each child's learning and development. Clear intentions are shown in planning and evidenced in observed classroom practices and a wide range of activities and resources in both indoor and outdoor spaces.

Outcomes are reflective of the individual development of the whole-child, and include consolidation and extended learning as required, with planning and programming based on a model of strength rather than a deficit. Other more formalised learning practices were also observed at developmental levels with children actively engaged and individually recognised and encouraged. Each child is supported and expected to do their best with a shared high expectation for each child's achievement in personal development and learning.

Another key aspect of the EYLF is ongoing learning and reflective practice. Reflective practices are discussed and observed with both staff and students in the early years and seem embedded in normal daily routines.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

- 1 Develop a structured approach to the monitoring and reporting of the National Quality Standard.
- 2 Continue to develop an induction program for new staff as recognised by the leadership.

² Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and workplace Relations (2009). *Belonging, Being & Becoming*, The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

CONCLUSION

The early years' phase of Wongan Hills District High School is characterised by stable and effective leadership over the past eight years. This stability, as well as the unrelenting focus of staff on high achievement within a strong pastoral care environment has created the conditions for sustained improvement from Kindergarten to Year 3.

The support of the whole child is evident at Wongan Hills District High School and provided through the early childhood educators, the school leadership, families and the community having a clear commitment to equity and the belief that all children have the capacity to succeed at an individual level, regardless of diverse circumstances and abilities. This commitment is not symbolic but is clearly evidenced in informed, consistent actions and ongoing practices by the school and community.

The staff's individual and collective expertise and commitment to the school's direction provides for authenticity and consistency in curriculum delivery and pastoral care. The level of staff professionalism evident at Wongan Hills District High School has created a high performing and compassionate learning environment. The sequencing of early years' curriculum in conjunction with leaders and staff is to be commended for their collaborative practice and teaching expertise.

Parents and community members have a high regard for the early years' staff and appreciate the consistency and quality of communication and engagement with staff and leaders. They acknowledge the teaching practice and pastoral care of the staff which has enabled high levels of achievement over many years. Staff articulate that the significant support of parents and volunteers has contributed to the success of students. This level of reciprocity underpins the trust and respect evident across the entire school community.

A noteworthy feature of this school is the high level of competency of all teaching and support staff and the engagement of students in their learning.

The Expert Review Group endorses Wongan Hills District High School's status as a school that has high quality early childhood teaching. This teaching has had a positive influence on the achievement of students and the school's learning environment.