Priority Review Report—2016 Cycle
Briar Hill Primary School
North Western Victoria Region

School number:	4341
Principal:	Suzanne Young
School Council President	Sophie Walsh
Regional Office Representative:	Rebecca Haig
Review Company:	Monash University
Accredited School Reviewer:	Anita Forsyth
Date/s of Review:	24 & 30 November, 1 & 2 December, 2016

Priority Review Report Executive Summary

1.1 School Context

Briar Hill Primary School (Briar Hill PS) was established in 1927. The school is located in a mainly residential area in the North Eastern Metropolitan region of Melbourne.

The school has a number of buildings consisting of 13 classrooms, a library, an art and science area, a multipurpose room which also serves as a performing arts centre, an Out of School Hours room and a canteen. The school has an agreement with the Diamond Valley Special Developmental School (Diamond Valley SDS) to locate two rooms at the Briar Hill PS site.

An Environmental Hub community project established in 2011 includes an Enviro Hub building, a vegetable garden, an orchard and a 'chook run'.

The majority of students at the school live outside of the immediate area and enrolments have increased from 172 in 2009 to 229 in 2016. The gender breakdown is boys 54 per cent and girls 46 per cent. The proportion of students with a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) is eleven per cent and the proportion of English as an Additional Language (EAL) students is five per cent. The proportion of indigenous students is one per cent.

In 2016, a total of 17.4 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff are employed at the school (12.8 teaching and 4.6 non–teaching). Apart from the Acting Principal, there was no leadership profile in place at the time of the review. Teachers have class responsibilities and some have extra responsibilities in areas such as Numeracy and Literacy.

A Steiner Stream was established in 2005 when the school was facing closure. Since 2011 a 'Steiner Influenced' model has been delivered across all classrooms. This model incorporates some (but not all) elements of a Steiner model. Briar Hill PS's curriculum was being aligned with the Victorian Curriculum Foundation–Year 10 and Steiner Curriculum at the time of the review.

The school offers a range of specialist programs that complement core classroom programs, including whole school Environmental Science and Gardening, Physical Education, Languages Other Than English (LOTE) (German), a Year 3–6 instrumental music program, Foundation–Year 3 Eurhythmy (a type of movement used in Steiner tuition) and Year 4–6 Circus Skills.

A whole school approach to student wellbeing is based on restorative practices and positive education principles. Parents are involved in a range of activities including membership of the School Council and its sub–committees. Parents assist in classroom art and craft activities and are involved in the Enviro Hub, excursions, working bees, fundraising and family social events such as the Spring Fair.

The school established a number of contacts with different community agencies, such as the Banyule Council to develop the indigenous gardens in the school grounds.

1.2　Summary of the School's Performance

1.2.1　Summary of the School's Performance against the Previous Strategic Plan

The School Strategic Plan (SSP) for 2014–17 included a number of goals and targets in the areas of student learning, engagement and wellbeing, and productivity. The school achieved mixed results with some goals partially achieved, some targets achieved and others not achieved. The school established a number of key improvement strategies to achieve the specified goals and targets but a number of these strategies had not been fully implemented or embedded.

The student learning goal was 'to ensure learning growth and achievement in all dimensions of literacy and numeracy, for every student'. Targets were set against this goal for both the National Assessment Program–Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and Teacher Judgements against the Australian Curriculum and Victorian Essential Learning Standards (AusVELS).

This goal was partly achieved given one target was achieved and two targets were not achieved. The NAPLAN target that by 2017, mean scores in Years 3 and 5, in Mathematics, will improve, to represent an increase in the percentage of students in the top three bands. In 2016, the percentage of students in Years 3 and 5 in the top three bands of NAPLAN Numeracy improved after a decline in 2015. This target was achieved.

By the end of 2015 (the latest full year of AusVELS Teacher Judgement data at the time of the review), a further target that 90 per cent of students will experience at least one year's growth in AusVELS Teacher Judgements in all dimensions of English and Mathematics was not achieved.

Further, the target of 90 per cent of students achieving an AusVELS score of C or above in all dimensions of English and Mathematics was not achieved. This result was consistent with the comparatively low percentage of students achieving at least one year's learning growth in English and Mathematics based on teacher judgements in 2015.

Two student engagement goals were set. The first goal aimed 'to develop teacher effectiveness, to ensure that all students are confident, curious and motivated in their learning'. Achievements related to this goal were to be evidenced by the opinion collected through the Years 5 and 6 Student Attitudes to School Survey (ATS Survey). This data largely trended up from 2015 and 2016. A number of targets were achieved related to student opinion of their learning confidence, motivation, stimulating learning and teacher effectiveness. Their opinion of their connectedness to school and teacher empathy did not reach the target level. Interviews with students confirmed this opinion and therefore the reviewer concluded that the school had for the most part achieved this goal.

The second student engagement goal was 'to improve the school's student attendance data so that it was equal to or better than the State primary school mean level'. This goal and target was not achieved even though attendance improved by a small margin in 2015 compared to 2014. Overall absences were 20.65 days in 2014 per full time student compared to 19.59 days in 2015. This compared to the State average of 14.66 days per student in 2015, indicating that the school absence rates were well above the State average.

The goal for student wellbeing was 'to continue to develop an inclusive, safe, orderly and stimulating environment for learning'. Three student attitudes targets were set—one was achieved being student opinion related to their connectedness to peers while two targets were not achieved with opinion of student safety and classroom behaviour not reaching the targeted level. The school introduced a Kindness Framework to guide behaviours and wellbeing but the processes and protocols have not yet been consistently applied or embedded inside and outside classrooms.

The school's productivity goal was to maximise the effective allocation of resources, 'to ensure that every student at Briar Hill Primary School is given the best opportunities to achieve self-development, discovery and growth, aligned to our strategic intent'. The school achieved the specified targets related to this goal.

1.2.2   Summary of the review findings against the Terms of Reference

1. To what extent has the school been aligned with the Framework for Improving Student Learning (FISO)? What evidence of implementation and impact is emerging?

The 2016 Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) was aligned with FISO. While the School Council and staff had been introduced to FISO, up until the time of the review, an understanding of how FISO could be used individually, in teams and as a school to assess current levels of progress against the four statewide priorities—Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Professional Leadership, Positive Climate for Learning and Community Engagement in Learning was not developed. Using FISO to identify and assess current progress and then develop a clear pathway to identifying the next level of work was not common practice.

2. To what extent are leadership and governance structures, processes and practices developing the school as an effective professional learning community focused on improving student outcomes?

The School Council, staff and parents reported that a school improvement focus and the development of the school as an effective professional learning community had been difficult to sustain due to a number of leadership changes over the past two years. Staff and parents indicated that this had resulted in some difficulty in developing, sustaining and communicating common understandings about the school's vision and values and the meaning of a Steiner inspired program.

The adoption of a flat leadership model without a leadership team structure had not been effective in building the required leadership capacity throughout the school. Additional leadership capacity was required to design and manage the quality of teaching and learning, develop curriculum, assessment and moderation practices and monitor student achievement. The lack of well–distributed leadership had led to a lack of consistency, shared responsibility and collective accountability in school processes and practices.

3. To what extent is there a guaranteed and viable curriculum, aligned with the AusVELS/Victorian Curriculum requirements, guiding teachers and teams in establishing consistent and high quality curriculum planning and assessment practices to enhance student outcomes?

A lack of a whole school documented, sequential and developmental curriculum program, a schedule of assessments and an agreed, whole school teaching and learning model resulted in inconsistent practice across the school.

In 2016, teachers were focused on documenting curriculum and working to align the Victorian and Steiner curriculum expectations. However, curriculum documentation remained incomplete and therefore a clear line of sight between the curriculum standards, learning goals, learning activities and assessment strategies was not in place. So far, curriculum and weekly planning documents did not show how learning was differentiated for the broad range of student abilities. These factors have hindered the achievement of consistent and sustained school improvement and enhanced outcomes.

4. To what extent is student learning data collected, understood, analysed and used effectively to inform planning for point of need teaching and learning and to monitor student learning growth in literacy and numeracy?

A comparison of a range of student learning data sets showed that systematic processes to build the capacity of staff to make consistent judgements and to moderate assessments effectively had not been developed.

A regularly reviewed assessment schedule was not in place and therefore a whole school approach to the use of a range of selected assessments to monitor and track student progress in literacy and numeracy was not established. The ability of all staff to analyse and use it to inform more differentiated curriculum and point of need teaching and monitor student learning growth remained underdeveloped.

Assessment practices did not include a schedule of consistently implemented norm–referenced tests. Teacher judgements were often based on subjective testing of student progress. A lack of understanding of the importance of triangulating data to gain a balanced assessment impacted the accuracy of teacher judgements.

1.2.3   Key findings: areas for improvement

•   There was a lack of clarity and shared understanding by the whole school community of what is precisely meant by a Steiner influenced program.

•   Building leadership capacity, the development of a distributed leadership model and leadership team, with explicit descriptions of roles, responsibilities and expectations, was not established practice.

•   Curriculum documentation was incomplete and a clear line of sight between the curriculum standards, learning goals, learning activities and assessment strategies was not in place. The curriculum and weekly planning documents did not show how learning was differentiated for the broad range of student abilities.

• A full understanding by all staff of the role of evidence–based practice in teaching to the point of need, assessment moderation and data literacy in monitoring and being accountable for student learning growth was not embedded.

• Assessment practices did not include a schedule of consistently implemented norm–referenced tests. Teacher judgements were often based on subjective testing of student progress and lacked triangulation of data to gain a balanced assessment.

• There were few formal opportunities for student voice in school decision–making, in taking responsibility for learning, in providing feedback to teachers and leaders about concerns they may have, or in negotiating what and how they were learning.

• The school had a defined, whole school approach to the management of student behaviour, set out in a Kindness Framework. Consistent implementation of the framework both inside and outside classrooms was not embedded.

• The school had been unable to establish a high expectations culture related to student attendance with data indicating high levels of absenteeism, well above State mean levels, over the review period.

1.2.4   Next steps

The School Council, staff and parents acknowledge the need for change and improvement. Following the review, a plan will be established to respond to the issues identified and the school will be supported in achieving the plan so that it is able to communicate explicitly what it stands for and establish a cohesive, powerful professional learning community where all students achieve their potential.