

External validation - Executive Summary 2019

School: Cook School

Principal: [REDACTED]

School Code: 5575

Director, Educational Leadership: [REDACTED]

On 17/09/2019 our school will participate in external validation. In preparation for this meeting, the required body of evidence has been prepared, reviewed and annotated. The Executive Summary synthesises the annotated information provided in the body of evidence.

Our Executive Summary synthesises the annotated information provided in the body of evidence. Cook School values continuous improvement through the synthesis of data and feedback from a range of sources. Our school community view external validation as an opportunity to reflect and refine our practices using the School Excellence Framework.

Our school was established in 2002 to provide support for students who have been identified by their mainstream school as those who could benefit from the intensive educational and social support of a specialist setting.

Cook School currently has eight classes and runs four distinct specialist programs. There are three classes for students in Years K–6 that present with a diagnosed mental health support need (ED), one class for students in Years K–6 requiring Autism support (AU) with a second being established Term 4, 2019, three classes for students in Years 7–10 who typically demonstrate challenging behaviours in the classroom (BD), and a specialist intensive ED support class for a single student with high level support needs.

Student enrolment takes place via an operational directorate placement panel. The school aims to deliver a program designed to help all students learn to better manage their approach to learning and successfully integrate back into their referring schools.

Cook School sets challenging, yet attainable goals for all students. The emphasis is to provide students with a safe and caring environment in which they can access quality teaching and learning and be supported in building their capacity to self-regulate. Cook School operates on an integration model, with students initially attending four days and integrating into home schools or work placements one day per week, with the exception of the students in the AU support class, who attend 5 days per week.

Cook School has a staffing allocation of 22 and a head count of 30. Most of these positions are filled permanently, with a few temporary positions as there are a number of staff members seconded to higher duties in other areas of the Department of Education. All permanent teaching staff members have significant teaching experience (15+ years). There is very little staff turnover for both teachers and SASS, with the average length of service in the position being 8 years. Teacher staff are highly skilled with 75% holding additional post-graduate degrees.

All staff have an understanding of the SEF. The Self-Assessment process at the beginning of our EV journey involved all teaching staff, with staff looking in detail at each theme and suggesting available evidence sources for inclusion.

When looking at various ways to group all of the evidence into themes, a staff member suggested that we base it entirely upon the three strategic directions of our 2018–2020 School Plan and the six processes contained within. With this in mind the school leadership team mapped the elements of the SEF into the school plan and presented it to staff for agreement.

Staff members collected and submitted evidence and the external validation team annotated these, analysed them and made on-balance judgements using the SEF.

Future directions were written in the context of the steps that need to be taken to better meet the elements within each domain of Learning, Teaching or Leading, and vary greatly from the future directions outlined within our 2018 Annual Report, which are more process or action oriented. The school community are looking forward to the

feedback from this process in order to synthesise these directions and adjust our plans for the last year of this school planning cycle.

Learning

The results of this process indicated that in the School Excellence Framework domain of Learning:

Cook School rates itself as 'Sustaining and Growing' on all measures except for 'Wellbeing' and 'Reporting'. As a specialist education setting, relationship and a strong positive **learning culture** is at the core of all we do. We build supportive relationships with students, and strongly advocate for their social inclusion. We form constructive partnerships with parents, caregivers, support workers and referring school personnel with transparent processes for adjustment planning, which support clear improvement aims – evidenced by regular placement review meetings, clinics and personalised learning plan reviews.

Strong processes are in place to ensure students can connect, succeed and thrive back in their mainstream setting, following Cook School intervention, and schools are supported with improved capacity to meet student need. These assertions are evidenced by a strong reduction in student suspensions, improved attendance and successful transition to the mainstream.

Cook School has significantly improved student access to **curriculum** through targeted professional learning of staff and a huge investment in resources. Our K–6 school now has evidence-based explicit whole school literacy programs in place which are referenced to the curriculum in multi-stage units of work, with a suite of adjustments to provide differentiation for all learners. High School students are now achieving the award of a RoSA through an innovative curriculum delivery model that ensures students whose attendance is impacted by mental health concerns or increased integration, TAFE or Work Experience opportunities can still meet stage appropriate outcomes and connect with class teachers. Additionally, all students at Cook School have a personalised learning plan (PLP) written in partnership with families and stakeholders.

Over the last two planning cycles, the school has put significant resources into determining a consistent **assessment** suite to use 'for learning', 'as learning' and 'of learning'. This has been a complex journey. Most of our student cohort had had poor schooling experiences and are significantly behind their grade level. Many are triggered by the process of assessment itself. Additionally, as we are a short-term intervention and students remain census at their referring school, assessment data must be transferrable between settings and be easily interpreted by the school students return to. We believe we have got the mix right with our 2019 assessment measures and are already recording student growth.

In the element of **student performance measures**, Cook School can only work with internal measures, as described above, as we do not have access to NAPLAN, Best Start, Value Add, HSC or usual external assessments.

Reporting is the area which our on-balance judgement was at 'Delivering'. Our student reports are personalised, comprehensive and contain clear, detailed specific information about student learning, as well as self-regulation and behaviour progress. 'Next steps' and suggestions for further improvement are all outlined, and parents have the opportunity to discuss any concerns arising with teachers.

It is in the area of **wellbeing** that much of our activity is focused, and we marked this theme at excelling. Our PBL framework has been independently assessed as high performing and creating a consistent and positive environment for learning. Individual student needs are explicitly addressed and informed by sound holistic information in consultation with parents and carers. We have embarked on innovative programs to support student wellbeing which have transformed school practice, as evidenced by our Schools Plus project and the associated research paper we have produced with our tertiary academic partner. This expertise has been further recognised by the DoE, with the 'Every Student is Known, Valued and Cared For' team singling Cook School out as one of 12 exemplars of best practice in wellbeing supports across the state.

Teaching

The results of this process indicated that in the School Excellence Framework domain of Teaching:

Effective classroom practice and **professional standards** are both sustaining and growing. A whole school approach ensures the most effective evidence-based teaching methods optimise learning progress for all students.

There are thorough student screening processes in place for literacy, numeracy, sensory and motor supports and well as social–emotional capacity. Lesson sequences are planned with this knowledge and evidence–based interventions are selected for both curriculum and wellbeing. Effective methods such as the 'Berry Street Education Model', 'Cognitive Load Theory' and 'Zones of Regulation' are identified, promoted and modelled consistently across the school. Staff collaborate in order to explicitly link social–emotional learning within the curriculum, which is reflected in lesson programs and documentation. PBL processes are also explicitly taught every day, with focus areas rotating in five–week cycles, ensuring all learning environments are well managed and consistent.

While all teaching and non–teaching staff have current PDPs that reflect both staff member and school priorities, and are high performing, through this evaluation process we believe that as a school we could do more to encourage and promote accreditation at the higher levels.

Data skills and use is another area in we, on–balance, we believe we are delivering. We collect significant amounts of data in the form of student behaviour, which is collated and tracked for growth and improvement, as well as student growth measures from norm–referenced assessments. While all staff have had PL in the administration and interpretation of the [REDACTED] assessments, we believe that further work could be done to support staff to have a sound understanding of data concepts, as they have experienced some difficulty translating these data sets to mainstream colleagues. Due to our short–term program and small student cohort, longitudinal tracking of program effectiveness has been a challenge, and it is a key area in which we are in discussions with our tertiary research partner to work towards addressing.

Learning and development is an area at which our school believe we are excelling. All staff complete significant amounts of professional learning throughout the year and there are clear frameworks and practices that ensure this learning is embedded into classrooms so that students are ultimately the beneficiaries. A distributed leadership model exists within the school and all staff have carriage of school–plan related projects. Staff are explicitly mentoring teachers from other schools and, have also written and delivered NESA accredited course to mainstream teachers in the area of trauma–informed practice. Our transdisciplinary education model with the occupational therapist has seen staff significantly expand their skillset by drawing on expertise from outside education in order to better support the whole student.

Leading

The results of this process indicated that in the School Excellence Framework domain of Leading:

Cook School's leadership team has expanded in 2019. A new position of 'Instructional Leader – Wellbeing' was created, and one of the three Assistant Principal positions has been converted into a Deputy Principal position. These changes will be instrumental as we move into the final year of this planning cycle, and prepare ourselves for the next.

The leadership team continually look to expand knowledge and skills, presenting as high–performing **educational leaders** for staff, reflected in People Matter survey results. Leadership is collaborative and distributed, demonstrating great confidence in all staff.

The school is outward–looking and continually seeking out ways in which we can use our specialist skills and resources to improves outcomes for students outside of our school gates. We believe in leading profound and sustainable change for our student cohort and as such ensure staff are engaged in current evidence–based best practice in teaching and wellbeing initiatives.

Management practices and processes are sound, with clear communication and procedures that ensure all are aware of their roles and responsibilities, ensuring a safe working environment for students and staff. There is a collaborative approach to service delivery improvement, with all staff leading key projects in support of the intended outcomes of the school plan.

School resourcing has been a significant area of growth during the past few years, which we would judge to be at excelling. Staff members have been successful at sourcing community grants and ongoing funding in order to build new indoor and outdoor areas within the school, upgrade ICT, significantly improve the range of literacy and numeracy resources and fund innovative projects, such as our transdisciplinary education model. None of this was possible four years ago when the school was running at a structural financial deficit. Spending on short term casual staffing has also dropped by almost 80% per capita since the introduction of more flexible staffing models and better staff deployment methods.

School Planning, implementation and reporting is an area that upon discussion and analysis of evidence we believed that we were at a higher level than we had previously thought. The school plan is the basis for all activities within the school. Milestones are up to date, evaluated and projects are on target, and in some cases achieving better than expected impact. The plan itself, has proven to be well–thought out and using an internal logic model, given to us by our Schools Plus coach, we were able to colour–code themes and address gaps prior to finalising it –

ensuring that it meets the needs of the school and its community. Upon reflecting on its implementation, through the EV process, we now believe that we are excelling within this element.