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# Riverside Primary School

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## Executive Summary

Expert Review Group

June 2010



Department of **Education**

## Context

Riverside Primary School is a Level 6 school in Mandurah enrolling some 644 students, of whom 39 are Aboriginal, from Kindergarten to Year 7.

Students are drawn from a wide catchment area, with families representing diverse social and economic backgrounds. The school has a socioeconomic index of 92.72, placing it in the State Band 2 category, and a national decile rank of 9.

Riverside Primary School was built in 1994, in the modern learning block style. Two new classroom blocks are currently being constructed under the Australian Government building program. It is on a large site, with a shared community oval.

The school offers several specialist curriculum areas: physical education, music, library, drama, Indonesian and Aboriginal language studies. It has established a number of pastoral care and environmental programs.

Riverside Learning Centre is situated on site and caters for students with disabilities. Students from the Centre are integrated into classes in the Primary School when appropriate. A combined School Council and Parents and Citizens' Association serves both schools.

## Review methodology

The methodology developed by the Expert Review Group incorporates three key features:

- a thorough and rigorous desktop examination of the school's performance data and assessment reports. This process identifies lines of inquiry to be pursued at the school site;
- the co-opting of additional Expert Review Group team members with specialist knowledge and skills relevant to the context of the school under review; and
- a school visit of four days duration.

Interviewees included the Principal, three deputy principals; the executive teams of Riverside Primary School and Riverside Learning Centre; 20 teachers; literacy and numeracy specialist teachers (past and present); two registrars; five education assistants; the chaplain; the Aboriginal and Islander education officer; student council representatives; student faction captains; various groups of students involved in specific programs; eight parent representatives of the School Council and Parents and Citizens' Association, including the patron of the school; members of the Environmental Committee; canteen managers; parent and community volunteers; and the relevant Director Schools.

### The Expert Review Group team

Janine Milton	Director, Schools Review, Expert Review Group
Maxine Augustson	Principal, Mount Lockyer Primary School
Gavin Power	Consultant Principal, National Partnership Program
Steve Richards	Principal, Wirrabirra Primary School

## Findings

The Expert Review Group's major findings are as follows:

- 1. For the past six years, student performance in literacy (especially writing) has been consistently higher than in like schools. Student performance in Year 3 is particularly strong.**

Student performance in Year 3 has been consistently above expected levels in all areas tested by the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) between 2004 and 2007 and the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in 2008 and 2009.

Student performance in Years 5 and 7 has generally been within or above expectations in literacy and in accordance with expectations in numeracy.

In 2008, the school's mean scores in 14 out of 15 tests were higher than predicted and in 2009, 11 out of 15 mean scores were higher than predicted.

Riverside Primary School had at least 10 per cent fewer students performing at or below the national minimum standards than like schools in Western Australia in all tests in Year 3 and in the majority of tests in Year 7.

There were fewer students at risk in writing and punctuation and grammar in Years 3, 5 and 7 than in like schools in Western Australia.

- 2. Several whole-school literacy strategies are well established. Highly respected specialist teachers have supported the staff and the school over many years in implementing a range of quality programs and explicit teaching strategies.**

Employment of valued and respected specialist literacy teachers over many years has assisted teachers to embed strategies such as First Steps, reciprocal reading, repeated reading, Chunks-Investigate-Memory-Practice (CHIMP) and Reading in Bed-It's Terrific (RIB-IT) in their literacy programs.

Strong student performance in writing appears to be a result of a whole-school focus on the explicit teaching of narrative structure, paragraphing and spelling. Effective teaching, especially in the early childhood years, has established a strong foundation for literacy learning across the school.

Teachers have developed differentiated approaches, targeting the specific needs of students in their classes.

In recognition of the higher than expected student achievement in literacy, the school was a finalist in the Western Australian Literacy School of the Year Awards in 2009.

- 3. The school, led by a cohesive executive team, has developed a safe and supportive learning environment that is orderly, friendly, welcoming and inclusive. Proactive problem solving, the building of trust through positive relationships, structure, predictability and consistency are all key components of the school's approach. There is a school wide focus on positive rewards for good behaviour.**

The school leadership team is very strong and cohesive, with all members being recognised by staff and parents as approachable, fair and effective leaders who contribute actively to the school's effectiveness.

They have a collective philosophy of 'enabling' - building upon the strengths of individuals, developing a responsive team and seeking innovative ways to make things happen.

School leaders are proactive in their approach, establishing programs and strategies to deal with underlying issues and problems rather than reacting to isolated incidents. Problems are tackled and resolved in a positive and progressive way. This 'can-do' attitude is a key to the success of the school.

There is a high level of trust among the members of the executive team and between the executive team and staff.

All members of the executive team play an active role in ensuring that the learning environment is calm and orderly and the pastoral care of students is maintained, enabling staff to focus on teaching and learning.

They are in the playground before and after school and during all breaks. This enables them to model positive behaviour, provide greater supervision, take a more active role in play based activities and establish stronger connections with students and their families.

- 4. A significant number of programs are in place to address student engagement, alienation, remediation and emotional issues. In combination with whole-school pastoral care processes, they provide an effective 'wraparound' support for students at risk.**

Riverside Primary School is recognised for its strong pastoral care focus, which extends to and includes families and the community.

The school has been proactive in seeking funds and staff to support initiatives such as the Song Room (providing drama and drumbeat programs), the chaplaincy, the Rainbows, the Breakfast Club, the environmental program, Repeated Reading and one-on-one literacy support.

Effective training and use of education assistants, parents and volunteers to provide structured and purposeful literacy intervention is extremely beneficial to students at risk.

Key staff and a number of community volunteers have mentoring roles with specific students. The development of ongoing, respectful relationships between mentors and students is extremely beneficial.

Students state that they feel safe, well supported and cared for by the school and its staff. They comment that it is a friendly school where teachers make learning fun.

**5. The school has a critical mass of good teachers. They develop positive learning environments through effective, relevant and appropriate teaching and classroom management practices, thus facilitating targeted and individualised intervention and support for students.**

Many teachers have remained at the school for a number of years. They demonstrate that they genuinely care for students, have high expectations of them and have a strong collective ethos that seeks to provide the most supportive and appropriate educational environment possible.

Programs offering small group and individualised support for students at risk are a feature of the school. This is particularly evident in literacy, where trained education assistants and parent helpers provide structured daily support in reading. Students value this approach and state that it provides a personalised safety net.

Classrooms are generally vibrant, stimulating and well managed learning environments. Student engagement and motivation are high.

Many teachers demonstrate effective class management strategies, implementing appropriate pedagogy and curriculum that actively engages students.

The management of disruptive students (through collegiate support, buddy classrooms and support from school administrative staff) reduces the impact of their behaviour on the learning of other students.

Students state that their teachers are caring and effective. They generally enjoy learning and find the activity based approach and differentiated support make lessons enjoyable and motivating.

**6. A strong and supportive professional culture has been developed in the school over many years. Teaching and non-teaching staff willingly share with colleagues and take on additional roles and responsibilities that enhance the engagement and learning of students.**

Positive relationships are actively developed by staff at all levels. This has built a culture of trust and sharing that encourages people to make extra efforts to maintain the extensive suite of programs for students.

Staff volunteer to undertake additional roles and responsibilities as they appreciate the positive impact this will have on students.

Leadership is dispersed through the school, with many teachers and education assistants demonstrating effective and progressive leadership of projects and programs.

Tasks are delegated to staff with clear role statements and expectations, appropriate supervision and support, and abundant praise.

Teachers share programs and ideas willingly, demonstrating a very committed, supportive and professional approach.

**7. Staff, students, parents and community members value and take pride in the school. Effective communication and the development of positive partnerships with families and the community have created a strong school identity and sense of belonging.**

Riverside Primary School is well regarded by parents and community members. They appreciate the 'personal touch' from school leaders and staff and describe it as being a very family friendly school.

The commitment of the executive team and staff to developing and maintaining strong, positive relationships with students, parents, community members and colleagues underpins the successful culture in the school.

Proactive communication processes ensure that staff, students and parents are well informed about forthcoming events. School leaders model mutual respect and care in verbal communication with staff and students.

The staff, students and community show pride in the school's facilities. The incidence of vandalism and graffiti is low.

The school is seen as a friendly, community oriented place that cares for the environment and the people within it.

**8. The school is well organised and well resourced. Resources are innovatively accessed and strategically and flexibly used to optimise student learning.**

The school is well resourced with staff, finances, facilities and information and communications technology infrastructure.

It has sound financial, physical and human resources management practices.

Staff state that they have access to adequate resources and the purchasing of required resources is effective and efficient.

The school library is extremely well resourced, with books, teaching resources, computers and other information and communications technology equipment. Its central location and effective staffing make it a learning hub for the school.

Effective human resource management processes are in place to maximise the strengths of staff and cater effectively for identified student needs. Flexibility is maintained through strategic and proactive staff deployment.

The school buildings and grounds are purposely developed to engender school pride, shared ownership and a feeling of community. Facilities are well maintained and utilised. A high standard of equipment is apparent in the school's playgrounds.

## Conclusion

Riverside Primary School has consistently demonstrated that its students achieve better literacy results than students in like schools.

It has developed a number of areas of exemplary practice that combine to create an environment that supports students' learning.

Sustained effective leadership by a number of people over many years has enabled the school to build on past practices and achievements. This stability is a key to the school's success.

Quality staff, both teaching and non-teaching, have contributed over time to the development of a strong professional culture. Their willingness to share and assist others has led to the development of strong personal and professional bonds. Staff display a high level of commitment to the school and the community. Their satisfaction is obvious.

The capacity of the school to support and nurture all students, sometimes through extreme adversity, is quite extraordinary. The genuine care, trust and mutual respect that exist among the members of the school community are easily observed. Students feel safe and well supported.

The school is well placed to continue providing a quality education for its students.