



# School Improvement Unit Report

## Thargomindah State School





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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This report is a product of a review carried out at Thargomindah State School from 26 to 27 October 2015. It provides an evaluation of the school's performance against the nine domains of the [National School Improvement Tool](#). It also recommends improvement strategies for the school to consider in consultation with its regional office and school community.

The review and report were completed by a review team from the School Improvement Unit (SIU). For more information about the SIU and the new reviews for Queensland state schools please visit the Department of Education and Training (DET) [website](#).

## 1.2 School context

<b>Location:</b>	Dowling Street, Thargomindah
<b>Education region:</b>	Darling Downs South West
<b>The school opened in:</b>	1884
<b>Year levels:</b>	Prep to Year 6
<b>Current school enrolment:</b>	23
<b>Indigenous enrolments:</b>	34 per cent
<b>Students with disability enrolments:</b>	4 per cent
<b>Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value:</b>	913
<b>Year principal appointed:</b>	2014
<b>Number of teachers:</b>	3
<b>Nearby schools:</b>	Cunnamulla P-12 State School, Eulo State School, Yowah State School, Eromanga State School
<b>Significant community partnerships:</b>	Bulloo Shire Council, Cluster Schools, School of Distance Education
<b>Unique school programs:</b>	E-Kindy, Remote Secondary Learning Program



### 1.3 Review methodology

The review was conducted by a team of two reviewers.

The review consisted of:

- a pre-review audit of the school's performance data and other school information
- consultation with the school's Assistant Regional Director
- a school visit of two days
- interviews with staff, students, parents and community representatives, including:
  - Principal
  - Two teachers
  - Guidance officer
  - Administration officer
  - Three teacher aides
  - Two student leaders and 10 students
  - Parents and Citizens' Association (P&C) president and secretary
  - Eight parents
  - Principal of Eulo State School
  - Bulloo Shire Mayor and community relations manager

### 1.4 Review team

Judy Dale	Internal reviewer, SIU (review chair)
Richard Nash	Peer reviewer

### 1.5 Reading the report

The executive summary outlines key findings from the review. The key improvement strategies prioritise future direction for improvement. The executive summary should be read along with the findings and improvement strategies outlined in the nine domains which provide a strategic view for improvement.



## 2. Executive summary

### 2.1 Key findings

- There is a school-wide commitment to every student's success and a strong and optimistic commitment by all staff to school improvement.

Reading, spelling, writing and number have been identified as school priorities. There is a shared understanding by staff, parents and students that reading is a focus area. Staff, students and parents speak positively of student progress in reading. There is an opportunity to strengthen the improvement agenda through explicit action planning and the development of a school reading framework.

- The school team places high priority on, and is committed to assessing, identifying and catering for the needs of all students.

The school principal and teachers view reliable and timely student data as central to effective school leadership and to the implementation of responsive learning programs for students. A range of diagnostic tools and trackers are used effectively to monitor and celebrate student progress. A range of individualised and targeted programs are in place to personalise learning.

- School leaders and staff take personal responsibility for continuous improvement in teaching practices within the school.

Reflective, professional conversations by staff focus on improving student outcomes and are a regular aspect of school life. The school has a pedagogical framework which is based on current research. Some elements of the framework appear in classrooms, however the use of agreed teaching practices is not yet consistent. A professional learning plan for the school is yet to be developed.

- The Australian Curriculum is delivered using Curriculum into the Classroom units as a resource with units of work adapted to suit the local context and cater to individual student needs, backgrounds, experiences and interests.

The school focuses attention and energy on priority curriculum areas and ensuring all students are proficient in the basics. The principal and teachers acknowledge the need to develop a whole-school curriculum plan that provides an overview of units of work and what is taught from year to year whilst accommodating the needs of the multi-age school setting. Cluster school partnerships have been established to support the development of curriculum frameworks.



- The tone of the school is a respectful, positive happy one with productive relationships evident throughout the school.

Parents and community members speak positively of the school and its important role in community life. There has been significant improvement in attendance over time. The school actively promotes positive behaviour. Student learning and progress is actively recognised and celebrated. Students speak with pride about their school and recognise the commitment of staff to student learning and wellbeing.

- The school makes deliberate and strategic use of partnerships with families, local businesses and community organisations to enhance student learning and wellbeing.

The school has an established and highly successful partnership with the Bulloo Shire Council. Through this partnership the council provides significant resourcing for a range of learning initiatives. These include the E-Kindy program, playgroup and the Remote Secondary Learning program and homework club. The school's committed Parents and Citizens' Association takes an active role in guiding and supporting school decision-making and providing additional resourcing.



## 2.2 Key improvement strategies

- Refine the current improvement agenda with staff to identify a sharp, narrow and deep focus supported by a clearly articulated explicit action plan with achievable, measurable targets and timelines.
- Develop and implement a whole-school sequenced curriculum plan aligned to the Australian Curriculum.
- Collaboratively review the school's pedagogical framework to clearly outline the school's signature teaching practices.
- Formalise a reading program to provide clear guidance and consistency of practice for teachers, teacher aides and the school community.
- Develop a professional learning plan responsive to individual staff needs, aligned to the school's improvement agenda and pedagogical framework, and supported by timely whole-school coaching, observation and feedback cycles.



### 3. Findings and improvement strategies against the domains

#### 3.1 An explicit improvement agenda

##### Findings

There is a school-wide commitment to every student's success, a strong and optimistic commitment by all staff to school improvement and a clear belief that further improvement is possible.

The school expects all students to learn successfully and has high expectations for student attendance, engagement and outcomes. Students, parents and community members speak positively of the school's high expectations and the staff's commitment to improving student learning.

Reading, spelling and number have been identified as the current improvement agenda of the school. The degree to which these are supported by explicit action planning is limited.

There is a shared understanding by staff, parents and students that reading is a priority area. Staff, students and parents speak positively of student progress in reading. This is supported by positive gains in individual reading data.

Significant efforts have been made to understand students' current achievement levels through collection and analysis of a range of data.

Differentiated teaching and learning is implicit in classroom practice.

Regional targets are used as the basis for tracking student progress in reading. The school has developed a tracking tool to monitor student progress in numeracy.

A whole-school reading program to clearly document agreed and consistent reading practices and shared language is not yet in place.

The school is currently working with cluster schools to develop a range of school plans to provide direction in curriculum and pedagogical practices and have begun by developing English and mathematics curriculum frameworks.

##### Supporting data

Strategic Plan 2012-2015, Annual Implementation Plan 2015, Great Results Guarantee 2015, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, school website, school newsletters, pedagogical framework, staff, student, community member and leadership team interviews, classroom observations and student work samples, classroom displays, school data wall, school maths tracker, OneSchool records.



### **Improvement strategies**

Refine the current improvement agenda with staff to identify a sharp, narrow and deep focus supported by a clearly articulated explicit action plan with achievable, measurable targets and timelines.

Formalise a reading program to provide clear guidance and consistency of practice for teachers, teacher aides and the school community.



## 3.2 Analysis and discussion of data

### Findings

The school principal and teachers view reliable and timely student data as central to effective school leadership and to the implementation of responsive learning programs for students.

The school implements a comprehensive and systemic collection of a range of student achievement data. This is centrally stored on G drive and OneSchool and displayed on classroom and office walls for quick reference and regular review. Assessment tools include *Words Their Way*, PM Benchmark, PROBE, *Keylinks*, PAT-M, PAT-R and NCR Diagnostic Maths.

Attendance data is effectively tracked and actioned, as evidenced by improvements in student attendance.

The school is yet to document a data action plan and yearly data collection overview for the systematic collection and analysis of achievement data.

There is strong evidence that student achievement data is being used in a timely manner to monitor individual student achievement and inform school and classroom practices. Class teachers regularly draw on individual student data to track student progress against regional targets, to personalise learning and celebrate success.

The school is beginning to use reading data with students to encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning.

The school has developed a tracking tool in mathematics aligned to the Australian Curriculum. This is used to track student progress against achievement standards and inform planning.

Whilst there is evidence of the school's commitment to effective use of data to inform school and classroom practices, staff recognise that further professional development and consolidation is needed to further build skills in analysing and interpreting data.

There has been priority placed on quality assuring assessment and reporting practices through triangulation of data, use of achievement standards and participation in moderation with cluster schools each term.

In 2015, National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) preliminary results for students in Year 3 were similar to that of the similar Queensland state schools cohort in all domains other than reading which was below.

### Supporting data

Annual Implementation Plan 2015, Great Results Guarantee 2015, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, staff, student, community member and leadership team interviews, classroom observations and student work samples, classroom displays, school data wall, school mathematics tracker, OneSchool records.



### **Improvement strategies**

Develop a school data plan with clear school targets and benchmarks linked to the priority areas, to scaffold systematic collection, analysis and reporting of student data and to inform school and classroom practices.

Continue to provide multiple opportunities, for staff to further develop data literacy through professional development and regular engagement with data at whole school, cohort, class and individual levels.



### 3.3 A culture that promotes learning

#### Findings

The tone of the school is a respectful, positive and happy one. Positive and productive relationships are evident throughout the school. The school provides a safe, respectful, caring and productive learning environment as evidenced by positive classroom interactions and feedback from staff parents, students and community members.

The school presents positively to the school community in both its physical appearance and welcoming culture. Thargomindah community members speak positively of the school and the important role it plays in community life.

Parents and community members recognise and appreciate the commitment and efforts of school staff both within the school and as active contributors to community life.

Parents are valued as partners in their child's learning. The school provides multiple opportunities for parent participation including a playgroup, weekly parades, school community events, parent information sessions and parent teacher interviews. The Parents and Citizens' Association (P&C) is consulted in school decision-making. P&C members express some frustration that not all parents are actively engaged in school life.

The school's safe and supportive environment is strongly endorsed by parents, students and staff. There are few behavioural incidents that distract from teaching time. Students interviewed spoke of respectful and caring relationships across the school.

Staff speak with pride and ownership of the school and describe a culture of care, respect, collegiality and support. Staff morale is high.

At the time of the review, the school attendance rate stands at 93.8 per cent with no students attending less than 85 per cent of the school year. Attendance data indicates significant improvement over time. Monitoring and celebration of student attendance is occurring and non-attendance is regularly followed up. The school is yet to document policy and procedures in relation to student attendance.

The school actively promotes positive behaviour through the implementation of the *Six Kinds of Best, Values Education Program* which provides a weekly focus for school assemblies.

Positive behaviour is encouraged and celebrated through a variety of strategies across the school. There is a strong commitment to providing positive incentives for students to acknowledge appropriate behaviour. Students interviewed valued and spoke positively about these incentives.

The school's Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students is due for review and does not reflect current school practices.

Some school staff are trained in Essential Skills in Classroom Management and classroom profiling. Data provides opportunities for reflective practice.



### **Supporting data**

Strategic Plan 2012-2015, Annual Implementation Plan 2015, Great Results Guarantee 2015, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, school website, Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students, Discipline Audit Report 2014, school newsletters, staff, student, community member and leadership team interviews, classroom observations and student work samples, classroom displays, OneSchool records.

### **Improvement strategies**

Review the school's Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students to ensure it reflects current practice.

Continue to explore, and refine communication strategies and ways of engaging all parents in school life.



### 3.4 Targeted use of school resources

#### Findings

The school has implemented a range of strategies for identifying individual student learning needs and works collaboratively with support staff to ensure responsive programs are in place to respond to these needs.

The school's current bank balance is \$123 964. The Great Results Guarantee funds of \$13 660 are allocated to supporting targeted intervention for identified students, resourcing the E-Kindy and playgroup programs and teacher professional development in the teaching of writing.

Physical spaces and learning resources are used effectively to maximise student engagement in learning. Staff use classroom spaces creatively for whole-school, small group and individual work.

The school has established effective partnerships with local government and community organisations to provide substantial additional resources to support student learning and wellbeing.

The school has invested in a number of on-line learning programs including *Reading Eggs*, *Mathletics*, *Spell City* and *Literacy Planet*. The use of these programs in supporting student learning is yet to be maximised.

There is some evidence of targeted intervention programs to address individual student needs. The degree to which the effectiveness of these programs are being tracked over time is unclear.

Developing performance plans for staff are currently being developed.

There is significant financial investment both by the school and the local council in teacher aides as partners in the delivery of learning programs. Teacher aides expressed a desire to further build their skills through professional development in priority areas.

#### Supporting data

Annual Implementation Plan 2015, Great Results Guarantee 2015, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, budget overview, staff, student, community member and leadership team interviews, classroom and school displays.

#### Improvement strategies

Develop individual performance plans for all staff to address individual needs, aligned school priorities and supported by responsive professional development.

Continue to explore ways to maximise and monitor the effectiveness of personalised learning and targeted intervention programs.



### 3.5 An expert teaching team

#### Findings

There is clear evidence that the principal sees the continual development of staff members as a coherent team, as pivotal to improved student learning outcomes.

There is a culture of sharing and collegial support and strong evidence of a school-wide shared responsibility for student learning and success.

Teaching staff meet formally fortnightly to discuss curriculum, student progress and responsive teaching practices.

The school accesses regional resources to support staff development, school programming and planning for students with disabilities.

The school is actively networking with other small schools to provide collegial support and develop a cluster approach to curriculum development and teacher induction.

Some strategies are in place to support staff including an induction and mentoring program for graduate teachers. Professional learning opportunities are provided for aspirational leaders.

Teaching staff have participated in the take the lead and mentoring beginning teachers programs.

Staff members source on-line learning, relevant courses and continually reflect on their classroom practice with a focus on improved student learning.

Staff are open to sharing and demonstrate a commitment to improvement in teaching. Developing performance plans are being developed for all staff however no formal, regular feedback strategies are in place. There is limited alignment of these plans with the school's improvement agenda.

A professional learning plan is yet to be developed with alignment to the school's improvement agenda and inclusive of individual staff needs.

Formal observation and feedback processes are yet to be developed for teachers and teacher aides.

The school faces some challenges recruiting and retaining quality staff to address identified needs.

#### Supporting data

Annual Implementation Plan 2015, Great Results Guarantee 2015, School Data Profile, Headline Indicators, cluster school meeting minutes, budget overview, staff, student and leadership team interviews.



### **Improvement strategies**

Develop a professional learning plan responsive to individual staff needs, aligned to the school's improvement agenda and pedagogical framework, and supported by whole-school coaching, observation and feedback cycles.

Work collaboratively with regional staff to develop a workforce plan including a recruitment and retention strategy.



### 3.6 Systematic curriculum delivery

#### Findings

The Australian Curriculum is delivered using Curriculum into the Classroom units as a resource. There is evidence that units of work are adapted to suit the local context and cater to individual student needs, backgrounds, experiences and interests.

The principal and teachers acknowledge the need to develop a whole-school curriculum plan that provides an overview of units of work and what is taught from year to year and accommodates the needs of the multi-age school setting.

The school is actively networking with other small schools to support curriculum development. Current priorities for the cluster include development of multi-age frameworks for English and mathematics.

Teachers backward map from the assessment tasks and use the guide to making judgements for the appropriate year level when assessing student work.

The school focuses attention and energy on priority curriculum areas and ensuring all students are proficient in the basics. There is some evidence of the teaching of cross-curricular skills although the school is yet to develop school-wide strategies to ensure a consistent approach.

The school has adopted Sheena Cameron's<sup>1</sup>, reading comprehension strategies to scaffold the teaching of reading. The consistent use of these strategies across the school is developing.

The school is yet to develop consistent approaches to teaching other elements of reading such as decoding and vocabulary.

The teachers moderate once a term using iConnect and Blackboard with colleagues in other small schools in the cluster.

Reporting processes are aligned with the Australian Curriculum and provide parents with information about the achievement of student against and progress

#### Supporting data

Annual Implementation Plan 2015, Great Results Guarantee 2015, school website, cluster school meeting minutes, pedagogical framework, school curriculum plans, staff and leadership team interviews, classroom observations and student work samples, classroom displays, school data wall, school mathematics tracker, OneSchool records.

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<sup>1</sup> Cameron, Sheena 2009, *Teaching Reading Comprehension Strategies: A Practical Classroom Guide*, Pearson, New Zealand.



### **Improvement strategies**

Develop an explicit, coherent and sequenced curriculum plan, with clear alignment to the Australian Curriculum.



### 3.7 Differentiated teaching and learning

#### Findings

To address the multi-age nature of the small school setting, differentiation is central to classroom practice.

Individual curriculum plans and evidence-based plans are currently being developed to document the differentiation strategies that are enacted for each student.

The school team places high priority on and is committed to assessing, identifying and catering for the needs of all students. The school uses a range of diagnostic tools to monitor student progress and identify learning needs. A formal assessment schedule is yet to be developed.

Teachers actively consult with parents to ensure the needs of students are met and engage parents in celebrations of learning as evidenced by events such as the school's *Cooking up a Storm on Dowling Street* and a toy/energy expo.

Tracker Diagnostic numeracy tests provide pre- and post- test data to inform differentiation in the classroom.

Small group and individual instruction in reading, spelling and numeracy is provided across the school, based on data. Students' progress is reviewed regularly and groupings altered in response to changing student needs. Teacher aides work with individual students requiring additional support.

Staff work creatively to ensure that all students including the high achieving students are appropriately challenged and engaged through a range of classroom activities designed to meet student learning needs, interests and motivations. Topics and tasks are selected and modified to personalise learning for students. Students interviewed report that the work provided is at their level and helped them learn.

Targeted intervention programs are in place for students identified as requiring additional support.

The school draws on a range of on-line programs and School of Distance Education programs to meet the needs of the range of learners. These include Project 600, IMPACT, E-Kindy and languages.

Students are encouraged to monitor their own learning and progress, particularly in reading. Students interviewed could articulate reading levels and spoke enthusiastically of the motocross data track used to acknowledge achievement and progress. The use individual learning goals by students is yet to be developed.

#### Supporting data

Staff, student, community member and leadership team interviews, classroom observations, student work samples, classroom displays, school data wall, school mathematics tracker, OneSchool records.



### **Improvement strategies**

Explore the use of individual student learning goals in priority areas to further promote student engagement in and ownership of their own learning.



### 3.8 Effective pedagogical practices

#### Findings

Staff take personal responsibility for continuous improvement in teaching practices in the school. Reflective, professional conversations by staff which focus on improving student outcomes are a regular aspect of school life.

Personal developing performance plans are in development and opportunities for professional development are provided through a variety of sources.

The school has a pedagogical framework based on current research. Some elements of the framework appear in classrooms. There is evidence of teachers using strategies including warm ups, We are learning to (WALT), What I'm looking for (WILF) and This is because (TIB) and the gradual release of responsibility model of *I Do, We Do, You Do* in their classrooms. The degree to which the pedagogical framework reflects current practice is limited.

The principal acknowledges the need to identify and consistently use a range of appropriate pedagogical practices throughout the school. There is limited evidence of the modelling of effective teaching strategies and the provision of on-going feedback.

There is a particular focus on improving teaching practices in reading, spelling and mathematics. Small group and individualised instruction are a regular aspect of the classroom.

Foundations have been laid to set high expectations for every student's progress as evidenced by the work being undertaken by staff through their focus on visually tracking student achievement against targets and standards.

Teachers use student data, pre-testing and guides to making judgements to provide relevant and constructive feedback to students.

The school team works collaboratively with other local schools through a variety of cluster arrangements professional support and curriculum development.

Regional staff and resources have been utilised to support the school's development in identified priority areas.

#### Supporting data

Annual Implementation Plan 2015, Great Results Guarantee 2015, cluster school meeting minutes, school newsletters, budget overview, pedagogical framework, staff, student, community member and leadership team interviews, classroom observations and student work samples, classroom displays, school data wall, school mathematics tracker, OneSchool records.



### **Improvement strategies**

Collaboratively review the school's pedagogical framework by drawing on current research to identify and clearly outline the school's signature teaching practices.

Embed signature teaching practices consistently across the school through modelling, observation and feedback cycles.



### 3.9 School and community partnerships

#### Findings

The school makes deliberate and strategic use of partnerships with families, local businesses and community organisations to enhance student learning and wellbeing.

Parents and community members speak highly of the school and school staff. Parents, staff and students show a commendable pride in their school and view it as central to community life.

The school has an established and highly successful partnership with the Bulloo Shire Council. Through this partnership the council provides significant resourcing for a range of learning initiatives. These include the E-Kindy program, playgroup and the Remote Secondary Learning program and homework club.

The school has a documented Memorandum of Understanding with the Bulloo Council and the Charleville School of Distance Education for the operation of the Remote Secondary Learning program on site.

The school's swimming program is made possible through the use of the council pool.

Parents and community members interviewed speak highly of the Remote Secondary Learning program and acknowledge this program as being central to families remaining in the community.

School staff and parents value the early learning initiatives including the E-Kindy and playgroup and tell stories of significant improvement in social-emotional development and school readiness.

Student leaders from the school meet quarterly with the Bulloo Council and provide a youth perspective for potential improvements for the community. Student input is valued by the council as evidenced by their uptake of student ideas such as the building of a skate park, road safety measures and solar street lighting.

The school actively uses a range of communication strategies to engage with parents and the wider community including distributing the school newsletter to all households in the community in partnership with the local post office.

The school actively participates in community life through community events such as ANZAC Day. Community organisations are regularly included as participants in school life such as weekly awards by the Adopt-a-Cop.

The school's committed P&C takes an active role in guiding and supporting school decision-making and providing additional resourcing to improve student learning and wellbeing. The P&C supports initiatives such as the small schools camp and is currently providing funding for students to attend Tallebudgera Camp.

The school has established a number of partnerships with cluster schools to enable additional learning opportunities for students such as the small schools sports camp and



Tallebudgera camp. Partnerships with cluster schools also support curriculum development and collegial networking.

### **Supporting data**

Strategic Plan 2012-2015, Annual Implementation Plan 2015, school website, cluster school meeting minutes, school newsletters, pedagogical framework, staff, student, community member and leadership team interviews, classroom observations.

### **Improvement strategies**

Continue to work collaboratively with cluster networks to support the development of curriculum frameworks and provide further professional development opportunities for staff.

Continue to investigate ways to sustain and enhance key partnerships and identify new opportunities.



#### **4. Follow-up timelines**

- School to publish the executive summary on their website within two weeks.
- School to meet with Assistant Regional Director to discuss review findings and improvement strategies.