



Department of Education Services

Carson Street School

2012

Independent Review Findings



Independent Review of
Independent Public Schools

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Disclaimer

This document has been based on the findings of the independent reviewers' verification of the school's self-review. The school's self-review has been complemented by information provided by the Department of Education.

The Department of Education Services quality assures the findings of the independent reviewers.

The findings of the independent review are forwarded to the Director General of Education, the Principal and the Board Chair.

The Department of Education Services can only guarantee the authenticity of original documents.

School and Review Details

Principal:	Mr John Exeter
Board Chair:	Mr Les Ozsdolay
School Location:	19 Carson St, East Victoria Park, WA 6101
School Classification:	Education Support Primary
Number of Students:	78
Independent Reviewers:	Mrs Kerry Usher (Lead), Mr Rees Barrett
Review Dates:	Self-review presentation – 28 May 2012 Independent review – 18 and 19 June 2012

1. About the Independent Review

The purpose of the independent review of Carson Street School is to provide an assurance to the school community, the Director General of Education and the Minister for Education on the extent to which the school has met its commitments as outlined in its Delivery and Performance Agreement (DPA) and associated Business Plan. The focus of the review is on:

- how well the school has improved the standards of student learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students
- how well the school has created an environment that promotes student learning
- how well the school is placed to sustain and improve its performance.

The school has been required, under the DPA, to undertake regular self-assessment. The outcomes of these assessments form the basis for the school self-review which is presented to the reviewers for verification at the commencement of the independent review.

Prior to the presentation of the school's self-review, reviewers are provided with information on the school's educational achievements, its processes and its student performance data from a number of sources which include, but are not limited to:

- the MySchoolTM website
- the Department of Education School Performance Monitoring System
- Schools Online reports.

Reviewers then visited the school for a half day presentation of the school self-review by the Principal, the Board Chair and other key stakeholders chosen by the school. Subsequently the reviewers analysed the evidence presented in the school's self-review documentation and developed lines of enquiry where further verification was required.

An agenda for a two day review visit was negotiated with the school to enable the gathering of further evidence to clarify or confirm the claims made in the school self-review. During these two days the reviewers sourced information and evidence to support the school self-review claims through observation and discussion with teaching and non-teaching staff, board members, parents, students and the school leadership team.

The evidence provided by the school, along with information gathered by the reviewers prior to and during their review visits, was used by the reviewers as the evidence base for their verification of how well the school has met its commitments as outlined in its DPA and Business Plan.

This document reports on the findings of the independent review.

2. Summary

Carson Street School is a primary education support school catering for students with intellectual and physical disabilities. Belief in the ability of each child to learn and sharp focus on the improvement of that learning are central to the school's culture.

A wide range of resources and strategies are used to create an environment in which students can achieve their potential. Exemplary processes are used for the development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). They provide the foundation for a differentiated curriculum, individualised program planning, assessment and reporting. Excellent portfolio reporting strategies are also used to document each student's achievement, progress and engagement.

Considerable progress has been made in using fine-grained, calibrated scales to describe and record student achievement. The school is well placed to advance in its use of this information in the business planning and self-review processes.

Productive partnerships with parents/carers and community groups form another outstanding feature of the school. There are many examples of how these partnerships contribute to improvement in student learning. Carson Street School Board members are enthusiastic participants in the school's quest for improvement. The Board is well placed to deepen its involvement in overseeing the school's performance in the context of its DPA commitments.

The following features of the school's improvement processes are commended:

- The exemplary process used to negotiate each student's IEP ensures a high degree of relevant targets as well as parent/carer engagement. It also strengthens the home-school partnership in reinforcing student learning.
- Implementation of highly differentiated curriculum that challenges and engages students and improves learning.
- The wide range of strategies and resources implemented to meet learning needs and maintain an inclusive environment that values all students.
- The positive relationships between staff and students and the way the school manages the behaviour of the students effectively.
- Adaptations made to the school buildings for the learning needs of students with multiple, complex and severe disabilities. Greater empowerment at the local level is used to initiate projects to improve the older buildings.

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- The recognition and valuing of quality teaching and learning throughout the school. System recognition of high quality teaching is evidenced through selection as a Teacher Development School.
- The excellent processes for reporting to and involving parents. Partnerships with community groups are also productive.
- Evidence of robust self-review based on the use of *Six Dimensions of Successful Schools*. High quality IEPs for each student provide a strong foundation for evidence-based self-review.
- The clear overall direction of the school which is supported by staff and parents. The school enjoys a positive image in the eyes of students, staff and the community. Community partners and parents are well represented on the Board.
- Flexibility in the selection and support of staff members who are innovative leaders. Change is managed effectively and involves all staff members. Priority is given to developing each classroom teacher as the leader of a learning team, including education assistants.

The following areas for improvement identified by the school are affirmed:

- Continue to refine target setting so that it is more consistent and rigorous throughout the school. Priority will be given to setting specific, measurable, appropriate, realistic and timed (SMART) targets.
- Make better use of comparative assessment information to demonstrate more clearly how students make progress.
- Enhance the use of the sensory room, alternative and augmentative communication strategies and iPads to develop the communication capacity of non-verbal students.
- Continue to develop the proactive approach to behaviour management.
- Implement a performance development system for all staff with teacher performance development to focus on leadership, classroom management, assessment and evaluation.
- Establish procedures so that board members use a range of information provided by the school to form their own judgements when evaluating the school's effectiveness.

The following recommendations are made to add value to the improvement process:

- The Business Plan should use achievement of IEP targets and summative assessment data as key indicators of student learning. Analysis of data at year-cohort and sub-group level needs to be included in the School's self-review.

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- Development of data analysis skills be given high priority.
- Business planning capacity be developed, with priority given to setting measurable targets that focus on student learning, rather than inputs and strategies.
- The Board be involved in monitoring school performance against the DPA, determining satisfaction levels of parents, staff and students for inclusion in the annual report, and in the conducting of an annual open forum.

The independent reviewers conclude that Carson Street School has succeeded in harnessing available resources to create an environment that promotes the learning of students with intellectual and physical disabilities. The school has developed quality Individual Education Plans to demonstrate student progress in the absence of quantitative standardised data. When the strategy to aggregate data has been developed, the school and its Board will be better placed to increase their business planning capacity through setting measurable targets for improving learning for all students.

3. School Context

Carson Street School is the only primary education support school in Western Australia. It caters for students who presently are not integrated into regular school settings because of the nature of their disabilities. Located in the Town of Victoria Park, the school's main catchment area is the south-eastern corridor of Perth. However, about one-third of the students travel from outside the area.

At the end of first semester 2012 the school had 58 full-time students (Pre-Primary to Year 7) and 20 Kindergarten students. The total enrolment includes students in two satellite classes located at Burbridge School in Koondoola and at Belmay Primary School in Belmont. The satellite class at Burbridge is for children in the Conductive Education Program (CEP). The satellite class at Belmay Primary School is for students who can benefit from the socialisation and models of behaviour in an inclusive setting while receiving a classroom program tailored for their individual learning needs. Student numbers 'have been increasing for several years due to the CEP and early intervention programs provided for children aged 0-4 years'.

Students graduate in the year they turn 13. Most then transfer to Kensington Secondary School after participating in a transition program.

The school's vision is to 'work as a team to meet the needs of the whole child in partnership with the family'. Staff members work closely with parents/carers to enact this vision. The school's philosophy is that each child can learn and achieve. Staff enact this philosophy through a clear focus on making a difference by meeting the particular needs of each child.

Students have a range of medical conditions that affect their school attendance. Many require extensive therapy. School nurses, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and school psychologists provide health and therapy services. Partnerships with organisations like Therapy Focus are also used to meet student needs. School programs such as swimming/hydrotherapy have a high profile.

The ability of the students to communicate effectively is essential for their emotional literacy. The school uses innovative strategies, including the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT), to meet students' complex communication needs.

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Early intervention strategies include My Time (16 enrolled in 2011) and Parent and Child (15 enrolled in 2011).

The school's DPA refers to additional funding provided for the CEP.

The school's documentation indicates this additional funding is 'to improve developmental and educational outcomes for students with cerebral palsy and other significant motor disorders.' The CEP is one of the school's early intervention strategies 'aimed at laying the foundations for future schooling and life'. The school's program evaluation must consider the extent to which 'a viable and sustainable program is being provided for children aged 0-4 years; individual CEP goals for participating children are being achieved; and parents/carers are satisfied with the quality and outcomes'.

The school staff includes 14 teachers and specialists (13.95 FTE) and 50 education assistants (43.6 FTE). Teachers are also learning area coordinators, taking responsibility for leading the development of curriculum programs, reports, data entry and analysis. Classroom teams include the teacher and several education assistants.

Workforce planning at the school responds to several trends. Staff turnover is minimal but there can be problems obtaining relief staff. Recruiting staff to lead conductive education involves gaining sponsorship of teacher conductors from the United Kingdom.

Carson Street School was recently selected as a Teacher Development School in the areas of science, risk management and assessment and positive behaviour support. A key focus is developing expertise and providing support for other teachers in the implementation of the Australian Curriculum.

The school's buildings and infrastructure are adapted for the students' complex needs. Building the Education Revolution (BER) funding has been used to construct purpose-built classrooms and extra undercover areas. Specialised equipment and facilities also include: electronic whiteboards, computers in every classroom, iPads in some classes, sensory room, hydrotherapy pool, two buses (one with wheelchair positions) and adapted playground equipment.

The incorporated School Board includes three staff members and the School Principal, three community members, the presidents of the Parents' and Citizens' Association and the Conductive Education Centre of WA (CECWA), and

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representatives of the Town of Victoria Park, the Disability Services Commission and the Department of Education. Another staff member acts as secretary. The Board is currently chaired by one of the community members. The Board Chair is also on the School Finance Committee.

An active Parents' and Citizens' Association serves as the fundraising arm of the school.

4a. School Performance - Student Learning

Carson Street School provides all of its students with learning opportunities appropriate to their needs. Teaching and learning programs are based on the targets in each student's IEP. A team approach is used to annually negotiate and review each student's IEP. Input is gathered from parents/carers as well as teachers, education assistants, and specialists. A formal approach is used for the IEP meeting. Agendas and minutes are recorded. Previous outcomes are discussed and developmentally appropriate goals are set. School documentation viewed by the reviewers indicates that these need to be 'suitably high, yet realistic expectations for students academically, socially and emotionally'. IEP goals also relate to the whole-class thematic programs incorporating learning outcomes from a range of curriculum areas.

The school's Business Plan has been reviewed and fine-tuned annually during the three-year period of the DPA. Each year the focus areas have included communication, numeracy, behaviour, physical fitness and mobility, science and ICT skills. Evidence provided by the school demonstrated that, as the curriculum is based on individual student needs, these are the most appropriate focus areas for improvement. Whole-school targets for specifying improvement in student learning are not included in the Business Plan. School leaders explained that this has proven difficult due to individualised student targets and programs.

Teachers use *P-scales* – finer-grained descriptions of progressive achievement developed in the United Kingdom for students with Special Education Needs (SEN). There are eight P-Levels, with two parts in each of the first three. Assessment and recording of a student's progress at each level is rated from 'Encounter, Engage, Gain Skill and Understanding, Master to Confirm'. A software package (*Connecting Steps*) is used to record assessments. Varied assessment strategies are used, including video recording, student work and education assistants' anecdotal observations. Evidence provided to the reviewers indicated that, while of use, the P-scales are not always sensitive enough to indicate the annual progress of the student.

During 2012 the Department of Education is developing a version of the P-scales (called Performance Descriptions) and SENAT (Special Education Needs Assessment Tool). Carson Street School will investigate the use of these scales during the phased implementation of the Australian Curriculum.

Standardised testing, such as National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is not applicable. However, other standardised tools such as the Gross Motor

Function Measure (GMFM) are used to provide relevant evidence. The independent reviewers examined sample IEPs and assessment records. These demonstrated the comprehensive and rigorous nature of the IEP and assessment processes.

Individual student assessments using the P-scales have been aggregated to provide class-group and whole-school averages. These are available in comprehensive reports for each of the eight Curriculum Framework learning areas. Aggregations are considered to be of limited use given the wide range of student achievement and the small number of students in each year level. Teachers account for progress against goals set in Individual Education Plans designed for students. They use observation, student work samples, teacher records, education assistant input, parent feedback and specialist support to verify the progress of individual students. Data from these sources is analysed for future planning. The Reviewers were able to observe students in the classroom and the progress made in their IEPs which was confirmed through staff and parent discussion.

Learning area reports tend to focus on strategic milestones rather than learning targets. Priority needs to be given to setting SMART targets.

At the time of the review visits, a formal school CEP evaluation report against the agreed indicators was not available. The *2011 CEP Learning Area Report* concluded, 'the majority of students are making progress in all areas of development'. The independent reviewers met with four parents. Their comments confirmed a high degree of satisfaction with the program, the school and their child's progress.

Appropriate monitoring mechanisms are used to monitor student engagement, personal and social outcomes. Student attendance is closely monitored. In 2010 85.7% of students were classified in the regular attendance category (i.e. attending school 90% or more). During 2011 that category fell to 67.7% (compared with state mean of 77.7%). The Principal advised that this was largely due to students' fragile health. An improvement strategy includes appointment of a student welfare officer.

The following features of the school's approach to improving student learning are commended:

- The exemplary process used to negotiate each student's IEP ensures a high degree of relevant targets as well as parent/carer engagement. It also strengthens the home-school partnership in reinforcing student learning.

- Implementation of highly differentiated curriculum that challenges and engages students and improves learning. (For example, the *Primary Connections* science curriculum has four to five levels of differentiation, lesson ideas underpinned by visual displays and assessment scales.)

The following areas of improvement identified by the school are affirmed:

- Continue to refine target setting so that it is more consistent and rigorous throughout the school. Priority will be given to setting SMART targets.
- Make better use of comparative assessment information to demonstrate more clearly how students make progress.

It is recommended that:

- The Business Plan should use achievement of IEP targets and summative assessment data as key indicators of student learning. Analysis of data at year-cohort and sub-group level needs to be included in the school's self-review.
- In the context of significant progress already made at the school, moderation of assessment within the school and across schools will add value.

4b. School Performance - Quality of Learning Environment

Attention is paid to assessing and meeting individual student needs. Each child has a 'profile' held in the classroom. It includes a base line check made at the time of enrolment, mealtime management plan, behaviour plan, personal hygiene plan and communication plan. In addition, all high-needs students have risk management plans.

Carson Street School has used the *Six Dimensions of Successful Schools* as a tool for self-review. Through this process, the school identifies features of its learning environment and strategies for improvement. Regular team meetings allow for system level, school based and classroom based initiatives to be discussed and developed.

The school has developed a positive culture for building and maintaining a safe and inclusive physical environment. Implementation of a risk assessment team is an example of a recent school-based initiative. The strategy acknowledges student and staff safety risks associated with heavy lifting and intensive handling. Appropriate training is provided. Physical adjustments are made to classrooms and equipment.

A supportive emotional environment is built and maintained through a range of strategies. Differentiated learning programs engage, support and challenge students. Assistive technologies are used for communication and curriculum access. A Positive Behaviour Support Program fosters a proactive approach to student behaviour management. School assemblies, newsletters and displays are used to recognise achievement.

Strategies to ensure student health and safety are also given high priority. Student profiles provide a strong foundation for meeting individual needs. There is daily collaboration between teachers, education assistants, school nurses, therapists and parents. The Protective Behaviours and Resiliency Program also supports these strategies.

Varied learning strategies and resources meet learning needs. Alternative augmented communication technologies and pragmatic organisation dynamic display systems are used throughout the school. Aspects of Conductive Education is a strategy used for school-aged children. Literacy whole-school learning strategies (like 4 blocks) and practices are under development across the school. Development of a sensory environment is another priority. Specialised play areas and equipment are also available. Two classes use the Riding for the Disabled program. Extra-curricular activities through Active After School Programs are held twice a week. During 2011 the Artist in the School program promoted sensory theatre.

Productive partnerships with parents and carers are fostered in numerous ways. *Getting Started* booklets have been developed for parents as partners in the learning process. In partnership with School for Parents Inc., the school gained Commonwealth government funding for a series of these booklets. The schools two 0-4 year's programs target 31 children (16 with an intellectual disability and 15 with a physical disability).

Excellence of the learning environment created by the school staff is confirmed by parents and carers. They expressed their appreciation of the school's ethos 'that every one of its students is capable of learning'. Parents and carers expressed appreciation of the IEP process, daily two-way communication booklets, portfolios reflecting IEP goals, and the constant care given to their children. Parents appreciated the new portfolio format, including detailed descriptions of student progress and targeted photographs. DVD and CD recordings are sent home throughout the term to celebrate student progress and achievement.

The following features of the school's efforts to create an environment that promotes student learning are commended:

- The wide range of strategies and resources implemented to meet learning needs and maintain an inclusive environment that values and supports all students.
- The positive relationships between staff and students and the ways in which the school effectively manages the behaviour of the students.
- The adaptations made to school buildings appropriate to the learning needs of students with multiple, complex and severe disabilities. Greater empowerment at the local level is used to initiate projects to improve the older buildings.
- The recognition and valuing of quality teaching and learning throughout the school. System recognition of high quality teaching is evidenced through selection as a Teacher Development School. This will promote a 'hub' school model whereby staff expertise can be a resource to other schools – both education support and mainstream.
- The school's excellent processes for involving and reporting to parents. Partnerships with community groups are also productive.

The following areas of future improvement identified by the school are affirmed:

- Enhance the use of the sensory room, alternative and augmentative communication strategies and iPads to develop the communication capacity of non-verbal students.
- Continue to develop the proactive approach to behaviour management.

4c. School Performance - Sustainability

Robust self-review has been promoted by the school's leaders as the key process for continuous improvement. This was evident through the high quality self-review documentation provided to the reviewers. It was also confirmed by the comments of board members, staff members, parents and carers.

School leadership is distributed. *The 2011 Annual Report* highlights community recognition of the work of the Principal and Deputy Principal in leading the school. Performance development and professional learning will focus on building leadership capacity among the comparatively young teaching staff.

The school involves teachers in the review process through their roles as learning area coordinators. Plans are well advanced for implementing a performance

development system focused on leadership and team management. This includes trialling the involvement of teachers in leading and developing the performance of their classroom team. Productive working relationships between the teacher and education assistants are critical to the learning environment. Fortnightly team meetings promote communication, planning and problem solving.

The IEP negotiation, monitoring, review and reporting process provides the foundation for gathering high quality evidence. Consistent use of calibrated scales (such as the P-scales) across all learning areas is developing. There is significant progress in consistent whole-school software use for recording assessments. However, the scales have varying degrees of usefulness for monitoring individual progress. Data aggregation is also problematic because individual progress is so varied. Development of staff capacity to analyse meaningful aggregated data needs to be an ongoing priority.

Operational planning is detailed and comprehensive. The school manages its financial and physical resources through sound, collaborative and well-documented planning processes. There is forward planning for the maintenance of school programs and equipment. However, there is a need for further capacity building around the business planning process, as distinct from operational planning. This needs to include the development of specific, measurable student learning targets.

Productive partnerships with parents and community provide a strong foundation for sustained improvement of school performance. This includes daily involvement of parents and community groups in the school's work. Significant community representation on the School Board is another positive indicator of this.

The School Board has evaluated its own performance. Appreciation of the ongoing development of its role since 2010 was expressed. There is also appreciation for the comprehensive information provided by the Principal and other staff members. For example, the *'How Well Do You Know Your School?'* brochure provides an excellent overview. The *2011 Annual Report*, endorsed by the Board, acknowledges the need for building capacity for critical reflection. Strategies are needed for increasing involvement of the Board in monitoring school performance against the DPA, including the Business Plan. Induction of new board members is an ongoing priority.

The Board also needs to be involved in determining satisfaction levels of parents, staff and students for inclusion in the annual report. The school is sensitive to the demands

on parents/carers of SEN students. It is also aware that parents and carers may feel 'over surveyed' and 'overburdened'. Notwithstanding the limitations on parental involvement, it is expected that the Board will conduct an annual open forum. School activity days, designed to increase parent/carer involvement, could be used.

The following features of the school's efforts to build its capacity to sustain and improve its performance are commended:

- The evidence of robust self-review based on the use of *Six Dimensions of Successful Schools*. High quality IEPs for each student provide a strong foundation for evidence based self-review.
- The clear overall direction of the school, supported by staff and parents. The school enjoys a positive image in the eyes of students, staff and the community. Community partners and parents are well represented on the Board.
- The flexibility used to select and support staff members who are innovative leaders. Change is managed effectively and involves all staff members. Priority is given to developing each classroom teacher as the leader of a learning team, including education assistants.

The following areas of improvement identified by the school are affirmed:

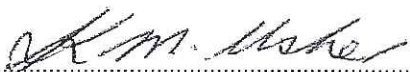
- Implement a performance development system for all staff with teacher performance development to focus on leadership, classroom management, assessment and evaluation.
- Establish procedures so that board members use a range of information provided by the school to form their own judgements when evaluating the school's effectiveness.

It is recommended that:

- The development of data analysis skills be given high priority.
- Business planning capacity be developed, with priority given to setting measurable targets that focus on student learning, rather than inputs and strategies.
- The Board be involved in monitoring school performance against the DPA, determining satisfaction levels of parents, staff and students for inclusion in the annual report, and the in conducting of an annual open forum.

Declaration

We the undersigned hereby confirm that the information provided in this findings document is to the best of our knowledge true and correct and is based on our assessment of the evidence provided by Carson Street School as part of the Department of Education Services' independent review process. The School Principal and Board Chair have had an opportunity to comment on any matters of fact contained within this document.



(Signature of Kerry Usher, Lead Reviewer)

19 September 2012

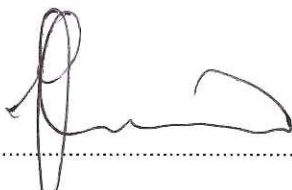
(Date)



(Signature of Rees Barrett, Reviewer)

19 September 2012

(Date)



(Signature of Richard Strickland, CEO, Department of Education Services)

19 / 9 / 12

(Date)