Rai Valley Area School - 22/01/2019

School Context

Rai Valley Area School is a rural school located between Nelson and Blenheim. It caters for students in Years 1 to 13. The roll is growing and is currently 109.

The school’s overarching vision is ‘Growing and Learning towards a Great Future’. The school states that they want students to succeed in national curriculum areas and to develop attitudes and values promoted through the RAI WAY values. These values are Respect, Achieve and Inspire.

The board’s strategic goals relate to student achievement, communication, celebrating student success and wellbeing. Student outcome targets are the same as the Kāhui Ako targets. These targets are:

* raising the achievement in writing for Māori and boys from Y1 to 10
* acceleration of learning in reading for students after 40 weeks at school
* raising the achievement in mathematics from Years 4 to 8
* raising NCEA achievement at Levels 2 and 3, and/or University Entrance (retention and engagement.

Leaders and teachers regularly report to the board, schoolwide information about outcomes for students in the following areas:

* achievement across Years 1 to 10 in reading, writing and mathematics
* NCEA achievement within the New Zealand Qualifications Framework
* achievement across the school in relation to the board’s strategic targets
* information relating to engagement, e.g. attendance, behavioural data and the recent student wellbeing survey
* students with additional learning needs
* participation and success in sporting, curriculum and community activities and events.

Since ERO’s 2015 review, the board is made up of elected trustees with one Ministry of Education appointee who provides ongoing support. The board has recently appointed a new principal following the previous principal’s retirement. The school also has other senior leaders new to their roles.

Over the past three years, staff have participated in professional learning and development (PLD) in literacy and mathematics. The school has also undertaken considerable development of the RAI WAY as part of a Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) contract.

The school is part of the Top of the South Island (TOSI) Area Schools Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako (CoL).

Evaluation Findings

1 Equity and excellence – achievement of valued outcomes for students

1.1 How well is the school achieving equitable and excellent outcomes for all its students?

The school is making good progress towards achieving equitable and excellent outcomes for all its students.

Since 2017, the school has used, and generally achieved, the CoL targets.

School data, over the past three years, shows a general trend of improvement for students in Years 1 to 8 in reading, writing and mathematics, with most students achieving at or above national expectations. Girls’ achievement reflects this improvement and work is being done to further lift the achievement of boys.

School leaders are very aware of the need to address disparity and promote equitable and excellent outcomes for all students. They are now tracking each student’s progress and achievement over time to monitor accelerated progress.

In Year 10, 2018 data show that most students achieve at or above national expectations in reading, writing and numeracy. The 2018 data shows that most students at Year 9 achieve at or above national expectations in reading and mathematics. School leaders are considering alternative curriculum approaches to increase student engagement in learning and to improve overall outcomes.

Students with additional needs are identified. The school has specific interventions in place to help promote wellbeing and learning for their students. Support strategies for this group, and all students, include their needs being well known to staff, a focus on developing positive relationships and their active engagement in learning. The school is developing more effective systems for reporting student progress. This should include reporting on outcomes of interventions for identified students.

There are increased levels of retention through to the senior school. Achievement information from 2015 to 2017 shows significant improvement in NCEA for all students, including Māori. The school reports that most students, by the time they reach Year 11, achieve NCEA Level 1. The school’s achievement information for 2017 shows that almost all Year 11 to 13 students achieved the relevant NCEA Level 1, 2, or 3 qualification. There is also an increase in the number of students achieving level endorsements and university entrance qualifications.

Students are well supported and prepared to determine their future direction and participate in further education, training and employment.

1.2 How well is the school accelerating learning for those Māori and other students who need this?

Acceleration in learning for Māori students is evident across the school.

The school effectively identifies students whose learning requires further support. There has been ongoing disparity for Māori students in reading, writing and mathematics at each level of the junior school. However, 2018 student achievement data for Māori students in Years 3 to 8 shows that they are achieving as well as, or better than, other students. There is good evidence of acceleration of Māori student progress, particularly in writing.

2018 data also shows that there is acceleration for some students in reading, writing and mathematics. School leaders are aware that some students’ achievement has regressed over time. They are using specific initiatives and interventions to address this trend and to achieve equitable outcomes for all students.

Accelerated student progress for students in Year 10 is evident in 2018. Numeracy data shows that they have improved from being at national expectations to above since the beginning of that year. Disparity in boys’ achievement for reading, writing and mathematics continues to be an area that requires ongoing focus.

2 School conditions for equity and excellence – processes and practices

2.1 What school processes and practices are effective in enabling achievement of equity and excellence, and acceleration of learning?

The curriculum is highly responsive to students’ individual strengths and capabilities, particularly at senior secondary level. Flexible course design and responsive planning allow students to explore new interests and develop skills to support their individual future learning pathways. The curriculum emphasises collaborative approaches to, and choice in, learning.

Student wellbeing and the RAI WAY values are prioritised as foundations for learning success. Recent curriculum reviews have focused on increasing collective teacher responsibility for literacy and mathematics learning across the school, and continuity in learning across Years 1 to 13.

Trustees, leaders and teachers build their professional capability and collective capacity through relevant professional learning and development (PLD). This PLD builds their understanding of current effective practice aligned with the school’s strategic direction. The PLD is positively impacting on school culture and student achievement.

Since ERO’s 2015 report, the board and school leaders have continued to provide effective leadership and a positive learning culture. This gives a sound foundation for new leaders and trustees who are working collaboratively to further develop, refine and extend learning opportunities for students. The new leadership team is focused on giving students equitable opportunities to learn within a rich curriculum, and promoting student wellbeing in a positive learning environment. They lead, model and engage in professional learning with and alongside teachers. They also encourage and recognise leadership and innovation amongst staff.

The school has deliberate and successful ways of building community partnerships. School facilities are used by the community. Well–supported events such as Pet Day, and students’ involvement in aspects of community service, raise the school profile and benefit students. The “Reading Together” programme is building a partnership in learning with parents. Connections with the Pelorus School Cluster and the TOSI CoL are contributing to school improvement.

2.2 What further developments are needed in school processes and practices for achievement of equity and excellence, and acceleration of learning?

The principal and leadership team are strengthening practices to clearly identify where disparity in outcomes occur and to better track the progress of at risk learners. Leaders and teachers need to ensure that the practices aimed at achieving equity of outcomes for those learners whose progress and learning require acceleration are fully implemented. This includes very close monitoring of target learners’ progress, inquiring into teaching and learning practices, and more frequent reporting to trustees. Deeper analysis, reporting and use of student achievement information for groups of students over time, including students with additional learning needs, will assist the school to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of initiatives and interventions in accelerating student progress.

School leaders should now extend curriculum review to include all learning areas across Years 1 to 13 in order to continue the development of a coherent, authentic curriculum that reflects the school’s valued outcomes for students and promotes continuity in their learning. As part of this curriculum development, they should continue to prioritise culturally responsive perspectives that build teachers’ cultural competency and respond effectively to Māori students’ language, culture and identity. Strengthening the partnership with the Māori community is an important part of increasing cultural responsiveness.

School leaders are aware of the need to strengthen the teacher appraisal process. This process needs to include meaningful and specific goals, indicators and robust evidence that includes achievement information.

3 Board assurance on legal requirements

Before the review, the board and principal of the school completed the ERO board assurance statement and self-audit checklists. In these documents they attested that they had taken all reasonable steps to meet their legislative obligations related to the following:

* board administration
* curriculum
* management of health, safety and welfare
* personnel management
* finance
* asset management.

During the review, ERO checked the following items because they have a potentially high impact on student safety and wellbeing:

* emotional safety of students (including prevention of bullying and sexual harassment)
* physical safety of students
* teacher registration and certification
* processes for appointing staff
* stand down, suspension, expulsion and exclusion of students
* attendance
* school policies in relation to meeting the requirements of the Vulnerable Children Act 2014.

Appraisal audit

The school should continue to develop a robust appraisal system, focused on positive outcomes for students, that meets all the requirements of the Education Council.

Areas for improved compliance practice

To improve current practice, the board of trustees should:

* review the existing policy framework to ensure they meet all current legislative requirements and align with board expectations
* ensure effective cyclical policy review is maintained.

4 Going forward

Key strengths of the school

For sustained improvement and future learner success, the school can draw on existing strengths in:

* the highly responsive curriculum that caters for students’ individual strengths and capabilities, particularly at senior secondary level
* effective leadership that promotes a positive learning culture
* PLD that positively impacts on school culture and student achievement
* the deliberate and successful ways of building community partnerships.

Next steps

For sustained improvement and future learner success, priorities for further development are in:

* continuing to build trustees’ and staff cultural competence and expertise in providing an inclusive and productive bicultural learning environment to achieve equitable and excellent outcomes for Māori and all students
* improving internal evaluation to enable evidence-based judgements about the quality, effectiveness or value of policies, programmes, practices and new initiatives in terms of their contribution to equity and excellence for all students.

ERO’s next external evaluation process and timing

ERO is likely to carry out the next external evaluation in three years.

Alan Wynyard

Director Review & Improvement Services

Te Waipounamu - Southern Region

22 January 2019

About the school

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| Location | Rai Valley |
| Ministry of Education profile number | 291 |
| School type | Composite (Years 1 to 15) |
| School roll | 109 |
| Gender composition | Girls 51% ; Boys 49% |
| Ethnic composition | Māori 16%Pākehā 82%Other ethnicities 2% |
| Students with Ongoing Resourcing Funding (ORS) | No |
| Provision of Māori medium education | No |
| Review team on site | October 2018 |
| Date of this report | 22 January 2019 |
| Most recent ERO reports | Education Review November 2015Education Review November 2012Education Review September 2010 |