# Gilmore College

# 2015

# Independent Review Findings

Independent Review of
Independent Public Schools

# Disclaimer

This document reports the findings of the Department of Education Services' review and verification of the school's self-review. The school's self-review has been complemented by information provided by the Department of Education, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

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

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## School and Review Details

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| **Principal:** | **Ms Carolyn Cook** |
| **Board Chair:** | **Mr Chris Oughton** |
| **School Location:** | **Dargin Place Orelia WA 6167** |
| **School Classification:** | **SHS CLASS 6C** |
| **Number of Students:** | **1140** |
| **Reviewers:** | **Ms Pauline Coghlan (Lead),** |
| | **Mr John Iacomella and Mr Peter Wilson** |
| **Review Dates:** | **4 and 5 June 2015** |

## Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the independent review is to provide assurance to the school and its 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. Additionally, the findings have the potential to inform school improvement.

The focus of the review is on:

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

# Review Methodology

The school has been required, under the DPA, to undertake annual self-assessments of its performance. The outcome of these assessments formed the basis for the school's self-review. The school sent its self-review documentation to the IPS Review Team, Department of Education Services one month prior to the commencement of the review.

The IPS reviewers supplemented the information provided by the school with information on the school's achievements, its processes and its student performance data from a number of sources which included:

- the *My School*® website
- the Department of Education School Performance Monitoring System
- Schools Online reports
- School Curriculum and Standards Authority Year 12 Student Achievement data.

Reviewers analysed the evidence presented in the school's self-review documentation and developed lines of inquiry where further verification was required.

An agenda for the two review visit days was subsequently negotiated with the school to enable the gathering of evidence to verify claims made by the school. During these two days the reviewers sourced evidence to support the school's self-review claims through observation and discussion with leaders, teaching and support staff, board members, parents and students.

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

This document reports on the findings of the independent review.

## School Context

***What are the important features of this school's context that have an impact on student learning?***

Gilmore College is a co-educational school established in 2008 on the site of the former Kwinana Senior High School. The college caters for students from Years 7 to 12 and is located within the City of Kwinana in the rapidly growing southern metropolitan corridor, 38 kilometres from central Perth. There is a high level of industrial development and employment within the Kwinana industrial area. The college is bordered by the Challenger Institute of Technology, Kwinana Campus and shares oval facilities with the Orelia Primary School. Gilmore College commenced as an independent public school (IPS) in 2013.

The school caters for students from Years 7 to 12 and has 1140 students, 112 of whom come from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and 17% have a language background other than English. There is a high multicultural mix in the student population from 34 different nationalities; including 9% of students from New Zealand and 7% of students from the Philippines. The proportion of students from a diversity of backgrounds has increased over the past three years.

The Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage (ICSEA) is 928 placing it in the 9th decile of schools in Western Australia. Fifty-two per cent of students come from backgrounds in the bottom quartile of the ICSEA range and five per cent in the top quartile of the ICSEA distribution.

The school employs 106 staff including 71 teaching staff. Student numbers have been increasing since 2011. The majority of students enter Year 7 from six local primary schools.

Gilmore College's values of relationships, rigour and relevance are evident in the progress the college has made since becoming an IPS.

There are enduring partnerships with business, industry and community organisations within the Kwinana district. The links with industry are particularly strong through the Kwinana Industries Council, which provides support for the college's Vocation Education and Training (VET) program. Gilmore College is engaged in partnerships with other secondary public schools in the Rockingham and Kwinana region through the Peron Alliance

Curriculum and Teaching (PACT). This assists in providing students with a broad curriculum offering.

Academic tertiary pathways have been significantly strengthened by the introduction in 2013 of an Academic Extension program in Year 7, which is now operating in Years 7, 8 and 9. The progression of the program to each year level will see Academic Extension Year 12 students in 2018.

A diverse suite of VET programs are available to students of Gilmore College. These include very competitive Year 11 and 12 specialist-engineering programs, a joint venture between Kwinana Industries Council, Challenger Institute of Technology and the college. The embedded sustained partnerships with the local community are highly valued.

A new Trade Training Centre to provide students with skills and qualifications in the Process Plant Operator and Chemical Engineering trades will be built within the college over the next year. This new facility is part of the joint Peron Trades Training Centre.

The College has a Board which is well informed and is actively engaged in decision making. Board members bring a range of skills and experience to their task, and show great commitment to the college.

## The School's Self-Review Process

### *How effective was the school's self-review in accounting for its performance during the period of the DPA and Business Plan?*

A reflective and responsive approach to self-review and improvement is developing at Gilmore College. The college has used a range of appropriate information, both academic and non-academic data to do this. Collection of data and information involves staff, students and parents. The resultant action takes many forms including specific strategies in classrooms, whole-college approaches which guide the type of professional learning required for staff at both an individual and whole-staff levels.

Operational plans have been developed by each learning area/department and are reviewed annually. The three priority areas in the Business Plan are evident within all operational plans, reinforcing the whole-college strategic direction; however, the specific targets in the Business Plan and progress towards them were less apparent and understood.

Whilst it was evident that discussion of data and the implications of this information for the college and classroom practices has occurred, some of the information has not been fully understood by all learning areas and their staff. The development of a published cycle of annual review detailing all the dimensions of improving college performance (such as student learning, teaching, leadership, governance learning environment and partnerships) which includes what data will be reviewed, when and by whom could result in a deeper understanding of the purpose and sequence of self-review by all staff.

The College Board is involved in examining the analysis of data, and there is regular reporting of the college's progress in achieving targets in the Business Plan. Student performance is reported to the wider college community in each Annual Report.

# School Performance—Student Learning

*How well has the school performed in improving learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students?*

The college Business Plan 2013–2015 states "Gilmore College must improve outcomes for our students and develop a culture of success, pride, community and one of striving to achieve personal best". It clearly articulates what the college believes in and values: Rigour; Relevance; and Relationships. Over the life of the Delivery and Performance Agreement, the Business Plan, through the Board, has evolved into a more succinct document supported by a range of operational plans.

The reviewers undertook interviews with parents, board members, leaders, teachers, students, support staff, Clontarf and Follow the Dream staff. The college performance is explicitly reported each year as is evidenced by the 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports, and is available on the college and Department of Education websites.

The Business Plan outlines three strategic focus areas to improve overall performance:

- Building staff capacity to improve student behaviour, attendance and well-being
- Raising standards in literacy and numeracy to enable success for all students
- Building partnerships through effective communication with all members of the wider community.

The college set 16 targets of which 13 relate to student achievement and use a "traffic light" system to monitor each target. This approach provides a strategic overview of the college's progress, which is laudable.

The information used to reflect on college performance for eight of its targets is the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).

It was difficult to interpret the data on which judgements about college performance had been made, due to the ambiguity in the description of a number of targets. This was clarified by key college personnel. Greater clarity when describing student improvement targets is needed. This can occur by stipulating what is to be improved; the amount of improvement; how this will

be measured and by when. It was agreed that the intent of the four ambiguous targets was to close the gap between the State and the college (targets 1 and 2) in the percentage of students at or above the national minimum standard (NMS) in reading, writing, numeracy, spelling and grammar by 2016. Similarly, for targets 3 and 4, the college was to perform the same or better than like schools in Years 7 and 9. The reviewers confirm the college's judgements for targets 1 and 2 with the gap reduced between the college and the State in reaching the NMS in Year 7 for four of the five NAPLAN areas; and for all NAPLAN areas in Year 9. For targets 3 and 4 the college judgements of performance at or above NMS when compared to like schools is confirmed with all NAPLAN areas being similar or better than like schools in Year 7, and in Year 9 two NAPLAN areas are similar to those of like schools and three areas are below.

The reduction of the percentage of students below the NMS to less than 10% (targets 5 and 6) has been achieved for numeracy in Years 7 and 9; however, it has not been realised for reading and writing in either year levels. Notwithstanding this, it is encouraging that there has been an overall reduction of the percentage of students below the NMS from 2012 to 2014.

The college supports Aboriginal students through the Clontarf Academy (65 males), *Follow the Dream* (23 students) and the Wirrapunda Foundation's *Deadly Sista Girlz* program. Two student achievement targets (targets 9 and 10) focus on Aboriginal performance for the percentage of Aboriginal students performing at or above the NMS to be equal to the percentage of the whole-year cohort in reading, writing and numeracy. This has been achieved for Year 9 Aboriginal students. Given that Year 7 students have been at the college for only a term prior to NAPLAN, the current Year 7 target is, in reality, simply baseline information. The college may be better served using this information as part of their annual data analysis rather than as a specific target.

Other performance indicators are outlined and regularly reported on in the Gilmore College Follow the Dream strategic Plan. The program monitors closely student engagement and supports 23 Aboriginal students. This includes an outreach component of Aboriginal students from four high schools (12 students). In 2014, there were four Year 12 Aboriginal WACE students from the Follow the Dream program, all have successfully transitioned to either work, TAFE or university.

The college aims for 90% of Aboriginal students who complete a college-to-work program, to successfully transition to employment (target 11) and 90% of Aboriginal Year 12 students attain a WACE, employment or further training (target 12). The reviewers confirm that these aspirational targets were not achieved, with a 50% success rate for each target.

The same set of data, NAPLAN proficiency bands, has been used in developing eight of its 10 academic student achievement targets. The college may wish to consider reducing the number of targets related to NMS and explore a wider range of targets using different data sets, which are more representative of the six years of schooling. Given that the college staff already analyses a range of other measures in the annual self-review, such as Year 7 to 9 progress, Year 12 Certificate II completion rates, ATAR success and attainment rates, some of these measures could be considered appropriate targets in the next iteration of the Business Plan. This would provide the Board with a broader and more strategic overview of the college's progress and achievements over the six years of schooling.

After just one term at the college, Year 7 students complete NAPLAN testing. This forms a base line for student performance, providing the college with a reference point for making judgements about future progress. Over the last three years (2012, 2013, and 2014) with three different Year 7 cohorts of students, results are available for a total of 15 tests (five tests each year/Year 7 group). The *My School®* website indicates that: for 12 of the 15 tests the student performance was below the average of statistically similar schools with one test substantially below; and for three of the 15 tests student performance was close to the average of statistically similar schools. This information forms a Year 7 baseline from which the college works.

Student achievement and progress from the Year 7 baseline is considered in its self-review analysis. The *My School®* website indicates that student achievement in four of the five areas of Year 9 NAPLAN in 2014 is similar to statistically similar schools. The college staff is mindful that whilst this is encouraging, the mean scores in all tests are below the State and Australian means. The progress from Year 7 in 2012 to Year 9 in 2014 in NAPLAN is better than the average progress of statistically similar schools, Australian and State schools, in four of the five NAPLAN areas, which is commendable.

The range of school-based traineeships, Aboriginal school-based traineeships and Certificate II courses is extensive. In 2014, there were 11 Certificate II courses available. Of particular note is the endorsed specialist program in

engineering run as a traineeship in partnership with the Kwinana Industries Council (KIC). The improvement since 2010 and the sustained very high Certificate II completion rates are impressive. The *School Curriculum and Standards Authority Year 12 Achievement* data indicates that in 2010, 69% (44 students) achieved an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Certificate II, compared with 83% (34 students) in 2011, 84% (46 students) in 2012, 97% (69 students) in 2013 and 95% (35 students [the half cohort]) in 2014. The VET Program Coordinator manages all aspects across the senior years, including partnerships with business, industry and community organisations within the Kwinana precinct. A trade training centre is to be built on campus for the delivery of the Certificate II in Process Plant Operations, providing additional pathways for students.

Over the period of the DPA, the college's NAPLAN comparative performance has improved. The college attributes this to a combination of strategies: the restructure of the college in 2012 to enhance rigour; the Literacy Strategy (an integrated English and humanities and social sciences highly structured literacy block for two hours each day for all Year 8 students); the introduction of an academic extension class; targeted support in reading with *Student Training Around Reading* (STAR); the ability to select staff well suited to the Gilmore College context; and a range of strategies to improve teacher classroom practice.

Even though the three focus areas are well understood by staff, many are unaware of the targets and associated information.

The college staff developed two non-academic student targets for attendance. These included a target (target 7), regarding improving each year group's attendance rate to be equal to the State rate. There is no consistent trend to date; however, it is encouraging that in 2013 two year groups exceeded the State average. A further target (target 8), involves the disaggregation of the global college attendance rate, aiming for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal rates to be equal to the State attendance rate. Similarly, there was an upward trend in 2013 where the State rate was exceeded; however, this has not been sustained. The student services team regularly monitor and review the four categories of attendance and develop responsive strategies to further improve attendance.

The progress towards developing effective and productive partnerships with the college and wider community is monitored through the National School Opinion Surveys for students, parents and staff (targets 14, 15 and 16).

Aspects were confirmed in parent, student and staff discussions. There are positive indications from all stakeholders that teachers expect students to do their best, and the college looked for ways to improve. Student behaviour continues to be a concern identified by all stakeholders surveyed. The Board is supportive and responsive, as is evidenced by the creation of an Engagement Committee.

The reviewers affirm the college's judgements in all 16 targets and the three focus areas, having examined the relevant data sets, annual reports and through discussions with college leaders, learning areas and support staff, students, parents and board members.

College staff are developing a culture that monitors, analyses all feedback and then responds with appropriate action. The reviewers saw ample evidence of the success of such actions, for example the academic extension classes, the diversity of pathways available in VET and the literacy strategy.

# School Performance—Quality of the Learning Environment

*How well has the school performed in creating an environment that promotes learning and wellbeing for all students and the attainment of the school vision?*

The Gilmore College vision is to "create a learning community where there is a strong commitment to bringing together individual, institutional and community stakeholders to provide the resources (economic, social and political) to enhance the life opportunities of all young people in the process of lifelong learning".

The 'three Rs' describe the ethos of the college:

- Rigour—high expectations and striving for excellence
- Relevance—catering for individual differences to achieve the best possible outcomes
- Relationships—building on trust, mutual respect and the acceptance of rights and responsibilities to develop productive partnerships with students, parents, staff and the wider community.

Discussions with staff, parents and community members confirm there is an understanding of the value of everyone working together to achieve the best possible outcome for all students at the college and to achieve the college's vision. A parent described the case of one of her children who had become disengaged in schooling and was disruptive in the classroom. The college responded, in consultation with the parent and external agencies, and developed and successfully implemented an educational plan that assisted the student to re-engage in schooling and then to participate in a post-school trade training program. Similar examples were frequently cited.

In 2011, an extensive college-wide audit of the existing organisational structures (four sub-schools within the college) was conducted. It indicated that the expectation of student learning outcomes amongst teachers was generally low; the NAPLAN and WAMSE data showed student performance was significantly below students from like schools in four learning areas; there was inconsistency in the management of student behaviour; and the culture and vision in the college was not unified. In response to the audit findings, the Principal restructured the college to improve the learning environment for all students. A faculty/learning area model of organisation was adopted and commenced in 2012, the same year that the college commenced as an IPS.

The college has undergone significant re-profiling of its Level 3 staff since becoming an IPS and in addition to three associate principals, has six heads of learning area and three Level 3 program coordinators. The flexibility of IPS has allowed the Principal to gradually change the staff profile to meet the identified needs of the college.

The Principal and staff believe this has enhanced rigour and been one of the contributing factors for the improved performance of students since 2011 (see previous section School Performance—Student Learning).

The college has implemented a variety of strategies, both in and outside the classroom, to provide a learning environment that better caters for, motivates and engages the diverse student population. The three youth workers organise (in conjunction with the year coordinators) and participate in lunchtime and recess activities for students. This has given students opportunities to participate in structured sporting and other activities during their free time and establish informal relationships with support personnel. Discussions with the youth workers, students and staff confirm this program is another key factor in creating a positive environment at the college as well as minimising opportunities for inappropriate behaviour during breaks.

Other support programs include the UWA Aspire program to assist and encourage students to enter higher education after leaving school, and *Follow the Dream* program providing ongoing tutorial and mentoring to Aboriginal students to support their goals of post-school education and training. Enduring partnerships also exist with not for profit organisations such as the Wirrapanda Foundation *Deadly Sista Girlz* program which engages, educates and empowers Aboriginal females to make better choices for their health and future, and the Gilmore Clontarf Academy, which actively engages male Aboriginal students to maximise their school attendance, promotes positive participation and achievement in school along with training and prospective employment. The Clontarf Academy staff illustrated the program's impact using a case study of a student who has changed direction from disengagement to now enthusiastically completing a traineeship.

To provide a broader curriculum offering Gilmore College is engaged in partnerships with other secondary public schools in the Rockingham and Kwinana region through the Peron Alliance Curriculum and Teaching (PACT).

Discussions with staff indicate a clear understanding of the complex interconnections between classroom teaching, student learning, attendance

and behaviour standards. Building staff capacity in all of these areas, concurrently, is a focus and is well underway. The two main capacity building professional learning programs being used are the Classroom Management Strategies (CMS) and the use of Instructional Rounds to improve teacher skills and student behaviour and learning. Instructional Rounds is a form of classroom observation and feedback, through which teams focus on problems of teaching practice. Implementation of this program across the college facilitates the development of high-quality instruction in every classroom. Developing staff skills in dealing with behavioural issues in the classroom has been systematically occurring over four years resulting in most staff having accessed training. With annual staff turnover and appointment of new staff it is an ongoing challenge to ensure that all staff are trained, especially as only six training places have been allocated to the college this year.

Discussion with Principal, staff, students and parents indicates that while there has been overall improvement in the tone of the college and student behaviour over the last five years, there is still significant room for further improvement. This was supported by the National School Opinion Surveys of students, parents and staff, which found that only 35% of all surveyed students and parents agreed with the statement *"Student behaviour is well managed at my College"*. Teachers commented that it was not unusual in some classes for more than half of their classroom time to be used in dealing with behavioural issues. It was also indicated there is some inconsistency between learning areas in the application, support and monitoring of strategies. Student behaviour in the classroom and its management continues to be a significant issue which impacts on the learning environment. However, it is encouraging that in the same survey the parent, student and staff responses highlight that *"This school looks for ways to improve"* and *"Teachers at this school expect my child/students to do his or her best "*.

Furthermore, 91% of the 2014 Year 12 students surveyed (*Year 12 Student Intentions and Satisfaction Survey*) indicated they were highly satisfied or satisfied with the quality of teaching, which was consistent with the 2013 Year 12 students' satisfaction level which was 88%.

Discussions with staff, parents, students and community members confirm a good understanding of the college's context and the need for further support and commitment from the community to provide a positive and safe environment where all students can experience success in their learning. The Board has closely examined the results of the National School Opinion Surveys of students, parents and staff. As a result, they have established an

engagement committee with the express purpose of improving the communication and engagement between the college and the community. One of the key aspects of the committee is to improve communication with primary school communities.

The reviewers confirm the ongoing efforts to provide a safe and supportive learning environment at Gilmore College. The college is implementing a wide variety of educational programs to cater for a wide range of student needs, as well as providing pastoral support both inside and out of the classroom.

## School Performance—Sustainability

*How well placed is the school to sustain and improve its performance into the next planning cycle?*

The college has a cycle of ongoing planning for improvement. There is significant focus on the priorities of building staff capacity, raising standards in literacy and numeracy and building partnerships. There is a high level of support and understanding for these general priorities within the staff, students and the Board. This support provides a good foundation for sustained improvement in student performance over time.

To further embed the process of evidence-based self-review, a clearer articulation of the cycle of review across all areas of the college would further ensure that the college sustains its improvement into the future. The progress towards the targets and individual roles in the self-review processes is not universally understood by all staff. Self-review processes are present within learning areas, VET and student services although the regularity of self-review through analysis of student data and linking these to strategic planning and the targets could be more frequent.

The restructure of the college in 2012, and the ability of the college to select staff who best match the college's needs, have further developed a culture within the college that emphasises the care of students, the enhancement in academic standards and an improvement in student behaviour.

Building staff capacity is an important focus of the Business Plan. The college has within its staff a strong professional learning base that will lead to improvement in student learning together with a high level of commitment to improving teaching practices.

The college has developed a comprehensive Workforce Plan which outlines staff profile data from 2011 to 2015.

The Board has moved toward a practical understanding of strategic planning using the targets and goals identified in the Business Plan. The adoption of a 'traffic light' approach to reporting against important aspects of the Business Plan has assisted in this development. The Board has carried out a self-review process and members of the Board have undertaken professional learning to improve effectiveness. The Board has a wide representation from

business, community and college staff. This membership is reflective of the strong links the college has with the local community and industry.

A significant focus for the Board in the years ahead is 'community engagement'. This focus accords well with community survey data and with interviews with community members.

From the evidence provided, the reviewers are confident of the college's ability to sustain and improve student learning. Significant economies have been necessary in the budget over the past 12 months with the introduction of a new funding model and the cessation of some Commonwealth Government funding programs. The college has been able to maintain many programs due to the successful partnerships with outside agencies. The college has given high-level attention to future development through workforce planning, professional learning, and self-reflection, all focused on improving the outcomes for students. Despite its current challenges, with the support of the Board and staff, Gilmore College is well placed to sustain its performance.

## Conclusion

A reflective and responsive approach to self-review and improvement is developing at Gilmore College. The staff have analysed a range of appropriate academic and non-academic information to do this.

Student learning is enhanced by a range of learning opportunities, both in and outside the classroom, to meet the range of student needs and abilities. There is a determination to enhance and improve the learning environment and student performance.

Enduring partnerships with business, industry and community organisations within the Kwinana district has been a critical factor in the success of VET programs. The links with industry are particularly strong through the Kwinana Industries Council.

The Board is well informed of issues affecting the college and is actively engaged in decision making. Board members bring a range of skills and experience to their task, and show great commitment to the college. The Board has made significant progress in its own development toward a strategic approach to governance and has responded well to the needs of the college.

## Commendations

### The following areas are commended:

- progress in literacy and numeracy from Year 7 to Year 9
- sustained high completion rates of Certificate II in VET courses
- investment in programs that support student engagement and achievement
- support programs enhancing the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students
- the number, quality and commitment of partnerships established by the college
- the range of pathways in response to student interests, reflecting the college's commitment to finding relevance for every student

- the initiative taken in developing a variety of out-of-class activities during lunch and recess times to enhance relationships
- the Board composition, its role in strategic planning and the undertakings being pursued by its members to better engage the community.

## Areas for Improvement

***The following areas for improvement are identified:***

- further development of a systematic cycle of review, with timelines and responsibilities, that is published and available to staff to enhance communication and the process of evidence-based reflection
- consideration be given to enhancing the clarity of Business Plan targets, using a range of targets that cover the six years of schooling and differentiating between targets and milestones
- greater alignment of learning area operational plans with the Business Plan targets, with more frequent monitoring of learning area strategies and milestones to achieve greater consistency and better understanding of data analysis
- further engagement of all learning area staff in the consistent monitoring, support and feedback of classroom practices
- development of communication strategies to further engage parents and the wider school community
- improvement in attendance rates for all year levels
- implementation of behaviour management and instructional strategies to create a safe and secure learning environment.

## 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 the verification of the evidence provided by Gilmore College's part of the Department of Education Services' independent review process. The Principal and Board Chair have had an opportunity to comment on any matters of fact contained within this document.

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     Ms Pauline Coghlan, Lead Reviewer                     Date

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     Mr John Iacomella, Reviewer                     Date
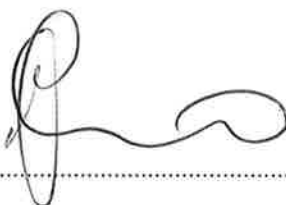
......................................................................        ......................3 July 2015......................
     Mr Peter Wilson, Reviewer                     Date

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Mr Richard Strickland, Director General, Department of Education Services             Date