



Department of Education and  
Early Childhood Development

# Priority Review Report

Thornbury Primary School  
North Western Victoria Region

School number:	3889
Principal:	Karen Mazurek
School Council President	Andrew Radojkovic
Regional Office Representative:	David Kilmartin
Review Company:	Cambridge Education
Accredited School Reviewer/s:	Debbie Peynenborg – Lead reviewer Gavan Schwartz
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## Executive Summary and Context

Thornbury Primary School (TPS) is a, community-minded school located in the inner northern suburbs. Established in 1915, the school has a long, proud tradition of educating children in the Darebin area. Students, parents and staff enthusiastically promote and value the curriculum and cultural diversity within the school, and the unique school culture is regularly celebrated through special events such as the Arts festival, NAIDOC week, and the Harvest and Winter Festivals. The school is a public mainstream school that provides a rich and diverse program offering which includes whole school Indigenous studies involving the Woiwurrung Language (spoken by the Wurundjeri people), accommodates Croxton School multi age class on site and provides an optional Steiner Stream. Steiner students make up approximately 30% of the student enrolment.

The school currently has an enrolment of 372 students which is predicted to increase to 409 by 2017. The students come from diverse economic, social and cultural backgrounds including 12% indigenous population, many of whom travel from outside the local area and 26% of children from English as an Additional Language (EAL) background which is a significant cohort within the school. The school's Student Family Occupation index has decreased to 0.36 over the last eight years (the state median is 0.52) indicating an increase in the socio-economic status of the families of students attending the school.

The school's two storey Edwardian brick building houses classrooms, multipurpose room, art craft room, library, music/drama room, piano room, outside school hours care room and indigenous studies room. Another four classrooms, the information technology lab and communal space are located in the Building the Educational Revolution unit renamed the Babajen building. The school's grounds include three separate adventure playground areas, two sand pits, a chicken coop, and an indigenous garden. An edible community garden has been established, with assistance from the Cultivating Community Garden Educator, parents and students. The edible garden program's focus is a 'hands on' experience in all aspects of food growing and sustainability. Students' supervised use of the neighbouring park during recess and lunch breaks overcomes the lack of grassed playing space within the school grounds.

The school's strategic direction has been implemented as set out in the TPS School Strategic Plan 2011-2014. The school motto '*One School One Community*' was developed as part of the strategic planning process. The reviewer found that the leadership team hasn't been able to bring the diverse school groups together cohesively under this motto. In fact a number of the different parent groups in the school voiced a concern about the lack of unity across the school and concerns about a 'them and us' view starting to develop in the school community.

It is understandable that there will be differences in pedagogical approaches between mainstream and Steiner classes and it is not uncommon for a school to offer different pathways in order to support the learning needs of all its students. However, such pathways should be unified by a common set of principles which have not as yet been articulated at TPS.

The school went through a period of change with a series of Acting Principals and Assistant Principals until the current Principal and Assistant Principal were employed two and a half years ago. Current

staffing includes 22 Effective Full Time (EFT) teachers and 6.2 EFT Education Support staff in roles covering administration, integration aide assistance and Koori Education Support Officers (KESO). The school's leadership consists of a full time Principal and Assistant Principal. The team has begun building a performance and development culture which is leading to greater accountability and a stronger performance management process.

There has been a high level of staff turnover at the school in recent years. The school leadership has taken some actions in order to mitigate the impact of this. This has included having eight staff members including the principal team participate in Indigenous Leadership training through the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program; each term all staff continue to participate in cultural awareness activities. Furthermore, a number of the Steiner teachers had been made ongoing recently to reflect the Steiner philosophy where the one teacher and a class group of students progresses through the school together. Overall, the whole school community has expressed high levels of regard and support for the committed and caring teachers and Education Support staff both past and present.

Student welfare is a high priority in the school in order to support increasing numbers of students with learning and behavioural needs. A whole school approach to behaviour management has been implemented to provide a safe and secure learning environment. Student, staff and parent perception is that bullying behaviour has decreased due to the strong focus on positive wellbeing programs. Students feel safe and happy at school. There is a high degree of satisfaction for the support provided by the school leadership for students with significant learning or behavioural needs. However, student behaviour issues continue to impact and in some cases disrupt teaching and learning. The school's management of disruptive behaviour means that leaders have less time available for other leadership activities.

Students and families are supported by an extensive range of welfare and support services. The staff has received professional development on 'Calmer Classrooms', and in partnership with parents have established a 'Kids Matter Action Team'. The "Koorie Kids" staff PD program and the CASEA P-2 program for parents, children and teachers have also been effective. Student attendance in 2013, and as a four-year average (2010-2013), is lower when compared with similar schools. In 2013, the average attendance rate for classes was 91% which represents about 18 absent days per FTE student. The school has clearly stated procedures for following up on student absences. Programs such as 'It's not ok to be away' and attendance awards/incentives have been used to raise awareness and encourage punctuality and attendance however this is having little impact on improving student attendance data.

The AusVELS curriculum has been introduced and is being progressively implemented. The staff is starting to use multiple sources of data to inform teaching and learning including NAPLAN data, On Demand testing Years 3-6, and English and Maths On-line Interviews are conducted for Prep students. Student learning outcome data indicates reading outcomes for Year 3 and 5 students as measured by NAPLAN show strong performance in growth terms. The results for writing and numeracy are below expectations.

Various approaches to teaching numeracy and literacy have been introduced at specific year levels over recent years. At the time of introduction each approach was well supported by professional

learning and coaching. However, teaching practice remains variable across the school and there appears to be little evidence of a consistent, sustained whole school approach.

Having to reduce a budget deficit of \$35,000 is currently impacting on staffing and other resource decisions. The school currently employs Numeracy and Literacy coaches, both at 0.2 EFT. The data suggests this strategy is appropriate given current performance in Numeracy and Literacy. However, there were only initial measures in place to determine the impact of this strategy on student learning outcomes.

There was evidence that the School Council's role in governance was not as effective as expected which had resulted in the Senior Advisor supporting the operation of Council.