Belridge Education Support Centre

2013

Independent Review Findings
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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 and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

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

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School and Review Details

Principal: Ms Jenine Wall
Board Chair: Mr Tony O’Gorman
School Location: 17 Gwendoline Drive, Beldon WA 6027
School Classification: Education Support Class 5
Number of Students: 71 (Semester One 2013)
Reviewers: Mr Rees Barrett and Mr John Iacomella
Review Dates: Self-review presentation: 13 May 2013
Review visits: 27 and 28 May 2013

1. About the Independent Review

The purpose of the independent review of Belridge Education Support Centre is to provide an assurance to the Minister for Education, the Director General of Education and the Centre’s community on the extent to which the Centre 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 Centre has improved the standards of student learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students
- how well the Centre has created an environment that promotes student learning
- how well the Centre is placed to sustain and improve its performance.

The Centre has been required, under the DPA, to undertake regular self-assessment. The outcomes of these assessments formed the basis for the Centre’s self-review which was presented to the reviewers for verification at the commencement of the independent review.
Prior to the presentation of the self-review, reviewers were provided with information on the Centre’s educational achievements, its processes and its student performance data from a number of sources which include, but are not limited to:

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

Reviewers visited the Centre for a half-day presentation of the self-review by the Principal, the Board Chair and other key stakeholders chosen by the Centre. Following the half-day visit the three centres making up the Westcoast Education Support Cluster met with the reviewers for the cluster self-review. Subsequently the reviewers analysed the evidence presented in the Centre and cluster self-review documentation and developed lines of enquiry where further verification was required.

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

The evidence provided by the Centre, 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 Centre has met its commitments as outlined in its DPA and Business Plan.

This document reports on the findings of the independent review.
2. Summary

Belridge Education Support Centre (the Centre) provides secondary education to Special Education Needs (SEN) students from Years 8 to 13. Its vision is to provide opportunities for students to develop independence and lifelong learning skills. The Centre, a member of the Westcoast Education Support Cluster, is collocated with Belridge Senior High School with which it shares specialised facilities. Two-thirds of the students are bussed to the Centre. There is increasing diversity in the nature of students' disabilities. Effective partnerships with parents, therapists, businesses and community groups underpin the Centre's programs.

Students at Belridge Education Support Centre demonstrate achievement, progress and engagement in their learning. All students have individual education plans (IEPs) that detail individualised learning programs and goals. These goals are used for 'whole-of-school' target setting. The Centre has achieved its Business Plan targets in transition (primary to secondary) and health and wellbeing and almost achieved the numeracy targets. Priority is being given in future planning to improvement of IEP goal setting, achievement of communication targets and inclusion of post-secondary transition targets. The Centre is making progress in addressing the challenges of aggregating achievement of individual learning goals to meaningful whole-of-school information in planning for improvement.

All members of staff collaborate to provide a varied and challenging learning environment for all students. Technology is used to enrich the learning opportunities for students and enhance the quality of their work. Learning programs are delivered in partnership with the wider community to develop and extend the academic outcomes for students. Together with Belridge Senior High School, the Centre has actively fostered social integration of the students. Partnerships with the wider community and local schools provide the students with the opportunity to enhance their belief they are valued members of the community.

Sustainability is a key challenge for Belridge Education Support Centre. Leadership provided by the current Principal and the Board together with staff dedication and positive parental support have contributed significantly to maintaining performance in the face of significant changes. Opportunities to build sustainability and improve performance will be provided through the priorities already identified. Systematic self-review of current Belridge Education
Support Centre and board processes for accountability and community engagement will further enhance the capacity for ongoing improvement.

Implementation of a cluster strategy has benefitted the parents and students of the Centre, particularly through a successful transition strategy and sharing of resources and innovations. Review of the current Cluster Board role and operations will be crucial for sustaining improvement. This particularly applies to the Centre ensuring that it is implementing fully its DPA commitments.

The following **commendations** support the Centre’s claims of significant strengths and areas of improvement:

- achievement of the transition and health and wellbeing targets and near achievement of the numeracy targets
- application of technology to improve access to communication and create a positive and rewarding learning environment for the students
- implementation of a form-group structure to improve student learning and promote student social development
- establishment of a learning environment that is welcoming to students and consistently achieves a high rate of attendance
- collaboration with Belridge Senior High School to implement integrated programs and activities that increase student self-worth and enrich the students’ learning experiences
- the range and quality of learning experiences offered to students in partnership with local community groups, businesses and training institutions
- the effectiveness of the Year 7 to Year 8 transition program
- the Cluster Board’s successful leadership and implementation of effective transition strategies benefitting parents and students
- the sharing of resources and innovations achieved through the cluster strategy.

The following **affirmations** support continued implementation of strategies and initiatives or areas for improvement identified by the Centre:

- the priority being given to improving the writing of IEP goals and implementing improvement strategies in the communication area
- plans for the inclusion of successful post-school transition as a future priority
- the planned implementation of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) standards as a reflective framework for reviewing leadership and teaching practice
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- the planned future priority of improving IEP goal setting using the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Assessable, Realistic and Timed) model
- the planned priorities for developing the leadership structure, employing additional therapy services (speech and occupational) and ongoing development of the most appropriate mix of teacher and education assistant skills to meet student learning needs in the face of changing enrolment patterns
- the Centre’s planned priority in advocating for its students and responding pro-actively to recent changes in post-school service providers.

The following **recommendations** are made to add value to the Centre’s improvement and review processes:

- review of the student learning targets in the Business Plan, with a view that these either reflect the intention of 100% achievement of IEP goals, or an alternative approach
- links with similar schools and centres be developed to share professional knowledge and, where appropriate, to compare student outcomes
- development of its own Business Plan and a method of target setting that reflects the specific learning improvement priorities for its students
- student learning related to non-academic outcomes, progress and engagement be considered in future planning and target-setting processes
- sustainability be enhanced through the documentation and embedding of Centre practices, particularly those related to school self-review and induction of new staff
- the current cluster board members representing the Centre review possible options that will enable them to fully carry out their DPA commitments
- the Board explore and implement other strategies for building community engagement
- the transition target and implementation of joint strategies for improvement be a focal point for future cluster planning, monitoring and review processes
- Belridge Education Support Centre Board representatives review the role of the cluster in conjunction with their review of options that will enable them to fully carry out their DPA commitments
- terms of reference be prepared to reflect the new board arrangements that are negotiated to enable DPA commitments to be fully implemented and the processes for induction and ongoing training of members.
3. School Context

Belridge Education Support Centre is one of three centres in the Westcoast Education Support Cluster. It provides secondary schooling for students considered to have special education needs. The Joondalup and Beldon Education Support Centres, the other two centres in the cluster, provide primary schooling for the large majority of students currently enrolled at the Belridge Education Support Centre. The vision of the Centre is to provide a seamless education, with planned transition points, that will enable students to lead quality lives. The ethos is that all students are capable of learning and have different needs requiring an individualised approach.

Situated in the northern Perth suburb of Beldon, the Centre shares a site with Belridge Senior High School. The Centre’s administration offices and nine classrooms are distributed throughout the Belridge Senior High School buildings. This collocation enables access to specialised learning infrastructure required for secondary education as well as to discrete education support facilities such as the independent living and horticultural training areas. Space is however, limited and this will pose challenges in the future.

SEN students are drawn from a wide area stretching from Duncraig to Yanchep. While the majority come from the two primary centres of the cluster others are enrolled from mainstream primary schools. Three-quarters of the students are bussed between their home and the Centre.

At the time of the independent review, 71 students were enrolled at the Centre (two-thirds male). After a short period of decline, enrolments are increasing again. It is likely that this trend will accelerate with a possible policy change requiring enrolment of all eligible students within the local intake area.

There are similar student numbers for each year of secondary schooling. Students are organised into eight form groups, in which they spend most of their class time. Allocation of students to form groups reflects two main considerations: year of schooling and student learning needs. One group comprises seven high-needs students (Years 8 to 11). Currently, three students have elected to complete Year 13 in order to prepare for successful post-school transition.

There is increasing diversity in the nature of the students’ special education needs. Growing numbers of higher needs/lower functioning students are being enrolled. Enrolment of students with mental health issues is also increasing.
Currently, the staff includes a principal; a deputy principal; 11 teachers (10.2 FTE); 27 education assistants (21 FTE); a school psychologist (0.2 FTE); a school chaplain (0.4 FTE); a registrar and two clerical administrative assistants (2 FTE). A further 1.2 FTE is allocated to Belridge Senior High School to fund the integration program from design and technology (home economics, woodwork and art).

The Belridge Education Support Centre Workforce Plan identifies the following six 'key gaps': shortage of qualified teaching applicants; need for new skill set in the finance area; increasing information communication technology (ICT) demands; shortage of hydrotherapy staff; need to increase school psychologist time, and education assistants' training needs. Strategies to address these gaps are being implemented and reviewed.

The Centre relies on effective partnerships to expand educational opportunities for its students. The partnership with parents/carers underpins all learning; however, there is not a Parents and Citizens' Association. Student wellbeing and development relies on effective partnerships with therapists. Partnerships with businesses and community groups underpin successful workplace learning and community access programs. The partnership with Belridge Senior High School is crucial given the integration of the Centre's classrooms and students.

The Cluster Board has 14 members, including two community representatives and four representatives of each of the three cluster schools (two parents, one elected staff member and the Principal). The Board's terms of reference is based on the generic Department of Education document.
4a. School Performance - Student Learning

The Westcoast Education Support Cluster Business Plan lists cluster targets for the three education support centres. Targets are grouped in four priority areas: Transition, Communication, Numeracy, Health and Wellbeing. Specific measures for each target are an aggregated percentage of IEP goals achieved by all students. It is not possible to use standardised testing programs such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) to measure and compare student achievement as none of the students participate in those assessments.

The IEPs comprise individualised learning goals that each student is expected to achieve. Teachers negotiate these goals with education assistants and parents/carers each semester. Expectations for each student’s achievement are based on staff and parent monitoring of the student’s progress over the previous semester. Input from other sources, such as therapists, is also included in the negotiations. Goals are set for academic and non-academic learning (including independent living and personal goals). Most of the goals are written in behavioural terms such as ‘follows simple rules in familiar games’, ‘uses language to describe shape’. The Leadership team is responsible for monitoring the implementation of all IEPs.

Targets in the Business Plan are written in percentage terms. Teachers confirmed the percentage targets in the Business Plan do influence and shape their teaching programs. For 2011 and 2012, the targets in the Business Plan for Communication, Numeracy, Health and Wellbeing are for students to achieve 50% and 60% respectively of the IEP goals. These targets were achieved in each priority area in 2011. In 2012, the target was achieved only in Health and Wellbeing (60%), and was nearly achieved in Numeracy (58%). Of most concern was the fall in achievement of IEP goals in the Communication area (from 59% in 2011 to 49% in 2012). Belridge Education Support Centre is commended for achieving the health and wellbeing target and almost achieving the numeracy targets. The reviewers affirm the priority being given to improving the writing of IEP goals and implementing improvement strategies in the communication area.

The Principal and teachers believe that it is not possible for students to achieve 100% of IEP goals. This belief is based on:
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- the uneven nature of each student’s progress (for example, health issues significantly affecting progress)
- the large number of goals (for example, there are 66 goals in one Year 9 student’s IEP)
- the lack of a standardised progress map describing expected ‘growth’ in learning for students with SEN over a specific period of time
- the difficulty experienced in writing specific, measurable, timed goals.

Parents acknowledge their child may in fact regress in some areas at some stage during the year. Nevertheless, they expect their child to have appropriate and realistic goals for achievement. The Principal acknowledges that the process of goal setting needs refinement and consistency across the school.

Discussions with staff, parents and board members centred on the difficulties associated with using aggregated percentages of IEP goals achieved as the target for improvement. Parents and staff acknowledge that 100% is not achievable in this Centre’s context. However, during the IEP negotiation process the intent is that the student should be able to achieve the goals set at least by the end of the year. Ideally, therefore, the 100% target seems most appropriate, even though it may be aspirational. The advantage of this approach is that it focuses attention in the next review of IEP goals on the factors that led to the student not being able to achieve the intended learning. If a target of 100% is considered inappropriate, an alternative approach to target-setting needs to be developed. It is recommended that the Centre reviews the student learning targets in its Business Plan, with a view that these either reflect the intention of 100% achievement, or an alternative approach.

Achievement of the primary to secondary school transition target was not reported for 2011 or 2012 as the improvement strategy was fully implemented for the first time during 2012. Parents of the 12 Year 8 students were surveyed in 2013. Based on the eight surveys returned, 87% (target 80%) of parents felt more confident and less anxious about their child attending secondary school. This represents a commendable achievement given the understandably high degree of anxiety expressed by parents in the past.

The achievement of non-academic learning outcomes (including motivation, social, personal, independent living and post-school transition skills) is particularly significant in this context. Information on each student’s progress is available through analysis of hard-copy work portfolios that are retained by teachers. There appears to be limited systematic, centralised collection of data in the non-academic achievement and student progress aspects of student
learning. Student engagement is high, based on observation of classroom behaviour and attendance. Despite the significant challenges faced each day by individual students, Centre attendance rates across all year levels are consistently above State averages. It is recommended that the student learning related to non-academic outcomes, progress and engagement be considered in future planning and target-setting processes.

Preparing students for a successful transition from schooling after Year 12 or 13 is a significant part of the Centre’s work. For parents in particular, the capacity of their child to be in a position to enter the workforce and/or participate meaningfully in community life after completing secondary school is of vital importance and of highest priority for the educational program. However, in the current Cluster Business Plan this aspect of transition is not mentioned. Plans for the inclusion of successful post-school transition as a future priority are affirmed.

The context of the Belridge Education Support Centre makes it difficult for like-school comparisons of student achievement and Centre performance. The learning context is based on the diverse educational needs of each student and their individual rates of progress. Student learning is not always linear, as on occasions their learning may regress for reasons beyond the Centre’s control. There is capacity for staff to visit similar schools and centres to increase their own professional learning in terms of teaching strategies and facilitate comparison of student achievement through sharing of work samples and non-academic achievement. It is recommended the Centre develops its links with similar schools and centres to enable staff to share professional knowledge and, where appropriate, to compare student outcomes.

4b. **School Performance - Quality of the Learning Environment**

It is very evident there is a culture within Belridge Education Support Centre of all staff and parents working together to assist students to achieve their IEP goals. It is based on a belief that every student is capable of improving their learning, regardless of their disability. All students are encouraged to be lifelong learners and develop the independent living skills required to be successful citizens.

Class sizes range from seven to 11 students. There is considerable collaboration between teachers and education assistants to ensure the
individual needs of students are met. Teamwork was very evident amongst all staff.

Each student has access to a computer tablet which has enabled students to overcome speech and language difficulties and to present written work more effectively. Students have increased confidence in approaching learning tasks and completing their work. All classrooms have interactive whiteboards, which are connected to student tablets. This connectivity "has brought content to life for the students"\(^1\). Classrooms have a positive learning environment built around the use of the technology. The literacy coordinator is responsible for the application of this technology in the classroom and responsible for ensuring students have access to the latest computer applications. The Centre is commended for the application of technology to improve access to communication and create a positive and rewarding learning environment for all students.

Students are grouped into eight form groups of mostly the same year level. Each form is based in one room with one teacher responsible for the educational program, similar to the traditional primary school model. This represents a change from previous years where students moved to different rooms as in the traditional secondary school model. The new organisational model gives students a base for most of their school day. Students move to other rooms and other teachers only for a limited number of electives. Grouping students in peer groups has supported student transitions and "aided the use of language as a social process"\(^2\). The Centre is commended for implementing a form group structure to improve student learning and promote student social development.

Classroom visits confirm students are engaged in their learning and receiving the appropriate level of support from the staff. Discussions with parents confirm that students willingly attend the school despite significant difficulties in some cases. The Centre is commended for establishing a learning environment that is welcoming to students and consistently achieves a high rate of attendance.

The Centre's classrooms are distributed amongst the classrooms of Belridge Senior High School. Building the Education Revolution funds were used to create a purpose-built centre for the senior students and an attached undercover area. This facility serves as a centre for students from the Centre. Nevertheless, students from the Centre are integrated with students from

\(^1\) Belridge Education Support Centre Literacy Report 2012
\(^2\) Belridge Education Support Centre Literacy Report 2012
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Belridge Senior High School as they move between their own classes and during recess and lunch times. Students from the Centre readily mix with those from the Belridge Senior High School and feel valued as fellow students. The integration process is enhanced with students from the Centre also attending the high school ball, camps and excursions. Parents and staff believe students' social development is considerably enriched through this integration.

Students have the opportunity to utilise the home economics, technology and enterprise and art facilities at Belridge Senior High School under the direction of the high school specialist teachers. The students follow a prescribed program that enables them to complete samples of work they can take home or sell during the Belridge Education Support Centre Market Day. Classroom observations and examination of student work confirm the diversity of student learning. Teachers report that students modify their behaviour to attend these classes and feel valued as learners. Belridge Education Support Centre and Belridge Senior High School are commended for the diversity of the integration programs and activities that increase student self-worth and enrich the students' learning experiences.

The Centre provides significant transition to work and independent living learning opportunities for its senior students, including Vocational Education and Training (VET) and the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) programs. The IEPs for some Year 11 and 12 students are relabelled as Individual Transition Plans (ITPs). The Centre provides opportunities for students to improve work related skills with strategies such as all Year 11 and 12 students participating in workplace learning for at least one day per week, including the students integrating with mainstream students in the ‘Try a Trade Day’ and students working with BIZLINK (a disability employment service) to develop work and interview skills.

Students are provided opportunities to develop work preparedness and undertake workplace training through these programs. Typically, over 50% of students successfully complete the programs. Year 10 students also participate in the Workplace Experience and Community Access programs in partnership with local businesses and industry groups. Students also participate in cadet training for the Fire and Emergency Services Authority. The focus of these programs is to develop in students a belief that they are valued members of the community. Student self-belief and confidence is enhanced. Belridge Education Support Centre is commended for the range and quality of learning experiences it offers its students in partnership with local businesses and training institutions.
The Centre also conducts a significant Year 7 to Year 8 transition program. This transition point is of great concern to parents as their child leaves a small school setting to move into a larger school where the education support facilities are interspersed with a senior secondary school. The transition program includes activities where the students complete a series of half-day visits to the Centre in semester two and participate in the Centre's sports and market days (where students sell products to the public). Parents are welcome to accompany their children on these days. The IPS cluster arrangement has enabled the three schools to develop a common ethos and culture with a focus on developing K-12/13 learning programs. Discussions with parents and survey results confirm the success of the transition program. Parents commented how their children enjoyed the transition program and felt more prepared to begin high school with their fears and anxieties reduced. The Centre is commended for the effectiveness of the Year 7 to Year 8 transition program.

The Centre has identified future developments that will impact and challenge the existing learning environment. These developments include: the establishment of another similar centre to the north of Belridge at a new secondary school; Year 7 student enrolment from 2015; increasing student enrolment and student diversity; the need for additional classrooms; the impact of government funding, and the difficulty of finding additional workplace learning providers. The Principal, staff and parents have acknowledged these challenges and are working together to develop and implement strategies so that all students will have access to a positive learning environment. Reviewers affirm the consultative and collaborative processes Belridge Education Support Centre has established with parents, the other centres in the cluster and the wider community to help provide the appropriate learning environment for all students in response to changing community needs.

4c. School Performance - Sustainability

Changes in leadership since the start of the DPA in 2011 have affected the Centre's self-review process. It is fortunate that the current Principal transferred from another centre in the cluster (Joondalup Education Support Centre). The level of Belridge Education Support Cluster performance evident throughout the review process reflects well on the leadership, vision and sense of purpose achieved by the Principal and Cluster Board. It also reflects the high level of staff dedication and parent support.
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The leadership survey involving staff and board members will be conducted in the near future.

Belridge Education Support Centre has an established structure and process for performance management that includes all staff members. This is an integral part of the ongoing self-review process. The reviewers affirm the Centre’s planned implementation of the AITSL standards as a reflective framework for reviewing leadership and teaching practice.

The Centre’s evidence-based self-review practices currently focus on each student’s IEP. Each semester, goal attainment in the IEPs is used to review and report on student achievement and progress. The quality of goal setting therefore influences the quality of the self-review process. The reviewers affirm the Centre’s planned future priority for improving IEP goal setting using the SMART model.

Hard copies of students’ work portfolios are retained as evidence. The reviewers affirm the Centre’s planned priority for enhancing its evidence base by implementing the Department of Education’s Special Education Needs Online Reporting and SENAT (Special Education Needs Assessment Tool). School leaders are not optimistic, however, about the potential of using the Australian Curriculum “to compare student progress in a developmental sequence”4.

During 2011, the Centre commenced implementation of the IDEAS (Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in Schools) strategy developed by the University of Southern Queensland. It involves all staff members and parents in reviewing current practice and identifying ideas for improvement. The IDEAS Diagnostic Inventory informs the Centre’s self-review process. It is designed to provide feedback across five areas: Outcomes (school successes and achievements); Strategic Foundation (school vision and structures); Cohesive Communities (the school and its community); Infrastructural Design (work practices and school organisation); and Three Dimensional Pedagogy (teaching, learning and assessment). Parent and staff responses have been independently collated. A mean score greater than 3.5 is deemed to be a positive outcome (although statistical significance is reduced due to the small survey population). This applied to all parent responses indicating a high level of confidence in the Centre’s work. In several cases staff responses that fell below 3.5 have been considered in school improvement planning.

4 Westcoast Education Support Cluster Business Plan 2011-2013, p2
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Strategies for improving pedagogy feature in the Centre’s plans for the future. For example, priority is given to improving learning through students’ use of tablets. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) strategies and resources are used to improve students’ literacy. A rigorous process for reviewing the appropriateness of computer applications is implemented. Ongoing provision of related professional learning opportunities is a priority.

Planning processes are established in the Centre. The Business Plan (2011-2013) is connected to classroom planning and practice through a three-year operational plan. There are annual reviews of the Centre’s progress towards the achievement of cluster targets in the Business Plan and implementation of milestones in the operational plan. The Belridge Education Support Centre 2012 Annual Report includes data on three of the four Business Plan milestones.

The focus on cluster targets has proved problematic for three main reasons. Firstly, they are based on students’ achievement of IEP goals. The highly individualised and patchwork nature of the achievement of these goals reduces their value as the basis for whole-school target setting. Secondly, the targets are averaged across the three centres in the cluster. Thirdly, the key learning priority for Belridge Education Support Centre, related to increasing independence and successful post-secondary transition, has not been included because it lacks relevance to the other two centres in the cluster. It is recommended that the Belridge Education Support Centre develops its own Business Plan and a method of target setting that reflects the learning improvement priorities for its students.

The workforce plan highlights several significant and ongoing issues facing the Centre. The reviewers affirm the workforce planning process and the planned priorities for developing the leadership structure, employing additional therapy services (speech and occupational) and ongoing development of the most appropriate mix of teacher and education assistant skills to meet student learning needs in the face of changing enrolment patterns. It is recommended that sustainability be enhanced through the documentation and embedding of Centre practices, particularly those related to school self-review and induction of new staff.

The Cluster Board met four times in 2011 and similarly in 2012. It is evident from the wide-ranging agenda items included in minutes of the meetings that limited time was available for the Board’s review of performance and plans for improving student learning in each of the three cluster education support
centres. It is recommended that the current cluster board members representing Belridge Education Support Centre review possible options that will enable them to carry out their DPA commitments to “participate fully in … processes to review the school’s performance; processes to determine satisfaction levels of parents, staff and students, with results reported in the annual school report; endorsing the annual school report…”5. One option raised during the review visit was the formation of a Belridge Education Support Centre Board similar in composition to the current Centre representatives. This group, it was thought, could meet as required to focus on this Centre’s commitments. These meetings could be timed to lead in to cluster meetings. Alternately, increasing the number and/or length of current cluster board meetings was raised as a consideration.

The Belridge Education Support Centre community is engaged in the ongoing improvement of student learning. Partnerships with parents, therapy services, Belridge Senior High School, primary schools and centres from which the Centre’s students are drawn, training providers, employers and businesses are particularly important. Post-school service providers are crucial in the priority area of building student and parent confidence about the post-school transition. Recent changes to the service providers receiving Commonwealth funding have the potential to impact negatively. The reviewers affirm the Centre’s planned priority in advocating for its students and responding pro-actively to recent changes in post-school service providers.

There were several indicators of limited engagement of the broader community with the Board. The reviewers were advised that the Cluster Board has held a meeting that was open to the community, however, only board members attended. It is recommended that the Board implement other strategies for building community engagement.

Sustainability is a key challenge for Belridge Education Support Centre. Leadership provided by the current Principal and the Board together with staff dedication and positive parental support have contributed significantly to maintaining performance in the face of significant changes. Opportunities to build sustainability and improve performance will be provided through the priorities already identified. Systematic self-review of current Centre and Board processes for accountability and community engagement will further enhance the capacity for ongoing improvement.

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5 Belridge Education Support Centre Delivery and Performance Agreement, 19/4/2011 to 17/4/2014
5. School and Cluster Performance

The Westcoast Education Support Cluster vision is to strengthen the long-standing partnership between the three education support centre members. Through this strengthened partnership, it is intended to provide "exceptional educational opportunities to students with special educational needs enabling them to lead quality lives"6.

No formal, documented self-review of the achievement of the purpose of the cluster strategy was made available to the reviewers. However, based on evidence drawn from several sources, membership of the cluster has benefitted Belridge Education Support Centre in the following ways:

- Economies of scale have been achieved through one relatively small school community joining with two others. This has enabled the formation of an active Board with significant parent and community representation. It also has the potential to enhance the community presence of the Board (through increased status and awareness).
- A higher level of connectedness with the Beldon and Joondalup education support centres has been developed with potential benefits for improved student learning through improved continuity of educational programs and priorities from primary to secondary.
- The achievement of the transition target in the Business Plan which resulted in significant improvements to student and parent confidence in making the difficult change from primary to secondary schooling.
- The improvements to the transition strategy which benefit other students enrolling at the Centre from mainstream primary schools.
- The ability to implement proactive planning and shared professional learning opportunities and professional development days (e.g. development of new pedagogies through the use of tablets) across the cluster.
- The increased capacity for resource sharing (e.g. shared school psychologist time) across the cluster. Individual centres retain control of their resources and there are no discrete cluster resources.
- The continuity of leadership in an environment of change (e.g. the Joondalup Education Support Centre Principal was appointed Principal of Belridge Education Support Centre during 2012, leading both schools until her former position was filled).

6 Westcoast Education Support Cluster Business Plan 2011-2013, p1
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For these reasons, there is strong staff, parent and community support for continuing the cluster initiative. The reviewers commend the Cluster Board on its successful leadership and implementation of effective transition strategies benefitting parents and students. Also commendable is the sharing of resources and innovations achieved through the cluster strategy.

The Board’s plans to review achievement of cluster targets (in the priority areas of Communication, Numeracy, Health and Wellbeing) did not eventuate. Belridge Education Support Centre reported separately in these priority areas through its 2012 Annual Report (although no documented Cluster Board endorsement of the report was provided to the reviewers). It is logical that improvement targets in these areas are best treated as a matter for the individual education support centres.

Currently, the cluster’s key drivers are the primary to secondary transition target and implementation of joint strategies for improvement. It is recommended that these be the focal points for future cluster planning, monitoring and review processes. It is also recommended that the Belridge Education Support Centre Board representatives review the role of the cluster in conjunction with their review of options that will enable them to carry out fully their DPA commitments.

It is also recommended that revised terms of reference be prepared to reflect the new board arrangements negotiated to enable DPA commitments to be fully implemented. These should also highlight the priority given to the processes for induction and training of members. Currently, the Cluster Board’s terms of reference are generic and have not been customised to reflect the specific details of its operations.

The cluster strategy has the potential to significantly benefit Belridge Education Support Centre in its planned improvement of IEP goal setting. Some of the joint strategies listed in the Business Plan that have not yet been implemented have the potential to inform this process (e.g. “teachers moderate student work and student targets to ensure consistency of judgements”). Such strategies should be given priority in future planning.

Implementation of a cluster strategy has benefitted the parents and students of Belridge Education Support Centre, particularly through a successful transition strategy and sharing of resources and innovations. Review of the current Cluster Board role and operations will be crucial for sustaining improvement. This particularly applies to Belridge Education Support Centre ensuring that it is implementing fully its DPA commitments.
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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 Belridge Education Support Centre as 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.

Rees Barrett, Lead Reviewer
6 August 2013
Date

John Iacopella, Reviewer
6 August 2013
Date

Richard Strickland, CEO, Department of Education Services
14/8/13
Date