

ADVERTISER.COM.AU THURSDAY NOVEMBER 13 2014

Schools' progress goes under the microscope

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PARENTS will be given more information about their child's education through new performance targets and regular reviews for schools.

Education Minister Jennifer Rankine has announced a suite of changes to more closely monitor the progress of students, provide more support to struggling schools and encourage more consultation with parents.

Every school will be set tailored performance targets based on data such as NAPLAN results, SACE scores, attendance rates and progress in reading and mathematics, which will be used to judge their improvement over time and in comparison with other similar schools.

A panel will conduct four-yearly reviews of performance data, observe schools in action and consult with parents, students and school staff.

Review reports will be made publicly available to ensure accountability. The Education Department has identified the first 35 schools to undergo reviews in Term 1 next year. A total 135 schools will be reviewed in 2015.

"This is not a punitive approach, it's about a stronger focus on how our schools perform and how that performance can be improved," Ms Rankine said.

"These are significant reforms that will deliver a stronger focus on how schools are performing, where they can improve, and where successful measures can be translated to other schools."

Other elements of the reform package include:

BETTER - performing schools enlisted to mentor schools with weaker results.

ASSESSING schools in regional clusters.

MORE "sophisticated" data collection techniques to track outcomes.



READING: Premier Jay Weatherill signs a Little Big Book Club book for Ava Hunter, 2.

Picture: CALUM ROBERTSON

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THE LITTLE
 BIG BOOK CLUB

In August, preliminary results of the 2014 National Literacy and Numeracy tests showed SA was the worst performing mainland state across the five areas of testing. The State Government is working

to improve educational outcomes by focusing on early childhood education and development.

It has allocated \$350,000 a year for the next three years to provide book packs for the Little Big Book Club program, which encourages reading for parents and young children.

Premier Jay Weatherill yesterday took time to read to Ava, 2 ½, who is the first toddler in the state to receive a new Toddler Reading Pack from The Little Big Book Club.

The program began as a partnership between the State Government, *The Advertiser* and the Public Libraries of SA in 2005.

Mr Weatherill said reading to babies was "absolutely critical" for their brain development. "We now know that right from the start children's brains have been wired up for language so as they are seeing the images and hearing the words their brains are being wired up so they can speak," he said.

The 21,000 reading packs

will be available to parents with children aged from 18 months to 2 ½ years.

Little Big Book Club general manager Sue Hill said the Toddler Reading Pack aimed to develop numeracy skills in youngsters and commissioned SA authors and illustrators to write the resources for parents.

Eligible families will be able to collect their free pack from any of the 136 public libraries in SA and from selected Child and Family Health centres.

PAGE 22: EDITORIAL