

Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Blackwood High School

Conducted in November 2020



Government of South Australia
Department for Education

Review details

Our education system aspires to become the best in Australia by seeking growth for every student, in every class and in every school.

The purpose of the External School Review (ESR) is to support schools to raise achievement, sustain high performance and to provide quality assurance to build and sustain public confidence in government schools.

The External School Review framework is referenced throughout all stages of the ESR process.

This report outlines aspects of the school's performance verified through the review process according to the framework. It does not document every aspect of the school's processes, programs and outcomes.

We acknowledge the support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community. While not all review processes, artefacts and comments are documented here, they have all been considered and contribute to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Rob McLaren, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate, Kylie Eggers and Warren Symonds, Review Principals.

Review Process

The following processes were used to gather evidence relevant to the lines of inquiry:

- Presentation from the principal
- Class visits
- Attendance at staff meeting
- Document analysis
- Scan of Aboriginal Education Strategy implementation
- Discussions with:
 - Governing Council representatives
 - Leaders
 - Parent groups
 - School Services Officers (SSOs)
 - Student groups
 - Teachers

School context

Blackwood High School caters for young people from year 8 to year 12. It is situated 11kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2020 is 984. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 933 students. The local partnership is the Mitcham Hills.

The school has an ICSEA score of 1062, and is classified as Category 7 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 1% Aboriginal students, 5% students with disabilities, 4% students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, 1% children/young people in care and 11% of students eligible for school card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of the principal, who began her tenure at the beginning of Term 2, 2017 and is in her 3rd year of tenure, and:

- one B4 deputy principal responsible for curriculum and pedagogy
- three B3 assistant principals:
 - middle school and student wellbeing
 - senior school and whole-school literacy and numeracy
 - information/communication systems and learning technologies.
- curriculum leaders:
 - four B1 coordinators – innovation in the arts, HPE, LOTE, maths
 - two B2 coordinators – innovation in English and humanities, science and technology
 - one B2 coordinator – innovation in pedagogy.
- year level Leaders
 - one B2 coordinator – year 10-12 learning improvement and SACE
 - one B1 coordinator – year 10-12 learning improvement leader
 - two B1 coordinator - year 7-9 learning improvement leader.
- two student wellbeing leaders
- one personalised learning leader
- one student pathways and career development leader
- one school services officer level 6, business leader.

There are 34.6 FTE teachers including 1 in the early years of their career, and there are several teachers in the first 5 years of their teaching career. There are 19 Step 9 teachers and 5 advanced skills teacher 2 teachers.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

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| Direction 1 | Continue to develop a consistent approach to the implementation of a wide range of pedagogical practices, including the use of student inquiry and digital technologies, to further improve student engagement and achievement. |
| Direction 2 | Continue to progress the implementation of effective and consistent performance development processes to improve the quality of teaching and learning practices, including the sharing of good practice and increased accountability for effective differentiation practices that meet the needs of all students. |

- Direction 3** Continue to build leadership capacity by clarifying leadership roles and expected outcomes, providing targeted professional learning, and consolidating whole-school priorities, their explicit outcomes, targets and timelines.
- Direction 4** Develop the data literacy of all staff so that teachers and leaders can use achievement data to identify strategies to support the progress and growth of all students, and measure the effectiveness of programs.
- Direction 5** Further develop and embed the full capabilities of the current learner management system (Daymap) and ensure its consistent use across the school.

What impact has the implementation of previous directions had on school improvement?

Following the external school review of 2016, the current principal was appointed. After reviewing the report and its directions, she spent time observing teaching and learning, analysing data sets and gathering feedback from students, staff and parents/caregivers. This evidence allowed her to plan a strategic approach to implementation. The following is a list of actions in response to the directions:

Direction 1:

- The deputy principal role aligned to pedagogical development supported by a B2 leader with a role in innovation and pedagogy.
- Ongoing development of interdisciplinary units of work at year 8 in English, humanities, mathematics and science promoting collaborative pedagogies.
- Re-scoping Year 9 science focusing on student inquiry and collaborative pedagogies enhanced by flexible learning space upgrades to facilities through STEM Works.
- Ongoing development and implementation of a consistent and agreed approach to formative assessment.

Direction 2:

- Principal shared the school improvement plan (SIP) with explicit expectations for all staff.
- Teacher performance development plan (PDP) goals aligned to the goals of the SIP.
- Curriculum teams developed curriculum improvement plans aligned to the SIP goals.
- Sharing of practice, in line with SIP, as a key agenda item of curriculum teams.
- High-band improvement strategy implemented with all teachers identifying and supporting high achievers

Direction 3:

- Executive leaders' roles made explicit to all staff.
- Principal and deputy principal completed Orbis instructional leadership trial.
- Principal working with deputy principal and partnership principals to facilitate leadership programs for middle leaders.
- Aligning curriculum improvement planning with SIP and PDP.

Direction 4:

- Ongoing building of capacity through professional learning of leaders' use of data to inform improvement strategies and interventions.

Direction 5:

- Explicit directions to staff through staff handbook of expectations of Daymap use.
- Auditing of Daymap by leadership to determine current state.
- Induction processes developed for new staff.

Lines of inquiry

Effective school improvement planning

Improve practice and monitor impact – how effectively does the school monitor and enhance its improvement strategies and actions based on their impact on student learning?

The clarity of school improvement priorities and their evolution is evident in SIP documentation, outlining the goals for improvement, actions, and success indicators while making links with department and partnership priorities. Refinements of the SIP have taken place over the last 3 years. The principal described this improvement journey as "a focus on developing high expectations and achievement of excellent outcomes for all students". She noted that while many data sets of student achievement were good, the school's previous performance trends indicated 'little or no change'.

Leadership roles aligned to the school's priorities have enabled leaders to engage in developing processes to gauge the impact of strategies in setting these goals at a school, team and individual teacher level. These have included:

- Development of a Gantt chart to represent and support planning and monitoring of the SIP progress.
- Alignment of current curriculum improvement plans, PDP processes and professional learning with the SIP.
- Introduction of a 50-day retrospective protocol with curriculum leaders to support Step 4 of the school improvement cycle.
- Week 9 staff meetings scheduled for staff reflection on progress and impact.
- Professional learning conversations promoted by leaders in curriculum team meetings.
- Performance conversations with staff made more rigorous.
- Data wall introduced to make data more authentic and visible.
- Collection of evidence/artefacts that support the improvement narrative more prominent.

Curriculum leaders described how their roles have become more aligned to achieving SIP goals. They explained how they developed curriculum improvement plans that reflect how their team will improve student performance and achievement of the challenge of practice. These plans provided a basis for retrospective reports to leaders and further conversations of progress to date. The principal described various approaches to measure the school's impact in step 4 of the improvement cycle. Teachers and leaders discussed a more significant role of data and how the school's data schedule supports teacher planning, tracks student progress, and monitors the SIP progress.

When explaining how they know their impact on student learning, teachers' responses varied. A small group referenced scheduled time in curriculum and staff meetings to reflect on a cohort or school data. However, they found it difficult to describe how this influenced positive changes to their practice. Others spoke of informal professional conversations with peers and leaders as a method in which they reflect on practice. All teachers were able to recall more formal PDP meetings with line managers. Some commented that they brought evidence to these meetings to discuss improvement against their agreed goals, while others described this practice as not widespread and dependent on the line manager. There is an opportunity to develop structures and processes that support teachers to improve their practice, through evidence-based reflection leading to whole-school agreements and consistent implementation of highly-effective practice.

Direction 1 **Reach agreements of highly-effective teaching strategies that challenge all learners by developing structures and processes that support evidence-based teacher reflection of practice.**

Effective teaching and student learning

Assessment and feedback – how effectively are teachers analysing assessment and feedback data to inform differentiated curriculum planning and instruction?

In her presentation, the principal highlighted 'the vehicle for change' would be through curriculum leaders and teams, and how they supported the priorities for improvement through their action plans and extended team and planning meetings with teachers. Teachers spoke positively about this time and value professional discussion in developing effective assessment strategies and tasks and creating consistency of judgement through internal moderation processes. Many teachers believed these activities were highly beneficial. Examples of tasks in the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program and SACE illustrated task design that allows all students to provide evidence of understanding. Curriculum leaders described how teaching teams continually developed assessment tasks to ensure a more significant challenge for all learners. Students commented that many tasks were consistent in their format and expectations. They were successful when teachers provided clear instructions, clarity of the expectations and annotated examples of quality work.

Students described an increasing use of learning intentions and success criteria to clarify the learning and success expectations. This was not a consistent practice across all classes, but when teachers provided greater clarity of learning expectations and a range of quality feedback, students were more successful. Some students received feedback from teachers through comments in draft work and in Daymap on posted assignments, verbal explanations in class or end of term or semester grades. The quality of this feedback was dependent on who the teacher was. Several students talked of the newly formed 'student learning culture team' as having the potential to influence teaching quality and how feedback through various assessment strategies can support them.

Teachers believed that useful feedback to students was essential, and they were at the beginning of the implementation journey of ongoing formative assessment. Grades achieved in summative assessment tasks were prominent in students' discussions when describing how they knew of their learning progress. Teachers commonly directed feedback towards students as opposed to students providing feedback in improving tasks or teaching practice. Many teachers' comments provided limited evidence of how feedback informed their planning for ongoing instruction and task design. Some teachers use formative feedback through questioning, check-in tests or quizzes towards a unit's end to check understanding before moving on.

There is a need to develop effective, continuous formative assessment practices that guide learners to the next steps in learning while informing teachers in their planning cycle.

Direction 2 Support teacher planning and student understanding in the next steps by developing agreements of highly effective assessment for learning practices.

Effective teaching and student learning

Student influence – To what extent do teachers ensure that students have authentic influence in their learning?

Many teachers recognised engagement and challenge for all learners as potential growth areas, with specific reference to increasing high-band learners. Teachers' professional learning is developing their capacity to implement effective differentiation strategies to meet all students' needs. The SIP goals focus on identifying and developing high-band learners, and providing learning opportunities to stretch and challenge these students. Comments from leaders and teachers suggested that student attitudes and motivation to learning influenced their achievement. When describing innovative pedagogies, some teachers told how they designed engaging activities that encouraged students to take greater ownership of their learning.

Several students commented positively on opportunities that the school provided to develop their leadership skills. Leaders highlighted the recently established student, 'Learning Cultures team', where students engaged in activities to provide the school and teacher groups feedback on teaching practice and learning. Students valued the opportunity to have a voice in improving teaching and learning, however widespread understanding of the group's work was limited. Some students spoke of prefects or house captains' roles and how they worked in groups to organise sports teams or school activities.

Teachers described student agency in learning in several areas across the school. The specialist sports program provided coaching and mentoring roles as part of their leadership development. In some mathematics and English classes students were encouraged to provide feedback for improvement in end of unit or semester surveys. Care-group sessions promoted connection and responsibility of learning through students developing and monitoring SMARTAR goals. Students' responses varied in the value of this, as some believed these goals were not regularly reviewed in lessons. Year 8 students were observed planning presentations about what, why and how they learn to present to a panel later in the year.

From each of these examples, there was a lack of consistent approach and importance applied by teachers and students to student agency. When trying to describe their learning and how they learn best, students lacked a consistent language of learning. Opportunities exist to develop staff and students' capacity as partners in teaching and learning, with agreed structures, processes, and a language of learning that enables co-design and 'student voice'.

Direction 3 Promote greater student ownership and achievement in learning by strategically developing teachers and students' capacity to be partners in learning, with a common language fostering authentic student agency and co-design.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2020

At Blackwood High School, the influence of previous directions is evident in establishing a clear roadmap for improvement supported by planning processes that are evidence-based and targeted to raise student achievement. The demonstrated growth in student achievement is at or above what would be reasonably expected of a school in a similar context. Effective systems that build capacity are developing, impacting positively on teacher and leader practice. The school is providing effective conditions for student learning.

The principal will work with the education director to implement the following directions:

- Direction 1** **Reach agreements of highly-effective teaching strategies that challenge all learners by developing structures and processes that support evidence-based teacher reflection of practice.**
- Direction 2** **Support teacher planning and student understanding in the next steps by developing agreements of highly effective assessment for learning practices.**
- Direction 3** **Promote greater student ownership and achievement in learning by strategically developing teachers and students' capacity to be partners in learning, with a common language fostering authentic student agency and co-design.**

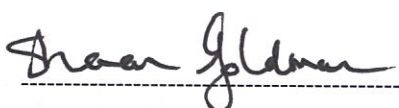
Based on the school's current performance, Blackwood High School will be externally reviewed again in 2023.



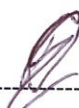
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Governing Council Chairperson

Appendix 1

School performance overview

The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the Department for Education Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Reading

In 2019, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 77% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019, the trend for year 9 has been upwards, from 66% to 77%.

For 2019, year 9 NAPLAN reading, the school is achieving within the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2019, 16% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 9, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 21%, or 16 out of 76 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

Numeracy

In 2019, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 80% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019, the trend for year 9 has been upwards, from 68% to 80%.

For 2019, year 9 NAPLAN numeracy, the school is achieving above the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2019, 20% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 9, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 41%, or 23 out of 56 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2019, 94% of students enrolled in February and 100% of those enrolled in October, who had the potential to complete their SACE did go on to successfully achieve SACE. Between 2017 and 2019, the trend has been upwards, from 98% in 2017 to 100% in 2019.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2019; 100% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 100% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 literacy units, 96% successfully completed their Stage 1 numeracy units and 100% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2019, 99% of grades achieved were at 'C-' level or higher, 21% of grades were at an 'A' level and 48% of grades were at an 'B' level. This result represents an improvement for the 'A' level grade and an improvement for the 'B' level grade, from the historic baseline averages. Between 2017 and 2019, the trend for 'C-' or higher has been upwards, from 90% in 2017 to 99% in 2019.

Twenty four percent of students completed SACE using VET and there were 23 students enrolled in the Flexible Learning Options (FLO) program in 2019.

In terms of 2019 tertiary entrance, 76%, or 104 out of 136 potential students achieved an ATAR or TAFE SA selection score. There were also 2 students who were successful in achieving a merit.