

The Department for Education

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Mount Barker High School

Conducted in June 2018



Government of South Australia
Department for Education

Review details

A priority for the Department for Education is to improve the educational attainment and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

The purpose of the External School Review 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 underpinning the review identifies the key levers for school improvement and has been shaped and informed by research.

The overarching review question is "how well does this school improve student achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity?"

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, they all have been considered and contributed to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Kathryn Entwistle, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Kristen Masters, Review Principal.

School context

Mount Barker High School caters for children from year 8 to 12. It is situated 34kms south-east of the Adelaide CBD, and is part of the Heysen Partnership. Enrolment in 2018 is 616, and has been steady around this number for 2 years. There are 17 students enrolled in the FLO program in 2018. The Adelaide Hills Vocational College operates from the school, and provides learning opportunities for 115 students who may have previously disengaged from traditional schooling.

The school is classified as Category 4 on the department's Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school's ICSEA score is 972.

The school population includes 3.5% of Aboriginal students, 10.5% students with disabilities, 205 families eligible for School Card assistance, 3.8% of students of English as an Additional Language or Dialect background, and 7 young people in care.

The school leadership team consists of a principal in his 8th year at the school, 1 deputy principal with leadership of 5 senior leaders who, in turn, have responsibility for 7 coordinators, and 1 wellbeing coach. There are 34FTE teaching staff, 11 Aboriginal community education officer hours allocated, a 0.4FTE Aboriginal education teacher, 3.4FTE in special education, and 651 school services officer hours.

Lines of inquiry

In considering the data summary in the school performance overview (Appendix 2) and the principal's presentation, the review panel explored the following lines of inquiry to evaluate the school's effectiveness towards raising student achievement and sustaining high performance.

During the external review process, the panel focused on 3 key areas from the External School Review framework:

Student Learning:	To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?
Effective Leadership:	To what extent is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change evident? How effectively does the school leadership foster a culture of learning?
Improvement Agenda:	How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?

To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

The External School Review (ESR) conducted at Mount Barker High School made evident that the school has engaged in significant processes of pedagogical renewal. Initially, the school undertook exploration into the Art and Science of Teaching (ASoT), which saw leaders and teachers learning about the place of success criteria and learning intentions in teaching practice. These teaching strategies are designed to develop student agency in learning, to ensure they know why they are learning, what they are learning, and that they are able to monitor their progress to known outcomes. This work has had a notable effect across the school. Class visits and conversations with staff showed that the implementation of these

approaches is widespread. The panel was also informed that criteria and intentions are entered into DayMap for students to access.

Currently, the practical application of success criteria and learning intentions varies from teacher to teacher. Some students access information, either written or verbal, which makes the intent of learning clear, and is closely aligned with the Australian Curriculum (AC) or SACE outcomes. Some students are also provided with detailed criteria specifying the learning qualities students will demonstrate in order to succeed. These make the subsequent grade the student might attain clear, according to the degree to which the criteria are met. In this case, the use of learning intentions and success criteria is very sophisticated, and provides students opportunities to truly engage with purposeful learning.

Some students are provided with success criteria that are less strategically designed, referring to inclusions in a product, such as illustrations, footnotes or links. Some criteria were more a description of the task and, in these instances, alignment with learning outcomes was not obvious.

The potential impact of success criteria and learning intentions on student learning can be powerful, developing informed and active learners. Students who reported using the criteria and intentions deliberately, agreed that they are of value and support them in deepening their understanding of the learning, and how they are tracking towards grades. Almost all students discussed having received criteria and intentions from teachers, but reports on the level of influence this is currently having on their learning varied. Some students reported that they are made aware of the purpose and criteria at the start of a unit of work, and that minimal reference is made to this, by themselves or the teacher, once the assignment has begun.

The panel commends the introduction of teaching strategies designed to develop learner expertise and agency. The school is continuing to consolidate these approaches.

Recently, the school has undertaken exploration into the provision of formative feedback to students. A number of students reported teachers letting them know not just how they are progressing, but also how they can improve. This was particularly clear when speaking with senior secondary students. During class visits, examples of written feedback allowing students to celebrate success, whilst being clear on the next learning point, were observed. Also, a number of students accessed in-the-moment feedback from teachers. The school is well-placed to continue to embed this valuable approach across all faculties and year levels.

When considering the extent to which students are engaged and challenged in their learning, some students are clearly provided with opportunities to respond to provocations, conduct inquiry, consider real-world issues and to question rather than answer. Students were clear that 'independent' learning, which allows them to experiment and inquire, is a more engaging and productive approach. Many students also discussed the potential that exists to improve learning when challenged to extend their knowledge or thinking. Teaching designed to intellectually challenge students was evident in some, but not all learning areas. Most teachers reported being aware this is an area the school is moving towards and uniformly agreed that this is a welcome initiative. Staff can complement the implementation of success criteria, learning intentions and feedback with teaching designed to deepen cognition and inspire engagement.

Direction 1

Engage and challenge all learners through collective inquiry into, and consistent implementation of, pedagogy designed to develop creative and innovative thinking and deepen students' potential to connect with purposeful learning.

To what extent is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change evident?

How effectively does the school leadership foster a culture of learning?

Throughout the review, the panel heard that significant work has been undertaken to reposition the school as a viable option for secondary learning within the area. Almost all staff and parents discussed the substantial change in culture, expectations, behaviour and identity that has taken place under current leadership. Positive community perceptions, and students' and staff sense of pride and commitment were evident throughout the review. As such, the line of inquiry regarding a focused approach to improvement and change was not seen to add further value to the school and, in consultation with the principal, the panel explored how effectively the learning culture is led.

When considering the leadership of learning, it is noted that the school's leadership structure is designed strategically to align with the school improvement plan priorities. Roles and responsibilities are very clear, and staff are aware of whom to approach with particular questions or ideas.

The panel also notes the evidence sourced regarding leaders and the time spent in classes. Many teachers and leaders discussed visits to classrooms as common practice. Strong educational leadership is often characterised by approaches of this nature.

A belief commonly expressed by staff is that professional learning (PL) at Mount Barker High School is exceptionally valuable. An example of this was the ongoing and rigorous PL regarding 'positive education'. This has allowed staff to implement and embed PL approaches across faculties and year levels, with positive impact on students' dispositions and mindsets. Staff agreed that PL is aligned with the school's priorities, and the panel heard that a new adjustment to the weekly PL timetable will better allow learning areas to continue collaborative learning.

Opportunities for teachers to consider and reflect on practice are offered through the Educator Impact program. Teachers seek feedback from peers and students against aspects of their work, and are in a position to adjust their practice accordingly.

Performance and development processes are in place, which include teachers accessing a line manager for daily outcomes, and selecting a mentor for development and improvement of practice. Some staff described having set relevant professional learning goals with their mentor and having then sourced feedback against these through observations. Some staff report that ongoing conversations with their mentor make the attainment of their goals possible, describing the approach as more of a partnership.

Most staff agreed that they have met and documented goals with their mentor, and some reported that their mentor has observed their practice. Some teachers discussed their understanding that once a goal was set, the onus to work towards the goal was their responsibility, and they would check in with their mentor at the next formal meeting. In a few instances, staff described their goal as an initiative or event they want students to undertake, or PL they wish to attend, rather than growth in their practice, aligned with Professional Standards for Teachers.

Professional learning has been undertaken strategically, and the alignment between school priorities and staff development is strong. Performance and development structures are in place to plan, develop and assess growth in teacher practice. Consideration of the coherence with which leaders implement these, and the level of impact achieved, characterises the school's next step in its work to ensure excellence in leadership of the learning culture.

Direction 2

Maximise the capacity of all staff to reflect on and grow their practice by refining existing systems of performance and development, to ensure influential and rigorous processes are consistently implemented across the school.

How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?

The site improvement plan (SIP) includes 3 priority areas: High Quality Learning, Positive Education and Community Connections. Documents sourced confirmed that learning areas have considered these priorities and used 2 or 3 of the targets in developing their plans. Most teachers are familiar with both the SIP and the learning area planning document. There is congruence between these and classroom practices, particularly with the implementation of positive education strategies.

In generating the SIP, the panel heard common agreement that leaders have presented an initial document to staff for their input and ideas, which were incorporated into the final draft. Analysis of the SIP does make clear the collective nature of its development, as a broad range of strategies and number of targets is apparent. The panel commends the clear intent to engage teachers in consultative processes of improvement planning. A more evidentiary approach, based on collective analysis of data and evidence in setting targets and identifying strategies, will ensure the school's plans are intentional and targeted.

When discussing processes in place to monitor progress towards learning area (LA) or SIP targets, teachers' comments were indeterminate. Most were confident that positive education targets were being met, and discussed anecdotal evidence to support this. Whilst a few individual leaders discussed how the school is tracking towards targets, a systematic and evidence-based approach to self-evaluation was not evident. The panel agrees the next stage of development is to design collective and methodical approaches to self-review and improvement planning at the school. The opportunity to embed ongoing processes that respond to emergent change and monitor the efficacy of practices will further support the school's improvement imperative.

A wealth of data is available, including attendance, wellbeing and achievement datasets. It was reported that leaders harvest the data, and some teachers stated they can access this through DayMap, with a few having done so. A data wall has been established to determine students' level of achievement, while regular 'at risk' (8-10) or 'traffic light' (11-12) data identifies students who may not be on track to achieve a passing grade. Some parents with whom the panel spoke have received contact from staff regarding their child's progress against this data.

In the Harold Mitchell Centre (disability unit), students' goals and learning strategies are clearly informed by analysis of the literacy and numeracy progressions and individual student context data. It was reported that NAPLAN data is used to identify year 8 students' potential to participate in classes that consolidate their literacy and numeracy skills.

The concept of differentiation was discussed by many staff with whom the panel spoke; in the Vocational College, students were able to describe the tailored approaches that support them in achieving their goals.

Most teachers described differentiated approaches as being reliant on familiarity with students, and having strong connections and relationships. Some staff explained that they 'know' their students, while a teacher described the concept of varying learning styles within the student cohort. Students reported that

much of their learning is directed at the whole class, and those who are exceeding standards agreed that, in some learning areas, they are given 'extra work', rather than different work.

Many staff understand the importance of differentiated approaches to learning and attempt to accommodate students' interests or support those struggling, through personalised intervention in class. Reference to the place of achievement data in informing differentiated practice for students was less common. In order to more effectively differentiate to meet the needs of all students, diagnostic use of achievement data will be integral. In working towards this, the opportunity to build teacher capacity to interrogate data and use it intentionally is evident. Learning area meetings may prove a valuable forum for staff to engage in collaborative learning as they build their data literacy.

Direction 3

Generate intentional, evidence-based improvement strategies by refining existing planning processes to include collective analysis of data and evidence, and the development of a systematic, ongoing cycle of self-review.

Direction 4

Maximise the potential of every learner by building teachers' capacity to use data more intentionally and diagnostically in tailoring targeted teaching.

What is the school doing particularly well and why is this effective?

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practice that is contributing significantly to school improvement at Mount Barker High School.

Effective practice in meeting the learning, social and emotional needs of students who are disengaged from traditional schooling was evident at the school. The Adelaide Hills Vocational College offers individualised and engaging learning opportunities to students no longer attending mainstream classes.

Students and staff report that the program allows the learners to work towards their goals at levels and rates relevant to their needs. Learning accessed by students was described as being at a deeper thinking level, diverse and addressing the learners' holistic needs. Students explained that they have a voice in their learning and, importantly, they are listened to.

An aspect of the college's procedures sees students engaged in volunteer work and making strong connections with the community. Students report that a sense of confidence and self-belief has been engendered during their time at the college. Leaders report that analysis of SACE, attendance and wellbeing data, ensures students' individual needs are met and progress monitored. In particular, the panel noted the strong relationships that exist between students and staff, commonly reported as key in supporting students to succeed.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

At Mount Barker High School, a culture of improvement is characterised by high expectations for students, and teachers are provided with and use structured time for ongoing professional learning, aligned with school priorities.

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

1. Engage and challenge all learners through collective inquiry into, and consistent implementation of, pedagogy designed to develop creative and innovative thinking and deepen students' potential to connect with purposeful learning.
2. Maximise the capacity of all staff to reflect on and grow their practice by refining existing systems of performance and development to ensure influential and rigorous processes are consistently implemented across the school.
3. Generate intentional, evidence-based improvement strategies by refining existing planning processes to include collective analysis of data and evidence, and the development of a systematic, ongoing cycle of self-review.
4. Maximise the potential of every learner by building teachers' capacity to use data more intentionally and diagnostically in tailoring targeted teaching.

Based on the school's current performance, Mount Barker High School will be externally reviewed again in 2022.

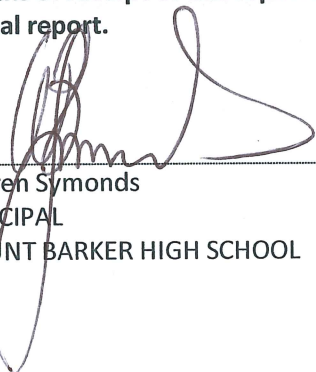


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The school will provide an implementation plan to the education director and community within 3 months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's annual report.



Warren Symonds
PRINCIPAL
MOUNT BARKER HIGH SCHOOL



Governing Council Chairperson

Appendix 1

Attendance policy compliance

Implementation of the Education Department student attendance policy was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy.

The school attendance rate for 2017 was 87.7%.

Appendix 2

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 2017, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 51% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the SEA. This result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For 2017 NAPLAN reading, the school is achieving lower than the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2017, 7% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 20%, or 5 of 25 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9, and 47%, or 8 of 17 students from year 7 remain in the upper bands at year 9 in 2017.

Numeracy

In 2017, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 55% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For 2017 NAPLAN numeracy, the school is achieving within than the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2017, 4% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 17%, or 3 of 18 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9, and 36%, or 4 of 11 students from year 7 remain in the upper bands at year 9 in 2017.

SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2017, 58% of students enrolled in February and 95% of those enrolled in October, who had the potential to complete their SACE, did go on to successfully achieve their SACE. This result for October SACE completion represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2017, 85% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 96% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 literacy units, 85%

successfully completed their Stage 1 numeracy units, and 100% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

Ninety-five percent of grades achieved in the 2017 SACE Stage 2 were C- or higher. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. Thirty-one percent of students completed SACE using VET, and there were 17 students enrolled in the Flexible Learning Options program in 2017.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2017, 13% of students achieved an 'A' grade, and 41% achieved a 'B' grade. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline averages for the 'A' grade and 'B' grade respectively.