

# Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

## Report for Mount Barker High School

Conducted in August 2021



# 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 and Peta Korbels and Bec Moore, 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
- Discussions with:
  - Governing Council representatives
  - Leaders
  - Parent groups
  - School Services Officers (SSOs)
  - Student representatives
  - Teachers.

## School context

Mount Barker High School caters for students from year 8 to 12. It is situated approximately 29kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2021, as at the February census, is 753. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 616. The local partnership is Heysen.

The school has a 2020 ICSEA score of 997 and is classified as Category 4 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes less than 5% Aboriginal students, 9% students with disabilities, less than 6% students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, less than 5% children/young people in care and 21% of students eligible for School Card assistance.

The school has a Department for Education special interest focus on positive psychology and is actively involved in the delivery of formal training to teachers in the area of positive education throughout South Australia.

The combined staff is 92, comprising of 58 Teachers and 34 Student Support Officers (SSOs). A level 5 Business Manager leads the SSO team. The teaching staff includes 17 Teachers with less than 7 years' experience and 8 Step 9 Teachers.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in the first year of their third tenure, a Band 4 Deputy Principal, two Band 3 Assistant Principals and two Band 2 Senior Leaders.

### The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

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

The influence of previous External School Review (ESR) directions is evident in the school's improvement. Performance development planning (PDP) processes recently restructured, facilitate professional conversations with mentors and line managers around individual teacher goals for improvement, aligned to the goals of the site improvement plan (SIP). Several strategies have influenced improvement in practice. Structured times called 'unconference sessions', highly valued by staff, facilitate sharing of best practices.

Teachers receive annual feedback from students through the school 360-degree feedback survey with questions aligned to highly effective evidence-based teaching practices. A co-construct toolbox supplied with the survey tool aids staff in strategies for improvement. The school has consolidated critical elements of the evidence-based Visible Learning professional development program into practice.

A range of student achievement and wellbeing data is accessed and shared by staff during meetings using the school's learner management system. The Principal presents a report on student achievement to governing council at the start of each term.

The school has transitioned from the recent 3-year partnership professional development in 'Visible Learning' to merging these approaches with 'The Art and Science of Teaching' (Marzano). Staff responses have been very positive about the support to guide their practice. A collaboratively developed standard learning assessment plan (LAP) and assessment task sheet provides students greater clarity of task expectations. The school is presently trialling and adapting Department for Education units of work in the Australian Curriculum to align with curriculum requirements and enhance student engagement and challenge.

## Lines of inquiry

### Effective school improvement planning

How effectively does the school monitor and enhance its improvement strategies and actions based on their impact on student learning?

The leader's presentation provided context to the development and implementation of the site improvement plan (SIP). Leaders were prominent in the initial analysis of student achievement data and the formation of writing and numeracy improvement priorities. Staff have subsequently engaged in monitoring and reviewing the school's progress using a range of student achievement data in actioning these goals towards agreed targets. Most staff members interviewed were able to articulate the SIP goals and their role in enabling achievement in their classes. They were less confident in describing what measures they used to know if their strategies and actions impacted. The Principal believed that a more collaborative approach to developing priorities would occur in the next improvement cycle to achieve greater ownership and clarity of the improvement work. Leaders and teachers described the importance of PDPs and targeted professional learning to support ongoing work improvement. Teachers detailed how they received explicit feedback on their practice through formal and informal methods, including PDP meetings, classroom observations and professional conversations in staff and team meetings. Several outlined their use of the 360-degree student surveys in their classes and how they use student responses to reflect and modify their approach. Others saw the importance of conversations with their choice of a line manager or mentor in PDP discussions as a positive. Teachers explained how their individual PDP goals aligned with the SIP has strengthened improvement work. However, responses across the school clearly showed the quality, consistency and robust nature of these processes varied.

Regular step 4 improvement meetings between the Principal and leaders have discussed how teams have endeavoured to implement improvement actions. Several middle leaders described how they developed action plans to document their team's implementation of the SIP goals and used student achievement data to measure progress. Leaders in English and Mathematics learning areas were more specific, implementing short impact cycles to monitor the effects of implemented strategies resulting in reflective team discussions that led to practice improvements. A formal review of the outcomes of the SIP involving all staff takes place towards the end-of-year reviewing data and sharing findings before planning the next steps. Providing opportunities and processes for staff to participate in continuous monitoring and review intentional self-reflection to evaluate the impact of their practice on student learning will further strengthen and refine teacher pedagogy to deliver on the SIP goals.

**Direction 1    Develop clear structures and processes that support regular teacher reflection of their impact on student learning to inform the next steps in planning.**

## Effective teaching and student learning

How effectively are teachers using assessment and feedback to inform differentiated curriculum planning and instruction and support students' learning?

Leaders detailed a range of student achievement data used to inform the school's improvement progress and report on student achievement. Several teachers described how they could access this data through the learner management system, while others described formal and informal conversations with colleagues about students to inform their planning. Leaders outlined how they had strengthened support for teacher planning by developing an agreed template to guarantee alignment to curriculum requirements and school priorities. There are clear expectations of teachers to know students and their learning needs. The Principal identified plans to enhance teacher access to data to plan and monitor learner progress more effectively.

Teachers provide students with regular written feedback on tasks which is accessible to students and parents through the student portal. Students commented that this feedback, combined with follow-up discussions with teachers in class were valuable and constructive for improvement. Senior school students provided examples of submitted drafts illustrating feedback comments that they had received from students and teachers for progress and next steps in learning. Many teachers promoted 'peer feedback' in drafting and saw this a strength in improving the quality of student work. Students described other formative assessment strategies that supported their learning, including teacher questioning and conferencing to check for understanding. While present across the school, these strategies were more visible in the senior school classes. Several middle school teachers identified this as an area for further development.

Teacher and leader responses varied when describing how to meet the diverse learning needs in their classes. Many answers had common threads of student choice in tasks, classroom organisation of how students worked or modes of product presentation but this was not consistent practice. Developing a consistent understanding or agreement of highly effective differentiated learning and assessment, incorporating effective formative feedback will further strengthen teacher practice and support student learning outcomes.

**Direction 2     Improve student achievement for all students by developing and implementing agreements of whole-school understanding of highly effective differentiated learning, assessment, and formative feedback.**



## Effective leadership

How well does leadership facilitate the development of coherent, high-quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?

Parents, teachers and students interviewed were highly complimentary of the Principal in developing a positive, supportive culture focused on teaching and learning and executive leadership, which promoted high expectations of teachers and students. They valued leaders support in providing continuous and targeted professional learning to assist the development of school priorities. Many staff across the school identified the strategic implementation of positive education as a strength in transforming the school's culture. Many believed that the key to the success of this implementation was in leaders having clarity of what needs to be developed, the roles of all stakeholders involved and guaranteeing accountability processes were in place to ensure agreements of practice.

Leaders developed action plans which outlined how teams would implement the site improvement priorities into classroom practice while using evidence to measure their impact. Although action plans are linked to the SIP priorities, many were very general and lacked an evidence-based approach to measure improvement. The Principal described these plans as a starting point for discussions with leaders in step 4 improvement meetings and an area for future refinement. Teachers were positive in their descriptions of established performance development processes and mentoring forums. However, many were unclear how these and other meetings supported improving practice in priority areas, with some commenting that these conversations were not rigorous and evidence-based. A lack of clarity, consistency, and accountability related to improvement has resulted in pockets of excellent practice not being reflected across the school.

Developing instructional leaders who have a clear line of sight to the classroom and relentlessly support quality teaching and learning through robust evidence-based performance development processes will ensure ongoing improvement and consistency of practice.

**Direction 3    Work with leaders to develop their ability to lead and coach others effectively and conduct systems and forums focused on their teaching and learning priorities.**

# Outcomes of the External School Review 2021

At Mount Barker High School, the influence of previous External School Review directions is evident in the school's improvement processes and documented in the site improvement plan (SIP) and learning area action plans. Mathematics and English teams have engaged in impact cycles to measure implemented strategies on learning to improve student achievement and teaching practice.

Many students interviewed were positive in their responses of how teachers supported them to be successful in learning. They were provided opportunities through regular surveys to give feedback to their teachers that enabled them to influence their learning authentically while supporting the improvement of practice.

The school provides effective conditions for student learning with a coherent and engaging curriculum using the appropriate pre-foundation curriculum, Australian Curriculum and South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE).

The Principal will work with the Education Director to implement the following directions:

- Direction 1**     **Develop clear structures and processes that support regular teacher reflection of their impact on student learning to inform the next steps in planning.**
- Direction 2**     **Improve student achievement for all students by developing and implementing agreements of whole-school understanding of highly effective differentiated learning, assessment, and formative feedback.**
- Direction 3**     **Work with leaders to develop their ability to lead and coach others effectively and conduct systems and forums focused on their teaching and learning priorities.**

Based on the school's current performance, Mount Barker High School will be externally reviewed again in 2024.



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# 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 59% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

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

In 2019 15% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading 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 reading 42% or 10 out of 24 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

### Numeracy

In 2019 the numeracy results as measured by NAPLAN indicate that 59% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

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

In 2019 10% 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 35% or 6 out of 17 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

### SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2020 51% 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 2018 and 2020 the trend has been upwards from 96% in 2018 to 100% in 2020.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2020, 99% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 100% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 literacy units, 95% successfully completed their Stage 1 numeracy units and 100% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2020 99% of grades achieved were at 'C-' level or higher, 17% of grades were at an 'A' level and 47% of grades were at a 'B' level. This result represents an improvement for the 'A' level and 'B' level grades from the historic baseline averages. Between 2018 and 2020 the trend for 'C-' or higher has been upwards from 96% in 2018 to 99% in 2020).

Sixty two percent of students completed SACE using VET and there were 22 students enrolled in the Flexible

Learning Options (FLO) program in 2020.

In terms of 2020 tertiary entrance, 34 out of 74 potential students achieved an ATAR score, with 1 student successful in achieving a merit.

In 2020, the school had a moderation adjustment of 5.1%.