

EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

Report for Woomera Area School

Conducted in July 2017



Government of South Australia

Department for Education and
Child Development

Review details

A priority for the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) 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 DECD schools.

The framework underpinning the External School 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 of the External School Review 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.

The support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community is acknowledged. 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.

The External School Review Process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are adhered to and implemented. This information is provided in Appendix One of the report.

This External School Review was conducted by Julie Bishop, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Graeme Fenton, Review Principal.

School context

Woomera Area School caters for students from Reception to Year 12. It is situated 489kms from the Adelaide CBD. The current enrolment is 7. Enrolment has shown a decline over the past five years. The school has an ICSEA score of 992, and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 20% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in his first tenure. There has been a succession of Principals appointed in previous years.

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 three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

Improvement Agenda: How effective are the school's self-review processes in forming and shaping improvement?

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

Effective Teaching: How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

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

The Principal, who was formerly the Assistant Principal at Roxby Downs Area School, indicated that a range of discussions relating to the future of Woomera Area School had been explored in 2016. These included the transportation of students to Roxby Downs several days a week; this strategy, coupled with a range of other factors, was not well-received by the staff and community, many fearing that the school would close. The Principal stated that his focus needed to be about changing the culture of the school and to build community confidence that the school would remain open.

The Principal position has recently been advertised for five years; the primary teacher position was advertised as a permanent position and has been filled. It was reported that these two actions have been significant factors in building trust within the community.

The key work in 2017 has been to develop opportunities to increase the number of people actually using the site, thus increasing the overall viability of the school. At this stage, a plan, timeline and framework have been developed and shared with major stakeholders. Consultation with the Governing Council, staff, community and associated stakeholders has been undertaken.

Opportunities that are currently being explored include the development of a Community Education Centre with a focus on STEM. This would allow students from other sites to visit and engage in a range of related learning experiences, including astronomy, and rocketry, with support from the local Air Force Squadron.

In terms of student achievement, the school has adapted a range of spreadsheets to track and monitor student progress over time. The 2017 Site Improvement Plan (SIP) has maintained the foci of Literacy, Numeracy and Integrated Learning. Well-planned, integrated learning has the potential to strongly support the development of an inclusive curriculum that will meet the needs of students across multiple year levels.

The SIP could be further strengthened by developing targets that directly relate to the students who are currently enrolled. With small numbers, and only one student eligible to sit the NAPLAN test in 2017,

alternate targets may be more appropriate.

The school is well-placed to begin consultation with staff, students and community in a review of the current SIP and the subsequent determination of next steps to improve the teaching and learning at Woomera Area School. It is important that staff and community understand the processes of self-review and, as such, can then be informed participants in all stages of self-review.

Recent research refers to three main types of review: *strategic*, characterised as long-term and focused on key goals related to the school's vision; *regular*, generally short-term, focused and ongoing, leading into the strategic self-review; and *emergent*, which occurs in response to unplanned events or issues as they arise. These are one-off reviews, but generally fit with overall goals and link to other reviews.

To further strengthen their self-review processes, Woomera Area School should develop common understandings and practices in the implementation of the three types of self-review, including documentation at each stage of self-review. The school, through the implementation of regular reviews, focused on student, teacher and community reflections around the improvement agenda will support and strengthen the school's capacity and commitment to informing and shaping improvement.

SIP processes are strengthened by the alignment of specific goals and targets against the identified priorities for learning. In this way, targets and goals can be shared and owned by all. Aspirational targets provide students and staff with a way forward, and make public that the improvement agenda belongs to every student. Tangible goals provide students, their families and staff with milestones to reach and successes to share. 'When we make public what we are aiming for, and we make it everyone's business, we have a much stronger chance of achieving them'.

Direction 1

Collaboratively develop the Site Improvement Plan that is informed and shaped by documented, consultative self-review processes.

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

At the staff meeting held during the ESR, staff were presented with the aggregated NAPLAN data over the past four years; staff identified trends that surprised them. They also acknowledged the value of looking at trend data over time to provide an alternate perspective of learning improvement.

Discussions then focused on the data that represented achievement in the higher bands. It became apparent, particularly in numeracy, that higher-band achievement was not commensurate with anticipated expectations. Discussions then focused on identification of possible reasons for the disparate results. The provision of opportunities for students to display their knowledge and understanding in a range of different contexts and to be intellectually challenged was discussed.

Staff worked in groups and discussed intellectual stretch and challenge at the school. Staff stated that they saw intellectual stretch as challenging students to move out of their comfort zone, challenging them to think more deeply and to trial new learning in different contexts.

When asked what taking an intellectual risk looked and felt like in classrooms, responses included: students and staff being out of their comfort zone, no fear of failure, taking risks, and a willingness to engage and use mistakes as opportunities to learn. Students displaying independence and hands-on tasks that were resource-rich with talking and discussion were also identified.

Staff then discussed how they developed student resilience; responses included modelling how to cope with failure and letting students know that failure is 'okay', and providing options instead of answers. The modelling of strategies required in becoming successful, and staff modelling themselves as learners, were identified as supportive ways to develop resilience. It was also stated that the use of Growth Mindset (GMS) language, in particular the use of 'yet' was important.

Staff looked at what they could do to improve intellectual challenge in their class; suggestions included more problem-solving and more open-ended tasks. Staff elected to continue discussions in this area in more depth at their next meeting and to progress this across the site.

An example of collaborative work in intellectual stretch can be evidenced from the work undertaken in Integrated Learning units in Terms 1 and 2 this year. The junior secondary students and the primary class worked together and explored a different theme each term. The first theme was 'fantastic food', and in the second term, students researched 'ecology escapades'. A student from the primary class was able to describe the process of learning, how they collected, collated and presented their learning, and could explain in detail some facts and opinions related to the topic. The student was highly engaged and responded with confidence when provided with the opportunity to be intellectually challenged.

During the ESR, discussions with staff indicated that due to decreased enrolments, the team teaching opportunities to work collaboratively were no longer viable. The primary class has elected to work on 'free learning' as their integrated learning topic. The teacher commented that this has resulted from the recent opportunity to work with a noted international educator where options for students to explore their interests/passions were discussed. Topics selected by primary students included learning about how a computer game works and how it is programmed to work, and a focus on gravity. Students also reported that they had previously built a robot and programmed it.

There is clear evidence that students appreciate the opportunity to be intellectually challenged in their learning. This can be further strengthened by developing the capacity of all staff to provide regular and quality opportunities for all students to be intellectually challenged in their learning across a range of learning areas. The collaborative development of transforming tasks with multiple entry and exit points will strongly support all staff and students to achieve this.

Direction 2

Develop and embed common understandings and practices in intellectual stretch and challenge for every student through the development of transforming tasks with multiple entry and exit points across all areas of learning.

How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

The three secondary students are currently undertaking SACE Stage 1. The school has worked strategically to develop a range of flexible options to ensure that the students are able to access a viable curriculum to complete their SACE.

Flexible options to access the required curriculum include the delivery of SACE via Open Access, face-to-face teaching, transporting students to Roxby Downs to attend courses run by TAFE, and negotiating options for a student to undertake work experience to complete the Certificate III in Hospitality. The school is to be commended for its commitment to ensuring that students have every possible opportunity to undertake studies of their choosing.

Students stated that when they found their work challenging they would go on the internet, ask for help from friends, or ask the teacher or Principal. Working alone and being the only student undertaking a specific subject can be demanding. Planned opportunities for students to talk about their learning, that is, to receive feedback about their learning and to provide feedback about themselves as learners with significant others (peers, mentors, and teachers), will assist students in their work.

There is clear evidence of planning, tracking and monitoring learning from the Australian Curriculum in the primary section of the school. The teacher stated that they select a concept from a learning area, and differentiate the task appropriate to each student.

It was reported that using rubrics for writing had been successful; in particular, being able to see the growth in learning had been especially beneficial. The classroom shows clear evidence of strong visual learning prompts and scaffolds. The teacher stated that they currently work with students to discuss their learning goals and is considering making them visible. When targets and goals are visible and public, students understand that these are highly valued and important components of their learning and, as such, are motivated to demonstrate and share their achievements.

Students, when discussing their recent reports, indicated that they were surprised with some of their grades in particular areas of learning. When we provide regular opportunities to discuss learning progress with students we are making learning improvement transparent. Every student can benefit from regular

feedback about their learning. Effective feedback identifies what students are doing well, what the areas for improvement are and, importantly, it provides the learner with strategies to enhance their learning.

Feedback from students is an integral component of the teaching and learning process. When feedback is sought from students about teaching, it is demonstrating that student opinions are valued, and “we are modelling that we are learners and we are developing a community of strong learners”.

Feedback for learning is truly effective when it is a two-way process. Students are then equipped with the tools to become powerful learners. Congruence in effective pedagogical practices, including the planned use of Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) tools, will support and strengthen student influence in their learning.

Direction 3

Develop and embed a whole-school approach to authentic student influence as a powerful means of students becoming equal partners in the learning process through the planned implementation of TfEL resources.

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

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practices that are contributing significantly to school improvement at Woomera Area School.

Effective practice in School Community Partnerships was evident at the school. The engagement with the wider community has been influenced by the development of mutually beneficial relationships leading to improved opportunities to support and strengthen the school’s viability and credibility within the community. In particular, the panel noted the recent strong support from the Governing Council and community members who assist in the development of the school garden. The Department of Defence also supports the school in establishing and rejuvenating facilities and programs to be run at the school.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

Woomera Area School works with parents and stakeholders to support the improvement of learning for students.

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

1. Collaboratively develop the Site Improvement Plan that is informed and shaped by documented, consultative self-review processes.
2. Develop and embed common understandings and practices in intellectual stretch and challenge for every student through the development of transforming tasks with multiple entry and exit points across all areas of learning.
3. Develop and embed a whole-school approach to authentic student influence as a powerful means of students becoming equal partners in the learning process through the planned implementation of TjEL resources.

Based on the school's current performance, Woomera Area School will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



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Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY



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Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND
PRESCHOOLS

The school will provide an implementation plan to the Education Director and community within three months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's Annual Report.

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Tony Holden
PRINCIPAL
WOOMERA AREA SCHOOL

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Governing Council Chairperson

Appendix One

Policy compliance

The External School Review process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are adhered to and implemented.

The Principal of Woomera Area School has verified that the school is working towards being compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal advised action is being taken to comply with the following DECD policies:

- Governance Item 2 – Collaborative development of the SIP.
- Learning Improvement Item 5 – Two teachers to be trained in the Child Protection Curriculum.

When the school's actions achieve compliancy with DECD policy and procedures, the Principal must resubmit the Policy Compliance Checklist to the Education Director.

Implementation of the *DECD Student Attendance Policy* was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be working towards being compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2016 was 93.4%.

Appendix Two

School Performance Overview

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

In considering the data below, there needs to be some caution in making a judgement due to the low numbers represented in the student cohorts at the school. This is done for two reasons: to overcome the anomalies that may occur in any one year, and to minimise the possibility of identifying individuals in any small cohort of students. The data below represents a summary of the aggregated data from Woomera Area School from 2012- 2016.

Reading

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. From 2011 to 2016, 60%, or 3 of 5 Year 1, and 57%, or 4 of 7 Year 2 students, demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

From 2012 to 2016, the reading results as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 83%, or 5 of 6 Year 3 students, 37.5%, or 3 of 8 Year 5 students, 67%, or 6 of 9 Year 7 students, and 33%, or 3 of 9 Year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

From 2012 to 2016, 33%, or 2 of 6 Year 3 students, none of the 8 Year 5 students, 25%, or 2 of 8 Year 7 students, and none of the 9 Year 9 students achieved in the top two bands in reading.

Numeracy

From 2012 to 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 83%, or 5 of 6 Year 3 students, 37.5%, or 3 of 8 Year 5 students, 56%, or 5 of 9 Year 7 students, and 22%, or 2 of 9 Year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

From 2012 to 2016, 17%, or 1 of 6 Year 3 students, none of the 8 Year 5 students, 11%, or 1 of 9 Year 7 students and none of the 9 Year 9 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN numeracy results.

SACE

There was no available data for the one Year 12 student who was enrolled in SACE 2016.