

# Department for Education

## External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

### Report for The Heights School

Conducted in July 2020



## 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 Joe Priolo and Tony Sullivan, 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:
  - Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer (ACEO)
  - Governing Council representatives
  - Leaders
  - Parent groups
  - School Services Officers (SSOs)
  - Student groups
  - Teachers

## School context

The Heights School caters for students from preschool to year 12. It is situated 15kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2020 is 1484. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 1073. The local partnership is Golden Way.

The school has an ICSEA score of 1026 and is classified as Category 5 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 3% Aboriginal students, 13% students with disabilities, 32% students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, less than 6 children/young people in care and 30% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The leadership team consists of a principal in their 5<sup>th</sup> year of tenure, deputy principal in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year of tenure, 5 assistant principals and a business manager.

There are 108 teachers, including 12 in the early years of their career, 65 step 9 teachers and 49 support staff.

## The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

- Direction 1**    **The school will continue to build on numerous initiatives and strategies it is using to engage students and challenge them to aspire to excellence. For teachers, this includes ensuring learning intentions, differentiation, task design and pedagogy, are effectively incorporated into practice.**
- Direction 2**    **Further develop a coherent preschool to year 12 school, including a preschool to year 12 scope and sequence that is supported by all leaders and teachers.**
- Direction 3**    **Develop a business plan that allocates resources to achieve school priorities. This includes a promotional strategy to build the preschool to year 12 reputation and attract local students, including those with aspirations in the STEM and Ignite Programs.**

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

Previous ESR directions have progressed through organisational change and professional learning. The development of student engagement and challenge remains a key focus, as evident in the 2020 site improvement plan (SIP). Ongoing maintenance of foundational work in learning intentions and differentiated practice has made way to resourced improvement work in the effective use of feedback and task design.

The new leadership structure created a more unified school culture with a leadership team that oversees preschool to year 12 development. This is further supported by teachers working across year levels, engaging in whole-school programs, professional learning and shared staff meetings.

The focus on improvement, STEM and IGNITE programs, raised expectations of students and improved outcomes in NAPLAN and SACE, creating a more positive school reputation. As a result, enrolments continue to rise from 1050 in 2016 to a predicted admission of 1500 in 2021.

## Lines of inquiry

### EFFECTIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

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

The school has an articulated improvement agenda as presented in the 2019-21 SIP. The priorities of increasing the number of students achieving in high bands (HB) in literacy, numeracy and SACE, collaboratively developed and referenced to student achievement data, have promoted a collective clarity and commitment by staff in their implementation. A range of datasets is collected, enabling leaders and their teams to triangulate and analyse information in monitoring and supporting student progress. A preschool to year 12 data schedule outlining timelines, roles, and responsibilities is currently being utilised and ready for adoption.

Leadership described processes in professional learning, professional learning teams (PLTs), HB conversations, performance development planning (PDP) meetings and instructional rounds. This supports teachers to reflect on the impact of their improvement strategies aligned to the SIP goals. Teachers described how formal and informal classroom observations provided them with feedback to improve practice and a willingness to expand this practice further.

A step 4 process is being trialled. It involves teacher groups presenting to the leadership team 'action' research about the impact of their improvement strategies in improving student learning outcomes. The review panel supports the leadership team goal to further develop and open this process to all staff. It has the potential to provide authentic opportunities for teachers to reflect, demonstrate and receive feedback on their practice.

Teachers' understanding about the connection between their work in reflective practices and the documented SIP challenges of practice and success criteria varied. An opportunity exists to strengthen and consolidate these practices for teacher reflection and improvement, leading to the collaborative development of whole-school agreements.

**Direction 1      Effectively implement the school's challenges of practice and agreed actions by consolidating coherent and scaffolded systems that develop the capacity of teacher practice.**

## EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND STUDENT LEARNING

*Effective Pedagogy – How effectively are teachers using evidence-based pedagogical practices that engage and challenge all learners? (In particular, the stretch and challenge in the learning of near HB and HB students.)*

Leaders described professional learning opportunities that built staff capacity in evidence-based pedagogical practices through programs. This includes Visible Learning, and Literacy for Learning, and the development of feedback to advance student engagement and achievement. While many aspects of Visible Learning are not embedded practice, it has enhanced teacher knowledge and skills and was part of teachers language when describing their work. The whole-school professional learning focus on literacy for learning and formative feedback has had a more significant impact, as evident in teacher planning and observed classroom practice.

Knowing students and their learning needs, as described by teachers and leaders, has influenced the use of data in teacher planning. DAYMAP, spreadsheets and conversations with colleagues were mentioned as sources of data.

A range of pedagogical practices were observed, in which teachers provided clarity of the learning requirements and opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning. In lower primary years, learning intentions and success criteria were presented in explicit conversations about the task set. In the middle and secondary years, rubrics were more commonly used to describe learning expectations and success. Many students in these years commented that they found rubrics useful, especially when teachers deconstructed them to make the language more accessible.

Learning and assessment tasks were provided to the panel designed with scaffolding and multiple entry and exit points that catered for a variety of student learning needs. Examples from the IGNITE program provided stretch through open-ended questions and real-world applications. Students in the program commented that they found these tasks engaging and challenging.

During classroom visits, students were observed working in groups on intentionally designed tasks that catered for individual and group needs. However, in several classes, teachers provided all students in their class the same task. Students commented that this was common for some teachers, with many providing extra support or extension work when needed. Conversations with teachers highlighted a varied understanding of high-yield strategies and approaches that provide significant challenge and stretch in learning.

Learning goals and targets developed collaboratively with students by teachers, while visible in some primary and secondary classes were not a prominent feature across the school. Students commented that they received feedback about their learning through informal classroom conversations with teachers, drafts, assessment comments, or termly grades. Effectiveness of this feedback and how it was received depended on the teacher.

There is internal capacity within existing staff experience and evidence-based resources to assist the development of whole-school collective understanding and agreement of high-yield pedagogical practices. These would engage and challenge all learners, in particular, those in the upper bands.

**Direction 2    Strengthen teacher practice, preschool to year 12, by developing a collective understanding and agreement on high-yield pedagogical practices that engage and challenge all learners.**

## EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND STUDENT LEARNING

### ***Assessment and feedback: How effectively are teachers analysing assessment and feedback data to inform differentiated curriculum planning and instruction and effective feedback to students?***

In planning for learning and monitoring learner progress, teachers described the increasing importance of data and how they access a variety of student achievement data and learning plans on DAYMAP. A detailed data schedule was cited and used by primary teachers, and will soon to be adopted across the school.

Several teachers were observed in classes using effective formative assessment strategies and questioning techniques, providing students with immediate feedback for improvement. Written feedback is provided using comments on drafts or notes in DAYMAP to inform next steps in learning, while many provided verbal feedback to students in-class. Students spoke positively about the feedback they received and had a positive perception of their progress. Teachers described 'unpacking' achievement and performance standards to inform students of the criteria for success and what is needed to improve.

Assessment tasks showed some consistency across the school in identifying demands of the curriculum and expectations for the student as well as indicators for success. There was considerable variation in task design incorporating differentiated practices to enable all students to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. In the junior and primary school, differentiation of teaching and learning was a strength, with teachers regularly checking student progress to inform and refine their practice. Regularity of checking student achievement data, by teachers, to inform and refine teaching practice or prepare at an individual or class level, was not consistent.

PDP processes are well-documented and understood by teachers and leaders. The approach and expectations in these meetings was not uniform, and could be strengthened by having a greater focus on evidence-based discussions with teachers, reflective on the impact of their practice.

Teachers are utilising a variety of effective assessment techniques to promote ongoing learning and to determine student progress and success. An opportunity exists to further develop and consolidate understanding of highly effective assessment strategies that engage and challenge all students.

**Direction 3     Strengthen challenge and stretch for all learners by reaching agreement and implementing highly effective differentiated practices in assessment and learning supported by evidence-based performance development processes.**

## Outcomes of the External School Review 2020

At The Heights School, the influence of previous directions is visible in the establishment of a clear roadmap for improvement, supported by planning processes that are evidence-based and targeted to raise student achievement. Effective systems that build capacity are developing, impacting positively on teacher and leader practice, providing sound conditions for student learning.

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

- Direction 1** Effectively implement the school's challenges of practice and agreed actions by consolidating coherent and scaffolded systems that develop the capacity of teacher practice.
- Direction 2** Strengthen teacher practice, preschool to year 12, by developing a collective understanding and agreement on high-yield pedagogical practices that engage and challenge all learners.
- Direction 3** Strengthen challenge and stretch for all learners by reaching agreement and implementing highly effective differentiated practices in assessment and learning supported by evidence-based performance development processes.

**Based on the school's current performance, The Heights School will be externally reviewed again in 2023.**



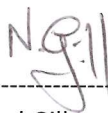
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GOVERNING COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON

# 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 the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2019, 63% of year 1 and 65% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents a decline for year 1 and year 2, from the historic baseline average.

In 2019, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 85% of year 3 students, 84% of year 5 students, 81% of year 7 students and 77% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3, 5 and 9, this result represents an improvement and for year 7, little or no change, from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019, the trend for year 5 has been upwards, from 72% to 84%.

For 2019, year 3, 5, 7 and 9 NAPLAN reading, the school is achieving within the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2019, 48% of year 3, 37% of year 5 and 23% of year 7, and 21% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3, 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, 81%, or 13 out of 16 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5, 47%, or 14 out of 30 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7, 41%, or 24 out of 58 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

### Numeracy

In 2019, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 82% of year 3 students, 78% of year 5 students, 83% of year 7 students and 81% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For year 3, 5, 7 and 9, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019, the trend for year 9 has been upwards, from 70% to 81%.

For 2019, year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN numeracy, the school is achieving within and year 9 above the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2019, 32% of year 3, 28% of year 5, 27% of year 7 and 27% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019, the trend for year 5 and year 9 has been upwards from 16% to 28% and from 14% to 27%, respectively.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 63%, or 10 out of 16 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5, 52%, or 12 out of 23 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7, 61%, or 25 out of 41 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.



## **SACE**

In terms of SACE completion in 2019, 68% of students enrolled in February and 93% of those enrolled in October, who had the potential to complete their SACE did go on to successfully achieve SACE.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2019, 100% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 99% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 literacy units, 89% successfully completed their Stage 1 numeracy units and 99% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2019, 94% of grades achieved were at 'C-' level or higher, 19% of grades were at an 'A' level and 37% of grades were at a 'B' level. This result represents an improvement the 'A' level grade and a decline for the 'B' level grade, from the historic baseline averages.

Sixteen percent of students completed SACE using VET and there were 32 students enrolled in the Flexible Learning Options (FLO) program in 2019.

In terms of 2019 tertiary entrance, 60%, or 55 out of 92 potential students achieved an ATAR or TAFE SA selection score. There were also 4 students who were successful in achieving a merit.