The Department for Education
External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Adelaide Secondary School of English

Conducted in October 2018
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 Marion Coady, Review Principal.
School context

Adelaide Secondary School of English is a South Australian government school that offers specialist intensive English language programs to prepare secondary migrant, refugee and international students, newly arrived in Australia, for entry into mainstream high schools, study pathways or work. The school caters for students aged 12-18, representing over 60 different nationalities. The school is situated in Croydon, 5km west of the Adelaide CBD.

Enrolment numbers fluctuate across the school year as students exit or enter the program. In February 2018, enrolment is 419, but total annual enrolments throughout previous years have been above 700.

The school is classified as Category 2 on the department’s Index of Educational Disadvantage. This reflects the complexity of the school community, including the transitory nature of many of the families during their first years of settlement in Australia, as well as their high levels of unemployment and low socio-economic status.

The leadership team comprises a principal in the 1st year of her tenure, a deputy principal and 2 senior leaders. There are 11 coordinators, including 2 student wellbeing leaders, 44FTE permanent staff and 12 contract teachers. The fluctuating enrolments see short-term contract teaching positions regularly initiated. There are 10 permanent and 6 contract school services officers (SSOs) and an allocation of 336 bilingual school services officer (BSSO) 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:

Effective Teaching: To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

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

Effective Leadership: To what extent do teaching teams reflect on practice and use this information to improve?

To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

On enrolment, students at Adelaide Secondary School of English are allocated to learning pathway groups, dependent on previous educational experiences and subsequent learning needs. Pathway A students have minimal prior education and are commonly not literate in their home country language; Pathway B students have experienced disrupted educational opportunities, whilst Pathway C students have accessed ongoing learning in their home country and are literate in its language. A rigorous process of inquiry is conducted to place students appropriately, yet ongoing monitoring may, at times, mean students move to a different pathway.
Once in a pathway, students progress through stages of learning namely: Foundation, Intermediate, Advanced and Transition. The time spent at each stage differs according to the pathway, with pathway A students potentially spending up to 8 terms at the school. The structure of the pathways and stages of learning are, in themselves, strong evidence of the school catering to learners’ needs.

Wellbeing needs that students have are often significant and complex and work that staff undertake to address these is outstanding. Regular case-management meetings allow staff to design services appropriate to the students’ diverse needs, and include connections with outside agencies, support groups and in-school accommodations. Access to wellbeing leaders and BSSOs is available daily. Responses to students’ concerns or issues are tailored deliberately and monitoring of the learner’s wellbeing needs is ongoing.

Differentiated learning is a priority. All teachers are expected to submit a differentiated planning form for their subject each term. The level of sophistication and potential impact of the plans differ across the school. The External School Review (ESR) panel accessed plans that evidenced teaching tailored to address varied learners’ educational needs, informed by Running Records assessments and language and literacy data. Plans that incorporated common tasks and then indicated scaffolds to support less able students were also apparent. Some differentiated learning plans were less targeted and lacked specificity to learners’ needs, focusing on students’ behaviour or a whole-class activity.

The panel heard and saw a wealth of evidence of the school supporting students who are not on-track to achieve incremental milestones. Leaders engage in regular meetings to assess student progress and identify those needing to take part in intervention programs such as Levelled Literacy Intervention (LLI), MultiLit or MacQLit. Students who are at the transition stage of their learning, but have not yet achieved level 24 of Running Records, are identified and provided intensive support. Conversation made evident the school’s highly responsive work in supporting students at risk, as well as some staff perception that students exceeding expectations require less differentiated teaching.

Opportunity exists to deepen the consistent implementation of differentiated planning and raise all staff potential to do so significantly.

**Direction 1**

**Deepen the school’s agreed approach to differentiated practice and planning and meet the learning needs of all students, through continued professional processes that allow teachers to build expertise in this area.**

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

The school has a clear intent to move towards contemporary, high-yield pedagogy. Recently, collective planning has seen a document on authentic engagement developed. Whilst in the early stages, the pane agrees that engagement with learning was evident in many classes visited. Students uniformly reported a strong connection with their learning and appreciated the opportunity the school offers to support them in transitioning to their new country. Purposeful and intentional learning is evident at the school.

Engagement is not limited to a connection with learning. The school’s intent to support students’ engagement with education, Australian society and as world citizens is clear. All staff work to maximise students’ intellectual, emotional, behavioural, physical and cultural engagement. These concepts have
been explored in depth in order for staff to develop a common understanding of the implications to their work.

It was reported that some teachers have had an opportunity to work in partnership with University colleagues to develop their understanding of task transformation; to plan learning that elicits student cognition and engages learners in processes of inquiry. In some classes and through conversation with teachers, the panel sourced evidence of this work in practice. When participating in a maths assignment, some students were required to plan and conduct inquiry and present their findings. They used strategies of collation, graphing and drawing inference.

In one class visited, the learning focus was clearly literacy and comprehension, yet the task design enabled students to engage in a process requiring them to consider relationships and class culture; and to make decisions about the behaviours and responsibilities that contribute to a harmonious learning environment. All students engaged strongly with both the learning and task.

Professional learning teams (PLTs) have worked collaboratively to focus on improvement in practice and have explored effective approaches to oral language, IT and robotics, and critical thinking. STEM learning has been discussed at the school and adds another element to the pedagogical reform that is being undertaken.

The panel acknowledges the uniqueness of students’ learning needs. A directed and strongly scaffolded approach to learning is necessary in introducing learners to a new language. This is evident within the school and is operating effectively to support students in learning English. It is also evident that in some learning areas, opportunities for students at the advanced or transitional stages to engage in processes that inspire thinking can be amplified. Some students participated in learning that required minimal cognitive processing and led to students disengaging with teaching.

Pedagogical implementation and an appropriate approach for students is a priority. Documents on pedagogical expectations have been generated, and opportunities for some staff to take part in professional learning to respond to these have been undertaken. Many staff are aware of the school’s didactic priorities and implement these effectively. Broadening this consistently across learning areas and ensuring all teachers have opportunities to develop task transformation that inspires intellectual challenge, is an exciting prospect for the school.

**Direction 2**

*Broaden the intent to engage students in creative thinking and processes of inquiry through opportunities for all staff to access regular, tailored professional learning, and to engage in ongoing collaborative planning.*

**To what extent do teaching teams reflect on practice and use this information to improve?**

PLTs are convened through teachers proposing an aspect for exploration and improvement, aligned with the school improvement plan (SIP). The initiating teacher then leads colleagues through planning and implementation processes throughout the year. Each PLT is then required to present findings and make recommendations for improvement at the end of the year. To date, these have included the instigation of the ‘tree of life’ initiative, breakfast club, resource development, and trialling of data walls. The panel acknowledges the undertakings of these teams: planning documents are consistent, as are expectations
and opportunities for teachers to lead. Staff should consider if the work of the PLTs is professional learning that builds teacher capacity or, in fact, development of school initiatives and programs.

Performance and development (PD) processes are widely understood by staff and clearly structured. Two meetings are convened each year, in term 1 and at the end of term 2. Line managers meet with teachers, BSSOs and SSOs to discuss and identify a goal aligned with the SIP. This is documented in the departmental PD planner. An allocation of $500 is provided each staff member to resource their attendance at professional forums that support their potential to reach their goal. Staff also report that experts in fields pertinent to the school’s priorities regularly present at staff meetings.

Student feedback is featured as a tool in supporting teachers to reflect on and develop their practice. This is sought through processes designed to meet the needs of students and enable their input to be authentic. Depending on the pathway, students offer feedback through BSSOs, in writing or using pictorial scaffolds. This initiative ensures student agency within learning whilst accommodating difference.

PDP goals were discussed with staff and evidently vary in intent. Some staff discussed goals that would ensure the effective implementation of a program, for example, the Trauma Intervention program; some referred to improving school initiatives, such as parent partnerships, and others discussed development of class culture. Limited evidence was sourced to confirm that improvement of pedagogical practice featured as a priority in PD plans. All staff uniformly appreciated opportunities to attend and access what they term ‘training and development’, whilst reporting that once the PD goal is identified, responsibility to work towards this is generally at the discretion of the staff member.

Some teachers described the opportunities they have offered for newer staff members to come and observe their teaching and to discuss preferred practice. This informal option is an ideal opportunity to contribute to consistent practice, and encourages leaders to consider how they might develop a more formal, structured approach to building teacher capacity.

The school has very clear and contemporary agreements in place regarding pedagogy and differentiated practice. There is noticeable opportunity to use the well-structured PDP and PLT processes to focus on building staff capacity to respond to these effectively across the school.

**Direction 3**

*Ensure all staff respond to the school’s agreed expectations, through an explicit focus on teacher pedagogy within performance and development planning, and strengthening ongoing and strategic approaches that build teacher capacity.*

**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 Adelaide Secondary School of English.

Effective practice from the Effective Teaching aspect of the ESR framework was evident. Learners new to Australia who have to learn English have been positively influenced by the responsive approaches to their varied needs. Connections with outside agencies and support personnel are sourced through a wrap-around approach to case management. Staff work to maximise learners’ potential to assimilate into their new country and subsequent requirements. The panel attended the Homework Club, which is convened every week, which supports students to understand how to complete their citizenship test. Another out-of-hours offering is Job Club that supports students in learning how to write a resume, apply for jobs online and develop job readiness.
The school’s focus on developing not just the students’ language acquisition, but their understanding of life in their local community, supports learners to develop safe behaviours, understand cultural norms and to contribute as active citizens. There is no doubt about the value of work undertaken at the school. The commitment, expertise and goodwill displayed by all staff is acknowledged and applauded. Strong leadership with a clear vision for the school and deep understanding of quality improvement planning and effective pedagogy is clearly integral to the school’s success. The panel commends all staff who are making such a difference in the lives of new Australian citizens.
Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

At Adelaide Secondary School of English effective leadership provides strategic direction, planning and targeted intervention, and a culture of improvement characterised by high expectations for students.

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

1. Deepen the school’s agreed approach to differentiated practice and planning and meet the learning needs of all students, through continued professional processes that allow teachers to build expertise in this area.

2. Broaden the intent to engage students in creative thinking and processes of inquiry through opportunities for all staff to access regular, tailored professional learning, and to engage in ongoing collaborative planning.

3. Ensure all staff respond to the school’s agreed expectations, through an explicit focus on teacher pedagogy within performance and development planning, and strengthening ongoing and strategic approaches that build teacher capacity.

Based on the school’s current performance, Adelaide Secondary School of English will be externally reviewed again in 2021.

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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 91%.

Appendix 2

School performance overview

Data pertinent to the context of the school follows.

Reading
Whilst the school relies heavily on data sourced through Running Records assessments, this data is not provided to the system, as it is not aligned with regular chronological standards.

Once students reach level 24 (mainstream year 2) the PAT Reading test is conducted at level 3 or above. In 2017, 97% of students achieved standard in this assessment.

In 2017, 58% of pathway A, 90% of pathway B and 82% of pathway C students reached level 24. The school suggests this is an improvement on previous years’ results that may hinge on the introduction of a new pathway A and B curriculum, where more time is allocated to EALD, and a focus on phonics and phonemic awareness has been introduced.

Numeracy
Quantifiable data regarding students’ progress in numeracy is not sourced in years 8 to 10. Students studying maths as a SACE subject receive a grade according to their achievement against the standards.

Mathematics is designed to meet a range of student needs in both middle school and senior school classes. Specific topics are selected and presented in ways which teach students a range of mathematical concepts and skills, whilst developing English language competencies in mathematics.

Topics are taken from three content strands of the Australian Curriculum. The content strands are number and algebra, measurement and geometry, and statistics and probability. The 4 proficiency strands of understanding, fluency, problem-solving and reasoning, which describe how the content is explored or developed are an integral part of mathematics content across the 3 content strands.

Assessment is both formative and summative and includes the assessment of students’ ability to comprehend and use the language of mathematics as well as apply mathematical knowledge and skills.

SACE
In 2017, all senior students (pathway A, B & C) took part in PLP and a new subject: Integrated Learning (Work Studies) was trialled by senior pathway A & B classes. In semester 1, 78 students completed PLP and 37 completed integrated studies. Fifty-seven percent of students achieved C or better in Integrated Learning and 89% in PLP.

In semester 2, 64% of students achieved a C or better in Integrated Learning and 87% in PLP.