

Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Birdwood High School

Conducted in February 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 Kylie Eggers, Review Principal.

Review Process

The following processes were used to gather evidence relevant to the lines of inquiry:

- Presentation from the Principal and leadership team
- Class visits
- Attendance at staff meeting
- Document analysis
- Scan of Aboriginal Education Strategy implementation
- Discussions with:
 - Governing Council Chairperson
 - Leaders
 - School Services Officers (SSOs)
 - Student groups
 - Teachers.

School context

Birdwood High School caters for students from reception to year 12. It is situated 43km from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2021 was 484. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 412. The local partnership is Torrens Valley.

The school has an ICSEA score of 1001 and is classified as Category 6 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 1% Aboriginal students, 9% students with disabilities, 2.7% students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, 2 children/young people in care and 31% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in the 4th year of tenure, a Deputy Principal, an Assistant Principal, 4 Senior Leaders and a Business Manager.

There are 34 Teachers including 4 in the early years of their careers, 1 Advanced Skilled teacher AST2 and 13 Step 9 teachers.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

- Direction 1** **Ensure data is available and used to measure levels of student performance, engagement and challenge and to reinforce the practices and accountability of teachers.**
- Direction 2** **Focus on being accountable for student achievement in all areas of the Australian Curriculum and SACE, including quality teaching, which engages and challenges every student.**
- Direction 3** **Develop and implement a long-term plan for sustainability of the school's directions for improvement, which includes implementation of a local promotion strategy.**

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

It was evident from the Leader's presentation, observations in classes and conversations with staff students and parents that a culture characterised by high expectations, learning support and improvement has developed.

The Leader's presentation highlighted the collaborative development of the School Improvement Plan (SIP), referencing evidence from student achievement and growth data to inform the agreed goals and targets for improvement in the priority areas of literacy, numeracy and SACE learning. Leaders provided examples of action plans detailing how and when they were implementing actions in their focus areas. Staff members had a clear understanding of the Plan's priorities and how their role connected to the documented actions for improvement.

Teachers and leaders provided several examples of using a range of data and evidence to intentionally plan for, track, monitor and report on learning progress. Teaching and learning was more aligned to curriculum requirements through quality assurance processes of learning plans and assessment tasks. Learning area, team and performance development meetings have developed a greater focus on discussions about student performance and sharing of resources. Many teachers commented positively on their individual and group performance development meetings as an opportunity to reflect on their

practice using evidence to measure their improvement against set targets while sharing strategies that improve student learning.

Classroom observations, instructional rounds and addressing non-compliance issues of the SACE/ Australian Curriculum, have been significant levers to support the transformative nature of Birdwood High School.

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, pedagogical and assessment practice?

Leaders and teachers positively described the collaborative development and agreement of the priorities, actions and targets for improvement documented in the SIP. The process of development has ensured staff ownership of the priorities, strengthened by the alignment of individual teacher improvement goals with the goals of the SIP. Many were clear in their understanding of the priorities and how they were implementing the actions into their work.

Review and improvement of strategies and actions and their impact on student learning across the school were evident in staff explanations and documentation of steps 4 and 5 improvement cycle processes. Successive SIP plans were adjusted in response to these processes and the review of a range of student achievement data.

A range of performance development structures and processes featured in staff responses about self-review and sharing of practice. Several referred to regular individual and group performance development meetings that provided opportunities for evidence-based discussions and reflection on practice with peers and line managers using student achievement and growth data. Many commented positively on group meetings and their learning area team meetings for discussing pedagogy and sharing best practice. Learning observation walkthroughs where trained leaders, teachers and students visited classes as a team, observed lessons and provided feedback at staff meetings were also seen as a positive way to receive feedback on classroom practice. Leaders commented that there was a growing number of peer to peer observations taking place in learning teams. Additionally, professional learning communities (PLCs) provided forums for staff groups to build their knowledge and skills in particular focus areas to support the SIP goals.

It was clear that staff positively viewed these structures and processes as support to the improvement and de-privatisation of practice and achievement of the SIP goals. However, staff descriptions varied in how these structures and processes connect and their role in supporting the development of whole of school agreements of practice. An opportunity exists to connect and clarify these structures, processes and the expectations of all participants to enable agreements to be reached.

Direction 1 Connect and clarify expectations of improvement structures and processes that support teachers' evidence-based reflection, leading to best practice agreements.

Effective teaching and student learning

How effectively are teachers using evidence-based pedagogical practices that engage and challenge all learners?

Classroom observations by the panel confirmed that the majority of students were participating in well-organised and structured lessons. Several teachers observed were interacting positively with students using dialogic teaching approaches. They explained that they were engaging in and encouraging questioning to support learner understanding and to keep all students actively involved in learning. Students interviewed commented that they felt supported by teachers who had high expectations of them to succeed. Senior students believed that the school's expectations to be successful had risen over several years and was most visible in teachers' requirements of them in class learning activities and assessment tasks.

In the Leader's presentation, the Principal highlighted several developments that significantly impacted developing the school's learning culture. Intentional planning by teachers of learning has been strengthened with student achievement data on class placemats to guide them in planning to meet the learning needs of all students. Many students commented that the learning has been made clearer through the development of learning intentions and success criteria. These were highly visible in classrooms across the school, in some cases, co-constructed with students, making learning expectations more explicit.

The panel observed teachers using various evidence-based pedagogical approaches in their classrooms to engage and challenge students. A small number of teachers explained how targeted professional learning and references to best practice in guidebooks aligned to the priorities for improvement in the SIP and were sources for these pedagogies. These were further refined in professional learning communities (PLCs), learning area teams with feedback from learning observation walkthroughs and PDP meetings.

Leaders presented a newly developed document, 'Learning in the Middle Years', as an agreement that guides teacher practice. Several teachers commented that aspects of this document and skills developed through professional learning in dialogic approaches to learning influenced their teaching approaches. Most recognised that this was an initial attempt to reach some agreements on what is best practice and that broader and more refined agreements needed to be achieved. It is timely to collaboratively review this document looking at the effectiveness of current practices against evidence-based research. Reaching whole-school agreements that articulate the roles and responsibilities of all participants will guide teacher practice in engaging and challenging all learners.

Direction 2 Consolidate teacher practice (8-12) by further developing a collective understanding and agreement of high-yield pedagogical practices that engage and challenge all learners.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2021

At Birdwood High School, the influence of previous ESR directions is evident in the school's improvement. The school's planning processes are evidence-based and targeted with clear alignment between the agreed goals for improvement and support and accountability processes to raise student achievement. Effective teaching is being developed to actively engage and challenge students. Students are provided opportunities and scaffolds in a coherent and engaging curriculum that enable them to authentically influence their learning. Long term strategic planning and focused commitment to improvement by leadership and teachers has resulted in the significant improvement of SACE performance and completion rates for students.

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

- Direction 1** **Connect and clarify expectations of improvement structures and processes that support teachers' evidence-based reflection, leading to best practice agreements.**
- Direction 2** **Consolidate teacher practice (8-12) by further developing a collective understanding and agreement of high-yield pedagogical practices that engage and challenge all learners.**

Based on the school's current performance, Birdwood 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 76% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA.

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

In 2019 9% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 9, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 22% or 6 out of 27 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

Numeracy

In 2019 the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 80% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA.

Between 2017 and 2019 the trend for year 9 has been upwards from 63% to 80%.

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

In 2019 11% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 9 this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 33% or 4 out of 12 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2020, 94% of students enrolled in February and 97% of those enrolled in October, who had the potential to complete their SACE did go on to successfully achieve SACE. This result for October SACE completion represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

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

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2020, 98% of grades achieved were at 'C'-level or higher, 20% of grades were at an 'A' level and 37% of grades were at a 'B' level. This result represents little or no change for the 'C'-level or higher grade, the 'A' level grade and for the 'B' level grade from the historic baseline averages.

Thirty-seven per cent of students completed SACE using VET and there was 1 student enrolled in the Flexible Learning Options (FLO) program in 2020.

In terms of 2020 tertiary entrance 86% or 48 out of 56 potential students, achieved an ATAR score. There were also 4 students who were successful in achieving a merit.

In 2020 the school had a moderation adjustment of 1 in 4 subjects.