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.

This External School Review was conducted by Liz Schneyer, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and John Tiver and Liz Matheson, Review Principals.
Policy compliance

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

The Principal of Underdale High School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies.

Implementation of the DECD Student Attendance Policy was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2015 was 91.3%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context

Underdale High School caters for children from Year 8 to 12. It is situated 6kms west of the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2015 was 569 students, which represents a decline from 713 in 2010. The school has an ICSEA score of 984, and is classified as Category 5 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 2% Aboriginal students, 9% students with disabilities, 58% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), 3 young people in care, and 30% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in a one-year tenure, who has recently been appointed as Principal for 5 years, a Deputy Principal Curriculum/Wellbeing, and two Assistant Principals responsible for Pathways and Literacy respectively. There are 9 Coordinators responsible for curriculum leadership.

School Performance Overview

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

Reading

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 57% of Year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. This result represents a decline from the historic baseline average. The school is achieving within the results of similar students across the DECD system.

In 2015 NAPLAN Reading, 9% of students achieved in the top two bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 36%, or 4 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 9 in 2015.

Numeracy

In 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 62% of Year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2013 and 2015, the trend has been upwards, from 43% in 2013 to 62% in 2015. The school is achieving within the results of similar students across the DECD system.

In 2015 NAPLAN Numeracy, 9% of students achieved in the top two bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 67%, or 4 of 6 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 9 in 2015, and 60%, or 3 of 5 students from Year 7 remain in the upper bands at Year 9 in 2015.
SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2015, 94% of students who had the potential to complete their SACE did go on to successfully achieve their SACE. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Ninety-five percent of grades achieved in the 2015 SACE were C- or higher. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. Ninety-seven percent of students successfully completed their Research Project.

In 2015 SACE Stage 1, 80% of all grades achieved were C or better and 94% of students successfully completed the Personal Learning Plan. Ninety-four percent of students successfully completed their Literacy requirements.

Lines of Inquiry

During the review process, the panel focused on four key areas from the External School Review Framework:

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

Effective Leadership: How well does leadership facilitate the development of coherent high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?

Improvement Agenda: How well are the results of data and evidence translated into targeted actions?

School Community Partnerships: How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and throughout the school?

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

How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and throughout the school?

Underdale High School teachers are continuing to work hard to improve student achievement data, with consistent growth in SACE, some particular areas of NAPLAN and PAT data, and improvement in all subjects at Stage 1, and most at Stage 2 in 2015. There has also been an increase in As achieved at Stage 2. There has been a growth in attendance over 5 years, increased participation of students in NAPLAN tests and a significant reduction in student behaviour issues, partly due to a more consistent approach by the Leadership Team towards student behaviour management and higher expectations of teachers and students.

Leaders could account for the 40 Year 12 students who left the school between February and October 2015, and could also detail the destinations of students who completed their PLP but did not go on to complete the Research Project. Most of these students gained apprenticeships through the automotive program and other Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses.

The Review Panel was impressed with the capacity of almost all senior students interviewed to clearly articulate their post-school pathway. They discussed the support they receive from subject teachers and the Pathways Assistant Principal and the range of options available to them. There is an impressive range of subjects, some of which are innovative, and this is appreciated by students. Some students are prepared to attend Thebarton Senior College to access the additional subjects they require. Over 90% of students use some Vocational Education and Training to complete their SACE and most of the 30 FLO students access some curriculum at Underdale High School and achieve some SACE credits.
All members of the school community who were interviewed are very proud of the multicultural nature of the school, where students come from 48 different countries. There is a traditional focus on literacy, because of the number of students who do not have English as their first language. Some parents are also not literate in their own language, which has made it difficult to involve them in the school. The use of the MultiLit intervention program, and establishment of a Supported Learning Centre in the Resource Centre have been critical strategies in improving literacy levels across the whole school. The appointment of a literacy coach some years ago is also strategic, as she provides whole-school leadership in improving literacy levels, including comprehension, writing and reading. She is committed to trying to get all families to include reading at home as common practice.

Two maths teachers are involved in the DECD Mathematics Enrichment Project, and it is hoped they will lead the introduction of project-based learning in the future. The Advanced Technology Project has been led by the Science Coordinator and has been in place for some time. It encourages student participation in a range of activities and programs including on-site STEM robotics and Engineering Challenges managed by the Universities.

During interviews with teachers and students, it was evident to the Review Panel that a number of teachers have low expectations of the students, and there is a perception amongst some that ‘both students and teachers in the school are coasting’. Students identified the good teachers and the strategies used to engage them in lessons. They provided examples of activity-based lessons, some use of ICT, group work, clear guidelines about assessment and how to ‘get an A’, and a clear purpose for the lesson. They often received good feedback through 1 to 1 conversations with their teacher. Observations of lessons revealed some pockets of highly engaging, contemporary and relevant teaching practice, and it was evident that some teachers had an awareness of ESL pedagogy and were using it in their lessons. Unfortunately, this was not always the case, and examples of some teachers talking for a high proportion of the lesson, relying on textbooks and worksheets, and providing low-level tasks were observed. A number of teachers discounted the capacity of students and their learning intention.

Several teachers had difficulty talking about how they stretch or challenge students, or design tasks to meet the individual needs of students in their classes. The use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool is teacher-dependent.

The students are very confident when talking about the school. Members of the Student Voice Council (SVC) could detail projects that they are involved in and appreciated ready access to the Principal. There are opportunities for involvement in student leadership programs with students from other schools, and these are enjoyed and appreciated. Students were keen to share their work with the Review Panel and discuss their projects during lesson observations, where they were friendly, polite and compliant.

When students were asked about their influence on, and ownership of, their learning, it was evident that only some teachers include formative assessment, encourage drafting and ask for feedback. Students are not confident about providing feedback to their teachers or raising issues about their learning. Where they had provided feedback, they did not always see change as a result. Some members of the SVC, however, are currently involved in conversations about the use of diaries. There was a perception amongst some teachers that students only become engaged in their earning if it is linked to their future pathway. Students, however, were clear that relationships with their teachers impact most on their engagement in lessons.

**Direction 1**
Explore and enact pedagogies across the whole school that engage and stretch all students and incorporate student influence on their learning.
How well does leadership facilitate the development of coherent high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?

The appointment of a new Principal, and decreasing enrolments, have impacted on the capacity of the Leadership Team to effectively implement the current Site Improvement Plan priorities. In particular, the financial impact of falling enrolments has meant fewer leadership positions and more one-year tenures. This has resulted in some experienced leaders accepting long-term appointments in other schools, and putting pressure on some teachers, coordinators and leaders to accept additional responsibilities.

It was evident that some leaders are undertaking overlapping responsibilities, and their Job and Person Specifications did not reflect current school priorities. This is particularly apparent in the senior school, where 4 different leaders look after the wellbeing and achievement of approximately 200 Year 11 and 12 students.

It was also evident that the responsibilities of both the Principal and Deputy Principal need alignment to a new Site Improvement Plan that reflects whole-school strategic planning and priorities for the future in relation to a new leadership structure and the current financial constraints.

The Review Panel found there is a particular need for greater clarity around curriculum leadership in the school. Much of the curriculum leadership is provided by the Coordinators, many of whom admitted to struggling with the breadth of responsibilities that include both leadership of the wellbeing of a year-level of students and leadership of a learning area. There was consensus that most of their time is spent on year-level leadership, focusing on student wellbeing programs, many of which are highly effective, rather than curriculum leadership.

The effectiveness of curriculum leadership is leader-dependent, including the quality of curriculum documentation on the school’s internal drive, which is inconsistent in breadth and depth. Some learning areas have not loaded any documentation, even though this is a school expectation. Variations in assessment expectations and practices within and across learning areas are apparent, and there appears to be greater emphasis on the SACE rather than the Australian Curriculum (AC), although all learning areas appeared to be compliant in using AC standards to inform assessment practices, and are delivering the AC content and skills.

Effective leadership of Performance Development Programs that include line management, peer observations and feedback, is also leader-dependent. It is unclear what standards the current program is aligned to and many leaders expressed reluctance to participate in necessary hard conversations. All leaders, many teachers and students, and some parents, talked about the small number of staff who are struggling, and believed an immediate and consistent approach from leaders is needed to support these teachers.

Professional Development opportunities are readily available, encouraged and appreciated, and there are some examples where this training is reflected in teaching practice. Teachers are looking for increased opportunities to have professional conversations with colleagues, and some changes have already been made by the Principal to the weekly meeting cycle to facilitate this. Most learning area meetings are currently operational in nature. The school is encouraging more teachers to become moderators, with internal and external moderation being organized. Aspiring and new leaders are seeking additional training on how to manage their competing responsibilities, and ongoing mentoring and coaching for leaders is encouraged.

There is evidence that some new directions introduced in 2016 by the new Principal are beginning to have impact, and the potential of the new Leadership Team is recognised within the school community.

**Direction 2**
Build leadership capacity in the school to lead pedagogical improvement and effectively monitor teacher performance.

**Direction 3**
Collaboratively develop a vision and strategic plan that informs current and future leadership structures and resource allocation.
How well are the results of data and evidence translated into targeted actions?

In their interviews, students and parents expressed their unhappiness about the gap between the school’s reputation in the community and the reality of their experiences in the school, which have always been very positive. They are keen to participate in programs to address this misconception.

One strategy discussed was improved promotion of the school’s datasets, including SACE and attendance data. Supporting almost all students to successfully complete their Research Project in a school where literacy is a major factor is an outstanding achievement. A number of teachers are also working with students in feeder primary schools to promote the STEM and music programs, and ensure there is a seamless curriculum transition for these students into Underdale High School.

The SACE Coordinator was able to discuss the SACE data confidently, including details of moderation shifts and the impact of literacy levels on achievement in exams and Directed Investigations. An exam room has been established to give students practice in an authentic environment, and relevant professional development has been provided to teachers whose grades are consistently adjusted via moderation.

The school has installed DayMap as a Learner Management System and use it for managing attendance. The school’s processes for monitoring attendance are exemplary. There is intent to expand the use of DayMap in 2017, for sharing information with parents through the parent portal.

There is a data wall in the staff room, but it was apparent that few staff accessed the data, and even less used it to inform their teaching practice. The Data Dashboard is not yet in use and information about students’ wellbeing is largely paper-based. A traffic light system has been introduced, but the potential is not yet fully utilised. PAT data is not yet available, and students were completing the MYDI data survey for the first time during the ESR visit. A few teachers are using ‘Survey Monkey’ to gather student feedback, but a number of students admitted to being “sick of surveys”.

There is intent by the school leadership to improve the management of data, including implementing a plan for data generation, distribution and analysis, and monitoring the inclusion of data in conversations in all line management and learning area meetings.

Direction 4
Strengthen the engagement of leaders and teachers in the generation and use of data to inform their practice and improve student performance.
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Underdale High School has demonstrated growth in student achievement in the SACE, which is at or above what would be reasonably expected of a school in a similar context. The growth in enrolments of students who have English as their second language and whose parents are not necessarily literate in their own language has added to the complexity of the student cohort in the school.

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

1. Explore and enact pedagogies across the whole school that engage and stretch all students and incorporate student influence on their learning.
2. Build leadership capacity in the school to lead pedagogical improvement and effectively monitor teacher performance.
3. Collaboratively develop a vision and strategic plan that informs current and future leadership structures and resource allocation.
4. Strengthen the engagement of leaders and teachers in the generation and use of data to inform their practice and improve student performance.

Based on the school's current performance, Underdale High School will be externally reviewed again in 2020.

Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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.

David Harriss  
PRINCIPAL  
UNDERDALE HIGH SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson