EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

Report for Willunga High School

Conducted in August 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 Kathryn Entwistle, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Rob Knight and Chris Roberts, Review Principals.

School context

Willunga High School caters for children from Year 8 to 12. It is situated 47kms south of the Adelaide CBD. Enrolments have steadily increased from 792 in 2010, to 1083 in 2017. The school is classified as Category 4 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage, with an ICSEA score of 972.

The school population includes 4% of Aboriginal students, 10% of students with disabilities, 22% of families eligible for School Card assistance, 3% of students of EALD background, and 14 children/young people in care. In 2017, 136 students access Flexible Learning Options (FLO).

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in the first year of his tenure, one Deputy Principal with leadership of curriculum and operations, and three Band 3 Senior Leaders with responsibility for Middle and Senior Years and Flexible Learning Options. Four Band B2 leaders are responsible for Wellbeing, Inclusion, Middle Schooling and Maths, Science and Quality Teaching. In addition, there are 12 Band B1 leaders, including four Learning Area Coordinators, five Year Level Coordinators with responsibility for VET/SACE, Counselling and timetabling and eLearning. There are 75 teachers employed at the school.

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:

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

Effective Leadership: **How effectively does the school leadership foster a culture of learning?**

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

How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

During the pre-review process and the on-site External School Review (ESR), conversations with most members of the Leadership Team and analysis of the Site Improvement Plan (SIP) made evident that in 2017, expectations regarding the design and delivery of teaching are informed by contemporary and evidence-based research. The SIP references challenging and engaging pedagogy, differentiated practice, data informed planning and 'international mindedness' through eLearning, as some of the main priorities at Willunga High School. The ESR panel members agree that these statements of intent represent high-yield approaches to teaching and learning, and are aligned with DECD priorities. The potential to authenticate and embed these intended outcomes is apparent, as at the time of the ESR process, it was clear that practice of this nature was limited across the school.

In some Learning Areas (LAs) visited and through conversations with some teaching staff, it was evident that approaches to student learning are strategically designed to elicit curiosity. Planning then capitalises on this to engage students in processes of inquiry for which they are responsible, to pose questions, access research, develop findings and assess their progress against known criteria. In instances such as these, students were able to discuss which grades they are aiming for and how they will strive to meet the standards within that grade. In these LAs, the expectations of students were high and the teachers were clearly active in supporting and encouraging students to maximise their potential. In these instances the concept of student agency within their learning was operating at a high level and is commended by the ESR panel.

The ESR panel members also heard and saw examples of students with special needs accessing learning catered and adjusted accordingly. A visit to the Flexible Learning Options (FLO) campus demonstrated that the intent to support these students to re-engage with intentional learning and to connect with outside

agencies to provide pathways to vocational training or employment was happening. An ESR panel member sourced evidence that confirmed the strategic and differentiated planning that informs this program, and the commitment and high expectations staff have for the students. Students with special needs also have detailed and documented Learning Plans generated. These include specific learning targets and strategies to support them to achieve these. It was reported that these plans are filed on SEQTA in order for all teachers to access and respond accordingly. For students who learn in the Special Options class, these plans are influential and applied. However, many reports from staff and some parents indicated that as students with learning plans moved from one LA to another, the response to the plan depends wholly on the individual teacher having accessed and then differentiated their approach to meet the student's needs. Learning Plans for ATSI students provided an example of strategic and intentional planning, and the ESR panel heard these students discuss the perception that they are well-supported in their learning by most teachers with whom they work.

Other evidence of effective teaching to support student learning was sourced by the ESR team. The newly introduced concept of literacy and numeracy as cross-curricula priorities has been strategically led by the Leadership Team. Staffing has been allocated to appoint a coach to support staff in this initiative and a survey conducted during the review showed that 100% of the respondents believed that teaching literacy and numeracy is every teacher's responsibility. The panel also saw the school's outdoor learning areas used effectively to support students to engage in processes of inquiry and research, and the recent review and rejuvenation of IT infrastructure, whilst still a work in progress, has contributed to improvement in eLearning across the school.

Whilst the ESR panel did hear and see evidence of learning opportunities designed to develop learner expertise, characterised by teaching that featured high expectations, staff, students and parents also made very clear that a student's potential to engage with the learning or to reach their potential was influenced strongly by 'who you get'. A repeated theme throughout the ESR was that inconsistent practice operates between LAs and across the school, and that teachers bring varied aspiration and optimism to students' potential. Students and parents uniformly reported that vastly different teaching approaches and attitudes are evident across LAs and from year to year. Conversations with staff in forum groups and the survey conducted during the ESR showed that many staff also believe teaching is inconsistently delivered across the school. Responses to the question *How do we teach at Willunga High School?* included statements such as: 'traditionally', 'in isolation', 'differently', 'inconsistently' and 'mostly individually'.

Some responses to the question referred to a pocket of resistance to change and a lack of accountability regarding expectations of teachers' pedagogical practice. Other responses made evident that some teaching staff hold reservations regarding the potential some students bring to the learning agenda. However, it is encouraging to note that some staff discussed their response to this question with comments that included terminology such as: 'dynamically', 'enthusiastically' and 'inclusively'. A review of pedagogical implementation and the culture of aspiration for the students at Willunga High School is an urgent, yet stimulating, direction for the school to pursue. The ESR panel urges leaders to undertake this process as an inclusive and collective one, in order to establish commitment and shared accountability. Reference to recognised and verified systemic documents will further support this regeneration of practice.

Direction 1
Establish and consistently deliver effective pedagogical approaches, characterised by high expectations for all students, through collective inquiry into evidence-based practice, referenced to recognised frameworks.

How effectively does the school foster a culture of learning?

Conversation with the Executive Leadership Team made evident the priorities and vision they have for the school. The focus on developing pedagogical consistency, influential improvement planning and a more unified culture was apparent to the ESR team members. At the time of the review, it was evident that some systems to bring about development regarding these priorities have been introduced.

Dedicated time, termed Think Tanks, are scheduled regularly throughout the term to progress teachers' understanding and practice regarding differentiated practice, learning design, assessment and reporting,

think-pair-share and student feedback. Whilst these Professional Learning (PL) sessions are clearly aligned with the school's priorities, little evidence was sourced that the content of these forums is influencing teachers' practice. Many staff with whom the panel spoke expressed an appreciation of the concept of differentiation and, at the same time, expressed their uncertainty regarding implementation or planning to actualise the concept. As well as Think Tanks, Literacy and Numeracy Lunches (LAN lunches) were discussed by some staff as opportunities to develop their practice in these areas. LAN lunches are optional forums that provide staff an opportunity to share their ideas and strategies regarding teaching in these areas and some teachers reported attending with enthusiasm.

The influence of Performance and Development (PD) was mainly reported as relatively minimal when considering impact on teacher practice. The ESR heard a few teachers describe a process that was regular, strategic and conducted in partnership with their line manager, and this had continued to support their professional practice. Other reports varied significantly. Some teachers reported taking part in a meeting and discussing teaching goals with limited strategy or follow-up, others spoke about conversations with their line manager being an exercise in compliance, and others were dismissive of the process, citing, not unlike students' and parents' perceptions of teachers, that it depended upon 'who you get'. During these conversations, teaching staff also expressed the belief that a lack of clarity regarding expectations of school policies or practices was apparent, and informed the Review Panel that increased accountability would be welcome. Reports from leaders responsible for line management made clear that varying levels of efficacy regarding the management of PD are apparent. Some were highly articulate in describing the process they use to build teachers' capacity, others were less confident. An opportunity to strengthen the process of PD, aligned with school priorities and characterised by authenticity and accountability, is apparent.

The concept of communication was raised in virtually every conversation held during the ESR. Leaders reported that they had tried varying forums to improve communication to teachers, electronically, through line management or in LA forums. Teachers responded that communication from leaders was one of the most frustrating aspects of school management. In turn, teachers reported that they had attempted to improve communication with students through the learner management system, in person or electronically. Students responded that communication of timelines, expectations and feedback from teachers was one of their biggest issues of concern. All staff discussed attempts to improve communication; families, in turn, reported that whilst one-to-one issues were, in the main, responded to promptly, on-going communication regarding events, assessments or general school operations were still lacking. A trend that emerged from the review was the inconsistent utilisation of the learner management system SEQTA. Students and parents, in particular, expressed their concern that a tool designed to enable partnerships and transparency in learning and reporting was not operating effectively. Staff who generate Learning Plans for students with special needs concurred with this frustration.

Equal frustration was voiced by both staff and leaders regarding the process by which decisions are made and subsequent expectations established. The panel was made aware that attempts have been made by the Executive Leaders to implement a process of consultation with teachers to develop an agreed decision-making policy. This was progressed through Learning Area forums and, at the time of the ESR, the process was reported as 'stalled'. It is here that the ESR panel sourced evidence of the breakdown between the Executive Leaders' intentions and the eventual message to teaching staff. The panel heard that the transference of school priorities and consequent teacher commitment varies according to the process or approach undertaken in the LA forums. A clear and coherent message is not coming through, and some teachers cite this as the reason they might disconnect with school initiatives. The opportunity to design systems that ensure all leaders with line management responsibility have a clear and coherent understanding of the intended message, and the capacity to then engage and lead staff in consistent processes that allow them to comprehend and commit to whole-school priorities, is evident. Many leaders and teachers with whom the ESR panel spoke are optimistic regarding the potential to review these systems.

Regarding the issue of a decision-making policy, the ESR panel believes the evidence sourced indicates it is time to 'draw a line in the sand' and to put past history regarding inconsistently reached or unpalatable decisions behind all staff. The opportunity to work together through a rigorous and transparent process, inclusive, equitable and, most importantly, undertaken *optimistically* by all, will ensure that future decisions at the school are taken with authentic consultation and reached within agreed protocols. The ESR team believes that students, staff and leaders should all be afforded this entitlement.

Direction 2
Build the capacity of staff and leaders to progress and embed effective pedagogy through consistently implemented, on-going processes of performance and development that identify goals for improvement in professional practice and strategies to meet these.

Direction 3
Build unity and shared commitment in working towards school improvement imperatives by continuing ongoing, collective review of processes of communication and decision-making models, characterised by both equity and accountability for all.

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

It is important to note at this point that the school's SACE completion and Grade Point Average data has improved steadily over the last three years. Whilst there is still room for further improvement, the ESR panel acknowledges that the appointment of a Senior Secondary Leader responsible for SACE improvement and a focus on higher expectations and scaffolds for both Stage 1 and 2 students to achieve, have been strategic and successful initiatives.

Analysis of data provided prior to the ESR and further conversations with staff and leaders, made highly evident to the ESR panel that the value of data in informing planning or making decisions about students' learning needs was minimal. NAPLAN data over a three-year period showed withdrawals and absences as exponentially high compared with similar schools, and PAT Maths and PAT Reading data saw up to 37 students from one year level not sitting the test. Of those who did in 2016, the highest percentage of students achieving SEA was 38% in Year 8 PAT-M, and the lowest was 16% in Year 9 PAT-R. Reports from parents and staff informed the panel that, historically, there had been a culture of dismissal regarding the place data has in intentional planning. The ESR survey conducted determined that 46% of teachers believe data is not used to inform student or learning area planning. In discussion groups, some staff discussed students who sat the PAT and NAPLAN tests clearly selecting random or un-considered responses, and simply progressing through the test as quickly as they could, regardless of their answers.

When considering a re-culture regarding the perception and use of data at Willunga High School, the ESR panel encourages staff to examine Hattie's statement that reminds us of the true purpose behind data collection and analysis: S*o that we, as teachers, know who we taught well, what they mastered or failed to master, who made larger and smaller gains, and what we may need to re-teach. Tests are primarily to help teachers to gather formative information about their impact. With this mindframe, the students reap the dividends.* Many processes of the ESR made evident that a whole-school review into the perceptions, potential and purpose of data and its analysis provides an opportunity to build a more intentional and differentiated approach to planning at the school. The panel strongly recommends a circumspect approach to this process, in order for it to be universally engaged with and sustainable. The hasty establishment of a data wall, or 'putting faces on the data', is not what the panel is directing. The need to work, at length, with staff to engender a deep and shared understanding of the *purpose* of valid data in planning and to develop whole-staff *commitment* to this essential aspect of school improvement will be crucial. This will take dedicated time, regular and collective professional learning and PD processes that align with individual teachers' needs. This *educative* process will only be effective if introduced strategically, methodically and over time.

When reviewing the development of the 2017-2021 SIP, it is highly evident that leaders have analysed both MDI and NAPLAN withdrawal data to identify Wellbeing as a priority at the school. A focus on resilience and perseverance is apparent, and a number of strategic and targeted initiatives operate to support students at risk from social, emotional or mental health issues. Connections with outside agencies see a medical practitioner available to students regularly and an Action Team is designing a whole-school approach to improving students' perception of themselves and learning through the Mind Matters model. The panel commends this tailored response to the range of data available to ensure student wellbeing.

When asked what the priorities of the school were, many staff and some parents reported Wellbeing as the imperative. Reference to other aspects of the SIP was minimal, and some staff did not report having knowledge of the document. From initial stages of the ESR, leaders were open in discussing that processes

of self-review were yet to be established. Consequently, at the time of the ESR, systems that operate to enable staff to work together to monitor progress towards agreed targets and outcomes were not apparent within the school. Staff did not discuss targets to which the school was working or the place their work in their Learning Area has in contributing to improvement at the school. Teachers discussed their work often as just that: "my work" or, at best, as part of a faculty. The concept of whole school unity to progress improvement was not evident. The ESR panel is optimistic that once dedicated systems and forums that make existing school imperatives and targets known are established, and staff are collectively and regularly assessing data to determine progress towards these, a much more coherent and unified culture of self-evaluation and improvement planning will exist.

Direction 4
Design intentional planning that responds to students' needs through dedicated, ongoing and scaffolded systems that deepen teacher and leader capacity to understand the value, and diagnostic use, of data.

Direction 5
Develop a consistent, responsive and strategic approach to improvement planning through a systematised and collective model of self-evaluation that makes clear the links between teacher practice and whole-school imperatives.

OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

Willunga High School is in the early stages of its school improvement imperative. A well-documented Site Improvement Plan identifies high-yield approaches to teaching and learning, improvement planning and a culture for learning as priorities. The External School Review sourced evidence that these are highly appropriate areas for development.

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

1. Establish and consistently deliver effective pedagogical approaches, characterised by high expectations for all students, through collective inquiry into evidence based practice, referenced to recognised frameworks.

2. Build the capacity of staff and leaders to progress and embed effective pedagogy through consistently implemented, on-going processes of performance and development that identify goals for improvement in professional practice and strategies to meet these.

3. Build unity and shared commitment in working towards school improvement imperatives by continuing ongoing, collective review of processes of communication and decision making models, characterised by both equity and accountability for all.

4. Design intentional planning that responds to students' needs through dedicated, ongoing and scaffolded systems that deepen teacher and leader capacity to understand the value, and diagnostic use, of data.

5. Develop a consistent, responsive and strategic approach to improvement planning through a systematised and collective model of self-evaluation that makes clear the links between teacher practice and whole-school imperatives.

Based on the school's current performance, Willunga High School will be externally reviewed again in 2018.

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.

Anthony van Ruiten
PRINCIPAL
WILLUNGA HIGH SCHOOL

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 Willunga 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 working towards compliance with this policy. The school attendance rate for 2016 was 88.6%

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).

Reading

In 2016, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 55% of Year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD SEA. This result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average. Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for has been upwards from 43% to 55%.

Between 2014 and 2016, the school has consistently achieved lower in Year 9 NAPLAN Reading relative to the results of similar groups of students across the DECD system.

In 2016 NAPLAN Reading, 8% of students achieved in the top two bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 23%, or 11 of 47 students from Year 3 remain in the upper bands at Year 9 in 2016, and 48%, or 13 of 27 students from Year 7 remain in the upper bands at Year 9 in 2016.

Numeracy

In 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 44% of Year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD SEA. This result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2014 and 2016, the school has consistently achieved lower in Year 9 NAPLAN Numeracy relative to the results of similar groups of students across the DECD system.

In 2016 NAPLAN Numeracy, 2% of students achieved in the top two bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 4%, or 1 of 27 students from Year 3 remains in the upper bands at Year 9 in 2016, and 33%, or 4 of 12 students from Year 7 remain in the upper bands at Year 9 in 2016.

SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2016, 35% of students enrolled in February, and 88% of those enrolled in October, who had the potential to complete their SACE did go on to successfully achieve their SACE. This result for October SACE completion represents an improvement from historic baseline average. Between 2014 and 2016, the trend for has been upwards from 76% in 2014 to 88% in 2016.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2016, 94% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 92% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Literacy units, 88% successfully completed their Stage 1 Numeracy units and 98% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

Ninety-one percent of grades achieved in the 2016 SACE Stage 2 were C- or higher. This result represents

an improvement from the historic baseline average. Between 2014 and 2016, the trend has been upwards, from 80% in 2014 to 91% in 2016. Five percent of students completed SACE using VET, and there were 136 students enrolled in the Flexible Learning Options program in 2016.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2016, 10% of students achieved an 'A' Grade, and 44% achieved a 'B' Grade. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline averages for both the 'A' Grade and 'B' Grade.

In terms of 2016 tertiary entrance, 64%, or 58 out of 91 potential students achieved an ATAR, and 76%, or 70 out of 91 students secured a TAFE SA selection score.