

The Department for Education

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Grant High School

Conducted in May 2018



Government of South Australia
Department for Education

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 Jayne Heath and Rob McLaren, Review Principals.

School context

Grant High School is a year 8 to 12 school located 436kms south-east of Adelaide in the suburb of Mount Gambier. The school was first established in 1971, and has a current enrolment of 820 students, representing an increase over the last 2 years. The student population includes 6% Aboriginal students, 7% students with a disability, 11 students in care, and 6% of students of non-English speaking backgrounds. In 2018, 84 students are included in the FLO program: 24 of whom are enrolled at Grant High School. The school has an ICSEA value of 937 and is Category 4 on the department's Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school leadership team includes a principal in the 3rd year of her tenure, 5 community leaders, 4 managers and 2 wellbeing coordinators, both with teaching loads. There are also 12 staff members in Band 1 coordinator positions. Recently, the school formed 5 'communities' that see students in years 8 to 12 allocated to a particular 'community' in which they will remain throughout their time 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 3 key areas from the External School Review framework:

Student Learning: How well are students achieving over time?

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

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

How well are students achieving over time?

Data sourced prior to and during the External School Review (ESR) at Grant High School showed that a number of students have experienced improvement in their learning achievement. In 2017, data showed an increase in the percentage of students achieving their SACE against both October and February enrolled potentials, at 95% and 52% respectively. Students achieving A and B grades increased to 65%, whilst Stage 2, C- or above results, remained steady at 96%.

Senior students were clear that the support they receive from teachers is outstanding. They reported teachers expected them to succeed and achieve high grades, and these expectations are reinforced through regular targeted feedback from teachers, with staff 'going out of their way' to attend to individual's needs. One student reported that her unavoidable absence saw a teacher differentiate her learning and completion dates in order for her to re-enter the class successfully.

Whilst year 9 NAPLAN reading and numeracy data shows a generally steady Standard of Education Achievement rate of 65%, PAT reading and maths data does represent a greater success rate of 81% and 87%, respectively, and absences and withdrawals are few. Year-to-date data available on the department's dashboard shows that in term 1, attendance has increased to 90%, providing an incentive and encouragement for further achievement.

Priority groups within the school reported that their learning needs were supported by staff responsible for their progress. Aboriginal learners discussed the opportunities offered to diversify learning options, particularly through the SAASTA program. They spoke with enthusiasm about the engaging choices offered to them to progress their cultural, sporting or personal identities. Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) showed the level of detail apparent in designing plans pertinent to the individual Aboriginal student, informed by PAT data and inclusive of personalised strategies. The students themselves were articulate in reporting their attendance rate and how they can work to increase this.

Students in the Flexible Learning Centre also reported a highly individualised approach to their potential learning and pathways. They discussed personalised support offered to them by staff, and made clear that they would not be in a position to achieve SACE without this. The panel spoke with some students who access intervention and assistance through a case management approach designed to sustain their progress. These students appreciate the small class size and are able to learn 'at their level'. The review panel agrees that the learning of many students with particular needs is supported across the school.

At the time of review, teaching practice delivered at Grant High School is at the individual teacher's discretion and, as such, varies greatly across faculties and year levels. Some discussions and class visits allowed the panel to source evidence that, in some settings, students are provided opportunities to engage with teaching that provokes curiosity, deepens cognitive functioning and enables collaborative learning. Many students who discussed these opportunities believed that learning this way provides more challenge and enables greater potential for extension. A teacher discussion group reported that "we are moving to teaching *strategies*, not *content*" and that there is a move to interdisciplinary teaching.

The intent reported above is indeed an important next step in the school's improvement imperative, as the option to teach in ways suited to the individual staff member does see students required to adapt accordingly from one lesson to the next. Some pedagogies operating across the school minimise the student's potential to think critically and creatively, or to engage with purposeful learning that inspires enthusiastic participation. It is a logical next step for the school to define its agreed pedagogical priority, and make explicit expectations about it.

Direction 1

Broaden the opportunity students have to engage in purposeful learning by collectively exploring and identifying agreed pedagogical approaches that enable students to think critically and creatively, and ensuring expectations are made explicit across the school.

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

The panel was provided with a draft site improvement plan (SIP) 2018-2021. The mission is clearly stated as 'Build Future Ready Citizens' who are resilient, creative, and life-long learners. During the leader's presentation, the panel was informed that analysis of destination data had shown a need to design learning pathways for students who may not undertake tertiary education, but have potential to engage in other stimulating and rewarding employment options. In 2019, the school intends to begin planning career pathways for students from year 8.

Many staff and parents were able to articulate the school's vision and appreciated its significance, whilst limited understanding of the priorities that may drive the initiative was apparent. Staff and governing council members agreed that the draft SIP has recently been provided to them, and teaching staff reported they had been asked to offer feedback, although leaders mentioned that few staff had taken this opportunity. Certain

disconnect between the school's SIP and the work of teachers was apparent. Some staff reported that collective planning at the 'grass roots' of the process may engender greater ownership, while others said the plan had little influence on their work.

Much discussion regarding an adjustment to the timetable in 2019 was apparent during the ESR. It is evident that a good deal of consultation, debate and consideration has been given to this proposal. Processes that engender collective input are key in bringing about informed change in schools. Whilst it is not expected that every participant agrees with the eventual proposal, time to *trial* and, importantly, *review* the concept, with reference to valid data, is important in judging the efficacy of any initiative.

When considering ongoing processes of self-review regarding practices operating across the school, the panel sourced an opportunity to further develop rigour in this area. Teachers reported that forums for them to collaboratively meet were through the community groups, and these meetings tended to focus on students' wellbeing needs. Dedicated time to discuss students' needs is laudable. These processes have led to strategic intervention for students at risk. An opportunity now exists for leaders and staff to consider how collective engagement in processes of school improvement planning can be undertaken. An ongoing cycle of collaborative self-evaluation, based on data analysis that makes direction clear to all, will support a more unified response to the improvement and change agenda across the school.

Evidence was sourced on data-informed judgements about student learning and how effectively data is used to inform planning and teaching. The school uses *Sentral* to store student achievement and wellbeing data. PAT, NAPLAN, SACE, behaviour, attendance and wellbeing data is filed and available for teachers to access to inform and individualise their planning. Evidence of this having been utilised in developing Aboriginal students' ILPs was strong. However, little indication that teaching staff use data analytically or diagnostically was evident. Learning plans for students with NEPs showed minimal targeted direction or reference to data to inform teachers of student's adjustments.

When asked how teachers monitor student progress, responses varied, and included reference to quizzes on Fridays, commercial online assessment tools, observations, discussions and tests. In the survey conducted, some teachers responded that they use PAT and NAPLAN data as references when planning. The panel agrees that this more evidentiary approach to tracking student growth and planned tailored teaching will be key in achieving the school's intent to deliver opportunities that meet all students' needs and designing individualised pathways to success.

Direction 2

Enable a collective and strategic approach to improvement and change through the establishment of a collaborative, ongoing cycle of self-evaluation, informed by data analysis and systematically implemented over time.

Direction 3

Track student growth accurately and regularly, and design teaching responsive to needs, through the establishment of processes that ensure teachers better understand and utilise data to inform intentional planning.

How effectively does the school leadership foster a culture of learning?

The panel was made aware of the positive culture for learning that has been developed at the school. Reports that staff are a cohesive group, and that informal collegiate support is widespread, were common throughout the review. The introduction of the 'communities' model was reported by many as having influenced a change in the school's culture. Behaviour management is implemented promptly and equitably, while connection between community leaders and wellbeing coordinators ensures responses

to students at risk are immediate and influential. Parents reported that students transitioning from year 8 benefit from the model that sees them confidently approach secondary schooling surrounded by peers. The panel commends the structure that has supported an extensive change in culture, and led to a potential focus on the teaching and learning agenda.

The school has effective leadership processes to attend to student wellbeing, with visible procedures and responsibilities that operate seamlessly. The panel sees an opportunity for the leaders to consider how this initiative has been brought about so effectively and how this model might provide a reference for the introduction of pedagogical consistency across the school. Whilst the leadership framework includes reference to differentiation and powerful learning, it does not identify who has responsibility for leading pedagogical implementation or teaching and learning across the school.

Processes that maintain and build teacher capacity were operating with varying levels of influence across the school. Some staff reported they valued the school's support with accessing external professional learning (PL) opportunities; others appreciated their line managers' support in exploring and trialling new ideas. School services officers reported that their PL was often addressed through Pupil Free Day sessions which they welcomed.

Some staff gather during out-of-school hours to engage in shared learning related to their discipline. Other staff reported that they would welcome dedicated time to engage in in-house PL, shared with colleagues and designed to improve practice. The panel noted that time is already designated for 'pedagogy' at regular meetings, and it could be used more productively to focus on contemporary practice. These meetings may provide a forum from which to progress shared learning.

Professional development (PD) documents were provided to the review panel for both teaching staff and SSOs. Analysis of these made clear that many staff have met with line managers and discussed a variety of goals relevant to the individual. The strategies to achieve these goals were mainly referenced to external attendance at PL opportunities. Some staff expressed the opinion that PD had not been undertaken, and that the 'communities' model had inadvertently meant that line managers were not of their faculty, explaining that, previously, PD had been more aligned and influential. There is an opportunity to design PD that supports all teachers to reflect on and grow practice in line with the school's agreements.

Many staff with line management responsibility are quite new to the role, and experience in strategic building of the capacity of others is varied across the cohort. Consequently, the school has secured the services of a mentor who will work with staff with line management responsibility to build their capability to positively influence the potential of staff they lead. To date, all staff have had access to a session looking at people's differing "World Views", and line managers have attended how to manage "Difficult Conversations". Line managers expressed varied levels of engagement with professional learning, and the panel encourages consistent and committed uptake of this opportunity to deepen educational leadership across the school.

There is strong evidence of positive intent, commitment and goodwill. Staff, students and parents discussed the willingness of staff to 'go out of their way' to support students and colleagues. There is an opportunity to now invest in this positive culture as the school works towards coherent practice. The school is ready to maximise educational leadership to build teacher capacity, and the development of professional forums aligned with school expectations will be key in moving the teaching and learning agenda forward.

Direction 4

Build teacher capacity to respond to school expectations through consistent and influential educational leadership and line management, and the development of regular professional learning forums that are aligned with the school's priorities.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

At Grant High School a culture of improvement is characterised by high expectations for students, and effective leadership provides strategic direction and planning to ensure a culture conducive to learning.

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

1. Broaden the opportunity students have to engage in purposeful learning by collectively exploring and identifying agreed pedagogical approaches that enable students to think critically and creatively, and ensuring expectations are made explicit across the school.
2. Enable a collective and strategic approach to improvement and change through the establishment of a collaborative, ongoing cycle of self- evaluation, informed by data analysis and systematically implemented over time.
3. Track student growth accurately and regularly, and design teaching responsive to needs, through the establishment of processes that ensure teachers better understand and utilise data to inform intentional planning.
4. Build teacher capacity to respond to school expectations through consistent and influential educational leadership and line management, and the development of regular professional learning forums that are aligned with the school's priorities.

Based on the school's current performance, Grant High School will be externally reviewed again in 2022.



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 3 months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's annual report.



Fleur Roachock
PRINCIPAL
GRANT HIGH SCHOOL



Governing Council Chairperson

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 regarding process, however an update of documentation is required, as the policy provided was dated 2013 and not representative of the school's new leadership structure or attendance targets.

The school attendance rate for 2017 was 88.8%

Appendix 2

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 2017, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 64% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average. The school is achieving within the results of similar students across the public system.

In 2017 NAPLAN Reading, 8% of students achieved in the top 2 bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 14%, or 5 of 36 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9 in 2017, and 32%, or 8 of 25 students from year 7 remain in the upper bands at year 9 in 2017.

Numeracy

In 2017, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 72% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

The school is achieving higher than the results of similar students across the public system.

Between 2015 and 2017, the school has consistently achieved higher in year 9 NAPLAN Numeracy relative to the results of similar groups of students across the public system.


In 2017 NAPLAN Numeracy, 9% of students achieved in the top 2 bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 28%, or 5 of 18 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9 in 2017, and 50%, or 8 of 16 students from year 7 remain in the upper bands at year 9 in 2017.

SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2017, 55% of students enrolled in February and 96% 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 little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2017, 92% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 95% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Literacy units, 83%



successfully completed their Stage 1 Numeracy units and 95% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

Ninety-six percent of grades achieved in the 2017 SACE Stage 2 were C- or higher. This result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average. Nineteen percent of students completed SACE using VET and there were 24 students enrolled in the Flexible Learning Options program in 2017.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2017, 24% of students achieved an 'A' grade, and 41% achieved a 'B' grade. This result represents an improvement in 'A' grade achievement and little or no change from the historic baseline averages for 'B' grade achievement.

In terms of 2017 tertiary entrance, 74%, or 73 out of 99 potential students achieved a TAFE SA selection score and 67%, or 66 of 99 students achieved an ATAR score.