

Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Whyalla Town Primary School

Conducted in June 2021



Government of South Australia
Department for Education

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 Sue Mittiga, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Shane Misso, Review Principal.

Review Process

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

- Presentation from the Principal
- Class visits
- Attendance at staff meeting
- Document analysis
- Discussions with:
 - Governing Council representatives
 - Leaders
 - Parent groups
 - School Services Officers (SSOs)
 - Student representatives
 - Teachers.

School context

Whyalla Town Primary School Primary School caters for students from reception to year 7. It is situated 400kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2021, as at the February census, is 369. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 338. The local partnership is Whyalla.

The school has a 2020 ICSEA score of 1007 and is classified as Category 4 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 4% Aboriginal students, 20% students with disabilities, less than 8 students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, less than 6 children/young people in care and 12% of students eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in the 19th year of tenure, a Deputy Principal, a student wellbeing senior leader, a mathematics coordinator and an English coordinator

There are 17 teachers, including 7 in the early years of their career and 2 Step 9 teachers.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

- Direction 1** Strengthen feedback structures and processes to students and parents about learning.
- Direction 2** Develop a clear and comprehensive cycle of improvement that is coherent for staff.
- Direction 3** Improve decision-making in the school and ensure it is inclusive of authentic consultative and monitoring processes.
- Direction 4** Ensure deepening levels of student engagement and intellectual challenge in their learning.

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

Direction 1: Leadership and staff have improved the communication channels to the school community. Parents reported that the communication from the school was at a high level, including the ability to contact staff through email, accessing the 'Remind App' and a weekly newsletter. They felt staff were approachable, and always available if they needed to speak with them about their child's learning.

Direction 2: Staff have a comprehensive improvement cycle that is collectively owned and actioned by staff. There is a clear line of sight from the challenge of practice to classroom practice. Formal SIP review processes occur twice per year, where multiple measures of data are analysed to determine the progress and impact on student learning.

Direction 3: Processes and structures have been created and implemented to ensure decision-making is consultative, including open staff meeting agendas, weekly staff meetings with a professional development focus and with scheduled times for data teams to meet. Staff collaboratively moderate student work and develop units of work and assessment tasks during data team meetings.

Direction 4: The language of learning has been taught and modelled to students, including the use of success criteria and learning intentions and their purpose. Executive functions and how they support brain development and learning were explicitly taught to students. Differentiation and higher-band achievement are renewed school improvement plan (SIP) foci and staff are planning tasks and assessments with multiple entry and exit points.

Lines of inquiry

Effective school improvement planning

How well does the school review and evaluate the effectiveness of improvement planning processes and the impact on student learning to inform the next step?

Quality school improvement requires schools to continuously monitor and review the impact of their practices on student learning outcomes. Whyalla Town Primary School has a culture of continuous improvement. There is a commitment to increase learner achievement through the ongoing development of teacher pedagogy and practice. Planned professional learning on pupil free days and in staff meetings is aligned to the SIP challenges of practice and actions. Staff have commitment to action plans in numeracy and literacy, and performance development plan goals that outline the improvements to classroom practice they are aspiring to achieve. There is a collective ownership of the SIP, with a clear line of sight from classroom practice to the SIP challenge of practice and actions.

The focus on numeracy and oral language is being driven by leadership through the implementation of the SIP actions. Staff meet in data professional learning teams (PLCs) fortnightly to moderate student work and assessments. Student achievement data, including pre and post test data is reviewed by PLCs and informs the next planning steps. A planned moderation procedure was developed and documented to support staff to make consistent judgements about student grades.

Robust self-review and evaluation processes that effectively monitor the impact of improvement actions against student learning outcomes are integral to the work of the teams. The analysis of data has led to a renewed SIP focus on higher-band achievement in numeracy.

Formal review processes occur twice per year, where data and evidence are examined to measure the progress made towards achieving SIP goals and identify the next steps in the planning cycle. There is an opportunity to extend the focus of this work to ensure there is stretch and challenge for all learners, including those in the higher bands. The school is well positioned to further embed and consolidate current review and evaluation processes, to collect evidence, review student progress against the success criteria and refine improvement practices.

Direction 1 Embed and refine the SIP processes to support learning for all students with a focus on stretch and challenge.

Effective teaching and student learning

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

Pedagogy is the science and craft of teaching. How teachers teach is critical to student engagement in learning and their achievement. Whyalla Town Primary School staff are committed to improving their practice and pedagogy through engaging in professional learning, trialing new practices, reviewing, monitoring the impact of changes and participating in a formal feedback process. The literacy and numeracy leaders provide mentoring support and feedback, following formal observations on a 4-weekly cycle. The formal feedback and reflection process is highly valued by staff, and supports them to implement intentional changes to pedagogy.

A curriculum planning process developed by staff outlines lesson components, including explaining the purpose of the learning (ie clear learning intentions), a warm-up, explicit topic instruction, differentiation in small groups, independent work and using success criteria as a benchmark. Students can describe different levels of tasks and reported that the oral and written feedback from their teachers supports them in their learning. Word walls, anchor charts and scaffolded templates are displayed in classrooms to support learning. Students described how a learning journal supports them with their working memory.

Extensive documentation supports staff to implement maths and literacy learning into classroom practice, including school-developed scope and sequences aligned to the Australian Curriculum, collaboratively planned units of work, assessment rubrics, checklists and agreements.

A recently drafted differentiation agreement helped staff recognise that this is an area for continued development. They reported that school agreements and checklists in oral language are also in the early stages of implementation. They need time to evolve their conceptual understanding and to trial and embed new strategies. There is an opportunity to continue a narrow and deep focus and to transfer agreements into classroom practice. This will consolidate the new learning and assist to coherently embed this across the school.

Direction 2 To continue a narrow and deep focus to consolidate and embed school agreements into classroom practice coherently across the school.

Effective teaching and student learning

To what extent do teachers ensure that students have authentic influence in their learning?

Authentic student voice involves students collaboratively planning and making decisions about their learning. Becoming partners can strengthen students' meta-cognitive skills equipping them to assess, monitor and regulate their learning.

Whyalla Town Primary School staff explicitly teach executive functions and growth mindset to develop an awareness of how to learn, self-regulate and build metacognition (ie thinking about learning). Students understand what is meant by executive functions, including impulse-control, short-term memory and muscle memory. They commented that, 'executive functions help you to train your brain to do challenging tasks, to be persistent and not reactive'. Students can describe their learning in writing and mathematics using technical topic specific language.

The use of learning intentions and success criteria is an embedded practice across the school. They are displayed in every classroom. Students can confidently describe the use and purpose of learning intentions and success criteria. They explained that learning intentions make the purpose much clearer, and they check their work against the success criteria.

Students, however, were less able to describe where they were in their learning on a continuum, or the strategies they needed to take to improve and to produce better work. Teachers recognise that increasing the opportunity for students to undertake self and peer assessments will empower them to have more ownership.

The school made significant progress in building students' understanding of learning as a process. It is now time to support students to establish individual goals using their assessment and learning data. Students will need greater clarity in the steps they will need to take to accomplish their goals. Progress in mastering skills or concepts needs to be reviewed as a continual process so that students are constantly moving forward.

The school is beginning the journey of visible data mapping to empower students to track and monitor their learning data enabling them to become powerful partners in their own learning.

Direction 3 Build student capacity to use data to develop learning goals and identify the next steps in their learning as a continual process.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2021

Whyalla Town Primary School is to be commended for its commitment to continuous improvement and enhancing learning outcomes for students. A collaborative staff culture exists where staff work together to improve their practice through engaging with evidence-based pedagogical practices and professional learning. The school community is held in high regard by parents, staff and students for its strong educational programs, underpinned by a focus on wellbeing for learning.

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

- Direction 1** **Embed and refine the SIP processes to support learning for all students with a focus on stretch and challenge.**
- Direction 2** **To continue a narrow and deep focus to consolidate and embed school agreements into classroom practice coherently across the school.**
- Direction 3** **Build student capacity to use data to develop learning goals and identify the next steps in their learning as a continual process.**

Based on the school's current performance, Whyalla Town Primary School will be externally reviewed again in 2024.



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Whyalla Town Primary School



Governing Council Chairperson

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 the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2020, 93% of year 1 and 88% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

In 2019, the reading results as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 86% of year 3 students, 82% of year 5 students and 79% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3 and 5, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. For year 7, this result represents little or no change from historic baseline average.

For 2019 year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN reading, the school is achieving within the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2019, 51% of year 3, 44% of year 5 and 20% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3 and 5 this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 78%, or 18 of 23 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5, and 28%, or 7 out of 25 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.

Numeracy

In 2019, the numeracy results as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 89% of year 3 students, 84% of year 5 students and 86% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3 and 5, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. For year 7, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For 2019 year 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN numeracy, the school is achieving within the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2019, 40% of year 3, 18% of year 5 and 27% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For years 3 and 5, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 32%, or 7 out of 22 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5, and 50%, or 4 out of 8 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.