

Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Unley High School

Conducted in August 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 Meredith Edwards, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Eva Kannis-Torry and Peter Mader, Review Principals.

Review Process

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

Presentation from the principal and his leadership team

Class visits

Attendance at staff meeting to explain the ESR process and introduce the online survey

Document analysis

Discussions with:

- Governing Council representatives and a parent
- Leaders
- School Services Officers (SSOs)
- Student representatives
- Teachers.

School context

Unley High School caters for young people from year 8 to 12. It is situated 6kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2021, as at the February census, is 1278. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 1277. The local partnership is Mitcham Plains.

The school has a 2020 ICSEA score of 1082 and is classified as Category 6 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes less than 10 Aboriginal students, 13% students with disabilities, 18% students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, no young people in care and 11% of students eligible for School Card assistance. The school hosts a Link program for students with multiple disabilities.

The school leadership team consists of:

- a Principal in their 3rd year of tenure
- a Deputy Principal
- Assistant Principal Year 8 and transition
- Assistant Principal pedagogy and IB Diploma
- Assistant Principal daily operations and SACE.

There are 105 teachers including 2 in the early years of their career and 31 Step 9 teachers.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

Direction 1 Provide a range of opportunities for students to give regular feedback to their teachers, resulting in improved pedagogical practices that engage and challenge all students.

Direction 2 Develop a whole-school commitment to the use of strategies, structures and data to facilitate growth in student learning.

Direction 3 Align leadership roles, school structures and school processes, with targets, in a contemporary, long-term strategic plan.

Direction 4 Ensure the school has an effective Learner Management System that meets the needs of the whole community and identify and implement an action plan for the use of ICT in future school programs and processes.

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

The leadership team has attended to the previous external school review directions. The successful trial of pedagogies to support adolescent learners in their transition to high school highlighted the importance of student feedback. This work has been influenced by the department's learning design, assessment and moderation strategy. At a classroom level, the use of strategies such as pop-sticks and 'thumbs up, thumbs down' enables students to indicate their understanding of new concepts or skills. In 2020, student leaders surveyed the school population regarding the effectiveness of teaching approaches in their learning. One of the five student leadership groups continues to focus on curriculum and learning.

The introduction of an effective learner management system, along with platforms for online learning, facilitates teacher feedback on submitted drafts and greater communication between teachers, students and families.

The department's site improvement planning process provided additional impetus for the school's work in the use of data-informed structures and pedagogies to facilitate growth in literacy and numeracy extending all students. Data-led initiatives such as the introduction of dedicated classes to support students with learning difficulties and the introduction of the International Baccalaureate Diploma attend to diverse learning needs; so too is the school considering structures and strategies to halt the hiatus in achievement progress at Year 9.

These initiatives have been supported by the design of a new leadership structure which provides all positions with a focus on facilitating effective teaching and learning. The school's role in designing a partnership program for building leadership capacity strengthens this work, as does the new decision-making policy.

Lines of inquiry

Effective school improvement planning

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

The leadership team recognises the value of school improvement planning for the benefit of its diverse school population. A phrase commonly used by members of the executive leadership team in improvement planning discussions is a “bookend approach”. This is evident in the school’s support of high achievers through summit classes alongside the introduction of the International Baccalaureate Diploma as well as school-funded special options classes for students with learning difficulties.

The school has clear and measurable goals for improvements in writing, numeracy and pedagogies to engage all students. These priorities were determined through leaders’ use of a range of achievement and perception data. Priority is also given to widening data literacy for curriculum leaders and teachers. A leadership position has been established to support capacity building in data analysis. While most teachers rate themselves well in their use of data, an external school survey identified a range of teacher suggestions to support improved data literacy. These requests range from easier access to student achievement data, to coaching in data analysis and subsequent choices of evidence-based pedagogies. Such capacity building would improve the connection of classroom teachers with the school’s improvement plan (SIP) and in evaluating the impact of agreed challenges of practice. Shared professional learning would underpin both a common understanding of agreed pedagogies and the monitoring of the fidelity and consistency of their implementation across all classes.

As the department’s initial three-year school improvement planning cycle concludes, it is timely for leaders to review and refine the school’s improvement planning processes. A particular focus on monitoring the impact of chosen challenges of practice aligned to set targets and the evaluation of the school’s progress in meeting the SIP goals are priority areas.

Direction 1 Refine current approaches to school improvement planning by attending to step 4 in monitoring the impact of agreed challenges of practice and step 5 in evaluating these to inform next steps.

Effective teaching and student learning

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

The school's commitment to furthering pedagogies and structures that attend to the needs of all learners is evident in the diverse range of initiatives on its improvement agenda. A feature of the SIP is the goal to, 'increase student engagement and achievement through improved pedagogy.'

A good example of effective leadership of pedagogical improvements is the trial of structures, processes and teaching strategies to engage, challenge and support year 7s and 8s as they move into the high school setting. Many respondents to an external school review survey, identified their participation in this classroom research as the professional learning impacting most on their skill in curriculum design and their range of effective teaching practices.

By contrast, many who are enthusiastic about their involvement in the International Baccalaureate Diploma feel torn between their commitments to the curriculum development required for its successful implementation and the improvement demands of other areas of responsibility. Curriculum leaders and teachers identify the wide range of school initiatives as problematic in consistency and fidelity of their implementation. This impacts on the effectiveness of pedagogies to engage and challenge all learners. A lack of consistency in both understanding and implementation of agreed teaching strategies such as learning intentions, success criteria and formative feedback was identified. It is important that leaders clarify and reinforce greater cohesion between improvement initiatives to support more consistent implementation of agreed evidence-based pedagogies.

Paradoxically, the effectiveness of the implementation of the challenges of practice is impeded by the breadth of initiatives. Not only is the school preparing for year 7s joining the high school community in 2022 but the school has recently been accredited to offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma for senior students in the same year. In addition, the school is still refining the curriculum for students in two specialist programs; one that caters for students with learning difficulties and another designed to extend students with gifts and talents. Strategic leadership is required to maximise the level of staff engagement needed for the success of these diverse initiatives.

Direction 2 **To further guide and extend all learners, attend to consistent implementation of the linked pedagogies of explicit learning intentions, success criteria documented in rubrics and formative feedback.**

Effective leadership

To what extent is leadership capacity developed across the school to improve student learning?

The school recognises the critical role of curriculum leaders in school improvement. Plans are in place to convert Band 1 curriculum leaders to a Band 2 level, potentially opening up an additional line for leadership of improved teaching and learning. Historically, coordinators predominantly focused on managing the wide range of administration tasks from timetabled subject time, allocation of classes, budget oversight and updating teachers about new resources. Current Band 1 leaders highlighted a previous lack of professional learning targeting their level of leadership. With the department's focus on site improvement planning processes, the need for such targeted professional learning for middle leaders is critical. This challenge has been taken up by the school and partnership with plans in place for a professional learning program to build the capacity of Band 1 and 2 leaders across a number of schools. In planning for the development of curriculum leaders as change managers, it is important that a focus on building their pedagogical and curriculum expertise is not overlooked. The credibility of this critical level of leadership in improving classroom practices is founded on expertise in designing inclusive and challenging curriculum and on modelling and supporting effective teaching practices.

A lack of time for instructional leadership is another concern for curriculum leaders given the diverse range of initiatives the school has on its improvement agenda. A lack of consistency in curriculum documentation with clear links to agreed pedagogical foci was noted during the review. It was reported that faculties are provided with release time to produce curriculum overviews but often units of work, which impact most on student learning, are developed 'on the run'. This impacts on the quality and consistency of curriculum design and implementation of agreed pedagogies which curriculum leaders see as 'core business'. Concern was also expressed about what leaders saw as the erosion of faculty-based professional learning team opportunities due to other school demands and administrative matters.

Direction 3 Maximise school conditions which support the successful implementation of curriculum leaders learning about change management and pedagogical improvements from planned leadership programs.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2021

Student leaders described their pride in being a part of the school and identified its educational community as innovative, interactive and inclusive. These features were echoed by many of the students interviewed. The school has a strong tradition of academic excellence but not at the expense of inclusive opportunities for the increasingly diverse student cohort. Teachers are dedicated to supporting students to reach their potential and their goodwill is evident in the provision of a range of challenging and community-minded curricular and non-curricular opportunities. School discussions and decisions are guided by its four values of respect, excellence, diversity and community.

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

- Direction 1** Refine current approaches to school improvement planning by attending to step 4 in monitoring the impact of agreed challenges of practice and step 5 in evaluating these to inform next steps.
- Direction 2** To further guide and extend all learners, attend to consistent implementation of the linked pedagogies of explicit learning intentions, success criteria documented in rubrics and formative feedback.
- Direction 3** Maximise school conditions which support the successful implementation of curriculum leaders learning about change management and pedagogical improvements from planned leadership programs.

Based on the school's current performance, Unley High School will be externally reviewed again in 2024.



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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 2019, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 87% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019, the trend for year 9 has been upwards, from 76% to 87%.

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

Between 2017 and 2019, the school has consistently achieved higher in year 9 NAPLAN reading, relative to the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2019, 24% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 9, 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 38%, or 36 out of 95 students, from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

Numeracy

In 2019, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 88% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019, the trend for year 9 has been upwards, from 81% to 88%.

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

Between 2017 and 2019, the school has consistently achieved higher in year 9 NAPLAN numeracy relative to the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2019, 27% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 9, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019, the trend for year 9 has been upwards from 23% to 27%.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 50%, or 29 out of 58 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2020, 84% of students enrolled in February and 98% 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. Between 2018 and 2020, the trend has been downwards, from 99% in 2018 to 98% in 2020.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2020; 99% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 99% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 literacy units, 94% successfully completed their Stage 1 numeracy units and 100% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2020, 97% of grades achieved were at 'C-' level or higher, 30% of grades were at an 'A' level and 42% of grades were at an 'B' level. This result represents an improvement for the 'C-' level or higher grade, an improvement for the 'A' level grade and a decline for the 'B' level grade, from the historic baseline averages. Between 2018 and 2020, the trend for 'C-' or higher has been constant, from 97% in 2018 to 97% in 2020.

Thirty-one percent of students completed SACE using VET and there were 21 students enrolled in the Flexible Learning Options (FLO) program in 2020.

In terms of 2020 tertiary entrance, 89%, or 167 out of 188 potential students achieved an ATAR or TAFE SA selection score. There were also 5 students who were successful in achieving a merit.

In 2020, the school had a moderation adjustment of -1.8.