

Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Blair Athol North B-7 School

Conducted in October 2020



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 Phil Garner, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Rebecca Pears, 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
- Scan of Aboriginal Education Strategy implementation
- Discussions with:
 - Governing Council representatives
 - Leaders
 - Parent groups
 - School Services Officers (SSOs)
 - Student groups
 - Teachers

School context

Blair Athol North B-7 School caters for children from birth to year 7. It is situated 9kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2020 is 420. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 429. The local partnership is Torrens.

The school has an ICSEA score of 910 and is classified as Category 2 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 13% Aboriginal students, 13% students with disabilities, 55% students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, less than 6 children/young people in care and 85% of students eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of:

- principal in first year of tenure
- deputy principal
- senior leader early years
- senior leader children's centre
- senior leader, Intensive English Language Centre
- senior leader innovative pedagogies
- senior leader wellbeing
- senior leader intervention and inclusion.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

- Direction 1** Improve student achievement by developing a clear and focused whole-school approach to academic stretch and challenge that is monitored and adjusted at the school, studio and individual learner level.
- Direction 2** Ensure that the learning goals and standards are developed and shared explicitly with students by all learning advisors and SSOs in keeping with the school's aim of making learning visible.
- Direction 3** Maximise student engagement and achievement by developing the better use of feedback to motivate learners and promote understanding of what they are learning and why.
- Direction 4** Improve learning outcomes for all students by using the Standards in the Australian Curriculum to benchmark student achievement and as language for sharing learning design and assessment with students and parents.

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

Direction 1

The school has maintained a strong personalised learning and wellbeing focus for students. However, teacher conversations continue to reflect limited understanding about how learning progresses, and academic stretch and challenge impact on student improvement. Achievement data over time reflects little change. Whole-school initiatives in engagement and challenge are a focus of this review.

Direction 2

Goal-setting is embedded practice across the school. Despite variation between studios, students could clearly articulate what they were working on. Co-educators are provided with student learning tasks and report back to teachers regularly on student learning. Success criteria are used in some studios to inform students of their expected learning.

Direction 3

Teachers continued to use conferencing as a strategy to provide formative feedback to students. Identification of next steps and the setting of achievable and aspirational targets for each student is yet to be realised.

Direction 4

Teachers engage with the 'what' and 'how' of teaching and learning, using Learning Design, Assessment and Moderation strategies and resources to improve their practices. Opportunities to engage with curriculum advisers to develop and design numeracy tasks were enacted. Using Australian Curriculum standards as a language for sharing assessment with students and parents is yet to be realised.

Lines of inquiry

Effective school improvement planning

How effectively does the school monitor and enhance its improvement strategies and actions based on their impact on student learning?

The school engaged in collaborative analysis of student achievement data to identify areas for improvement. Departmental guidebooks and best practice papers were consulted for support and advice. There are 3 challenges of practices, one for each 'neighbourhood' (section of school). As a result, changes in pedagogical practices in reading and mathematics are currently being implemented independently across the school in the absence of a whole-school focus. A uniform birth to year 7 approach to a single improvement goal and challenge of practice will promote:

- consistency of pedagogical practice
- whole-school professional collaboration
- collective accountability
- sequencing and scaffolding of learning.

Time is allocated throughout the term for teachers to meet in teams, plan, program and share student growth. Recently, the school introduced an 'InterPLC', designed to enhance collaboration between neighbourhoods and promote collective understanding.

'Neighbourhood' meetings are attended by leadership and have a clear focus on analysis of student learning data and school improvement plan initiatives. Learning sprints are a recently implemented and effective teaching and learning process, analysing current pedagogical practices in the goal area and consolidating the design of learning. They ensure teachers stay on track, target specific learning needs of students and provide a professional level of accountability. These processes are evaluated as a team, including leadership, and adjusted where required.

Effectiveness of tracking student progress and growth varies across the school. A whole-school monitoring and tracking process is accessible to staff but inconsistently used. The next step is to implement an effective whole-school process that tracks growth and progress and effectively influences the design of learning.

There are limited opportunities for teachers to receive feedback on their performance or gauge the effectiveness of whole-school improvement initiatives. Including a formal teacher appraisal process and learning walks would be a positive addition to professional learning and developing of consistency of practice across the school.

The panel acknowledges steps taken this year to improve teaching and learning and student achievement. With pockets of effective practice evident, the school is in a position to design and implement processes that enhance collaboration and improve consistency of practice.

Direction 1 Enhance collective collaboration and consistency of practice by engaging in birth to year 7 improvement goals and developing a culture of shared responsibility and accountability for whole-school improvement.

Effective teaching and student learning

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

Ability grouping of students occurs across the school in literacy and numeracy, with teachers and co-educators managing small groups or students working independently. While the majority of students engaged well with this process, a number of groups were disengaged from the learning task using quality learning time ineffectively. As mentioned previously, the panel have concerns about effective tracking of individual student progress. It is possible that some students could be spending considerable amounts of time away from their home class teacher. This has potential to complicate the effective tracking and monitoring of individual student learning.

Setting of learning goals in the early years is visual and dynamic. Students are conferenced regularly to identify progress, review their achievement and set the next learning goal. Goals in the upper years tend to be less specific, general in nature and not necessarily linked to the next steps in learning. For example: 'get faster at reading', 'read for longer', 'sit where I am not disturbed', and 'not get distracted'.

There is a consistent focus on lower-achieving students to achieve the department baseline (SEA). While this proved successful for some students, learning for higher-achieving students was compromised. Fifty percent of students the panel met with indicated that learning tasks in English were less than challenging. This is reflected in historical data, with low levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy compared with like schools. The school is advised to reassess their focus by:

- raising their expectations for all students
- reviewing and evaluating the viability of ability grouping/streaming
- differentiating learning using multiple entry and exit points
- providing high-quality extension tasks
- engaging students in analysing their achievement data.

Provision of formative assessment and feedback on student learning is an area for whole-school review. Most student-written literacy work is not physically marked by the teacher, with students indicating that feedback is mostly provided verbally. However, when asked about specific feedback provided on how to improve a piece of writing, they had difficulty recalling what had been discussed.

Direction 2 **Improve student achievement by implementing a consistent whole-school understanding of what high expectations, formative feedback and challenge mean for effective teaching and student learning.**

Effective teaching and student learning

How effectively are teachers using the Australian Curriculum to support and improve student learning?

Teaching staff collaborate effectively within their neighbourhood, planning, programming, team-teaching and sharing strategies. While this resulted in deprivatised practice within 'one's own building', there is a general lack of awareness about other sections of the school. For the most part, neighbourhoods are autonomous and self-contained.

Explicit and consistent teaching of phonics in the early years is providing sequenced learning in reading. Intensive English Language Centre (IELC) classes are considering implementation of these phonics practices to ensure consistency with junior primary practice.

A mentor and coaching program provided a positive focus on improving pedagogy and maintaining a balanced approach to the teaching of numeracy.

There are literacy and numeracy agreements that provide guidance and support; however, the majority of teachers are not engaging with them. While they see the benefit, they would like to see them reviewed. Australian Curriculum literacy and numeracy progressions are currently not being used by teachers.

The IELC has a comprehensive and proven literacy and numeracy learning program, which provides effectively for student learning needs. The school is well-positioned to investigate the possibility of wider implementation of some of these practices.

A thematic approach to curriculum delivery was seen in some classes as allowing curriculum areas to be integrated within a theme. However, the depth and rigour required to ensure students are engaging in high-level thinking synonymous with an inquiry-based approach were not clear.

A physical and social activity transition program operates across the school most mornings. During this time, there was limited evidence of structured learning activities. To ensure equity of access to a balanced curriculum for all students, the school should conduct a curriculum audit to guarantee appropriate allocation of time to each learning area.

With the recent release of departmental curriculum support resources, the school is in a position to develop and implement a coherent and continuous progression of learning. This will allow all students to receive their year-level curriculum entitlements.

Direction 3 Enable all students to reach expected learning outcomes through a consistent, whole-school approach to planning, referenced to the Australian Curriculum achievement standards and delivered through consistent, high-yield pedagogy.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2020

The school has an established focus on wellbeing with a positive effect on student dispositions. Students are welcoming, communicate well, are extremely well-mannered and engaged in their learning. They have a positive work ethic and value education highly. This culture is firmly embedded and critical to retain.

The next step is a focus on learning for wellbeing. With student achievement in both literacy and numeracy across all year levels remaining well below that of like schools, there is an immediate need to improve learning outcomes for all students.

The challenge for the school is to re-establish a birth to year 7 continuity of learning, where staff are united in building their capacity to improve student achievement, through equity of access to a balanced engaging and rigorous curriculum, for all students.

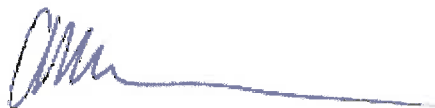
The principal will work with the education director to implement the following directions:

- Direction 1** Enhance collective collaboration and consistency of practice by engaging in birth to year 7 improvement goals and developing a culture of shared responsibility and accountability for whole-school improvement.
- Direction 2** Improve student achievement by implementing a consistent whole-school understanding of what high expectations, formative feedback and challenge mean for effective teaching and student learning.
- Direction 3** Enable all students to reach expected learning outcomes through a consistent, whole-school approach to planning, referenced to the Australian Curriculum achievement standards and delivered through consistent, high-yield pedagogy.

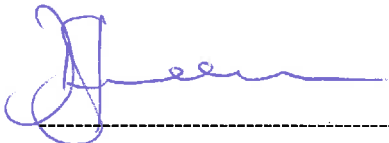
Based on the school's current performance, Blair Athol North B-7 School will be externally reviewed again in 2023.



Kerry Dollman
A/DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND
PRESCHOOLS



Darren Stevenson
PRINCIPAL
BLAIR ATHOL NORTH B-7 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 2019, 33% of year 1 and 40% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement for years 1 and 2, from the historic baseline average.

In 2019, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 44% of year 3 students, 37% of year 5 students and 47% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3 and 5, this result represents a decline and for year 7, little or no change, from the historic baseline average.

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

Between 2017 and 2019, the school has consistently achieved lower in years 3 and 5 NAPLAN reading relative to the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2019, 11% of year 3, no year 5 and 9% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 3, 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, none of the 2 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5, and 50%, or 1 out of 2 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.

Numeracy

In 2019, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 24% of year 3 students, 37% of year 5 students and 49% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3 and 5 this result represents a decline and for year 7, an improvement from the historic baseline average.

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

In 2019, 2% of year 3, no year 5 and 7% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019, the trend for year 5 has been downwards from 4% to 0%.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, the 1 student from year 3 did not remain in the upper bands at year 5, and 100%, or 2 out of 2 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.