

Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Mallala Primary School

Conducted in June 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 Greg Graham, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Ros Frost 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

Mallala Primary School caters for students from reception to year 7. It is situated 45kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2021, as at the February census, is 147. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 155. The local partnership is Greater Gawler.

The school has an ICSEA score of 954 and is classified as Category 4 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 4% Aboriginal students, 18% students with disabilities, no students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, less than 6 children/young people in care and 21% of students eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in their 5th year of tenure, 2 senior leaders in curriculum and pedagogy, and wellbeing and inclusion.

There are 10 teachers, including 3 in the early years of their career and no Step 9 teachers.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

- Direction 1** Deliver intentional teaching that maximises each student’s potential and systematically track learner’s progress across the school by building all teachers’ capacity to use data analytically and responsively.
- Direction 2** Engage students in purposeful learning and stimulate intellectual cognition through the implementation of teaching strategies that enable processes of inquiry, and that make clear the intent and criteria of the learning.
- Direction 3** Deliver differentiated and accessible learning opportunities and enable authentic demonstration of achievement, through contemporary planning and assessment design, informed by recognised departmental frameworks and aligned with the Australian Curriculum standards.
- Direction 4** Build teacher capacity to respond to school agreements and expectations through regular strategic Performance and Development processes that are collectively designed and implemented, and that are afforded priority within the school’s improvement goals.
- Direction 5** Ensure continuous improvement and respond to emergent change through the establishment of forums that systematically and regularly analyse valid data and monitor progress towards school improvement targets.

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

Actions were taken to address the previous ESR directions. The school instigated clearer professional development processes with increased documentation on school expectations, responsibilities and procedures. There is an increased focus on high-impact teaching strategies, which are buoyed through

observations and feedback. Professional learning communities (PLCs) are centred on the school improvement plan (SIP) focus areas.

All staff are working with students to develop a deeper understanding of what, why and how they are learning through student goal-setting and student input into identifying success criteria.

There is a growing understanding and integration of the Big 6 reading approach to develop strong readers. This was supported through introduction and effective use of evidence-based programs to address phonological and phonemic awareness. The early years team embedded this approach, with further work planned for it to progress into the middle and upper year levels. A phonics-focused intervention program is used to address minor early phonological gaps in higher-achieving students, as well as students with more significant gaps. This can be delivered in an age-appropriate manner to support student engagement. The effective utilisation of alternate curriculum for students with specific needs and the monitoring of their progress through an abilities-based learning education support (ABLES) assessment process has been successful.

Elements of the previous directions are still to be addressed and actioned, in conjunction with strategies identified in the SIP.

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 next steps?

All staff were involved in the SIP development, and recognise the importance of a focus on improving teacher practice and student learning. The Principal was strategic in gathering information from all staff in identifying the SIP focus, including recognising potential barriers and working on what is to be done to progress. The SIP emphasis on literacy, with a particular focus on phonics and writing, is well-understood by all staff. The review of the SIP Stages 4 and 5, helps define what the challenge of practice looks like in the classroom, and provides direction for the next steps. Staff recognised the work of leaders in directing and supporting them in actioning of the SIP. Commitment to the uptake of improvement processes is evident.

Work in learning approaches, such as mathematical mindsets, Jolly Phonics/Grammar, Big 6 and, more recently, synthetic phonics and 7 Steps in Writing, was implemented. These challenges of practice changed or are changing individual teachers' thinking and actions towards learning improvement for all students.

The school is to acknowledge what is already happening and build on the successes of what is occurring. Next steps to consider involve reflecting on quality processes for SIP review, with intent to develop high-yield teaching strategies. In strengthening the existing practice of involving all staff in the improvement cycle, the school will be well-positioned to ensure quality teaching with high impact on student learning.

The school achievement data is in the mid to low-range, and leadership recognise that they are charged with leading the focus on 'raising the bar' when it comes to SEA and high-band results. It is opportune for leadership and staff to reflect on the data trends, as a result of practices implemented, to create the new and aspirational 2022-2024 SIP targets.

Direction 1 To improve student outcomes strengthen the use of data to determine the impact of teaching and making appropriate modifications to practice.

Effective teaching and student learning

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

All staff are united in doing their best for all students, and enthusiasm about the positive change in direction, in terms of whole-school pedagogy, is shared amongst them. Sharing of good practice and resources, and supporting individual teachers with their teaching and learning, is apparent. Teachers are now using the data to audit student progress and make adjustments to their teaching. Future considerations include reflecting on current practices and identifying the core elements of a balanced literacy approach (reading, writing and word knowledge) that is evidence-based and complements the Big 6 strategy.

The teacher survey indicated that 73% of staff create opportunities to stretch students to enable them to think deeper about a topic at a medium level, with the remaining at a high level. Almost two-thirds of staff indicated they needed to expand the stretch and challenge opportunities in their planning for all students (in particular the higher-band students). Responses from students about the level of challenge indicated they wanted more challenge in their work. Consider strategies to elicit from students the level of challenge or types of learning they believe would offer them more challenge.

Learning intentions are used across all classrooms, with only some use of success criteria. Just under half of staff indicated they needed to expand student involvement in developing success criteria during their planning. Consider revisiting the purpose of learning intentions, success criteria and learning goals, with an agreed consistency of language and regular reference to the intention and success criteria as the learning progresses.

Consider developing a collective understanding of what constitutes differentiated learning to cater for all, in particular, with the middle and higher-band cohorts. Reflect on current practices that offer problem-solving learning and not just next year-level-up work. Next steps include a whole-school consistent approach to planning for differentiated teaching opportunities to give students a stronger connection to and stretch with their learning.

Direction 2 Continue the development of evidence-based, high-impact teaching and learning strategies for students, to enable stretch, challenge and apply their learning in authentic contexts.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2021

Mallala Primary School demonstrates a whole-school culture of continuous improvement, strong sustained leadership, clear school processes, accountability and aligned professional learning. Expectations of students are of the highest level, while aspiration in student achievement characterises the culture. The school is well-positioned to refine the established highly-effective practices, whilst exploring possibilities for the future.

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

- Direction 1** To improve student outcomes strengthen the use of data to determine the impact of teaching and making appropriate modifications to practice.
- Direction 2** Continue the development of evidence-based, high-impact teaching and learning strategies for students, to enable stretch, challenge and apply their learning in authentic contexts.

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



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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, 43% of year 1 and 70% of year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For year 1, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average. For year 2, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

In 2019, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 76% of year 3 students, 74% of year 5 students and 92% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3 and 5, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average. For year 7, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

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

In 2019, 35% of year 3, 21% of year 5 and 25% of year 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For years 3, 5 and 7, 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, 100%, or 2 out of 2 students from year 3, remain in the upper bands at year 5, and 100%, or the 1 student from year 3, remains in the upper bands at year 7.

Numeracy

In 2019, the numeracy results as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 65% of year 3 students, 53% of year 5 students, and 83% of year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. For years 3, 5 and 7, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

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

In 2019, 12% of year 3 and no year 5 or 7 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 3, this result represents decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, no students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 5, and no students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 7.