

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

## REPORT FOR WHYALLA STUART CAMPUS R-7

Conducted in June 2016



**Government  
of South Australia**

Department for Education  
and Child Development

### **Review details**

*A priority for the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) 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 DECD schools.*

*The framework underpinning the External School 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 of the External School Review 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.*

*The support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community is acknowledged. 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 External School Review was conducted by Liz Matheson, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Helyn Strokowsky, Review Principal.*

### **Policy compliance**

*The External School Review process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are adhered to and implemented.*

The Principal of Whyalla Stuart Campus R-7 has verified that the school is compliant with all applicable DECD policies.

Implementation of the *DECD Student Attendance Policy* was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy.

The school attendance rate for 2015 was 74.7%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

### **School context**

Whyalla Stuart Campus R-7 caters for children from Reception to Year 7. It is co-located with the Whyalla Stuart High School, which caters for students in Years 8 to 10. The school is located in the west of the city of Whyalla, 384kms from the Adelaide CBD, and is a member of the Whyalla ECD local Partnership.

The enrolment has declined from 125 in 2011 to 86 students in 2016. Approximately 90% of the students are eligible for School Card assistance, and 52% are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. Approximately 25% of students have a disability, and 15% of students are referred to Interagency Behaviour Support. The school is classified as Category 1 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school's ICSEA score in 2015 was 767. Student transience is significant.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in his 2<sup>nd</sup> year at the school, and a School Counsellor appointed in 2016. The school has had a high turnover of teaching staff over the last two years, with only one ongoing teacher from 2015. Most teachers are in the early years of their career.

### **School Performance Overview**

*The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).*

#### **Reading**

In the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2015, 30% of Year 1 and 25% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). This result represents an improvement in Years 1 and 2 from the historic baseline average.

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 57% of Year 3, 33% of Year 5, and 22% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Year 3, this result represented an improvement from the historic baseline average. For Year 5, there is little or no improvement, whereas in Year 7, it represented a decline against the historic average. It is noted that 4 of 9 students (44%) in Year 7 did not participate in the test.

For 2015 Year 3, 5, and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving within the range of results of similar students across DECD schools.

In 2015, 29%, or 2 of 7 Year 3, 0 of Year 5, and 0 of Year 7 students achieved in the top two NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

### Numeracy

In 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 29% of Year 3 students, 33% of Year 5 students, and 67% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 5, this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average, while the result represents an improvement at Year 7.

For 2015, in all year levels of NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving within the range of results of similar groups of students across DECD schools. Year 3 is just within the range, whereas Year 7 was well within the range.

In 2015, 1 of 7 (14%) Year 3 students, and 0 students in Years 5 and 7, achieved in the top two NAPLAN Numeracy bands. For Year 3, this result represented little or no improvement from the historic baseline average.

As no student had achieved in the upper bands in Year 3 or 5 in 2013, upper band retention is not applicable.

### Lines of Inquiry

During the review process, the panel focused on two key areas from the External School Review Framework:

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|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Effective Leadership:</b> | <p><b>How effectively does the leadership foster a culture of learning?</b></p> <p><b>How does the leadership facilitate the development of coherent high-quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?</b></p> <p><b>To what extent are the school's professional learning and performance development processes effective in building teacher capacity?</b></p> |
| <b>Improvement Agenda:</b>   | <p><b>How effective are the school's self-review processes in informing and shaping improvement?</b></p>  |

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

The Principal provided the Review Panel with the story of the school over the past 5 terms. He talked about the students with challenging behaviours who 'just turned up' to school at the beginning of 2015. He described the environment as one of 'continuous fires with an occasional flare-up'. Since that time, the school has referred students to the Behaviour Coaches in Support Services, and has had a Counsellor appointed in 2016. The Principal has endeavoured to get to know and understand the families and the context from which students come to school.

The school's strategies to promote attendance have had some positive spin-offs. When asked what helps them with their learning, many students talked about the importance of being at school, and learning through practice. Members of the Governing Council also valued the school's efforts to promote attendance and the acknowledgement and awards students get for regular attendance. Although the school would like to improve the weekly attendance percentage rate, the Review Panel found the school's attendance improvement plan, strategies and interventions to be comprehensive.

At the end of 2015, several teachers left the school and the ongoing staff members in 2016 consist of the Principal, one teacher (newly appointed in 2015), and a group of dedicated School Services Officers (SSOs). The Principal listed many frustrations in trying to build an improvement culture. These include the turnover of teaching staff, recruitment processes, and lack of easy access to school by bus for some families. The challenges have been highlighted by the recent economic challenges for the Whyalla community, as a few families have left the city to seek other employment opportunities.

Members of the Governing Council and students were very aware of the turnover of teaching and

leadership staff, as they raised it in discussions with the Review Panel. Students indicated they become wary as they progress through their school and it takes a while to trust new staff. On the other hand, they talked with respect about their teachers and accepted their reasons for leaving. Teachers talked positively about the collegiate support they gain from each other, the school and students.

The Principal indicated he wants to develop an improvement culture. He told the Review Panel he did not want a situation where teachers wished students stayed away from school, because their behaviours could be disruptive and challenging. Although this is his intention, the Review Panel felt that the frustrations and the concern for the school community sometimes override any opportunity to develop a culture of improvement. There are many facets of students' lives which schools have no control or influence over. School improvement requires a concentration on the things staff can control; that is, the development and maintenance of a safe learning environment and learning growth. The 2015 student achievement data showed that Year 1, 2 and 3 reading levels, measured by Running Records and NAPLAN, and Year 7 numeracy, were higher than the historic average. Additionally, the last 3 years have shown an upward trend in achievement in Year 5 reading, compared to students with similar characteristics across DECD. These are positive signs and strengths for teachers to build on.

**Direction 1**

**To improve student learning and growth, ensure an emphasis on learning and high expectations as the key priority for the school.**

**How does the leadership facilitate the development of coherent high-quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?**

At the beginning of the year, an audit was conducted of the literacy programs that had been adopted and resourced by the school. It was found these were numerous. It appeared new teachers over time had brought their preferred systems to the school. However, from the lens of students, the only consistent approach across the school was Spelling Mastery. Older students talked positively about Spelling Mastery, as students who struggle with spelling and word knowledge are "going up levels and get certificates of acknowledgement".

Curriculum agreements documenting the expectations of what and how teachers will provide cohesive and seamless learning experiences for students, were either out-of-date or non-existent. Teachers new to the school advised the Review Panel that they were well-inducted into the DECD and school administration and operations, but not into the curriculum or pedagogy expectations.

The school is aware of this and has embarked on a process of adopting a Levelled Literacy Intervention (LLI) program across the school. It incorporates learning related to text structure, high-frequency words, phonics and book features, and provides teachers with a well-paced script and resources. The school has spent many hours and significant funding to purchase the LLI resources. In preparation for the school to adopt this program, teachers watched a series of webinars, and assessed and levelled all students' reading skills. At the time of the review, teachers had begun using the program in their lessons.

LLI is designed to be an intervention program and there are several students within classes already at their age levels, for whom the program is not suitable. Teachers need to map the learning provided in the LLI program with the English Curriculum to ensure students are being provided with holistic and sequential learning at and, with appropriate stretch, beyond their current levels.

The School's Improvement Plan 2016 refers to *Rational Emotional Behaviour Education* (REBE), which appears to have been a system previously used in the school to support student behaviour. The current teaching staff members do not have an in-depth knowledge or ownership of this system. At the time of the review, the school was in the process of investigating various wellbeing and safe classroom programs to adopt.

Overarching common beliefs about learning and student behaviour do not appear to have been developed to guide decision-making. The Review Panel was concerned about duplicity or multiplicity of programs, potentially causing confusion and inconsistency in their application and implementation. At the same time, the Review Panel recognises teachers and students need to have consistent school-wide scaffolds and

language to support the development of learning dispositions and academic progress. It is vital that the school makes a decision to adopt an approach, which will work in the context of a high turn-over of staff and a significant level of transience of students in and out of the school. Most importantly, the guiding principle needs to be strengths-based to build students' capacity to self-regulate their behaviour and learning.

The Review Panel cautions the school about adopting programs as the solution to the apparent lack of consistency and coherence across the school. The power of improvement is in teachers working together to identify challenges, and to collaboratively shape the school's approaches to support the context and assessed learning needs. The school's leadership needs to facilitate and lead this work. It is especially vital that systems are maintained and improved over time, without chopping and changing when there is a turnover of staff.

**Direction 2**

**To provide cohesive learning experiences for students as they progress through their schooling, adopt and document agreed pedagogical and behaviour management approaches.**

**To what extent are the school's professional learning and performance development processes effective in building teacher capacity?**

As stated in the school context section, and throughout this report, most teachers at Whyalla Stuart Campus R-7 are in the first 5 years of their career. Some of the teachers appointed to the school have had short-term contracts in a number of schools, and this is their first full-year appointment into a classroom. The Review Panel was keen to ascertain the professional learning and performance development processes in place to support teachers to develop their craft and professional capacities.

Teachers talked about the professional development provided by an SSO on the LLI program and staff meeting PD provided by the Counsellor. As stated earlier, they talked about the strong collegiate support in the school. The Review Panel heard about informal support and advice provided by the Principal and Counsellor. It appears that several formal performance discussions have been conducted by the Principal; however, a systematic approach to mentoring and performance development was not evident.

Research shows strong educational leadership is a critical element in building successful schools, and it requires Principals to engage in a dynamic interplay of instructional and inclusive-facilitative leadership to build teachers' capacity. Leaders need to create time, structures and clear expectations to enable teachers to collaborate, as well as provide continuous individual mentoring, coaching feedback and support.

It was also not clear that the school is utilising the AITSL (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership) *Professional Standards for Teachers* as a framework to build teacher capacity. The Standards define the work of teachers and make explicit the elements of high-quality, effective teaching in 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools. They describe the professional knowledge, practice and engagement expected of teachers representing various levels of experience and expertise. The *Professional Standards for Teachers* have been designed as a mechanism to attract, develop, recognise and retain teachers.

**Direction 3**

**To build the capacity of teachers to meet the varied learning needs of students, develop and enact systematic performance development processes based on the AITSL framework.**

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

Access to reliable and valid achievement, growth and engagement data is critical to support schools and teachers to make improvements. At a classroom level, teachers need to be able to analyse data to inform their planning, so that their instruction is targeted and tailored to the needs of individuals and groups of students. The regular analysis of achievement data provides information for teachers about the progress a student is making, and whether their learning design is having the desired impact.

At a basic level, data is used to measure and provide an indication of the school's performance and identify areas for improvement. At a more sophisticated level, the use of data can shape and inform the school's improvement strategies and practices.

At Whyalla Stuart Campus R-7, teachers were able to talk knowledgeably about their students at an individual level, particularly, about their reading behaviours and levels. The Primary Australian Curriculum Education Officer (PACEO) worked with the school and Partnership to 'dive into the data' to develop greater staff ownership. Unfortunately, this work has not been ongoing. The Review Panel heard from teachers that they tested and assessed their students 'from scratch' at the beginning of the year, as they could not find the students' reading levels from the previous year.

A systematic way of collecting and managing student achievement data, easily accessible to teachers, was not evident. Furthermore, there seemed no way of knowing whether the progress students were making was 'good enough'. SSOs responsible for the Quicksmart (automaticity in number) program were able to talk about and show graphs of the progress students had made. However, they were concerned about whether the level of progress was commensurate with the experiences in other schools, and consistent with the intended program outcomes.

Reflections by staff in Term 4, 2015 identified school-wide planning as an aspect of the school that needed improvement. A Site Improvement Plan was developed for 2016. The Review Panel could not see how the plan was developed or how it was based on an analysis of student data. Without this, the risk for the school is that the strategies employed may not be targeted, specific enough or achievable. Additionally, the evaluation measures, to enable the school to measure the impact of its actions, were broad and unwieldy as measurement tools. Whyalla Stuart Campus R-7 is a small, complex school, so it is essential that the School Improvement Plan is manageable, specific, improvement-focused and measurable.

**Direction 4**

**To track every learner's growth, and to shape the school's improvement plan and actions, develop and embed systems for data collection, analysis and use at student, class and school levels.**

### OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Whyalla Stuart Campus R-7 does not yet have a coherent whole-school approach to learning and teaching. The school's self-review and evaluation processes require further development. The use of data to inform decision-making, school planning and intervention is in the early stages of development.

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

1. To improve student learning and growth, ensure an emphasis on learning and high expectations as the key priority for the school.
2. To provide cohesive learning experiences for students as they progress through their schooling, adopt and document agreed pedagogical and behaviour management approaches.
3. To build the capacity of teachers to meet the varied learning needs of students, develop and enact systematic performance development processes based on the AITSL framework.
4. To track every learner's growth, and to shape the school's improvement plan and actions, develop and embed systems for data collection, analysis and use at student, class and school levels.

Based on the school's current performance, Whyalla Stuart Campus R-7 will be externally reviewed again in 2017.



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Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY



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Jayne Johnston  
CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

The school will provide an implementation plan to the Education Director and community within three months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's Annual Report.



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George Hewitson  
PRINCIPAL  
WHYALLA STUART CAMPUS R-7



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Governing Council Chairperson