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# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

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Report for Waikerie High School

Conducted in August 2017



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**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.*

*The External School Review Process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are adhered to and implemented. This information is provided in Appendix One of the report.*

**This External School Review was conducted by Liz Matheson, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Sue Burtenshaw, Review Principal.**

### School context

Waikerie High School is located in the Riverland District, 183kms from the Adelaide CBD. The current student enrolment is 311. The enrolment has been slowly decreasing. The school has 6 feeder primary schools and 72% of students travel to school by bus. The school has an ICSEA score of 936 and is classified as Category 4 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 18 (6%) Aboriginal students, 11 (4%) students with disabilities, 11 (4%) students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), no children/young people in care, and 75 (24%) families eligible for School Card assistance. The school has a learning hub which includes provision for Flexible Learning Options for 11 students.

The school Leadership Team consists of a Principal in his final year before retiring at the end of 2017, a Middle School Leader, a Senior School Leader and 5 Coordinators.

The school is a participant in the Waikerie Partnership 3-year Visible Learning project.

### Lines of Inquiry

In considering the data summary in the School Performance Overview (Appendix 2) and the Principal's presentation, the Review Panel explored the following Lines of Inquiry to evaluate the school's effectiveness towards raising student achievement and sustaining high performance. During the external review process, the panel focused on three in words key areas from the External School Review Framework:

**Effective Teaching:** How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

**Student Influence:** How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and throughout the school?

**Effective Leadership:** How effectively does the school build leadership capacity to drive the school's improvement capacity?

### How effectively are teachers supporting students in their learning?

Over the past three years the school has developed its vision, mission and guiding values to create a positive, success-orientated environment where students develop to their full potential. The school aims to work in close partnership with parents and broader community to provide relevant curriculum, educational experiences and care so that students may be successful contributors as adult citizens.

At the end of 2016, the school entered into a 3-year professional learning contract as a member of the DECD Waikerie Partnership. This project, known as Visible Learning, uses evidence-based research to enable teachers and leaders to better understand learning, making the characteristics of what successful learners do visible to students, and to become better evaluators of the impact of their teaching practices on learning progress. To date, the project has involved teachers in learning about the research, the concept of effect size, the selection of an Impact Coach, and a review conducted in April 2017.

During the Visible Learning review, students described learning as a set of behaviours, such as "doing my homework, not getting distracted, and concentrating". This finding was consistent with the way students described their learning and how to improve in discussions with the ESR Review Panel. The school has yet to develop a consistent, coherent understanding and articulation, and documentation of what it means to be a good teacher, and to make learning visible to students. This is work-in-progress, as documented in the school's project Action Plan.

Teachers talked positively about their recent professional learning in moderating student work with other teachers. The SACE report shows that teachers at Year 12 level are very accurate in grading work according

to the performance standards. The Review Panel found that most teachers had a very good understanding of the Achievement Standards in their Learning Area. Furthermore, many teachers are active in participating in their subject associations or networking with teachers beyond the school.

Teachers have been working on making their learning intentions and success criteria more explicit for students. There should be a 'line of sight' between the learning intentions, the learning experiences, tasks and success criteria for assessment. Learning intentions are brief statements that explicitly describe what students should know, understand and be able to do *as a result* of the learning and teaching. Teachers deliver learning experiences which offer the scaffold for students to develop their learning. Tasks should be designed in a way that provides multiple entry points and enables students to demonstrate their learning to various levels, including at an 'A' level. At this stage, more professional learning is needed for all teachers to be able to provide this visible 'line of sight' for students.

As described above, many students were not able to provide examples of what actions they had taken as a result of feedback from teachers, except for behaviours, such as "don't get distracted" and "if you lift your game you could get a B or an A". The feedback does not seem to relate to the success criteria or advise students on how to improve.

Feedback is most useful as a continuous process when teachers use various strategies to find out the extent students have grasped the concepts or skills during the unit of learning, not at the end in the summative assessment; most importantly, it is the modifications and adaptations they make to their practices to support students. Some students indicated that when they are provided with examples, or teachers explain their thinking as they model skills, it helps them have a visual picture of what is expected.

The use of data helps teachers in providing a more targeted and tailored approach. The school has a range of capabilities within all classes. To ensure that all students are being supported and intellectually challenged, the Leadership Team has developed the expectation that all teachers use a '2x2x2' approach to their planning. Several teachers identified this as being an effective strategy to achieve improved student learning. The Review Panel noted there were six students who had been assessed in the higher proficiency bands in Year 7 in reading and numeracy, however, by Year 9, only one of these students remained in the top bands. This suggests the group's progress is not being sufficiently tracked, and they are not developing the higher proficiencies in reading and maths. The degree to which teachers actively use a differentiated method to their planning and task design seems to vary. Additionally, the use of the 'traffic light' data and the semester grades data is under-utilised to inform strategic improvement planning at a faculty and school level.

#### **Direction 1**

**Develop an agreed and consistent understanding of what constitutes quality teaching and visible learning, and deepen the pedagogical practices identified through the Visible Learning 3-year project and school's Action Plan.**

#### **How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and throughout the school?**

Through the Visible Learning teachers participated in an online survey to find out their 'mindframes' or ways of thinking about learning and pedagogical approaches.

The staff members are congratulated on their willingness to reflect honestly on their practices, and in the way they participated in the ESR processes. The survey revealed the need for improvement in the level of student voice and influence in their learning. For example, teachers rated themselves lowly in the area: "students talk about learning in my class". They noted that students do not feel Okay about making errors, nor do teachers make it clear to students that "errors are welcome".

The most striking results from the teachers' survey relate to the level of trust between students. Teachers observed there is low trust and respect between students, and that students do not respect help from other students, unless they are considered 'experts in the learning'. The Review Panel noted that students have a similar perception of their peers. In the 2016 Year 8 and 9 Engagement and Wellbeing Survey (107 responses), 46% of students perceive there is a low level of respect in the way students treat each other, compared to a state average of 31%, and only 17% reported the school climate as high. This seemed

surprising as the school values are respect, responsibility, trust, achievement and community.

In discussions about this data, most teachers were not surprised with the survey findings, but were unsure of what to do next. A number of teachers indicated the low trust is particularly evident in specific year levels, where there appears to be considerable conflict between students. Many teachers commented on students wanting to be 'spoon-fed', rather than doing the hard intellectual work of thinking and problem-solving.

In discussions with students, much of the learning process was described as teacher-directed with little opportunity to learn from each other. Many teachers recognise this is a concern, especially as there is a focus on STEM and Visible Learning, which promotes collaborative problem-solving and critical and creative thinking. With the low level of trust and respect, in some year levels, teachers are concerned about increasing the level of peer assessment and student collaboration in inquiry-based learning.

Most teachers indicated they are not confident in knowing what strategies to use or how to change the climate in their class. One teacher reflected that as students "become self-guided learners they may start to shift their thinking into how this will affect their learning, rather than how it will affect them socially".

To successfully and systematically promote a growth mindset to learning, a cultural and 'mindshift' change is required, where teachers and leaders see themselves, and act, as learners, including willingness to take onboard ideas and feedback from students. They also need a collection of strategies to help them, and be prepared to trial and learn. There will not be a cultural change if the 'telling' pedagogy dominates, but will require teaching students to visualise, to develop positive learning-focused self-talk, and develop individual strategies. The Review Panel noted that most teachers appear willing to engage with this new learning.

The Review Panel met with a small number of Governing Council members, who talked about the importance of a growth mindset and collaborative learning as essential skills for life, for employment and other pursuits, including sport. At this point in time, the school has not had time, or opportunity, to access the resources and skills of the Student Representative Council (SRC), people in the broader community, or within the non-Government sector, to help teachers to develop their collection of strategies.

#### **Direction 2**

**Work in partnership with students, parents and the broader community to develop a growth mindset to learning, and deepen the opportunities, with scaffolding and support, for greater student voice in the learning and assessment process.**

#### **How effectively does the school build leadership capacity to drive the school's improvement capacity?**

As a participant in the Visible Learning project, the school has developed an Action Plan focused on the visible learner, knowing their own impact, aligning learning intentions and success criteria, effective feedback and using data more effectively. To date, the school has released a teacher to act as the Impact Coach to work with the Principal, to lead the professional learning for staff.

The Action Plan specifies what knowledge students, teachers, leaders and parents will need, and what practices need to become routine. This Action Plan represents the school's main improvement agenda and strategic guide for the next three years (2017 to 2019 inclusive).

The school Leadership Team consists of the Principal, two Assistant Principals, and five Faculty Leaders. The faculties meet several times a term. The Faculty Leaders will be instrumental in supporting teachers to develop their pedagogical practices, as well as their strategies to promote and foster a student growth mindset.

At this stage, there is variance between the conversations and practices about this change at the faculty level. In one faculty, for example, the Faculty Leader creates time for teachers to showcase their practices and to discuss 'something new' they have tried. Other faculties are still very focused on the curriculum, and the frequency and depth of conversations about pedagogy is limited. The Review Panel heard that there are still some teachers who are reluctant to put their learning and assessment plans on the Learner Data Management System (DayMap), so that they can be visible to other colleagues. This is a concern, as there needs to be a rigorous and authentic learning culture at the faculty level, with a positive intent to support

each other to improve.

The Review Panel noted that one of the main processes for gathering evidence of what is happening in the classes is through 'walkthroughs'. One of the pedagogical priorities the school wants to improve to a 'routine' level relates to giving and receiving quality feedback. It is possible that the school leaders could do a walkthrough and not see this practice. The Review Panel encourages the leaders to decide what they want to gather evidence about, and then design the best process to gather that evidence. The SRC and students' voices need to be a part of the evidence-gathering processes.

When asked what do staff think will be the most challenging aspect for the school in the Visible Learning continuous improvement, teachers indicated getting all staff to value it, needing someone to drive it, structuring the pace of change, and maintaining momentum. Several teachers indicated leaders need to adopt a coaching approach, and there needs to be more focused time on Visible Learning.

The Review Panel agrees with these sentiments, and is of the view that ongoing development of leaders' capacities to be coaches and facilitators will be critical to the success and improvement. Most importantly, leaders must approach this school improvement work as learners, not as an accountability process, and be transparent about strengths and concerns.

### **Direction 3**

**Build the capacity of the broader Leadership Team to utilise coaching and facilitating processes that enable teachers to learn from each other to make cultural and pedagogical shifts in their practices.**

### **What is the school doing particularly well and why is this effective?**

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practices that are contributing significantly to school improvement at Waikerie High School.

The staff members at Waikerie High School are committed to supporting students to gain their SACE and to pursue their desired pathways. The Review Panel heard examples of teachers going 'beyond the call of duty' to tutor and coach students. This included providing tutorial opportunities, during the school holidays and even at night while on the holiday ski trip. Students were very appreciative of teachers' efforts to support them in their learning, and in providing a wider range of extra-curricular activities that they are able to access.

The Review Panel noted staff members are open to learning and to examining and reflecting on their professional practices. As stated earlier in this report, the school is student and improvement-focused. This professional culture of learning is a significant contributor to improvement.

These effective practices were evident through interviews with students, teachers, leaders and in observations during the staff meeting.


## OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

Waikerie High School has shown a willingness to be reflective, work collaboratively, and engage in and enact continuous improvement practices.

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

1. Develop an agreed and consistent understanding of what constitutes quality teaching and visible learning, and deepen the pedagogical practices identified through the Visible Learning 3-year project and school's Action Plan.
2. Work in partnership with students, parents and the broader community to develop a growth mindset to learning, and deepen the opportunities, with scaffolding and support, for greater student voice in the learning and assessment process.
3. Build the capacity of the broader **Leadership** Team to utilise coaching and facilitating **processes** that enable teachers to learn from each other to make cultural and pedagogical shifts in their practices.

Based on the school's current performance, Waikerie High School will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY



Anne Millard  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND  
PRESCHOOLS

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**.



Rob McLaren  
PRINCIPAL  
WAIKERIE HIGH SCHOOL



Governing Council Chairperson

## Appendix One

### Policy compliance

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

The Principal of Waikerie High School has verified that the school is working towards being compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal advised action is being taken to comply with the following DECD policies:

- Aspect of Governance – to report the results of the site bullying audit data twice a year, and work with the Governing Council to monitor the school's policy and practices in relation to student behaviour.
- Aspect of Learning Improvement – ensure and document that teachers have accessed the professional learning program before delivering the Keeping Them Safe Child Protection Curriculum.
- Aspect of Learning – ensure the school has a documented Aboriginal Education Strategy.
- People and Culture – align the performance development policy, plans and processes to the school's key improvement agenda, the Visible Learning project.

When the school's actions achieve compliancy with DECD policy and procedures, the Principal must resubmit the Policy Compliance Checklist to the Education Director.

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 2016 was 89.8%. This percentage represents the highest attendance rate since 2010.

## Appendix Two

### 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 2016, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 66% of Year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD SEA. This result represents a decline from the historic baseline average. The school is achieving within the results of similar students across the DECD system.

In 2016 NAPLAN Reading, 14.5% of students achieved in the top two bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 55%, or 6 of 11 students from Year 7 remained in the upper bands at Year 9 in 2016, and 36%, or 5 of 14 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 9.

#### Numeracy

In 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 73% of Year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the DECD SEA. This result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

The school is achieving within the range of results of similar students across the DECD system.

In 2016 NAPLAN Numeracy, 7%, or 4 of 55 students achieved in the top two bands. Between 2014 and 2016, the trend has been downwards, from 17.5% in 2014 to 7% in 2016.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 43%, or 3 of 7 students from Year 7 remained in the upper bands at Year 9 in 2016, and 44%, or 4 of 9 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 9.



## **SACE**

In terms of SACE completion in 2016, 80% of students enrolled in February and 94% of those enrolled in October, who had the potential to complete their SACE did go on to successfully achieve their SACE. This result for October SACE completion represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2016, 97% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 92% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Literacy units, and 71% successfully completed their Stage 1 Numeracy units. All of these results represent an increased percentage from 2014 to 2016.

Ninety-two percent of students successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

Eighty-nine percent of grades achieved in the 2016 SACE Stage 2 were C- or higher. This result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average. Thirty-four percent of students completed SACE using VET, and there were 11 students enrolled in the Flexible Learning Options program in 2016.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2016, 16% of students achieved an 'A' Grade and 42% achieved a 'B' Grade. This result represents an improvement, and little or no change, respectively, from the historic baseline averages for the 'A' Grade and 'B' Grade.

In 2016 the school had a minor moderation adjustment.