

Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Nuriootpa High School

Conducted in September 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 Rob McLaren, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Peter Kuss and Julie Taylor, Review Principals.

Review Process

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

- Presentation from the Principal
- Class visits
- Survey conducted
- Document analysis
- Discussions with:
 - Governing Council representatives and parent groups
 - Leaders
 - School Services Officers (SSOs)
 - Student representatives
 - Teachers.

School context

Nuriootpa High School caters for young people from years 8 to 12. It is situated 65kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2021, as at the February census, is 1155. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 1023. The local partnership is Barossa Valley.

The school has a 2020 ICSEA score of 999 and is classified as Category 5 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes less than 5% Aboriginal students, 14% students with disabilities, no students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, less than 5% young people in care and 19% of students eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in their 4th year of tenure, a Deputy Principal responsible for whole-school curriculum and improvement and attendance, four Assistant Principals and eleven Senior Leaders.

There are 90 teachers, including 5 in the early years of their career and 33 Step 9 teachers.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

- Direction 1** **Develop whole-school agreements on the learner dispositions and capabilities and what effective strategies are needed to develop them.**
- Direction 2** **Collaboratively develop agreements around the use of assessment and assessment data, incorporated into staff reflection and performance development planning processes, that inform the improvement of practice.**
- Direction 3** **Build the capacity of leadership to lead teams through clarification and alignment of their roles and responsibilities and performance and development processes that effectively enable school priorities to be met.**
- Direction 4** **Strategically develop a plan, which enables the development of agreements and the capacity of leaders and teachers to use data more effectively, to further enhance the alignment of school priorities, performance development processes, and professional learning with the focus on student learning improvement.**

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

In reviewing the previous External School Review directions, Nuriootpa High School has placed greater responsibility on leadership to lead school improvement work. The leadership presentation highlighted the development of school agreements embedded in the school improvement plan (SIP) that guide teachers in learning area teams to explicitly teach the literacy aspects of writing in tier 3 technical vocabulary. Changed teaching practices in response to this focus, including adopting standard writing templates and applying specific literacy strategies to teach vocabulary, are well documented in all learning areas. Success is evident in student achievement improvement in both the 2020 progressive achievement test (PAT) reading and 2021 NAPLAN tests.

In mathematics, the focus is to increase numeracy achievement in years 8 to 10. All mathematics teachers utilise common evidence-based approaches in Back to Front Mathematics and Big Ideas in number. Greater use of diagnostic testing identifies student misconceptions and provides evidence to implement effective intervention programs. Students are supported in their report writing with scaffolded templates. In year 8 numeracy classes, growth of 2 to 3 years was recorded in 8 months. Reforms implemented by Inclusive Education Centre (IEC) leaders are developing a greater learning focus. All centre staff are taking part in professional learning around the evidence-based approaches to mathematics and numeracy improvement to inform better planning for learning.

Whole-school agreements in writing using tier 3 vocabulary, formative assessment and feedback, and performance development and planning processes (PDP) are developing. PDP processes align with the SIP goals and have expectations of teachers to engage in evidence-based approaches to improve identified students. Established professional learning communities (PLCs) have been utilised to research best practice strategies in formative assessment and pedagogies, while promoting engagement and the use of ICT to support literacy were positively received by staff.

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?

School leadership has promoted collaborative development and refinement of the SIP, which identifies the improvement priorities in writing and numeracy. As a result of this approach, there is collective ownership of the improvement process. Most staff were able to articulate the goals for improvement and many described their actions in class to support their achievement. Many teachers responded that they understood the agreed challenges of practice (COP) in literacy and referred to whole-school agreements in writing, to change current approaches to improve student learning. While restricted to mathematics, numeracy improvement has agreements across the faculty to inform the next steps in the whole-school improvement.

Teachers and leaders referred to greater use of triangulated student achievement and wellbeing data, readily accessible to staff on the learner management system and through constructed reports provided by leaders. Several teachers detailed how access to this information had enhanced their knowledge of the needs of students, planning of learning and decision-making. Teachers described their use of formative assessment strategies in class to gauge student understanding. Students confirmed that many teachers used questioning to check and support them when engaging in new work. Several students pinpointed teachers who sought feedback about their practice through surveys and questions at the end of units or semesters of work.

A presented yearly planner illustrated targeted professional learning supporting SIP actions and the development of the COP. Several staff members positively described how professional learning and the recent use of PLC's provided opportunities for them to investigate and develop their teaching practice. Leaders detailed how they had strengthened PDP processes, aligning individual teacher development goals with SIP priorities and expecting staff to present evidence of improvement.

The executive leadership team are currently modelling cyclic (5 weekly) reviews of the SIP to monitor its progress. They included all leaders in this process to build leader capacity to review data and provide evidence to determine the impact of actions on student learning. Senior leaders have undertaken similar evidence-based approaches for improvement; the Inclusive Education Centre (IEC) to shift the focus on wellbeing and play-based learning, to learning through literacy, numeracy, and personal and social general capabilities. So too the wellbeing team in the provision of intervention and support programs for identified student needs. Formal agreements or processes that support cyclic evidence-based reviews of the impact of actions on student learning at the learning area and teacher level were less evident.

There is an opportunity to strengthen teacher and leader evidence-based self-review practices supported by structures and processes that facilitate ongoing review leading to whole school agreements of best practice.

Direction 1 **Align evidence-based improvement and performance development processes to ensure all teachers know the impact of their practice and actions to improve student learning and wellbeing for learning.**

Effective teaching and student learning

How effectively are teachers using assessment and feedback to inform differentiated curriculum planning and instruction and support students' learning?

Teachers described the extent of learning needs in many of their classes as a growing challenge. Leaders outlined how developed learning design and assessment task templates supported teachers in planning to meet curriculum requirements while promoting differentiated practices to meet the needs of all learners. Leaders made clear teachers' expectations to engage with the range of accessible student achievement and wellbeing data when planning learning.

In a current school survey, teachers rated themselves highly in designing differentiated learning and assessment tasks to meet the needs of all learners. Several students highlighted teachers in mathematics and science who provide tasks for students working at different levels and more challenging tasks for extension. However, this practice was not consistent across the school, with many describing all students in their classes being given the same task. Learning and assessment tasks provided varied in quality, with some providing students with different entry and exit points or choices in how students could present their produced work. Classroom observations and conversations with teachers and leaders showed a wide-ranging understanding of what is highly effective differentiation. While not highly visible in task design, challenge and stretch could be seen in some tasks as student choices in difficulty levels. Learning intentions or success criteria to clarify the value and purpose of learning was not a standard feature across the school; however, several teachers included these in tasks, while others referenced the assessment criteria contained in the task rubric.

Many teachers spoke positively of past professional learning in collaborative PLC's with a focus on learning design, assessment, feedback and moderation. The staff viewed these as meaningful opportunities for developing a collective understanding, possibly leading to whole-school agreements to guide consistency of practice. Formative assessment strategies were more prominent in senior years classes but varied in quality and frequency in the middle years, indicating that agreed standards of practice had not yet been reached. Teachers valued scheduled moderation processes enabling sharing of practice and building consistency of judgment across the school. However, these processes had become faculty-based and less formal. Several teachers demonstrated a developing use of questioning techniques to check student understanding and prior knowledge but were unclear in how they use this knowledge to inform future planning. There is an opportunity to develop highly effective differentiated learning and assessment design approaches, including effective formative feedback from recent PLC work to support teacher practice and improvement. Developing agreements of high impact teaching strategies, including effective differentiated practices, would strengthen teacher understanding and consistency. To ensure this is embedded, quality practice, a range of rigorous, supportive performance development processes would provide feedback for ongoing improvement.

Direction 2 Develop a collective understanding of high impact teaching strategies that support effective differentiated teaching and learning that supports all learners.

Effective leadership

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

Governing council members, parents, and staff commented positively on the support from leadership in developing a collaborative school culture with high expectations for teaching and student learning. The Principal, described by many as highly visible, 'walking the talk' in the development of culture and implementing the SIP, providing a robust role model to teachers and leaders. Leaders pointed towards curriculum agreements in improving literacy across the curriculum and the development of numeracy in mathematics that guides teachers work. Curriculum standards are evident in teacher overviews, unit planning and assessment tasks.

The capacity of leaders to effectively use agreed data to review and improve school performance is prominent at the executive leadership level. They are currently modelling this practice to other leaders to build their capacity to replicate in their teams. Many members of this group described performance development processes aligned to the SIP to conduct rigorous professional discussions that review student progress data leading to improvement around the challenges of practice. The rigour of this process varied when discussing this amongst other leaders. Teachers and leaders detailed a range of performance development processes that have provided them with feedback, including performance development planning meetings, classroom observations and mentoring or coaching conversations. PDP meetings could be strengthened by referencing professional standards and making explicit links between performance development structures and processes. Creating a clear line of sight between the school's new SIP, staff professional learning, performance development processes, and classroom practice would maximise all improvements in practice and student learning.

There is a need for the strategic development of instructional leadership across the school by articulating quality leadership skills and attributes and providing targeted professional learning and continuous performance development processes that support instructional leadership development.

Direction 3 Strategically develop evidence-based instructional leadership practices that support the improvement of teacher practice and the achievement of all students.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2021

At Nuriootpa High School, the influence of previous External School Review directions is evident in the school's improvement. The school's planning processes are evolving with a greater focus on evidence-based planning and targeted support. The school is effectively using improvement planning and monitoring processes to raise student achievement. A coherent and engaging curriculum for students uses the Australian Curriculum and South Australian Certificate of Education or appropriate pre-foundation curriculum. The school provides suitable conditions for student learning, supporting a conducive working and learning environment where students are engaged and positively interacting with teachers and support staff.

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

- Direction 1** **Align evidence-based improvement and performance development processes to ensure all teachers know the impact of their practice and actions to improve student learning and wellbeing for learning.**
- Direction 2** **Develop a collective understanding of high impact teaching strategies that support effective differentiated teaching and learning that supports all learners.**
- Direction 3** **Strategically develop evidence-based instructional leadership practices that support the improvement of teacher practice and the achievement of all students.**

Based on the school's current performance, Nuriootpa 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 2021 the reading results as measured by NAPLAN indicate that 65% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2019 and 2021 the trend for year 9 has been downwards from 75% to 65%.

For 2021 year 9 NAPLAN reading the school is achieving within the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2021 10% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 9 this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2021 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading 19% or 13 out of 68 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

Numeracy

In 2021 the numeracy results as measured by NAPLAN indicate that 72% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For 2021 year 9 NAPLAN numeracy the school is achieving above the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2021 13% 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.

For those students in 2021 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy 45% or 18 out of 40 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2020 74% of students enrolled in February and 93% of those enrolled in October who had the potential to complete their SACE did go on to successfully achieve SACE.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2019 100% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 99% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 literacy units, 93% successfully completed their Stage 1 numeracy units and 100% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2020 96% of grades achieved were at 'C'-level or higher, 25% of grades were at an 'A' level and 44% of grades were at a 'B' level. This result represents an improvement for the 'A' level grade and a decline for the 'B' level grade from the historic baseline averages.

Thirty-four per cent of students completed SACE using VET, and there were 75 students enrolled in the Flexible Learning Options (FLO) program in 2020.