

The Department for Education

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Para Hills High School

Conducted in March 2018



Review details

A priority for the Department for Education 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 government schools.

The external school review framework underpinning the 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 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, they all have been considered and contributed to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Kathryn Entwistle, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Meredith Edwards and Peter McKay, Review Principals.

School context

Para Hills High School was established in 1973, and is situated 16kms from the GPO in the suburb of Para Hills West. Mainstream enrolments declined from 435 in 2014 to 400 in 2016; however, an increase has been apparent over the last 2 years with enrolments sitting at 514 in 2018. In 2016 there were 400 students in mainstream, 48 in the disability unit and 70 in FLO, and in 2018, there are 399 students in mainstream, 49 in the disability unit and 56 in FLO.

Thirty-four percent of students are English as an additional language or dialect EALD learners, 10% of students identify as Aboriginal, and 38% of families are eligible for School Card assistance. Nineteen percent of students have been identified as students with disabilities (SWD). The school is Category 3 on the department's scale of advantage and has an ICSEA value of 911.

There are approximately 47FTE staff employed alongside 21 support staff. The school has a 1.7FTE ESL entitlement, a 0.5FTE Aboriginal education teacher (AET), 30 Aboriginal secondary education transition officer hours, and 8 bilingual school support officer hours per week.

The leadership team comprises a principal in the final year of her 2nd tenure, who is retiring at the end of term 2 2018. There is a deputy principal whose responsibility is to lead curriculum implementation and pedagogy, 3 Band 3 leaders with responsibility for senior school/VET/career development, middle school/operations/timetabling and the disability unit, 6 band 1 learning area leaders, 1 band 1 unit leader, 1 Band 1 English as an additional language (EAL) coordinator, and a student wellbeing coordinator. There is 1 flexible learning options (FLO) leader, 5 year level managers, a sports coordinator and an AET.

The school's disability unit comprises 6 classes: 5 operate to support students with varying abilities to access a modified curriculum, and 1 class is dedicated to meet the needs of 8 students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

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 3 key areas from the External School Review framework:

Effective Teaching: To what degree are the school's agreements about learning illustrated in each classroom?

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

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

To what degree are the school's agreements about learning illustrated in each classroom?

Documents provided established the school priorities as clear imperatives at Para Hills High School. The school's 2016-2018 site improvement plan (SIP), literacy and numeracy improvement strategy, and the 'Expectations of PHHS Teachers' documents made evident the school's intent to focus on:

- students' literacy and numeracy achievement
- innovative teaching strategies
- post-school pathways
- attendance, and
- a culture of aspiration.

Concepts critical to achieving these outcomes were clearly stated and include:

- differentiated practice
- provision of feedback
- the teaching of literacy and numeracy across all learning areas (LAs), and
- the establishment of learning goals towards which students can progress.

The review panel were provided with policies designed to support staff and students in achieving the school priorities, including a detailed performance and development and assessment and reporting policy.

Conversations with teaching staff and students allowed the panel to quickly establish how far literacy and numeracy was embedded across learning areas and year levels. The school leaders reported that work to achieve this has been implemented over a number of years, and a focused and uncompromising approach has ensured successful implementation.

Classroom visits saw students in a science class recording a procedural text and utilising subject-specific language. In a food and technology class, year 12 students had created a technical report regarding their use of a recipe, citing numerical formula employed to increase the output of the procedure. When asked when else they use literacy or numeracy within their learning, these students discussed writing a persuasive text in the area of health and physical education (HPE).

A conversation with students from the disability unit heard them building on one another's comments regarding literacy and numeracy across the curriculum, the place of measurement in HPE, oral language and writing in social education and literacy in science. One student stated that literacy and numeracy are in every subject, to which her peers agreed. When speaking with staff, the review panel heard "literacy and numeracy are at the heart of everything" reported uniformly throughout the review.

Evidence sourced confirmed that the school's priority to embed literacy and numeracy teaching across learning areas and year levels has been successfully implemented. The principal confirmed the importance of continuing this work and striving for continued improvement in students achieving the Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA), indicating that they are leaving the school with literate and numerical competencies, will remain a priority.

Also cited in the SIP and accompanying documents is the school's intent to implement innovative teaching strategies, designed to increase engagement and challenge in learning, and to extend students' ability to think critically and creatively. Some evidence was presented during class visits of students given learning opportunities that meet this intent.

In a science lesson, students proposed hypotheses regarding an experiment, conducted the trial and assessed varying outcomes. These students worked collaboratively in groups and engaged in rigorous conversation and debate. In a maths class visited, students were required to use numerical computations to solve problems and to assess their outcomes against exemplars, and then to reflect on, modify and adjust the processes they employed. Conversations with students and class visits showed that some teachers engage students in learning designed to gradually release responsibility to the learner.

Evidence was sourced about some staff providing highly explicit instruction at the start of a unit of work and scaffolding students' understanding through demonstration, exemplars and rubrics. Students in these learning areas have opportunities to think creatively and critically, and to potentially deepen their cognitive processing. Evidence that these approaches were based on an agreed pedagogical framework in place at Para Hills High School was not apparent.

Teaching staff and students made evident that the way a teacher teaches and, therefore, the student learns, varies across the learning areas and year levels. In one student forum, learners described teaching as 'worksheet after worksheet' and all concurred with the student who explained that "if teachers have the ability to think outside the box, they can think of mind boggling questions and complex and creative tasks". These students also discussed an understanding that "interactive and visual learning as well as puzzles that make you think hard" would be "useful in class".

An opportunity to further authenticate the school's priority to implement innovative teaching consistently across the school was evident through the review process. The panel agrees that the unyielding model employed to introduce literacy and numeracy across the school, coupled with examples of effective practice already operating in some learning areas, provide the school with an exciting platform from which to build this next innovation.

Direction 1

Increase student engagement and stimulate cognitive processing through the establishment of a consistent, school-wide pedagogical approach that challenges and inspires learners and provides opportunities for higher-order thinking.

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

It should be noted that the initial line of inquiry against the 'effective leadership' aspect of the external school review framework was 'How successfully does the leadership team promote high expectations and quality teaching?'

Confirming evidence about expectations was sourced early in the review process. The panel considered whether broader inquiry about the systems and processes that build teacher and leader capacity to embed quality teaching may be more effective. Consultation with the principal about the evidence confirmed this proposal was an appropriate adjustment to the inquiry.

Evidence regarding the high expectations that influence an aspirational culture was strongly represented throughout day 1 of the review. Through the principal's presentation and conversations with staff, students and parents, it was evident that the school culture was characterised by an expectation that all students can achieve and work to maximise their potential. It is significant to note that this philosophy exists for all students, including those who may bring complexities to the learning agenda. Expectations are high and differentiated to encompass the broad range of student needs.

The panel heard discussion from teachers and parents that made clear the school strives to work with students to ensure every avenue is explored to capitalise on students' skills and understandings. Students in the disability unit have career pathways designed and tailored from year 8, and from year 10 onwards, numerous off-campus learning and vocational opportunities operate to meet these needs.

A historically deficit culture of expectations has been systematically challenged. Students are supported with differentiation, and encouraged to succeed. Students spoke about a 'C' grade not being good enough, and some were able to discuss the criteria of A and B grades to which they were working. High expectations, persistence and commitment to maximising all students' potential through a supportive culture of aspiration are emphasised.

When considering the efficacy of the systems of professional learning (PL) and performance and development that operate to build teacher and leader capacity, the panel members heard several responses from staff. The long-term and systematic implementation of literacy and numeracy across the school has been strategically led, and whole-school professional learning has been ongoing and focused.

Introduction of classroom observations, conducted by line managers and focused on the school's priorities, is well-intended. The observation assesses teacher efficacy against an aspect of literacy, numeracy or writing, and feedback is provided post observation. The teacher can also engage in self-reflection against these strategies and identify areas for improvement.

There are varied perceptions about the impact of observations, and the concept is intentional. Some staff cited observations as influential in building their practice. Others appreciated the process of observation and feedback, yet were uncertain that it influenced ongoing improvement in their practice. When discussing observations, some leaders referred to how many they had to conduct, rather than the evidence they provided to potentially impact on improving teaching practice.

Reports about systems and processes to build teacher capacity varied, often dependent upon faculty areas. Professional development processes depended upon the line manager, and leadership of initiatives to meet school priorities was implemented inconsistently. There was little evidence of processes in place to build management capabilities in consistently leading and building staff capacity, and represents an area for improvement.

The panel agrees that future implementation of an agreed pedagogical approach, as documented in Direction 1 of this report, will be highly dependent upon consistent and rigorous processes of performance and development and professional learning. These systems will need to be led strategically by well-informed, coherent line management processes.

Direction 2

Ensure processes that build teacher and leader capacity to achieve school priorities are influential through the implementation of consistently designed and led systems of performance and development and professional learning for all staff.

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

Processes to identify and design strategies and targets to meet school priorities are initiated by members of the leadership team. It was reported that draft proposals of the SIP and supporting documents are presented to teaching staff, and input from the teacher forum is welcomed. Adjustments respondent to

the feedback are made and improvement plans then ratified by staff and governing council. Staff reported satisfaction with the process and appreciated the consultative element. The panel also acknowledge the collaborative approach to planning and intent to bring about collective commitment to agreed priorities. Exploration against this line of inquiry saw the panel focus more deeply upon how well the school makes data-informed judgements about student learning.

The concept of data and its place in planning is fully appreciated and understood. Some significant work has been undertaken to ensure that data is used influentially and deliberately to improve both teaching practice and student achievement. One faculty in particular has used valid data to identify individual student's miscues and strengths and then planned interventions accordingly. This information has then been disseminated across the school.

In some teaching areas, staff collated a wealth of data to identify and prioritise teaching points. Of particular note is the introduction of 'Snapshot', a process whereby teachers alert students to potential grades and achievement every 5 weeks. Teachers use data sourced from draft work, deadlines and observation to track students' progress and then make this known to the student. Improvement is then made possible through email conversation between the student and teacher, focused on areas the student needs to address to ensure a positive outcome or grade. Students reported that this initiative supported them in monitoring their progress and achieving goals, which is another representation of the school's high expectations.

A common theme arising from the disability unit was the place of data in informing planning for individuals. The panel saw student wellbeing and numeracy displays that identified students' existing abilities and understanding, and made next improvement stages clear. These datasets had been sourced through assessments that staff and families reported were newly introduced to the unit and highly valued. In addition, the unit staff have developed a SIP relevant to their students' needs and targeted accordingly, yet also aligned with whole-school agreements and priorities.

Whilst staff described their appreciation of data in improvement planning and differentiation, it was evident that an opportunity to further build a coherent response to, and use of, data across LAs and year levels is apparent. Staff reported using data sourced from online programs, recognised systemic tests, and from teacher-designed assessments.

Panel members heard that the amount of data available to teachers is 'overwhelming', and uncertainty regarding which data provide the most valuable findings is not uncommon. Some teachers agreed that data played a limited role in their planning, whilst others reported that although they know certain data is available, they are unclear how to interpret it or, in some instances, access it. A process designed to collate and plan in response to student achievement data had simply been too cumbersome to complete.

The opportunity to methodically establish common understandings in using data for planning and differentiation, and developing 'data literacy' across the staff, is a valuable next step in the school's improvement imperative. Once staff members' collective understanding of effective data interpretation and planning is developed, a set of agreed and valid data to support targeted planning and purposeful differentiation can be identified. The existing work of some learning areas will provide an excellent model from which to promulgate this concept across the school.

Direction 3

Broaden the effective and intentional use of data across the school by building all staff members' ability to work strategically with and respond to data, and to identify agreed, manageable datasets that best inform planning and practice.

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

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practice that is contributing to school improvement at Para Hills High School.

Effective practice in the student learning aspect of the external school review framework was evident at the school. Students' potential success has been positively influenced by closely monitoring learners who may be at risk of disengaging from learning or failing to meet standard. Whilst in 2018 there are 56 students enrolled in FLO, the school has identified another 50 who may potentially disconnect or not achieve SEA. The school is committed to keeping these students engaged and on-track within the mainstream.

A salary has been sourced to appoint a case manager who works with students to design learning plans that focus solely on identified achievement in literacy, numeracy and 1 other area of the curriculum. Students reported that this intervention supported them to better focus on their learning and achieve at appropriate levels, describing their teachers as 'amazing'. There is evidence that this early intervention process enables students at risk to reconnect with learning and achieve their potential.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

At Para Hills High School a culture of improvement characterised by high expectations for students, and effective leadership has provided strategic direction and targeted interventions.

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

1. Increase student engagement and stimulate cognitive processing through the establishment of a consistent, school-wide pedagogical approach that challenges and inspires learners and provides opportunities for higher-order thinking.
2. Ensure processes that build teacher and leader capacity to achieve school priorities are influential through the implementation of consistently designed and led systems of performance and development and professional learning for all staff.
3. Broaden the effective and intentional use of data across the school by building all staff members' ability to work strategically with and respond to data, and to identify agreed, manageable datasets that best inform planning and practice.

Based on the school's current performance, Para Hills High School will be externally reviewed again in 2022.



Brendyn Semmens
A/DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
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Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND
PRESCHOOLS

The school will provide an implementation plan to the education director and community within 3 months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's annual report.

Janette Scott
PRINCIPAL
PARA HILLS HIGH SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson

Appendix 1

Attendance policy compliance

Implementation of the department's student attendance policy was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy.

The school attendance rate for 2017 was 86.6%.

Appendix 2

School performance overview

The external school review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the department's Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Reading

In 2017, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 39% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents a decline from the historic baseline average. The school is achieving lower than the results of similar students across the public education system.

In 2017 NAPLAN Reading, 1% of students achieved in the top 2 bands.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 11%, or 1 student from year 3 remains in the upper bands at year 9 in 2017, and 25%, or 1 of 4 students from year 7 remains in the upper bands at year 9 in 2017.

Numeracy

In 2017, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 39% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

Between 2015 and 2017, the trend for has been downwards, from 49% in 2015 to 39% in 2017. The school is achieving lower than the results of similar students across the public education system.

Between 2015 and 2017, the school has consistently achieved lower in year 9 NAPLAN Numeracy relative to the results of similar groups of students across the public education system.

In 2017 NAPLAN Numeracy, 5% of students achieved in the top 2 bands.

For those students who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 22%, or 2 of 11 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9 in 2017, and 33%, or 1 of 3 students from year 7 remains in the upper bands at year 9 in 2017.

SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2017, 52% of students enrolled in February and 97% 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.

Between 2015 and 2017, the trend for has been upwards, from 88% in 2015 to 97% in 2017.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2017, 98% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 93% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Literacy units, 94.7% successfully completed their Stage 1 Numeracy units and 100% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

Ninety-six percent of grades achieved in the 2017 SACE Stage 2 were C- or higher. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. Between 2015 and 2017, the trend has been upwards from 91% in 2015 to 96% in 2017. Twenty-eight students completed SACE using VET and there were 64 students enrolled in the flexible learning options program in 2017.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2017, 15% of students achieved an 'A' Grade, and 38% achieved a 'B' Grade. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline averages for the 'A' Grade and 'B' Grade respectively.

In terms of 2017 tertiary entrance, 57% or 34 out of 60 potential students achieved an ATAR selection score.