

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

On-track evaluation report for Oakbank Area School

One-year return conducted in April 2018



On-track evaluation process

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.

All government schools are externally reviewed over a 4-year cycle. After the review the principal and the governing council chairperson receive a written report with a number of directions for improvement.

A copy of the External School Review report is available on the school website.

In some cases, when the review panel finds cause for concern about the levels of achievement and growth, together with evidence about the school's capacity for systematic improvement, a school will be advised that they will be visited again in a year.

Schools with a 1-year return are assisted during the intervening period by the education director and other department staff to ensure they receive coordinated, targeted and systematic support. Intervention is concentrated on building the school's capacity to improve teaching and learning across the school, lift expectations and achieve results as measured against the Department for Education Standard of Educational Achievement.

During this process, which occurs 12-15 months after the initial visit, a review panel determines the extent to which the school has, with external support, developed sustainable internal capacity to improve effectiveness and raise student achievement.

The school's priority improvement plan was the main document used as the basis for this review.

The review visit was conducted by Helen Tunney, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate, and Julie Taylor, Review Principal.

This On-Track Evaluation report should be read in conjunction with the report of the External School Review conducted at Oakbank Area School in September 2016.

Directions from the External School Review report

September 2016

- 1. All staff members need to actively support the focus on learning, engage in continual improvement, and maintain high expectations for their students to enable the school to achieve its vision.**
- 2. Build the capacity of leaders and teachers, and provide structures, processes and time, to enable staff to improve their practices and collectively implement whole-school agreed approaches.**
- 3. Build teachers' capacity to collectively analyse and use data to regularly track students' progress within classes and across the school, and for classroom planning, to provide more targeted and tailored instruction and support.**
- 4. Develop and embed emerging pedagogies that activate prior knowledge, provide clear learning intentions and design quality tasks and assessment criteria, enabling students to be stretched and challenged in their thinking.**

Additional information about the school context

Since the 2016 ESR there has been another change in principal. The current principal was appointed in 2017.

Development of a priority improvement plan (PIP)

The principal has advised that the PIP was not developed until June 2017.

The plan was sent to the Executive Director, Partnerships, Schools and Preschools in term 2, 2017.

The principal advised that because all schools in the partnership agreed to participate in a Visible Learning initiative (from 2017), and has aligned the ESR directions with each of the 4 aspects of the Visible Learning project.

Strategic support provided to the school over the past 12 months

The principal has advised that the school did not receive external support until the PIP was approved, which happened in term 3 2017. The school then received some support from LID.

Evidence and evaluation referenced to directions in the priority improvement plan

Direction 1

All staff members need to actively support the focus on learning, engage in continual improvement, and maintain high expectations for their students to enable the school to achieve its vision.

The school has aligned this direction with the Visible Learning aspect of 'inspired and passionate teachers'.

On-track evidence

- The chairperson of the governing council said that the principal, at the school's recent open night, gave a balanced presentation of where the school is at now. It was clear from this presentation that the school is showing improvement. There was a 75% increase on past attendance at this event.
- The governing council chairperson said that recent staff changes have been noted by families and are viewed positively. There is a noticeable new energy amongst the staff.
- The school's arrangement with the Hills Christian School has increased the SACE curriculum offerings. This is valued by students and families.
- Regular weekly training and development (T&D) is impacting on whole-school implementation of improvement initiatives, which the teachers and leaders have verified. However, not all teachers attend this weekly meeting, and there are a few teachers who comply with the requirements imposed by the T&D, but are not committed to the changes that are being asked of them.
- Teachers felt that the change agenda is being imposed on them and they are not authentically consulted. Although most (not all) could talk about the benefits of making changes to their practice.
- The school's improvement agenda has focused on implementing visible learning, which are aligned to the ESR directions.
- Full implementation of DayMap is yet to be achieved. It is important that the school prioritises this major initiative, on which it is relying, to secure full teacher commitment to focus on learning and engage in continual improvement.
- Teachers said that the school changes its improvement focus too frequently. Leaders are making links between initiatives over time, however, teachers see things as separate and disparate.
- Teachers mentioned issues with inconsistent student behaviour management (SMB) practices and levels of leadership support. Activating student agency in learning changes the quality of student-student relationships and students come to deeply understand and connect with the core business of schooling.

Review panel evaluation

The panel found evidence that the school has made some progress in uniting the focus of the school on student learning. Some teachers are responding proactively to the school's initiatives to ensure their work becomes more intentional around learning improvement. However, the panel concluded that, at this stage, there is considerable inconsistency in the commitment of staff to engage in continual improvement and to sustain high expectations for the learning of all students. Further alignment of the direction with visible learning would be helpful to further drive improvement.

The revised direction for the school is:

Ensure that any improvement work undertaken by the school is informed by the ESR directions and that all improvement initiatives are underpinned by these directions.

Direction 2

Build the capacity of leaders and teachers, and provide structures, processes and time, to enable staff to improve their practices and collectively implement whole-school agreed approaches.

The school has aligned this direction with the Visible Learning aspect: 'visible learning school'.

On-track evidence

- The school day has been shortened by 35 minutes each Wednesday to facilitate an extended staff meeting at which T&D and 'teaming' is now facilitated. This is the major structure that has been set up to enable staff to improve their practices and implement whole-school agreed processes.

However, due to timetabling, not all staff are able to attend the weekly Wednesday meeting at which all professional learning and collaborative teaming is facilitated.

- Peer observations and performance and development were referred to by leaders, but no teacher talked to the panel about any engagement with or benefits of such processes. It is clear that these are yet to be implemented.
- The intention of leadership is to develop teachers' collaboration but, so far, this is not connected to what teachers think they are doing, with the exception of the primary team (reception to year 6). The panel was given little evidence of any intentionality to support critically collaborative planning, professional learning teams or peer observations.
- There is some evidence of teachers working together. In the primary school, this is both by design and informally, and the collaborative work being done is at a deepening level. The work in this sub-school is valued by both leadership and the primary teachers. In the rest of the school, there is some informal collaboration (between like-minded teachers), and also because part of the weekly T&D is required to happen in teams, however, teachers have not developed a valuing of working in collaborative ways. There is a dominant view that "unless we can have a faculty and a faculty leader, collaboration can't happen".
- The panel found little evidence that staff are engaging in collaborative moderation. Some work has been done in the SACE arena to reduce the high levels of disparity between school and external assessments. However, this does not seem to be translated into collaborative moderation at the school level. The school does not appear to have engaged in collaborative moderation at the partnership level.
- Communication and decision-making were raised by teachers as areas of concern, especially in years 7 to 12. Teachers said that communication is unreliable, and they gave multiple examples of serious problems that had arisen for them because of poor communication. The DayMap strategy is yet to become fully functional as a tool for communication, and there is inconsistent use of the staffroom whiteboard and email. However, primary staff reported that communication for them is very satisfactory.
- Decision-making was referred to by years 7 to 12 staff as problematic, and they gave multiple examples of imposed decisions that directly impact on them without adequate consultation. This contributes to varied 'buy-in' by staff to improvement initiatives and to 'tokenistic' compliance with expectations. However, reception to year 6 staff did not hold this view, and felt that they have a strong voice in primary matters in the school.
- Secondary teachers identified a need for backwards curriculum mapping in agricultural science and science from year 12 to 7. The panel believes this is a point of leverage for the school, especially given the potential for increased enrolments if the school develops credible agricultural pathways for students.

Review panel evaluation

The panel found that, in the primary sector of the school, teachers are making good use of structures, processes and time, to improve their practices and collectively implement whole-school agreed approaches. In this sector, meeting times are being well-utilised and supplemented with additional teacher-instigated meetings. Teachers are collaborating to develop agreed, consistent practices, and communication and decision-making processes are strong and valued.

However, this is not consistent across the school. It is important for the school to strengthen communication and decision-making, ensure full attendance at staff meetings, explicitly develop collaboration between teachers in years 7 to 12, and develop performance management practices. This will

better ensure that all staff are building their capacity and engaging in the development and consistent implementation of agreed whole-school approaches.

The revised direction for the school is:

Improve communication and decision-making, ensure full attendance at staff meetings, and implement best practice and individualized performance and development processes to ensure every teacher is continuously improving their practice in line with agreed whole-school priorities.

Direction 3

Build teachers' capacity to collectively analyse and use data to regularly track students' progress within classes and across the school, and for classroom planning, to provide more targeted and tailored instruction and support.

The school has aligned this direction with the Visible Learning aspect: 'know thy impact'.

On-track evidence

- There is evidence from teachers that they have worked together to analyse and unpack systems datasets such as PAT and NAPLAN.
- The governing council chairperson reported that students are supported individually to fully engage in learning. The school has improved its identification of, and support planning for, students with disabilities, students with learning difficulties, Aboriginal students, students in care, and those with high intellectual potential. Some teachers reception to year 12 reported using the individual plans of their students in their classroom planning.
- The school has run extra classes to split cohorts of students and address behaviour issues. This has been effective but has also contributed to financial problems.
- Some teachers have an awareness of the need to use data summatively and formatively to design learning that is accessible to all students and that stretches them to their next point of development.
- In the primary school, there is a strong, deep use of data. Examples were provided of how an evidence-based cycle of student learning improvement had been enacted, and has influenced content and pedagogical agreements and future collaborative work in this sector of the school.
- Some year 7 to 12 teachers talked to the panel about using some data. This use was not deep, but some of these teachers are using data to differentiate teaching. However, not all teachers understand differentiation, and some believe that "it is a problem in a small school because streaming is the appropriate way to manage a range of learning needs".
- The senior school leader provided an example of how data had been used with staff to address the significant gaps between internal and external SACE grades. Pre- and post- data showed that the school had significantly reduced these gaps between 2016 and 2017.
- The panel found evidence of student goal-setting across the school; however, this is not consistent. The degree of teacher guidance for student goal-setting, and its links to the continuous provision of learning intentions, success criteria and feedback about learning, were not clear.

Review panel evaluation

The panel concluded that there is some use of data in the school to moderate learning achievement, track student learning growth, identify students for interventions, and to raise teacher awareness of the need to provide for differing student literacy and numeracy skills-sets in classes. This work is more advanced in the primary sector of the school. However, much work remains to be done to strengthen the individual and

collective data literacy of teachers to ensure they are using an evidence-base to design learning to intentionally stretch the learning growth of every student, regardless of individual starting points.

The revised direction for the school is:

Develop the capacity of teachers to collaboratively design learning tasks using student achievement data, and to use feedback strategies as evidence to continuously monitor and improve the efficacy of their teaching practice.

Direction 4

Develop and embed emerging pedagogies that activate prior knowledge, provide clear learning intentions and design quality tasks and assessment criteria, enabling students to be stretched and challenged in their thinking.

The school has aligned this direction with the Visible Learning aspect of 'effective feedback'.

On-track evidence

- The panel found some use of assessment rubrics by individual teachers, verified by what teachers and students said, and what the panel observed in classrooms. However, these proactive aspects are not embedded across the school.
- There are notable differences in assessment practices in the middle school. There is more student influence and responsibility. The governing council chairperson would like to see this across the school.
- Some provision of learning intentions and success criteria in secondary classes was evident, but this was not consistent in all classes or across the school. This is despite learning intentions and success criteria being the focus, through visible learning, of the school's improvement work in 2017.
- The engagement level of students in classes was high, with the exception of 1 class that was observed by the panel. Students were generally observed to be compliant, enthusiastic and keen to be engaged in quality learning.
- A quality middle school practice of actively engaging students in maths learning was observed.
- In 2018, the focus through visible learning of the school's improvement work is 'feedback'. Years 7 to 12 teachers reported that they are struggling to work in classrooms with new expectations of providing feedback to students, feeling that students are resistant to receiving feedback about their work as they perceive it as negative and critical. These teachers held a view that poor student engagement needs to be 'fixed' before feedback work can be done with students, which indicates a lack of understanding of the value of feedback to improving engagement and student metacognition about learning. A lot of work remains for the school in this space. In the primary school, teachers said they are valuing the feedback work so far, and can see its links to providing learning intentions and success criteria.
- The panel found a limited understanding of the value of student influence in learning. This understanding is limited to student voice through leadership for some students. The value of students as agents in their own and each other's learning is very limited in the school. Work in middle school in student-led discussions is a beginning step in this area. Activating student agency in learning changes the quality of student-to-student relationships.
- Secondary students said they are 'coasting' in their learning, and would like more opportunities for stretch and challenge, and to be engaged in real-life learning tasks.
- Primary students said their work is mostly just right, but they would like it to be harder.

Review panel evaluation

The panel concluded there has been some progress in the development and use of pedagogies that activate student metacognition, harness them as agents in their own and each other's learning, and stretch and challenge them in their thinking. A particular example of this is the work done so far in middle school, in the use of student presentations as an assessment and reporting tool. However, such practices are only emerging and not consistent across the school, or in all practices of teachers. The school must address the fixed mindset of some teachers to ensure every teacher maintains high expectations for their students, to enable the school to achieve its vision through consistent quality pedagogies in all classes all the time across the school.

The revised direction for the school is:

Narrow and deepen school improvement priorities to ensure each teacher has enough time and individualized support to develop and embed emerging pedagogies that activate prior knowledge, provide clear learning intentions, and design quality tasks and assessment criteria, enabling students to be stretched and challenged in their thinking.

Outcomes of the on-track evaluation

Based on the evidence provided, Oakbank Area School is not yet on-track to effectively implement the External School Review directions.

The review panel found some effective teaching that actively engages learners and provides challenging tasks. Student achievement and other evidence (for example, multiple measures) are beginning to be used to inform decisions and actions at the individual, class and whole-school levels. The use of structured time for ongoing, collaborative professional learning has begun.

The principal will continue to work with the education director to implement the External School Review directions:

1. Ensure that any improvement work undertaken by the school is informed by the ESR directions and that all improvement initiatives are underpinned by these directions.
2. Improve communication and decision-making; ensure full attendance at staff meetings, and implement best-practice, individualized performance and development processes to ensure every teacher is continuously improving their practice in line with agreed whole-school priorities.
3. Develop the capacity of teachers to collaboratively design learning tasks using student achievement data, and to use feedback strategies as evidence to continuously monitor and improve the efficacy of their teaching practice.
4. Narrow and deepen school improvement priorities to ensure each teacher has enough time and individualized support to develop and embed emerging pedagogies that activate prior knowledge, provide clear learning intentions and design quality tasks and assessment criteria, enabling students to be stretched and challenged in their thinking.

The principal will continue to work with the education director to implement the findings of the External School Review report from September 2016 and in particular the findings of the on-track evaluation process through a revised priority improvement plan. The education director will continue to ensure coordinated, targeted and systematic support is provided to the school for the next 12 months.

Based on current performance, Oakbank Area School will be externally reviewed again in 2019.



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