

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools Division

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Report for Wirreanda Secondary School

Conducted in September 2017



**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 Peter Mader and Julie Taylor, Review Principals.*

## School context

Wirreanda Secondary School is situated 26kms south of the Adelaide CBD. The school's current enrolment is 900, which is significantly higher than the previous four years. The school has an ICSEA score of 959 and is classified as Category 3 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The local DECD Partnership is Panalatinga.

The school population includes 10% Aboriginal students, 12% students with disabilities, 40% of families eligible for School Card assistance, 5% students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), 19 children/young people in care, and 145 students in Flexible Learning Options (FLO). This programme, known as the WAVE unit, is located in the school for most of the FLO students.

The current Leadership Team consists of a Principal in the second year of a 7-year tenure, a Deputy Principal, 5 Senior Leaders Band 3, 15 Senior Leaders Band 1, and a new leadership structure for School Services Officers.

The Specialist Sport Course at Wirreanda Secondary School has been established to assist talented student athletes to achieve at the highest levels of performance in their chosen sport and to help develop their educational, emotional and social wellbeing. The program also provides structures and processes to support students accessing a range of post-school options.

## 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 key areas from the External School Review Framework:

**Effective Teaching:** To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

**Improvement Agenda:** How well are the results of data and evidence translated into targeted actions?

**Effective Leadership:** To what extent is the leadership capacity developed to support the school to achieve its vision and strategic plan?

## To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

Wirreanda Secondary School has a commitment to the learning and wellbeing of every student who "walks through the door to come to our school". The Review Panel heard examples from parents and students of how teachers and leaders have been proactive and responsive to support students. There is a strong belief by teachers that all students can make progress in their learning, and that they need to provide support and challenge, recognising that learning involves a 'productive struggle'. To experience a sense of achievement, learning needs to be challenging, and often involves a new or different way of thinking and doing.

In a survey of teachers, 91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I believe intelligence can be improved through teaching". The Review Panel was told that this belief in all students' ability to learn, and that teachers make a difference, represents a significant change in teacher beliefs.

The Review Panel noted that 68.4% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed, and 28% of teachers were neutral in response to the statement: "My students believe they can learn the skills taught in school this year". Students' perceptions of how they see themselves as learners and belief in their academic ability is important, as it contributes to their willingness to 'have a go' and persevere when learning becomes tough or outside their 'comfort zone'. The Review Panel found there is a similarity between students' academic self-concept, and how teachers perceive students' view of themselves. In 2016, 42% of Year 8 and 9 students (out of a total of 195 respondents) reported high academic self-concept which is lower than the state average of 57%, while 18% reported low belief in their academic ability. The Review Panel is aware that the school is working with students and families to build their belief in themselves and to raise their aspirations.

Teachers and leaders are committed to providing students with choice and a voice in their learning. This commitment is driven by the view that students are more likely to be engaged and absorbed in their learning if they have a say and the opportunity to follow their interests. The Review Panel sighted examples of units of learning, tasks and assessment plans, which clearly gave students an opportunity to experiment, apply and demonstrate the key concepts in their learning in a variety of ways. The Review Panel acknowledges the creative work of teachers in designing rich tasks that are authentic, based on real-life problems and issues of relevance and interest to young people. The course handbook for 2018 provides an example of the way the curriculum has been developed and designed to capture students' interests.

The school has an action 'can-do' orientation in which many of the perceived barriers to providing innovative, personalised and empowered learning are worked through and resolved. For example, a new timetable has been established to foster greater flexibility to integrate different disciplines, enable deep learning by students, and to facilitate collaboration between teachers in professional development and planning.

In every class there is a broad range of skill levels, interests, learning support needs and previous school experiences. The school is working to improve pedagogical practices to enable greater personalised learning, with an emphasis on progress and growth in conceptual understandings and learning dispositions. In speaking with students, the Review Panel found that many students could explain the tasks they were working on, but were less articulate about the learning intentions, or purpose of the learning. This observation was more evident in the middle school. Many students were also not able to describe how they will go about the task, the progress they are making, or what strategies they needed to develop to improve. Some students spoke about behavioural changes they need to make, such as staying on-task, not drift onto Facebook, and being more organised. While addressing these habits will certainly help, students also need more explicit feedback and exemplars to know what quality learning looks like as they are learning (formative assessment or assessment for learning). Timely and useful feedback is critical to building students' belief in their academic abilities.

In response to the teacher survey, 22.8% of respondents were neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: "I am confident I know how to intellectually stretch the students who grasp the skills and concepts more easily". Similarly, 17.6% indicated they are neutral or unsure how to support students who struggle with the skills and concepts. Additionally, 36.8% indicated they were neutral or disagreed with the statement: "I use student data and assessment to discuss learning steps during a unit of learning". The response from teachers, and interviews with students about knowing how to improve, suggest that the school use of, and response to, effective, formative assessment is developing.

To enable this to be achieved, teachers need to have a repertoire of pedagogical practices that support the range of student learning needs in their classes. They also need to know how to scaffold support as and how students need it, and to intellectually stretch students. It is a complex craft. One student described their learning like rubber bands: good teachers know how to stretch, how far to stretch and when, and how to intervene so that the rubber band is neither slack nor broken.

The ability to tailor and personalise learning which is rigorous and effective in supporting students to make progress is the crux and challenge of quality teaching. It is timely for the school to develop an agreed understanding of what is meant by differentiating and personalising learning, and how to do this effectively. "Personalised education" does not mean "individualised". The term 'personalised learning', refers to a diverse variety of educational programs, learning experiences, instructional approaches, and academic support strategies that are tailored to address the specific assessed learning needs, interests, and aspirations of individuals and groups within the class. It also means creating opportunities for students to learn from each other.

#### **Direction 1**

**Deepen teachers' pedagogical practices to provide explicit instruction, effectively differentiate and personalise learning, to make learning intentions clear, and to use formative assessment practices to effectively plan and respond to students' learning needs.**

## How well are the results of data and evidence translated into targeted actions?

Personalised learning and targeted teaching requires teachers to have an in-depth knowledge of their students' skill and knowledge levels. Teachers at Wirreanda Secondary School value students' perceptions, and frequently use a survey and other processes to get feedback. The Review Panel noted there appeared to be less use of achievement and progress data at the class and student levels. When asked about how the student data was used, some teachers indicated they didn't know.

Every student in DECD from Year 2 to 10 participates in annual PAT tests in reading and numeracy, and in NAPLAN in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Additionally, all students receive a report of their achievement against the Achievement Standards in the Australian Curriculum twice a year. The PAT tests, in particular, provide rich data on students' strengths and learning gaps. It is also possible to manipulate the data to gain a class profile. The school should be able to access students' achievement data as they transition from Primary to Secondary school, and track their progress at a deeper level as they progress through the school.

Raw data is a set of numbers (quantitative) or narrative (qualitative). It is through constructive analysis that raw data is turned into information that enables explanations, comparisons and determinations to inform planning and actions. This is the case at a class and school level. The key to using data effectively is the alignment of the data to planning, and the subsequent adjustment to unit and program plans to enable more responsive and personalised learning.

The Review Panel observed that the school would benefit from using attendance, achievement and growth data at a more strategic level, whereby patterns over time provide indicators or pointers to the school about where interventions need to be. For instance: *What interventions should the school make in Year 9 and 10 as there are 3-year downward trends in attendance in these year levels? Is this absenteeism more prevalent in a particular cohort or gender within these year levels, and which, if any, of their interventions have had a positive effect?*

There is a myriad of ways of collecting and 'slicing' data in schools, so leaders need to be mindful and strategic in deciding which datasets might contribute to providing rich information to inform the school's evaluation and strategic planning. The approach to analysing and using data needs to be systematic, triangulated across a number of datasets, and analysed over time to identify patterns and trends in order to provide richer information.

### Direction 2

**Develop the systems to provide data and evidence, and the capacity of staff to analyse and use data, to enable more targeted teaching and interventions at a student, year, faculty, cohort and program level.**

## To what extent is the leadership capacity developed to support the school to achieve its vision and strategic plan?

Significant work has been done to reframe what it means to be a leader at Wirreanda Secondary School. Underlying this reframing of leadership is the understanding that innovation and improvement requires leaders who work to build the capacity of others by coaching and clarifying roles and expectations. There is trust and a belief that others can and want to 'step up'. At Wirreanda Secondary School, this has involved releasing leaders from managerial and administrative tasks, so that they can spend their time and energy focused on building their teams. School Service Officers (SSOs) have been required to take a greater role in ensuring the smooth running of the school by developing and implementing systems and processes. Whilst the Review Panel heard that this has been a significant change for many SSOs, members of the SSO Leadership Team talked positively about the trust afforded them, and the greater job satisfaction they were experiencing.

The broader Leadership Team, known as the Executive Team, meets several times a term. One of the major strategies to gain clarity of job roles has been the process for developing their Performance Development Plans (PDPs). The Principal and Deputy have modelled the process for developing their PDPs and facilitated dialogue to discuss and critique the PDPs, and this process has been extended to the rest of the team. A number of leaders talked about the PDPs as a continual work-in-progress, as staff members are continuing to review what they have achieved, or need to achieve, and what strategies they will use. It has enabled them to see how their job role fits with others, and is designed to collectively support the achievement of the school's vision. The PDP process is certainly not seen as a mandatory requirement. The Review Panel identified

performance and professional development as effective practices contributing to the school's improvement, and this is further elaborated on in this report.

Each term a staff survey is conducted to enable the Senior Leaders to collect feedback. The results are transparent and provided in a usable format. Wirreanda Secondary School is an action-orientated school, and the Review Panel heard about changes that have been made as a result of this survey. For example, in one of the surveys, a staff member had commented that staff meetings felt like repetitive information sessions, and this precious time could be used more productively. Staff confirmed that there has subsequently been a more streamlined approach to conveying information and decisions, and staff meeting time is now focused on professional development. While still challenging at times, student behaviour is now managed differently, and data and anecdotal comments indicate this has improved. The initial focus on managing student behaviour was also influenced by staff responses to the survey.

Wirreanda Secondary School actively seeks to introduce innovative practices to build and embrace confident and diverse learners for now and into their futures. The Year 8 approach to Project-Based Learning (PBL) introduced this year is one example. The initiative aims to challenge the notion of knowledge being fragmented and 'siloed' into disciplines, whereas the real-world knowledge, problem-solving and breakthroughs, are based on interdisciplinary and connected approaches. The initiative focuses on skills and capabilities that are at the core of all the disciplines, such as communication, critical and creative thinking, digital literacies, teamwork and citizenship. This initiative has also been designed to challenge students' reliance on textbooks and teachers as the font of knowledge, and to support an inquiry-based pedagogy. This approach has been trialled this year. The Review Panel noted the passion and energy that the staff involved have brought to this initiative.

Over time, there has been a multitude of innovations and changes in education, not all of which have resulted in improvements to learning. The key to deepening our understanding as to whether innovative practices are actually improvements is through evaluation. The evaluation process seeks to determine the extent to which a program has done what was intended, and to signpost next steps in relation to the various adjustments or redesign of elements that needs to be made. In some extreme cases, an evaluation of a program will actually signal the need for it to be abandoned but, even then, it will inform the educational leadership of various design features important to the success of any new replacement program. For a program evaluation to be at its most effective, it is important that stakeholders are open to what might be surfaced and committed to use its findings to inform future decisions. It is acknowledged that the PBL initiative is in its "early days", and that important adjustments have been made already. These have been made based on the understanding emerging through the school's natural feedback processes. However, at some stage, there will need to be a comprehensive evaluation of a program of this importance and magnitude.

Innovations are not the only programs that need to be evaluated in order to make judgements about the effectiveness of a strategy. Inclusive Education, as a major intervention strategy, also needs to be evaluated to determine whether students are making ground in their academic progress and self-concepts, more than they would make if they were not out of their mainstream subject and, more to the point, which students it is working for, and who is not benefiting from the current approach.

A key part of leadership is to be able to think strategically, to lead and manage change, and to lead evaluative practices at the faculty and program levels. The Review Panel concluded that the next stage of building the leadership capacity relates to supporting teachers to deepen their capacities in differentiating and personalising learning, in the analysis and use of data and evidence for planning at all levels of the school and in evaluation. The aim is to ensure rigour and improvement in achievement, and progress and engagement that are sustainable and embedded. The ongoing development of leaders' capacities is key to the school being able to achieve its vision and strategic plan.

### **Direction 3**

**Build the capacities of leaders to support and lead pedagogical shifts within their teams, analyse and use data, and think and act strategically.**

### 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 Wirreanda Secondary School.

The WAVE model provides effective pathways for students in Flexible Learning Options. The model has achieved a balance between a strong focus on achievement and accreditation, and sustained engagement of young people in their schooling. There is a strong team orientation amongst the school staff and non-government and private providers. The school has ensured that the expectations of external stakeholders are clear and articulated in the contractual arrangements. The WAVE Team has worked to provide a coherent model for students, and to ensure there is a common language and approach by all providers in the service. There are strong connections to expert groups such as SAMHRI, and the WAVE school staff are committed to learning from others. Continuous improvement is a feature of the program, and staff are involved in analysing relevant datasets to inform immediate actions and future planning.

Wirreanda Secondary School was externally reviewed by DECD in 2010. The school received recommendations, which related to the development of a more rigorous approach to professional learning and performance development, and the Review Panel verified there has been a significant change since that time, in which the culture of learning has been enhanced. Weekly PD, regular year or faculty level 'huddles, and Teach Meets', where teachers learn from each other, have all been put in place. This in-school approach is supported by external PD opportunities, including participation in SACE clarifying forums. There is a clear expectation that each staff member has a Personal Development Plan (PDP), and these are used to clarify job roles and responsibilities, the outcomes expected in the role, and how their job role connects to others within and beyond the immediate team. The transparent process of developing and critiquing the PDPs has been instructive, and has contributed to the school's positive culture.

These effective practices relate to Educational Leadership and Effective School Community Partnerships in the External School Review Framework. Evidence of these practices was verified through interviews with leaders, documentation, including copies of PDPs, observation in the WAVE program and discussions with students and staff.

## OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2017

Wirreanda Secondary School has a culture of improvement characterised by high expectations for students. Effective leadership is providing strategic directions and planning. Teachers are provided with and use structured time for ongoing collaborative professional learning.

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

1. Deepen teachers' pedagogical practices to provide explicit instruction, effectively differentiate and personalise learning, to make learning intentions clear, and to use formative assessment practices to effectively plan and respond to students' learning needs.
2. Develop the systems to provide data and evidence, and the capacity of staff to analyse and use data, to enable more targeted teaching and interventions at a student, year, faculty, cohort and program level.
3. Build the capacities of leaders to support and lead pedagogical shifts within their teams, analyse and use data, and think and act strategically.

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



Tony Lunniss  
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 three months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's Annual Report.



Caroline Fishpool  
PRINCIPAL  
WIRREANDA SECONDARY 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 Wirreanda Secondary School has verified that the school is compliant in 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 2016 was 83.3%.

## 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 54% 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 results of similar students across the DECD system.

In 2016 NAPLAN Reading, 4%, or 6 of 148 of students achieved in the top two bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 8%, or 2 of 25 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 9 in 2016, and 37.5%, or 3 of 8 students from Year 7 remained in the upper bands at Year 9 in 2016.

#### Numeracy

In 2016, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 50% 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 results of similar students across the DECD system.

In 2016 NAPLAN Reading, 2%, or 3 of 147 of students achieved in the top two bands.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 10%, or 2 of 20 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 9 in 2016, and 14%, or 1 of 7 students remained in the upper bands from Year 7 to Year 9 in 2016.

#### SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2016, 40% 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 their SACE. There has been an upward trend from 83% to 93% between 2014 and 2016. This result for October SACE completion represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2016, 81% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 90% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Literacy units, 78% successfully completed their Stage 1 Numeracy units, and 98% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

Ninety-four percent of grades achieved in the 2016 SACE Stage 2 were C- or higher. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average. Between 2013 and 2016, the trend has been upwards, from 81% in 2013 to 94% in 2016. Twenty-five percent of students completed SACE using VET and there were 145 students enrolled in the Flexible Learning Options program in 2016.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2016, 6% of students achieved an 'A' Grade, and 32% achieved a 'B' Grade. These results represented an improvement from the historic baseline averages.

In terms of 2016 tertiary entrance, 42 out of 81 potential students achieved an ATAR. Of these, 32 students applied through SATAC for a tertiary course. Fifteen of these students, or 47%, received offers of their first choice. A further 6 received 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> choice offers.