

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

## REPORT FOR MAGILL SCHOOL

Conducted in April 2016



**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.*

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

### **Policy compliance**

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

The Principal of Magill 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 2015 was 94.8%, which is above the DECD target of 93%.

### **School context**

Magill School caters for children from Reception to Year 7. It is situated in the eastern suburbs of Adelaide in the Morialta ECD local Partnership. The enrolment in 2016 is currently 792 students and has steadily increased. There are 11 Junior Primary and 17 Primary classes. The Junior Primary and Primary School amalgamated in 2011. The school underwent a significant re-build to ensure that the school's architecture facilitated learning from Reception to Year 7.

The school is classified as Category 7 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. The school's ICSEA score in 2015 was 1119. The school population includes 3 Aboriginal students, 36 Students with Disabilities and 1 student under the Guardianship of the Minister. The profile includes 60.3% students of Non-English Speaking Background (NESB), including students transitioning from specialist Intensive English Language Centres in other schools into mainstream classes at Magill School.

The Principal was appointed in August 2011 and led the amalgamation of the 2 schools. The Leadership Team includes a Deputy Principal, Senior Leader R-7 and 3 Coordinators.

### **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 the early years, reading progress is monitored against Running Records. In 2015, 83% of Year 1 and 89% of Year 2 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA). This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

In 2015, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 91% of Year 3 students, 90% of Year 5 students and 95% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Years 3 and 5, this result represents little or no change, and for Year 7, an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 7 has been upwards, from 89% in 2013 to 95% in 2015%.

For 2015 Year 5 and 7 NAPLAN Reading, the school is achieving higher than the results of similar students across DECD schools.

Between 2010 and 2015, the school has consistently achieved higher in Year 7 NAPLAN Reading relative to the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools.

In 2015, 50% of Year 3, 49% of Year 5 and 50% of Year 7 students achieved in the top two 2015 NAPLAN Reading bands. For Year 3, this result represents a decline from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 71%, or 35 of 49

students from Year 3, remain in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015, and 77%, or 24 of 31 students from Year 3, remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. The retention of Year 3 students to Year 5 represented an improvement, whereas retention from Year 3 to 7 represented little or no change from the historic baseline average.

### Numeracy

In 2015, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 89% of Year 3 students, 84% of Year 5 students and 98% of Year 7 students demonstrated the expected achievement under the DECD SEA. For Year 3, this result represents little or no change, for Year 5 a decline and, for Year 7, an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2013 and 2015, the trend for Year 7 has been an upwards, from 91% in 2013 to 98% in 2015.

For 2015, Years 3 and 7 NAPLAN Numeracy, the school is achieving higher than the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools.

Between 2010 and 2015, the school has consistently achieved higher in Year 7 NAPLAN Numeracy relative to the results of similar groups of students across DECD schools.

In 2015, 47% of Year 3 students achieved in the top two 2015 NAPLAN Numeracy bands, representing an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 68%, or 28 of 41 students from Year 3, remained in the upper bands at Year 5 in 2015, and 77%, or 17 of 22 students from Year 3, remained in the upper bands at Year 7 in 2015. The retention of Year 3 students to Year 5 represented an improvement, whereas retention from Year 3 to 7 represented little or no change from the historic baseline average.

### Lines of Inquiry

During the review process, the panel focused on three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

<b>Student Learning:</b>	<b>To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?</b>
<b>School Community Partnerships:</b>	<b>How authentic is the influence of students on their learning and throughout the school?</b>
<b>Effective Leadership:</b>	<b>How well does leadership facilitate the development of coherent high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?</b>

### To what extent are students engaged and intellectually challenged in their learning?

The Governing Council members and parents who spoke to the Review Panel, identified the use of achievement data to track progress and identify learning needs early in children's schooling, as one of the major positive initiatives in the school in recent years. The progress students are making through participation in intervention programs is closely tracked and reviewed once a term. On the basis of this data, the school has continually reviewed and adapted the intervention systems to ensure there is a positive impact.

All students in Years 3, 5 and 7 participated in NAPLAN (that is, no exemptions), and all students from Year 1 to 7 have been tested in reading, mathematics, and science, using standardised tests developed by the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER). Almost all students at Magill School have achieved well over time and half the students achieved in the upper proficiency bands. As outlined in the School Performance Overview section of this report, it is evident that Magill School has continued to improve student achievement in most areas.

The Review Panel investigated the extent that students are intellectually challenged and engaged.

The Review Panel observed that students in the Junior Primary classes are highly engaged and actively involved in their learning tasks. They talked about the STAR model (*sorts out, think about, act and reflect on*) used particularly in mathematics to solve problems. Students indicated they like this process, especially the reflection aspect. Many parents of young children talked about their surprise in how quickly students were learning to recognise words, read and write. They were aware that teachers were promoting greater independence and responsibility, and viewed this positively. One teacher was using Science, Mathematics, Engineering and Technology (STEM) methodology and digital technology to teach coding. Students were highly motivated and able to talk about what they were designing and learning from the activity.

Students and parents provided examples of tasks involving students in Years 3 to 5 in using integrated learning. One example mentioned over and over again, was the 'Ballarat' trip in 2015, in which students were involved in an in-depth study of the gold rush. The learning involved students inquiring, gathering and organising information in connected and integrated ways across curriculum areas. Other examples involved students in planning and designing an outdoor area with a budget, making cakes to raise money on a limited budget, and others had worked out the area of the human body.

When asked what makes their learning engaging, this cohort of students talked about real-life problem-solving using the STAR method and using different strategies to come up with the same answer. Students gave examples of teachers helping them construct questions to support an inquiry approach, and also to ascertain their comprehension of texts.

In the Upper Primary, students talked about the use of digital technology and STEM as being motivational and enabling them to present what they have learnt in different ways. The specialist areas were identified by students as providing opportunities for creativity in drama and music, and through the Term 4 presentation of a play in one class. In science, students learnt the 3 laws of motion and gravitational pull, and were required to design and build a model to represent their understanding.

The extent that creative and critical thinking was intentionally incorporated into the design of learning and learning tasks was less evident within the Year 6 and 7 classes. Some students described learning in Year 7 as getting ready for high school, and stretch was provided through 'extension' tasks.

Some students articulated learning as equating with test results, or completing the set assignments. Others said they knew when they were learning as they really concentrated on the task and were required to think. Many talked about using their imaginative thinking in writing, art, science and technology (STEM), and not in other learning areas within their classroom.

At the beginning of this year, the Principal shared her vision with the staff and talked about: "Know thy impact." She talked about her expectations that one year of school must equal one year of learning in every class. Parents and members of the Governing Council told the Review Panel that the quality of their children's learning experiences was very much teacher-dependent. The intention of the school leadership to reduce this variability in achievement, progress and engagement was evident in the school's Annual Operational Plan and Improvement Plan.

The design of learning tasks and the associated assessment is tied to the extent students are engaged and intellectually stretched. Teachers from Years 3 to 5 showed an awareness of this link as they talked about students needing to show how they can transfer and apply their learning into new contexts. At the time of the review, it was not evident that creative and critical thinking was intentionally and systematically incorporated into learning design in curriculum areas, particularly in the Upper Primary Years. This needs to be systematically addressed to support students to be creative, innovative, enterprising and adaptable to embrace the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **Direction 1**

**To engage and intellectually stretch students, teachers intentionally incorporate the General Capability of creative and critical thinking into their learning design and assessment, particularly in Years 6 and 7.**

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

Student voice in student learning and the broader decision-making of the school can be a powerful tool for improving the performance of students in their learning achievement. Research shows that the benefit of involvement of students comes when it is a sustained activity and in the manner in which others respond to their ideas. The greater the authenticity of students' voice, the greater the impact on their ability to articulate and reflect on their learning.

Student voice is valued by most staff at Magill School. The school has an articulated policy supported by Student Voice facilitators (i.e. teachers) being released to work with the elected student representatives. The school recognises that there is a close connection between levels of engagement in learning and achievement. This is demonstrated by the overarching School Improvement Plan, which seeks to improve both engagement and achievement in Mathematics and Literacy.

The Review Panel investigated the extent to which the school's policy is being enacted and enables authentic student voice.

The Junior Primary Student Council meets regularly. Students learn the skills of chairing the meeting, recording the decisions, time-keeping and observing. The observer provides feedback and reflection on the conduct of the meeting. These skills are being further developed within classrooms as each class has a meeting to discuss their ideas and initiatives.

In the Years 3 to 5 forum, students reported all classes have regular meetings and discuss problems. Students described the voting procedures involving voting slips and participation of all students. They gave examples of decisions they had made and the actions that had ensued.

In the Upper Primary, the Review Panel was informed by students that only half the Year 6 classes held regular meetings. In Year 7, the forum was structured around sports day teams and it was not clear whether the elected representatives had met during Term 1.

The Middle Years Development Instrument (MYDI) survey was completed by 170 Year 6 and 7 students in 2015. Their response highlighted that students value 'learning new things' above 'getting good grades' or 'making new friends'.

The Review Panel considered the extent that student voice and influence was evident within the classroom learning. The inquiry and STAR models provided an opportunity for students to have choice, to apply their learning to real-life contexts, and to be involved in reflection. Students talked about PE as being a curriculum area in which they are involved in planning, designing the skill focus, equipment needed and activities, to enable students to learn the intended skills. This process enables students to have a much greater understanding of the learning process and when they are 'learning new things.' In classes where the main pedagogy is teacher direction, students were less able to articulate what they are learning and when they are learning new things.

The MYDI survey also sought to identify students' perceptions of their social and emotional disposition, particularly as it related to being engaged and stretched in their learning. Students were asked about their sense of accomplishment and the extent to which they plan and stick to things until completion. The results showed that the level of perseverance was the lowest in the social and emotional domain. This disposition is essential as students progress through their education.

The Review Panel concluded that the student voice forums provide a vehicle for gaining greater understanding of what is meant by intellectual stretch, engagement, perseverance and learning. As stated earlier in this report, many students in the Upper Primary thought they were learning when they completed their work or passed their assignments and tests. This is a view of learning that needs to be challenged, if students are to develop greater perseverance. Furthermore, the school needs to develop an agreement about the pedagogies that have a positive impact. The student voice forums have the capacity to take a lead role in shaping this work.

#### **Direction 2**

**Strengthen student influence on their learning and throughout the school, and align the work of student voice forums more closely with the school priorities of engagement and intellectual stretch.**

**How well does leadership facilitate the development of coherent high quality curriculum planning and effective teaching?**

The need for coherence between classes and year levels to support student learning has been emphasised as the school has been amalgamated and steadily increased in enrolment. The importance of common language, consistent expectations of benchmarks and coherent approaches was well-understood by teachers at Magill School. The Review Panel met with representatives from each of the sub-school teams. Each team talked about joint planning, and common topics were provided as examples of collaborative work.

The school has documented agreements on the teaching of phonics and grammar in Reception to Year 2, and a genre map outlining the text types to be explicitly taught at the respective year levels. There is a mathematics agreement from Reception to Year 5, which sets out the expectation that teachers will teach fluency, understanding and problem-solving using the STAR method. Students referred to 'mental maths' in interviews with the Review Panel and indicated their belief that the fast-paced mental computation practice was helping them. This agreement has not yet been extended to incorporate the expected pedagogies in the Upper Primary.

The genre map sets out the language and grammar focus in each of the genres, and the topics and tasks across the year. It also incorporates the teaching of writing for a purpose as it relates to each curriculum area. This work is strongly supported by the EALD teachers, who model within classrooms, followed by withdrawal of students requiring extra English language tuition. They have also led the moderation of writing samples to support teachers in gaining greater consistency in the way which they mark and grade student writing. Both students and teachers spoke about this approach as being effective, as they could see improvements in students' writing samples through the course of the first term.

The school has documented the assessment tools to diagnose and support reading acquisition. It sets out the reading targets at students' instructional levels in Reception to Year 2, and Lexile levels in Years 3 to 7.

The school has decided that the teaching of reading is an area needing attention to develop greater consistency of explicit teaching. This work would appear to be most timely. In the interviews with the Review Panel, students were asked how they were taught to improve their reading skills. The responses included: silent reading, reading out loud, read slowly at first, read a lot, read in front of the whole class, read at night, read in a group and comprehension exercises 'from cards'. Lexiles are used to track students' reading levels. This system does not, however, inform teachers of the strategies students are using to comprehend texts, nor does it replace explicit teaching. Students were able to tell the Review Panel their reading levels, but not what to do or how to improve to get to the next level.

Some classes, especially in the Junior Primary and middle section of the school use guided reading pedagogy in which teachers work with small groups. In the Middle Primary the focus was on comprehension skills, which clearly aligned with the literacy strand (interpreting, analysing, evaluating texts) of the English Curriculum.

As the school works towards a common agreement on the teaching of reading, there needs to be an expectation of explicit teaching of higher-order comprehension skills across learning areas. While almost all students are achieving the SEA in reading, as measured by NAPLAN, this should not limit rigour, intellectual stretch and engagement in learning experiences provided to students. In developing this agreement, teachers and leaders need to consider how they will 'know thy impact' and evaluate that the practices are being consistently and effectively enacted in every classroom.

**Direction 3**

**To provide coherent, rigorous and engaging learning experiences for students, develop, document and embed whole-school agreements into practice, particularly in regard to the teaching of reading.**

## OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Magill School has demonstrated continuous growth in student achievement. Leadership provides strategic direction, planning and targeted interventions. Self-review processes are regularly and strategically used to determine the impact school strategies and practices are having on student achievement. Data is used to inform decisions and actions at the individual student, class and whole-school levels.

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

1. To engage and intellectually stretch students, teachers intentionally incorporate the General Capability of creative and critical thinking into their learning design and assessment, particularly in Years 6 and 7.
2. Strengthen student influence on their learning and throughout the school and align the work of student voice forums more closely with the school priorities of engagement and intellectual stretch.
3. To provide coherent, rigorous and engaging learning experiences for students, develop, document and embed whole-school agreements into practice, particularly in regard to the teaching of reading.

Based on the school's current performance, Magill School will be externally reviewed again in 2020.



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Jayne Johnston  
CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

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.

Di Fletcher  
PRINCIPAL  
MAGILL SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson