

Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Murray Bridge High School

Conducted in August 2021



Review details

Our education system aspires to become the best in Australia by seeking growth for every student, in every class and in every school.

The purpose of the External School Review (ESR) is to support schools to raise achievement, sustain high performance and to provide quality assurance to build and sustain public confidence in government schools.

The External School Review framework is referenced throughout all stages of the ESR process.

This report outlines aspects of the school's performance verified through the review process according to the framework. It does not document every aspect of the school's processes, programs, and outcomes.

We acknowledge the support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community. While not all review processes, artefacts and comments are documented here, they have all been considered and contribute to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Christine Bell, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Roley Coulter and Mike Clark, Review Principals.

Review Process

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

Presentation from the Principal

Class visits

Attendance at staff meeting

Document analysis

Discussions with:

- Governing Council representatives
- Leaders
- Parent groups
- School Services Officers (SSOs)
- Student representatives
- Teachers.

School context

Murray Bridge High School caters for young people from year 8 to 12. It is situated 80kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2021, is 1060. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 1070. The local partnership is Murraylands.

The school has a ICSEA score of 938 and is classified as Category 2 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 13% Aboriginal students, 10% students with disabilities, 4% students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, less than 5% young people in care and 51% of students eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a:

- Principal in the 3rd year of tenure
- Assistant Principal – Senior years
- Assistant Principal – Middle years
- Assistant Principal – Engagement and wellbeing
- Assistant Principal – Diversity and Inclusion
- Assistant Principal – Entrepreneurial Learning
- Business Manager

There are 83 Teachers including 11 in the early years of their career and 2 Step 9 Teachers.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

- Direction 1** **Establish whole-school expectations for the learning of all students, and the alignment of resources, policies, and procedures to support this.**
- Direction 2** **Provide opportunities for all teachers to implement a whole-school focus on growing students' skills and capabilities, regularly sharing their strategies and being accountable for their effectiveness.**
- Direction 3** **Collaboratively develop a strategic plan that meets the needs of all students, includes a cohesive approach across years 8 to 12, and effectively embeds self-review processes.**

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

Direction 1: Murray Bridge High School has a leadership structure with clear areas of responsibility and individualised portfolio improvement plans that have a direct link to the school improvement plan (SIP) and professional development plan (PDP) processes. There is a dedicated team working with Partnership and feeder primary schools to implement a smooth transition for the year 7 to high school students in 2022. The team is valued by staff, Aboriginal students and the community. It ensures collaborative development of learner profiles and one plans for student improvement. While attendance and student engagement remains a focus for the school, there is embedded processes and accountability for collaborative tracking, monitoring, and actions to support all students.

Direction 2: Backward mapping of core skill development across all learning areas has identified the need to introduce a focus on teaching specific vocabulary across all curriculum areas and year levels. This is embedded across the school and the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) achievement growth appears to be a direct link to this strategy. There has been a considerable amount of professional learning about the importance of learning intentions, success criteria, differentiated planning, teaching and assessment to improve student growth. There is a need to remain focused on these high impact strategies to ensure continual improvement occurs. Classroom observations are built into the professional learning process.

Direction 3: Murray Bridge High School Strategic Plan 2021-2025 was established through a consultative process with staff and the wider school community. This document has a clear vision and purpose, with six strategic themes comprising goals, actions, clear guidelines of what success will look like and an inbuilt review process.

Every leader has a portfolio improvement plan (PIP) and accountability for improvement is conducted through presenting this work to the leadership team and governing council. On Wednesday afternoons staff collaborate on learning design, moderation, one plan development, data analysis and self-review. This is a platform for sustained improvement.

Lines of inquiry

Effective school improvement planning

To what extent has the school drawn on evidence of best practice to determine strategies and actions for improvement?

Murray Bridge High School has provided all staff and students opportunities for engagement in teaching and learning through the access of digital technologies as a strategy of best practice. Extensive support for inclusive education students, through technological learning, ensures the students are connected to life and entrepreneurial skills. The panel did however, observe some students mis-using this platform of learning, and there is a challenge for the school to develop statements of expectations around consistent and appropriate use of digital technologies to enhance learning for students educational growth.

The development of a Murray Bridge High School Strategic Plan (2021-2025) is providing a clear direction for the school moving forward. Collaboratively developed through feedback from major stake holders, the plan has a clear purpose, vision, and values. Each focus area has articulated goals, actions, success criteria, and self-review processes embedded. Every leader has a portfolio improvement plan (PIP) and each teacher line managed by the leader, ensures one of the goals is a focus through to their own professional development plan and line managed meetings.

Most staff could articulate the school's goals in the school improvement plan (SIP) and explained the expectation about teaching vocabulary across all year levels. However, very few could provide the panel with evidence around being involved in the step four and five part of the improvement planning cycle. The school has an opportunity with the implementation of the new SIP in 2022, to ensure a collaborative approach to reviewing, refining, and developing goals, targets, and challenges of practice, encouraging all staff to have ownership of the improvement process. The challenge will be to build an alignment between the SIP, portfolio improvement plan, professional learning processes and the classroom, so the whole-school community has a clear understanding of how school priorities are driven by this strategic planning. The school has internal capacity to build these actions for improvement through the recent restructuring of the leadership roles and responsibilities to align with the SIP and external school review (ESR) directions.

Extensive work has been undertaken by the leadership team to provide quality time for staff to engage in effective and targeted professional learning. The school has an opportunity to align meetings to balance the professional growth for all staff.

Direction 1 Further strengthen school improvement planning by collaboratively reviewing documentation to enhance staff ownership and inform the consistency of practice in every classroom across the school.

Effective teaching and student learning

How effectively are teachers using evidence-based pedagogical practices that engage and challenge learners?

Murray Bridge High School provides a variety of choice and pathways with strong student outcomes. Quality time has been allocated for staff professional development and combined planning and it is evident there has been considerable work around curriculum mapping and development. There is opportunity to collaboratively develop statements of expectations to embed the implementation and accountability of high impact teaching strategies and their consistent use in the classroom.

Entrepreneurial pathways provide opportunities for agency, choice and problem solving. Feedback from some teachers to the panel detailed how it provided students with an opportunity to further develop their knowledge and skills. Many students told the panel that feedback from teachers to students varies and depends on the teacher, while feedback to teachers from students around their practice was very limited. The panel saw partial evidence of students having an authentic voice in their learning, and this is an area to be addressed.

Although a strong focus on the department's curriculum resources exists, a challenge for the school to embed a consistent approach to problem solving through higher order thinking skills is imperative, as the panel observed some students utilising textbook learning.

Some students articulated that a few teachers outline the goals of a unit of work when introducing a topic and what the success criteria are. Conversations and classroom observations highlighted limited evidence of differentiation in classes of task design, success criteria and assessment.

Some students articulated the need to be challenged more and appreciated teachers that gave them this opportunity, while some other students voiced their concern for equity. Most parents commented that they felt their children were not always challenged in their learning and would appreciate this happening on a more consistent basis.

The next steps for Murray Bridge High School are to provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on and adjust their practice with the aim of improving effective evidenced based pedagogies to engage students. Allocated quality time and professional learning for teachers to work in teams and reflect with peers on their practice to build teacher understanding of how high impact pedagogies will inform differentiated teaching and is critical in engaging all students in challenging and meaningful learning.

Direction 2 To meet the learning needs of all students by embedding high quality differentiated teaching strategies that enable students to engage and be stretched in their learning.

Effective leadership

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

Murray Bridge High School has re-positioned themselves through strategic planning, implementation, re-branding and documentation of plans and processes as a solid platform for the next level of school improvement. The wider school community appreciates this effort and commented on the positive image of the school through the introduction of new uniforms, neighbourhood learning teams and the construction of a culturally inclusive yarning circle and totems to complement the new buildings.

Most teachers indicated that they receive limited feedback from leadership on their teaching practice. They informed the panel that they would appreciate regular opportunities for peer-to-peer observations and for teachers to have quality time to discuss and provide feedback to their colleagues on their teaching. While the high accomplished teachers (HATs) have provided a strategic lesson observation and feedback for all teachers this year, to further the growth of students' learning, all leaders need to be visible in classrooms and across the school to open opportunities to coach and mentor all staff to support improved pedagogy. Leaders also need to ensure that data informed performance discussions are a feature of performance and development meetings. Embedding this practice by ensuring all leaders have a clear line of sight to effective teaching for every student in every class, and aligning regular feedback with the Australian teaching standards for teachers, will ensure a sustainable culture of learning improvement exists.

While leaders are currently working to understand the lived experience of students and to increase their sense of belonging, there is a need to build upon this work and provide further opportunities for students to have an authentic voice in their learning, school priorities and feedback to teachers. Students at Murray Bridge High are well positioned to become powerful partners in their own learning. Planned opportunities for students to engage in the language of learning and to provide feedback to their teachers about their learning and their teachers' pedagogical practice, will promote academic motivation.

Direction 3 Provide regular feedback on teachers' practice through focused observations and walkthroughs by all levels of leadership.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2021

Murray Bridge High School is to be commended on their support of the South Australian Aboriginal Secondary Training program. Comments from students and their families were very positive about the function of the program and the support they receive. The Independent Learning Centre has strong pathways and SACE outcomes for their students through provision of optimum learning conditions by tracking and responding to students' growth, and intervening cognitively, culturally, socially, and emotionally.

The quality of the leadership team to provide strategic and educational leadership and direction to all staff will strengthen the school's capacity to improve student learning, and raise student achievement and high performance. The school is to be acknowledged for the processes and procedures it has in place to ensure a smooth and successful transition of the year 6 and 7 students into high school in 2022.

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

- Direction 1** Further strengthen school improvement planning by collaboratively reviewing documentation to enhance staff ownership and inform the consistency of practice in every classroom across the school.
- Direction 2** To meet the learning needs of all students by embedding high quality differentiated teaching strategies that enable students to engage and be stretched in their learning.
- Direction 3** Provide regular feedback on teachers' practice through focused observations and walkthroughs by all levels of leadership.

Based on the school's current performance, Murray Bridge High School will be externally reviewed again in 2024.



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Governing Council Chairperson

Appendix 1

School performance overview

The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the Department for Education Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Reading

In 2019 the reading results as measured by NAPLAN indicate that 62% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019 the trend for year 9 has been upwards from 39% to 62%.

For 2019 year 9 NAPLAN reading the school is higher than the results of similar students across government schools.

In 2019 11% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 9 this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading 50% or 12 out of 24 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

Numeracy

In 2019 the numeracy results as measured by NAPLAN indicate that 66% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019 the trend for year 9 has been upwards from 40% to 66%.

For 2019 year 9 NAPLAN numeracy the school is achieving higher than the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2019 8% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN numeracy bands. For year 9 this result represents little or no change from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019 the trend for year 9 has been upwards from 5% to 8%.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy 39% or 7 out of 18 students from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2020 80% of students enrolled in February and 99% of those enrolled in October who had the potential to complete their SACE did go on to successfully achieve SACE. This result for October SACE completion represents little or no change from the historic baseline average

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2019 95% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 95% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 literacy units, 90% successfully completed their Stage 1 numeracy units and 98% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2020 99% of grades achieved were at 'C- 'level or higher, 11% of grades were at an 'A' level and 43% of grades were at a 'B' level. This result represents an improvement for

all grades from the historic baseline averages.

Fifty-nine percent of students completed SACE using VET.

In terms of 2020 tertiary entrance 24%, or 34 out of 141 potential students, achieved an ATAR or TAFE SA selection score. No students were successful in achieving a merit.