

The Department for Education

External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for School of Languages

Conducted in May 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 Tony Sullivan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Antoinette Jones, Review Principal.

School context

The School of Languages administrative base is located approximately 8km north-west of the Adelaide CBD. The school caters for learners from reception to year 12 from government (151), Catholic (58) and Independent (48) schools.

Language classes are held in schools across Adelaide, with Adelaide High School and Glenunga International High School being the largest teaching centres. Approximately 22 other teaching centres across Adelaide offer 27 languages at various year levels in response to local demand. Students come together after school hours to learn the language of their choice, which is not available in their home school.

The School of Languages has a current enrolment of approximately 300 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. Enrolment has grown steadily over time, with a gradual increase in primary enrolments, and comprises of 46% of students in reception to year 7, 16% of students in years 8 to 10, and 38% of students in years 11 to 12.

The school population comprises broad cultural diversity with many students coming from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The school leadership team consists of a principal, 2 assistant principals, and 6 coordinators of curriculum and pedagogy.

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:

Improvement Agenda: In what ways do teachers use data and evidence about their learners at the classroom and school level to plan, monitor, assess and evaluate student achievement and growth over time?

Effective Teaching: To what extent do teachers differentiate the learning to engage and challenge all students?

School Community Partnerships: In what ways are students encouraged to engage with and authentically influence learning?

In what ways do teachers use data and evidence about their learners at the classroom and school level to plan, monitor, assess and evaluate student achievement and growth over time?

The School of Languages has ample datasets to draw upon to support successful strategic planning and operation. Evident in the school's documented self-review schedule for 2018 is a summary of the extent

of data available to the leadership team and staff on an annual basis. This data includes: demographic, perception, process and student learning achievement data.

Due to the specialised nature of the school, the learning data related to the standard of educational achievement (SEA) available to the school is that of SACE and IB performance at year 12, and the A-E grades allocated in languages aligned to the Australian Curriculum (AC) standards from year 1 to 10. The SACE and IB data indicates high-level achievement by students completing year 12 (see Appendix 2). The moderation of assessment from the SACE Board indicates that the school has improved significantly in its judgements about student performance, indicating the school is setting students up for success in languages throughout the senior years.

The AC languages implementation by ACARA was fully rolled-out in 2017. Whilst teaching staff familiarised themselves with the curriculum and associated standards earlier than required, they only began to report against these standards in 2017. The panel was provided with ample documented evidence of the collection, collation, monitoring and tracking of student progress using the A-E grade scores.

Clear evidence of data analysis trials for years 1 to 10 began in terms 2, 3 and 4 2016, with an initial attempt to use a 3-tier 'traffic light' system to identify students: 'satisfactory or above', 'in danger of being at risk' and 'at risk'. Each time the data was analysed, suggestions for improvement to the construct of the data were incorporated to provide better insights into data analysis. The panel sighted a few variations in the way data is presented to elicit trends for further investigation by leadership and staff.

The school has a learner data management system (Accelerus) that now presents the SEA 'grade' data in the A-E standards. The data is presented to professional learning teams (PLTs) 3 times a year to reflect on the progress of students in each of the language classes. Teachers are provided with inquiry questions and are asked to reflect on the progress made by each student term-to-term. The panel witnessed 2 PLTs in operation during the review, and commends the school for its developmental and focused approach to monitoring student achievement. In considering the documentation provided, and the process conducted, the panel examined the following:

- What is the current level of reliability of teacher judgement in assigning an A-E grade?
- When considering learning progress from one term to the next, how can this be determined by 'teacher judgement and not just grades'?
- What teaching strategies are impacting on student learning and how do you know?

The panel discovered that a broad range of teaching strategies was recorded anecdotally from the PLT discussions in response to these inquiry questions. While the sharing and documentation of strategies is a useful process, this perception data could be further synthesised to identify a few key practices that are making an impact. Building high-leverage teaching practices, steeped in evidence, across all classes and languages in a strategic way will further enrich this effective improvement process employed by the student learning achievement committee.

Direction 1

Ensure the accuracy and validity of A-E grade data (SEA) from years 1 to 10 through effective design, assessment and moderation of learning across all languages.

Direction 2

Aggregate the A-E grade data in ways that supports further analysis to identify/explore patterns and trends in support of school improvement.

To what extent do teachers differentiate the learning to engage and challenge all students?

Teachers are provided with high-quality, comprehensive and relevant school documentation about the professional expectations with respect to planning, assessing, recording, reporting and tracking for learning and learner achievement. There is little room for ambiguity on organisational requirements of teachers engaged by the school. In particular, the planning components of course overviews, modules and lesson plans are of a high quality, and create clarity of expectation across the teaching team. All of these aspects were evident in high-quality documentation provided to the review panel.

There was also solid evidence to indicate that these key documents were 'iterative' in nature. The panel noted that improvement elements introduced into this planning process included:

- profiling student interests and strengths to better engage them
- introducing learning intentions and success criteria into lesson plans to make learning more visible, and
- identifying students requiring intervention if 'at risk' in terms of their success in learning a language.

Classes are multi-dimensional, not dissimilar to other mainstream schools, where teachers are required to differentiate the learning to meet the varying needs, abilities, backgrounds and year levels in any one class across a range of subjects. A skilled approach to differentiated teaching is a requirement within the class structures. An added complexity is that some teachers of smaller candidature languages are overseas-trained, and many language teachers are part-time employees, presenting inherent challenges for building highly effective and coherent pedagogical practice across the school. The student demographic has also changed in recent years, with growth in numbers at the primary years, requiring more age-appropriate practices and activities to be considered.

There has been significant strategic work undertaken across the school to build consistent high-level expectations in programming, planning and scaffolding the learning based on the current curriculum frameworks (AC, SACE and IB). The 'Student Learning and Achievement Policy' (updated 19 Dec 2017) documents 'Teaching for Effective Learning' (TfEL) 'as the basis for all teaching and learning'. The panel found evidence of reference to skilled teaching practice in 2 pieces of documentation: Teacher practice – what would be seen and heard in your classroom' and TfEL and School of Languages Classroom Practice. The panel noted that the planning exemplars provided to teachers emphasised lesson content and learning activities more than the teaching strategies required in engaging and challenging all students. Incorporating high-leverage strategies into the planning framework may help emphasise the important balance between curriculum and teaching.

Some parents believed that more challenge could be accommodated in the learning program. However, this concept of challenge was limited to 'harder' or 'higher-level' work. It is important that the concept of providing challenge in learning is expanded and enacted in a variety of ways in the classroom, and that these concepts are communicated to parents to build their understanding about how their child is being challenged. For example, the school reported in its annual report that there is more work to progress in developing 'deeper learning around intercultural understandings, inquiry questions and student reflection'. There are valid teaching strategies to engage and challenge learners, which should be incorporated into the school's future improvement work.

The Student Learning and Achievement committee role statement, located in the staff handbook, has 3 clearly defined objectives:

- Curriculum leadership
- Monitor curriculum, assessment and reporting, and
- Monitor learner achievement and growth.

The design of high-quality teaching practice is 'silent', as an important functionary role of this committee. The role of the committee needs to explicitly expand to include a focus on effective teaching.

The panel considered exemplars of staff professional development plans for Step 9, line management meeting agenda and notations, staff professional learning plans and feedback from line manager observations in class. There were a few references to the need to 'differentiate teaching' within these documents; however, they were not explicitly at the forefront of improvement strategies to be implemented consistently from all staff. There were some references to the AITSL professional teacher standards in this documentation but limited reference to the TfEL pedagogical framework.

The effective PLT model, currently investigating the use and analysis of assessment data, is a powerful avenue to build successful teaching practice. Teams are relatively small, aligned in faculties, and well-led by members of the leadership team. These teams are important for both professional support and growth. Staff-written feedback to the panel indicated a desire for leaders to communicate administrative matters in different ways and maximise opportunities for PLTs to connect more. Parents confirmed that a focus on quality teaching practices, particularly for younger students, would support a strong start to engagement and success in learning a language through these important early years.

When staff were asked to document for the panel the teaching practice having the strongest impact on learning from their perspective, there were many and varied responses. Whilst all were relevant, the practice mentioned more predominantly than any other was that of differentiation. The panel acknowledges that effective evidence-based teaching strategies will have the single biggest impact on student learning. Within the school's context, differentiated teaching is a natural next step in the school's improvement journey to raise engagement, growth and achievement in learning.

Direction 3

Continue to build the understanding and practice of differentiating teaching to meet the varying needs and abilities of learners in each class setting.

Direction 4

Expand the opportunities for the professional learning teams to collaboratively build the professional practice of teachers.

In what ways are students encouraged to engage with and authentically influence learning?

Students come together after school hours to learn languages not offered in their home school. For the majority of students this is an extra commitment beyond their normal curriculum provision. Students attend 1 lesson per week, with the length of lessons varying between primary and secondary. Within this context, the need for highly structured lesson plans connected with expected coverage of curriculum content is paramount. Both aspects are covered exceptionally well.

Learning intentions and success criteria were evident in many lesson plans collected by the panel. However, in classes with various year levels, there was little evidence of these being broken into different entry and exit points for learners working at different year level standards. Some teachers provided evidence of assessment rubrics used with students to explicitly describe the outcomes being sought and

how they would be evaluated. Opportunities exist for students to influence the type of classroom activities and format of assessments applied in their learning.

The school's future work on learning design and moderation presents a viable opportunity to connect the above approaches for teachers to make the learning visible to students. Building a written and oral repository of year level exemplars for students will provide further clarity for them around standards and expectations. Empowering students to self-assess and moderate their own work would be a powerful long-term outcome. Having these exemplars available online for students to access will be an important resource development. Teachers will firstly need to scaffold this through their professional learning.

Interviews with younger students reinforced the structure of lessons. Students readily described regular features as: roll-marking, visualising learning through videos, and distribution of the following week's homework. These students generally expressed that they did not influence the learning to any great extent. This may be an unintended outcome of tight lesson structures and the need to cover curriculum content in the format of 1 lesson per week.

Similarly, older students indicated verbally, and in writing, few strategies used by teachers that presented opportunities to regularly influence their learning. Students recognised the time pressures associated with curriculum coverage. A few strategies cited by the students where they had some influence included making suggestions and connecting to cultural aspects (for example, pop culture) in learning.

Students acknowledged the role of communication and learning technologies in supporting their skill and understanding in learning a language. Students liked the use of the interactive whiteboards within lessons as it integrates multimedia platforms (for example, videos, songs and music). Staff, school council members and students confirmed the importance of songs, pictures, dance, videos, music and stories presented through this medium to stimulate and demonstrate language in context, particularly in the early years of schooling.

At the end of each lesson teachers are responsible for providing the weekly lesson plan to students and parents alike to ensure that each lesson is connected and reinforced at home. This is done in 2 ways: students are provided with a hard copy, and a copy is accessible by students and parents via the school's secure online learning platform (Edmodo). A class security code is provided on the hard copy lesson plan. When the effectiveness of this tool was evaluated during the review, there was a number of anomalies discovered, such as reduced regular usage of Edmodo by teachers from 2017 to 2018, and some parents not being aware of Edmodo and its role in connecting the learning between school and home.

The panel considers the above an important platform in the learning process, enabling parents to view, discuss, support and reinforce the learning being undertaken by their children. Staff are able to include links and online references for students to access from home to further their learning, and students are able to pose questions, seek help and communicate with their teacher when necessary. For these reasons, the panel views the effective and efficient use of this e-learning platform as an important learning resource to be developed further as a 'blended learning' approach.

Direction 5

Further develop the application and use of communication and learning technologies to support student engagement and achievement in languages beyond the classroom.

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 the School of Languages.

Strategic leadership: the school is an important contributor to the quality provision and delivery of languages across the metropolitan area. The nature and complexity of the school's demography requires highly effective policies, structures, systems and processes to ensure that the school delivers quality programs. Leadership is vital to successful school operations. Members of the leadership team also confirmed the improved school effectiveness since the expansion of roles. The principal was acknowledged as a reflective learner who is focused on building the capacity of others. The PLT structure was also valued by staff, as it enables them to connect their work with colleagues in a supportive environment. Staff acknowledged the important link in the teams to other faculty members, and support provided from the assigned member of the leadership team.

Curriculum development and implementation: the school has engaged strongly in the roll-out of the Australian Curriculum over the past few years. This was clear in all documentation accessed by the review panel. Documents relating to overviews, modules, lesson plans, assessment and reporting, and tracking learning, represent quality artefacts to support teachers in designing and assessing learning. The clarity of professional expectations for teachers enables them to work with confidence and stability in a unique school environment.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

The School of Languages operates in a highly strategic manner. The school is well-managed, and the staff are engaged, professional and enthusiastic. Self-review processes are used effectively to ensure an improvement focus. Teachers are provided with regular structured time to plan and work together in a variety of ways and team structures.

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

1. Ensure the accuracy and validity of A-E grade data (SEA) from years 1 to 10 through effective design, assessment and moderation of learning across all languages.
2. Aggregate the A-E grade data in ways that supports further analysis to identify/explore patterns and trends in support of school improvement.
3. Continue to build the understanding and practice of differentiating teaching to meet the varying needs and abilities of learners in each class setting.
4. Expand the opportunities for the professional learning teams to collaboratively build the professional practice of teachers.
5. Further develop the application and use of communication and learning technologies to support student engagement and achievement in languages beyond the classroom.

Based on the school's current performance the School of Languages will be externally reviewed again in 2022.



Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY



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.

Lia Tedesco
PRINCIPAL
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES

Governing Council Chairperson

Appendix 1

Attendance policy compliance

Implementation of the Education Department 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 80%.

Appendix 2

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) and made available in a School Performance Report.

Languages offered for students reception to year 10 are studied as additional subjects and beyond their mainstream school hours. Due to the nature of this curriculum provision the School of Languages does not have a departmental school performance report.

Students in years 1 to 10 are graded on a five-point scale (A-E) of achievement against year level curriculum standards. A grading of 'C' or higher indicates the student is achieving at or above the Education Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Currently, these standards are not available in any school performance report. The School of Languages has recently begun collecting and analysing this A-E data to further inform its improvement planning and action. At the time of the External School Review, the school-collected data was not in a format to draw any patterns, trends or evaluative assessment.

However, the school did provide quality data in other forms (demographic, process and perception) that was used by the panel to evaluate school improvement.

SACE and IB Diploma

In 2017, 299 students studied across 29 language courses in 21 languages at SACE Stage 2. Of these students 97% (290) were graded C- or higher. The distribution of grades was as follows:

- A: 43% (129 students)
- B: 41% (122 students)
- C: 13% (39 students)
- Eight students received an A+ with merit.

In 2017, the school had a moderation adjustment of 0.3% across the total number of students whose subjects were graded. This is an outstanding result and represents an improvement from an adjustment of 15% in 2016.

In 2017, 37 students studied an IB language course at year 12. Of these students, 24% (9) students received a 'perfect' score of 7, and 46% (17) students achieved a 'near perfect' score of 6.