Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

School of Languages

Conducted in March 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 Meredith Edwards, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Peta Kourbelis, Review Principal.

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 at which feedback was sought from staff in relation to the Lines of Inquiry
- Document analysis
- Discussions with:
  - School Council representatives
  - Leaders
  - Parent groups
  - Student representatives and past graduates
  - Teachers and HPI teachers of languages

School context

School of Languages caters for young people from reception to year 12. It is situated 8kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2021 is 2,162 single subject enrolments which equates to an FTE of 319.45. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 2006 (300 FTE). The local partnership is West Torrens.

In offering out-of-school language learning, the school has neither an ICSEA score nor a Category of Disadvantage using the Department for Education's Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school's students come from over 270 schools across all 3 education sectors. There is considerable cultural diversity in the student body reflected in the wide range of languages offered with many from non-English speaking backgrounds. In some language classes, all students have a cultural or linguistic background in the language they are learning eg Persian, Dinka, while in other classes the profile is more diverse. Enrolments also include full fee-paying international students, concentrated in Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese classes. However, in 2021 due to COVID-19, the number of international students has decreased to 98 students with most being from China and Vietnam.

The school population includes less than 6 Aboriginal students, 35% of students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) background, and less than 6 children/young people in care. The percentage of students with disabilities and learning needs is 1.8%. School Card assistance is provided only through a student's mainstream school.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in the 3rd year of a 5-year tenure, 3 Assistant Principals: Teaching and Learning (newly appointed in 2021), Student and Staff Services and Public Relations. There are 6 Band 1 Coordinators and a Business Manager.

There are 70 teachers including 18 in the early years of their careers and 12 Step 9 teachers. All teachers are appointed on a part-time basis with fractions ranging from 0.1 FTE to 0.9 FTE. Approximately 75% of the teachers have a cultural background in the language they teach and 50% of teachers were trained overseas.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

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

Nothing is left to chance by the leadership of the School of Languages across all aspects of school improvement planning. The directions from the previous review have been implemented with focus and fidelity. Each of the directions has been incorporated into the 2018 -2021 site improvement plan (SIP) and monitored with rigour. There is a similar level of attention in gaining teacher feedback on improvement processes such as data analysis, the quality of professional learning, opportunities for collaboration, performance development processes, moderation activities and support for online learning during COVID-19. The 2020 Perspectives survey provides evidence that the structures for collaboration are valued and are impacting on teacher reflection on current practice. Recent feedback indicates that teachers seek more opportunities to embed and share successful differentiation practices.

Some parents indicated that they would like to have more than one extended lesson per week. The school plans to investigate the use of learning technologies associated with "Flipped" learning to augment face-to-face language teaching. This will be trialled in term 3 of 2021 after extensive consultation with parents.

Teaching staff are familiar with the role of the Australian Curriculum (AC) content descriptors in designing teaching units. Moderation activities ensure consistency of teacher judgement against the Achievement Standards. Many teachers in the School of Languages play an important role in inter-school moderation activities within the local Secondary Alliance. In the implementation of agreed pedagogies there is more variation across the school. Classes observed ranged from skilled differentiation in multi-level classrooms to more traditional worksheet-based approaches.

Lines of inquiry

Effective school improvement planning

How well does the school critically evaluate current curricular, pedagogical and assessment practice to determine challenges of practice?

Leaders in the School of Languages are committed to ensuring that all teaching staff are kept up to date with current curricular, pedagogical and assessment practices and their implications for implementation in multi-level classes. The large number of teaching sites for the school, as well as the number of part-time teachers, makes this challenging. In response to this challenge, the school requires all staff to be on site on Friday afternoons when professional learning is facilitated. The quality of professional learning in both Focus Days and these afternoon staff meetings is valued by all teaching staff. Also valued are the scheduled times for professional learning teams (PLTs) as opportunities to share the results of differentiation strategies. In addition, staff appreciate this time for informal opportunities to discuss effective teaching practices and resources with colleagues.

Through an inter-connected and well-documented system of school improvement processes, staff are encouraged to learn about, implement and reflect on the impact of intentional pedagogical practices, which include:

- Differentiation is the focus of the Site Improvement Plan's challenge of practice
- Participation in departmental programs such as Learning Design, Assessment and Moderation (LDAM)
- Professional Learning on differentiation
- The identification in Performance Development Plans (PDPs) of one new differentiation strategy to trial. In their final PDP meeting staff report on the impact of this strategy on student learning
- PLTs as a forum for staff to share ideas and resources.

The review team observed some outstanding examples of highly skilled, engaging and differentiated teaching in multi-level classes. However, there were also classes in which more traditional teaching practices predominated, with little evidence of differentiation strategies to support or challenge the range of language learners.

Middle Managers gave examples of the potential of student feedback in improving teacher practice. However, the challenge of encouraging all staff to critically examine sometimes entrenched teaching practices requires the focus of all leaders. Coordinators, in their pedagogical improvement role, would be best supported through curriculum leadership from all executive team members.

Direction 1   **Review the roles and responsibilities of all executive team members with a view to distributing and strengthening leadership of contemporary pedagogical and assessment practices.**

Effective teaching and student learning

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

The vision for the School of Languages is 'to promote excellence in student achievement, professionalism in teaching and richness in learning, to develop deeper understanding of language and culture in the school community and beyond.' This guides school improvement processes. The professional development structures of Focus Days and shorter professional learning in weekly meetings provides staff with access to quality professional learning.

However, the part of the school's vision statement which identifies the criterion for measuring success is 'students can articulate their learning to date, their achievements as referenced against the AC, SACE and IB and their next steps in learning'. This is more challenging in a school that has limited access to a range of data to measure incremental progress within each term or between each year. While classroom observations and student comments indicated that students were learning in their chosen language, there was less evidence that progress in language learning within a term or across years R-10 is tracked. While senior students can map progress using assessment rubrics, term grades are the only indication of levels of achievement for students in most primary and middle school classes. There is a need for an additional mechanism to track progress. Some parents also saw an opportunity for more information about their children's progress as an area for further improvement.

SACE assessment rubrics provide formative feedback on student performance. They are also used by students to make decisions about the 'next steps' to work towards 'excellence in student achievement'. In this way, rubrics are tools for independent student learning. Students in all year levels would benefit from such independence in their language learning. There is an opportunity for the school to look at the role that assessment rubrics, aligned to the AC Achievement Standards, have in providing more incremental feedback to students and families. It is acknowledged that this is not an easy task and might require multiple assessment rubrics.

Direction 2   **Broaden the use of assessment rubrics to provide feedback to students on their progress in learning and to identify points of differentiation for support and challenge.**

Conditions for effective student learning

To what extent does the school engage with parents, the community and local partnerships to support involvement and improvement in student learning?

The School of Languages is to be commended for its leading role in the promotion of language learning in the South Australian educational community and beyond. While much of its leadership is centred in the metropolitan area, language teachers in rural schools are actively encouraged to access resources and moderation activities. Holiday programs such as *Languages Alive* for primary students and *Let's Talk* holiday intensives for senior secondary students engage the wider community. Consequently, the school plays an important quality assurance role in language learning across the three sectors. Similarly, the school's teachers play a significant role in inter-school moderation of teacher judgement against the AC Achievement Standards in the local Secondary Alliance.

Partnerships with the ministerial committee for Multicultural Education and Languages and the Ethnic Schools Association are embedded through representation on the school council. The school benefits from these partnerships through their advocacy of the school's important work. While there is wide parent representation on the school council its governance role could be further promoted with families associated with the school.

The school's partnership with parents is primarily through personal contact at drop-off and pick-up times (prior to COVID-19), emails, phone calls and the use of *Edmodo* as an online learning system. Some parents find *Edmodo* cumbersome and look forward to the school taking up an alternative for online learning in the near future. Training for the diversity of parents in how to access any future system is important in strengthening parental involvement in their children's learning.

A long-term partnership with a tertiary institution which specialises in languages has added value to the School of Languages. Benefits include deepening teacher engagement with the Australian Curriculum and early work on the role of differentiation in effective teaching. Given its intention to continue to build the pedagogical content knowledge of the diverse range of teaching staff, the school would benefit from further collaboration with such tertiary partners.

Direction 3   **Collaborate with external partners to develop and deliver professional learning across all year levels in the differentiation of language teaching.**

Outcomes of the External School Review 2021

The School of Languages plays an important role in the provision of language learning for students who are unable to access their language of choice in their home school. Equally importantly, the school serves the diverse multicultural communities in offering languages which connect students to their cultural background. The school leadership has clear improvement processes and policies to guide further development of contemporary approaches to language teaching in terms of curriculum design and pedagogy. This is challenging in the context of classes which are often diverse in terms of age, level of schooling, background experience in the language and ability.

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

Direction 1   **Review the roles and responsibilities of all executive team members with a view to distributing and strengthening leadership of contemporary pedagogical and assessment practices.**

Direction 2   **Broaden the use of assessment rubrics to provide feedback to students on their progress in learning and to identify points of differentiation for support and challenge.**

Direction 3   **Collaborate with external partners to develop and deliver professional learning across all year levels in the differentiation of language teaching.**

Based on the school's current performance, the School of Languages will be externally reviewed again in 2024.
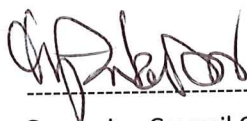
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Appendix 1

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).

As the School of Languages offers out-of-school language learning with students originating from other schools, a school performance overview is only available for A-E Grades and SACE. NAPLAN, PAT and Phonics data is not available for the School of Languages.

In terms of student achievement across reception to year 11, the School of Languages relies on A-E grades collected in terms 2, 3 and 4.

During 2020, there was an increase in 'A' grade and 'B' grade from term 2 to term 4 in most year levels, with a corresponding decline in 'C' grade. In terms of trends over time, the baseline data was established in 2018, following a year of trialling in 2017.

- In 2018, 80% of students achieved 'A and 'B' grades.
- In 2019, 81% of students achieved 'A and 'B' grades.
- In 2020, 81% of students achieved 'A and 'B' grades.

In reception to year 7:

- In 2018, 73% of reception to year 7 students achieved 'A and 'B' grades.
- In 2019, 78% of reception to year 7 students achieved 'A and 'B' grades.
- In 2020, 73% of reception to year 7 achieved 'A and 'B' grades.

In years 8 to 10:

- In 2018, 87% of year 8 to year 10 students achieved 'A and 'B' grades.
- In 2019, 82% of year 8 to year 10 students achieved 'A and 'B' grades.
- In 2020, 84% of year 8 to year 10 students achieved 'A and 'B' grades.

In year 11:

- In 2018, 85% of year 11 students achieved 'A and 'B' grades.
- In 2019, 81% of year 11 students achieved 'A and 'B' grades.
- In 2020, 89% of year 11 students achieved 'A and 'B' grades.

SACE

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2020, 99.8% of grades achieved were at a 'C-' level or higher, 46% of grades were at an 'A' level and 43% of grades were at a 'B' level. This result represents an improvement for the 'C-' level or higher grade, an improvement for the 'A' level grade and an improvement for the 'B' level grade, from the historic baseline averages.