

# **The Department for Education**

## **External School Review**

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

**Report for the Youth Education Centre**

Conducted in October 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 Helen Tunney, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Niki Takos, Review Principal.

## School context

The Youth Education Centre is a specialist educational facility located inside the Adelaide Youth Training Centre (AYTC), which itself is part of the South Australian juvenile justice system. The Youth Education Centre caters for children and young people aged 10 onwards, who enter the youth justice system. The school is situated across 3 campuses; each located within 14kms from the Adelaide CBD, and is part of the Montague Partnership. The current enrolment is 42 students with a capacity of 90. Enrolment fluctuates significantly, as does the time that a student can spend in education. The school is classified as Category 1 on the department's Index of Educational Disadvantage.

Two of the 3 sites are within AYTC. The Youth Education Centre works in partnership with the Department for Human Services (DHS) to deliver education and training to young people in juvenile custody. Young people at AYTC have been sentenced to detention by the court or remanded in custody.

The student population typically includes ≥40% Aboriginal students, ≤10% female, 40% of students with a disability, 12% of students of EALD background, and 70% students in care.

The leadership team consists of a principal in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of his tenure at the school, a deputy principal based at the Goldsborough Road campus; each of the 3 campuses has a site manager, and there are 2 other senior leaders: student services and pathways. There are 19 teachers, including 2 in the early years of their career, 1 highly accomplished teacher, and 3 Step 9 teachers. Ancillary staff members include: an ACEO, FLO case manager, occupational therapist, a pastoral care worker, and multiple school services officers for both administration and student support. School staff work closely with AYTC youth workers who are responsible for the security and behaviour of those students who are detained.

## 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 4 key areas from the External School Review framework:

|                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Student Learning:</b>              | <b>How effectively is student learning growth monitored and evaluated?</b>                     |
| <b>Effective Teaching:</b>            | <b>To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?</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>To what extent is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change evident?</b>    |

### **How effectively is student learning growth monitored and evaluated?**

The school is working strongly to track student learning growth within the constraints of the school demographic. Better systems for storage and retrieval of student learning data are being explored. The school adapts systems to meet the needs of their student cohort. Teachers realise the significance of keeping records of student learning growth even though it can be complex. Student reports are provided

each term. The school is working proactively across agencies (like DHS, FLO and home schools) to improve transition practices for students in custody.

The data literacy level of leaders, teachers and students is generally high. Data walls were evident in all 3 campuses. Displayed data included Running Records levels, reading comprehension and oral language levels. There are plans to include regular checks on numeracy development into these displays. Some parts of the school are reviewing data practices to better suit the needs of their students. Assessments are not done regularly at one campus. New, *formative* assessment practices have been introduced. The old practices of assessment are more *summative*. *Formative* assessment practices add more value to the tracking and monitoring of student learning growth. Some staff believe the new *formative* assessment practices are transforming their teaching practices, hence, student learning outcomes. A teacher said: “The recent assessment work has changed teaching practice. Understanding students’ oral language needs means we can pitch lessons to the kids, to make learning accessible to them”. Assessments are currently done by leaders or specialist teachers. Teachers need to be trained in formative assessment so they can become even more effective in tracking growth and intentionalising teaching.

Staff within each campus are collaborative, and plan and debrief daily about the learning program. A case management approach to monitoring student outcomes is a recent initiative – student review team (SRT); however, this initiative is not yet being implemented consistently across the school.

The panel concluded that, within the school, there appears to be a range of protocols to track and evaluate student learning growth. There is a need to review and evaluate current whole-school data practices in this area with all teaching staff, to ensure consistent practices across and between each campus. The use of regular assessments across the whole school would provide current evidence base for the SRT process.

#### **Direction 1**

**Review current assessment practices and establish common assessment protocols so that whole-school improvement data over time can be used to inform cycles of site improvement.**

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

Levels of differentiation and intentional teaching are high across the school. Comprehensive baseline data is collected and used to tailor a learning plan for each student. Teachers have commented: “We have developed a culture of responsiveness. How can we make learning successful for you?” and “We don’t waste time. Every lesson has a purpose”. Some staff said they have recognised the need to provide for, and track, more scaffolded individual learning progression. Individualised data and programs are kept in the school, and used to inform the next school or notify of students’ return. Programs and interventions are informed by data. The school is exploring the use of the One Child One Plan format for its individualised learning plans. Interventions that students reported are working very well for them include: Book Club, QuickSmart and journal writing. The school has employed an occupational therapist and speech pathologist to better analyse and support the learning needs of students. Youth workers said they could see how well teachers tailor the learning programs to the individual needs of students. They can see improvements in student confidence and skills.

There is good communication between the school and carers. All students talked positively about the quality of relationships they have with teachers, which are central to success in learning. For most students there is a significant lift in engagement in learning. A student mentioned that “this is a good school. It is made for what we need, not for what everyone else needs”. Students and families described

the teachers as enablers of learning and turning students' lives around. High expectations, which staff have for each student in their learning, are translated into the development of student self-belief.

Generally, the focus on learning and expectations is high; however, there are inconsistencies in this culture of high expectations. Some teachers expressed a view that emotional safety in learning was more important to realise for 'these' students than academic outcomes.

The panel concluded that academic rigour and 'realness' of the school is critical and at the heart of success the school is experiencing. The school is working hard to provide learning accomplishment and academic achievement for many of its students who all fall into the category of being 'hardest to teach'. However, the quality of intentionalised teaching does vary between campuses.

## **Direction 2**

**Ensure, through whole-school, evidence-based site improvement planning, that all teaching is increasingly purposeful and effective for more students more of the time.**

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

All learning programs are individualised, and planning is inclusive of the student. There is considerable DHS support for student security, behaviour management and wellbeing, so teachers are able to focus on teaching and learning, as well as successful management of classrooms in the interests of learning.

Students have very clear learning intentions and goals, a strong sense of educational purpose, and access some of their own progress data. They are supported to track and monitor their own progress and to be proud of, share and celebrate their successes. Students are authentically involved in the setting and review of learning goals. The school has had recent discussions about changing timetabling practices to better reflect the needs of students so their learning goals can be increasingly achieved.

Students value the testing, and can describe how it benefits them and peers. They see how assessment leads to individualised programming, intentionalised teaching and learning success. Students can describe and identify progress. They recognise that they are sometimes making-up years of lost schooling. Students report significant improvements in their school attendance.

However, the success of students varies. At Goldsborough Road, it is estimated that only 10% of students make full use of the educational opportunities they are offered. Students said the teachers need to improve the quality of learning programs even more to motivate and engage more boys over time.

Student voice was less evident at the custodial campuses. Students in the Flexi Centre have a strong voice in the school. Through governing council they are able to authentically influence decisions that impact on their life as a student. There is no tolerance of bullying and full acceptance of difference. The school has had success in addressing high levels of swearing through its 'code switching' initiative.

The panel concluded that, whilst some students are benefiting from high levels of agency in learning, there is a group of students for whom schooling is not as successful. Improving the intentionality of teaching for these students, and working in different ways to improve their influence on and ownership of their own learning would be helpful in achieving improvement.

### **Direction 3**

**Strengthen evidence-based goal-setting and review with all students to harness their agency in learning.**

#### **To what extent is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change evident?**

It was very clear to the panel that the core business of the school is understood and accepted as providing education and further employment pathways to students who are educationally complex for multiple, intersecting reasons. These students may be in and out of the youth justice system and, most commonly, have a history of poor attendance. The Youth Education Centre provides individualised learning programs, which enable catching up of literacy and numeracy skills, and provide accredited SACE and VET units. The panel found in all 3 campuses a consistent, strong understanding of and commitment to this shared moral purpose. Students identify and value the school as a 'real' school, where they can do 'real' learning and achieve 'real' outcomes. Students want rigorous, authentic and challenging academic work. A student said: "The learning and academic rigour of the school has lifted in the last couple of years. Relationships between teachers and students have improved".

There is a very well-resourced leadership structure, with a principal, deputy and 6 senior leader positions approved for 2019 and beyond. School leadership works closely with DHS to facilitate a holistic improvement model for students in custody. All staff talked about training and development and performance and development. There are high but varying degrees of cohesion between staff at each campus. The principal has a clear focus and vision for the school moving forward. He recognises work needs to be done in re-culturing the school, and uniting all staff in a code of ethics and purpose that will contribute more to whole-school improvement, and high levels of staff morale.

Some staff recognise that there is a need to better define the criteria for students coming to the Flexi Centre. There were inconsistent staff views about the access and equity, and value of staff training and development. Performance development was largely described as inconsistent both in terms of frequency and quality. Informal support was seen as more useful and effective than any formal meetings. Staff said there are some links between training and development and the site improvement plan, but any performance and development is largely isolated from the two.

Whilst internal campus staff cohesion is high, there is a lack of cohesion between staff in different campuses. The committee structure was inequitable and ineffective. Some staff expressed concerns about the frequency of use of specialist staff as temporary relief teachers. This takes significant time away from literacy and numeracy intervention programs.

The school will have a renewed and increased leadership team from 2019, and will be in a position to renew the school's vision and mission statement to define and unite the 3 campuses, re-culture leadership, review leadership roles and responsibilities with all staff.

### **Direction 4**

**Work actively to build collaboration between campuses and to harness whole-school teamwork in the interests of improving the efficacy of teaching practice, conducive to improved student learning outcomes.**

## 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 Youth Education Centre.

The impact of a changed culture of assessment from summative to formative, and the impact of the oral language program and explicit literacy practices is significant. Through explicit assessments of oral language and reading comprehension, teachers are being supported to understand the ways in which students are operating both receptively and expressively in language and how these levels of functioning impact on engagement in academic learning. Teachers' capacities to both accommodate and improve a student's language functioning within learning programs are being developed, and this is having a significant positive impact on students' engagement, motivation, success and growth in academic achievement. Regular teacher access to speech pathology, and occupational therapist and literacy teaching specialists has provided significant improvement in educational outcomes.

The quality of staff-student relationships and teacher/leader advocacy for students is exemplary. Students talked overwhelmingly about how they value the ways teachers are. Teachers are described by students as always:

- Welcoming
- Respectful
- Responsive to student feedback and needs
- Fair
- Inviting
- Trustworthy
- Honest
- Non-judgemental
- "Flexible and willing to change things until we get it"
- Individualising everything for everyone

A student commented that: "Teachers are good here. They treat us differently, like we're real people. They have respect for us and don't treat us differently because we are in here".

A parent said: "I cannot say enough how good all the teachers are in here. They 'get' my son. Staff can manage him. He doesn't have meltdowns. They manage his behaviour without overpowering him".

The combination of unconditional respect and regard for students and high academic expectations of them is delivering quality hard-to-come-by results for this group of students.

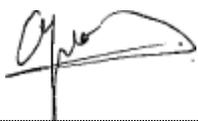
## Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

At the Youth Education Centre there is a culture of improvement characterised by high expectations of students. Effective teaching actively engages learners and provides challenging tasks. The school works in partnership with stakeholders.

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

1. Review current assessment practices and establish common assessment protocols so that whole-school improvement data over time can be used to inform cycles of site improvement.
2. Ensure, through whole-school, evidence-based site improvement planning, that all teaching is increasingly purposeful and effective for more students more of the time.
3. Strengthen evidence-based goal-setting and review with all students to harness their agency in learning.
4. Work actively to build collaboration between campuses and to harness whole-school teamwork in the interests of improving the efficacy of teaching practice, conducive to improved student learning outcomes.

Based on the school's current performance, the Youth Education Centre will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



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Andrew Wells  
MANAGER  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY



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Tony Lunniss  
A/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND  
PRESCHOOLS

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Greg Wirth  
PRINCIPAL  
YOUTH EDUCATION CENTRE

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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 93.1%.

## Appendix 2

### School performance overview

Youth Education Centre students are exempt from A-E grading and NAPLAN testing. Every student has an up-to-date Individual Learning Plan. The information on this plan is accessed by teachers in individually planning for each student's learning. Students range in age from 14 to 18 years, although sometimes can be as old as 20. The school assesses and monitors student literacy growth through oral language development, Running Records and Fountas and Pinell to understand and improve reading levels. In 2018, 10% of students have an oral language score of 6.0 years, which means they can access academic language. All other students are operating at language levels below 6.0 years. Students for whom longitudinal data in oral language development is available show students have achieved as much as a year's improvement in 6 weeks.

In 2018, 41% of students are reading at a year 2 level and 41% are reading at a year 1 level. Ten percent are reading at a year 3 level.

#### SACE 2017

Students were enrolled in 12 SACE subjects. Eighty 'C' or above grades were awarded in 2017. This equates to 93%, up from 89% in 2016. There were only 7 grades below a 'C'. SACE Credits were awarded to young women in custody for the first time in several years. Three students completed their SACE. The Stage 2 completion rate was lower than originally expected due to: 2 students not completing VET certificate courses and, therefore, not meeting the 200 credits requirement; 1 student deciding to attend university through alternative pathways; and 2 students withdrawing due to personal circumstances.

Twenty-five percent of 'learners permit' students took the Self-Directed Community Learning package offered, meaning up to 67 students obtained 10-20 credits for their learning in the course.

#### VET 2017

Completion results:

Building Links Cert I in Construction – 29

Building Links Cert II in Construction – 5

Cert II in Horticulture – 6

Cert I in Automotive – 10

2017 External VET courses:

1 student completed Cert III in Carpentry

1 student completed Cert II in Automotive

1 student completed Cert III in Community Services