

Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Millicent High School

Conducted in May 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 Tobias O'Connor, Review Principal.

Review Process

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

- Presentation from the Principal
- Class visits
- Visits to the 2 Flexible Learning Options (FLO) centres attached to the school (Mount Gambier and Millicent)
- Online survey of staff in lieu of presentation
- Document analysis
- Discussions with:
 - Governing Council representatives
 - Leaders
 - Parents
 - School Services Officers (SSOs)
 - Student representatives
 - Teachers

School context

Millicent High School caters for young people from year 8 to 12. It is situated 400kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2021, as at the February census, is 444 with 305 being mainstream students and 139 enrolled through Flexible Learning Options (FLO). Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 432 with 174 FLO and 258 mainstream students. The local partnership is South East Coast and Vines.

The school has a 2020 ICSEA score of 946 and is classified as Category 2 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 6% Aboriginal students, 6% students with disabilities, no students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, less than 6 young people in care and 32% of students eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a principal in the 17th year of tenure. Other leadership positions of the mainstream school include:

- a B4 Deputy
- Three B2 Senior Leaders
- Four B1 Coordinators
- a B3 manager for each FLO centre
- a B1 Curriculum Coordinator at the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) in Mt Gambier.

There are 23 teachers including 3 in the early years of their careers and 5 Step 9 teachers.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

- Direction 1** Support all teachers to use a quality teaching framework and contemporary pedagogical practices so every student is intellectually challenged and engaged, and all students have opportunities to have input into their learning.
- Direction 2** Develop a leadership structure and build leadership capacity to effectively implement DfE and agreed school priorities, including literacy and numeracy.
- Direction 3** Develop, document and effectively implement a whole-school approach to policies, practice and procedures in particular, relating to student behaviour management, performance management and authentic assessment.
- Direction 4** Develop, implement and promote a culture of self-review where there are high expectations of teachers and students that are clearly articulated and where all leaders and teachers use data to reflect on student achievement and growth.

What impact has the implementation of previous directions had on school improvement?
Millicent High School has implemented the directions of the previous ESR and OTE with commitment and fidelity. The focus on evidence-based pedagogy and its impact on student achievement is evident in the school. The pedagogical practices identified in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) are trialled collaboratively in cross-disciplinary Learning Teams. The leadership's intentional structuring of opportunities for professional collaboration and co-design of inclusive curriculum has resulted in the engagement of teachers in the site improvement planning processes and priorities.

Student feedback on their experience of the frequency and effectiveness of these practices in their classes is valued by the leadership team. A pedagogical survey conducted in term 1 of 2021 provided teachers with the opportunity to reflect on the results from their classes against the backdrop of whole-school data. There are plans to repeat the survey in terms 2, 3 and 4. Leaders and teachers then can track progress in the implementation of agreed teaching practices and monitor their impact on student learning.

The same attention to student learning needs is a feature of the two Flexible Learning Option (FLO) centres and in the Special Options class. In these sites, educators structure authentic assessment processes in partnership with local businesses and attend to wellbeing underlying student success.

There is increasing data literacy in the school. Both leaders and teachers measure the impact of agreed priorities using a range of data. It is commendable that the school not only uses system data provided by the department in the form of NAPLAN, PAT and SACE results, but is also exploring the important role of micro-data to measure incremental achievement progress within a term. Each term, leaders review the school's progress in meeting SIP targets. They link Step 4 of the department's improvement planning process with their own review cycle.

The school's improvement processes relating to teaching and learning, student wellbeing and behaviour management have resulted in both a learning-focused environment and an improved reputation for the school in the local community.

Lines of inquiry

Effective school improvement planning

How effectively does the school monitor and enhance its improvement strategies and actions based on their impact on student learning?

In the leadership team there is consensus that consistent implementation of teaching strategies identified in the Site Improvement Plan (SIP) needs to be underpinned by relational trust. Their approach is to support teachers to go deeper than superficial compliance in implementing agreed pedagogies, such as the explicit teaching of academic vocabulary and the use of Learning Intentions. The aim is to support teachers to be reflective practitioners willing to take risks in the process of trialling school priorities. To support this, the leadership team has developed collaborative forums through faculty-based *Curriculum Teams* and cross-disciplinary *Learning Teams*. In addition to this important role of collaboration, Learning Teams provide an opportunity for all teachers to demonstrate 'leadership of learning'. Teachers are also supported through release time to collaborate in designing teaching units which can leverage the consistent implementation of effective teaching strategies.

Leaders are considering the introduction of peer observation to further support teacher reflection on classroom practice. This would build on the school's policy of teachers nominating their preferred line manager. During the ESR, many teachers gave examples of the positive support they receive from both colleagues and leaders in developing their professional practice and in trialling agreed teaching practices.

An important lever in the effective use of high impact teaching strategies is consistent implementation across the whole school. What the results of the school's pedagogical survey in term 1, observations by the Review Team and conversations with students revealed is that there is considerable variability in the implementation of agreements. This indicates a need to monitor the fidelity and frequency of implementing improvement strategies in all classes and subjects for all students. Alongside peer mentoring is the complementary role of line managers in monitoring the quality and frequency of the implementation of school priorities. Line managers already conduct classroom observations aligned to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. There is opportunity for classroom observations by both peers and line managers.

Direction 1 Effectively monitor and refine the implementation of agreed pedagogies by clarifying the complementary roles of classroom observations by peers and line managers.

Effective teaching and student learning

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

All teaching strategies identified to meet the Challenges of Practice in the school's Site Improvement Plan (SIP) are evidence-based. They are drawn from either the department's Guidebooks, the educational partnership with a university, from training in Learning Design, Assessment and Moderation (LDAM) and High Impact Teaching Strategies (HITS), along with professional learning delivered by acknowledged experts in the field of literacy, numeracy and pedagogy. These key teaching strategies include *Forensic Reading*, the explicit teaching of academic vocabulary, Topic, Explanation, Evidence and Linking sentence (TEEL) as a framework for writing improvement, the Big 6 of Number, resources recommended from the Learning Assessment Framework (LAF) and explicit Learning Intentions.

The importance of explicit teaching was reinforced by the school's professional learning about the educational needs of students living in poverty. Clear learning intentions and success criteria are central to the high impact teaching strategies but there is a need to implement all strategies with what educational researcher, John Hattie, calls 'fidelity and frequency'. This is not the case with the current implementation of learning intentions. While there is shared commitment to this strategy by all teachers and leaders, there is no consistency in understanding the wording of learning intentions nor the frequency with which they are reinforced. Interviews with students revealed the use of specific pedagogies depended on the teacher. Some teachers do not document or reinforce the learning intention of a unit of work, but rather verbally share it and then not revisit it.

The Review Team noted that there is no shared understanding of how a learning intention should be written in terms of what students will *Know*, *Understand* and *Do* following their engagement in a topic. Sampled unit planners included learning intentions but most read as task descriptions or overviews of the topic. Given the commitment to this strategy, there is an opportunity to revisit its purpose and best practice in phrasing of effective learning intentions. So too is the frequency with which they are revisited an important factor.

Direction 2 **Revisit the purpose and wording of learning intentions to maximise the impact on student learning when referenced frequently.**

Effective leadership

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

Collaboration is central to the improvement journey at Millicent High School. This is a result of instructional leadership in the intentional design of collaboration forums. Pedagogical improvement strategies are decided on by the leadership team, but this decision-making is underpinned by this network of collaborative teams through which teachers are consulted.

Curriculum Teams provide one part of the interconnected collaboration forums. They are amalgamations of subjects led by a Band 1 leader. They provide opportunities for teachers to discuss the inclusion of agreed teaching practices in their planning of units of work referenced to the Australian Curriculum. The multi-faculty Curriculum Team comprises teachers who have fewer subject colleagues such as those in Creative Arts, Home Economics, Physical Education and Technology.

Forming a second layer of teacher collaboration are the cross-disciplinary *Learning Teams*. They comprise a Numeracy expert from Maths, a Literacy expert from English, a pedagogy expert from the multi-faculty Curriculum Team and a leader from senior management. This level of collaboration is structured to provide a forum in which teaching staff gain curriculum leadership experience. Teachers spoke enthusiastically about this opportunity to take an 'expert' role in sharing their knowledge and skill in either literacy, numeracy or pedagogy. An additional benefit is the chance to learn from other disciplines about ways to implement school priorities effectively. In this way, leadership facilitates the development of high-quality curriculum planning and effective teaching which connects the work of teachers with the SIP.

With the many high impact teaching strategies being explored at the school, there is a chance that some professional learning is not embedded into day-to-day teaching practice. A synthesis of the *Learning Teams* findings would assist consistency in curriculum planning and teaching. This synthesis could form a definition of effective teaching in the context of Millicent High School. Such a documented definition would also benefit the induction of staff new to the school.

Direction 3 Develop a shared definition of effective teaching in the context of Millicent High School based on the action research findings of Learning Teams.

Outcomes of the External School Review 2021

Over the last 3 years, the Principal of Millicent High School has developed a leadership team focused on both student wellbeing and improved student learning outcomes. This leadership team has structured a network of opportunities for collegial curriculum development and collaborative investigations into the impact of agreed pedagogies on student engagement and achievement. These opportunities, along with regular review of progress towards meeting the targets in the Site Improvement Plan, have engaged all teachers with the school's improvement planning processes.

It is this collaborative approach to school improvement which supports teachers to be reflective practitioners. Through the supportive forum of Learning Teams, teachers are willing to push beyond initial setbacks in implementing a new teaching strategy to persist in refining classroom practice based on its impact on student learning. The agreed pedagogies for literacy and numeracy improvement include explicit attention to academic vocabulary and learning intentions, TEEL as a support for writing improvement, and numeracy teaching strategies sourced through the Learning Assessment Framework and the department's Thinking Maths program.

The school's progress in effective teaching is underpinned by its attention to student wellbeing. The focus on wellbeing and student pathways to post-secondary study and work pathways is clear in both the mainstream school and the 2 Independent Learning Centres in Mount Gambier and Millicent. The latter 2 sites effectively support 139 students who are enrolled through flexible learning pathways. The focus on inclusive education for students in the PACES Special Options class is to be commended. Millicent High School is well-positioned to continue its improvement journey in the interests of the students in its care, and has earned the growing respect of its local community.

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

- Direction 1** Effectively monitor and refine the implementation of agreed pedagogies by clarifying the complementary roles of classroom observations by peers and line managers.
- Direction 2** Revisit the purpose and wording of learning intentions to maximise the impact on student learning when referenced frequently.
- Direction 3** Develop a shared definition of effective teaching in the context of Millicent High School based on the action research findings of Learning Teams.

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



Danielle Chadwick
A/Director
Review, Improvement and Accountability



Anne Millard
Executive Director
Partnerships, Schools and Preschools



John Shelton
Principal
Millicent High School



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 75% 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 53% to 75%.

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

For 2019 8% of year 9 students achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN reading bands. For year 9, this result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 23%, or 4 out of 17 students, from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

Numeracy

In 2019 the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 74% 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 56% to 74%.

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 an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Between 2017 and 2019, the trend for year 9 has been downwards from 10% to 8%.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 33%, or 3 out of 9 students, from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2020, 31% of students enrolled in February (including FLO students) and 100% 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 an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2020; 91% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 100% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 literacy units, 82% successfully completed their Stage 1 numeracy units, and 100% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2020, 100% of grades achieved were at 'C-' level or higher, 31% of grades were at an 'A' level, and 42% 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 a decline for the 'B' level grade, from the historic baseline averages. Between 2018 and 2020, the trend for 'C-' or higher has been upwards, from 99% in 2018 to 100% in 2020.

While 58% of students undertook a VET course, 30% of students completed SACE using VET and there were 158 students enrolled in the Flexible Learning Options (FLO) program in 2020. 35% of FLO students undertook VET in 2020.

In terms of 2020 tertiary entrance, 100%, or 23 out of 23 potential students, achieved an ATAR or TAFE SA selection score.

In 2020 the school had a moderation adjustment in 1 subject from an A to a B+.