Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

Report for Roma Mitchell Secondary College

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 Jayne Heath, Kristen Masters and Peta Kourbelis Review Principals.

Review Process

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

- Presentation from the principal
- Class visits across the three campuses: Co-Education, Girls and Special Education
- Introduction to staff in which the Lines of Inquiry were outlined
- Document analysis
- ESR team survey of staff with questions relating to the three Lines of Inquiry
- Discussions with:
    - Teachers
    - Governing Council representatives
    - Leaders
    - School Services Officers (SSOs) who support in either the Special Education campus, Regional Special Options classes or in mainstream classes
    - Aboriginal Education team
    - Student representatives

School context

Roma Mitchell Secondary College caters for young people from years 8 to 12. It is a multi-campus school composed of a Special Education Campus, a co-education campus, and a girls' campus. It is situated 11kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2021 is 1360. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 1289. The local partnership is Torrens.

The school has a 2021 ICSEA score of 976 and is classified as Category 3 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population includes 6% Aboriginal students, 14% students with disabilities, 30% students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, 2% young people in care and 40% of students eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal in their 1st year of tenure, a Deputy Principal (3rd year of tenure) responsible for Curriculum, IB Middle Years and Diploma Programs, oversight of timetabling, Aboriginal education, assessment and reporting, performance development, policy development, quality assurance, enrolments and school promotions.

The Disability Unit has 1 Head of Campus, 1 Assistant Principal responsible for Curriculum, Transition, Regional Classes, and data management and 2 B1 coordinators responsible for the middle and senior schools, respectively.

The girls', middle and senior campuses each have one B5 Head of Campus. In the middle school, multiple learning areas are supported by a B3 Assistant Principal who has additional oversight of year level in collaboration with a year level manager, and a middle manager responsible for creating and maintaining a culture of learning in a safe and welcoming environment. The four B3 Assistant Principals have oversight of amalgamated learning areas and are supported by six B1 coordinators for specific roles, such as learning support, EALD, Aboriginal Education, school operations, and 2 counsellors. In addition, there are two B2 senior leaders, one appointed for Year 7 into High School, and one B2 to support the senior school campus with year level management.

There are 162 teachers including 9 teachers in the early years of their career and 26 Step 9 teachers.

The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

Direction 1   **Ensure all teams are focused on improving the quality of the teaching and learning and maximising the opportunity for all students across all campuses to complete their SACE.**

Direction 2   **Build the capacity of all teachers to ensure their effective management of student behaviour in all classes to allow for a greater focus on quality teaching and learning.**

Direction 3   **Clarify the roles of current leaders and continue to build their capacity so that there is a cohesive approach to leading school priorities across all three campuses.**

Direction 4   **Enhance the current performance development process to include a focus on supporting teachers to develop teaching strategies based on analysis of data.**

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

Teaching teams across all 3 campuses are focused on the quality of teaching and learning to maximise all students' opportunities to achieve their SACE. The college has extended student access to the curriculum framework of the International Baccalaureate for the Middle Years (IBMY). The IB Diploma for students in years 11 and 12 was offered for the first time in 2021.

There is a culture of high expectations in the school. Ready access to achievement data assists tracking of student progress by the various levels of leadership. Each term, teachers reflect on the results of their students' grades with the view to intervening and extending where needed. Despite this, aspiring students did not feel that they are challenged in their learning in all classes by all teachers. Teachers of the IB Diploma also expressed the view that in years 8-10 potential candidates for the Diploma need to be extended more to prepare them for the demands of study in the senior school.

Teacher focus on quality teaching and learning, rather than predominantly on student behaviour management, was supported by 4-day training in the Berry Street Education Model. All staff participated. This framework not only raises awareness of the need to address the wellbeing of students who have experienced trauma, but also provides 'readiness to learn' strategies that can be applied across the whole school. These activities include 'activation of the brain', 'morning circles' and 'brain breaks'. Such engagement strategies are particularly important given that the school has 105-minute lessons in years 8-11. Leadership will need to consider how to provide induction into these relationship-building strategies for teachers and school services officers who subsequently join the school.

The current leadership structure served the college well in the past, but there is a general sense that it is time to consider the extent to which it continues to maximise student learning. The amalgamation of many learning areas under one Band 3 leader poses challenges for pedagogical improvements. Many teachers feel that their professional growth would be better served by opportunities to work in smaller learning area groups. Members of the senior leadership team believe there is a need to maximise the instructional leadership role of all leaders.

There is a wealth of data available to teachers but the use to which it is put is variable. The wide range of data and multiple platforms on which the data is located does not support increased data literacy at a classroom teacher level.

Teacher professional development plans (PDPs) are linked to at least one goal in the Site Improvement Plan (SIP). There is room for the school to formalise and refine classroom observation to monitor the extent to which school priorities and agreements are being implemented consistently in all classes for all students across all campuses.

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?

The executive leadership team identified the need to develop consistent practices to monitor and enhance pedagogical improvement strategies across all 3 campuses. 'Learning Sprints' proved to be an effective process to monitor the impact of pedagogies identified in the SIP. There was evidence of the school's use of Simon Breakspear's model of 'Learning Sprints' to investigate, confirm and then amplify inclusive teaching practices aligned to the SIP. Conversations with the school's 'Learning Sprint Champions' and documentation of their findings demonstrated a commitment to enhancing teaching strategies which impact positively on student learning. However, further work is needed in the documentation of pedagogical agreements along with more formal approaches to classroom observations to reduce variability in teacher practice across the school.

The school's learning areas are amalgamations of many subjects led by a Band 3 leader. Each learning area is expected to undertake 'Learning Sprints' related to school improvement strategies. Teachers expressed frustration with the size of the learning areas, preferring to participate in smaller collaborative forums aligned more closely to their subject area. This was considered by many as a more effective way to translate SIP 'Challenges of Practice' into classroom practice. Plans to widen the use of 'Learning Sprints' were interrupted in 2020 by the significant and prolonged impact of Covid-19.

Monitoring of consistent implementation of pedagogical agreements is important in such a complex school. Currently, there is an ad-hoc and informal approach to lesson observation across all 3 campuses and between leaders. This limits the effective monitoring of consistent implementation of evidence-based teaching practices outlined in the SIP. Leaders said that classroom observations were considered an important improvement tool to reduce inconsistency in classroom teaching. Currently, leaders do not share a consistent vision of what form classroom observations would take. Attention to these aspects of improvement planning would be beneficial.

Direction 1   **Structure opportunities for wider participation in 'Learning Sprints' and develop an agreed model of lesson observation to monitor consistent implementation of pedagogical agreements in all classes.**

Effective teaching and student learning

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

The IBMY provides a well-established and internationally recognised structure for quality curriculum design, which sets high expectations for all students and promotes evidence-based approaches. Graduates of this program are prepared to be inquiring and independent students who are critical thinkers able to connect learning across subjects and with world events. There is widespread support for this program from teachers, leaders, Governing Council and parents. It is a distinguishing feature of the college. The Department's focus on literacy and numeracy improvement sits comfortably within this curriculum structure. The IBMY framework also accommodates agreed evidence-based pedagogical practices drawn from professional learning through the Department's Learning Design, Assessment and Moderation program and other quality professional learning offered by the College.

Across all 3 campuses, teachers are passionate about and committed to the learning and wellbeing of their students. While access to quality professional learning is valued generally, the disruption to ongoing professional learning in the school's Challenges of Practice due to Covid-19, along with staff and leader changes, has limited consistent whole- school implementation of engaging and challenging pedagogical practices. Through discussions and classroom observations, the review panel saw no consistent implementation of explicit teaching of academic vocabulary and clear learning intentions.

There is opportunity for the school to revisit and deepen staff understanding of the pedagogical pillars of effective teaching. Newly appointed teachers would welcome more extensive induction into the school's agreed pedagogies. One teacher commented: "The PDs are great but there's never time to work out how to actually how to implement them… The strategies need to be ingrained into what we're actually doing, and ideally subject-specific." More structured time for small groups of colleagues to collaborate on how agreed practices can be embedded would be well-received.

Direction 2   **Consistently embed engaging and challenging teaching practices by revisiting the professional learning underpinning SIP Challenges of Practice and documenting pedagogical agreements.**

Effective leadership

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

The educational community is in transition between a leadership team which established the school's structure and good reputation in its first 10 years, and the current leadership team that seeks to both maintain the school's reputation and build the school's future directions.

While the existing leadership structure served the school well in the past, many subject teachers do not see the current structure, with Band 3 leaders managing mega-learning areas, contributing to improvements in their subject area. Some teachers commented that the priority on literacy and numeracy did not always allow the pedagogical aspects of their subjects to be met. With such large learning areas, teachers had less opportunity to work with subject colleagues to embed school priorities into their curriculum planning and teaching. Additionally, the line of sight between Band 3 learning area leaders and teachers is not clear, as many teachers are line-managed by other people.

Due to the concentration of leadership positions at Band 3 and above, it was observed that there are few opportunities for classroom teachers to gain leadership experience in a stepped progression. With many recent leadership changes due to leaders gaining positions in other schools, some classroom teachers gained internal leadership positions at a Band 3 level. Other teachers, who have leadership aspirations but limited opportunities at the school, win positions at Band 1 or 2 levels in other schools, hence the level of staff turnover is considerable. This turnover impacts on consistent implementation of professional learning and agreed approaches to school improvement between all leaders.

Given the current context, there is an opportunity to review the current leadership structure to ascertain the extent to which it continues to focus on pedagogical improvements that maximise all students' learning. This view was reinforced by the recently appointed Principal.

Direction 3   **Review the extent to which the current leadership structure and roles and responsibilities continue to serve the interests of student learning and the school's future directions.**

Outcomes of the External School Review 2021

After just 10 years, Roma Mitchell Secondary College established a good reputation for its focus on student wellbeing and achievement in a complex and diverse school community. With a new leadership team and growing enrolments, the plan to revisit the leadership structure is timely. The outcome required is a greater focus on instructional leadership by all leaders. Within the quality curriculum framework of the International Baccalaureate, the school's improvement processes and priorities outlined in the Site Improvement Plan sit comfortably. The challenge for a school which is comprised of 3 campuses is to facilitate documented agreements to further pedagogical priorities and ensure consistent implementation of these agreements. It is well-placed to continue its improvement journey because it places student wellbeing and learning at the heart of all it does.

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

Direction 1   **Structure opportunities for wider participation in 'Learning Sprints' and develop an agreed model of lesson observation to monitor consistent implementation of pedagogical agreements in all classes.**

Direction 2   **Consistently embed engaging and challenging teaching practices by revisiting the professional learning underpinning SIP Challenges of Practice and documenting pedagogical agreements**

Direction 3   **Review the extent to which the current leadership structure and roles and responsibilities continue to serve the interests of student learning and the school's future directions.**

Based on the school's current performance, Roma Mitchell Secondary College will be externally reviewed again in 2024.
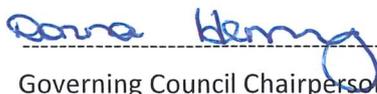

Kerry Dollman
Director
Review, Improvement and Accountability

Anne Millard
Executive Director
Partnerships, Schools and Preschools

Toni Carellas
Principal
Roma Mitchell Secondary College

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 57% of year 9 students demonstrated the expected achievement against the SEA. 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 42% to 57%.

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

Between 2017 and 2019, the school has consistently achieved lower in year 9 NAPLAN reading, relative to the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2019, 7% 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, 21% or 6 out of 28 students, from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

Numeracy

In 2019, the numeracy results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicate that 59% 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 46% to 59%.

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

Between 2017 and 2019, the school has consistently achieved lower in year 9 NAPLAN numeracy relative to the results of similar groups of students across government schools.

In 2019, 7% 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.

For those students in 2019 who achieved in the top 2 NAPLAN proficiency bands in numeracy, 48% or 7 out of 15 students, from year 3 remain in the upper bands at year 9.

SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2020, 93% of students enrolled in February 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 little or no change from the historic baseline average.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2020, 100% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 87% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 literacy units, 71% successfully completed their Stage 1 numeracy units and 100% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2020, 97% of grades achieved were at 'C- 'level or higher, 15% of grades were at an 'A' level and 38% of grades were at an 'B' level. This result represents little or no change for the 'C-' level or higher grade, little or no change for the 'A' level grade and a decline for the 'B' level grade, from the historic baseline averages.

Twenty percent of students completed SACE using VET and there were 98 students enrolled in the Flexible Learning Options (FLO) program in 2020.

In terms of 2020 tertiary entrance, 82%, or 158 out of 193 potential students achieved an ATAR or TAFE SA selection score. There were also 4 students who were successful in achieving a merit

In 2020, the school had no moderation adjustments.