

# **The Department for Education**

## **External School Review**

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

**Report for Marden Senior College**

Conducted in September 2018



Government of South Australia  
Department for Education

## 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 Kathryn Entwistle, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Lia Tedesco, Review Principal.

## School context

Marden Senior College, situated 8km north-east of the Adelaide CBD, opened in 1992, and is a school that offers students pathways to enable them to continue or to resume their studies in a dedicated senior secondary environment.

A range of subjects and courses provide opportunities for students to complete the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). In addition to the range of Stage 1 and Stage 2 options available, the college delivers Vocational Education and Training (VET) certificate courses.

The main focus of Marden Senior College is the provision of senior secondary education for mature learners who can benefit from a post-compulsory adult learning environment. Day, twilight and evening classes are offered for students to engage in full or part-time study.

The community values respectful relationships, mutual responsibility and a diversity of backgrounds and pathways. 'Innovation, Quality and Success for all students through best practice in senior secondary education' is the school's vision.

In 2018, there are 708 students enrolled at the school including 0.4% Aboriginal students, 2% students with disabilities, and 8% of students who are English Second Language learners.

The leadership team comprises a principal in his 7<sup>th</sup> year at the school, 4 senior leaders, 10 coordinators, and 4 wellbeing leaders. There are 46 teaching staff and 17 school service officers employed at the school.

## 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:

**Effective Teaching:** To what extent does the school cater for the varied needs of learners?

**How effectively are teachers using the teaching and learning framework to guide learning design and teaching practice?**

**Effective Leadership:** To what extent do teaching teams reflect on practice and use this information to improve?

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

The student community at Marden Senior College is diverse in its composition. Learners have come from a range of previous educational contexts, have been out of the educational community for extended periods of time or, in fact, may be enrolled in another school setting. Added to this, a number of students bring health, social, familial or economic complexities to the learning agenda. The external school review panel acknowledges that the staff at the college welcome all students to the community and develop processes and approaches designed to maximise students' wellbeing and a culture of inclusion.

On enrolment, a rigorous process of inquiry is conducted with the student and their family, where appropriate. Students' learning history, aspiration, contextual nuances and potential obstacles to learning are established. At this meeting, staff begin to consider how college systems and staff can work to accommodate students' needs and ensure the potential for learning is maximised.

A mentor system operates at the college. Every staff member acts as a mentor to approximately 7 students. All students under 18 are allocated a mentor who monitors their progress and intervenes if the student is potentially at risk of not achieving standard. The model also allows for each student to access support from their mentor if issues or concerns arise. One student described the support a mentor had provided in securing emergency housing for a student, whilst another discussed their mentor having secured tutoring to assist in her learning. The panel heard reports that this model of intervention and wellbeing ensures familiarity between the staff member and student, and enables a more immediate response to issues that arise.

Students with whom the panel spoke agreed wholeheartedly that teachers go out of their way to support and assist them, and expressed appreciation for the flexibility staff display in attending to their individual needs and personal issues.

When considering the degree to which students' learning needs are catered for, evidence regarding the school's use of data to inform intervention was sourced. The school accesses students' assignments and draft work, as well as attendance data, to regularly identify students at risk of not achieving a passing grade. Student progress meetings then determine strategies to intervene to support the student, mentors being critical in this planning.

The panel also heard some teachers discuss having reviewed previous years' SACE data to adjust their teaching; one staff member identifying the need to teach exam preparation, as some students' semester achievement was notably superior to their SACE examination grade.

The concept of differentiated teaching informed by achievement data is a thought-provoking one for the school to consider. Students enrolling at the school may bring NAPLAN or PAT data that is outdated, whilst others may have come from a system that does not generate these datasets. The intent expressed by the leaders, to deliver targeted and differentiated teaching designed to meet individuals' needs, is clear. The concept of differentiation is currently interpreted quite diversely across the school, often pertaining to students' wellbeing or as a provision offered only to students at risk.

In working towards authentically differentiated teaching, the college is in a position to collectively develop agreed understanding of the concept and its influence on teaching practice and planning. Exploration into what data will inform targeted planning will be key in bringing intentional teaching to the fore. Leaders discussed how all students new to the school were expected to write a piece about themselves, in order for staff to 'get to know' the learners. The panel thought this product might provide teachers with an opportunity to generate valid data by using the Language and Literacy Scale to assess students' needs in writing, grammar and spelling. This may well provide teachers with a strong starting point from which to design differentiated approaches for all students, including those at or above standard.

#### **Direction 1**

**Cater teaching practice to individual student learning needs by collectively developing an agreed and consistently applied approach to differentiation and determining what valid data will be generated to inform this.**

## How effectively are teachers using the teaching and learning framework to guide learning design and teaching practice?

A teaching and learning framework was collaboratively developed by teachers and students 2 years ago. Expectations of staff and learners are documented against 4 elements of practice: engagement, successful outcomes, online learning and feedback. The review panel agrees that within the document, a number of high-yield strategies are evident, including differentiation, intentional teaching, deep learning and two-way feedback. Evidence was sourced to confirm that aspects of the framework are practically implemented in some learning areas at the college.

Almost all students with whom the panel spoke reported that teachers provide them with clear and concise feedback that guides their learning and supports improvement. Many students were aware of the ATAR score they needed to achieve for their tertiary pathway and discussed teachers' feedback and input contributing to their working towards this goal.

Evidence of students accessing purposeful learning that engages participation and inspires thinking was apparent in certain learning areas. In some classes visited, students had access to exemplars, resources and task requirements that framed their entry into assignments and allowed them to monitor their progress. The Moodle platform allows students to access subject overviews and to determine performance standards. In one class, students were engaged in learning that involved Socratic questioning, which allowed them to make contemporary connections with historical concepts. The panel also heard a teacher describe how they had used reciprocal peer learning when absentee students returned to the class.

Learning opportunities in some class areas were less likely to inspire intellectual stimulation, as students worked through textbooks and responded to questions requiring limited cognitive processing. Students described the potential to engage fully with the learning as depending upon the teacher, and some teachers explained that pedagogy that inspires inquiry is less practicable in more traditional subjects.

Almost all students reported that the adult learning culture at the college has inspired them to improve their attitude towards learning and, as such, achieve higher results. The SACE outcomes for 2017 (see Appendix 2) attest to the college's success in encouraging students to reach their potential and realise their aspirations. The redesign of learning spaces sees the college poised to deepen interdisciplinary and collaborative learning. The opportunity to further build upon these successes through consistently applied contemporary practice is an exciting one for staff and learners to undertake.

### Direction 2

**Deepen learner expertise and broaden contemporary practice across the school, by establishing systems that ensure a more consistent implementation of the concepts and strategies within the college's teaching and learning framework.**

## To what extent do teaching teams reflect on practice and use this information to improve?

There is a collaborative culture at Marden Senior College, where responsibilities are shared, reporting that there is no concept of 'it's not my role'. Teachers newer to the profession described the willingness of colleagues to support and encourage them. The leaders' presentation made evident that the majority of staff are open to learning and change.

During the review, the panel spoke with leaders about the potential to capitalise on the strong collaborative culture and deepen the concept of collegiality: a culture where teachers move from perpetuation and sharing of practice to one where they are able to engage in rigorous self and peer reflection, to challenge and grow their practice.

Two forums are in place with the potential to support staff in reflecting on and improving practice. Learning area teams meet and have each developed an action plan that aligns their work to progress priorities within the site improvement plan. A number of strategies within the action plans comprise expectations of pedagogical approaches and, as such, provide teachers with references against which they can assess and develop their practice.

Other forums designed to promote teacher reflection and build capacity are the professional learning communities (PLCs). Staff elect to sit on 1 of 5 committees: wellbeing, Learning Design and Moderation (LDAM), literacy, numeracy or innovative technology. The literacy and numeracy groups have recently begun exploration into the use of PAT data in informing teacher practice, while the technology group is exploring the practical implementation of Office 365 in effective teaching. The LDAM and wellbeing teams are inquiring into high-yield pedagogical strategies and diversification of student support services, respectively. The panel notes the strategic design of the groups' planning processes. Each PLC has responded to 4 consistently applied critical questions that ask participants to consider their work in terms of improving student learning outcomes.

Reports of the impact of these forums on prompting teacher reflection and building capacity varied. Some staff discussed at length the deliberate plans they have designed to initiate peer observations against elements of their practice, and then discussed receiving and responding to feedback. Other staff members expressed a desire for the forums to be afforded more dedicated and regular opportunities to meet, in order for them to achieve greater influence on practice, and to establish communication between the groups.

The panel commends the work that has brought about the establishment of collective forums to progress teacher reflection on practice, in particular, with a focus on student learning outcomes. Both these elements provide an ideal opportunity to further deepen the concept of improvement in practice by further refining the PLC processes and working towards a culture of genuine collegiality. A PLC model that has dedicated times to meet throughout the entire school year, allowing participants in varying PLCs to discuss each other's learning, and to challenge and extend their practice, will further enable the college to achieve its vision as a leading senior college within our system.

### **Direction 3**

**Continue to promote contemporary practice by refining existing PLC processes to ensure regular communication and rich discussion between groups, and to progress a collegiate culture that enables staff to collectively reflect on and grow their practice.**

## **What is the school doing particularly well and why is this effective?**

During the review process, the panel verified the following effective practice that is contributing significantly to school improvement at Marden Senior College.

The review panel had originally agreed to pursue the line of inquiry (LOI): **To what extent is a positive and focused approach to improvement and change evident?** This was established as a LOI due to the recent changing nature of the clientele at the school, since the introduction of the adult education provision

policy. However, strong evidence quickly emerged to ascertain that this aspect of school improvement was being led extremely effectively.

Effective implementation of the change agenda and leading improvement was obvious. Strategic responses to changes in the now younger student cohort included the development of the mentor model. The introduction of new courses in order to meet learner requirements and maintain the college as a school of choice has been deliberate and effective. Teachers who were required to undertake different subject responsibilities have received scaffolded professional learning and support. The college deliberately plans and successfully implements approaches that address and accommodate a broad range of student needs. Students uniformly express pride in their college and appreciate the inclusive culture and the respect all students receive from staff. The culture of adult learning and its influence on students' self-perceptions, commitment to learning and success, has been expertly preserved and led. Whilst a minority of staff expressed a desire for greater input at the conceptual level of change, most evidence sourced illustrated the collective and inclusive approach to improvement at the college.

The panel agreed that the evidence sourced indicated excellence in this aspect of school improvement and commends the college as it continues its work in this area.

## Outcomes of the External School Review 2018

At Marden Senior College effective leadership provides strategic direction, planning and targeted interventions and a culture of improvement is characterised by high expectations for students within a well-established culture of adult learning.

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

1. Cater teaching practice to individual student learning needs by collectively developing an agreed and consistently applied approach to differentiation and determining what valid data will be generated to inform this.
2. Deepen learner expertise and broaden contemporary practice across the school, by establishing systems that ensure a more consistent implementation of the concepts and strategies within the college's teaching and learning framework.
3. Continue to promote contemporary practice by refining existing PLC processes to ensure regular communication and rich discussion between groups, and to progress a collegiate culture that enables staff to collectively reflect on and grow their practice.

Based on the school's current performance, Marden Senior College will be externally reviewed again in 2021.



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Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY



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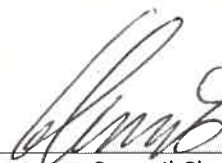
Anne Millard  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS AND  
PRESCHOOLS

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.



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Stephen Inglis  
PRINCIPAL  
MARDEN SENIOR COLLEGE



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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 75%.

## 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).

#### SACE

In terms of SACE completion in 2017, 27% of students enrolled in February and 95% of those enrolled in October, who had the potential to complete their SACE, did go on to successfully achieve their SACE. This result for October SACE completion represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

For compulsory SACE Stage 1 and 2 subjects in 2017, 85% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 Personal Learning Plan, 87% of students successfully completed their Stage 1 literacy units, 80% successfully completed their Stage 1 numeracy units and 98% successfully completed their Stage 2 Research Project.

Ninety-six percent of grades achieved in the 2017 SACE Stage 2 were C- or higher. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline average.

Ten percent of students completed SACE using VET.

For attempted Stage 2 SACE subjects in 2017, 44% of students achieved an 'A' grade and 38% achieved a 'B' grade. This result represents an improvement from the historic baseline averages for the 'A' grade and 'B' grade respectively.

In terms of 2017 tertiary entrance, 60%, or 319 of 527 potential students achieved an ATAR or TAFE SA selection score. There were also 36 students who were successful at achieving a merit.

