



ACT
Government
Education

The Woden School

Report of Review, 2021

This page left intentionally blank.

Publication and independent Review Team details

Date of School Review: 10, 11, 12 and 13 May 2021

Principal of Review School: James Malone

National School Improvement Tool Review Report prepared by:

- Lead Reviewer: Roberta Barbe, *ACER School Improvement Consultant*
- ACT Review Team members: 1. Robyn Strangward, *Principal of Lyons Early Childhood School*
2. Shaun Haidon, *Director School Planning and Review*

Report Date: 13 May 2021

Report of Review, 2021 prepared by:

ACT Government Education Directorate
Education Services Division, School Improvement Branch

Report Date: 20 May 2021

Overview of the School Review process

Approximately a fifth of all ACT public schools are reviewed each year. Reviews provide quality, independent, feedback tailored to individual school contexts. Findings from Review support annual implementation of a school's 5-year School Improvement Plan.

Reviews are undertaken by a team of experienced educators trained in the use of the *National School Improvement Tool (NSIT)* and are led by a Lead Reviewer from the Australian Council of Educational Research. Review Team size depends upon a range of factors, including the size and context of a school.

Through the lens of the NSIT, an internationally recognised framework for reviewing teaching and learning practices, reviewers gain an accurate picture of current school practices. During Review evidence provided by schools is considered alongside evidence gathered through consultation with staff, students, parents and community members.

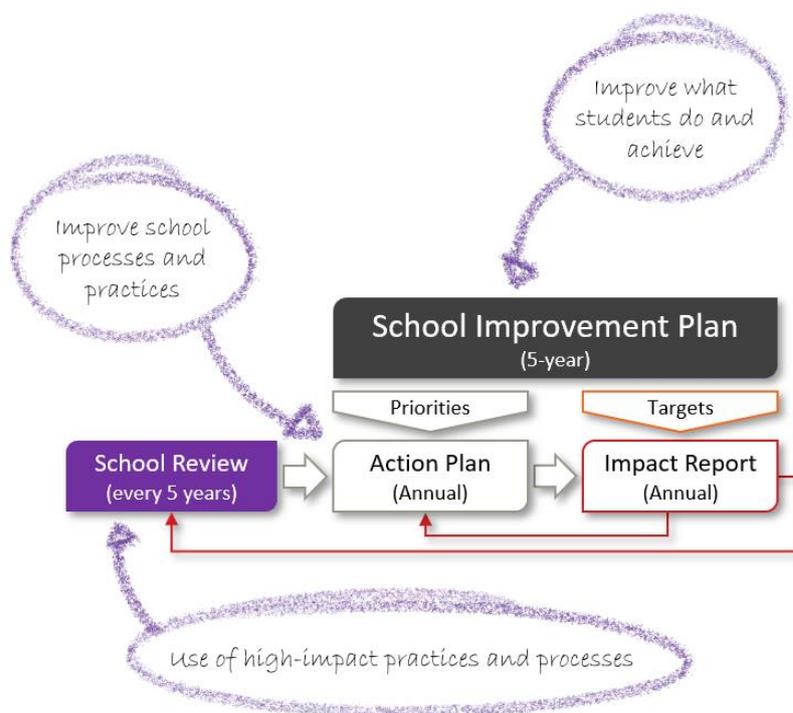
Following Review, the school receives a planning report, which is used as an internal working document, outlining key findings and recommended strategies for continued school improvement. The Education Directorate uses this planning report as a basis for the final *Report of Review* provided to school communities.

The *Report of Review* includes detailed findings for each of the nine Domains of the National School Improvement Tool, as well as Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations

for continued school improvement.

Where does Review sit within the school improvement cycle?

ACT public schools utilise systematic integration of evidence and data collection, access and analysis to inform sharp and narrow 5-year School Improvement Plans. Annually, all schools utilise a suite of tools to expand, monitor and report on these priorities. Additionally, schools are provided differentiated support and feedback by internal and external experts. School Review is one way that this differentiated feedback is provided and typically occurs at the end of the 5-year school improvement cycle.



What are Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations?

Commendations

Commendations highlight positive actions the school has taken over its last improvement cycle. Typically, these actions are either complete, or embedded in school practice.

Affirmations

Affirmations verify specific actions being undertaken by the school that are impacting positively on school improvement. These actions are typically either not yet complete and/or not yet embedded.

Recommendations

Recommendations provide the school with evidence-based advice regarding high-value areas for future school improvement efforts. Drawn from the NSIT, recommendations are key to the school effectively implementing its 5-year School Improvement Plan.

NSIT Domain 1: An explicit improvement agenda

Domain descriptor

The school leadership team and/or governing body have established and are driving a strong improvement agenda for the school, grounded in evidence from research and practice and expressed in terms of improvements in measurable student outcomes. Explicit and clear school-wide targets for improvement have been set and communicated to parents and families, teachers and students, with accompanying timelines.

Findings

- The recently formed leadership team express their shared commitment to improve student learning outcomes. They are looking to the current review outcomes to confirm the focus of the 2021 Action Plan (AP) and to inform the next five-year plan for the school.
- The Woden School Strategic Plan 2017-2021 identified a broad improvement agenda regarding development of a whole school data plan with individual and group targets in literacy, numeracy and personal/social capability; Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL); Professional Learning (PL) for teachers and Learning Support Assistants (LSA) and a whole school approach to staff wellbeing.
- The 2020 Impact Report (IR) identified PBL implementation informed by student behaviour incident data and use of Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES) assessments to monitor student learning as the amended focus for the school year. Relevant data sets were included in this report, presented to the School Board and on the website.
- The principal reports there are whole school data reports for each of the last five years on G drive. These spreadsheets are disconnected without a consistent measure of student learning growth. Whole school data sets are yet to be tracked longitudinally to inform school decisions and initiatives. The leadership team have now established a whole school data tracker.
- Broad improvement targets have been documented in terms of perception survey targets in previous AAPs. The leadership team acknowledge they are yet to determine an appropriate methodology for developing whole school explicit targets for improvement in terms of student achievement levels in the specialist school setting.
- Staff members are open to improving their teaching. They demonstrate their commitment to address barriers to student learning success.
- The principal, some parents and staff members comment on the need to review and redevelop agreed core values, beliefs and behaviours with all staff members and the community. The intention of this reflective process would be to consider stakeholder ideas about the school identity and structure going forward.
- The leadership team see the focus on PBL and wellbeing has laid the groundwork to focus on student engagement in learning as the next whole school focus.
- The principal's proposed 2021 priorities of improved student communication capability and establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) are yet to be finalised and communicated.

NSIT Domain 2: Analysis and discussion of data

Domain descriptor

A high priority is given to the school-wide analysis and discussion of systematically collected data on student outcomes, including academic, attendance and behavioural outcomes, and student wellbeing. Data analyses consider overall school performance as well as the performances of students from identified priority groups; evidence of improvement/ regression over time; performances in comparison with similar schools; and, in the case of data from standardised tests, measures of growth across the years of school.

Findings

- The leadership team acknowledge that reliable student data is essential to improving student learning outcomes. They acknowledge that lack of longitudinal student achievement data has impacted their practical use of data to inform whole school initiatives and programs.
- There is a brief documented assessment schedule that is yet to identify the timelines for test administration guidelines, who collects the data and when, where to store data and the level of analysis required to inform starting points for teaching and monitor learning growth over time.
- The assessment schedule identifies the use of unit assessments, ABLES, English, mathematics and Personal/Social Capabilities, PM Benchmarks, Schedule of Early Number Assessment (SENA), Waddington's Diagnostic Reading Test, Early Emergent Literacy. The principal comments that the Roadmap of Communicative Competence (ROCC) will be implemented later in 2021, in line with other specialist schools.
- Some school leaders and teachers question the efficacy, range and use of tests currently being undertaken for the students.
- The four specialist schools¹ in the ACT are beginning to work together with the Education Support Office (ESO) regarding common data sets including National Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD), ROCC, Occupational Violence/Risk Assessment (OVRA), ABLES. The focus is to discuss, collate and display meaningful learning, wellbeing and operational data.
- Routine Professional Learning (PL) and opportunities to discuss individual and class data with a school leader to build teacher data literacy is an emerging practice in the school.
- Baseline test data sets have been established regarding student learning. Wellbeing is monitored through ABLES personal/social capabilities. Individual student mood and behaviour data is tracked to inform Positive Behaviour Support Plans (PBSP). Sentral is used to track positive and negative behaviour incidents.
- The leadership team monitor attendance, behaviour and wellbeing data sets as well as stakeholder perception surveys.
- Parents acknowledge the accessibility of the leadership team and staff members, enabling them to provide constructive feedback.

¹ The Woden School is one of the four specialist schools

NSIT Domain 3: A culture that promotes learning

Domain descriptor

The school is driven by a deep belief that every student is capable of successful learning. A high priority is given to building and maintaining positive and caring relationships between staff, students and parents. There is a strong collegial culture of mutual trust and support among teachers and school leaders and parents are treated as partners in the promotion of student learning and wellbeing. The school works to maintain a learning environment that is safe, respectful, tolerant, inclusive and that promotes intellectual rigour.

Findings

- Staff consistently speak about how their caring and respectful relationships with students are critical to supporting students to engage in learning. All staff place high priority on supporting students' personal care needs and wellbeing, and they pay close attention to regulating student behaviour throughout the day.
- Students are gently encouraged by staff to engage in learning activities pitched at a level that will support them to demonstrate success. Supporting students to feel safe and happy in the learning environment is a priority for many staff. Learning environments feature visuals and consistent routines to support predictable experiences for students.
- Parents and carers share their overwhelming gratitude to school staff in how their children and family are supported. They have a high regard for the leadership team and recognise the challenge of supporting their child in learning.
- Students indicate they feel supported and appreciate the efforts of staff to improve their knowledge and skills. Students articulate the importance of mutual respect and kindness in their relationships with staff.
- Whilst some social interactions between students are closely supported, one student remarked "I like being at The Woden School, I have more friends here than my previous school".
- Staff indicate there is a high level of support among colleagues for managing complex and challenging behaviours, with strong systems for informing all staff about agreed strategies to manage risk, post-incident de-briefs, check ins, and plan reviews. A significant amount of school leader time is taken up responding to student behaviour.
- The school has an established Staff Wellbeing Committee to plan whole-school events that promote and maintain positive connections between staff.
- The school implements the PBL framework and uses this as a means to explicitly teach expected behaviours across all settings in alignment with the school values of Respect, Independence & Responsibility, Safety and Education. These lessons are taught by each pastoral care teacher.
- Staff have engaged with the BeYou mental health resources and the school has two identified Safe and Supportive School Contact Officers (SASSCOs).
- Staff identify that opportunity exists to refresh PBL implementation and clarify its connection to strengthening student capabilities in alignment with the Personal and Social Capabilities within the Australian Curriculum.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student group plays a key role in planning whole

school National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee NAIDOC week activities to celebrate indigenous culture. In 2021, all staff attended Engoori Cultural Integrity training.

- The outside spaces of the school provide for a range of purposeful sensory learning opportunities for students. Staff identify the need to update classroom spaces to enable collaborative and engaging learning.

NSIT Domain 4: Targeted use of school resources

Domain descriptor

The school applies its resources (staff time, expertise, funds, facilities, materials) in a targeted manner to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of all students. It has school-wide policies, practices and programs in place to assist in identifying and addressing student needs. Flexible structures and processes enable the school to respond appropriately to the needs of individual learners.

Findings

- The principal identifies the opportunity to use a full range of data to strategically allocate resources to better meet the learning and wellbeing needs of students.
- The leadership team is focusing on the strategic timetabling of LSAs to deliver greater consistency of staffing to support student learning.
- The school funds an occupational therapist and speech and language pathologist for two days per week in addition to the school's allocation. Allied health staff know the students and staff well and are thereby able to build the capacity of staff to support students. The additional time enables allied health staff to be more proactive in the school.
- The school employs LSA staff who support students to engage in lunchtime activities, as well as participate in hospitality, transition programs, girls and boys groups, an Indigenous group and to support work experience programs. Students can participate in movie making and weekly discos.
- The program for Indigenous students provides opportunities to spend time on Country, as well as create Indigenous art which is on display in the school.
- The leadership team identify the need to document intended outcomes of additional support programs as well as ascertain their effectiveness going forward.
- The school leases two buses enabling them to facilitate work experience and opportunities for students to transfer skills taught at school into real life learning situations in the community. For students with limited transport options, taxis are used to ensure all students can access community learning programs.
- Learning spaces beyond classrooms include an art room with a kiln, library, gym, food and design technology rooms. The technology program allows students to participate in electives including robotics, woodwork, jewellery making and horticulture.
- The school playground is an expansive and safe play space that includes exercise stations, trampolines and other sensory play equipment, horticulture and a chicken coop.
- The canteen is led by an LSA who develops students' work and life skills. The program has a strong connection to the school garden.
- Learning spaces within the school are organised to facilitate whole group learning, small group and individual learning.
- An EALD coordinator collects data for census and moderation and works with the speech and language pathologist to support EALD students' learning needs.
- A number of LSAs are timetabled to support students with complex medical needs through the Health Access at School program (HAAS).

NSIT Domain 5: An expert teaching team

Domain descriptor

The school has found ways to build a school-wide, professional team of highly able teachers, including teachers who take an active leadership role beyond the classroom. Strong procedures are in place to encourage a school-wide, shared responsibility for student learning and success, and to encourage the development of a culture of continuous professional improvement that includes classroom-based learning, mentoring and coaching arrangements.

Findings

- School leaders see the importance of developing the capabilities of all staff to improve student outcomes.
- The school is commencing a partnership with ACT specialist schools and the University of Canberra to promote placement of preservice and Masters of Education students to specialist settings, thereby enhancing the school's ability to attract teachers for recruitment. Some preservice students are currently employed as LSAs in the school with a view to retaining them as teachers on completion of their studies.
- Teachers speak of opportunities to take an active role in leadership beyond the classroom. This includes leadership of curriculum development and the resourcing of teaching units to support student learning. Some staff members take an active role in developing preservice teachers at university and are active participants in organisations that support teacher development at both the local and national level.
- A Professional Learning Plan (PLP) with an associated budget, aligned to school improvement priorities and reflective of staff-identified professional learning needs is yet to be documented.
- Early career teachers are assigned mentors and they access Education Directorate (ED) network and union opportunities for early career teachers.
- Staff speak of a culture of collaboration that supports their work and they welcome colleagues into their classrooms. Informal observation and feedback occur, and teachers often co-teach.
- Staff report they would welcome a clear approach to induction.
- Consistency of support staff is identified as a challenge when managing students with complex behaviours. All staff acknowledge the complexity of developing timetables to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all stakeholders.
- Staff are encouraged and supported to undertake professional learning. Accessing tailored professional learning that supports staff in a specialist school is identified as a challenge.
- Teacher performance and development plans are developed. Plans for LSAs are yet to be actioned.
- Learning Support Assistants attend staff meetings. Topics of interest for LSAs are timetabled at the beginning of staff meetings, enabling them to engage in relevant professional learning.

NSIT Domain 6: Systematic curriculum delivery

Domain descriptor

The school has a coherent, sequenced plan for curriculum delivery that ensures consistent teaching and learning expectations and a clear reference for monitoring learning across the year levels. The plan, within which evidence-based teaching practices are embedded, and to which assessment and reporting procedures are aligned, has been developed with reference to the Australian Curriculum or other approved curriculum and refined collaboratively to provide a shared vision for curriculum practice. This plan is shared with parents and families.

Findings

- The year 7-10 curriculum at The Woden School is drawn from the Australian Curriculum and Victorian Pre-Foundation Curriculum.
- There is a year 7-10 Scope and Sequence for the learning areas of English, mathematics, science, history, health and physical education, and pastoral care (drawn from the school's values and PBL). These learning areas are taught over a two-year cycle for mixed ability groupings within years 7-8 and years 9-10. Learning areas are arranged by subject-specific topics, taught within one-hour periods over a rotating two-week timetable.
- The years 11-12 curriculum is taken from the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN)² organisation in the UK and focuses on engaging the students in life skills development. As students complete ASDAN courses, they gain 'Registered Unit' points with the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS) for the purposes of year 12 certification. Year 11-12 class teachers moderate assessment and report student learning within ASDAN requirements.
- The years 7-10 curriculum committees meet each fortnight to develop 20-week unit plans that outline the content for students to learn over the period. The plans provide teachers with a selection of sentences from the Achievement Standards (pre-Foundation to year 10) relevant to the topic taught. Curriculum committee meetings include sharing and co-development of learning activities to enable students to access and engage in learning at their relevant level. Assessment design is led by individual teachers with specific consideration to their students at that point in time.
- Students in years 7-12 have the opportunity to complete two electives every semester alongside core learning areas. Electives are offered in Food Technology, Design Technology, Dance, Drama, and Visual Arts. These electives feature similar documentation and the structure of collaborative curriculum development.
- Teachers indicate the desire to have increased collaboration and consistency on assessment design (formative and summative), moderation, and for making on-balance judgements to report student achievement.
- Teachers indicate it is difficult to know how students are progressing in literacy and numeracy and how they are increasing their knowledge across the learning areas year to year.
- Teachers value the curriculum committee structure and expertise within their respective

² **ASDAN** is an awarding organisation whose curriculum programmes and qualifications help young people develop knowledge and skills for learning, work and life.

year-level teams for further developing their understanding of the curriculum, enabling them to flexibly deliver the curriculum to their students.

NSIT Domain 7: Differentiated teaching and learning

Domain descriptor

The school places a high priority on ensuring that, in their day-to-day teaching, classroom teachers identify and address the learning needs of individual students, including high-achieving students. Teachers are encouraged and supported to monitor closely the progress of individuals, identify learning difficulties and tailor classroom activities to levels of readiness and need.

Findings

- School leaders explicitly encourage teachers and LSAs to differentiate teaching and learning for the individual needs and preferred learning styles of students. The leadership team articulates there is differentiated teaching in action, with teachers being responsive to the learning needs of every student.
- Staff members demonstrate their belief that every student can be a successful learner when provided with motivating learning sequences at their level, including support to engage.
- Teachers are using a broad range of data to identify starting points for teaching.
- Some teachers and LSAs comment that the level of support required to maintain learning engagement for individual students can impact on providing challenge and extending learning for other students in the class group.
- The pastoral care teacher is case manager for the collaborative development and review of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) with parents and carers, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) providers and external agencies, including work experience and transition to post-school plans.
- Student ILPs are stored electronically on Sentral. Teachers collaboratively review ILP goals and agree on strategies across the subjects.
- Team leaders work with their teaching team to plan for and facilitate differentiated demonstration of learning using multiple means of representation.
- Case management of individual students is undertaken within each sub-school. The principal recently trialled a voluntary whole staff case meeting to discuss and identify strategies to trial with an individual student prior to bringing the parent in for the case management meeting. A whole school coordinated approach to student case management is yet to be established.
- The allied health team work proactively beside teachers in targeted support for students focusing on communication systems, use of visual prompts, regulation strategies and access to learning.
- Some teachers are providing students with feedback on their learning. Other teachers identify the need to explore a variety of ways to differentiate and motivate students in their learning in the specialist school setting.
- Some parents express the desire to receive more information regarding their child's progress and next focus for learning through either reports or regular communication channels. Other parents focus more on the level of care their child receives.

NSIT Domain 8: Effective pedagogical practices

Domain descriptor

The school principal and other school leaders recognise that highly effective teaching is the key to improving student learning throughout the school. They take a strong leadership role, encouraging the use of research-based teaching practices in all classrooms to ensure that every student is engaged, challenged and learning successfully. All teachers understand and use effective teaching methods – including explicit instruction – to maximise student learning.

Findings

- School leaders are united in their expectation for seeing effective teaching in every learning space, and they all actively discuss and model to their teams what they think good teaching looks like in a specialist setting.
- School leaders and teachers refer to a range of pedagogical approaches they believe are effective to engage students or teach certain skills and understandings. Evidence of the effectiveness of these strategies is generally anecdotal, observational, and focused on effectiveness in engaging or arousing a student's interest in what is being taught.
- Teachers consistently reference the importance of using a broad repertoire of strategies. They are less clear about the pedagogies the repertoire should definitely include. Teachers speak of the professional freedom they have to try out a range of strategies to best meet the learning needs of every student in the class.
- There is a range of common instructional strategies present across all classrooms including visual charts and graphic organisers, learning worksheets, explicit teaching and hands on tasks.
- Classrooms often provide for sensory experiences, movement breaks and engagement through games.
- Role-playing real-life situations followed by in-community learning experiences are a strong feature of school practice for students.
- Teachers utilise LSAs in the room to assist them to work 1:1 with students and to support student focus and attention in whole-group instruction.
- The school is in early stages of implementing PLCs to support collaborative discussions about effective teaching and learning.
- In reflecting on their practice, teachers identify opportunities to improve their capability to establish the right communication system for each student and progress students' literacy and numeracy capabilities.

NSIT Domain 9: School-community partnerships

Domain descriptor

The school actively seeks ways to enhance student learning and wellbeing by partnering with parents and families, other education and training institutions, local businesses and community organisations. Parents and families are recognised as integral members of the school community and partners in their children's education. Partnerships are strategically established to address identified student needs and operate by providing access to experiences, support and intellectual and/or physical resources not available within the school. All partners are committed to the common purposes and goals of partnership activities. Procedures are in place to ensure effective communications and to monitor and evaluate the intended impacts of the school's partnerships.

Findings

- The school has established and maintained partnerships with a range of organisations to support student learning and wellbeing.
- A range of methods are used to communicate with parents and families through newsletters, the school website, Facebook and email correspondence. Parents speak positively of the school's recent efforts to strengthen and improve home-school communication.
- Parents identify the school's pastoral care program as a strength. They appreciate the role of the pastoral care teacher as the single point of contact for transition, support needs and discussing concerns.
- Partnerships exist with other schools including Alfred Deakin High School and McKillop College. Teachers report positive outcomes and benefits for students from both The Woden School and their peers. Formal documentation of the purpose and objectives of the partnership are yet to be developed and communicated among partners.
- Six students have been identified to attend a weekly sustainability and land care project with Alfred Deakin High School.
- Year 11 and 12 students participate in a weekly Warehouse Circus³ and nutrition program.
- The P&C organises the Bricks@Woden annual event with the Canberra Lego Users Group. The event is a major fundraiser for the school and popular event for Canberrans.
- The school maintains partnerships with allied health providers from both NDIS and Network Student Engagement Teams (NSET) to support access to learning and therapeutic goals.
- The Woden School and other Australian Capital Territory Education Directorate (ACT ED) specialist schools are partnering to ensure consistency of external provider processes and practices across settings. Clear communication expectations and protocols provide clarity for all stakeholders.
- Staff and parents speak positively about the school's WEX Program⁴ and the variety of

³ Warehouse Circus is an Australian youth circus organisation that helps young people find a means through which to experiment, grow and express themselves creatively and physically.

⁴ The school's inhouse work experience program

opportunities offered to students.

- Local businesses and community organisations including Marymead Sharing Places, Yarralumla Nursery, Green Shed, Woolworths and local childcare facilities provide multiple post school transition options and work sampling opportunities for students.
- Parents identify opportunities for students to participate as members of academic or sporting teams with same age peers from partnered schools.

Commendations

- Caring and supportive relationships between staff and students are a strength of the school.
- There are high levels of support between staff. Staff love working at the school.
- There are established structures for the ongoing development and refinement of curriculum.
- School leaders are deliberate in targeting available resources to the needs of the students.
- Teachers provide a range of ways to engage students in and demonstrate their learning.
- Staff share a collective commitment to improving student learning and wellbeing.
- Staff express appreciation of the collegiality and willingness to share planning and practice.
- Parents express admiration for The Woden School staff and the way they engage with students and their families.
- Established partnerships with local schools and businesses and community agencies extend learning opportunities for students and prepare them for post school life.

Affirmations

- The school has commenced PBL implementation and are exploring ways to strengthen whole school processes.
- Parents appreciate the consistency of support and information about their child's learning, particularly from the pastoral care teacher as the key point of contact.
- There is a growing culture of reflection where teachers are inquiring into the level of rigour in their practice.
- The school is working to refine its curriculum documentation in order to have clarity about what each student needs to know, and is beginning to explore the general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum.
- An assessment schedule has been developed and school leaders are exploring the data relevant to the school's context.
- Some unit plans include ways to track the progression of student skills over time.
- Teachers utilise a repertoire of instructional strategies and are exploring multiple ways to engage their students.
- Learning support assistants and administration staff play an integral role in supporting students' learning and wellbeing.
- Staff welcome opportunities to receive explicit feedback about their practice.

Recommendations

- Collaboratively develop a plan for enacting the school's renewed vision for learning that includes meaningful, explicit and measurable student learning targets.
- Further develop a coherent, explicit whole school curriculum plan that includes assessment and reporting processes.
- Develop a whole school data plan that incorporates the full range of relevant academic and wellbeing data, including student achievement in quality assessment tasks.
- Support staff to develop capability, engage with and incorporate a range of communication pathways to ensure every student has a voice.
- Utilise the emerging PLC structure to engage with and identify the research-based whole school pedagogical approaches to support every student's learning.