Black Mountain School

Report of Review, 2022

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Publication and independent Review Team details

Date of School Review: 16, 17 and 18 May 2022
Principal of Review School: Lara Coman

National School Improvement Tool Review Report prepared by:

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Report Date: 19 May 2022

Report of Review, 2022 prepared by:

ACT Government Education Directorate
Education Services Division, School Improvement Branch

Report Date: 17 June 2022

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.
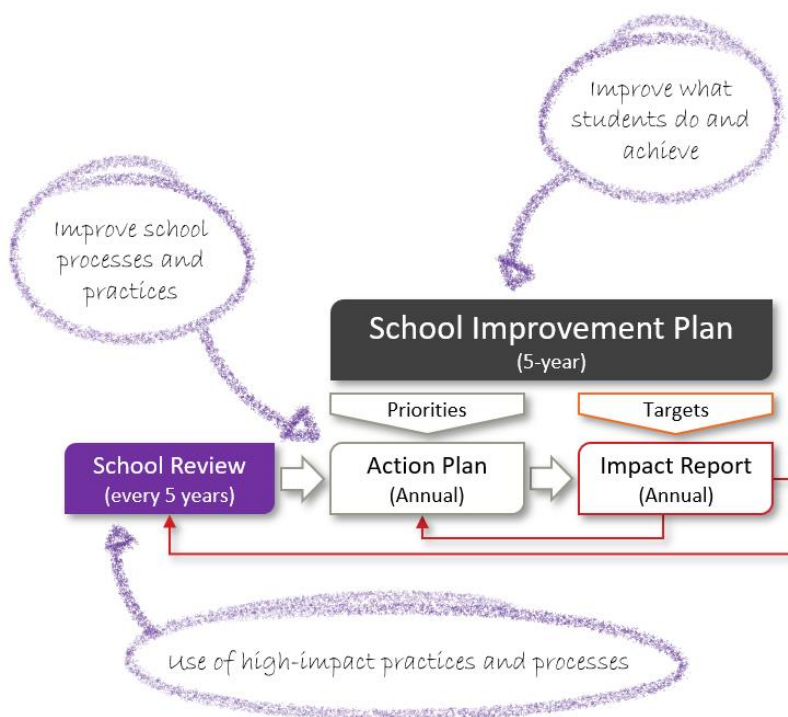
What are Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations?

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 Black Mountain School (BMS) Strategic Plan 2017-2021 outlines three strategic priorities: implement Positive Behaviours for Learning (PBL) across the school; implement a framework for teaching and learning; and improve staff capacity through an identified formal induction and coaching program targeting best-practice pedagogy. Two of these priorities have a target relating to improved student outcomes.

- The PBL strategy has a strong research base and has been implemented over the life of the plan. Some data have been tracked over time.

- The school has realigned its improvement agenda in 2021 to include staff wellbeing, as well as focusing on student communication and social and emotional regulation. These areas have action plans supported by data, but strategies have not been enacted for long enough to track progress. The BMS interprofessional allied-health staffing model is a significant evidence-based initiative to support the realigned improvement agenda. There is evidence that the school's staff and P&C Association support this initiative.

- The BMS Impact Report 2021 provides progress over time on some targets.

- The BMS Annual School Board Report 2020 outlines the information that is required to be reported to the school community. Board reports are available on the school's website.

- Parents interviewed have little recollection of the school improvement agenda or progress in the improvement areas.

- Some teachers are able to talk about a number of the school priorities of staff wellbeing, communication and writing. In general, many staff are unaware of the school's more longer-term priorities or how those priorities might be evaluated.

- The review team evidenced across the school a very strong commitment by all staff to improve practice and processes to ensure all students achieve their individual future pathway.

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 Coaching, Observation and Mentoring Program (COMP) calendar contained within the BMS Teaching and Learning Framework outlines a school data plan. The review team evidenced school-wide collection of data using the Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (ABLES)[1] tool and the Roadmap of Communicative Competence (ROCC)[2] assessment tool. The collection of data using the Developmental Writing Scale,[3] Schedule for Early Numeracy Assessment (SENA)[4] and Writing Continuum[5] are dependent on the needs of each of the five teaching teams. The data plan has a current focus on the classroom teacher and there is an opportunity to extend this to the team and school levels.

- More recently, staff have been entering student data as part of the PBL initiative. The school's PBL team is responsible for analysing and displaying this data to promote further actions. There is an intention to include data about positive student behaviours, with the team investigating a more streamlined approach to minimise staff workload. The RiskMan database is used to record incidents relating to occupational harm.

- The ACT School Climate data are collected from parents and staff and there is evidence that these data are used to support the development of the strategic agenda.

- While BMS has a strong focus on wellbeing data, investigations are under way for the further collection of academic data to support school and teacher-level improvement.

- Some school-level data are analysed and communicated to staff by the leadership team. However, staff are generally unaware of school-level data.

- Teachers express a need for a more centralised system for student-data collection and storage. They emphasise that data types should be customised to the level of student

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[1] *Abilities Based Learning and Education Support is a curriculum assessment and reporting suite that allows teachers to assess the learning readiness of students with disabilities and additional needs, generates reports for individualised learning planning, provides guidance and strategies to help teach students based on their individual learning needs, and tracks student progress and achievements over time.*
[2] *The Roadmap of Communicative Competence is a tool to help **measure and compare communication** for people with complex communication needs.*
[3] *The Developmental Writing Scale for beginning writers was developed as a tool that can capture evidence of refined changes in growth over time using a **14-point** ordinal scale.*
[4] *SENA is an assessment element of Count Me In Too: a professional development program in numeracy designed to assist teachers to broaden their knowledge of how students learn mathematics. The assessment provides teachers with information on students' understandings of number formation and strategies used to solve problems.*
[5] *The Writing Continuum is a resource offering support for teachers so they can identify where a student is in their abilities and what instruction they are still needing.*

need and ability. For example, one teacher describes how SENA has been useful for "more able students", whereas another teacher describes ROCC and ABLES as essential to their teaching. Most teachers suggest that a centralised system would help student transition from one teacher to the next.

- Some teachers raise the need for improved destination data of graduates so that they can reflect on student achievement in destination goals.

- Many staff raise the need for further training on the collection and use of data.

- Parents are unaware of the performance of the school in terms of whole-school data.

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
- The school motto of "Learning, growing, achieving" is the basis of all processes and practices at the school.

- The future planning for each student collaboratively involves parents – and, as appropriate, students – to establish a post-school pathway and the skills and knowledge required to achieve that pathway. That process is a key to providing individualised goals for schooling. Parents are regularly involved in discussions about how their child is progressing towards their future goals.

- All staff demonstrate a strong passion for helping students achieve the goals as set out in their Future Planning Document (FPD).

- For many students, behaviour is a barrier to learning other aspects of the curriculum. A socio-emotional toolbox is used throughout the school. The program is designed to provide all students with skills and strategies to assist them with processing emotions, difficult information or anything that may pose a challenge to an individual's behaviour.

- The school commenced PBL in 2018, led by a designated team. The PBL team and school leaders are able to point to indicators that the consistent approach across the school is having a positive effect. The implementation has been impacted by the significant turnover of teachers and leaders.

- Students are explicitly taught social safety using the SoSAFE! program, 6 involving the use of visuals and role-playing exercises, before practising these skills beyond the classroom.

- Due to the need to revert to online learning during the review, the review team has been unable to talk to many students or see classrooms in action. The team, however, has observed that for the students who remain in the school, the learning is purposeful and engaging. The few students interviewed feel the school is a safe environment for them and are very happy with the work of the school staff. The review team has evidenced strong, positive relationships between staff and students.

- ACT parent climate surveys over the years demonstrate strong trust and support of the school. This is verified through parent interviews. Many parents say they have a solid partnership with the school, where they work together to source additional supports and programs to enhance the schooling of their child. Communication is ongoing and

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6 SoSAFE! uses a standardised framework of symbols, visual teaching tools and concepts to teach strategies for moving into intimate relationships in a safe and measured manner, and provides visual communication tools for reporting physical or sexual abuse.

appropriate.

- The BMS staff handbook outlines communication protocols with parents.
- Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) are essential to the learning process at BMS and feel they are treated as equals to all other staff. The BMS staff wellbeing strategy is focused on reducing incidents of occupational violence and enhancing staff morale.

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
- BMS is managing within a constrained allocated budget. This is providing a challenge to support improvement processes at the school and fund the expanding need for resources.

- The BMS leadership team has expanded the BMS student-engagement team (SET) to include a senior psychologist, speech and language pathologist/Team Teach 7 trainer, occupational therapist, and a physiotherapist as a response to school needs. The SET works across the school in response to referrals and data, to build teacher capacity and provide targeted interventions to improve student outcomes.

- Most students at BMS use their technology as a learning and communication tool. Technology has supported most students through the home-learning period.

- All students at BMS have an individual learning plan (ILP) as part of the FPD to target and personalise their learning priorities. These are used by the leadership team to resource the learning environment. Systematic use of both the ABLES and ROCC assessment tools support these processes.

- BMS has experienced a significant increase in student enrolment and is undergoing a major building program. Staff describe a sense of optimism that the new facilities will provide improved flexibility and opportunity to expand their programs.

- BMS has previously upgraded administration areas, classroom learning spaces, outdoor learning areas and sensory equipment to ensure they meet the needs of their students.

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[7] *Team Teach training focuses on positive behaviour support approaches with an emphasis on de-escalation, risk and restraint reduction.*

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

- At BMS, professional learning is supported through school leaders and the SET. This professional learning is targeted at need, based on school data.

- BMS has strong teams that includes leaders, teachers, LSAs and school allied-health workers who together provide each student with an individualised learning program.

- A staff wellbeing plan has been developed to address identified needs within the school. The wellbeing director supports the leadership team members and helps them support their own teams.

- The BMS Professional Reflective Practice (Supervision) Framework outlines the expectation that teachers meet with their supervisor twice a term to focus on professional development goals and reflect on practice. As part of this process, the school is working towards aligning development goals with staff performance and development plans.

- All staff at BMS are Team Teach-trained and this is updated regularly. This training is provided through a qualified instructor on staff.

- Classroom teachers can take on whole-school leadership roles, particularly through school-improvement committees.

- LSAs work as paraprofessionals in the classrooms, and they have access to professional learning relevant to student needs in their classroom. Some LSAs have asked for further opportunities to access learning in areas relevant to them. LSAs and teachers reflect together to improve classroom practice.

- The school has developed a sophisticated handbook to support staff induction. Some teachers feel that the handbook is a great resource, while others believe the information is too generic. Many casual LSAs and teachers have asked for a more thorough induction process.

- New educators have mentors appointed, but the process at times has become disconnected.

- Some teachers suggest that the professional learning process could be enhanced through shared classroom observations.

- Teachers appreciate the work of team leaders in supporting reflection on student learning, developing new teaching programs and managing classroom issues.

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
- Over the past four years, BMS has prioritised the Australian Curriculum as a framework for curriculum delivery. Professional learning has been targeted to support that priority and teachers are becoming more familiar with using the Australian Curriculum to develop their teaching programs.

- Use of the Australian Curriculum varies across the school. Some teachers continue to develop their teaching programs using either the BMS capabilities or a combination of the BMS capabilities and the Australian Curriculum.

- The school leadership and teaching teams are investigating how to introduce an explicit, coherent, sequenced plan for curriculum delivery across the years of school that is tailored to their context.

- The school has developed its Program Writing Guide to support teachers to write comprehensive teaching programs. Use of the guide varies across the school. The programming template considers achievement standards, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.

- The school has streamlined its student ILP and student Personal Future Action Plan into one document known as the FPD. The FPD for each student is reviewed formally every semester with their family and updated as required outside these times.

- All teachers use their students' FPDs to inform their teaching programs.

- The school is formalising qualifications for students in the Horticultural, Hospitality and Office Administration and Business Skills (Woolworths's shop) programs. In 2022, these students will attend the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) Bruce to work on achieving the competencies for their certificates.

- There has been consideration of what culturally responsive practices might look like at Black Mountain School.

- Some of the assessment tools have been recently introduced, and discussions on moderation are in their infancy.

- Parents value the focus on academic learning for their young people.

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
- The school has a strong student-centred approach to the formation of class groups and learning teams each year. Students are assigned to a learning team and class group according to their intended destinations, strengths, abilities, communication skills and social skills.

- In 2022, there are five learning-team options for students enrolled at the school.

- Students are provided with opportunities to transition between learning teams. Students in Year 10 can experience all Senior program options and are supported to move into a specific Senior program, such as horticulture, if desired.

- The school provides a range of learning environments tailored to meet the different learning needs of its students. The review team has observed that students have access to multiple means of representing their learning.

- Teachers incorporate their individual student FPDs into curriculum planning for teaching and learning.

- The school has a full-time SET. This team consists of allied health staff and youth support workers and consults with classroom teachers, school leadership and families. It uses a data-informed, case-management approach to support individual students to engage positively in their learning.

- Class teaching teams have regular class team meetings. These meetings are opportunities to share updates about individual students and their learning needs.

- Teachers across the school use ABLES, ROCC and their own knowledge of how their students learn to assess student progress and plan the next steps in learning.

- The school reports to families formally each semester using a system curriculum report template.

- Parents value the regular updates on learning they receive via postings from class teachers on the Seesaw[8] communication app, classroom communication diaries, emails and phone calls. Parents identify themselves as partners with the school in their young person's learning.

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[8] *Seesaw is a platform for student engagement. Teachers can empower students to create, reflect, share and collaborate. Students "show what they know" using photos, videos, drawings, text, PDFs and links.*

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
- The school has developed its Teaching and Learning Framework, but teachers make little reference to this.

- School leaders describe five best-practice instructional strategies as a BMS pedagogical toolbox: systematic instruction, functional-ecological approach, teaching augmentative and alternate communication, positive behaviour support and community-based instruction.

- Some teachers refer to the BMS pedagogical toolbox in conversations about the pedagogy in their classrooms.

- Evidence of the use of zones of regulation and the social and emotional toolbox can be found in many classrooms.

- Many teachers instigate partnerships with colleagues. The purpose of these partnerships is to share practice, provide mentoring support and explore problems of practice.

- Student communication is a school focus. Universal, selected and targeted staff professional learning has occurred with regard to pragmatic organised dynamic display systems, hi-tech communication systems including eye gaze, and the importance of students knowing how to communicate "yes" and "'no". The student communication strategy focuses on the belief that student behaviour is a form of communication. Common teacher strategies are being developed across the school to improve student communication skills.

- All staff at the school have undergone Team Teach training.

- The school is implementing PBL. The PBL team oversees the implementation of the framework across all classrooms.

- The school has a focus on developing student writing.

- There is an expectation that all students have individual communication and social and emotional learning goals. These goals are a focus of work in the classroom.

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
- BMS has built a strong suite of partnerships to improve opportunities and outcomes for students.

- BMS has developed and maintains solid partnerships with parents to support their young person's learning.

- The collective parent body supports whole-school endeavours, including fundraising and the procurement of resources, to enhance the student-learning environment. The Parents and Citizens Association oversees the business operation of Six Degrees Cafe, Gallery, Garden which provides opportunities for students in work readiness and post-school employment in the areas of hospitality, horticulture and industrial art.

- BMS has established strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with Merici and Radford colleges which provide opportunities and outcomes for students from BMS and partner schools.

- BMS has a long-standing partnership with Yarralumla Nursery, providing students with a horticultural pathway and an opportunity for them to work at the business during the school week, transferring their skills to an industry setting.

- BMS has forged a new partnership with Woolworths and Fujitsu to provide students with opportunities to develop retail experiences within their school through an authentic mini supermarket. This also provides an authentic pathway for work-experience opportunities with Woolworths Dickson (the partner store).

- While these and other partnerships have a clear understanding of purpose, they could be enhanced by having mutually agreed outcomes to use as a basis for review.

Commendations

- Leaders and all staff at Black Mountain School are committed to working together to ensure each student achieves their learning goals in a safe and supportive environment.

- ABLES and ROCC assessment tools are used universally to support planning and monitoring of student learning.

- There are strong working relationships between staff and students.

- Staff and parent/carer partnerships are valued across the school. Parents say the strength of the school is its staff.

- The SET is appreciated by all staff. The team supports staff at the point of need.

- All staff feel valued as integral to and equal in the educational team.

- The futures-planning process provides a powerful driving force in the school.

- The school has forged a broad suite of partnerships to support students' future destinations.

Affirmations

- The Black Mountain School is developing a culture of using data to inform planning for learning.

- The school is using data to drive school and student improvement.

- Teams are cohesive. Team members are strongly connected and supportive of each other and their students.

- The school is developing processes for coaching, observation and mentoring to support the professional growth of teachers.

- Staff are working outside the classroom to support whole-school initiatives such as implementing and embedding PBL and strengthening cultural integrity.

- The school has an Australian Curriculum focus to support teaching and learning.

- Teachers provide a multifaceted approach to catering for the individual learning needs of their students. Students are offered a variety of ways to express their learning.

- The school is working to develop a common approach to pedagogy that caters for the varying needs of the students.

Recommendations

- Collaboratively develop a Black Mountain School strategic plan for 2023-2027 that is consistent with the school's vision for teaching and learning and provides a narrow and sharp agenda focused on student outcomes. Incorporate explicit targets for student achievement that are well communicated to the school community. Progress towards targets should be monitored and initiatives and programs systematically evaluated for their effectiveness in producing the desired improvements in student academic and/or wellbeing outcomes.

- Build upon the school's data plan by clearly outlining the purpose for the data at the school. Ensure this plan includes the full range of academic and wellbeing data including post-school destination information. Also ensure data sets are systematically analysed at a team and/or individual student level. Ensure student data are easily accessible to enable smoother student transitions. Build leadership and staff data-literacy skills.

- Develop and implement a professional learning plan that continues to build a professional learning community. The plan should be characterised by individualised arrangements for professional learning, classroom observation, mentoring and coaching.

- Continue to develop 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. Explore ways of making the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities more explicit.

- Continue to define common expectations of teaching and learning that are grounded in evidence-based research.

- Develop or refine partnerships, particularly to support the strategic intent of the school. That includes having overt, stated student outcomes that would be the focus of any partnership review.