



**ACT**  
Government  
Education

# **Belconnen High School**

Report of Review, 2019

Date of School Review: 3, 4 and 5 September 2019  
Principal of Review School: David McCarthy

*National School Improvement Tool Review Report* prepared by:

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Report Date: 1 October 2019

***Report of Review, 2019*** prepared by:

ACT Government Education Directorate  
Education Services Division, School Improvement Branch

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## Overview of the School Review process

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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 are considered alongside system and school level student achievement, perception and demographic data as the evidence base for development of the school's next 5-year School Improvement Plan.

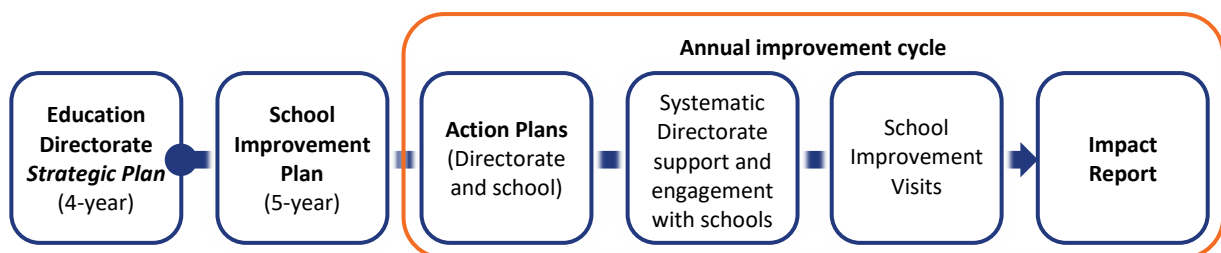
Reviews are undertaken by a team of experienced educators trained in the use of the *National School Improvement Tool (NSIT)* and are led by a Lead Reviewer from the Australian Council of Educational Research. Review Team size depends upon a range of factors, including the size and context of a school.

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 Review Team findings for each of the nine Domains of the National School Improvement Tool, and Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations for continued school improvement.

Where does School Review sit within the broader 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. School Improvement Visits (SIVs – which include School Review) provide differentiated support and feedback to schools through varying levels of in-school immersion. SIVs progress in relation to a school's needs and improvement cycle, with School Review typically occurring at the end of this cycle.

## What are Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations?

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### Commendations

The 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

The 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

The 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 developing a sharp and narrow improvement plan.

## NSIT Domain 1: An explicit improvement agenda

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### 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 *Belconnen High School 2015-2018 School Plan* included reference to key recommendations from the previous school review (validation) process. These include: the systematising of student performance data; improving student learning outcomes through high expectations; the documentation of school processes; and full implementation of the Australian Curriculum.
- The school plan has one priority – to improve student learning outcomes. Key improvement strategies have been the implementation of the professional learning community approach; the modernising of the learning environment; and strengthening school-community partnerships. These strategies were informed by educational research and, in the case of the school refurbishment, strong reference to industry best practice.
- Over the life of the school plan, the substantial physical refurbishment activity on the site has had the effect of consuming the energies of leaders, as well as the focus of staff. Whilst this has seen a transformative outcome in relation to the physical learning environment, other key improvement strategies have not been enacted as deeply as originally planned.
- Staff were generally able to describe key improvement strategies, although there was less referencing of specific targets set by the school.
- Staff engaged with strategies to improve the reading performance of students, and in particular, the use of targeted interventions. There has been less attention paid to numeracy performance.
- Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) and National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data have been analysed to understand cohort performance.
- Annual school Board reports and annual action plan (AAP) reports are available on the school website. School Board members were able to talk about their involvement in monitoring actions listed in annual plans. Board members and parents were less able to comment on school attainment of targets listed in improvement plans.
- The review team observed a commitment by all staff to improving the outcomes of all students.

## NSIT Domain 2: Analysis and discussion of data

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### 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

- Whilst the school has not yet developed a plan for the systematic collection of student learning, wellbeing or destination data, pockets of data collection practices are emerging across the school.
- The school regularly administers PAT Reading (PAT-R) and PAT Mathematics (PAT-M) testing and shares a high-level analysis of this data with staff. The school has begun recording and monitoring student wellbeing data.
- The review team evidenced significant variability across faculties in relation to routines for analysing and discussing data. However, it was noted that there are examples of data-driven improvement cycles occurring in some faculties. In such cases, classroom-based student learning data were analysed and discussed and different teaching strategies considered. In some cases, teachers were able to describe improvements in student learning outcomes over time.
- English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) student performance is being monitored, tested and checked for growth and proficiency.
- In the learning support area of the school, in addition to PAT-R and PAT-M data, staff are closely monitoring the attainment of Individual Learning Plan (ILP) social and emotional learning goals and reporting performance and growth to families.
- System stakeholder satisfaction data are part of the school's reflection on its performance.
- There are signs of teachers seeking more feedback from their students in relation to their teaching.
- Some teachers commented on a need for further learning around the use of data.
- Parents were generally unaware of the performance of the school and preferred to focus on the achievement of their own child.

## NSIT Domain 3: A culture that promotes learning

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### 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 has faced many years of disruption and difficulty arising out of the facility modernisation project. The review team observed remarkable resilience of staff in moving on from this period with renewed collaborative energy and commitment to using the new learning spaces to maximise student learning.
- The school is developing a strong culture of inclusion, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The school leadership team constantly refer to 'Yindyamarra', a Wiradjuri word, which means to give someone or something the respect they or it deserves.
- Relationships between members of the school community were respectful and caring. Students report "the school listens to them" and "teachers adapt to the needs of every student". Parents said that "the school is responsive to concerns" and "has fantastic teachers".
- It was evident across the school that learning areas are calm and focused. Learning is purposeful and there is a high expectation of success for every student. Some students in general classes felt that more could be done to further challenge them in their learning.
- The school is in the first years of implementation of the Positive Behaviours for Learning (PBL) framework based on 'respect, responsibility and learning' and a behaviour matrix has been drafted. Many teachers said that they looked forward to developing a shared whole school community language around the positive behaviours expected.
- Teachers reported that behaviour management took up little time in years 7 and 8, and more of their time in years 9 and 10. When a behaviour issue occurs there are clear procedures to be followed to minimise disruption of student learning. Parents interviewed felt that any concerns were quickly and effectively managed.
- Guidelines for communication between the school and families are stated in the *BHS staff expectations* document.
- Through newsletters, P&C-run parent information sessions, Google Classrooms, parent interviews, semester outlines and other conduits, parents felt connected to the school community.
- Students interviewed felt they had a voice in many aspects of their education at Belconnen High School.

## NSIT Domain 4: Targeted use of school resources

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### 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

- A wellbeing team has been resourced to support student health and wellbeing needs. The school leadership team is evaluating the level of resourcing given the growing number and complexity of student presentations to the team. This evaluation is also considering the respective roles within the team in order to maximise student supports.
- The school's learning support program provides a mix of small group and mainstream opportunities, catering for students who have learning difficulties. All students have a negotiated ILP to support their social and emotional development, and mainstream teachers are supported in adapting programs to student needs.
- In analysing both NAPLAN and PAT-R data the school recognised a need to support student reading skills. In response, a new position was created for a specialist literacy teacher to provide in-class and small group literacy interventions. EAL/D students are identified and monitored in the school with interventions designed to suit individual needs.
- The school has funded a School Leader C position to support the development and implementation of the Indigenous language and cultural inclusion programs.
- The school's Pinnacle Enrichment Program (PEP) provides a challenging and engaging learning experience for students with a higher capacity to learn. Students in PEP classes said they felt the pace and level of learning was appropriate to their need.
- To enable team leaders and teacher's greater opportunity to focus on teaching and learning, administrative support staff have been assigned to faculties. Teachers expressed their appreciation of this support.
- Technology is abundant in the school: all students have Chromebooks; teachers have data projectors; and technology students have robotics kits. The effective use of technology is a source of ongoing professional development, particularly through the appointment of an e-learning teacher.
- Education Perfect software has been provided, in part, to facilitate additional learning support for students. Students recognise the contribution of the software to their learning at school, at home, or during periods of absence.
- Staff are focused on how to use the new facilities and classroom furniture to maximise student learning.



## NSIT Domain 5: An expert teaching team

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### 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 have actively recruited staff in support of curriculum initiatives, and the vast majority of teachers are teaching in their area of expertise.
- The school has a consistent and highly valued induction support program for newly appointed teachers – many of whom are new educators. Supports include immediate access to the SLC Professional Practice, the assigning of a mentor, and systematic lesson observations. It is through these supports that teachers are made aware of the school's approaches to curriculum development, pedagogical strategies and classroom management.
- The Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) are, in some cases, using their sanctioned time to focus on the sharing of curriculum and assessment.
- School leaders have identified posts of significant responsibility and staff have been assigned based on their particular expertise. These functions are providing a point of reference for staff. Teachers are expected to contribute to the life of the school, according to their levels of experience.
- Teacher professional development plans have clearly defined goals, which allow for the progressing of school priorities, whole-school responsibilities, and personal goals. These plans are reviewed throughout the year. Professional discussions also form part of the contract assessment and probationary assessments for early career teachers.
- The layout of the new school learning areas is making visible the teaching practices of all staff. This has allowed a more collegiate approach to teaching.
- Teachers and school leaders are being supported by non-teaching staff who have particular areas of expertise.

## NSIT Domain 6: Systematic curriculum delivery

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### 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

- Belconnen High School has developed a 'Guaranteed Curriculum' which describes the core set of knowledge and skills to be delivered to all students. Current work is considering how to report on the curriculum against the achievement standards.
- Faculty-based teams are discussing curriculum and assessment at both the year and subject levels.
- The review team noted curriculum planning documents in each faculty area, including year and term level plans. The nature and content of these documents varied.
- School leaders are investigating the embedding of General Capabilities and cross-curricular priorities. The review team noted that most teachers in the school were taking responsibility for literacy.
- The school has implemented an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and culture course for students in years 7 and 8 called 'Connecting to Country'. In this course students learn Aboriginal language and culture, starting with the local area, Ngunnawal country, then students investigate the surrounding regional countries of Ngarigo, Gundungurra, Yuin, and Wiradjuri. Students in years 9 and 10 undertake a Wiradjuri language course as part of their electives.
- The school has developed and implemented a social and emotional learning (SEL) program called CARE with specific outcomes identified. The CARE classes are based on year levels, except for the students participating in the student representative council (SRC).
- There has been a deliberate expansion of elective options to align with student pathways. Students report high levels of satisfaction with these course options.
- Vocational Education and Training (VET) curriculum options are available to students in the areas of hospitality and construction.
- Students with additional needs have ILPs to supplement the delivery of curriculum in each classroom.

## NSIT Domain 7: Differentiated teaching and learning

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### 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

- There is an active intention on behalf of school leaders to meet the needs of individual students, and professional learning on effective differentiation is provided to teachers. The review team observed (in most classes) that teachers were trying to adjust their curriculum.
- Teachers in some faculty areas were able to talk about the use of assessment instruments to identify individual strengths and weaknesses as starting points for teaching. Formative assessment strategies are being widely used to assist in the monitoring of student progress.
- Teachers were able to provide evidence of a balance of both formative and summative assessment for students in their relevant learning areas.
- PEP classes are pitched towards higher order thinking activities and are being paced to reflect learner strengths.
- Learning support and intervention strategies reflect differentiated teacher practice based on regular assessment of student performance.
- Education Perfect software is supporting personalised learning across the curriculum allowing students to revisit concepts that challenge them.
- Reporting to parents describes student performance in relation to learning outcomes and work patterns. There is some evidence that parents are accessing the learning of students through Google Classroom.

## NSIT Domain 8: Effective pedagogical practices

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### 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 supporting effective teaching through professional learning opportunities and the work of the School Leader C Professional Practice.
- Mentoring of staff includes explicit training in the ‘10 essential instructional skills’.
- The sharing of the school’s results in literacy and numeracy aims to inform collaborative discussion around effective pedagogical practices. These discussions are also occurring in relation to student performance on assessment items.
- The Futures Learning project and solution fluencies are providing a broad direction for teachers in relation to pedagogical practices that will develop the skills the school wants to see in its students.
- There is variability throughout the school in relation to how explicitly learning outcomes are made to students.
- The school has made some progress to embed formative assessment for learning. Further, some teachers are seeking student feedback on the effectiveness of their assessment tasks to drive improved pedagogies.
- The school has appointed an e-learning coordinator to support teachers with choosing and implementing online applications and platforms to support student learning.

## NSIT Domain 9: School-community partnerships

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### 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 developed many links and partners to support the learning of students. While these partnerships have students' outcomes as their foundation and the support of the school leadership team, they do not always have enough clarity of outcomes to enable effective evaluation. Some of the partnerships include:
  - > the school works in partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The school has resourced a leadership team position to develop and maintain the partnership with families to improve the wellbeing outcomes of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students particularly around connectedness to schooling. Through this partnership the school has developed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and languages programs and in doing so developed a wider inclusion culture in the school for all students and their families. The partnership is yet to be formally reviewed.
  - > the school has also developed a partnership with the University of Canberra Outreach program to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in understanding their career options and broadening their horizons. The program aims to improve student understanding of what they can achieve and how they can get support. The school and university aim to use student feedback to gauge the success of the partnership.
  - > the school has built upon a relationship with Menslink to develop a partnership to implement a 'PRIDE' program. This aims to develop student self-awareness and expose them to valuable life skills to help them identify and cultivate constructive personal behaviours, while eliminating destructive ones. Menslink has also provided a 'silence is deadly' program around the themes of looking after oneself and one's friends and the program can be adapted to focus on issues such as bullying, anger management and self-esteem as required by the school. Both programs are yet to be formally evaluated.

## Commendations

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- Belconnen High School has developed a strong culture of learning, where there is a commitment to the success of every student.
- The school has faced many years of disruption and difficulty arising out of the facility modernisation project. During this time the school leadership team has maintained a firm vision for the future and communicated this at every opportunity to all of the community. All staff have demonstrated a remarkable resilience in moving on from this period with renewed collaborative energy and commitment to using the new learning spaces to maximise student learning. Caring and respectful relations are underpinning this culture. Staff, parents and students speak of the school as a place they value.
- The school has resourced and developed significant strategies to improve its partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, families from other cultures, and families in general, to engender a culture of inclusion.
- The adoption of universal testing of cohorts is providing a rich basis for teacher decision-making, particularly for targeted student populations.
- School leaders have enacted a range of strategies to attract, induct and build the capacity of its staff. In particular, the systematic way in which new staff are inducted and supported, is allowing for a rich and talented array of teachers working to their strengths in support of student learning and wellbeing outcomes.
- School leaders are supporting new staff and early career educators in the development of their craft. New staff value this support.
- The school has introduced innovative language and cultural courses based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. This is providing a school-wide emphasis on the cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

## Affirmations

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- Belconnen High School's leadership team and staff have worked tirelessly to transition from an old school to one that can facilitate 21<sup>st</sup> century schooling.
- The school is developing a strong culture of inclusion, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The school leadership team constantly refer to 'Yindyamarra'; a Wiradjuri word meaning 'to give someone or something the respect they or it deserves'.
- The beginning of a culture of data-informed practice is emerging. Some teaching teams are using classroom-based data in context with diagnostic cohort data to inform their next teaching episode or assessment item.
- The clearly articulated expectations in relation to teacher professional development plans are aligning whole-of-school and individual goals. As a result, staff can see how their work is adding value to the school.
- Leaders promote the value of staff members taking on posts of responsibility across the school based on their particular expertise, and this is allowing for the provision of high

quality and devolved leadership to the broader school population.

- The work on the 'Guaranteed Curriculum' has provided a platform for curriculum planning focused on achievement standards.
- Teachers across the school have a shared responsibility for the literacy of every student.
- School leaders and teachers are placing a priority on differentiation. Teachers are using formative assessment to plan future learning.
- The Futures Learning project has been a deliberate strategy to develop highly effective teaching strategies for the new Belconnen High School learning environment.
- The school works hard to supplement its own resourcing by tapping into the rich sources of expertise within and beyond the school community, to support student learning and wellbeing.

## Recommendations

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- Collaboratively develop a narrow and sharp improvement plan for Belconnen High School, consistent with the school's vision for teaching and learning, and focused on learning and wellbeing outcomes with targets expressed as expected improvements. Align the work of the school to actively monitor and communicate the plan.
- Develop a school data plan which identifies the key data sets that can be used to monitor 'whole student' performance and wellbeing. Build the capacity of staff to work with data to drive their teaching practices. Develop systematic processes to use the full range of data to prioritise resource allocation.
- Continue to develop processes to effectively use physical spaces and technology to maximise learning.
- Develop a professional learning plan outlining a suite of supports to target individual staff needs and ensure a culture of ongoing professional development.
- Continue to develop a curriculum delivery plan that provides a consistent view of how the achievement standards are taught and assessed to cater for the range of students within each year level. The plan should include the General Capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.
- Continue to develop teacher capacity to cater for individual needs by using student data to determine starting points for teaching. Strengthen the offering of multiple ways for students to engage with and express their learning. Ensure the active monitoring and celebration of individual student learning.
- With reference to the strategic agenda of the school, develop an agreed set of evidenced-based teaching practices to be used consistently across the school.
- Continue to develop or refine partnerships, particularly to support the strategic intent.