

# Department for Education External School Review

Partnerships, Schools and Preschools division

## Report for Riverland Special School

Conducted in June 2021



## Review details

Our education system aspires to become the best in Australia by seeking growth for every student, in every class and in every school.

The purpose of the External School Review (ESR) is to support schools to raise achievement, sustain high performance and to provide quality assurance to build and sustain public confidence in government schools.

The External School Review framework is referenced throughout all stages of the ESR process.

This report outlines aspects of the school's performance verified through the review process according to the framework. It does not document every aspect of the school's processes, programs and outcomes.

We acknowledge the support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community. While not all review processes, artefacts and comments are documented here, they have all been considered and contribute to the development and directions of this report.

This review was conducted by Julie Bishop, Review Officer of the department's Review, Improvement and Accountability directorate and Niki Takos, Review Principal.

## Review Process

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

- Presentation from the Principal
- Class visits
- Attendance at staff meeting
- Document analysis
- Discussions with:
  - Governing Council representatives
  - Leaders
  - Parent groups
  - School Services Officers (SSOs)
  - Student representatives
  - Teachers.

## School context

Riverland Special School caters for students from reception to year 12. It is situated 245kms from the Adelaide CBD. The enrolment in 2021 is 53 students. Enrolment at the time of the previous review was 67 students. The local partnership is Berri Barmera.

The school has a 2020 ICSEA score of 941 and is classified as Category 3 on the Department for Education Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school population in 2021 includes 19% Aboriginal students, 100% students with disabilities, 4% students with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) background, 10% children/young people in care and 72% of students eligible for School Card assistance.

All students at the school have a verified Intellectual disability and have engaged in Special Options placement.

The school leadership team in 2021 consists of a Principal in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of tenure and a coordinator with a 0.6FTE teaching load and 0.4FTE leadership load.

There are 12 teachers, including 2 in the early years of their career and 5 Step 9 teachers.

### The previous ESR or OTE directions were:

**Direction 1** Develop student capacity to plan, assess and talk about their own and each other's learning.

**Direction 2** Deepen the involvement of all key stakeholders in determining future school priorities and targeted strategies.

**Direction 3** Engage students with data to inform SMARTAR goal-setting for improvements in personal learning.

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

**Direction 1:** Key implementation of this direction was predominantly in the senior school, through SACE learning, in particular, students' capacity to talk about their and others' learning related to their SACE goals and future pathway planning.

**Direction 2:** The school improvement plan (SIP) was largely developed by leadership with minimal teacher input and collaboration. Goals, targets and challenge of practice were determined prior to being presented to the teaching staff. Groups worked independently on SIP actions, with little facilitation or implementation as whole-school actions. Staff were consulted based on expertise in school priorities – areas of communication, literacy, numeracy and SACE.

**Direction 3:** Key implementation of this direction was predominantly in the senior school, focusing on engaging students in their learning data to structure SMARTAR goals within personalised learning plans. These goals were designed in conjunction with future pathway and social communication conversations, with year 10 to 12 students who have the capacity for verbal communication.

## Lines of inquiry

### Effective school improvement planning

How well does the school use evidence from student achievement and growth data to inform relevant and high impact goals and targets for improvement?

The school is to be commended for their strategic and collaborative approach to school improvement planning. Staff reported that previously the SIP was managed by leadership and, as such, it was not collaborative in its development, implementation, or application across the school. Staff were provided with extensive support in implementing the SIP goals, and noted that every professional learning session was linked to the SIP.

The school is focused on developing processes where all staff contribute to the SIP and are collectively responsible for key actions and timelines. Staff identified that the addition of SACE goals within the SIP has ensured an inclusive whole-school approach to improvement planning. School services officers (SSOs) are essential partners in tracking and monitoring progress of the school improvement plan.

Data is recorded and reviewed via a range of processes including formative, summative and anecdotal evidence. Teachers reported that these processes supported clarity in determining next steps in learning, informing programming and planning from individual and whole-school perspectives. Several teachers noted that sharing assessments and moderating with SSOs was an area for further development.

All students have a personalised One Plan that contains specific information to support inclusion and achievement. Some staff reflected that the school could consider a staged approach to the planning, development, implementation and review of one-plans at identified points across the year. The following schedule was suggested: term 1- planning, term 2 – report writing, term 3 – reviewing one plans, term 4- developing One Plans in readiness for the coming year.

Staff reported that there was a lack of consistent moderated data to comprehensively inform effective goal-setting. The Principal identified that staff undertook some work in the Abilities Based Learning and Educational Support (ABLES) assessment tool. The school is well-placed to identify, review, and refine current assessment practices, including the alignment of assessments that complement the use of ABLES.

**Direction 1 Collaboratively develop and embed whole-school processes in the review and identification of datasets, including ABLES to inform relevant, high-impact goals for improvement.**

## Effective leadership

How effective is the school's professional learning and performance and development processes in building teacher capacity?

The panel noted a strong commitment from leaders to support and strengthen ongoing improvement for every staff member. Teachers and SSOs were provided with extensive support in implementing SIP goals and all professional learning is linked to the SIP priorities. The focus on school improvement is also strengthened through personal performance and development goals being linked to the SIP. School services officers report feeling valued, included in professional learning, and provided with opportunities to network with schools of similar complexities.

Staff identified a variety of strategies in mentoring and coaching to build teacher capacity, which included but was not limited to:

- co-teaching with a colleague
- mentoring staff new to the school
- exchanging ideas and resources with peers
- undertaking training in peer tutoring.

Teachers reported: "we know we are strongly supported and valued, leadership offer support in any circumstance" and "we will always need mentoring and coaching".

Teachers reflected that feedback from leaders was informal and confirmed that they were 'on track'. It was reported that, whilst it is difficult to obtain feedback from students, they continue to seek it. Several staff identified that PODD (pragmatic organisation dynamic display) and AAC (augmentative and alternative communication) devices were instrumental in supporting student self-advocacy.

The panel noted considerable variance relation to classroom observations. Some staff had never been observed, others observed peers as a result of professional learning in peer tutoring. Staff reflected that: "we've talked about observations being a focus, we need to set up planned opportunities for peer observations in pairs with trusted colleagues". The school is well-placed to develop and embed processes where peer observations with written feedback are undertaken with trusted colleagues on a planned and regular basis.

The school undertook significant work in developing and sustaining teacher capacity. As such, they are well-positioned to develop and embed a planned, whole-school approach to peer classroom observations to strengthen collective efficacy.

**Direction 2    Develop, implement and sustain a whole-school approach to classroom observations, and feedback where teachers work collaboratively with peers and collectively build teacher capacity across the school.**

## Outcomes of the External School Review 2021

The school is to be commended for their comprehensive approach to continuous improvement. The panel observed a strong, collaborative staff. Staff identified that they are supported and valued by leadership. The school provides multiple opportunities for students to participate in a range of forums.

The Principal will work with the Education Director to implement the following directions:

- Direction 1 Collaboratively develop and embed whole-school processes in the review and identification of datasets, including ABLES to inform relevant, high-impact goals for improvement.**
- Direction 2 Develop, implement and sustain a whole-school approach to classroom observations, and feedback where teachers work collaboratively with peers and collectively build teacher capacity across the school.**

Based on the school's current performance, Riverland Special School will be externally reviewed again in 2024.



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Governing Council Chairperson

## Appendix 1

### School performance overview

The External School Review process includes an analysis of school performance as measured against the Department for Education Standard of Educational Achievement (SEA).

Riverland Special School tracks and monitors student learning growth on an individual basis. Student progress is monitored through individual goal setting. The school has identified an assessment tool that provides incremental steps to demonstrate learning progress and as such are looking at trialing this in the school.