

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

# EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW

## REPORT FOR MODBURY SPECIAL SCHOOL

Conducted in August 2016



**Government  
of South Australia**

Department for Education  
and Child Development

### **Review details**

*A priority for the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) is to improve the educational attainment and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.*

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

*The framework underpinning the External School Review identifies the key levers for school improvement and has been shaped and informed by research.*

*The overarching review question is "How well does this school improve student achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity?"*

*This Report of the External School Review 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.*

*The support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community is acknowledged. While not all review processes, artefacts and comments are documented, they all have been considered and contributed to the development and directions of this Report.*

*This External School Review was conducted by Tony Sullivan, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability Directorate and Niki Takos, Review Principal.*

### **Policy compliance**

*The External School Review process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are adhered to and implemented.*

The Principal of Modbury Special School has verified that the school is working towards being compliant in all applicable DECD policies. The Principal advised action is being taken to comply with the following DECD policies:

Part 1 Governance: Item 8

The Principal will update the Governing Council twice per year with respect to site bullying data, trends and initiatives.

Part 3 School Organisation: Item 2

The Principal will implement an Attendance Improvement Plan with clearly stated targets.

Part 5 Safety: Item 5

The school will develop and implement a Cyber Safety Policy.

Part 6 Site Procedures: Item 1

The school will establish Safety Management Systems (SMS) requirements for Plant Management.

When the school's actions achieve compliancy with DECD policy and procedures, the Principal must resubmit the Policy Compliance Checklist to the Education Director.

Implementation of the *DECD Student Attendance Policy* was checked specifically against documented evidence. The school was found to be compliant with this policy. In 2015, the school reported attendance of 89.4% in the Primary section and 91.8% in the Secondary section, which are both below the DECD target of 93%.

### **School context**

Modbury Special School is a large and complex organisation with an enrolment of approximately 161 students ranging from 5 to 18 years of age.

The enrolment comprises 115 students from Reception to Year 7 and 46 students in Years 8 to 12. These students are accommodated in 20 classrooms situated across 5 campuses. Thirty percent (48) of students are accommodated in annexes located in nearby mainstream schools. There are nine (6%) children and young people in care.

The school is not a disability-specific school; however, 95 students have a primary diagnosis of Autism and another 15 students have Autism as their secondary diagnosis. This means that the school has the largest enrolment of students with Autism (68%) of any Public school in South Australia.

The school does not have an ICSEA score, but is classified as Category 6 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage.

The school Leadership Team comprises a Principal, Deputy Principal and two Coordinators.

## School Performance Overview

### Negotiated Education Plan (NEP) Goals

All students who attend Modbury Special School are verified under the DECD Students with Disability Policy. Based on the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), every student has a rightful access to the provision of the Australian Curriculum and appropriate adjustments to support them. These adjustments can include: Educational (curriculum, assessment and reporting); Instructional (individual teaching programs and strategies); and Environmental (space, equipment and support).

In 2015, there were approximately 4,000 learning goals established across the curriculum for students attending Modbury Special School. These goals were established, monitored and assessed throughout the school year as a key part of the Negotiated Education Plan (NEP) requirement. Of these learning goals, the students achieved 92% of the established goals. This exceeded the school-established 2015 target of 90%.

### SACE

Twenty-four differentiated Modified Learning and Assessment Plans were delivered across 10 subjects, inclusive of English Pathways, Maths Pathways, Personal Learning Plan, Health, Business and Enterprise and Research Project. One-hundred percent (5) of Stage 2 students successfully completed the requirements of the Modified SACE in 2015.

The Principal's presentation highlighted the complexity of educational provision in a large, complex site comprising: a number of annexes, Reception to Year 12 student cohort, complex disability needs with primary diagnosis of Autism, and 80+ professional and para-professional support personnel provided on any given day.

The Principal commented: "We don't give up on children".

In response to this mantra, the school initiated a focus on Highly Structured Teaching (HST) across the site, and associated annexes, as a way to provide 'predictability' to the student cohort that is predominantly on the Autism spectrum. This strategy was introduced as a pilot program approximately three years ago, and has now reached a stage where all teachers are implementing this approach. The only exclusions, accommodations or limitations to this approach apply where it does not meet student need, or the physical space precludes its successful implementation.

The Principal cited a range of successful outcomes that have been observed or verified through a number of indicators. These include: higher levels of student engagement, calm class settings, increased on-task behaviours, increased staff wellbeing, better comparable attendance rate, decreased behaviour statistics, reduced teacher talk in classes and improved communication, and better outcomes for students.

As a result of the above data and the Leadership Team's presentation, the Review Panel explored the Lines of Inquiry below.

## Lines of Inquiry

During the review process, the panel focused on three key areas from the External School Review Framework:

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|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Effective Teaching:</b>   | <b>How effectively are teachers using the Highly Structured Teaching framework to guide learning design and teaching practice?</b>             |
| <b>Effective Leadership:</b> | <b>To what extent are the school's professional learning and performance and development processes effective in building teacher capacity?</b> |
| <b>Improvement Agenda:</b>   | <b>How well does the school make data-informed judgements about student learning?</b>  |

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

Modbury Special School has been undertaking a staged implementation of Highly Structured Teaching (HST) over the past three years. Currently, there is a state coordinator in HST based at the school. This teacher was previously leading and influencing the roll-out of HST within the Modbury Special School context from 2014 when it was introduced as a pilot program in two classes. This expanded over ensuing years to include all twenty classrooms from Reception to Year 12. Some staff and Governing Council members reported varied levels of acceptance and resistance to HST in the early phase of adoption.

The Principal stated that the school wanted to ensure that change across the school was evidence-based and applied consistently. To ensure both, the school has collected survey information from a number of sources. These have included: the Autism Program Environment Rating Scale (APERS) from some selected classes and teacher self-assessment and observational assessment data against the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. These aspects were verified through teacher meetings and documentation during the review. The Principal commented that in implementing the HST framework for students: "Predictability is the key, not routine".

HST consists of four main elements in each classroom: Physical Structure, Visual Schedules, Individual Tasks and Work Systems. These elements work together to provide meaningful learning, predictability, spontaneous communication, independence, and skills for adulthood. Evidence of the successful implementation of each of these elements was substantiated through class observations and student, parent and staff interviews.

The visual systems verified through observations as successfully used in classrooms included: daily organisers, task completion strips, communication boards and the use of an iPad application (proloquo2go). The majority of classrooms had break-out spaces adjacent to the main learning space to cater for student sensory needs and motor coordination activities. Class spaces incorporated workstations, visual cues and individual student drawers pre-packed daily to incorporate the tasks and resources to complete the set tasks. As one student commented: "The visual schedules help you, because they tell you where to go".

The HST approach places emphasis on visual communication systems to aid the development of student verbal skills. A fundamental tenet in HST is to 'reduce the amount of talking in the class and increase the level of communication' and, therefore, reduce student distress due to sensory overload. Through classroom observations, the Review Panel confirmed: a high level of engagement and on-task behaviour by students, calm and ordered classrooms, and limited teacher-talk. About this structure, one student commented: "I know I am good (at my work), because I finish the boxes".

The majority of students living with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have a sensory processing disorder. To accommodate for this, classrooms are equipped with various sensory equipment and incorporate 30 to 45 minutes of intensive physical-sensory work daily. This aspect of the program was verified during structured observations of this activity in progress during the review. Staff and parent interviews verified less sensory overload resulting in calmer student dispositions.

Learning goals are aligned to defined subjects in the Australian Curriculum. The goals are based on each student's presenting needs and are confirmed with parents early in the school year. This was corroborated through discussions with parents. The Review Panel also confirmed a quality assurance process undertaken by senior members of the Leadership Team to ensure that the goals are realistic, measurable, achievable and challenging for each student. Evidence of feedback to staff about the quality of the learning goals was sighted by the panel. A couple of teachers interviewed confirmed that they had received written feedback about the quality of goals from senior leaders (for example, sticky notes or notations on the goal sheets).

Differentiation in learning design was highly evident across all classes. During class observations, it was apparent that students were provided with different amounts of time to complete goals; prompting was varied for students leading to levels of independence; task designs (located in individual student drawers) differed between students; and support from SSOs/various service providers was linked to individual need. During interviews, staff also confirmed differentiation in content, process, product and assessment.

The Principal and staff cited anecdotal indicators of improvement across the school in relation to: reduced

student ‘meltdowns’ due to sensory overload, increased staff wellbeing (reduced ED155 reports), and reduced staff relief days. Parents also verified that their children were communicating more (even non-verbal children), calmer with siblings, more successful at Modbury Special School than previous placements and displaying less frustration. One parent commented: “Modbury is doing something right. My child is progressing and getting what they need”. Another parent said: “This program is fantastic, just brilliant”.

Students interviewed reported that the Pathway Classes are ‘awesome’ due to the workstations, the task design, ‘Studyladder’, the CAPS program and personal awards. Teachers and SSOs remain with students for consecutive years, wherever possible, to maintain relationships with students and deliver a high level of predictability with/for them. The panel verified that teachers prepared explicit role statements for SSOs to strengthen this professional in-class working relationship and provision of student support. A number of documented exemplars were provided as evidence of this practice.

Teachers corroborated through perception data that, as a result of the implementation of HST, a number of improvements had been noted: student behaviour has improved due to ‘less sensory overload’, student expectations about work (where, how and how much) had improved, on-task time had improved, and there was decreased 1:1 reliance on adults in the class. The Review Panel observed and verified these patterns during class visits.

#### **Direction 1**

**Use an inquiry-based process to review, document and implement the fundamental aspects of Highly Structured Teaching at Modbury Special School to a high level of proficiency and predictability (consistency), to raise outcomes for all learners from Reception to Year 12.**

#### **To what extent are the school’s professional learning and performance and development processes effective in building teacher capacity?**

In establishing the HST approach at Modbury Special School there was a gradual uptake to the framework over time. The genesis of the approach began with one staff member travelling to the USA to undertake intensive training related to HST. In-school support for a couple of teachers was provided for what was described as a ‘pilot program’. Over time, numbers of staff travelled to Victoria to develop a greater understanding about the principles and practices involved in HST.

Teaching staff and Governing Council members verified the above change process used to introduce this framework across the school from 2014 to 2016. Once a critical mass of teachers had adopted the HST framework, a decision was taken to introduce this across the whole school by the end of 2015. The Principal confirmed that this decision was taken in support of the overriding principle to provide predictability for students as they moved across the school.

‘Early adopter’ teachers provided mentoring for other teachers who started at later stages, or were new to the school. Workshops run by the state coordinator are offered to staff to continue to build their practice in this approach. Some staff had the opportunity to observe other classes that had successfully implemented HST. Some staff had been observed by the state coordinator and have had feedback provided to them in notation form. This documentation was sighted during the review. The Principal commented that staff are still at different stages of implementation, and this will require further ongoing professional learning.

Exemplars of staff performance and development plans were shared with the Review Panel, and some class observations were undertaken by Leadership Team members using the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers assessment tool. Some staff indicated that they had completed a performance plan, but it had not been followed up by line managers at this stage. Staff commented positively about the model used in linking staff to other mentor teachers (for example, Step 9 teachers), and viewed this type of strategy as effective in building capacity.

The panel heard from the Leadership Team members, parents and some staff that ‘one size doesn’t fit all’ and that HST doesn’t work for all students. This has required staff to negotiate and adapt their approach in these instances. Staff and leadership members viewed this as a natural course of differentiation applied in any school environment.

Sharing and collaboration of ideas and resources between teachers occurs at unit meetings and staff meetings. Leadership Team members stated that there is now enough staff capacity to implement HST to a deeper level of implementation across the school using the skills of a broad range of people at the school. This team confirmed that some teachers had volunteered their Non-Instruction Time to observe HST in operation in other classes. Staff also confirmed the need for further professional learning to maintain high levels of effectiveness and predictability for students across the school. Instructional training undertaken by 'lead' teachers was identified by staff as an effective improvement strategy.

Staff presented different views about the effectiveness of teams to work strategically to build skills and capacities in a structured and programmed way. The development of resources to support the delivery of HST has been time-intensive, and this was a general view confirmed with staff. However, there was also general consensus that time would have been spent in unproductive ways (behaviours caused by sensory overload) before the implementation of HST. Staff verified through interviews and written feedback that structuring a more formalised approach to professional learning to build teaching practice would further support their work of improvement in learning and teaching.

#### **Direction 2**

**Extend the evident staff capacity to deliver quality student outcomes of learning achievement, engagement and growth through strategic and highly collaborative structures that enable staff to reflect upon, refine and embed Highly Structured Teaching across the school.**

#### **How well does the school make data-informed judgements about student learning?**

Every student in the school has documented personal learning goals established to guide planning, assessment and reporting across the school. These are documented in each student's Negotiated Education Plan (NEP) and represent key outcomes for student achievement and growth over the academic year. Learning portfolios are developed each semester to support the teacher assessments. Copies of each were provided to the Review Panel as evidence of this practice. The NEPs did not necessarily have a consistent format, but the Panel verified they did have consistent frames of reference.

Learning goals are established for each curriculum area of the Australian Curriculum and are reported against biannually using a 'Learning Goals Record'. Achievement of the goals is predominantly assessed through teacher observation. As one student commented: "The adults sing and dance when they are really happy with what we have done."

A similar assessment and reporting process applies to students completing their modified SACE in the secondary 'Pathways Program' with additional tracking to ensure successful completion. This was verified through staff and parent interviews and in documentary evidence. To ensure continuity in learning, the school has implemented 'handover sheets' that transfer from teacher to teacher at the end of the year to supplement the NEP achievement data. Exemplars of these were verified in documentation gathered during the review.

The Governing Council chairperson affectionately referred to the Principal as a "data junkie". Some of the parents indicated that they were not overly enamoured with academic achievement as long as: "the children come home happy and you can see that they're achieving". They did confirm that they were seeing improvement in both learning and wellbeing.

Given the school is leading the implementation of HST across the whole school and tangible improvements are being evidenced, largely through staff, student and parent perception data, it would be highly strategic of the school to collect and interrogate key data to validate the impact on student outcomes over time. The Review Panel verified a number of review processes the school has established that could be collated and aggregated as datasets to validate the improvement work being undertaken across the school.

The verified datasets that offer this opportunity to make judgements about the effectiveness of teaching and learning at Modbury Special School include: the number, nature and quality of all NEP goals; the 'prompting hierarchy' as a scale to measure student improvement towards independence; the APERS rating scale used to determine the strengths and areas for improvement in the effectiveness of the HST framework at the class and school level; AITSL observation tool data; engagement data; wellbeing data;

attendance and behaviour measures. The school has an opportunity as a 'lighthouse' school to promulgate this research for the school's benefit and for other sites in the Partnership.

**Direction 3**

**Lead initiatives to collect, analyse and use various existing and emerging datasets to strategically track, monitor and inform student and school improvement over time within the Modbury Special School context.**

## OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2016

Modbury Special School is operating effectively to progress outcomes for students with disability and complex learning needs. The school has implemented a framework of Highly Structured Teaching to engage and challenge learners to levels of independence through personalised learning experiences. Teachers and SSO staff provide a safe, supportive learning environment where high expectations for learning are maintained. The Australian Curriculum and SACE are delivered effectively across the school through the structure of the Negotiated Education Plan for every student. Learning goals are established, monitored, assessed and reported for every student. The school works successfully in partnership with parents, support services and broader stakeholders.

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

1. Use an inquiry-based process to review, document and implement the fundamental aspects of Highly Structured Teaching at Modbury Special School to a high level of proficiency and predictability (consistency), to raise outcomes for all learners from Reception to Year 12.
2. Extend the evident staff capacity to deliver quality student outcomes of learning achievement, engagement and growth through strategic and highly collaborative structures that enable staff to reflect upon, refine and embed Highly Structured Teaching across the school.
3. Lead initiatives to collect, analyse and use various existing and emerging datasets to strategically track, monitor and inform student and school improvement over time within the Modbury Special School context.

Based on the school's current performance, Modbury Special School will be externally reviewed again in 2020.



Tony Lunniss  
DIRECTOR  
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY



Jayne Johnston  
CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

The school will provide an implementation plan to the Education Director and community within three months of receipt of this report. Progress towards implementing the plan will be reported in the school's Annual Report.

Cam Wright  
PRINCIPAL  
MODBURY SPECIAL SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson