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 overarching review question is “How well does this school improve student achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity?”

This External School Review has evaluated:
- the school’s self-review processes and findings,
- the school’s achievement data and progress over time,
- the outcomes of the meetings and interviews with representatives from the school, and
- parent and student views about the school.

The External School Review included an analysis of the school’s key policies and procedures.

The support and cooperation provided by the staff and school community is acknowledged.

This External School Review was conducted by Sue George-Duif, Review Officer, Review, Improvement and Accountability and Graham Clarke Review Principal.
Policy compliance
The External School Review process includes verification by the Principal that key DECD policies are implemented and adhered to.

The Principal of Penola High School has verified that the school is compliant in all applicable DECD policies.

Implementation of the DECD Student Attendance Policy was checked specifically against a documented set of criteria. The school has implemented comprehensive tracking and intervention processes, and was found to be compliant with this policy. In 2014, the school reported attendance of 86%, which is below the DECD target of 93%.

School context
Penola High School is a small secondary school of approximately 110 students located in a rural area of South Australia, close to the Victorian border. The school's average enrolment over the past five years is 116 students. The school has an ICSEA score of 970, and is classified as Category 4 on the DECD Index of Educational Disadvantage. Fifty percent of students catch a bus to school.

The school population includes 1 Aboriginal student, 6 Students with Disabilities (5%), no students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), 1 student under the Guardianship of the Minister (GoM) and 18% of families eligible for School Card assistance.

The school leadership team consists of a Principal, in her fifth week of a six month tenure, and the following members of the Leadership Team:

Deputy Principal: Student Management, SACE Manager, Buses and Enrolments
Coordinator: Learning Support, Attendance and Absences, and Transition
Coordinator: Teaching and Learning.

A new Principal and Deputy Principal will be appointed for 2016.
Lines of inquiry

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

**Student Learning:**
- How well are the students achieving over time?

**Effective Teaching:**
- How effectively are teachers using the Australian Curriculum and SACE to support and improve student learning?
- To what extent is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction?

How well are the students achieving over time?

In 2014, the reading results, as measured by NAPLAN, indicated that 81% of students achieved the SEA.

- Between 2011 and 2014, the percentage of students at SEA was 80%, 63%, 70% and 69% respectively, averaging at 70%.

There were 7 students, or 23%, of Year 9 students who achieved in the top two NAPLAN bands in reading.

- The percentage of students in the top two bands, between 2011 and 2014, was 20%, 7%, 8% and 27%.
- The average for 2011 to 2014 was 15%.

For those students, who achieved in the top two NAPLAN proficiency bands in reading, 4 students from Year 3 remained in the upper bands at Year 9 in 2014.

In relation to numeracy, 16 (62%) of Year 9 students were above the national standard in Year 9 NAPLAN.

- Between 2011 and 2014, the percentage of students at SEA was 80%, 48%, 61% and 62% respectively.
- The average over the four year period was 62%.

The percentage of Year 9 students achieving in the top two proficiency bands in numeracy was 3 students, or 11%.

- Between 2011 and 2014, there were 15%, 14%, 8% and 11% of Year 9 students in the top two bands respectively.

Two out of five students, who achieved in the top two proficiency bands in their Year 3 NAPLAN, remained in the top two proficiency bands in Year 9.

Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading Comprehension (PAT-R), Numeracy (PAT-Maths) and the Neale Analysis were collected by the school in 2014. This was used by the Strategic Learning Committee to identify students who needed intervention support. Support is then offered to students using WAVE Model strategies for ongoing, short-term and long-term literacy intervention by either teachers or School Support Officers.

In 2014, the percentage of students completing the SACE as a percentage of potential completers was 100%.

- This compares with 92%, 100%, 90% and 100% of students completing their SACE as a percentage of potential completers between 2011 and 2014.

The percentage of grades, which were above the SEA standard of C- or above for attempted Stage 2 subjects, was 97%.
Between 2011 and 2014, there was an upward trend with 82% of students achieving a C- or above grade in 2011, and 89%, 98% and 97% of students receiving a C- or above-grade in 2012, 2013 and 2014 respectively.

In relation to the compulsory literacy requirement of the SACE in Stage One:

- 100% of students achieved a C or above in an English subject.

The percentage of grades that are above the SEA standard of C or better for the compulsory numeracy requirement at Stage One was 79% in 2014.

School Australian Curriculum A-E data indicates that 87% of students received a C or above in Years 8, 9 and 10 across all subjects.

### How effectively are teachers using the Australian Curriculum and SACE to support and improve student learning?

The Implementation of the Australian Curriculum has been a focus for staff in recent years with leaders reporting that they have implemented the Phase One Subjects, namely: Maths, Science and English; and are developing overviews for the Phase Two Subjects of The Arts, Geography and Languages. The Semester Overviews, developed by staff at Penola High School, are presented as sequential topic overviews and saved electronically, allowing easy access by all staff. They indicate scope and sequencing consistent with the Australian Curriculum requirements and detail the content delivery covered. Unit plans are at the discretion of the teacher, as is the design of assessment tasks.

The attributes of an ‘Ideal Learner’ have been identified through an extensive consultation with all key community stakeholders. These attributes align with the capabilities of the Australian Curriculum and the South East Coast and Vines (SECAV) Partnership Priorities for creating confident learners by improved pedagogy and developing learning dispositions.

The ‘Ideal Learner Plan Proforma’ is used to guide teachers’ case management of students, to document goals and strategies for improvement, and communicate them with other staff members and parents. The plan is being trialled with Year 8 students, and staff report that its use has already resulted in improvements in identifying and supporting, not only those students who are struggling, but the high achievers who need extension and challenge. Students interviewed valued the use of the plan and believed that it had assisted them in connecting their learning in school with their future goals and aspirations.

The staff use the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) to plan, scope and sequence learning for students in the senior years and utilise the flexibilities of the SACE in order to meet the varied needs of learners at Penola High School. For example, students are accelerated into Year 12 (Stage 2) subjects whilst in Year 11, and those students identified as potentially having difficulties in meeting the literacy requirement of the SACE, complete Literacy for Work and Community Life. The school works with other high schools in the SECAV, to offer a range of subjects in Stage 2. Teachers and students report they are confident in their capacity to support students’ achievement within the SACE curriculum and confident in the standards they use to assess students’ work.

System and school-based data was used to identify the priority of literacy and numeracy skill improvement and to set targets for improvement, incorporated in the Site Improvement Plan. Evidence gathered from interviews with staff members, parents and students affirmed that the school has had a strong focus on both of these areas and that the staff had collaboratively engaged in an extensive range of professional development opportunities that included literacy and numeracy capacity building for staff. The school has developed a philosophy that positions literacy and numeracy as ‘everyone’s business’. An SSO is employed to mentor students and to provide literacy and numeracy support for targeted students.

The panel was interested in exploring to what extent teachers are using the Australian Curriculum to support and improve student learning. The school’s literacy and numeracy focus has evolved into a strategic learning focus that seeks to improve student engagement, achievement and transversal skills though quality teaching
and learning. The staff have developed a draft Site Improvement Plan (SIP) that is based on this new focus area and includes strategies such the Year 9 Initiative Program and the Learning Capabilities Folio Project. The students, staff and parents interviewed not only identified these as activities that supported their learning, but were also able to articulate how they developed skills useful in their transition into the workforce. The panel saw some evidence of literacy and numeracy development in unit plans. Some teachers reported that they integrated literacy and numeracy strategies into their everyday pedagogical practices and this was confirmed by classroom visits.

The staff are continuing their work implementing the Australian Curriculum as a way of supporting student learning, and have identified the link between the learning design process as described in TfEL with the Australian Curriculum as their next step.

**Direction 1**

*Raise the achievement levels of students by linking learning design with the Australian Curriculum and explicitly incorporating whole-school literacy and numeracy practices within curriculum documentation.*

The Panel saw evidence of a positive, reflective and genuine desire by all staff to assist each and every student achieve their full potential. All staff spoke positively about the school, each other and the students. The staff, students and parents interviewed, without exception, identified, the size of the school as a strength. They believed that this assisted in communication, staff knowing the students, personalising the learning and providing individual support for every student in the school. The Governing Council and staff hope that the community could work with them, in a positive manner, to publicise the benefits of Penola High School and fulfil their aim of a thriving and sustainable school.

The main strategy for ‘personalisation of the curriculum’ is to provide individual (one-on-one) support to students by providing additional learning opportunities for them, often outside of scheduled lesson times. The panel noted that there was a wide range of subjects and programs offered to the students. Programs included: Learning for Life, sport, leadership, competitions, SAPOL Leadership Camp, Youth ANZACS, Overseas trips and exchanges, the World Culinary Challenge, World Challenge and work placements.

Penola High School offers a variety of subjects that lead to tertiary and vocational pathways and ensures, through careful monitoring, that every student is on track for their post-school destination. The school seeks to engage students in Years 10, 11 and 12 through a range of VET programs, such as an automotive, fitness and the ‘hospitality program – Café 43’, where the students undertake hospitality competencies. In 2015, 7 out of the 12 students completing Year 12 Studies had some component of VET in their results. The parents and students interviewed outlined the positive prospects for employment and the success of recent graduates who had gone on to employment and tertiary education, including in the Engineering field.

The students and parents were grateful to the staff for their willingness to provide individual support for their children and the range of activities they could access. They acknowledged that this would not be possible without the staff’s dedication. One student commented: “All we have to do is to ask for a subject or activity and the teachers will organise it for us, or ask for help and they will be there”.

Another aspect of the size of Penola High School, identified by the community as a challenge, was the school’s capacity to offer a sufficient range of subjects and opportunities to their students, given the size of the school. This point was also raised by the Education Director and the Principal in the Pre-Review meeting. The decision to develop integrated studies or multi-domain projects at the middle school level will assist in addressing this issue.

**Direction 2**

*Better support students in their learning and assist in the ongoing sustainability of learning opportunities at Penola High School by exploring alternative curriculum delivery models.*
The staff collaboratively engage in a wide range of whole-staff professional learning opportunities with their colleagues, colleagues from other schools and curriculum experts (SACE). Recent whole-staff professional development has included focusing on the work of Dr Neil Carrington, Professor Dyan Wiliam (formative assessment), Carol Dweck (growth mindsets), Professor John Hattie, Professor Martin Westwell (powerful learners) and the use of the Langford Quality Improvement Tools. The panel saw some evidence of the impact of this learning in the work of individual staff members.

**Direction 3**

*Raise and sustain higher levels of achievement by targeted use of professional development for all staff which has the most potential for high yield strategies.*

**To what extent is assessment used to inform curriculum planning and instruction?**

Both system and school-generated data is used to inform whole-school planning; for example, identification of students requiring intervention (including resourcing required), and pathway planning to ensure that pre-requisites for their planned pathways can be achieved.

Moderation of work to ensure consistency of grading occurs consistently throughout the senior years with teachers taking advantage of moderation activities organised by the secondary network of schools and the pairing of schools used for statistical purposes in Year 12. In Years 8, 9 and 10 there is limited opportunity for moderation activities to occur within the school. It is left to the discretion of the teacher, although it was noted that, during 2014 Phase 1 of the Australian Curriculum, subjects were moderated with Millicent High School staff and there were opportunities provided through the partnership schools to share task design and moderation of assessment. It was unclear whether the results of the moderation activities were used to inform curriculum planning and whether or not assessment informs task design.

When enquiring into how students understood their work is assessed, and the purpose for which assessment is used, students commented that they were unclear if they were learning what they needed to, and whether or not their work was at the standard required. This was specifically relevant for Years 8 to 10 students. Students talked to the panel about differences in approach by their teachers. These included differences in learning expectations, assessment and questioning techniques. They noticed that some students had different tasks given to them but they thought these were only for students who struggled with their learning. The students believed that their learning would benefit from a more consistent use of rubrics and assessment criteria prior to engaging in learning.

At a staff meeting, staff brought a task that was designed to engage and stretch learners and discussed how they used assessment to inform curriculum planning and instruction. They described a variety of strategies, such as starting with easier tasks and working up to harder tasks, using formative assessment techniques, pre-tests and questioning, and the use of the same task but ‘tweaking’ it annually to make it more interesting. Some discussed how they used performance standards to describe assessment tasks whilst others had a more flexible approach and let student voice guide the learning and assessment.

**Direction 4**

*Increase the achievement and engagement of students by the design of assessment tasks that assess students at that point of time, are used to inform curriculum planning and instruction, and promote rigour.*
OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW 2015

Penola High School is tracking well. The Panel saw evidence of a positive, reflective and genuine desire by all staff to assist each and every student achieve to their full potential.

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

1. Raise the achievement levels of students by linking learning design with the Australian Curriculum and explicitly incorporating whole-school literacy and numeracy practices within curriculum documentation.

2. Better support students in their learning and assist in the ongoing sustainability of learning opportunities at Penola High School by exploring alternative curriculum delivery models.

3. Raise and sustain higher levels of achievement by targeted use of professional development for all staff which has the most potential for high yield strategies.

4. Increase the achievement and engagement of students by the design of assessment tasks that assess students at that point of time, are used to inform curriculum planning and instruction, and promote rigour.

Based on the school’s current performance, Penola High School will be externally reviewed again in four years 2019.

Tony Lunniss
DIRECTOR
REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Anne Millard
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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.

Kirsty Trahar
PRINCIPAL
PENOLA HIGH SCHOOL

Governing Council Chairperson