



Government of Western Australia  
Department of Education Services

# Southern River College

2017

Review Findings



Independent Review of  
Independent Public Schools

## Disclaimer

This document reports the findings of the Department of Education Services' independent review.

The Department of Education Services does not endorse any commercial organisation, product or service mentioned in this report.

The Department of Education Services can only guarantee the authenticity of original documents. This document is uncontrolled once printed.

*To help people with disabilities obtain access to information, this document can be provided in alternative format on request. Please contact [jpsreview@des.wa.gov.au](mailto:jpsreview@des.wa.gov.au) with specific requests or telephone 08 9441 1900.*

## School and Review Details

<b>Principal:</b>	Ms Everal Miocevich
<b>Board Chair:</b>	Ms Pat Morris AM JP
<b>School Address:</b>	Southern River Road, Gosnells WA 6110
<b>Number of Students:</b>	1011
<b>ICSEA<sup>1</sup></b>	937
<b>Reviewers:</b>	Mr Bill Mann (Lead) Mrs Lyn Caudle
<b>Review Dates:</b>	7 and 8 June 2017

## Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the Department of Education Services' independent review is to provide assurance to the principal and school community, the board and the Director General of the Department of Education of the extent to which the school staff and board have met the commitments of the Delivery and Performance Agreement (DPA). The review verifies the degree to which there are effective processes in place bringing about improved student learning.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is a scale of socio-educational advantage that is computed for each school. It allows for comparisons to be made between schools that are matched according to their socio-educational advantage, allowing fair comparisons of NAPLAN results between schools with students who have a similar ICSEA. The median ICSEA value is 1000.  
[http://www.acara.edu.au/resources/Fact\\_Sheet\\_-\\_About\\_ICSEA.pdf](http://www.acara.edu.au/resources/Fact_Sheet_-_About_ICSEA.pdf)

## Review Methodology

Underpinning the review methodology is the understanding that the principal is required to ensure the roles and responsibilities of the DPA are met; school performance and student improvement targets and priorities, as detailed in the school's business plan, are assessed, reviewed annually and an annual report made publicly available. The review seeks to determine the extent to which these commitments have been met.

The principal forwarded the school self-review conclusions to the Department of Education Services one month prior to the commencement of the review.

The Department of Education Services' reviewers supplemented the information provided by the principal with information on the school's achievements, its processes and its student performance data from a number of sources which included:

- the *My School*<sup>®</sup> website
- the Department of Education's School Performance Monitoring
- Schools Online reports
- School Curriculum and Standards Authority Year 12 Student Achievement data.

Reviewers analysed the evidence presented in the school's self-review documentation to verify achievement of the DPA and business plan commitments, and developed lines of inquiry where further in-school verification was required.

An agenda for the site visit was negotiated with the principal to enable the gathering of evidence to verify claims made in the school self-review statements. During the review visit the reviewers sourced evidence to support the claims through observation and discussion with leaders, teaching and support staff, board members, parents and students where required. Where the school belongs to an Independent Public School (IPS) cluster of schools the review considers whether the purpose of the cluster has been met and the benefits to the school.

The evidence provided by the principal, along with information gathered by the reviewers prior to and during the review visit, was used as the basis for judgements made in verifying how well the school staff and board have met the commitments of the DPA and business plan.

## Business Plan

### ***How effective was the business plan in responding to the school's context and improving student learning (progress, achievement and engagement)?***

Southern River College celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2016, having commenced as Gosnells Senior High School and undergoing a major revitalisation in recent years. A rapid growth in the student population since the inclusion of Year 7 in 2015 has led to a current enrolment of 1011.

The college has undertaken a series of projects to enhance and expand its facilities in recent times and this work is continuing. Recruitment of new staff with explicit curriculum knowledge and mindset to fit the college's approach to its students has been a focus to meet expanding curriculum needs. The college has widened its Year 11 and Year 12 course offerings and developed a range of special interest programs to engage and challenge its students.

With an ICSEA of 937, the college's population reflects its local community with some areas of disadvantage but with a strong level of support from businesses, community groups and local government.

## Findings

- The 2015–2017 Business Plan contains a clear and explicit direction for the college's intention to improve student outcomes through a focus on four areas: quality teaching and learning, curriculum differentiation, positive school and positive culture. The college's vision, values and mission statement are linked to the intention of providing a wide range of opportunities to enable students to achieve success.
- Each priority area has target areas outlining strategies to achieve key outcomes. The quality teaching and learning outcome '*to improve academic pathways and the number of students undertaking Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) courses by 20% in 2018*' has been met. However, the target '*to improve National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results targeting 40% of students in Year 9 above Band 7 and 35% of Year 7 above Band 6 in all areas of literacy and numeracy*' has not yet been achieved. '*Advanced leadership development of key leaders to assist understanding of best practice for whole-school improvement and effectiveness*' is under way, with the college engaging the Fogarty Foundation to establish a framework for future planning.
- The priority of curriculum differentiation targets explicit teaching strategies and improved outcomes for English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D),

autistic and Aboriginal students. General achievement targets were set for these groups with strategies for improved retention, attendance, aspirations and educational outcomes of Aboriginal students evident in operational plans. Similarly, the target for autistic students' transition to senior school and to further education or employment was evident in the plans for the extension program. EAL/D students' improved results and achievement at the completion of Year 12 were not quantified.

- The introduction of the Positive Behaviour Support framework and its implementation in classrooms this year has been a significant element in the positive culture priority area. The target for attendance (90% rate by 2018) has not yet been met; however, the suspension rate (12% or less by 2018) has been achieved. The reviewers met with student leaders from across the year groups and they described how they have been active in the college, indicating progress towards the third outcome *'increase in student leadership roles across the college with active participation in community service, cultural and sporting activities.'*
- The plans for the positive culture priority included the fortieth anniversary celebrations in 2016, which served as a focus for *'developing a positive brand in the community that promotes and celebrates our achievements with positive trends in enrolments and surveys showing improved satisfaction.'* The work towards the target for *'improved school facilities targeting: college amenities, science rooms, performing arts centre, design and technology refit, grounds beautification, courts resurfacing, parking and drop off areas'* is evident and several projects are currently under way, for example the traffic management work being done in partnership with local government. The college is part of a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) innovation partnership for 2016–17, indicating success in this target area. The college community surveys indicate a positive regard for the college and local media publicity shows positive success stories about students and the college. Academic extension programs in lower school with opportunities for students to choose option subjects in science and technology have been successful, as has the expansion of mathematics and science courses in the senior school.

### Area of strength

- The college business plan is overtly and consistently reflected in strategic and operational plans for the three-year period, and is reviewed with milestone documentation clearly delineating progress towards the goals set.

## Teaching and Learning

***How has the quality of teaching improved and sustained student learning (progress, achievement and engagement)?***

### Findings

- In its progress towards developing and expanding its academic programs, the college has undertaken deliberate and well-planned strategies to broaden the range of ATAR, vocational education and training and general courses in the senior years. In 2016 students studied physics, chemistry, human biology and mathematics applications and methods as well as English and geography. The level of participation in ATAR improved, with a median score of 67.35 in 2016, up from 66.9 in 2015 but the Western Australian Certificate of Education achievement rate fell from 100% to 75%. The college has recognised that the change to online literacy and numeracy assessment (OLNA) requirements has impacted on these levels and monitoring and support measures are being put in place for those students at risk. Twelve certificate courses were auspiced in 2016 for delivery within the college and an extensive range of certificates are delivered by external providers. Seventy certificates were completed by the 2016 cohort with 44 students achieving two or more certificates. College-based traineeships are available in a range of areas including hospitality, retail and public sector.
- Development of teacher skills for ATAR courses is a priority and the college is seeking to work with exemplar schools to enhance their ability to deliver these courses successfully. The college has recruited staff from the Teach for Australia program, with mutually beneficial success in developing their skills and those of the staff they work with. The Choose Maths program is also designed to improve teacher skills to improve student performance in mathematics.
- Career and learning pathways for students are well-developed and an explicit career education program is delivered through health classes in the lower school. Monitoring of academic progress is now the responsibility of the newly appointed Dean of Academic Studies, and links to universities and gifted and talented schools is strengthening the college's approach to developing academic rigour. The establishment of a suite of extension programs: Inspire Academic, STEM, music, netball and soccer, caters for a wide range of student interests and success has been gained in various forums and competitions in all of these programs. The college has developed highly effective links and partnerships with industry to reinforce student awareness and career goals. Aboriginal students are supported through programs such as the Deadly Sistaz and Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME).

- Due to NAPLAN Year 7 results declining in numeracy and reading in 2016, the college is implementing a range of strategies, including developing closer links with local primary schools to work on improving student performance. The reviewers recognise the college's strategic thinking in looking to work with a wider education network with common issues in student learning. Learning Centre and Development classes, explicit teaching and EAL/D strategies are the principle approaches to lift student performance in literacy and numeracy at the college. Year 9 NAPLAN performance has shown some improvement but is still below the Western Australian public school mean. Compared with like-schools, the progress from Year 7 to Year 9 generally showed lower progress and lower achievement, except for spelling which had higher progress and higher achievement, and numeracy which had lower progress and higher achievement. The college is rightly focused on improvement for the significant number of students in the lower achievement bands.
- The college has made a clear and focused move towards improving teacher collaboration and reflective practice. Learning communities have been established to enable teachers to improve their understanding of effective moderation and accurate teacher judgements. Learning area meetings regularly examine student performance data and improvement planning is becoming more directly linked to the data. Teachers have undergone professional learning in strategies to enhance academic programs developed by the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre and explicit teaching is being developed to ensure improvement for those students with deficits in learning. Technology skills and utilising information and communications technology (ICT) in teaching and learning practice are also being addressed for staff through Connect, Moodle and the substitution, augmentation, modification and redefinition process. A Future Learning framework is being established to underpin ICT understanding and use across the college. A system of classroom observation and peer collaboration also assists teachers improve their classroom practice.

### **Areas of strength**

- The college has developed a wide range of pathways to suit all students and has gained support from business and industry, local government and tertiary institutions to effectively support an expansion of student horizons and attainment.
- The comprehensive processes for review of student achievement and planning for improvement provide a clear foundation for future progress in raising attainment levels.

### Areas for improvement

- In addition to the continued development of explicit teaching across the college, a review of lower school assessment policy and practices be undertaken to examine how the high number of 'D' and 'E' grades in some areas can be addressed.
- Specific achievement targets for EAL/D, autistic and Aboriginal students are to be set as part of the college's continuing priority of differentiating learning.

## Student Performance Monitoring

*How well established are the school's self-assessment practices in accounting for school improvement?*

### Findings

- The reviewers were particularly impressed with the extent and effectiveness of the college's self-review practices. There was clear evidence in meetings with the administration team, the learning area heads and specialist program leaders that this exercise (of self-review to improve student outcomes) was well accepted practice and led the improvement agenda. The business plan provides the scaffolding for this work, and the four priority areas with their associated targets are reviewed regularly.
- The administration team have been involved with the Fogarty Foundation program to improve college leadership, and this activity has had a considerably positive impact on both the way this team works and their ability to focus on the college's improvement agenda. Data-driven processes, deep reflection on current practices aligned with research-based best practice and very collaborative behaviours have been the central themes for this work. While this has yet to fully filter down to improving classroom practices the college is well placed to implement a whole of college improvement program to lift student performance through better instructional practices and more rigorous curriculum design.
- Student performance data in Years 11 and Year 12 is showing signs that better pathway planning for students, targeted interventions for students at risk and closer ties to post-college destinations (both universities and industry) are bringing about important improvements. There is not yet the same evidence of improvement in the Years 7–10 cohorts, although positive trends are emerging with NAPLAN and other assessment data. The work across the college in relation to student performance monitoring, reflecting on the evidence and strategically developing curriculum and pedagogy to meet the challenges presented by the data is developing well. Additionally the implementation of programs for students at risk (students whose academic, social and/or emotional attributes are a barrier to engagement with the curriculum) is excellent.
- The annual report is a well presented and comprehensive document, providing both an extensive summary of the college's progress across all programs during the year and a very useful promotional tool. The numerous links developed between the college and local government, industry and post-college

destinations are well supported in the annual report. The business plan priorities and targets provide a focus for the report content.

- In addition to the annual report the college has developed a continuous communication strategy with the local community, using its web page and Facebook page to provide regular updates on college initiatives and achievements.
- Sustainability of the improvement agenda is enhanced through the capacity building of the teaching and support staff, developing the positive college culture and learning environment, and developing engagement strategies for parents as partners in the learning journey for each student. The administration team understands clearly that this aspect of their work will underpin the future success of Southern River College.

### **Areas of strength**

- The work of the administration team in reflecting deeply on data to drive college improvement.
- The impact of the business plan priorities and targets in developing the college's improvement agenda. This focus will generate improvement in both curriculum development and implementation and pedagogy.

### **Area for improvement**

- The work of the administration team is yet to impact significantly on the college's middle-management team to the extent that this group has changed its practice in relation to curriculum leadership and improving instructional strategies. There is certainly a clear understanding that this is the next step towards building capacity across the college to become a great public school.

## Program Delivery

*How well has the school performed in providing education programs that promote learning and wellbeing for all students?*

### Findings

- The college has developed a comprehensive suite of initiatives to meet the demands of the students. Pathways to ATAR courses and university entrance have been enhanced significantly as the numbers of academically able students has grown. The focus as a STEM school has enabled a number of programs (such as robotics, and strong industry links) to flourish. Implementing differentiated curriculum strategies for students at educational risk (the Learning Centre for students below NAPLAN Band 4, EAL/D initiatives and the Autism Extension Program) reflect a commitment to meet the individual learning expectations for all students.
- The STEM initiative has been particularly important as a driver for building curriculum rigour and developing academic improvement across the college. The Gosnells Education Training and Industry Link (GETIL) project has facilitated a number of pathway links into training and industry, and brought additional partners into the college to enrich the curriculum for all students.
- While there have been considerable improvements across Years 11 and 12 in curriculum design and implementation (with resulting improvements in student performance), there is evidence that there is work to be done in Years 7–10 in improving particularly literacy and numeracy outcomes for students. Curriculum rigour, better data analysis and explicit teaching have been identified as the key strategic directions for improvement. More students meeting the OLNA expectations by Year 10 will be an important measure of the success of this work.
- Over the last five years there has been a considerable turn-around in student behaviour and classroom engagement across the college. Staff, students and parents all reflect positively on the improved college tone.
- The college's grounds and facilities are being enhanced in ways that build both a welcoming and safer school environment. Additionally, classroom facilities and resources, particularly ICT, have improved considerably. Southern River College looks and feels like a safe and friendly school.

- There is clear evidence that the college is operating in a positive and efficient manner. Systems are well established to ensure an orderly environment that promotes a focus on teaching and learning. The staff working in the areas of pastoral care, student support programs and educational support initiatives are providing excellent service to the students in their care.

### **Area of strength**

- There has been a thorough examination of all aspects of the college's operations over the last three years, culminating in the development of a broad suite of initiatives that will enable the college to better meet the needs of all its students. This work has been evidence-based, pragmatic but built on best practice principles, and designed around the pursuit of excellence. This work has been an exemplary developmental model for a college on a steep improvement trajectory.

### **Area for improvement**

- The recent increase in the number of initiatives has the potential to overwhelm the capacity of the college to deliver all of their associated outcomes. It would be prudent for the administration team to now consolidate each and all the current initiatives to the point where they become embedded into the college's daily routines and practices.

## Resourcing and Support

*How well has the school established systems to monitor and review the allocation of resources to meet strategic and operational priorities?*

### Findings

- A comprehensive workforce management plan with clear links to the college's business plan priorities outlines strategic thinking for future planning and resourcing. As there has been significant growth in student numbers and a change in curriculum over the last few years, the allocation of resources to support programs and initiatives has been important. Effective recruitment of new teachers to meet curriculum and college ethos requirements and creation of new positions have been significant bases for the college's thrust to improve teaching and learning. Alignment with Teach for Australia has enabled the college to access 12 staff with expertise in mathematics and science to support the college's major thrust into STEM education. The college has identified potential staff retirements.
- With the need to provide for lower achieving students, the college employed a primary teacher to work in the Learning Centre. A male Aboriginal and Islander education officer with a sporting background was recruited and has good success in engaging at risk Aboriginal boys. A reconfiguration of Level 3 staff resulted in a new position in 2017 to manage complex behaviours, attendance and engagement; all areas identified in the college plans for improvement. Support staff to enhance the college's ICT needs and technical assistance, youth workers and education assistants with specific skills have all been part of the effective program delivery to complement the educational programs.
- To support changes in curriculum and teacher practice, a significant investment in professional learning has taken place and will continue in the next phase of development. Another investment to improve student learning has been to create opportunities for teachers to meet and collaborate. This has been important in enhancing practices across the college.
- The GETIL partnership, actively fostered by the college board, has provided valuable resources to support student learning opportunities in the community. The college has support from organisations such as Toll Group, Chevron, Curtin University, University of Western Australia, Chamber of Minerals and Energy, The Smith Family, Beacon Australia, Engineers Australia and the City of Gosnells which greatly benefit student opportunities and learning.

- The college was established 40 years ago and a case has been presented to government for refurbishment and renewal of facilities. In addition, the college has undertaken a works program to improve the grounds and reformat existing spaces to add classrooms and other learning areas. The college priority of improving its image in the community has been well served by the upgrading of the external appearance of the buildings.
- The financial planning of the college is well supported by the board and its members who have effective connections in the wider community and who actively seek opportunities to benefit the students.

### **Area of strength**

- The college's resourcing is well-managed with effective strategic planning to enable future needs to be met.

## School Board

*How effective has the board been in carrying out its functions, roles and responsibilities?*

### Findings

- The board at Southern River College is well constructed and representative of all aspects of the immediate and broader college community. Strong leadership, ready access to explicit data presentations, clear ownership of the college's business plan and its priorities and targets, and a willingness to engage with the improvement agenda underpin the success of the board.
- The board fulfils all its requirements and obligations as prescribed under policy. The board is involved in the development and regular review of the business plan, and the review of college performance data and financial reports. The board is proactive in seeking support for college improvement initiatives, and engages with the wider community to achieve this goal.
- The link between the board and the college leadership team is strong and effective. The board members clearly understand their purpose and functions, and apply the skill set they bring to the advantage of the college.
- The board proactively seeks new members who will bring additional expertise to the table to add value to the work of the board.
- The board at Southern River College is an excellent example to other IPS of how significant a role a board can play; both in relation to governance and capacity building.

### Area of strength

- The work of the board provides significant and important value-adding to the continuous improvement agenda for Southern River College. They are to be congratulated for this exemplary contribution to the college.

## Conclusion

There is a clear sense within the Southern River College community that there is a determination to be a great public school, where students strive to achieve their best work always, teachers are excellent practitioners and the administration team leads from the front.

The introduction of the IPS initiative to the college three years ago provided an important stimulus to the push for improvement that began earlier with the appointment of the current principal. This view is supported in conversations with all sectors of the college community. There are several key drivers for this work.

The administration team's engagement with the Fogarty Foundation is significant and their deep self-reflective practices using data to inform their work sets the priorities for the strategic improvement agenda.

The development of strong community links has created considerable momentum for curriculum renewal around pathways for all students towards post-college destinations and developed curriculum relevance particularly related to STEM areas.

Improving the learning environment, building the capacity of the teaching and support staff, and a more relevant and rigorous curriculum have led to a more positive college tone and a stronger student focus on learning for life.

Southern River College has good reason to be pleased with the progress made during its first three years as an IPS.

## Declaration

We confirm the information provided is, to the best of our knowledge, true and correct, based on the verification of the evidence provided by Southern River College for the Department of Education Services' independent review.

The principal and board chair have had an opportunity to comment on any matters of fact contained within this document.

.....  
Mr Bill Mann, Lead Reviewer  
Date

.....  
Mrs Lyn Caudle, Reviewer  
Date

.....  
Mr Ken Perris, Director,  
Independent Public School Review  
Date