



**ACT**  
Government  
Education

# Canberra High School

Report of Review, 2019

Date of School Review: 23, 24 and 25 July 2019  
Principal of Review School: Samara Chisholm

*National School Improvement Tool Review Report* prepared by:

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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.

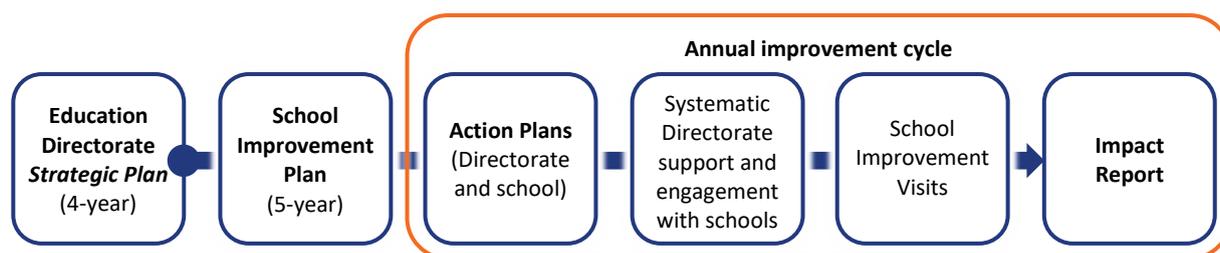
Reviews are undertaken by a team of experienced educators trained in the use of the *National School Improvement Tool* (NSIT) and are led by a Lead Reviewer from the Australian Council of Educational Research. Review Team size depends upon a range of factors, including the size and context of a school.

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

- Canberra High School's Improvement Plan 2014-2018 articulates four key priorities for improvement: Differentiated Teaching and Learning; Effective Pedagogical Practices; A Positive Culture of Learning, and School-Community Partnerships.
- There is evidence that these priorities have been intentionally pursued over the life of the plan. While development of each priority has varied to some extent in both precision and outcomes, there is evidence that school leaders have engaged with these priorities with the clear intent to strengthen teaching practices.
- The school executive team has provided faculties with a level of autonomy to progress their approaches in implementing expected strategies aligned to these priorities.
- The priorities of the school are broadly understood by all staff. In conversations with teachers, a strong commitment to the professional sharing of pedagogical practices and seeking ways to cater for the diversity of learners was evident.
- The extent of communication of school priorities and their progress to parents was not as explicit, although members of the Board had an understanding of the school's improvement journey.
- Agreed targets for measuring improvement in the progress of priorities are evident in school improvement plans, however they are not well known. Targets are broad and general. Leaders report that some of the targets originally established have been difficult to measure. Faculties have developed, and are working towards, targets to improve the learning environment in response to student surveys that are conducted at the start and conclusion of each subject.
- Routines for the analysis of whole-of-school performance data are emerging to support the monitoring of trends over time.
- The importance of wellbeing in the school is evident and highly visible to students and families through the extensive support services available, references in the newsletter, Google Classroom<sup>1</sup>, and direct teacher-parent contact.

## 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

- School leaders are committed to systematically collecting data about student performance, wellbeing and perception. There is an emerging culture of using data for self-reflection and to closely monitor the progress of individuals and groups of students over time.
- The school has been working to develop annual data plans which capture the data sets that will be collected, their purpose and how they will be analysed. These plans include how each faculty collects and uses data.
- Data sets collected within the school include progress towards elements of the Achievement Standards, A-E grade performance, student subject entry and exit surveys, and wellbeing data.
- Canberra High School has introduced a number of standardised and faculty- based assessment and survey routines. The intention has been to improve monitoring of student progress and student perceptions of their learning. Standardised assessment tools are used primarily for class placement. School leaders express the potential for the broader use of these data sets to monitor student learning growth over time as well as the success of learning initiatives.
- The relatively recent introduction of pre and post-unit student surveys support staff reflection and discussion about teaching practices at the faculty level.
- These school-developed student surveys supplement the Directorate's Student Satisfaction Survey and enable a cross referencing of data. This provides a finer lens on specific aspects of student wellbeing and engagement. Similarly, the surveys used within the student leaders group provide an insight into the leadership needs and aspirations of this group.
- Teachers convey an awareness of the range of student data available at the school level and how to access this data. Consistent routines and the confidence and skill to extract and analyse these data are not yet evident.
- Leaders are exploring how to make a broader range of data sets easily accessible to staff. The potential of the migration of student performance and background information into the new Sentral database<sup>2</sup> is being considered.
- Teachers and school leaders are made broadly aware of the school's performance through annual presentations in staff meetings. The formal sharing of student performance data is primarily limited to staff allocated this role.

## 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

- High levels of trust, support and respect are evident amongst staff, parents and students. All stakeholders speak with pride about their school and there is an obvious sense of belonging.
- Leaders and teachers describe staff morale as being high. Perception surveys support this view. Staff identified that professional support and the welcoming community are the key reasons why they enjoy working at Canberra High School.
- The school has placed a high priority on providing extensive support for student wellbeing and this is evidenced in the work of the student services and management teams. These teams are supported by pastoral care teachers, the executive teachers, and classroom teachers.
- The school has developed, and is successfully implementing, its Anti-Bullying and Anti-Harassment Policy that includes cyber-bullying. Student leaders have played an active role in promoting a safe learning environment.
- There is a *Framework for Student Management Practices and Procedures* that articulates a scaffolded approach to responding to inappropriate behaviour. Reviewers observed, in most classrooms, focussed and settled classrooms where interruptions to learning were minimal.
- A comprehensive transition program which includes specialised support for identified students ensures that year 7 students are well supported to commence their first year of school.
- Parent communication is maintained through regular emails, pastoral care teacher communications, newsletters, parent teacher interviews, school diaries, the school website and Google Classroom. Parents reported that they feel well informed and connected to the school.
- A dedicated mentor works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families to support their learning, wellbeing and connection to their culture.
- The annual Arts and Technology Showcase is an event that celebrates both the achievements of students and the diversity of backgrounds in the school community. It was first held in 2010 and has been held every year since.
- The Student Leadership Program provides a multi-layered approach to developing leadership skills and offers an active voice in the consideration and design of key initiatives.

## 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

- Discretionary funds are allocated to support initiatives such as the 'REACH' room where additional support programs are centralised. These include literacy intervention, EAL/D, and opportunities for personalised extension for students studying as part of the Inspire program.
- The allocation of staffing resources to support student wellbeing and behaviour management services includes two executive teachers, eight year coordinators, a youth worker, a school nurse and a school psychologist.
- There has been significant and sustained investment in continuing to build the expertise of staff through extensive professional learning.
- Strategic deployment of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) provides additional support for identified students both within classrooms and where appropriate, through small group withdrawal.
- Resources have been committed to support the school's extensive enrichment and co-curricular (for example, Tournament of the Minds) programs.
- Multiple learning pathways are maintained through a significant investment in vocational and training programs.
- A dedicated mentor has been resourced to monitor and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners. Through this role family links are strengthened and formal documented plans support goal setting.
- The purchase of assessment tools, for example, Progressive Assessment Testing (PAT) and the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT) are used to identify and address the learning needs of year 7 students.
- The school actively seeks community partnerships to augment resources through grants applications.
- Financial resources have been allocated to supplement funding provided by the ACT Government to provide a Chromebook device for each student. Additional investments in national library database subscriptions, interactive digital texts, and specialty software support student learning using technology.
- Finances have been allocated to enhance school grounds and buildings.
- Individual learning plans (ILPs) and personal learning plans (PLPs) inform the work of teachers and LSAs. These plans are collaboratively developed and guide the provision of goals and adjustments for students requiring additional support.

- Reviewers observed that, in the main, school classrooms are used traditionally and organised for whole group instruction.

## 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

- The leadership team has, over time, strategically recruited to ensure that for most subjects and year levels, staff are teaching in their first area of expertise.
- All teachers identify three key priorities in their annual Teacher Professional Development Plans. These are strategically aligned to school improvement priorities. Teachers nominate one school priority, one faculty priority, and one personal priority.
- Targeted whole-school professional learning is aligned to school and system priorities. An annual whole-school professional learning plan maps the opportunities, timelines and responsibilities for implementation.
- The expectations about the purpose of professional learning is documented in the staff handbook.
- A mentoring program operates to support new educators appointed to the school.
- An observation cycle for teachers to visit a colleague's class is used to expand and reinforce best practice across the school. Documented protocols for feedback are in place. Leaders and teachers report that feedback is predominantly positive.
- There is a whole-school focus on using technology to maximise student learning. The approach is underpinned by the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition (SAMR) continuum which supports teachers to reflect on how they use ICT to engage learners and support differentiated learning.
- A network approach through the Belconnen Registered Training Organisation (RTO) supports the maintenance and development of teacher Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications.
- There are multiple opportunities for staff to access leadership opportunities across the school. Examples of these include year coordinators, a gifted and talented learning officer (GATLO), and a literacy coordinator.

## 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

- Course overviews have been developed for all subjects and these have been provided to students and their families.
- Curriculum planning documentation in most faculties clearly references the Australian Curriculum. Faculties are currently working to develop long and short-term plans that link learning experiences to the content descriptions, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.
- Within faculties, teachers actively contribute to unit planning documentation and these are regularly reviewed and refined.
- Reviewers noted variability in the quality, approach and detail in this planning documentation.
- A whole-school approach to planning, underpinned by a shared vision to guide faculties in curriculum development and delivery, is emerging.
- The use of rubrics to both guide teachers in their decision-making about standards and to give clarity to students about how they can improve their performance is evident across faculties. Students reported that these rubrics support them in understanding where they are at in their learning. These are unpacked by their teachers to ensure that they understand the criteria. Some students reported that the more frequent use of exemplars would support them in understanding what an 'A' would look like.
- Student achievement results are moderated by processes such as cross-marking and collaboratively reviewing samples of student scripts. There is variability in the frequency and type of moderation practices across faculties.
- Through strategies, including the 'TEXAS<sup>3</sup>' paragraph writing process, there is an increasing awareness of the importance of embedding literacy skills across the curriculum.
- VET programs provide opportunities for students to attain industry qualifications, participate in work experience and commence apprenticeships.
- Parents and students alike expressed their strong appreciation for the extensive range of enrichment and co-curricular (for example, Mountain Bike Club) activities that support students in pursuing their interests and talents.

## 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

- Encouraging and supporting teachers to differentiate and personalise learning for all students has been a priority for the school across the life of the plan. All teachers clearly articulate the school's expectations that the progress of individual learners is closely monitored, and that appropriate adjustments to teaching are made in response to those needs.
- Professional learning opportunities have been provided to support teachers in effectively tailoring their teaching to student needs. Through the school's 'teachable moments' focus, teachers have shared practice during staff meetings about the ways in which they cater for the diversity of learners.
- Faculties have developed, and use, curriculum trackers to centralise information about student progress, particularly progress towards the Achievement Standards.
- The use of differentiated assessment tasks was evident in all faculties. This has been an expected strategy, and reviewers found evidence of teachers consistently providing students with some choice in how they demonstrate their learning.
- There has been a whole-of-school focus on the use of technology to effectively monitor learning and provide differentiated learning experiences.
- The school places an emphasis on teachers knowing their students as individuals and personalities. This knowledge is gained through the pastoral care (ACE) model, where teachers often remain as the student's home room teacher for their four years of schooling, through regular meetings with year coordinators and members of student services, and by interacting with students in enrichment and co-curricular activities.
- In core subjects, students are placed in three levels based on their previous academic performance. In year 7 screening tests are used to support placement and intervention. Adjustments are made to the pace of learning and assessment tasks across these levels to better support student learning.
- Primarily teachers teach the same curriculum to all students in a year level although there is a growing recognition of the importance of ensuring that curriculum planning and delivery is flexible and responsive to needs.
- Differentiated teaching strategies are not consistently understood and applied across the school, although there are pockets of sophisticated responsive teaching.
- An 'Inspire' extension program is in place. Students in this program are provided with class-based extension activities, participate in a philosophy course, and are regularly involved in competitions and off-campus extension programs. Some year 10 students have commenced senior studies at a local college.

## 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 have ensured that there are multiple opportunities for teachers to learn from each other's practices. A centralised repository that captures a range of strategies that teachers have shared with their colleagues during meetings, supports teachers in trying new approaches. Many teachers were able to describe the strategies they have experimented with as a result of this professional sharing.
- Several pedagogical approaches are expected in all classrooms and this includes the regular monitoring of student learning using a range of strategies and some timely feedback to guide student learning.
- Reviewers observed the use of learning intentions in Google Classrooms, displays in classrooms and introductory segments of lessons. This has provided students with clarity about what they are expected to learn and do.
- Canberra High School uses a Growth Mindset approach to building students' beliefs in their own capacities to learn successfully.
- Students report that many teachers strive to ensure that lessons are engaging and interesting by providing them with learning experiences linked to real life contexts, using group work and interactions to support enjoyment and achievement. Some students reported that at times there was a lack of variety and balance in teaching methods.
- Students reported that they value the feedback that teachers regularly provide to them to support them in understanding how they can improve. Some faculties have adopted a systematic approach using the Direct Improvement Reflection Time (DIRT) model. Feedback is provided through a range of mechanisms including verbal and written feedback on assessment tasks, in Google Classroom and in the classroom.
- Peers regularly provide feedback to each other about their classroom practice, although there is less evidence of school leaders routinely providing feedback and, where appropriate, modelling effective teaching strategies.

## 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 an active P&C Association which regularly contributes additional funding from fundraising activities. Minutes of meetings provide evidence of regular updates by the school staff on school events and initiatives. The School Board, P&C and staff work collaboratively to support student learning.
- The school has established a strategic partnership with local senior colleges that has been sustained over time. Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) and Third-Party Agreements are in place with the Belconnen Network Registered Training Organisation (RTO) for the provision of vocational education programs. Career counsellors support year 10 students as they prepare to transition to colleges.
- The school offers trade courses through the Belconnen Trade Training Centre that operates within the Belconnen Network RTO, and partners with local businesses and organisations to provide work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Within the Belconnen Network RTO there is evidence of attainment data being analysed, along with the professional learning and sharing of practice.
- The school regularly connects with local galleries, museums and Questacon to support both classroom learning and whole-of-school events, for example, the annual Arts and Technology Showcase.
- There are a very broad number of connections to organisations to support wellbeing, and these include: Men's Shed, Headspace, Lifeline, and the Belconnen Youth Centre. The student services team has clear intent in sourcing appropriate support for individual students from a range of providers.
- The Athlete Development Program (ADP) has been established to assist talented student athletes to achieve the highest level of performance in their chosen sport and to help them with their personal and educational development. External qualified and experienced coaches support and deliver the program.
- A strong relationship has been forged with the CSIRO. Canberra High School has been invited to trial some of its new programs. The school is promoting STEM initiatives through its partnership with the Australian National University.
- The school has in place a sustained partnership with the University of Canberra. Pre-

service education teachers are regularly invited into the school for their practicum experience.

- A collaboration between the school and local Aboriginal community members is in place, and seeks to build stronger connections to country through an enriched art program.

## Commendations

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- There is an obvious strong sense of belonging and pride in the school. Genuine, respectful and caring relationships are clearly evident and high levels of trust are apparent across the school community.
- The school is well served by a professional team of highly experienced and capable staff who support each other professionally and personally.
- The school's emphasis on student wellbeing is proactive and extensive, in part due to a culture of care from teachers and the commitment of significant human and financial resources.
- Students can pursue a broad range of interests and talents through an extensive academic and co-curricular program.
- The school draws on students' perspectives on teaching and school life through its active student leadership program and regular opportunities to give authentic feedback about learning across classrooms. Student leaders take responsibility for decision making, design, delivery and maintenance of a range of student-focused initiatives.
- Canberra High School is committed to a planned approach to professional learning clearly focused on the school's improvement agenda. The introduction of 'teachable moments' presented regularly at staff meetings and collated in a communal Google Classroom has provided a strong pathway for sharing practice.
- A school culture that respects and values partnerships with parents to maximise student engagement is evident in the emphasis placed on the importance of regular parental contact through Google Classroom, email and phone calls, close collaboration with the P&C and Board, and participation in range of school events.
- A sustained partnership with University of Canberra Lake Ginninderra College and Hawker College has enabled a strong and shared responsibility across the areas of student transition, careers education, subject choice, learning extension opportunities, and vocational education and training.

## Affirmations

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- There is an emerging data culture at Canberra High School. Leaders are clearly committed to supporting teachers to use data effectively. Data plans are evident for each faculty. The use of data to inform student progress over time is currently moving from primarily end of term/semester assessment to a focus on the more frequent monitoring of student learning. This approach is supporting teachers to plan their teaching.
- There is an obvious commitment across the school to providing students with some choice in how they demonstrate their learning through a range and balance of differentiated assessment tasks.
- Regular peer observations are embedded practice at Canberra High School, and are underpinned by clear and well understood protocols. This enables teachers to share practice and learn from each other.

- Significant work has been undertaken recently to ensure that all learning areas are aligned to the Australian Curriculum. Faculties are currently developing and/or refining their curriculum planning documentation to tighten this alignment.
- Teachers are working to make the learning visible for students and are regularly using learning intentions to provide clarity of what learning is to take place, and by providing explicit feedback to students.

## Recommendations

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- Develop an explicit school improvement agenda in close partnership with the wider school community which identifies specific improvements in student learning and wellbeing. Targets for improvement should be well defined, time-bound and measurable. Establish achievable, yet challenging, targets aligned to these outcomes.
- Continue to build a data culture through the enactment of the school's data plan, supported by targeted and ongoing professional learning in data literacy. Ensure that the establishment of regular routines of data analysis inform school-level decisions, interventions and initiatives.
- Continue to support teachers to use a range of evidence to regularly monitor individual growth in learning and personalise teaching and learning activities.
- Ensure that the school's curriculum delivery plan reflects a shared vision for teaching and learning for the school and that all planning documentation, both short and long term across faculties reflects this vision. Pay particular attention to the vertical and horizontal alignment of the curriculum as faculties revise planning, delivery processes and practices.
- Build upon the strong collegial culture that has already been established and the openness of teachers to feedback about their practice. Expand feedback protocols to include critique to further support teachers in the continuous improvement of their teaching. Consider how coaching models and the development of an agreed instructional model can align to the feedback teachers receive.
- Ensure that regular opportunities are created for teachers to work together to learn from each other, with particular emphasis on the joint analysis of student work, planning, delivering, and reviewing the effectiveness of curriculum plans and lessons within professional learning communities.