

School review report

Bendigo Special Developmental School (5298)
School strategic plan 2025–2029

Executive Summary

This section provides a summary of key review findings and areas of focus, which can be shared with the school community.

Key findings on student outcomes and school practices

In Term 1, 2025 Bendigo Special Developmental School completed their 4 yearly school review to inform development of the next School Strategic Plan (SSP). The review was facilitated by an independent, external school reviewer with input from the school's Senior Education Improvement Leader (SEIL) and 2 challenge partners. The principal, school council president and key staff members were also part of the school review panel. The following provides a summary of the review's key findings regarding student learning and wellbeing outcomes and supporting school practices.

The Panel agreed that the school prioritised the establishment of a consistent approach to enhance student engagement in learning and wellbeing. The strategic allocation of key personnel provided students and staff with a well-resourced team to support the needs of the school. The Panel noted leadership developed structured leadership roles assisting the school to develop a culture of respect and collaboration and to promote focused professional dialogue. The Panel agreed leadership's commitment to improving teacher practice was apparent and teachers expressed confidence when approaching leaders. The Panel found middle leaders had opportunities to strengthen their leadership knowledge and skills, and several new leaders benefited from opportunities to move into leadership roles. Some middle leaders were new to their roles, and the Panel agreed continuing to build their capacity to confidently facilitate team discussions and/or lead professional learning could be advantageous. Continuing to provide opportunities for aspiring leaders could also provide a succession plan for future leadership. Staff articulated roles and positions of responsibility were not always clear. The Panel agreed an opportunity exists to continue to develop and strengthen role clarity, communication and visibility for leadership roles to enhance greater transparency of operations across the school.

The Panel agreed protected time to meet and structures and protocols for Professional Learning Communities (PLC) were established. School leaders supported PLC leaders to build their capacity to lead the process and teachers received professional learning to enhance their capacity to undertake inquiry cycles. The Panel observed some variability across PLCs and agreed there is an opportunity to strengthen the inquiry cycle to ensure PLCs remain the driver of the core work. The Panel suggested given some PLC leaders were new to their roles continuing to provide ongoing leadership support and refining PLC operations would be beneficial.

The first SSP (2020–24) goal was to maximise the learning outcomes for each student. This goal was partially achieved, with both targets partially achieved. Professional learning supported the school to implement both literacy and numeracy initiatives. An instructional model aligned with the Victorian Teaching and Learning Model 2.0 (VTLM) was routinely used for both literacy and numeracy. The Panel observed some variability at times in the implementation and recommended continuing to refine and embed the model. A structured program for phonics, reading and spelling supported students in pre-Foundation to Level 2. Teachers expressed greater confidence for teaching numeracy than literacy and the Panel recommended a continued focus on strengthening literacy approaches. Professional learning and coaching supported the teaching of mathematics impacting positively on staff confidence and attitudes for teaching mathematics. Comprehensive curriculum documents were not yet in place and the Panel suggested enhancing the depth of curriculum planning across the school. This could be achieved by developing units of work and scope and sequence outlines aligned with the Victorian Curriculum 2.0, strategically scaffolding age-appropriate materials across the school.

The second SSP goal was to improve student voice and agency. This goal was mostly achieved, with one target achieved, one target mostly achieved and one not achieved. The Panel found a student leadership model enhanced students' participation and engagement in school life particularly for senior

students. The Panel agreed there was potential to expand student leadership opportunities to junior students and those with complex communication needs, encouraging greater student representation and advocacy.

The Panel found that a proactive behaviour framework and systems for recording, monitoring and analysing behavioural incidents were strengthened. The Panel agreed a reduction in major incident reports and measurable improvement in student behaviour demonstrated improved student self-regulation and the effectiveness of proactive behavioural strategies. The behaviour matrix was visible in every classroom although parents and staff reported the use of the matrix and the rewards system was not always consistent across the school. The Panel recommended continuing to refine and embed the framework would be beneficial.

The Panel agreed the deliberate focus to build an inclusive culture and a consistent approach to wellbeing was a school strength. The Panel found that Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), personalised communication supports and positive behaviour frameworks offered structured interventions and engagement strategies to enhance active student participation in school life. Professional learning equipped staff and students with skills and strategies to elevate wellbeing and to cultivate positive mental health strategies. Use of targeted intervention and allied health professionals provided individualised student support and contributed to positive personalised learning pathways. Visible adjustments were observed in classrooms, supporting students to fully access the curriculum. Some staff expressed a desire for further professional learning in identifying and making reasonable adjustments would be advantageous. The Panel agreed the school's consistent use of tiered interventions contributed to a safer and more predictable learning environment.

The Panel agreed the school fostered strong relationships and active partnerships with families, carers, and external organisations enhancing student participation, engagement and a sense of belonging. Parents expressed high levels of trust in leaders and teachers to provide specialised support for students and families. Parents identified communication for the handover of student information for the following year as an area for improvement. They also noted challenges in accessing allied health and support services, as well as student anxiety during staff absences. These concerns were highlighted as areas for future focus.

Focus areas for the next School Strategic Plan

The school review Panel recommends the following areas of focus be prioritised in the next School Strategic Plan:

- PLCs particularly refining and embedding structures and monitoring the impact.
- Leadership particularly role clarity and visibility for leadership positions and capacity building and opportunities for existing and aspiring leaders.
- Coaching, mentoring and peer observations.
- Literacy and numeracy initiatives and the instructional model particularly refining implementation in alignment with the VTLM 2.0.
- Implementation of the Victorian Curriculum 2.0 and understanding of a continuum of learning.
- Assessment and data literacy, particularly accuracy of teacher judgements, differentiation, moderation and formative assessment.
- Student voice and agency, particularly feedback strategies, communication modes and student leadership.
- Students' health and wellbeing particularly enhancing the school's behaviour approaches and staff capacity to make adjustments.
- Learning and wellbeing partnerships with parents.
- Student attendance and transitions and pathways