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External Review Section

Report of the Focused External Review by the ERS

for

**Maria Regina College
Dun Manwel Attard Young Adult Education Resource Centre
Wardija**

**External Review
carried out from
27 February to 1 March 2023**

9 March 2023

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Introduction

Centre Details	Name of Centre	Dun Manwel Attard Young Adult Education Resource Centre, Wardija
	Date of Review	27 February – 1 March 2023
	Head of School	Mr Nicholas Agius
Review Team	Review Leader	Dr Alexander Cutajar
	Review Member	Ms Mariella Farrugia
	Review Member	Mr Anthony Grech

Data Sources

- School documentation;
- Pre-external review questionnaires disseminated among teachers, learning support educators, support professional staff and parents;
- Interviews with various stakeholders;
- Observations carried out during the review by the external review team members.

Survey responses

Questionnaires were disseminated prior to the focused external review among stakeholders as shown in the table below. The highlights of the questionnaire results were discussed with the Head of School at the end of the review.

Pre-external review questionnaire	Distributed	Responses	Response rate
Parents/legal guardians	108	68	63%
Teachers	21	12	57%
Learning support educators	49	30	62%

School context and focus of external review

Dun Manwel Attard Young Adult Education Resource Centre at Wardija forms part of Maria Regina College. The vision of the school is to empower every learner to realize his/her full potential in a safe, inclusive, and supportive setting.

The post-secondary institution currently caters for 76 males and 32 females, aged from 16 to 22 years, on a full-time basis. The school has 14 teachers and 49 learning support educators (LSEs). The School Leadership Team (SLT) is composed of the Head of School, Mr Nicholas Agius, and two assistant heads, Ms Anna Bugeja and Mr Keith John Agius. The school is fully accessible to persons with mobility impairment.

The external review focused on the key area of Educational Leadership and Management. It also aimed to highlight good practices and provide recommendations as a way forward to sustain ongoing improvement at the school.

Objective of Report

This report follows the Focused External Review carried by the Education Review Section. Its aim is to give the Head of centre, the Head of College Network (or equivalent), the Director Quality Assurance Department and relevant education authorities a thorough and realistic picture on the centre's Educational Leadership and Management. It does not purport to be a comprehensive report about the centre and, on its own, it does not impinge on any decision to be taken on the centre's licence. This report will not be placed in the public domain by the Quality Assurance Department. Any data that serves as supporting evidence will be retained by the Quality Assurance Department for a period of two years in accordance with the department's Retention Policy and in line with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679.

Review Findings

The vision of the Head of School

The vision of the Head of School (HoS) revolves around providing learners with varied experiences that help raise their self-esteem and equip them with the necessary personal, social and life skills useful for their future life. This vision is shared with all stakeholders.

The school's welcoming, calm, resourceful and well-kept environment, both inside and outside, is used in various ways to its maximum for the benefit of learners. A positive sense of community prevails, marked by a strong synergy between the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the staff as well as close collegiality between educators. In fact, educators have been commended by parents for their dedication and commitment.

The SLT is aware of the challenges which the school currently faces, namely, instances of challenging behaviour of some young adults attending the school and an increased learner intake as from the next scholastic year. Due to this substantial increase, the HoS envisages a strain on the school's present physical and human resources which may not be sustainable in the near future given the existent shortage of teachers and limited physical space. The shortage of teachers is creating an overwhelming load on other members of the teaching staff and is impacting the well-being of the SLT and educators.

Leadership

The HoS is a resourceful leader and shows characteristics of transformational leadership, seeking advice when and where necessary. The HoS is adept at building relationships with stakeholders. Together with the assistant heads, and in consultation with educators, he ensures that learners' diverse needs are met through the provision of various resources as well as external support, which is sometimes sourced from private providers to organize drama, dance and equine assisted sessions for therapeutic purposes.

The SLT promotes a culture of trust and collegiality among staff members and empowers them to reflect, take initiatives and propose ideas. In so doing, the SLT is willing to support the staff and provide the necessary training and resources.

The HoS demonstrates effective problem-solving capabilities in the face of arising complex and challenging circumstances on a day-to-day basis. Although the School Council is functional, no teachers have been elected to be members of this important body. To address this gap, the HoS has set up a committee composed of the SLT and three teachers so that the latter have a voice too. Interviews with teachers who form part of this committee revealed that they are appreciative of this opportunity to meet and discuss curricular matters. With the help of the assistant heads, the HoS acts on arising situations, draws on personal experiences, and basis decisions on school and official documents to reach a compromise and amicable solutions.

Internal evaluation processes

The HoS gathers feedback from stakeholders through a variety of sources which include emails, one-to-one verbal communication, questionnaires, phone calls to parents and a suggestion box. However, for this scholastic year data collected has not been collated in a SWOT analysis exercise. Reviewers

noted that interviewed educators were not always aware of the school's goals. A collective and data-driven SWOT exercise would lead to the identification of the school's main priorities and eventually strategies on how to address them.

The SLT monitors and evaluates school matters through meetings with educators and class visits. This is appreciated by the educators as they see it as an opportunity to engage in professional dialogue. However, teaching staff do not have opportunities to meet due to timetable constraints and lack of human resources. This is resulting in the staff not having enough opportunities to work collaboratively, reflect collectively on how to plan for school development, and address possible school priorities.

School policies

The school policies can be accessed on the school website. Some educators are aware of these while others do not seem to know that these are written down and found in the school prospectus and online. An awareness of school policies is important for the staff, particularly new educators, to have a common understanding of school procedures and the rationales behind them and to be able to follow them.

Learning programmes

The school offers a curriculum whose learning outcomes (LOs) have been written by the educators themselves. The three different learning paths alongside the Prince's Trust Achieve Programme and the Duke of Edinburgh Award offered to learners address both the academic aspect as well as therapeutic care. Reviewers noted that the use of laboratories, therapy rooms and the school grounds make for a hands-on approach to learning.

The curricular path system has been up and running for the past eight years and evolved to accommodate diverse needs. Every year, educators are consulted to determine the paths learners are to be placed on. Regarding the academic paths, teacher interviews and questionnaire results have shown that some find working with LOs at times rather restrictive and can influence the teaching of more important life skills. Some educators feel that this conflicts with the vision of the school. The SLT is aware of the need to evaluate how the curricular path system is working out. Reviewers were informed that plans are in place to initiate this reflection exercise with an eye to improving the school's curricular provision.

Educators make use of a variety of assessment strategies which document the progress of the learners at the school. They keep a healthy line of communication with parents on a daily basis wherein they update them about their young adults' learning achievements, accompanied by photographs of important learning moments, via email or contact book. Teachers also discuss with parents the progress of their children's educational journey during termly parents' days. Moreover, the school organizes monthly talks to parents about various topics, identified through suggestions following feedback and through consultation with the School Council.

Job exposure is being done both in-house and on the workplace. This process is well-coordinated and is assisted by the Lino Spiteri Foundation. The job exposure exercise supports the vision of the school in providing young adults with a holistic educational experience.

Other matters

A number of rooms in the basement level purposefully equipped for learning purposes are presently out of use except for the dance studio. This is due to humidity issues following flooding. The SLT has reported the issue many times and the relevant authorities are aware of the situation. These rooms would be of beneficial use to current learners and the use of space at school needs to be maximised to cater for an increase in learner population.

Required actions/Recommendations

1. The relevant education authorities need to assist the SLT in addressing the school's increased learner intake in terms of the impact on the school's teaching capacity and existent physical resources for the next scholastic year as well as subsequent years, while keeping in mind the well-being of the young adults, the educators and the SLT. It is important that every effort is made for these classes to be managed by warranted educators.
2. As part of the school's plans for development, the SLT is highly encouraged to conduct a SWOT exercise and with the participation of all educators, identify common goals, devise strategies on how to address challenges, and consequently reach the desired goals.
3. To increase opportunities for teachers to engage in reflection, the SLT is advised to explore possibilities of introducing time-tabled departmental meetings. This would bring them together to discuss school- and curricular-related matters on a weekly basis.
4. Given the importance of school policies in the day-to-day running of school life, it is suggested that the SLT ensures that these are better shared with the staff, particularly new educators, and evaluated from time to time.
5. The SLT is highly encouraged to pursue its plan of evaluating the present curricular path system. In planning the evaluation exercise there needs to be reflection on how working with LOs can be adapted to better suit the abilities of individual learners. It is also recommended that the SLT and educators better align the curriculum with the vision of the school, which is that of preparing young adults for their future life and be lifelong learners.
6. The relevant authorities need to support the SLT in solving the situation in the basement level as soon as possible so that this space can be effectively used by learners.

Next external review

The ERS will follow up the outcomes of the Focused External Review through one of its external review models within the following scholastic year.



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Appendix

QAD Standards

- 1.1 The Head of School has a clear vision for the school and, in collaboration with the rest of the Senior Leadership Team, fosters and supports a professional learning community.
- 1.2 The school has effective internal evaluation processes that inform school development planning. The school development planning documentation has appropriate structure, content and format facilitating effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- 1.3 Appropriate structures and good human resource management ensure effective school administration and consistency in all actions.
- 2.1 The school's curriculum satisfies learners' entitlement as outlined in the National Curriculum Framework.
- 2.2 Learners experience successful learning in a positive environment. Teachers plan and deliver scaffolded lessons that motivate learner involvement, respecting different needs, abilities and learning preferences.
- 2.3 The school's assessment policy and practices sustain quality development at classroom and school levels through both formative and summative assessment.
- 3.1 The school supports learners to reach their full potential
- 3.2 A sense of mutual respect amongst all stakeholders prevails, promoting positive behaviour and fostering a sense of belonging.
- 3.3 Parents take an active part in the life of the school

Table indicating the average quantities referred to when the following terms are used:

nearly all	=	more than 95%, to under 100%
Most	=	more than 80%, to 95%
Many	=	more than 65%, to 80%
a low majority	=	more than 55%, to 65%
around half	=	45% to 55%
a minority	=	less than 45%, to 35%
Few	=	less than 35%, to 20%
very few	=	less than 20%, to 5%
almost none	=	above 0%, less than 5%