

School Structure



Management Teams Timetabling Reporting

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Abstract

I suspect in many secondary schools there is a conversation, however brief, held at the end of the school year by the management team about the roles that each person fulfils, and whether there needs to be any changes made. “I’ve been doing relief for 7 years, and I would be keen for someone else to take this on”. The room goes quiet and all the others either look at the floor or stare at the pieces of paper in front of them.

In some of these schools, the management team structure may well have been established a decade ago and with all the changes that have taken place over that time may no longer be best suited to meeting current demands.

This is the very position we found ourselves in at Kaikorai Valley College. Over a number of years the school’s roll has slowly declined, yet the structure of the management team had remained much the same.

Add to this the never-ending task of creating timetables that meet the needs of students and continue to offer as broad a curriculum as possible. When faced with a competitive environment and parental choice, schools need to be responsive to their communities and provide courses that are equipping students for the future.

With the evolution of communication tools schools find themselves considering how to keep parents, caregivers, and whānau informed about their child’s progress at school. How often are we to report, what format should this take and how do we do this in a way that is conscious of the ever increasing demands on teachers in our schools?

Keywords: Management, Timetabling, and Reporting.

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Glossary

The following terms are defined to help the reader understand terminology used throughout this mini research project:

Management Team: This is the most senior group of managers/teachers who ultimately make the final day to day decisions about the running (management) of the school. This group sits above the middle management structure of HoDs or Faculty Heads and is usually, but not necessarily restricted to, Principals, Rectors, Deputies (DP) and Assistants (AP).

For the purposes of this project I will refer to Principals rather than Rectors, but ask readers to assume they are the same.

Vertical Structure: Is when management teams are arranged in a hierarchal structure eg Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal, Senior Dean and so on, each having slightly more responsibility than the other. In such a structure the DP holds more units and has more contacts than the AP and so on down.

Flat Structure: Is when the management team tends to have a Principal and several positions underneath that all have equal responsibility, rewarded by an equal number of units and non-contacts.

Timetable: Is the structure that sits around the school day learning occurs. In most schools this includes somewhere between 4 – 6 classes per day.

Modules/options: Are blocks of time on a timetable, ranging from 10 weeks to half a year, for the purposes of students getting a taste of a subject, generally in the earlier years of secondary schooling.

Reporting: The method by which schools communicate with parents and whānau about student progress both academically and socially.

Written reports: Is when schools provide written comments from teachers to parents, over and above any grading. This may be either electronically or posted home.

Introduction

Over the past nine years, the roll at Kaikorai Valley College has steadily declined to a point where it is now half the size it was in 2005. Our 2014 roll, based on the 1st March return, was 493 students, from Years 7 – 15.

The decline in student numbers has mainly been due to a city-wide drift away from co-education to single sex schooling over the past decade. 70% of students across Dunedin now attend single sex schools. This is somewhat of an anomaly when compared to the rest of NZ. Prior to 2005 the opposite pattern existed in Dunedin with a large majority of students attending co-educational schools. In fact Kaikorai Valley College was the largest school in the city.

During the same period of time, as well as the drift to single sex education, there has been a steadily declining secondary population within the city and the pattern of roll decline is mirrored by many other schools across the city.

When I first came to Kaikorai Valley College (2012) I noted that many of the structures that existed in the school were those that had set up in the past, when the school was much larger. This was true of staffing, both teaching and non-teaching, the number of HOD/TICs, management team structure, as well as the school timetable. For example in a school of 600 we had a management team consisting of a Principal, three Deputies, and a Senior Administrator (Head of Junior College, Yr 7 and 8).

Those staff within the management team were extremely experienced in their roles and were doing a superb job. It was a wonderful team to work with. Along with this management structure, teachers who in the past had been HODs of larger departments remained in these roles but were now in sole charge, or only had one other colleague in their department.

Likewise, the timetable was set up in such a way that the school continued to offer a vast array of subjects that were legacies from the past. Many of these classes were very small and placed huge pressures on staffing, with some teachers not receiving their full quota of non-contact hours (by their own choice) or classes not actually having a full four contact hours (out of a 25 period week).

Against this background, the management team began to consider ways in which we might restructure the school to better meet the needs of students, as well as fitting within the fiscal constraints of the school's GMFS and operations' grant.

When an opportunity for a Principal's sabbatical arose, I saw this as an opportunity to explore management and timetabling structures, and reporting systems, in schools of a similar size and decile rating to Kaikorai Valley College.

Research Methodology

Scope

This research project is only a small snapshot, based on information gathered from a series of interviews conducted with five secondary or composite schools in New Zealand during the 2014 calendar year. The five schools were selected from all secondary schools in the South Island and were of a similar size and composition to Kaikorai Valley College. All schools approached agreed to be involved and I am very grateful for their willingness to share some of their practices.

In selecting the sample group, priority was given in the following order, co-educational, school size, did the schools include Year 7 and 8 students, and finally decile rating.

	Information
School 1	Year 7 – 13, Decile 8, coeducation, urban, Approx. roll 520
School 2	Year 7 – 13, Decile 8, coeducation, semi-rural, Approx. roll 420
School 3	Year 9 – 13, Decile 6, coeducation, urban, Approx. roll 570
School 4	Year 7 – 13, Decile 8, coeducation, semi-rural, Approx. roll 570
School 5	Year 9 – 13, Decile 5, single sex, urban, Approx. roll 415

The sample of schools involved, ranged in size from 414 students to 570. All except one of schools were co-educational. Three of the five schools included Year 7 and 8 students, while the remaining two were full secondary (Year 9 – 15). Four of the schools were state schools, with one being a state integrated school. The decile distribution is illustrated below:

Decile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
School					*	*		***		

The five schools selected were spread from Canterbury to Southland, a large geographical area, and situated in both semi-rural and urban settings. Although the sample is small, it does provide useful comparisons and consistent data. In all cases consent was obtained and confidentiality assured.

Method

Initially, sending questionnaires out to the five schools was considered as the only contact, however research suggests that respondents are either not keen, or don't feel confident in expressing their views, thoughts or feelings on paper. Using questionnaires is not problem-free. Their limitations are that they often can provide answers to the questions *what? where? when?* and *how?*, but it is not easy to find out *why?*

In a real interview participants can be encouraged to elaborate on their answers, allowing them to say what they think and to do so with greater richness and spontaneity.

The use of semi-structured interviews is a qualitative case study approach. In this study, qualitative research, rather than the collection of statistical data, relied on the analysis of descriptive and anecdotal information gained through interviews and conversations. Each of the five schools became a case study where responses to similar questions could be compared.

The Principal of each of the selected schools were asked to set aside an hour to meet with me to go over a list of standard questions.

One face-to-face interview was conducted in each of the five schools. Subsequent to each of these interviews, follow-up questions were answered by either a phone call or e-mail. As a courtesy, a copy of the interview questions was sent to each school prior to the actual interview, allowing them the opportunity to consider their responses. The order of the questions was not strictly adhered to in the interview, to allow for areas of interest or answers to be explored in more depth or to go with a logical sequence for the particular situation.

Findings

Size of Schools

All five schools spoke about fluctuations in school rolls over the past five years, with movement up and down. In no school did the fluctuation exceed 10% of the total roll. Reasons given varied and included the impact of a shrinking population of secondary school-aged students in the city/town; the 2011 Canterbury earthquake; improvements in hostel settings and parental choice. Some of the semi-rural schools experienced fluctuations around family movement in the middle of the year with changeovers in the dairy farming industry.

Size of management teams

The table below illustrates the make-up of the management teams in each of the five schools. The number in brackets signifies the number of management units held by each. Where an arrow is shown a decision has been made to move to a different structure in 2015.

In almost every case, members of the management team, excluding the Principal, also received a permanent senior management allowance.

	Structure
School 1	P, DP(6), 2APs*(4) → P, DP(6), DP(6), SCT
School 2	P, DP(5), AP(4)
School 3	P, DP(7), AP(5) → P, DP(6), DP(6), Rotating HOD
School 4	P, DP(6), DP(6), GC(3)
School 5	P, DP(6), AP(6), SA(2+2MA) → P, DP(6), DP(6), SA(2+2MA)

P = Principal, DP = Deputy Principal, AP = Assistant Principal, SA = Senior Administration, SCT = Specialist Classroom Teacher, GC = Guidance Counsellor. * One AP was also an HOD of a Core Department

From this table we can see that at the time of publication of this report three of the five schools had decided to move away from a vertical to a flatter management structure. In such situations there was generally a DP with more experience who would assume the role of Principal in their absence for extended periods of time.

In almost all of the schools the Deputy Principals tended to take only the one class. The exception to this rule was where an emergency had occurred requiring someone to fill in for a period of time. Assistant Principals usually taught two classes.

The various responsibilities that each of these positions held was unique to each school, but generally focused around responsibilities for given year levels, pastoral and curriculum roles. In a couple of schools these duties also included PN responsibilities. In the other three schools this task was given to another individual. All schools had a list of tasks assigned to each position, but a couple of Principals indicated that this had not been the case on their

arrival and in these situations a list of responsibilities was quickly established.

In school 1 one of the APs was also a head of a curriculum area for which some of the units were attached. Likewise in school 3 an additional position was included that saw HODs rotate through a management role for a year. In this case their teaching load was reduced by an additional 4hrs. This role was seen very much as a development position and consequently the allocation of responsibilities is co-constructed; eg the present person expressed an interest in Pastoral care so consequently is doing a review of systems. In addition they look after some other minor responsibilities.

Sitting underneath the management teams in all schools was another layer of responsibilities including pastoral and curriculum roles.

One of the schools indicated that the management team had gone through significant change in the past twelve months due to a number of staffing promotions.

Timetable structures in classes below NCEA level

The next series of questions briefly asked schools how their timetables were set up for students Year 10 and below.

Of the three schools that included Years 7 and 8 students were placed into homeroom classes. This essentially means that the students spend about half of their time with the one teacher for English, Mathematics and Social studies. In some schools this homeroom time also included other curriculum areas such as Health, Physical Education and Te Reo. There were a few anomalies, where a teacher who was also taking classes across the senior school may not have taken the Mathematics for example.

These Year 7 and 8 classes then had compulsory tasters/modules in other curriculum areas including subjects such as: Art, Music, Māori, Languages (varied from school to school), Digital Technology (Computing), Hard Materials Technology, Soft Materials Technology, Computing, Performing arts (Dance and Drama) and in the case of the integrated school, Religious Instruction. In most cases coverage of these subjects was spread over a two year period.

Schools 1, 2 and 4 all continued with compulsory tasters/modules through Year 9 before making option choices in Year 10. In schools 3 and 5 students in Year 9 would choose option subjects for either the whole year or half a year. These modules/tasters rotated during the year and tended to be for three periods per week.

Schools 3, 4 and 5 all required students to take two options in Year 10 for the complete school year. School 1 allowed students half year options; however, when taking a language they required students to do so for the whole year. School 2 allowed students to select two half year options.

All schools reported that new subjects had been introduced in the past five years. They also reported to have withdrawn some. These subjects sat outside the main core subjects. In almost all cases this introduction or withdrawal of subjects was around the availability of teachers to offer these subjects.

Reporting System

All five schools provide at least two written reports to parents per year. These reports included written comments from teachers on student progress. All schools supported these written reports with at least two formal conferencing/interviews situations.

School 1 generated a fortnightly report that is accessible through a parent portal. The same school has developed an extensive bank of report comments that teachers are able to use for its written reporting system. This results in six letters going home to each parent rather than a report.

Three of the five schools are using KAMAR as their reporting platform.

Conclusion

It has been very interesting to see what the five schools in this sample group are doing around management structures, timetables and reporting. It has affirmed many of the practices we currently have in the school.

I found it interesting that three of the five schools were deliberately moving towards a flatter management structure, where two DPs made up a significant part of the team. Responsibilities tended to sit either with Year levels or Curriculum and Pastoral. In all cases one DP would assume responsibility in the absence of the Principal.

A management team of four people tended to be a common element in schools of a similar size to our own, with the number of units allocated to DPs being 5 or 6. Each also held a SMA.

It was also of interest that in four out five schools an additional person was included in the management team who had fewer units and taught or held other responsibilities outside the senior management role. In a couple of cases this was used as an opportunity to see how these teachers functioned in a management role.

While there were similarities in Year 7 and 8 programmes, Years 9 and 10 timetables were set up in slightly different ways, providing pathways into the senior school. In some cases the subjects offered depended on the staffing available.

Written reporting to parents happened at least twice per year in all schools with some adopting a more regular interchange, using some form of electronic communication. Several of the schools expressed interest in a parent portal approach. Conferencing/interviews took place in all schools at least twice per year.

As a result of this research and other factors, our school has reduced its management team by one, restructured our junior module system, and has moved towards fortnightly electronic reporting with more formal electronic written reports occurring at least twice per year. We will explore parent portals with a desire to move in this direction in the future. At present the school is using MUSAC but is seriously considering a move towards KAMAR.