

PRIMARY PRINCIPALS' SABBATICAL

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Are our students from remote /isolated rural schools prepared for their transition to High School/Boarding School?

Sabbatical Report Term 3 2015

Kia ora.

My name is Jenny Vincent and I am currently the Principal of Marco School. I have been very fortunate to have held this position for 9 years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Thanks to:

Ministry of Education for funding this initiative that offers Principals the time to reflect on their practises and to recharge their batteries with some rest and relaxation.

Marco School Board of Trustees for acknowledging the importance of this initiative and supporting me in my application.

NZEI, NZSTA and TeachNZ for providing the documentation to apply for these sabbaticals and recognising the importance of the health and well-being of our hard working Principals and the endless hours of work they do to provide the best opportunities for their students and staff.

Purpose

To investigate if students from remote /isolated rural areas have the social, academic and physical skills to enable them to make a smooth transition to boarding school?

To investigate if there are any issues that Principals in remote /isolated rural schools need to address to ensure that their students have a smooth transition to boarding school?

To investigate if opportunities are provided to encourage independence for our students?

Rationale and Background

I attended the 'Small School/Sole Charge Principals Conference' in Palmerston North and find that this conference is really beneficial to our Sole Charge Principals. A place where we can share ideas and help with any issues.

Our group got into a big discussion in regard to the transition to boarding school for our remote /isolated rural students. So what started as a question in regard to our students transitioning to High School/Boarding School was to become my focus for my study.

Focus questions:

Do our remote /isolated rural students have the social and physical skills to enable them to make a smooth transition to boarding school?

Are there any issues that the remote /isolated rural Principals need to address to ensure that their students have a smooth transition to boarding school?

How do we know that opportunities are provided to encourage independence for our students?

Activities undertaken

Discussions with Principals/ Deans/Hostel Managers at High Schools and Boarding Schools.

Survey with Year 7-8 students.

Discussions with Principals from remote /isolated rural school

Findings

What started out as research to find if our students are socially and physically ready for the transition from remote /isolated rural schools, I found that my inquiry into the social and physical readiness of our students was better reflected in the ‘Wellbeing ‘ of students.

Student wellbeing is strongly linked to learning. A student’s level of wellbeing at school is indicated by their satisfaction with life at school, their engagement with learning and their social-emotional behaviour. It is enhanced when evidence-informed practises are adopted by schools in partnership with families and the community. Optimal student wellbeing is a sustainable state, characterised by predominately positive feelings and attitude, positive relationships at school, self-optimism and a high level of satisfaction with learning experiences (Noble et al, 2008, P30)(Ministry of Education)

From my discussions in regard to the readiness of our students from remote /isolated rural schools for their transitioning to Boarding/High Schools:

- Students need to be resilient, social and emotionally competent, physically active and have a strong sense of identity.
- Students need to have a good understanding of the Key Competencies and put them into practise.
- Liaison with parents/students during the Yr8 school year
- Orientation day very beneficial especially for students that are not so resilient, or socially/emotionally competent.
- Informal visits from the Deans/Matrons to get to know the students that will be attending their school, and learn about the students school environment.
- Assessment data sent to Boarding school

Discussions with Principals in similar environments:

The common thread we have is that our students need to be socially and physically active.

They need to be able to make friends easily when at town sports events, when they are placed in different teams.

They need to be physically active and find things to entertain themselves, albeit on an island or in the hill country.

Transitioning between schools is an experience all our students will have on their learning journey. The transition is a process not a milestone or event that has arrived.

This process should be nurtured and supported by whanau/teachers and support staff. Our students need to feel safe and secure in their new environment as it is completely different to what they have had for 8 years on their learning journey.

Our remote/isolated and rural students are also many hours from their respective homes and are not able to just call home. Most of our remote/isolated rural schools do not have cell phone reception. Therefore our remote/isolated and rural students need to be resilient and independent learners. They need to have the wherewithal to solve little issues and be problem solvers.

Our Year 7-8 students chose from a list and ordered some attributes in order of priority, to establish what they thought were important attributes to have when going off to High/Boarding School:

- Participate and contribute
- Social and physical skills
- Respect
- Know who we are and where we stand-turangawaewae

Conclusions

When our remote, isolated rural students are supported by their parents/teachers to develop the ‘student wellbeing outcomes’ they will be better prepared for the transition into High School.

- *Students need to be resilient, social and emotionally competent, physically active and have a strong sense of identity.*

We all want the transition to High/Boarding School to be successful for our students. We need our remote/isolated and rural students to be independent and be able to solve little issues.

Our students listed the attributes they thought would help them transitioning into High/Boarding School. Therefore we are on the right track when we develop our Key Competencies, school values and ‘students wellbeing’ outcomes.

Principals can ensure that their Year 8 students gradually start the transition process throughout the year with guidance from the college Deans/Matrons/Principals. This allows the time to support and guide our Year 8 students and make for a positive experience for the students to transition from our remote/isolated and rural schools into High/Boarding School.

We are going to ensure that all our students are ready for their next step along their learning pathway throughout their final year at primary school as a Year 8 student, and that the transition will be fully supported by teachers/staff and support staff.

References

Ministry of Education (2013)

Wellbeing for Success:

draft evaluation indicators for student wellbeing