Sabbatical Report

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'An investigation into how other schools with a similar profile to Timaru Girls' are adapting their curriculum to meet the learning needs of students to be placed well for life beyond school'

Sabbatical Time – Term 3 2016

Executive summary

Purpose

After five years as Principal of Timaru Girls', I wanted to visit other schools to get some ideas to consider for future improvements and growth of the school. I wanted to discuss how schools support the development of learning capabilities in their schools, as well as how they foster a culture of investigating potential pathways for students as they travel through and beyond school. Some key areas I wanted to investigate included:

• Building learning capabilities for students – what methods can schools use to build resilience for students in schools? Are there some examples of a school-wide approach that would suit TGHS?

• Curriculum design – how have schools adapted their curriculum to support student achievement?

• Pathways education – what examples are there of schools supporting pathways education throughout year levels, in particular in non-traditional areas?

• Multi-purpose classroom space – how have school adapted traditional classroom spaces to support a variety of teaching strategies?

Background and rationale

Timaru Girls' High School has been through considerable change in the last five years. A significant roll growth as well as an overall improvement of NCEA results from Year 11 to 13 has occurred.

As a leadership team, we have identified key areas we wish to improve. Many students who leave the school often tend to choose female traditional pathways. The leadership team is keen to hear how other girls' school have introduced wider types of information for students to consider especially those of a non-traditional pathway.

At the present time, most careers information is pooled into the senior school. Although some careers work done in the junior school, most students do not appear to consider a variety of career options.

The school is in the middle of the construction of Stage 1 of its Master Plan. As part of this work two multipurpose class spaces are being built (four classroom equivalents). I was keen to observe how similar spaces in

other schools are used. If possible I was keen to see how two different curriculum areas could combine in a shared teacher space.

As Senior Leader in charge of Year 13, I have noticed some students still have issues with learning confidence. These students are the ones most likely to struggle with NCEA. I was keen to view how other schools support the building platforms of learning throughout the year levels.

Methodology

Most of my investigation was centred on visiting schools to meet and discuss with other school leaders how they approach some of the challenges we face. By visiting other schools, speaking to students and staff, a huge range of dialogue could assist in developing ideas on how TGHS could develop in some areas.

Findings

All principals and senior leaders that I met with shared the journey of change in their schools. Prompts for change were primarily to improve student engagement and achievement. The need for a relevant curriculum that met the needs of the students within each school was a consistent message; their transition to the world beyond their schools was a primary driver for how the school managed their curriculum responsibilities and subsequent design.

Some schools had made a significant change to the structure of the senior curriculum as well as the structure of the school timetable to enable the development of opportunities with other providers to allow for a wider range of learning opportunities for students, and to customise learning for individual students. It is clear that there is no simple single solution. All schools employed a variety of strategies and approaches, building atop a foundation laid in enhancing relationships, with students, the family/whanau and the wider school community.

Key findings

Strong pastoral and support networks for students are clearly important. These varied between the schools and included Academic Mentors, Academic Deans and Deans, as well as new titles and roles for traditional group/form teachers. Within each senior lead team there was a significant involvement in supporting staff through strong communication systems in procedures. Some initiatives developed by schools included:

- Designing a flexible approach to learning orientated around the needs of the individual student was crucial to supporting student success. Various examples were observed in schools from teaching in multipurpose spaces with a couple of curriculum areas delivering

teaching at the same time, to increasing contact time (double period slots) for teachers to be able to offer a variety of different learning opportunities for students within each learning block. In these situations the students chose the type of learning and content they wished to use.

- Course counselling as well as careers advice and guidance was seen as critical. This was most successful when adopted as a school-wide approach. Some schools took staff into the work places to observe how their curriculum area could be seen in a working setting. Involving families/whanau was also important. Many schools hosted evenings for families to gain information. Most schools didn't rely one avenue of information, but provided a range of organisations and speakers to be available to students. Providing PLD opportunities for staff was also crucial so that in teaching and learning, messages could be put into a context that linked to life beyond school.

- Utilising regular tracking information to identify students that may require extra support with staff working together to find solutions for students at risk of not achieving qualifications was crucial.

- Many of the schools had developed partnerships with various tertiary providers (mostly polytechnics) and Industry Training Organisations to deliver or enhance programmes both on and off the school site. Secondary Tertiary Partnerships are valued and the partnership approach has resulted in programmes being developed to fit in with the school context. Schools in urban settings could access a variety of different providers; in most cases these providers appreciated having access to students before they left school. Students appreciated being able to start vocational qualifications before they left school.

- Creativity and flexibility in the structure of a school timetable is important to minimise the impact of students being involved in secondary tertiary partnerships as well as academy programmes. The schools visited have acknowledged this and most have made changes to the school timetable ranging from longer periods and fewer options and standards offered to students.

- Changes in the senior curriculum are generally not implemented in isolation. Many of the schools visited also had made changes to their pastoral/student management system such as PB4L or designed programmes specifically for their school. The change in thinking for these changes was aligned to the schools having a greater student-centred approach.

Examples of Good Practice or innovations that could be considered by Timaru Girls' High School

Timetable Structure:

One of the possible impediments of implementing changes to the senior curriculum is the traditional structure of school timetables. Many of the schools I visited have increased the contact time teachers have with their students. This allowed many of the off-site opportunities for students (such as Secondary Tertiary partnership programmes, Gateway and Academy Programmes as well as some STAR programmes) to operate with less impact on learning.

Kelston Girls' High School

Have 2 hour periods slots with their Trades Academy classes.

Papamoa College

Have 3 'Learning Blocks'

Wellington Girls' and Wellington East Girls'

Have 6 x 50 minute periods but have 100 period classes for each subject during the week.

To consider for TGHS

Do we look to implement a double period (100 minute slot) in the senior school? How would this affect our shared time table with TBHS?

Changes in Senior Curriculum

A number of the schools have made changes to what is offered as part of their senior curriculum. This includes changes in subjects, reducing the number of credits available to students, as well as opportunities available to students through a variety of different approaches to the curriculum. As schools have moved in this direction, they have looked at what strengths exist in the school (in terms of teaching and resources).

Papamoa College

Papamoa College (opened in 2006) was designed from the outset as an Inquiry Based school. I observed open-plan teaching areas with a number

of students and teacher learning across curriculum areas. Teachers offered 'workshops' that were optional for students to attend. Students were expected to have 'learning outcomes' achieved each week, but could choose the method they wished to achieve these. Teachers monitored each morning the progress of each student. (NB The classes I observed were in the junior school.)

Wellington Girls' College

Students select the number of standards they complete in each class in Y12 and Y13. They are counselled into what each qualification is required so they understand the consequences of the choices they make. In Y12 less flexibility is offered (some internals are compulsory) in Y13 students are allowed pretty much to take whatever standards they wish. The students I spoke to felt that this prepared them well for university education. They all seemed clear to what was required for achievement. (NB about 90% students from WGC go onto University Education beyond school.)

To consider for TGHS

Do we allow a greater flexibility for students in terms of how many credits they wish to take? Should we trial some curriculum areas delivering alongside each other when the new classroom classes are built? Could some teachers who would like to trial this go and have a look at this in action at either schools? Should we limit the number of standards on offer in the senior school, but expect a greater depth of learning as a consequence? Do we tailor programmes more for the individual needs of students?

Pathways support through school

As schools have made changes to what is offered as part of their curriculum, they have also reflected on the delivery of vocational pathways information available to students. Schools had quite different approaches to how they delivered this information as a result of the common pathways students take leaving schools. Some schools visited (with a high proportion of university bound levers) spent a large amount of time allowing students to explore their own learning pathway. Other schools with a more mixed levers profile provided a blend of information from a wide variety of providers (University, ITO, Polytechnics, employers). These schools tended to look at programmes to get students 'work ready'.

A number of schools provided information evenings for whanau/ family to attend to hear about different options for students. One school described these evenings as 'event management'.

Kelston Girls' Grammar

KGG find the use of PTEs rather than Polytechnics as being more relevant to their students. (NB KGG had their own Trades Academy places.) They were prepared to go to any organisation that would suit in the delivery of programmes for their students. They weren't locked into any particular relationship with an individual group.

KGG run a 'Wahine Toa' evening in Term 3 where girls invite a 'significant person' to school for an evening to look at vocational opportunities – Kelston asks old girls who are from non-traditional areas to speak at this evening.

Kelston acknowledges as all teachers are university trained that they therefore have a 'default' to steer students towards this pathway. The senior lead team works hard to support professional learning for staff to understand the various other pathways for students at the school.

Gisborne Girls' High School

Careers education was well resourced in the school. In a school of 700 the school resourced one full-time careers teacher and two part-time teachers (who also had deaning responsibility).

GGHS had a Service Academy that was particularly successful for non-academic students. Gisborne Boys' also accessed places on this course.

Hastings Girls' High School

In 2017 HGHS are going to pilot offering a Certificate of Health Science for their students though EIT.

Wellington East Girls' College

WEGC have an extensive 'ako' programme for students throughout all year levels. This programme is developed by a team, led by a senior leader, for mentors (like form teachers) to deliver to students. The programme is changed each year to reflect the changes with students and also the community. WEGC take department areas out into the work place to see where their curriculum areas led to beyond school.

To consider for TGHS

Do we set up an ako programme at TGHS? Should we get the Chamber of Commerce to assist in getting staff to visit employers?

Do we get speakers into the school to speak to different year levels? Allow students to select some of the areas they would like to hear from? Make sure that some of the options include women in non-traditional work?

Should we set up a wahine toa evening and get speakers of non-traditional areas to be available for families to hear? Could we get a group of staff who are interested in this area to visit some schools to see their programmes in action?

The building of learning competencies for students

Papamoa College

By allowing students to learn in the style which best suited them which enabled students to gain confidence in learning, academic progress was clearly evident. The teaching programmes focussed on students learning, rather than focussing on curriculum content.

Hastings Girls' High School

Led by the Guidance Councillor the school had a 'wellness group'. This group focus on initiatives to support the wellness of both staff and students. During Term 2 the group organised a nurse to be available for the day to provide a 'warrant of fitness' for staff (to access during their non-contact time) as well as organising a roster for staff to take a last period off (but with the understanding they weren't to do school work). During Term 3 this group was organising other activities for students. HGHS worked hard to support the wellness of students. They believed this to be a major support for the ability of students to learn.

Wellington East Girls' College

WEGC had a 'spirit week' when I was there. Student decorated the school with supportive messages for students. Department followed up with assisting with bringing these messages into learning.

The school also had a timetabled 'ako time' each week which had a well-developed programme attached to it. This time also included work on careers and pathways. During this time visiting speakers talked about different vocational areas. The junior school choose the vocational areas they wanted to hear from, the senior school had vocational areas selected for them. There was always a range of options for students to choose from.

Wellington Girls' College

A team of staff developed a 'graduate profile' of what the community expected from WGC students. They then defined the key elements into goals (five feathers) which they built 'stepping stones' or expectations towards for each year level. The five feathers were built into the school's strategic plan.

Nelson Girls' College

As a result of their Principal's sabbatical, the school is adopting many of the principles of Guy Claxton into their teaching programme. This programme is being piloted by some staff with their learning being shared with other staff in the school. Guy Claxton's work is underpinning much of the building of learning capabilities in the school. NGC contracted an outside provider to survey the staff and students about what they perceived NGC learning to look like. This information formed part of the design for how school strategic goals were crafted.

To consider for TGHS

Should we think again about our graduate profile? How could we break this into stepping stone throughout year levels?

What are we doing for staff and student wellness? Could we get a team to work on initiatives for the school?

Conclusions

A summary of common themes in schools visited to enable success for senior students:

• Effective leadership (at different levels in the school) with a clear vision shared with the school community, ensuring that leadership strategies are delivered by a number of people in the school, not just the Principal and the senior lead team. This would mean that progress would often be made (and owned) throughout the school. If this is in place then student achievement should definitely improve.

• Knowing the learners and having a focus on improved student achievement as well as providing various pathways facilitating success for all students. Giving students (in the senior school in particular) an opportunity to explore their own learning pathways while in still within the support of school gave greater ownership and value to the learning path of students in the school. Having staff who are willing to allow students to

develop their own learning platform was a key element of students' preparedness for tertiary education.

• Willingness to trial and review new innovations/programmes/strategies focused on raising student achievement. Looking at ways similar curriculum areas can support each other, perhaps delivered alongside each other in a classroom setting.

• Good support in the form of course counselling and careers advice. Providing opportunities for whanau/families to access information throughout the year levels at school. Giving choices for students to explore.