

## PRINCIPAL SABBATICAL REPORT 2018

### **Purpose:**

To investigate best practice in the transition from U1 / U2 rural schools to urban U3 / U4 +, more specifically to meet the needs of Maori students and their whanau.

### **Background:**

Our small catholic rural school transitions year 8 students to at least four urban Years 9 – 13 High Schools (U3 +). Two of those are Years 7-13 Integrated High Schools (not co-ed) and include boarding.

We also transition Maori students to school well outside our region, which are for Maori students. Frequently we have had only one student in Year 8 to transition and this can pose issues in itself.

I identified my purpose because one Maori student (the only Year 8 that year) was transitioned into a hostel and had previously been very engaged in learning, attendance had improved since the student had been at our school, and academic achievement was mostly 'Above' or 'Well Above' the National Standard for their year level.

However after transitioning and beginning Year 9 in a 'city' High School and boarding, attendance dropped dramatically, engagement in learning dropped, self- esteem failed them, and whanau communication between school and themselves was very limited.

This student's needs were being met academically, and costs were covered by our school applying for and securing some funding however the cultural differences were not identified prior to boarding and this impacted greatly on the students well- being and education in general.

### **Acknowledgements:**

I would like to thank the Board of Trustees for allowing and supporting the sabbatical study, and refreshment time.

Also my relieving principal for carrying the load of teaching and day to day management.

Thanks to the Ministry of Education and Teach NZ for this opportunity to identify what we can do better for our students, more specifically our Maori students.

This is a report by Sue Harrison, St Patrick's School, Kaponga.

## **Methodology:**

Consultation with students from small rural school now in high schools and employment. I communicated with a range of past students to get a clearer picture due to the small numbers we deal with.

The consultation with the students was around their pre-conceived ideas of what lay in store for them at High School.

I wanted to identify from student voice what they would recommend for schools, teachers and principals to do better to transition them from U1 to U3 or larger schools, most especially they were the only Year 8 transitioning to a particular school, or if they were Maori.

## **Findings:**

From the consultation of past students, including some now finished High School, the outcomes from the data gathered showed:

- **New Teachers:** Past students had in general been very apprehensive around having a number of teachers in one day when from Years 1-8 most of them had only had two teachers (Junior and Senior years). They found that while it took some time to get to know their teachers they did get to place trust in them as they had at primary school. They didn't feel they shared as much about their family and outside of school as much with High School teachers, but most thought that was possibly because social areas of their life changed and they weren't sure if their teachers needed to hear all 'that'.
- **Friendships:** Past students who moved to High School with their peers had tended to continue to 'hang' with them for the first year before making new friends. Those who transitioned as the only Year 8 were very anxious about who they were going to be able to play with. One of the problems was that there were so many students from other contributing schools who already had friendships that the solo Year 8 students did not have the confidence to just join in. Also, travelling from an area away from the school posed a problem for socialising outside of school hours unless it was for sport.
- **Most friendships for the solo Year 8 students** happened through sporting activities.
- **Getting Lost:** Most did not find getting around a bigger school a problem although getting to class on time was an early issue for a small proportion.
- **Bullying:** A small number of students experienced bullying in some form in the first year, more specifically those students who had transitioned on their own but when they looked back they decided it might not have been bullying...more that they felt left out.
- **The curriculum:** The majority said it was vastly different to primary school. Those whom I remembered to be working at lower levels at our school found the classroom work quite like the learning at primary school. This suggests they were placed according to the assessments prior to High School entry. Those who said it

was vastly different then explained that this was probably more to do with self management including less teacher direction.

- Longer school day: Those who found the long day more difficult were those who had to travel by bus, but said it didn't really affect them at school.
- Sport: This impacted on some students ability to be home for longer periods (those who boarded mainly), and at times in Year 9 especially they reported that they often didn't want to go back to the school for sport in the weekend as it was more travel.
- Formal testing: Students didn't feel stressed when sitting any tests the High School carried out prior to entry.
- Boarding / Travel: Boys were the majority of boarders at Year 9 and although in the first year some really disliked it those boys then said it just became their normal life. For girls, more specifically Maori, girls boarding was really upsetting as they didn't like being away from whanau or at least having one member of their family with them.

The information gathered and collated showed: Students mostly settle into High School after the first two terms and the schools met their expectations. U1 students pre-conceived ideas on U3 + High Schools disappeared for the majority early in Year 9.

### **Outcomes:**

The question to the past students was – What would they recommend for a small rural school to do to better prepare them for a 'city' High School with many more students and alleviate unnecessary anxiety and pre – concerns and help them to stay engaged with their learning, including attendance. For many the number of primary teachers these students had was just two or three.

- Primary school teachers suggest schools to parents based on the knowledge they have of the High School.
- Primary teachers then went with them to open days, that would help as the primary teacher could help out with some suggestions for both the student and the parents, in consultation with the High School teacher.
- Primary teachers could help them making choices around extra curricula activities such as kapa haka and sport.
- Primary teachers could visit the hostels with the students and talk to the house master or matrons with the student and parents.
- Primary teachers to be available to answer any questions that the student may have because mum and dad are not confident in asking questions.
- Primary teachers to support cultural needs when transitioning students into High School.

Key differences between primary and secondary school: (Supporting Vulnerable Young People in the transition to Secondary School – Oranga Tamariki Seminar Series. Nicholas Pole ERO Feb 2018):

- Immense change in one's life
- Size differences particularly for students from small rural schools
- Often requirements for greater levels of conformity (eg, uniform, routine)
- Regimented timetable
- Often schools use streaming
- Multiple student- student relationships
- Multiple adult – student relationships
- Loss of key support network

All of the above at sometime were a point of discussion in collecting this information.

This research was to support our small rural school to effectively, including academically, socially and culturally, transition Maori students into further engagement in education.

Transitioning can be challenging for some students. Family circumstances, background, poor attendance, low self- esteem and high health needs were those areas linked to a student's transition from our school to boarding. The social implications for the student who was the catalyst for this research is that the transitioning impacted on her ability to engage at this high school and be 'included' in this hostel. The student just simply said "I didn't belong'.

The student had also never been away from the family, or had at least one other sibling with them. What wasn't considered enough was sending one vulnerable Maori student to live in a predominantly middle class European School/ hostel environment. A pattern emerged of low attendance more especially after going home to family for long weekends or holidays, and whilst I was this student's emergency contact and support person, I still didn't recognise the important role I would play in the student's High School education as far as ensuring they would fit culturally and socially. Although having given the high school the student's academic achievement (which was as a high achiever), acquired funding for this student to attend the high school and be a boarder, and given my name as a support person, there was obviously a lack of thought and action around cultural and whanau needs for this student and it impacted negatively on the student's education.

Isolation from the whanau was the most important area that was overlooked as was the cultural needs of this student. We must never just assume that they will fit in because they are academically very capable, and appear to be coping.

## **Conclusion:**

In order for students, more especially Maori students, from rural U1 schools to continue a successful educational journey we must:

- Communicate options to the Year 8 students early, including schools available, type of school (Integrated/ State, other special character) boarding options, travel and the effect of all of these on their education.
- Have very in-depth communication with the High School of choice to find out what they will expect of our students, so we can discuss with our students. They have been with us generally for Years 1-8 and they trust us to guide them so we must understand as much as we can around the holistic child.
- Involve parents early in the conversation around which High Schools they should be considering, and why. They don't know what they don't know.
- Visit the hostels / boarding options with the student and parents so that socially, culturally and morally their child will have their needs met.
- Discuss travel options with parents around students being day students rather than boarding. Look at how they can apply for funding to help with this.
- Ensure all the agencies that need to be involved to support the continued education of this student are accessed, including cultural support ie, kaumatua, iwi and I Maori leaders already in the school.
- Ensure the High School is more involved than just coming and having a friendly talk to the student prior to enrolment. They need to know and understand the holistic child and their whanau.
- Build an understanding that the culture of a school is different to the culture of a child's home so identify how we mitigate this barrier to inclusiveness.
- Support the parents in understanding the importance of their child's education for long term success.

**References:**

Practical skills for Primary School. Transition from Primary to Secondary School

Easing the transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling: Helpful information for schools to consider (MOE 2010)

Education and Pacific Peoples in New Zealand ([www.stats.govt.nz](http://www.stats.govt.nz))

A study of student's transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling (Research Division, MOE 2008)

Supporting vulnerable young people in the transition to secondary school – Oranga Tamariki Series (Nicholas Pole ERO 2018)

Understanding education    Preparing for successful transitions    Support for vulnerable students    Using effective transition process    Responsive Curriculum    Monitoring and review    transitions (/publication/evaluation-at-a-glance-transitions-from-primary-to-secondary-school)