



Relationships are Paramount

Bill Noble

Principal Bill Noble believes that relationships are central to running an effective school. While good systems provide the organisational shape of Hamilton's Fairfield Intermediate, Bill says that it is the positive, trusting relationships he has with staff and that they have with him and each other that really make the school tick as a learning institution. In his report Bill provides a detailed overview of his working week and the systems structure at the school that enables him to keep his finger on the pulse.

I've found as a principal that it is not enough to have good systems in place. In fact, I believe that you need a system to monitor the systems! Systems are only as good as the people who have to work within them, and people work best when they are supported to do their jobs, and when the relationships they have with each other are positive. This idea is captured well in the KLP.

"Building trusting and learning-focussed relationships within and beyond the school is central to the principal's role. Relationships built on trust are developed when principals respect and care for others and consistently "walk the talk". (Kiwi Leadership for Principals p.13)

Know your staff

Schools are no different from other workplaces in terms of the personality types you might find there. Some people want to be told what to do and they get on with it, while others want to do their own thing (and don't necessarily think of the consequences). Others can wittingly or unwittingly create problems that lead to the kinds of conflicts that rob you of sleep. Over the years though, I've developed some ways of managing the wide variety of personalities that grace any staff room so that everyone feels supported to be the best they can be.

One of the key things I've learned is that to build effective relationships you really need to know your staff as people, so I make the

effort to spend quality time with them in a planned and systematic way. I do this by being in classrooms observing the teaching and learning process and through spending time with each individual teacher away from their classroom to talk to them about their work, their strengths, and their concerns. I also talk to them about what their next steps might be and how I can assist them.

I know that many principals provide this kind of support to teachers, but most have varying degrees of success because unforeseen day-to-day issues often get in the way. I face this kind of problem too. The issues for me in doing this well are usually:

- Managing my time.
- Balancing my workload.

- Being available to parents.
- Ensuring I have time to do critical office work that must be completed by me as principal.

I'm going to outline here the kinds of organisational things I've put in place at Fairfield that aim to address these systems issues so that I can spend more time with teachers. Other principals might, or might not, find them useful. I am well aware that they may not fit well with all principals and would need to be adapted to suit the style and personality of individuals.



Organisation at Fairfield Intermediate

The organisational structure at our school enables me to keep my finger on the pulse. This structure ensures that the two very important aspects of the role of a principal actually happen – that they're not just rhetoric. The system ensures I spend time in classrooms and I meet individually with all teachers every term.

Here is a typical day, including the fact that there are some meetings that cannot be changed.

9:30 – 10:00	Monday to Friday: meet with principal's secretary to discuss what needs to be done each day.
10:00 – 11:00	Monday: meet DP management Tuesday: meet DP curriculum Wednesday: meet AP pedagogy
11:00 – 12:00	Tuesday: meet support staff
11:00 – 12:00	Wednesday to Friday: individual classroom visits
12:00 – 12:30	Monday to Thursday: meet individual staff
1:30 – 2:00	Monday to Thursday: meet individual staff

I timetable a lot of meetings with individual staff members, both teaching and support staff, because I believe this is critical for developing quality staff and principal relations. Every staff member must have their sacrosanct time with the principal with NO interruptions.

When I meet with staff members, I always begin by asking them about their personal lives, often their families. This could be, "How are your children?", "What are they doing?", "How is your wife/husband?", "How is your sport going?" I think it is important to show your interest in the people you work with as people rather than only as professionals. This is not hard – I AM interested!

Following this, I usually move on to questions about the classroom and what I have seen during my visit. This could include, "How are you managing X and Y?" (their more challenging students). Sometimes I might talk about their planning or assessment. I am also keen to hear their views about the school as a whole – for example, I might ask them to tell me what is working well and what needs fixing! Finally, they get the opportunity to give me feedback on what I am doing. I ask them this question, "If you were the principal what would you do differently?"

Here you can see two timetables of how it all looks during some typical weeks. I am on a number of committees and as a consequence am often out of the school. It is important to me that when I am at school I am fully involved in the life of the school.

This structure works for me. My secretary Wendy is a critical person in that she takes some of the administration from me. However, I have office time each day for those critical "principal tasks" and these times also allow me to meet with parents.

FAIRFIELD INTERMEDIATE PRINCIPAL'S PROGRAMME 2009

	Monday 2/18/2009	Tuesday 2/19/2009	Wednesday 2/20/2009	Thursday 2/21/2009	Friday 2/22/2009	Monday 2/25/2009	Tuesday 2/26/2009	Wednesday 2/27/2009	Thursday 2/28/2009	Friday 3/1/2009
8:00	Staff Meeting	Senior Staff Meeting	Meeting Paul	Office	Office	Staff Meeting	Senior Staff Meeting	Meeting Paul	Office	Office
8:30	Term 1 Week 3 February					Term 1 Week 4 February/March				
8:45	Assembly	All Students in Classrooms			Assembly	Assembly	All Students in Classrooms			Assembly
9:15										
9:30	Meetings Wendy					Meetings Wendy				
10:00	Belinda	I.C.T. Contract Rotorua			Principals	Belinda	Lisa	Helen	Office	Office
10:45	INTERVAL					INTERVAL				
11:05	Management Meeting	Support Staff	I.C.T. Contract Rotorua		Council	Management Meeting	Support Staff	Classroom Visit R2	Classroom Visit R22	Office
12:00										
12:35	Brian				Principal Meetings	Peter	Mike D.	Brett	Paula	
	LUNCH					LUNCH				
1:25	Ian	I.C.T. Contract Rotorua				Principals Meeting		Stacey H.	Sandra	Cindy
2:00	Andrew Camp Office				Wellington	Office	Office	Office	Office	Office
3:00										
4:30						Board meeting				

FAIRFIELD INTERMEDIATE PRINCIPAL'S PROGRAMME 2009

	Monday 7/21/2009	Tuesday 7/22/2009	Wednesday 7/23/2009	Thursday 7/24/2009	Friday 7/25/2009	Monday 7/28/2009	Tuesday 7/29/2009	Wednesday 7/30/2009	Thursday 7/31/2009	Friday 8/1/2009
8:00	Staff Meeting	Senior Staff Meeting	Meeting Paul	Office	Office	Staff Meeting	Senior Staff Meeting	Meeting Paul	Office	Office
8:30	Term 3 Week 1 July					Term 3 Week 2 July/August				
8:45	Assembly	All Students in Classrooms			Assembly	Assembly	All Students in Classrooms			Assembly
9:15										
9:30	Meetings Wendy					Meetings Wendy				
10:00	Belinda	Lisa	Helen	Office	Office	Belinda	Lisa	Helen	Office	Office
10:45	INTERVAL					INTERVAL				
11:05	Management Meeting	Support Staff	Classroom Visit R5	Classroom Visit R7	Office	Management Meeting	Support Staff	Classroom Visit R30	Classroom Visit R25	Office
12:00		Classroom Visit R3					Classroom Visit R27			
12:35	Mike	Helen	Sarah	Craig	Principal Meetings	Nicky	Lyndon	Bernie	David	
1:25	LUNCH					LUNCH				
2:00	Erin	Stacey	Jenna	Sheila	Julie	Principal Meetings	Abbie	Wendy	Mike D.	
3:00	Office	Office	Office	Office	Office	Office	Office	Office	Office	Office
4:30										

To make the learning work for the kids, I need good relationships between staff members and I need to know what is happening in my school. I seek to achieve this with my time in classrooms and talking with teachers.

I believe that the strategies I've outlined here show my commitment to *awhinatanga* – guiding and supporting staff.

I have a number of systems in place for different kinds of tasks. On the web-based version of this story I have included an example of my organisational approach to the allocation or review of units. Colleagues are welcome to download the powerpoint and use the ideas if they find them of value. I believe we should share our ideas around – **principals helping principals** is what it's all about!

