

(a) Title – Principal’s Sabbatical Report: Wayne Asplin

Proposal “*to research how rural schools use teacher aides to enhance student achievement, in particular how they attract quality teacher aides and the programmes they use to support student learning.*”

(b) Author, school, period of time sabbatical covers

I am the principal of Ngahinapouri Primary School, a U4 Decile 10 full primary school situated 17km south west of Hamilton.

(c) Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Board of Trustees from Ngahinapouri for their support of my application and for their desire for the staff and pupils of Ngahinapouri to continually ‘Strive to Improve’.

I also thank my DP Marika Karshagen and AP Kari Ter-Morshuizen for ably leading the learning and managing the school in my absence.

Thank you to the 21 schools from the Waikato Principals Association who completed the on-line monkey survey and a special thank you to following principals, who I visited,

John Cubitt	Pekerau Primary School
Andy Morgan	Kihikihi Primary School
Pat Poland	Deanwell Primary School
Tony Grey	Te Kowhai Primary School
Tony Howe	Opotiki Primary School (phone interview and presenter at Waikato Principals’ Catch Up Day)

(d) Executive Summary

Parents, teachers and principals know that children benefit from one to one support particularly when this is provided by trained professionals. Every school principal that responded to the questionnaire stated that Teacher Aides are valuable and they would like more. It also became apparent the role, responsibilities and expectations of Teacher Aides are many and varied.

(e) Purpose

In my role as a mentor principal for the Auckland University First Time Principal’s Programme I am frequently asked questions around teacher aides.

1. Employment issues, letters of employment, job descriptions, appraisals
2. Funding (especially high decile schools),

3. Effective programmes, especially for special needs students and ESOL students
4. Training, support and professional development

For many of our small U1 schools the teacher aide is often the only other professional adult that the principal has regular contact with.

As a result of my study I will be able to apply my findings to ensure that Ngahinapouri School is using our teacher aides effectively to enhance student achievement and more importantly I will also be able to share this information with the eight rural principals I am currently mentoring.

(F) Background and Rationale

For many schools teacher aides are part of the culture of the school. In small rural schools, that experience high turnover of principals and teaching staff, they can be the longest serving staff member. Newly appointed principals can inherit teacher aides who don't fit into the vision the principal has for his school. How to help first time principals manage this has led to my sabbatical research.

(G) Methodology

I gathered school information from a survey monkey questionnaire that was included in the Waikato Principals' Association weekly mail out. Twenty one schools responded to this survey, seventeen from the monkey survey.

To ensure I had a broad spectrum of schools and principals I also emailed the questionnaire to colleagues and visited four primary schools in and around Hamilton.

I also read "The impact of teaching assistants on improving pupils' academic achievement in mainstream schools: a review of the literature." Peter Farrell, Alison Alborz, Andy Howes and Diana Pearson *School of Education, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK*

(H) Findings

The 22 schools that provided the information for this report were made up of 18 rural schools and 4 urban, 16 full primaries and six year 1-6 primaries, with school size ranging from U1 to U5. No intermediates responded to my survey. The make-up was U1 4, U2 5, U3 7, U4 4 and U5 2. All but two of the respondents, Opotiki Primary School and Glenberbie Primary School were members of the Waikato Principals' Association.

A total of 75 teacher aides were employed by the 22 schools this is an average of 3.4 teacher aides per school. The largest employer of these schools is Opotiki with 14.

The table below shows the number of teacher aides per school.

Teacher Aides	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	14
Number of schools	6	4	3	5	0	1	2	1

The large majority of teacher aides 56 (78%) are employed in fixed term contracts while only 15 (22%) are on permanent contracts.

Nineteen of the 22 schools have a written job description and the other three schools have a timetable. The principals of these schools are all currently in the process of developing job descriptions. Principals reported that the job descriptions were quite general as the roles of the teacher aides in their schools were varied. The exception to this was when a teacher aide was employed to work with an ORRS funded or High Health needs student.

Three schools do not currently have an appraisal system in place for their teacher aides. Interestingly these are not the same three schools that don't have a written job description. In twelve schools the principal is responsible for appraisals, in two it's the team leader or senior teacher and in five schools the SENCO is responsible.

Teacher Aides are used in schools for special needs ORRS, High Health, ACC, CYPs, 1 to 1 support, targeted programmes, in class support, administration and duty. The graph below shows how Teacher Aides are used in school

Number of Teacher Aides	ORRS GSE CYF MOE	1 To 1	Targeted Programmes	In Class Support	Admin	Duty
4	GSE / CYFs (1), ORRS (1) Interim Support fund	Working with identified students in literacy Lexia ORRS Student	Toe to Toe Targeted maths NVC1	With GSE / CYF funded student ORRS Student Helping in junior classrooms (literacy & maths)		GSE / CYF student – interval / lunch (behaviour)
7	ORRS (1) GSE/CYFs (2)	ORRS –hearing (1) Behaviour plan (2) High health needs (1)	Successmaker Talk to learn	3- class support or targeted groups		
4		withdraw individuals / small groups to meet needs – numeracy / literacy		Targeted to area of need - literacy, numeracy, speech. work with in class		
4		Speech	Numeracy Literacy	Work with groups in class and withdrawal groups	Library (1)	
1		IEPs	Literacy Numeracy	In class free up teacher so they can spend quality one to one time with students on IEPs		
1		In class, not withdrawn		1:1 assistance in class following specific programme matched to next learning steps		
Number of Teacher Aides	ORRS GSE CYF MOE	1 To 1	Targeted Programmes	In Class Support	Admin	Duty
4		Health Withdrawing small groups or individuals and		Working alongside students in classes		

		working on learning programmes with them.				
3	GSE 1	Withdrawing small groups for Oral language, numeracy and literacy	Toe by Toe PMP Dyslexia Numpa Oral language NVC1	working alongside children		Playground duty – morning tea and lunch (behaviour needs)
3	ORRS x2 ACC	IEPs, 1 to 1 support Learning support for groups		In class support		
2	ORRS	One for severe behaviour needs global delays- ADHD The other work with students providing assistance with learning - one on one and small groups with reading ,writing and maths				
1				to support remedial programs, assist teachers by working with brighter groups while the teacher focuses on the lowest groups		
2				In class support withdrawing small groups	Library / clerical assistant	
2	GSE	High health needs		In class support for Literacy		
4	GSE RTL CYF	Student behaviour Learning support				
1		Groups and individuals to assist learning needs		In class support with groups or individuals to assist learning needs		
2	GSE	Specialised PE programme with disabled student		Highly trained TA works with our 5 yr olds to give them time to themselves away from the intense competition that is the multilevel class! She takes reading, writing, ABC work and music		Drives the school bus
1				Teacher aide time is split into two blocks currently. (1/2 day) She uses the Quick 60 reading programme to help our critical readers (x2). She also takes 1-1 decoding lessons, working on practising word building and word recognition using rime. The other half of the day she spends in the junior room helping the NE teacher out with reading and maths group exercises.		First 15 minutes of lunch to monitor eating
Number of Teacher Aides	ORRS GSE CYF MOE	1 To 1	Targeted Programmes	In Class Support	Admin	Duty
4	GSE	High Health needs		Used to support classroom programmes by working with groups of children. Resource making and collation		

7		Withdrawn for learning support	PPP Clicker 5	Work with individuals or groups to implement programmes set by teacher		
4	ORRS ACC		Home reading at school PPP Support riding for disabled	Kaiawhina – 31 hrs. –ACC funded 19 BoT funded – support child and 2 Rumaki classes, also after school bus etc. ORRS funded + 3hrs 1 to 1, 17.5 hrs. – works with groups, 6 hrs. riding for disabled		
14	ORRS x2	5 reading tutors All Students go to reading for 30mins 3x a week for 10 weeks. No stigma everyone goes to reading brightest for extension	Literacy HPP PPP TARP 3 Level questioning	First 5 junior classes all have full time teacher aide	Library Resource room (2)	

In total teacher aides delivered 17 recognised programmes. A large number of schools said that their teachers designed programmes to meet the needs of the students working with their Teacher Aides.

Every school surveyed funded teacher aides from their bulk grant. The amount of funding varied with schools often topping up funded hours.

The table below shows how Teacher Aides are funded

Bulk Grant	100%
GSE	59%
MoE	23%
CYFs	29%
Interim Support Fund	29%
Other	41%

Note; the responses in the Survey didn't indicate what MoE funding was for or what the other was made up of.

Training of teacher aides was in all cases task specific and relevant to the students they worked with. Typically teacher aides received training in literacy, numeracy, health and behaviour. Ministry of Education and Group Special Education (ESOL, Non Violent Crisis Intervention and Health) was the most common provider of training followed by in school training, RTLb and RTLit. Only two schools currently employed Teacher Aides with polytech qualifications.

When asked if funding wasn't an issue all but one school indicated they would like more teacher aides. Twelve schools indicated that they would want a teacher aide per class, the smaller U1 and U2 schools would have more than one per class and the large U5 urban school would like one per team.

There is a concern raised by a few principals that often it is difficult to get Teacher Aides with the skills we need as the hours are often not enough, the rural location

and the wages are pitiful. Also where Teacher Aides are working across the school and in a range of circumstances it is often difficult to monitor performance and delivery. Principals also stated that some teachers have a poor attitude toward Teacher Aides and can treat them like “second class citizens”

The synthesis of findings from literature I read supports the view of many of my colleagues that children who have identified difficulties benefit both academically and socially from a period of targeted intervention from teacher aides. However when teacher aides work in whole class situations their work is more of a general nature and may not involve working directly with children with identified difficulties. When this occurs a teacher aide does not have a positive effect on the achievement of all pupils.

The findings from the literature state that,

- (1) Trained and supported Teacher Aides can help children with learning difficulties to make significant progress in their attainments when they provide direct help to children on a one to one or small group basis, using a programme with which they were familiar and they were monitored throughout the intervention period.
- (2) Teacher Aides need to be trained and supported in how to use the techniques needed to help the children for whom they are responsible.
- (3) Increasing the numbers of Teacher Aides in a school does not mean the attainments of all pupils will not necessarily improve.
- (4) Teachers value Teacher Aides in a whole range of ways and that they feel their job has been made easier with the support of a Teacher Aide.
- (5) If you want to improve student achievement then the teacher aide needs to work with identified child or small group of children. The teacher aide must be provided with sufficient training, support and monitoring.

(I) Implications

Teacher Aides do have a positive influence on students' learning but it is up to principals to use them strategically. To ensure this teacher aides need,

- (1) Current up to date job descriptions
- (2) To be part of the schools appraisal system
- (3) To be trained and supported in the programmes they are to deliver
- (4) Teacher Aides are more effective when they work one to one or in small groups
- (5) In class situations teacher aides should be used to release or free up teachers to work with those traditionally assigned to teacher aides.
- (6) Yearly letter of appointment for teacher aides on fixed term contracts.
- (7) To be seen as a valued member of staff.

The funding of Teacher Aides is a major implication for schools with all seventy five teacher aides employed by the twenty two schools receiving some of their salary from the schools bulk grant. Forty one percent of schools used board raised funds to help pay Teacher Aide salaries. Several principals suggested schools should be given an entitlement of “support staff” based on size and be able to use this as they see fit. This could include office/admin staff as well as Teacher Aides.

Fourteen of the schools surveyed would employ one Teacher Aide per class if funding wasn't an issue. Seven schools would employ more than one Teacher Aide per class while only Opotiki was happy with the number of Teacher Aides they employed.

The decile rating of the school and the size of the school are also contributing factors to the number of Teacher Aides can employ. Smaller schools and higher Decile schools commented that budget constraints limited the number and hours that they could employ a Teacher Aide. Also several principals commented that the wages Teacher Aides received were not enough to attract good applicants.

(J) Benefits

The benefits for Ngahinapouri School have been many. The way Teacher Aides are used to support teachers in class will change to ensure that all students have equal access to the teacher. We have access to a wider range of programmes that have the potential to enhance student learning. With the copies of job descriptions and letters of appointments I have received I can review our current job descriptions and rewrite if necessary.

In my role as a First Time Principal Mentor I now have copies of job descriptions and letters of appointment that beginning principals can use as a model. I will also be able to recommend learning support programmes and schools for them to visit.

(K) Conclusion *to research how rural schools use teacher aides to enhance student achievement, in particular how they attract quality teacher aides and the programmes they use to support student learning."*

In most New Zealand primary schools teacher aides are part of the education landscape. Parents, teachers and principals all agree that having a teacher aide is a good thing. Like any resource their impact on student learning is directly related to how well they are managed.

When a teacher aide is used to work one to one or in small groups with a planned intervention then they will have a positive impact on student achievement. If a teacher aide works in a classroom then the influence on student learning is minimal unless the teacher aide works with the more able students leaving the teacher to work with the students who traditionally worked with a teacher aide.

It is essential for all teacher aides to have a written job description, be part of the appraisal process and have yearly letters of appointment for teacher aides on fixed term contracts.

Because teacher aides are requested to work with a wide variety of students using specific programmes the best training is often provided by Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour, Speech Therapists or the classroom teacher.

With all of the above in place teacher aides will enhance student learning.

References

“The impact of teaching assistants on improving pupils’ academic achievement in mainstream schools: a review of the literature.” Peter Farrell, Alison Alborz, Andy Howes and Diana Pearson *School of Education, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK*