

# Sabbatical Report 2011

## Term One

Donna Donnelly

Tikipunga Primary School

Whangarei

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>School Engagement with their Communities</b> <b>~National Standards~</b></p>
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### **Acknowledgement**

I wish to express my appreciation to the Tikipunga Primary School Board of Trustees for supporting my sabbatical leave application. The professional development opportunity has enabled me to visit schools, engage in professional conversations and to catch up on reading, which in the normal course of day to day management is extremely challenging to undertake.

I thank the senior leadership team, particularly Chris Rennie (Acting Principal) and Lana Wolfgram who so capably led the school during my absence, and the whole Tikipunga Primary School team who supported them in this role.

I thank my colleagues who openly shared their ideas, opinions and information and to the Boards of Trustees who welcomed me to their Board meetings.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of my sabbatical leave was to explore how schools are engaging with their communities to inform and share information about student progress in relation to National Standards.

### **Rationale and Background Information**

The change to Nag 2 - Nag 2(A) formally requires schools to inform parents about student progress in relation to national standards. This requirement is at an individual student level to their parents and also at school wide level to the Ministry of Education.

The issues around National Standards are well documented and this report is not intended to debate the issues but to report in a practical manner on how schools are sharing student achievement information as required by Nag 2(A).

Tikipunga Primary School is committed to increasing and supporting effective partnership between parents and the school. Partnerships are viewed as the overlapping of a sharing of power, responsibility and ownership (Bastini 1993) and student achievement is one of the conduits for this responsive dialogue. The intent of this report is for the Tikipunga Primary School Board of Trustees, as part of our self-review programme, to evaluate the school's effectiveness with regard to Nag 2(A) and to obtain ideas that will help us to improve.

### **Information Gathering**

Board Meeting Attendance:

- The Board meetings I attended all had student achievement on their agenda. Student achievement information was presented using evidence from data. From my observations some Boards were more skilled at determining their role in student achievement than others. Some of the evidence presented was in relation to school based academic year levels and this presented challenges when discussing the Nag 2(A) requirements.

Email Responses:

- The responses indicated the challenges that some schools have when engaging with their parents in relation to the sharing of student achievement. It appeared that the majority of schools found that parents were interested in their own children but the school wide information was only used by the Board of Trustees. Principals acknowledge that different levels of reporting were necessary for different purposes.

Interviews with Principals:

- On the whole, principals were enthusiastic about discussing student achievement but expressed frustration about the mandatory reporting requirements in their current form. I was surprised to find that not all schools had an SMS system. This presented challenges for schools as they had to manually aggregate data and this was generating significant workload pressures. For other schools with SMS systems, the

challenge was to understand the functionality of the system and how they could use the system to support their data reporting processes.

#### School Websites:

- A lot of schools have websites and it was clear that these sites were used for a variety of purposes. I was surprised to see so many out of date items (newsletters, information, staff) etc and that highlighted for me the challenges for schools to keep information current. It appears that this area can be another source of frustration for schools as many rely on a staff member who has an interest and passion for the ICT world (and that works well while they are able to undertake this), and for others it is sometimes a funding issue (paying a provider).
- Some schools were uploading student achievement information in various ways but there needs to be some monitoring of this as student information was also on the open website naming students who were not achieving.

#### Reading:

- Reporting Student Achievement Against National Standards: Discussion Paper on Reporting to Parents Examples (Kerry Mitchell)
- BES School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why
- BES Teacher Professional Learning and Development
- Ka Hikitia
- Ministry of Education – Kiwi Leadership for Principals (Walking the Talk – Pip Wells)
- Ministry of Education – Report Consultation Meetings with Parents, Family and Whanau Members on National Standards and Reporting to Parents (August 2009)
- Sabbatical reports (Brian Thompson, Dave Robinson, Judy Nicol, Jenny McNicol)
- NZC Curriculum Update Issue 10

#### **Implications for my context**

Suggestions for Tikipunga Primary School Board of Trustees:

I acknowledge the extensive work and dedication that the school team put into raising student achievement. I acknowledge that student achievement occurs in a range of contexts within the New Zealand Curriculum. National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are not the only reporting areas that parents are interested in, but for the purposes of Nag 2(A), specific information is required.

Therefore as part of the school's self-review programme to engage with parents with regards to student achievement the following may be explored:

- School website  
(construction, purpose and maintenance needs careful planning)
- School noticeboard in foyer dedicated to student achievement information  
(numerous schools had this display area clearly showing NS achievement)
- Outdoor display area
- Designated space for parent discussions
- Visible learning (Reggio Emilia concepts)
- Digital Portfolios and LMS (Learning Management Systems)
- Wiki Spaces

The following ideas are currently used at Tikipunga Primary School and by others schools:

- Newsletters
- Formal and informal opportunities (school events etc)
- Interviews (range of formats: 3 way led, parent/teacher etc)
- Parent evenings/workshops
- Sticking to Learning – parent afternoons

It became evident through my interactions with other schools that **communication** and **engagement** were determined by the different school contexts. The autonomy for schools to be responsive to their communities was valued by principals but there was a level of mistrust that this autonomy was being eroded.

### **Sector wide recommendations:**

I believe these areas should be explored as schools are sharing more information in a range of publically accessible forums:

- Boards are clear about privacy issues relating to the sharing of student achievement information (particularly websites and public documents (minutes etc))
- Principals are supported to write public reports so that staff and student privacy is not compromised
- Schools are supported with SMS training and development so that site based skills are available

## **Conclusions**

The most valuable aspect of my sabbatical was the opportunity to think strategically without the distractions of day to day management responsibilities. In addition to the community engagement review, it was a pleasure to view property developments, professional learning programmes and to share time with colleagues in their school contexts.

Many schools are actively engaging with Nag 2(A) and as time progresses I anticipate that more challenges will surface along with more solutions.

Once again I wish to thank the Board of Trustees for supporting my sabbatical leave. I have thoroughly enjoyed the professional and refreshment opportunities this has provided.