

**Renwick School**

**Blenheim**

**Marlborough**

**PRINCIPALS' SABBATICAL  
REPORT**

**Term 4, 2012**

**Simon Heath**

Email: [simon@renwick.school.nz](mailto:simon@renwick.school.nz)

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Renwick School Board of Trustees for supporting my application for sabbatical leave. The Woolf Fisher Trust for my Fellowship Award – a very humbling gift. I also acknowledge my senior staff and other school staff, who stepped up in my absence to ensure the smooth operation of our school.

I thank the Ministry of Education for making sabbatical leave available to principals. The opportunity I have had to be able to just take time out, to refresh, reflect, meet people and explore in more depth a development opportunity for our school has been invaluable.

Special thanks to the schools and principals I visited in the UK and NZ. Also to Wigan Council, Keep Britain Tidy - Wigan, Marlborough District Council and Mistletoe Bay Eco Village in the Marlborough Sounds.

To all the Teachers, Deputy Principals, Principals/Head Teachers and organization representatives who welcomed me into your places of work, were generous with your time and helpful in my cause, thank you for your passion, pride and enthusiasm.

## **Purpose**

Investigating conservation and sustainability models; their application and impact for primary schools education programmes. Looking at setting up and implementing a quality 'Eco School' model for Renwick School.

## **Key inquiry question**

*How are schools developing sustainable and conservation practices to improve school learning environments and how can this be effectively integrated into the implementation of the NZC?*

*How could this improve and benefit student learning at Renwick School, enhance teacher practice and lift student achievement?*

## **Overview**

Renwick School has been an Enviro School for 3 years. There has been some encouraging activity and growth with our programme and there are some significant opportunities ahead for the school. We have an energized student body through their contact and experiences with Mistletoe Bay Eco Village and support from our Enviro Schools facilitator. We have an enthusiastic group of staff who see real potential in developing our programme for the benefit of the school. Becoming an Eco School is a shared goal and we want to explore ways in which we can sustain ourselves for water and energy in particular as in doing so, we would reduce costs freeing up money to meet other school priorities. We also want to develop and embed a programme that demonstrates a long-term commitment to our environment and we want to involve our community in this process.

We have reached a cross roads in that we recognize that there are potentially huge costs to meet to achieve our goals, which could stop us in our tracks. We therefore need to explore ways in which we can find funds, organize and structure our programme to best meet the needs of the school, and look at a variety of options currently working well in schools both here and overseas. We also want to learn from others experiences to help us take a smart approach to how we go about things.

### **Schools Visited**

- 9 Schools around New Zealand in both North & South Islands
- 5 in the UK including 2 secondary schools

### **Supporting Supplementary Visits**

- Keep Britain Tidy/Eco Schools UK – Wigan
- Wigan Council - Wigan
- Splendid Hotel - Nice - France
- Contignac – Southern France

## Key Questions

### **1. To what extent does your school integrate conservation and sustainability practices and how does this impact on Student Achievement?**

Whilst the intensity and focus varied between schools, all have high levels of integration and views on how this impacts on student achievement.

Of note are the lengths some schools go to in measuring programme effectiveness and then evaluating achievement.

Examples of this are

- collecting food wrappers on a certain day each week, weighing, classifying building data then questioning and coming up with and communicating change options/solutions.

To

- 'Switch Off Fortnight' in 17000 UK schools each November. Each controlling authority can then provide actual data on energy savings made across UK schools.

All schools report that student achievement at this stage is observed more through attitudes and values towards the environment and being more 'green focussed' in their behaviours and decisions environmentally.

However, in the UK 'Keep Britain Tidy' report that there is a growing noticeable difference between ECO Schools and Non Eco Schools student achievement. Whilst they do not have complete research on this, their data at this stage is also backed up by OFSTED reports that students in Eco Schools are achieving better. They are continuing their research into this claim.

### Best Practice/Initiative Observations

- School established Environment Centre
- Butterfly Haven
- School Pond Development
- Solar water heating and photo voltaic systems to reduce school energy carbon footprint
- Government and Local Body support for solar systems
- Gully redevelopment into an outdoor classroom and high level teaching and learning space

- Garden to Table programme
- Trees for Survival
- Edible Gardens
- Native Gardens
- Fish in Drains
- School Forests/Orchards
- Walking Buses
- Maori/cultural perspectives integration
- Inquiry Learning integration
- Composting, Worm Farms
- Student Enviro Teams/Gangs/Warriors/Councils
- Paid personnel to support specific school Environmental programmes
- Council support for Enviro School and Eco School programmes through paid facilitators

The essential difference between the schools sampled is that in NZ we have our Enviro Schools programme and in the UK it is the Eco Schools programme. Both organizations are tremendously strong in support of schools. Councils play a key role in providing resources through facilitators and materials to assist the environmental education delivery. Further to this, the UK establishment is far reaching in that “national energy-use targets” are set with all district authorities. All district authorities/councils control the power for all schools and in turn set and have a responsibility to meet the energy targets or risk a fine. Such is the determination to reduce energy consumption across the country.

## ***2. How is your school community benefiting from Eco/Enviro Schools?***

Each of the schools sampled have strong community involvement and there are clear benefits being observed. One school described some of their parents as the ‘champions of change’. Some schools also reported less vandalism at school because of the greater student and parent involvement in school environmental projects. Others stated that a greater awareness of reducing the schools carbon footprint through their programmes – eg: nude food, more students walking to school – outcomes, less litter and less traffic congestion outside the school. Of note in NZ schools is the community appreciation of the school physical environment and the extra care taken to protect and enhance it.

The UK benefit was very clearly observed in Wigan where there is significant community environmental change. Eco Schools has by osmosis spread into the communities. Eco Communities and Eco Homes are born from the Eco Schools they surround.

**Eco-Homes** is the next step in the evolution of **Eco-Communities** with the express aim of getting the good practice and behaviours learnt in schools and centres instigated in our homes.

Communities are being encouraged to firstly

“take small steps and they will quickly notice the difference in energy or water bills and the amount of waste they throw away or recycle.

Secondly, it is more about behaviour change rather than spending money on things that are seen to be ‘green’ “ *(Wigan Council)*.

Eco Centres follow where all council buildings are expected to be operating in energy, water and waste efficient ways to reduce their carbon footprint and be a model to the greater community.

### ***3. What Professional Development do you do / require?***

Provided mostly by school facilitators from each of the councils. Maintaining momentum is largely through the support of these key people to keep pushing the message. Some schools report that the environmental message is a struggle and that many staff and parents pay lip service but are not activists. One school reported that some students, staff and parents were ‘over it’ and this tempered their ability to progress at that time.

In most schools however, there is absolute clarity and purpose to their environmental vision and this is the key driver of the professional development for staff.

The UK model is co-ordinated and led by ‘Keep Britain Tidy’ and Wigan is an excellent example of what can be achieved. The strong link established between schools, council and the greater community is evident in the projects and enduring momentum created across the city both in schools and in particular the cities green areas.

#### **4. How important is the leadership in this process?**

In every case, leadership is critical. In the most effective schools in my view, the principal was a key driver, but not necessarily the lead teacher.

Representation across the school from staff is also deemed vital for school-wide ownership, communication and understanding.

Student leadership too, is a vital ingredient for the overall success of Enviro/Eco Schools. Regular opportunity at assemblies, staff meetings, board meetings, community meetings are all viewed as important in building awareness, instituting and monitoring change and maintaining momentum. 2 schools reported that at times it was a struggle and that being a 'Lorax' type figure can be a big time and energy commitment. Both agree however, that the challenge is worth the effort and that committed leadership is not giving up on beliefs and values.

From my observations of the schools visited, the tenacity and innovation shown by the key Eco/Enviro School leaders is to be applauded, supported and where possible replicated. The Keep Britain Tidy research into enhanced student achievement and school performance is testimony to this.

#### **5. What supporting systems do you have in place to ensure**

##### **Consistency?**

Schools visited reported the following:

- Constant communication of key messages reinforcing agreed protocols/values,
- School Environmental Care Codes negotiated and agreed to annually,
- school wide plans detailing term by term focus and objectives, school wide audits on current achievement and status in relation to plans,
- student and staff teams to lead maintain focus and lead development,
- sustainable leadership
- supporting school and community champions of the cause,
- fully utilizing support from facilitators,
- clarity of roles within the leadership of environmental education,
- shaping and managing school culture – “it must be everyone”

### ***Understanding?***

Schools visited reported the following:

- Visibility of programme,
- Articulation of school environmental culture,
- Clarity of vision,
- Media – celebration of achievements,
- Teaching and instilling school values, protocols and attitudes,
- Newsletters,
- Community involvement,
- Student voice
- Regular communication to school and community at assemblies,
- Staff meetings,

### ***To encourage capability and confidence?***

Schools visited reported the following:

- Linking/Partnership with other agencies,
- Mentoring by experienced staff,
- Clarity of vision and plans,
- Accountability to achievement of annual plan,
- Taking time to embed in school thinking/behaviour – CULTURE,
- Student/Staff/Community ownership,
- Leadership,

## ***6. What support systems need to be developed?***

\*School Boards have been identified in most schools visited as being the critical link between school and community motivation and momentum. Budget decisions, fundraising decisions and supportive governance are critical to successful programme outcomes. Being an Enviro/Eco School does not come cheap; it requires innovation, energy, patience, passion, vision, leadership and money. School Boards have to be courageous to implement plans of environmental education and sustainability and have faith in the long-term benefit for the students, the school and the community. Committing to focusing on Eco/Enviro implications or possibilities in every decision they make is an attitude or value that perhaps School Boards have not considered in the past.

\*A total team approach by the school with the caretaker being a critical player is also a major consideration to ensure integrity and consistency of application. One school identifies that the school caretaker needs to be part of the staff leadership team for Eco/Enviro Schools. It has become clear in discussion with colleagues that if this isn't the case the hard work of many could fracture at a key point in the chain of delivery.

\*Schools also identify succession planning. Quality assurance in developing several people at anyone time is an essential element to maintain progress and of course direction.

\*One school identified networking with schools, teachers, and parents, having regular contact/meetings, visiting each other's schools to observe and just see what is going on as huge benefit. Sharing best practice and innovation is a potential motivator and supports collective learning, growth and raises the bar.

\*Of particular note in the Wigan School visited, they report everything is very much on track. They have developed strong relationships with key stakeholders and support services including Wigan Council. Have critical elements for success, as listed previously in place, and have achieved consistently at the very top of Keep Britain Tidy/Eco Schools Green Flag awards criteria. It is not surprising (and my observations support this view) to see that this school is clearly a leading example of what can be achieved. However, they too would be the first to admit that they still have much more to do.

### ***7. What self-review measures are in place to provide feedback on programme success?***

UK Eco Schools complete self-review using the Eco Schools Review Tools and submit to Keep Britain Tidy for analysis and assessment. The schools then receive a report with affirmations and recommendations for improvement strategies.

NZ Enviro Schools go through a similar process in working toward specific Enviro Awards.

Several Schools also report the use of Survey Monkey with some key questions about the school enviro/eco vision. Staff, students and parents are surveyed, responses are anonymous and as a result the feedback received is used if formulating a new action plan.

KnowledgeNet is also used to gather data from students, staff and parents through forums or polls.

Careful tracking of specific programmes or initiatives is reported by most as an ongoing function and progress reports are also prepared for the school boards. These reports contain data on the following

- quantities and classifications of rubbish in the school grounds or collated weekly from class samples,
- water usage,
- power usage
- specific projects completed such as gardens or recycling
- performance against budgets.

In most cases, the result of self-review is a new plan with budgets and key focus areas for the next year.

### ***8. What community or business links exist to support school practices?***

All schools report the key link they have is with their local council through their facilitator. The facilitators are viewed in every case as invaluable and if only they had more time to utilize their expertise.

Some have developed partnerships with the local Nursery, Conservation Dept Office, Electricity Supply Company, Church, Nature Reserve and Wildlife Trusts, Supermarkets, Wineries, School Architect, Parent Groups.

In each case schools are deriving significant benefit from these partnerships and this is evidenced in their schools visually and through their programming.

### ***9. General Comment***

I have listed some key comments from schools visited in regard to their approach to Conservation, Sustainability and Environmental Education.

- Making a difference is the point, not awards and certificates.
- One inquiry per year focusing on environment lifts attention across the whole school.
- Thermal panels and tweaked electrical infrastructure have saved the school £5,000 in the past year.
- Three solar water panels provide the entire hot water needs of the school. (450 students)
- MOE need to contribute more for the future – legislate from the top to drive and embed national change.
- We have focussed on influencing people/community habits rather than just impact on the environment.
- Notice already a generation of enviro kids developing.
- This is not about accreditations – it is about doing the right thing.

- Had to learn how to find money.
- Relationship with council is critical.
- Having data evidence is compelling, gets people listening and helping.

## **In Summary**

The schools and organizations I visited are all working in ways to conserve resources, reduce their carbon footprint and develop sustainable approaches with energy, water and waste. Through their processes (and just about every school was different) they are building and embedding environmental awareness values, attitudes and practices that are adding value to their student's educational outcomes. Whilst not conclusive, the Keep Britain Tidy Research to this point supports this view.

Each school and organization has different strengths and different priorities that they are focusing on as at all times, cost is a major factor in determining what can be achieved and how far you can or want to go.

The focus question responses above suggest that we have excellent examples of Eco/Enviro Schools in NZ and the UK. What is noticeable in comparison is that UK schools have had significant central government support in the formative years for Keep Britain Tidy to set direction, work closely with schools and follow a national policy framework to deliver on specific objectives and targets nationally. The energy targets are a good example of this. "Love where you Live" and "Britain in Bloom" have been major initiatives and contributors to growing community and school involvement and ownership in making Britain a cleaner, brighter, better place. Wigan is in my view, the very best example of what has been achieved and is clearly the epicenter of Keep Britain Tidy and Eco Schools UK.

Having said this, the best performing schools have several things in common. They have strong leadership, are innovative, are consciously integrating Eco/Enviro Schools into their curriculum and growing a generation of Eco Kids. This is evidenced in every school I visited. The sustainability of the leadership at all levels be it students, staff and or community is seen as mandatory and not left to chance. Let us not forget the role and value of the Eco/Enviro School Facilitators, funded by local councils. These people are the conduit of best practice. They provide the guidance and support for school innovation and they motivate schools to develop and grow their programmes, their students and their communities. It is also noticeable that in NZ there is little or no support from government for school environmental programming

other than what schools put aside from their own operations grant. It is by the good stewardship and awareness of our councils and good leadership from our Enviro Schools team that we have such a strong national programme.

Maybe this is a good thing as it forces us to be innovative, tenacious and resourceful. Isn't this what principals are good at? Eco/Enviro Schools should practice what we preach and build our own sustainability through our own efforts and not look to central government for additional support.

Outside of schools, the best example of this I have found in NZ is Mistletoe Bay Eco Village in the Marlborough Sounds - [www.mistletoebay.co.nz](http://www.mistletoebay.co.nz) I have been fortunate to be part of a Trust that has built this village from the ground up based on establishing and building partnerships with the Dept of Conservation, business, community groups, schools and a host of volunteers. The underlying principles of this village are Conservation, Sustainability and Education. What has been achieved to date is a tremendous tribute to all involved and serves as a great catalyst for schools in supporting these principles and building community awareness of the need to change behaviours around energy, water and waste.

Other examples of this approach, albeit on a smaller scale but with big outcomes are the green area developments in Wigan. 17 green areas within the Wigan borough are being maintained, developed and led by the community. The catalyst for this has been the 'Wigan in Bloom' and 'Love Where You Live' initiatives led by council staff. Support with planning, some resources and lots of encouragement have seen this grow across the city into the suburbs by osmosis. Areas which were once poorly looked after, sites for vandalism, even train stations are now sources of pride. The expansion of Eco Schools to Eco Communities has begun and is building a new level of health and wellbeing not possible before. There are champions in the community who are now the key drivers of environmental awareness and sustainability. The Wigan schools are caught up in this process as students support community initiatives and become involved themselves. This in my view is the outcome we would all want from our school Eco/Enviro programmes.

## **Finally**

It is clear from my observations and discussions that being an Eco School will take time, will take leadership and will take money. It is my belief, that by following the examples of those that I have had the opportunity to visit, taking the best from the best, ensuring authentic curriculum integration and bringing a level of innovation, tenacity and hold true to the established values and attitudes, student achievement/school performance will be enhanced, long term operational cost savings will be made for schools which will free up funds and ultimately we will make a big difference to our environment and maybe the planet.

## **Actions for Renwick School**

The school has made significant advances in our Enviro Schools programme over the past 3 years. Of note are our Edible Gardens, our two Native Gardens, Recycling, Paper for Trees, Energy Focus, Rubbish Free Policy, Waste Reduction and our EOTC Programme. It is now time to take stock, view some best practice examples around Marlborough and beyond and develop a longer-term strategy with a greater community focus. Renwick is fortunate in that it is a small town of 2500 and we are the only school forming a central point for the community. Our opportunity here is to do something not just for the school, but also with the community.

## **Keep Renwick Tidy – Love Where You Live – Renwick in Bloom**

In collaboration with the full staff and consultation with students and community

1. Complete an Eco/Enviro School audit looking at Energy, Water, Waste, Recycling, Biodiversity, School Grounds, Healthy Living, Transport, and Global Citizenship.
2. Develop our vision for Renwick School over the next 5 years with specific strategic targets in relation to our audit and in consultation with our Enviro Schools Facilitator. The plan must be owned by all and committed to.
3. Identify our immediate priorities to form an annual plan, integrate into our school curriculum and establish how we are going to measure student achievement and programme success.
4. Establish costs, funding needs and prepare a 5-year budget.
5. Identify lead staff to support the plan.
6. Present plans to the BOT and community for further input and endorsement.
7. Recruit students to be part of the team.
8. Recruit parents to be part of the team.
9. Seek community and business partnerships to support our 5-year strategy and long-term vision for the school.
10. Explore with the community and the Marlborough District Council ways in which the school efforts could be reflected, supported and established in the wider community of Renwick.

### **References:**

**Keep Britain Tidy** – [www.keepbritaintidy.org.uk](http://www.keepbritaintidy.org.uk)

**Enviro Schools NZ** – [www.enviroschools.org.nz](http://www.enviroschools.org.nz)

**Wigan in Bloom: Wigan Council** – [www.wiganboroughinbloom.co.uk](http://www.wiganboroughinbloom.co.uk)

**Big Nature:** - [www.bignature.co.uk](http://www.bignature.co.uk)

**Mistletoe Bay Eco Village: - [www.mistletoebay.co.nz](http://www.mistletoebay.co.nz)**