



**Halfmoon Bay**

**SCHOOL**

**Te Kura O Rakiura**

*A choppy sea can be navigated  
He moana pukepuke e ekengia e te waka*

# **PRIMARY PRINCIPALS' SABBATICAL**

TERM TWO, 2016

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“Investigating how to better prepare our students for the transition to boarding school.”

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to sincerely thank all the Principals, Hostel Managers and Deans for welcoming me to their schools and sharing their knowledge so freely. I would also like to acknowledge funding and support from Teach NZ & the Ministry of Education and to thank Diane Walker, my wonderful staff and the Board of Trustees of Halfmoon Bay School for allowing me to take time out from my school to visit a number of other schools (all different and all incredibly special in their own ways) all around the country, to rejuvenate, and to reignite my passion for leading my school.

During term two 2106 I visited **Otago Boys' High School** (Dunedin), **St Hilda's Collegiate School** (Dunedin), **John McGlashan College** (Dunedin) and **Southland Boys' High School** (Invercargill). At each school I spoke with the Principal, The Year 9 Dean (or equivalent) and the Hostel Manager/ Head of Boarding. These schools were chosen, as they are the schools that we have transitioned our Year 8 students to over the past two years.

## **PURPOSE**

To focus on how these particular students have made the transition and what we could do better for future students transitioning to these schools.

## **RATIONALE**

Growing up on Stewart Island our students are in the unique position of 'having' to go boarding. Most other students entering the schools listed above as Year 9 boarders are there through choice rather than necessity.

## **BACKGROUND**

Prior to being awarded this sabbatical I had been working closely on Year 8 transition with Loretta Reynolds our RTLB.

Some of the initiatives we have developed to ensure a smooth transition include:

- Year 8 students making **transition brochures**
  - These are sent to schools at end of Year 8 year
  - Made by the students at school with input from families
  - Enough colour copies printed (by us) to ensure all teachers and hostel personnel have their own copy
  - Include photos, likes, strengths and weaknesses, learning preferences

Comment from one of our Year 9 students. This was at a Year 7-13 school that doesn't have many students entering in Year 9.

*"The transition brochures were really cool. Every new class I went to the teachers would like introduce me using them. They would say "This is ..... he's from Stewart Island and he does .... (insert sport/ hobby)."*

Making connections like this was extremely valuable for this particular student it really made him feel welcome at his new school.

- Organising **whole class visits** to Invercargill and Dunedin secondary schools
  - This allows the students to see 'what's out there' in a non threatening way - it's just a whole class visit so there is no pressure on individuals.
  - If the students do end up applying to one of the schools we visited then they are also on the front foot when they are required to attend an interview.

Comment from one Year 7 student after a whole class visit to a secondary school.

*"Arghh now I know what a high school looks like."*

This student simply had no idea what to expect when he went to secondary school. Once he was able to picture something in his mind the whole idea became exciting rather than scary. It's important to note that the portrayal of high school through film and television in NZ is incredibly American.

- **Stewart Island Ambassadors**
  - Our Year 7&8 students work with visiting schools to teach them about our local environment.
  - It's a great way to practice interacting with same age peers in a setting where 'they have all the knowledge'.
  - Also a great chance to practice interacting with new adults - the kind of adults on a school camp are potentially the kinds of adults they will encounter at high school. (teachers, sports coaches, parent helpers, support staff)
- Our closest (geographically) and most popular (takes the highest percentage of our Year 8's) school organises an **overnight stay at the hostel** - an 'extra' orientation opportunity for its Stewart Island new entrant borders
  - The Year student 8 along with a parent stays overnight at the hostel in November (the night before Year 9 Orientation Day).

- The student also attends school during the day before Orientation Day - placed into a class containing Year 8 boarders
- A health and safety requirement is that a parent stays at the hostel too
  - They have the day to themselves but just need to be present at night
  - This is a fantastic insight for the parents into hostel life, a chance to ask the staff questions and a great start to building relationships with hostel staff

Comment from one Year 8 student's mother.

*"The opportunity to stay overnight at the hostel was invaluable. I really don't know if we would have survived the transition without it. I can't recommend this enough to other parents - make sure you take up this offer."*

- VLN ([Virtual Learning Network Primary School](#))/ Te Kura **online classes**
  - Senior (Year 5-8) students have multiple opportunities to learn a variety of subjects online through the VLN and Te Kura
  - Subjects include: Mandarin, French, astronomy, extension maths, visual art and technology
  - Not only does this provide our students with extra curriculum subject choices it also gives them opportunities to practice:
    - Working with a range of different teachers who all have different strengths and expectations
    - Time management - getting to (online) class on time, completing and submitting set work
    - Collaborating with a wider range of students

Comment from one Year 9 student when asked "Do you think your were ahead of the rest of your class in any subjects at the start of Year 9?"

*"Yes thanks to some of the VLN classes..."*

- VLN (Virtual Learning Network Primary School) **Rural & Remote Kids Project**
  - Year 7&8 students from seven remote/ rural schools work together in an online classroom every week on a range of 'senior primary' topics.
    - Topics so far include: cyber safety, advanced current events & general knowledge, (the stories behind) the Olympics, careers, poetry, folk music lyrics, novel studies.
    - Each term's topic is taught by one of the principals in the group

- Topics are aimed specifically at Year 7&8 and aim to challenge their thinking and extend their horizons
- Our [Biannual camp to Wellington](#) is the highlight of this class and is an amazing chance for the students from our small schools to be part of a larger (usually around 30) group of Year 7&8 students.
  - Camp runs for six days and is a mixture of social and educational learning opportunities
  - Focus on careers (opening the students eyes to a wider range of careers than are available in their local areas)

Observation from 2015 camp

*Year 8 boy - as soon as we get to Wellington he basically ditches his friends from our school and sets out to make as many new friends as possible. When questioned about this he explained that it was a great opportunity to 'practice' making friends for when he headed off to boarding school in a few months time.*

## **FINDINGS**

During my interviews we talked extensively about the 'profile' of a Year 9 student who transitions successfully to school and hostel life. Common themes that came through regarding the students who transition most successfully are:

- Independence
  - Including the ability to learn from mistakes without parental interference
  - Including being organised with practical things, eftpos cards, online banking, phone top ups, etc
- Confidence in their ability (good self esteem)
- Honesty
- Those who interact well with a wide range of people
- Those who get involved in school/hostel life from day one
  - Who can join a group rather than waiting to be invited
- Where staff 'know' (even only by phone/ email) and have constant communication with parents
- Knowledge that they are going boarding from a young age (not thrown into it at last minute)
  - Parents who went to boarding school
  - Older siblings boarding
  - Talking as a family about going to boarding school from a young age

- Visiting the school/ schools you are considering several years in advance, in a number of different capacities - eg school visits, driving past when in town, attending open nights/ days, organised visits by primary school, taking time to watch sports teams/ productions/ bands/ kapahaka

### **IMPLICATIONS & BENEFITS**

It was such an amazing opportunity to be able to visit all the schools and talk with the principals, hostel managers and deans about their schools and about 'our' special young Stewart Islanders.

None of the *common themes* (above) came as a surprise to me so it's great to know we are working along the right track to get our senior students prepared for boarding school.

All the schools I spoke to were incredibly passionate about their students and what their schools could offer and they all have a special place in their (school) hearts for the kids from Stewart Island.