

Primary Principal Sabbatical

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Term 3 2009**

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the

Ministry of Education for giving me the opportunity for a sabbatical leave

Pukeatua School Board of Trustees for allowing for my absence during the leave.

Schools of the Bay of Plenty, Waikato and Coromandel district who answered my questions and allowed me to visit.

Purpose of the study was to investigate

How are U1–U4, **full primary schools** catering for their Year 7 and 8 children? How do they retain children in Years 7 and 8 and stop movement to the nearby Intermediate? What factors influence parents' choices?

Background Information

Many if not all full primary schools, who have alternative schools close by (Intermediate, Year 7 to 13, Area schools) have the dilemma of losing children at the end of Year 6 to these schools. This movement can have big effects on roll numbers and staffing. Movement also has effect on other parents and children's choices which is unsettling for these full primary schools. There are many reasons for this movement but in my experience as Principal of Pukeatua School for 11 years the reason is very rarely the quality of the education the child is receiving. What are the reasons for these choices and what are full primary schools doing for their Year 7, 8 children? This was the focus of this sabbatical report.

What I did

In Term One 2009 I contacted 24 full Primary schools in the greater Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Coromandel (U1 to U4) who had alternative schooling as mentioned, close by.

- 27% (1 in 4) of children, of all school samples, left to attend another school at the end of year 6. (Two schools had 100% retention!)
- Highest school leaving rate at Year 6 was 64%. This was the school with the biggest roll!!
- Very few children (8.7% of Yr 7, 8 roll) enrolled at the Full Primary School surveyed in years 7, 8
- 10% of parents 21 in total (1 in 10) discussed with principal the pros and cons of remaining in Year 7, 8
- Of the 21 parents who discussed pros and cons 4 (20%) kept their children at school
- Two schools with Enrolment Zones could enrol many students from out of Zone in Year 7, 8 as parents were not happy with the alternative. Both these schools lose no children at the end of Year 6

Reasons for leaving Full Primary

There were many different reasons, but the most common in all schools were:

- Cultural- Music, drama opportunities etc
- Tradition - Others in family have gone before them
- Different experiences there- possible science equipment.
- Perception of challenge. More people therefore need to work harder.
- Social. More children to socialise with
- Sports teams.
- Big school prepares them for “shock” of College

Interesting there was not one school who reported the reason that the other school provided a better classroom education than they were receiving at the moment!

Reasons for enrolling at Full Primary

- Student safety-nurturing environment / family atmosphere
- Quality of curriculum/programme
- Quality of pupils work
- Range of opportunities
- Effective communication with parents
- Leadership opportunities
- Quality of staff
- Alleged bullying at previous school
- Improved Student/Teacher ratio
- School's reputation / Community perception
- Smaller School

In a full primary-

- Puberty can be a rocky road but more easily managed in a smaller environment
- There are opportunities for positive relationships between male and females
- Lots of parental involvement
- Extensive leadership opportunities are provided
- Student voice is encouraged
- There are no interruptions till year 9
- Provide authentic learning experiences are provided.
- There is a far more reflection of the mixed generations in society.

!

Special programmes for Years 7, 8 children

Not many schools had special programmes just for Year 7, 8 children. They were offering languages, camps, GATE programmes but these programmes run as a matter of course in all good schools.

Two clusters where the schools are smaller get together with the Year 7, 8 children from other schools in the cluster a couple of times per term for special science, literacy and numeracy days.

A couple of schools had definite extras for their Year 7, 8 children. (Only Year 7, 8 can work on the radio station, special camps, and Leadership days are only for the Year 7, 8 children.)

One bigger cluster had met and discussed the concern of losing children and have put together a discussion document for further reference.

Summary

Schools are affected by the leaving in Year 6 and 7 of students to other bigger schools.

There are many reasons for leaving. Reasons are mainly social or for “specialist” opportunities. Parents who are not happy with the education their children had received up to the end of Year 6 have not been a reason for moving.

Worrying, (as viewed by Principals) is the growing trend for children making the decision as to where they will attend school for Years 7, 8.

Schools are trying different strategies to inform parents by communicating positive reasons as to the reason for staying for Years 7, 8, like parent evenings and the writing of colourful brochures.

Clusters of schools have met to discuss the topic

Most points argued for a reason for a child leaving to a bigger school can also be argued as a reason for staying at the full primary

Smaller schools of less than 100 children are hardest hit when children leave in Years 7, 8

Conclusions

I have had a great term. I found it hard to stay at home and relax at the beginning but in the end I found it easy!

Visiting schools was enjoyable. All Principals commented on very similar issues. They were all wanting their Year 7, 8 children to remain with them for their schooling. All schools were providing very good educational opportunities for their Year 7, 8 children. Indeed in the smaller school setting they were getting many opportunities.

All principals told of ex students who have been leaders, top musicians and top sportspeople at secondary school after leaving their primary school.

In the end it will be the individual choices of the parents or in some cases the children as to where they go to school. All principals wished more parents would talk with them about the future of individual children's schooling but are resigned to the fact that individual choice will continue.

I thank the principal of the schools involved for their support and co-operation!

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