

# Proposal: Boys Transition from Intermediate to Secondary School

Sabbatical Report

Hugh Gully Nelson Intermediate School

## 1. Background

The inclusive nature of Primary and Intermediate Schools is at times at odds with the sometimes prescriptive and individual instructional aspect of secondary school. The one class predominantly one teacher model of Intermediate School allows the Teacher to build a deeper relationship with the learner, knowing about their strengths and abilities as well as gaps in learning.

Parents/ whanau can play a far greater role in Intermediate education as there is only one point of contact needed with the classroom teacher not 5 or more as in a secondary school.

It is therefore not difficult to understand that some boys find the transition very challenging as they leave the close relationship model of Intermediate to the specialist subject and teacher model of secondary schools.

## 2. Suspension, stand downs and exclusions trends, Intermediate to Secondary School

The trends and patterns observed support the notion that generally more boys are stood down or excluded in Year 9-10 than any other year. 14-15 year old boys are by far the most represented cohort in suspension and stand down rates. The spike is very sharp when boys are aged 14 but tapers off very quickly at 16 years of age.

Maori and Pasifika boys are over represented in that data.

## 3. Summary of transition processes

A great variety of transition processes were observed and I have attempted to summarise them under headings.

### (1) Liaison visits to Intermediate Schools

Many Secondary Schools visit the Intermediate School as the first point of contact and this is standard practice. Meeting the boys on their "home territory" is less threatening and opportunity for Secondary Schools to share early transition information. Boys report favourably that they enjoy this first point of contact in particular if the visiting Teachers are friendly and welcoming. Secondary Teachers visiting and portraying an authoritative and threatening attitude is not well received and makes the boys feel less valued or that their Intermediate years are devalued.

The second aspect to these visits which is powerful and usually happens at a separate time, is liaison between the College and Intermediate class teacher. This is a very

important time to share information that the Intermediate has build up over a 2 year period about the learner. Good practice is to have a profile sheet that is recorded during this interview. The recording of achievement data particularly around National Standards should provide a valuable tool for schools. Furthermore learning and behavioural difficulties as well as gifts and talents can be recorded.

Too often the Intermediate Schools feel that some of the information being shared is not valued by the Colleges. This can also be the case when Primary students are transitioning to Intermediate in that we share an inability to trust each others data. National Standards now provide a more finely tuned and consistent approach to assessment that needs to be trusted.

The third aspect of liaison visits are to help transition boys who need extra support in terms of their learning and engagement. These boys will be identified easily by the Intermediate. Some Colleges are investing an amount of time on multiple visits to observe the student working in class and meet with the Teacher, SENCO and student themselves on a 1:1 basis.

This can really help some at risk boys who can begin to build some sort of relationship with the new school.

## (2) Transition visits to Secondary School

Most Colleges provide a similar model and some boys report that this visits actually had a negative impact on their attitude.

The day visits usually occur in term 3 of the preceding year and involves a meet and greet by Senior Staff then tour of various aspects of the school working day. Typically the boys will have a tour of the school with a Senior student moving in and out of lessons in action. Some Colleges provide the opportunity for the boys to have a hands on experience in Technology or PE and this is appreciated by the boys.

Generally though these days can be rushed and stressful to the new students as they can be herded around sometimes in a group of strangers from other schools in a unfamiliar environment.

Using Senior students as leaders for these visits needs careful consideration and planning. If these students are to be used it can't be assumed that they will know what to do and will be effective leaders. These leaders and rooms that they visit need to be trained and prepared. The leaders must be positive and communicative advocates of the school they are representing with a planned and focussed tour that represents the qualities of the school.

Some Colleges provide the opportunity for extra transition visits for boys who are needing more guidance and support.

## (3) Parent/ Whanau information meetings

These are standard informational evenings where schools outline their values, visions and beliefs, promoting their schools for prospective students.

All Colleges back these meetings up with 1:1 meetings with Year Deans for Year 8 boys and their parents/ whanau. Again these meetings are valuable for building relationships with the new student.

#### 4. **Best practice and strategies that make a difference**

##### (1) Intensive transition visits

One Secondary School had the transition visits last more than one with an explicit planned and detailed programme outlined. The visiting boys recognise that the school is going to some effort to provide effect transition and not just lip service to the process.

The Principal would meet each group during the transition process and lead them through a well prepared presentation that would focus on:

- Vision
- Standards
- Uniform
- Basic rules
- Explicit expectations

Other Senior Staff would run modules around:

- Extra Curricular activities
- Curriculum options
- Careers
- Getting help
- Learning support

These intensive transition meetings result in the boys having a very clear and consistent expectation from the Principal and other Senior Staff as to the culture of the school they are entering. Using Senior Staff to do this rather than Senior Students provides a respectful culture and begins to build the relationship that the boys are seeking and are used to at Intermediate and Primary School.

##### (2) Cultural connectedness

A number of Maori, Pasifika and refugee students are closely connected to cultural groups at Intermediate School. This could be through performance groups or ESOL meetings. When they get to College it can be challenging to reconnect to those groups. Intermediate Schools know who these students are and Secondary Schools know who there groups are so transition needs to provide the opportunity for Maori, Pasifika and refugee students to be connected with their equivalent College groups. Welcoming the Maori boys onto the Wharenuui, inviting the Pasifika boys to perform, or introducing the refugee students to other refugees, again connects the boys before they begin College.

##### (3) Sporting connectedness

The drop off in numbers of boys connecting to sport from Year 8 to Year 9 is again large. Again it is the intimate knowledge and easy access to information that Intermediate can facilitate for individual students. Good quality information sharing at transition provides the student and parents/ whanau with connectedness to access sporting opportunities.

#### (4) At risk students transition

Successful transition to Secondary school involves investing money and time into finding out who these students are, what agencies and interventions have been positive and building relationships with them. Intermediate Schools usually know who the boys are that are in danger of not transitioning successfully and have crucial information around strategies and techniques that work. Not only do they need to glean that from the Intermediate School but run a process where Year 9 Teachers are aware of the at risk students that are transitioning and guidance to managing them.

### 5. **Conclusion**

The New Zealand curriculum has allowed Primary and Intermediate Schools to personalise a curriculum than reflects the values and culture of individual schools. Year 1- 8 schools have been responsive to creating learning environments that cater to the diverse and changing needs of modern learners. This is reflected in Primary and Intermediate learning environments that are personified by:

- collaborative learning
- inquiry learning
- modern learning environment: multi level seating arrangements that include individual or group desks, high learners, bean bags, break out spaces
- variety of mobile learning devices running off fast broadband

Students are graduating from Year 8 with an expectation that they will be provided with the same learning environment and with a Teacher who will engage with them and help them with their learning but in some ways this is creating a problem for Secondary Schools that is only going to increase.

The Secondary model of content based learning with high stakes around NCEA Level 1 is not always a good match with the modern Year 8 learner nor is a daily routine of 5 different subjects that involve 5 teachers and 5 transitions.

Students who may have been at risk at Intermediate can be managed successfully due to the close relationship they can develop with the classroom teacher and personalised management. The Secondary model doesn't allow for this and it is therefore little wonder so many feel disenfranchised and end up being stood down or excluded.

Connecting at risk Year 9 students with a key mentor is critical. These students need an advocate who they know and can trust and feel that that person cares about them. This relationship needs to be formed before Year 9 and could be a Teacher or very capable Senior student who could have daily contact with the student.