

10 October 2011

## **Principal's Sabbatical Report**

### **Purpose**

**The purpose of my sabbatical was to find out more about what is needed now and in the future for students to be successful beyond school.**

My sabbatical had 4 parts:

#### **1. Attending the International Thinking Conference in Belfast, Ireland.**

I attended 13 presentations from gurus, researchers and practitioners.

These covered a wide range of topics including thinking, teaching and learning, leadership and engaging parents.

#### **Key points:**

- A forward-looking curriculum is essential.
- NZ is currently a world leader in curriculum.
- Good education for all students is vital as huge numbers aged 16-24 are disengaged.
- Thinking is needed to create value rather than analytical thinking.

#### **2. Leadership Development course at Henley Business School, Reading, England**

The course was attended by business people from around the globe. I was the only education representative.

The course focussed on how organisations work and effective ways of exercising influence within the organisation.

Experiential opportunities in small and large groups allowed each participant to set and get feedback on personal and professional goals.

#### **Personal Outcomes:**

- Developing skills to create a sense of direction. Useful for both work and home.
- Connecting with people at an emotional level.
- Being myself more with skill.

#### **3. Visits to 5 schools:**

- The Perse, a co-educational public school in Cambridge, England
- Malvern College – co-ed public school Year 7-13
- Malvern St James –public girls' school Year 7-13
- South Hampton High School – public girls' school Year 7-13
- Plus a Jewish boys school - Year 1-7

These schools prepare students for selection into the top 20 UK universities.

They focus on developing all-round students.

I looked at school qualifications; International Baccalaureate and A Levels, the culture of the school and what contributes to the success of students.

#### **Key points:**

What makes great schools includes:

- Staff have high academic expectations and support every student to achieve personal excellence.
- There are regular personal discussions with students about their learning, goals and direction.
- The school provides active support for student's unique interests.

- These schools have fantastic environments – physical and social.

**Outcomes include:**

A. Academic

- All students have qualifications to attend tertiary education.
- Top academic students have UE achievement in a minimum of 4 subjects, 5 if possible. Two different learning area strands are preferable to one.
- Motivated, able students advantaged by having 7 subjects like IB model.
- All students study a foreign language and many economics/business.

B. Future Focus

- Students see and experience a range of real work options while at school.
- Students are globally aware and community minded.
- They build connections within and outside school.
- Schools offer co-curricular and extra learning based on student interest.
- Form teacher conducts a personal interview regularly with each student.
- Students take responsibility for their own pathway beyond school with adult input.

**4. Discussions with a range of business people**

I asked their views on preparing students to be successful in today's world.

Some people now both work and manage relationships globally.

People I talked to ranged in age from 27-60+. There were many different points of view and I have summarised what I consider relevant for schools.

**Key points:**

- The role of a school is to develop in students strong base skills for the phase immediately beyond school.
- Schools need to be open to new models such as appreciative inquiry as well as problem solving.
- Students should leave knowing their strengths and be prepared to work where work is, while continuing to develop new strands.
- Students need to develop a wide network of connections.
- The need to be independent, responsible, flexible and forward-looking.

Students (not the school) are responsible for getting a job, then developing their unique interests alongside this. This helps create future options. Examples I encountered include:

- Engineer plus music reviewer.
- Money manager plus international sports rep.
- IT expert in specific area working globally.

**Implementing ideas from my sabbatical experience**

The following points summarise key reflections that I will endeavour to address in my role as principal.

- The western world is teetering financially and future work choices are uncertain. However, a good education with preparation for viable work offers solutions.
- Students leaving school need to have sufficient skills to be employed productively and not depend on the state to provide for them.
- People need to work in areas where there is employment and alongside that build further capability and opportunity. This requires creativity and teamwork, confidence and resilience.
- The world is global and new attitudes are needed to manage work, relationships and finances.

During my sabbatical, I met people living their lives differently, working across countries and managing complex relationships and friendships. They are happy and optimistic.

I saw the opposite too; the recession in Ireland and England and the riots in London.

New Zealand has the highest unemployment in the OECD of youth aged 17-24 and 40%+ of 14-17 year olds say they have been binge drinking in the past four weeks.

It is urgent schools focus on student's individual strengths and provide education for productivity.

### **For NZ schools going forward**

- There should be partnerships between government, schools, tertiary and workplaces.
- The government should indicate its views on future New Zealand core industries.
- Schools need to provide education to build and sustain students with foundation skills and attitudes for this industry.
- Students must take responsibility for building their potential skills and attributes and deciding how and where to use them.
- Tertiary institutions provide teaching for work and development of further industry for the country and global world.
- Work places need to provide opportunities for work and training for current and future employees.

### **For my school**

I have identified key areas where shifts are required to better meet the needs of every student. New Zealand schools in general have many great attributes and major changes are not necessary.

However focussed attention in specific areas can make a considerable difference to outcomes.

Many students still have considerable untapped potential.

I recommend to my Board of Trustees and staff that our focus for the near future includes:

1. **Raising expectations that our students can achieve more academically and creating pathways for this.** New Zealand has top students who can create an optimistic future and a tail of under-achievers.
2. **Personalising learning so students engage earlier and make sense of it.** This is where new work and business opportunities are likely to come from.
3. **Building opportunities for students to see and experience diversity locally and globally.** Students get to know themselves better and take responsibility for where they are going rather than relying on others for this.

I have outlined a plan to implement these goals so they are understood and adopted school-wide.

### **Acknowledgements**

I thank the Ministry of Education, the Board of Trustees and staff for their generous support of me for this experience. Thanks also to the schools I visited and the people who gave their time and shared their wisdom.

Mary Nixon

Napier Girls' High School