

# Sabbatical Research Project

To investigate the processes that schools implement when allocating fixed term management units, which encourage distributed leadership practices, and how they identify, monitor and measure the impact and effectiveness that the allocated management units are making.

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## **Acknowledgements:**

My thanks to the West Eyreton School Board of Trustees, the Ministry of Education & Teach NZ for providing me with the opportunity to undertake this sabbatical research.

A special thank you to my deputy principal who ran the school very capably, & to all the West Eyreton School staff who contributed to the smooth running of the school, during my absence.

My sincere appreciation and thanks to the principals who gave so generously of their time, for their collegiality, for allowing me an informative & in-depth look at their management systems, approaches and for openly discussing & sharing their professional opinions and feedback with me.

## **Benefits of the Sabbatical:**

After 30+ years in the teaching service, eleven of these years as Principal, I have valued the opportunity to step outside of my school and to have quality time to pursue my sabbatical goals. The learning gained will stand me in good stead for subsequent years in my leadership role and will assist me to continue to grow my school's leadership positions to support the strategic direction.

This sabbatical has provided me with new insights into implementation processes and will enable me to deliver an improved process for unit management at my own school.

I have valued the opportunity to learn ways that other principals identify & encourage applicants in the allocation of management units, how they consult with staff to convey the purpose & the intended outcomes of the units and their monitoring systems.

## **Rationale:**

- To investigate the processes that schools implement when allocating fixed term management units which encourage distributed leadership practices in their schools
- To investigate how schools identify, monitor & measure the impact & effectiveness that the allocated management units are making

## **Purpose of the Sabbatical:**

West Eyreton School's Values are:

- Excellence, Empathy, Effort, Example, Enterprise

Leadership Aim:

- To grow leaders who reflect these values, who are future focused and are prepared to take on lifelong learning that in turn brings sustainable benefits for our school & our pupils
- To develop practices in the allocation of management units which staff will see the value in being a part of

At West Eyreton School the allocation of management units is prioritised towards leading & developing initiatives, which are fundamental to the school's strategic planning, which have a positive impact on learning for pupils.

## **Background:**

Excerpts from 'A Model of Educational Leadership / Kiwi Leadership for Principals':

- **Ako – Being a Leader:** *Leaders who take their own learning seriously and keep their own passion for learning alive act as important role models for their schools. Keeping up to date with the evidence for professional leadership in schools is a fundamental expectation of principals and other school leaders.*
- **Developing leaders:** *The principal has a key role in guiding and supporting others to step up as leaders. This is achieved by recognising and developing the leadership potential of teachers. Building leadership capacity in a school increases the opportunities for improving learning outcomes for all students.*

Excerpts from NZEI Unit Allocation Guidelines:

- *The (new) units will give schools\* an opportunity to consider how they create career pathways for teachers and to rethink the leadership roles they will need for the future. This is an opportunity to consider the ways that these units can best be allocated to distribute leadership and responsibility according to each school's strategic direction. A starting point is the consideration of the school's current leadership roles and how the strategic direction of the school, and the career structure for teachers, can be enhanced by the new units.*

*This section should be read in conjunction with the PTCA. In particular parts 2.2.1, 3.12 and 9 contain information about units.*

## Key Principles:

*The following six principles should underpin the development of policy/associated procedures in order to determine how units should be allocated within a school:*

- *The unit allocation supports a logical and transparent career structure within the school.*
- *Units are allocated, and new roles created, on the basis of the identified needs of the school.*
- *Units are allocated to provide recognition and reward for leadership and management of teaching and learning, not simply workload.*
- *Allocation of units is based on objective criteria, i.e. to positions rather than to specific people holding positions.*
- *The teaching staff is consulted about the development or review of the unit allocation policy.*
- *The requirements of the PTCA are met.*

## Methodology:

In term four 2012, initial contact was made with principals to ask if they would assist me with my sabbatical topic. Early in term one 2013, I contacted each principal to arrange a suitable meeting time and sent them a copy of my sabbatical application outlining the purpose and the scope of the interview questions.

Seven primary school principals were interviewed for this research study, which consisted of a set of eight questions planned to achieve a focused approach around the type of information requested, with the additional objective that data collation would be more straightforward.

The diversity of the schools visited (size, rural/city) and the wealth & quality of the information gained provided excellent data to base my research on. The comprehensive processes that these principals were implementing at their schools were impressive. At the completion of each school visit, I departed with an enriched sense of enthusiasm & passion for principalship.

Following each school visit the data gained from each research question was documented. This was a valuable time to reflect on the ideas gained and the implications/benefits for possible implementation at my own school.

In addition to the school visits, time was spent reading a number of articles and sabbatical reports related to the topics of leadership and the management of units. (Refer Readings)\*

The format of this report has been designed so that the summarised, specific feedback from Principals provides meaningful detail and is of direct benefit to both readers & myself.

## Schools Visited:

School	Roll	Year Levels	Location	Contact Person
School 1	400+	Y1 – 8	Canterbury	Principal
School 2	300+	Y1 – 8	Canterbury	Principal
School 3	200+	Y1 – 8	Canterbury	Principal
School 4	300+	Y1 – 8	Canterbury	Principal
School 5	400+	Y1 – 8	Canterbury	Principal
School 6	500+	Y1 – 8	Canterbury	Principal
School 7	600+	Y1 – 8	Canterbury	Principal

## **Eight Key Questions – Summary of Findings from School Visits:**

### **Question 1: How do schools identify school needs for a FTU (fixed term unit)?**

#### **What criteria do they use?**

1. Most schools use the Strategic Plan as their starting point then make links to the annual planning when identifying the FTU's; one school includes the Strategic Plan but does not necessarily start with this.
2. In most schools the Principal & senior management team meet in term four to:
  - Review the annual plan; a needs analysis determines the school's needs & priorities
  - Look at foci for the coming year in terms of curriculum – the jobs that need to be retained / student achievement data / maintaining a curriculum focus
  - Identify what has been achieved in the current year and what's coming up for the next year; professional opportunities for learning for the following year
  - Identify areas to develop further e.g. new directions, initiatives, creativity

One school focuses on 3 Guiding Principles - embedded across all school areas:

- a) Personalisation/differentiation - One size does not fit all
- b) Research based practice – Rich in data and information
- c) Asset based Development – Engaging with stake holders before during and after any process

3. A range of criteria is identified to receive FTU's e.g.
  - Those which require a lot of leadership or organisation e.g. staff professional learning PD/contracts
  - A need to assist procedural areas of the school e.g. Library – needs to work well; areas crucial to the organisation of the school
  - Roles that are the largest with more leadership / workload than others
  - Areas which take time out of normal classroom responsibility

### **Question 2: How do Principals consult with staff and how do they allocate the FTU's?**

A wealth of information was gained around each school's consultation practices. For the purpose of this report I have greatly summarised this information:

- Most schools allocated the FTU's at the end of the year with one school allocating at the start of the year so new staff had the opportunity to apply to take on leadership – in this case, the FTU's were outlined and advertised to staff on the Teacher Only Day.
- Most schools advertised the FTU's criteria / number of units without names beside them so all staff could apply –some schools tagged the FTU roles e.g. there is an expectation that the leaders of a first year of professional learning PD would opt again for following year; others didn't tag regardless of whether someone had previously held the role or not.
- In most schools the principal with their senior management teams identified the areas to receive FTU's and consulted / asked for feedback by staff – staff feedback / ideas were considered / listened to / FTU's may be tweaked/modified before they were finalised for staff to apply for.
- Preceding the above, three of the schools also put out a questionnaire asking staff

for their suggestions for areas of school responsibilities (with and without FTU's) - the principal collated these to discuss with the senior management team (SM Team) when they met to identify areas to be allocated a FTU.

- There was a general consensus from all schools that either the Principal and / or the SM Team determined the final criteria / FTU roles / positions and the final recipients. If more than one staff member applied for a FTU then the principal / SM Team held an interview – if one of the applicants was a member of the SM Team then the principal interviewed and appointed the recipient.
- Most schools make the fixed term units available to all teaching staff including their permanent unit holders but some initially offered them to non-unit holders – the SM Team can then apply for a fixed term unit if not allocated.
- The final decision as to who was allocated a fixed term unit was the responsibility of the Principal.

**Question 3: How is the FTU set out - hours, expectations, and achievement of goals, sustainability? How do they write up the proposals?**

- Clear expectations are set out on the job description defining the generic key tasks & intended outcomes to be achieved.
- The number of hours to be worked for the unit is not stipulated – the FTU expectations are set out in written form, & are also conveyed at a meeting to discuss the key tasks of the job descriptions e.g. at one school each FTU recipient fills out a FT Responsibility agreement. Not all units were evenly balanced in the terms of workload.
- The FTU holder has an opportunity to feed into the action plans as well as contributing new goals & outcomes throughout the year.
- Some schools set out the job descriptions at the expression of interest stage and some principals meet with the FTU recipient to collaboratively map out the job description and action planning.
- Principals meet with the FTU holder both informally & formally with one school also delegating responsibility for FTU self-review to their DP.
- The achieved FTU outcomes form part of schools' end of year reviews, which contribute to the development of the coming year's annual planning. The decision to retain a FTU for a further period was based on the end of year review.

**Question 4: How do schools provide support & guidance to the unit holders – i.e. what involvement does the Principal, BOT, DP's, teaching staff have throughout the process? How do other key players at the school become part of the new developments & initiatives?**

Principals gave the following examples:

- An inclusive model is important i.e. the involvement & support by the principal and staff; setting up curriculum teams comprised of team members as the key players who have a responsibility to work with and to provide support to the FTU holder as part of their team roles. In one school, the FTU holders have the opportunity to select the team members who could best support them to achieve the intended goals of their unit.
- Engagement by all members of the team is important so strong links are formed with the key players – this enabled teams led by the FTU holder to work effectively to achieve goals as a team. While one person might have a FTU responsibility i.e. a sole function on his or her own - they have to work with others. It is about doing

things with people & is part of the school vision. One example at a school with larger developments was often the FTU holders will come to SM Team meetings – talk about how things are going; often – senior staff will join a team meeting (but NOT leading) to gain an understanding of how the FTU is going. This is collegial i.e. Team Leader + 3 or 4 teachers

- Support is provided to the FTU holders in a variety of ways by Principals, DP's, team leaders, staff, leadership coaching, professional development & external facilitators– e.g. in one school, all the SM Team are on 'Development' teams lending their support as a team member – this is a great role model for others.
- Boards of trustees are kept informed during the year through either verbal or written reports presented by the principal; BOT staff trustee or the fixed term unit holder.
- Staff meetings are timetabled around the team meetings so staff had ample notice of when they were held, the purpose of meetings and what their involvement was e.g. responsibility to provide in – house PD
- Clear information is provided at the start of the unit to the FTU holder e.g. outlining the workload factor & additional support at the start of the unit / principals meet to discuss and frame up the job descriptions with the unit holders; conversations are held with FTU holders about what the job looks like; consistency around the action plan is developed by the Principal which the unit holder can then feed into.
- For most schools release time was not a given but the FTU holder had the opportunity to discuss any needs with the principal.

**Question 5: How do schools measure & evaluate the work undertaken by the unit holder – are units automatically paid out or do they need to achieve measurable outcomes termly? – How are these outcomes identified, developed and monitored?**

- In all schools the units are paid out for the full term of the unit – some feedback given was that pay based on the unit holder's performance was seen as constituting performance pay.
- Checkpoints & informal meetings are held: if the intended goals are not being achieved & then not included on the FTU holder's goals for the following term then the Principal will discuss this with them as the Principal wants teachers to be open about what has / hasn't been achieved each term; the Principal can see at staff PD sessions that the FTUs criteria are being carried out – is also kept informed through observations & staff/ parent/ pupils' involvement.

**Question 6: How is the unit assessed for value & completion? Benefits to the school?**

Principals commented that the benefits of the FTU's were assessed:

- Based on the FTU reports to the BOT outlining what difference has been made - these outline the benefits to the school + recommendations for further developments
- Based on the FTU holder's work with & consultation at staff meetings / team meetings
- Based on appraisals during the year & / or self reviews by the FTU holder (some with senior management) & the principal reflects on these
- The evidence seen in data to the MOE e.g. the FTU criteria completion / if exceeded / or not effective then reshapes the next year's goals
- Generally, from the end of Term 3 onwards, before identifying units or new units for the following year, the principal and the SM Team will meet over a number of days to

reflect on the school's needs going forward. The principal and the SM Team discuss how effective the FTU was. The review of the annual plan at the end of the year then leads back to the start of the cycle.

**Question 7: What responsibility does the recipient have to report back on the value of what has been achieved i.e. outcomes?**

A range of formal & informal reporting processes are employed by schools for the unit holder to provide updates on progress made at key points during the year:

These include:

- Informal conversations with the principal during the year with formal written reports each term and at the end of year to the BOT
- Informal periodic conversations with the principal during the year with a formal self review written by the FTU holder at the Term 3 appraisal time; the principal also writes a FTU report and this becomes an appendix to the FTU holder's formal appraisal report
- Informal meetings with the principal: some FTU holders report to the BOT and others to staff meetings. Some FTU holders fill out a 'Responsibilities Review' of the FTU work; the principal keeps appraisals focused on Teaching & Learning not FTU work – they don't allow the FTU to take over the main appraisal focus; no mid year reporting by the FTU holder; the FTU holder does not report to the BOT at the end of the year unless this is part of the FTU responsibility.
- Meeting with the principal at appraisal attestation times x 2 per year which is not in depth as is more about how are they going or if any problems? Are they on track? There's an expectation for completion by the end of T4; a high trust model; the DP reports to the BOT on behalf of each FTU x 1 new FTU per month – this is a short report on progress towards the intended outcomes; the Principal writes a report collaboratively with the FTU on the FTU holder's work (this doesn't go to BOT / Staff). The Principal selects which FTU they collaboratively write reports for as does not do this with all FTU's
- The Principal meets x 2 per year and also has regular meetings with the FTU holders as well as informally with ½ FTU holders. They ask what's going well? What are frustrations? The FTU holder writes a report at mid year and an end yr report to the BOT + Principal. These look at benefits to the school & recommendations for further developments; all FTU holders list progress to date at mid yr & all FTU holders complete a self appraisal of the expected outcomes before the appraisal meeting at the end of year
- During appraisals the Principal focuses on highlights, frustrations, recommendations for further development; this leads into a review of the Annual Plan for the following year / whether the FTU needs to be continued. Main unit holders are required to write a report to the BOT on progress with an expectation that they will report to the BOT at least x 1 per year but not all FTU holders have to report. In addition, the achievement of goals i.e. specific objectives using a FTU Responsibilities Agreement form is conducted with the DP. This feeds into a sustainability review that is used at the planning meeting at the end of the year by the Principal & the SM Team.
- The FTU holder meets with the Principal x 1 per term. There is ongoing feedback which is formative not summative. The MOE Review Tools are used to guide the achievement of goals. The FTU holder's team meetings are minuted x 1 per term.



**Question 8: How does the Principal separate the FTU leadership out of those who already have the leadership?**

- Most schools didn't distinguish between who can apply for a FTU. In the majority of schools the FTU's were made available to all teachers to apply for whether or not they were already receiving permanent management units.

The reasons given were that the best people get the job; is about the role not the person; enables the school to tap into the experience of its school leaders; is for roles that are the largest with more leadership than others. One school commented that as the FTU roles are differentiated to meet the school's needs each year that over a period of five years most teachers would have the opportunity to apply for a FTU in an area, which they could lead.

- Two schools made the FTU's available to non- unit holders initially as they wanted to encourage non-unit holders to become leaders / then if no one applied the unit holders are entitled to apply for the FTU.
- In all schools there is an expectation that everyone has to have a share of the Responsibility/Delegation roles. They learn to be a leader by being a leader – there's NOT always going to be a unit attached.

**Conclusion:**

**Implications for West Eyreton School:**

As a result of the sabbatical this opportunity has enabled me to reflect on current systems, to make improvements & to develop innovative approaches for allocating and monitoring fixed term units for staff:

- The outcome of this sabbatical has resulted in a more consultative approach being implemented for staff including a more robust unit allocation & monitoring process.
- The unit allocation process will be more transparent for staff
- Discussions with principals have clarified some ambiguities and reinforced existing good practice
- A flow chart outlining the process for managing units for West Eyreton School has been developed using the research from this sabbatical – this provides a clear process and achieves the purpose & rationale of this sabbatical.

## Readings\* Undertaken as part of Sabbatical Research:

- Ministry of Education. (2008). Kiwi Leadership for Principals: Principals as Educational Leaders. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education (2012). Leading from the Middle: Educational Leadership for Middle & Senior Leaders. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Kiwi leadership for principals: principals as educational leaders (2008) [www.educationallleaders.govt.nz/Leadership-development/Professional-information/Kiwi-leadership-for-principals](http://www.educationallleaders.govt.nz/Leadership-development/Professional-information/Kiwi-leadership-for-principals)
- Ako: Being a Leader. (5 April 2013) [www.educationallleaders.govt.nz/Leadership-development/Leadership-programmes](http://www.educationallleaders.govt.nz/Leadership-development/Leadership-programmes)
- Developing leaders(5 April 2013)[www.educationallleaders.govt.nz/culture/developing-leaders](http://www.educationallleaders.govt.nz/culture/developing-leaders)
- NCSL National College for School Leadership - Building leadership capacity – helping leaders learn - an NCSL think piece by John West-Burnham (Mar 28 2013)
- Hargreaves, A and Fink D. (2004) *The Seven Principles of Sustainable Leadership* Educational Leadership Vol 61: Number 7
- Teach NZ sabbatical reports based on leadership in schools (2006 – 2012):
  - a) Distributed Leadership; developing the leadership of others as a means to sustaining future schooling - Louise Moore Glendowie College – 2008
  - b) How do school leaders make a difference? W.J.Wootton - Principal Korokoro School, Petone, Lower Hutt-2009
  - c) Improving Teacher Performance – Jeff Freeman, Knighton Normal School, Hamilton, January 2011
  - d) How do exemplary principals manage and sustain change in order to enhance student-learning outcomes? Lyn Atkinson, Ilam School – 2006
  - e) Resourcing of Management and Administrative Structures in Large, High Decile Primary Schools – Peter Ayson, Meadowbank School, Remuera Auckland 1050 -2010
  - f) Leading Change & Developing Others – Bu Windsor – Aoraki Mt Cook School – 2010
  - g) Growing Leadership – the opportunities and effectiveness of programmes school leaders are providing to distribute, grow & sustain leadership in their schools – Peter Pointon
  - h) Growing Leaders in our Schools - Carolyn Marino, Westmere School Auckland – 2010
  - i) Career Pathways - Danny Nicholls, St Patrick's Catholic School, Taupo –2011
  - j) Sustaining Teacher Capability - Jacinta Cousins Principal Our Lady of Lourdes School, Palmerston North - 2011
  - k) Exploring how professional supervision can strengthen the leadership skills of principals in primary schools - Margaret Coleman, Our Lady Star of the Sea School – 2011
  - l) How do U6 schools (grading rolls from 501 – 675 students) structure their leadership teams to enhance teaching and learning? What are the specific roles and responsibilities of deputy, assistant principals and team leaders within these schools and their corresponding allocation of units and release time? Mark Gregory, St Joseph's School, Papanui, Christchurch - 2012
  - m) How can adaptive leadership help me build leadership capacity within our school to ensure that we are able to lead the change that is required to meet the needs of the 21st Century Learner? Derek Linington, Bailey Road School, Mount Wellington, Auckland – 2012