

Sabbatical Report for Peter Fava (October 2014)

Title: (a) Student Behaviour Management
(b) Catholic Life and Culture

Author: Peter Fava

School: St Bernard's College, Lower Hutt

Period of sabbatical time: Monday 5th May – Monday 28th July 2014 (10 weeks of term time)

Acknowledgements: Teacher Study Awards, TeachNZ, Ministry of Education
St Bernard's College Board of Trustees
Senior Leadership Team, St Bernard's College
Marist Brothers, Wellington and Sydney Provinces
Marist Brothers Colleges, Sydney Archdiocese
Ampleforth College, York, UK
Ex-Birmingham Catholic Partnership schools, UK
National Association of Catholic Secondary School Principals

Introductory explanation of sabbatical leave focus amendment

Due to exceptional circumstances (personal health reasons in 2013), I had to postpone my sabbatical leave until term 2, 2014. This postponement was approved by the St Bernard's College Board of Trustees and TeachNZ, Ministry of Education.

With this postponement, there had to be a re-focusing of the overall sabbatical leave study. It was not possible to visit the University of Connecticut as my health condition prevented me from obtaining medical insurance while visiting the United States. Also the conference dates for the annual School-wide Positive Behaviour Support in the USA had changed for 2014 and these dates conflicted with the sabbatical leave engagements in England. Instead, I decided to review the student behaviour management practices in selected schools in Sydney, Australia and England. This fitted well as I could also focus on Catholic Life and Culture in the Marist Brothers schools in Sydney instead of the Marist Brothers schools in the USA and Canada.

Executive summary:

The study was undertaken between April and July, 2014.

The sabbatical leave focused on two inter-related areas: student behaviour management systems and staff induction into the school ethos (mainly relating to Catholic Life and Culture). Two secondary foci considered the schools' approach to the use of hand-held electronic devices (Bring Your Own Device, BYOD), and the role of home-school partnerships. These secondary foci were not pursued in detail.

There were 6 schools of the Marist tradition visited in Sydney as well as the Marist Brothers Centre in Mascot. Ampleforth College of the Benedictine Order was visited in York, UK. Six schools from the dissolved Birmingham Catholic Schools Partnership, were part of the review. These Birmingham schools had previously been visited in 2003 and 2008. No state or secular schools were visited. Interviews were held with the Principals, key senior management personnel, middle managers (curriculum and pastoral), chaplains and chaplaincy teams, teachers and students. Some classroom observations were made.

It appears that there is commonality between schools with regards to student behaviour management and most of these present their community with similar school rules and codes of conduct. These rules and codes were widely advertised and circulated within the school communities and can be found in student diaries and websites. It is in the practical application detail that one would perceive differences and these differences of rule application were not only observed between schools, but also within schools. While all schools aspired for consistency of application, this uniformity varied. At least one school moved onto a “credit” behaviour management plan operated by a private company, where students gained behaviour “credits” which they could redeem for goods online. Several schools had opted for the House vertical tutor group system based on research that such a pastoral care structure would provide more of a family spirit and it would integrate the students from the different Year levels. It would also upskill the House Leaders (staff and students alike) giving the staff the opportunity to be familiar with the diverse needs of the students in their tutor group across the year levels; it would give plenty of opportunity for senior students to show leadership and witness the values that the school stood for; it strengthened the House spirit as all students in each tutor group came from the same house, including their Tutor teachers. In several schools, senior school leaders (staff) also had a tutor group to run. It was important to note that those schools which had moved to a vertical House tutor group structure still maintained regular Year level meetings which were mainly held to discuss or pass on information pertinent to that particular Year. Most of these schools with the change over to the vertical tutor group system reported that the positive tone of the school had lifted and the incidence of disciplinary matters had decreased, particularly that of bullying. Student engagement had improved and most disciplinary matters were dealt with in-House through a restorative reconciliation process. Substantial professional learning development went into the training of the tutor teachers and House leaders and the change over from horizontal forms to vertical tutor groups was phased in after the initial training was completed. *(For research studies and pastoral discussion on vertical groupings in secondary schools refer to a Google search for “vertical tutor groups” and “scholarly articles for vertical tutor groups secondary”. Good websites are www.verticaltutoring.org and www.tes.co.uk)*

The range of programmes for the induction into the Catholic life and culture of the school for new staff varied across most schools in England. Ampleforth College, a Benedictine Order school ran a formal induction programme into what a Benedictine college looked like focusing on how the rule of St Benedict permeated everything and it would be witnessed through the AHRISE values. In some schools, this induction into Catholic life was a brief part of the introduction, where the primary focus seemed to be on the more immediate and pragmatic matters that staff needed to engage with the school and be effective teachers. Perhaps, new staff would, especially at the start of their employment in that school, familiarise themselves with the ‘charism’ of the person of the school’s patronal name. The situation with the Marist Brothers schools in Sydney was very different and all staff attended professional development induction programmes run by the Marist Centre into the charism of St Marcellin Champagnat. Teachers were required to become accredited over a number of years as Marist teachers. These schools also had their own induction programme, specifically related to that particular school. There was a distinct difference between the Marist Brothers schools’ and the English schools’ ability of staff and students to articulate the charism of their patronal name. Signs and symbols relating to their founder abounded in the Marist schools, while English schools had predominantly signs and symbols of Catholicism. Ampleforth College was more similar to the Marist schools and the charism of St Benedict was well embedded. Formal induction programmes for students and staff alike provided those schools with a strong foundation for maintaining and enhancing an ethos grounded in the charism of their founders.

The BYOD discussion was a topical one in all the schools visited. There were mixed reviews with regards to a ‘requirement of all students to have their own device’, consistency in the identified tablet ‘brand’ (e.g. iPad, Samsung) and use of a device in class and school. Some schools allowed BYOD, others did not; some schools demanded a particular brand as stationery, others allowed the students to use whatever android, smart device they owned.

Some schools did not have the IT infrastructure or platform to handle the mass use of devices. The educational debate was ongoing within the schools, where one positive comment was that the students were now so advanced that they could access and do most things via their smart phone/tablet and therefore it was imperative for teachers to become familiar with best practice in using the devices. On the other hand, a negative comment maintained that some schools used the BYOD more of a marketing tool to impress parents and prospective students as many teachers had not acquainted themselves with the educational value of devices in assisting students to engage with learning. Several schools were considering asking students to purchase an identified make and model so that the schools' IT personnel would have ease to manage downloads of applications and servicing. Other schools believed in owning the devices and 'leasing' them to the students. One school in Birmingham would not consider owning the devices as it had other financial priorities and would not expect the students to have them because "the students could be assaulted on the way to school, if it was known they were carrying expensive tablets". The general consensus was that each school had to work out its pedagogical philosophy and the role of information and communication technology, while at the same time ensuring (as an imperative) that all staff received ongoing professional learning development and that all students had access to the technology at school.

The home-school partnership focus was not pursued intensely. While most schools had cultivated positive and enduring community relationships and communication between home and school was frequent, there did not seem to be formal structures (e.g. parent-teacher, ethnic groups) operating. This did not mean that parents' voice was not valued, but communication could be maintained via other means. The schools' websites were relied upon more and more and most schools, if not all, had a parental e-portal, which gave access to parents to much information relating to their child's life and progress at school.

2014 Sabbatical purposes:

Primary purpose

- i. To visit schools in Sydney, Australia and UK to review the pastoral care and student behaviour management policies, processes, procedures and practices and compare these discretely with the philosophy of School-wide Positive Behaviour Support (known in NZ as Positive Behaviour for Learning, PB4L).
- ii. To visit selected Marist Brothers high schools in Sydney, Australia and other Catholic schools in York and Birmingham, UK – reviewing the Catholic life and culture, ethos and climate as reflected in the induction of new staff of these high schools.

Secondary purpose

- iii. To review the schools' position in relation to the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) interactive technologies.
- iv. To consider the purpose and extent of home-school partnerships.

Background and rationale:

The College had expressed an interest to become a Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) school, but this did not happen for 2013. While there was and there is an ongoing high level of staff commitment to address issues surrounding the interpretation and consistency of application of the school rules and student code of conduct (i.e. what is the agreed bottom line, re-inforcement of positive behaviours, rewards and consequences, student voice, etc.), it was important to find out how other schools managed these issues. It was helpful to find out from other schools what works for them, what could be improved and what to avoid. This would be the evidential comparative ground work so that the College could have an informed debate, if it were to apply in future to become a PB4L school.

The College was in receipt of its Special Character Review and Development Report in 2013, where the role of ‘tagged’ teachers was highlighted. The College’s Proprietor had also negotiated an amendment to the Integration Agreement with the Crown with the addition of Schedule V, where St Bernard’s College was identified as being a Catholic College in the Marist Brothers tradition as founded by St Marcellin Champagnat. This amendment has far reaching and long term implications, especially with the appointment and induction of new staff into the College to ensure the Champagnat charisms and ethos are maintained and enhanced. The Catholic Life, ethos and traditions depend very much on all staff witnessing in their relationships with all people in our community the Marist Pillars and the school’s values for life, besides actively participating in Catholic rituals, events and activities. In this respect the ‘tagged’ teachers have a huge responsibility as they are called upon to be the first and foremost role-models that animate the Catholic life in the college.

The College has an evolving ICT strategic plan, which seeks to consider the introduction of a BYOD policy and protocols. The research on the effective use of student hand-held interactive devices is very limited at this stage but there is a growing field of good practice that can be reviewed. This lack of research perhaps is due to the very quick development and accessibility of such devices, which a large number of students own (e.g. smart phones, tablets). Finding out what other schools are doing would assist St Bernard’s College to plan successfully in the short and medium terms, avoiding pitfalls.

St Bernard’s College successfully runs several home-school partnerships involving different Maori and Pasifika ethnic groups, besides immigrant groups. As these partnerships evolved within the school community without any prescription or template, it was felt timely and appropriate to look at other overseas models.

The above presented a tall order to complete a thorough and in-depth research study of all aspects of the sabbatical proposal and some areas were considered according to the time and the availability of key personnel. Hence, the BYOD and home-school partnership aspects will not receive much coverage much coverage beyond the above executive summary.

Methodology:

- Review of documents supplied by the schools
- Qualitative observation in schools
- Interviews with principals, senior leadership staff; chaplains/chaplaincy teams, curriculum managers, performance management directors, heads of pastoral care, house masters, teachers and students.
- Professional reading and research

Findings:

Behaviour management systems:

“Students learn best when they are in classrooms taught by expert teachers.” This is the premise that preambles the behaviour management of students, articulated in the interviews in different schools. Schools behaviour management policies were similarly based on the principle that where there is a breakdown between a student and teacher, reconciliation is needed to restore authority and a positive attitude to learning. Teachers were reminded to “use appropriate language and follow the school’s essential standards, which are simple and basic: never raise your voice in anger; if a student chooses to disrupt learning, you must impose a consequence, preferably before the next lesson; and thirdly, always greet students at the door, retain them in the classroom and supervise their safe departure from your room on the bell.” All schools asked teachers to be consistent with their application of student

behaviour management procedures and there was an escalating range of consequences, if the student did not respond to verbal warnings, continued to disrupt learning, failed to attend same day detention and then failed to attend social time (usually after-school) detention. At every stage before a consequence was meted out, there were attempts by the key personnel and the teacher to work through reconciliation by the end of the day. Parents were contacted if the student was required to be removed from class and there was further escalation to higher authority, if the student chose not to comply with directives. This approach would not be dissimilar from most of the schools visited in Australia and England. It would be safe to say that many NZ schools would follow similar procedures. One school found a novel way of trialling a merit system to reward positive behaviour which involved a commercial arrangement with a firm that provided rewards on line in exchange for student behaviour merits. The other side of the ledger meant that students could receive demerit points. The school deposited funds with the firm each term that covered the costs of the rewards. Other schools had devised their own ways of rewarding positive behaviours and punishing negative behaviours. Most of the schools in Birmingham had set up well-resourced and staffed student centres to receive highly disruptive students on a day-by-day in-school exclusion. This was in line with the school ethos that every student was to be accorded dignity and provided with an education, but it was also a response relating to the government out-of-school exclusion protocols.

Student behaviour management was taken seriously and several protocols surrounded the instigating of a consequence. For example, in one school, while a classroom teacher may issue an after-school detention, this had to be sanctioned by the form teacher, and if the student challenged the consequence, it would have had to be sanctioned by the dean (or Head of Year/House). This process was followed to make sure that the appropriate support procedures were in place for students and that teachers had followed the procedures. It was explained that these checks ensured there was justice and fairness and there was consistency among teachers for instigating consequences.

Nevertheless, the primary issue confronting the schools was one of consistency amongst the teachers in the application of the student behaviour management procedures. In discussing this with senior leaders, heads of faculties, heads of houses and lead teachers, consistency was critical as the opposite was detrimental to staff morale, the good order of the school, confusion amongst the students and an opportunity for exploitation by difficult students. Strong Heads of Faculty, heads of houses, deans and lead teachers with student behaviour management responsibilities held regular formal and informal meetings with their staff to ensure consistency about addressing non-acceptable behaviour. Where there was positive dialogue, good communication, early intervention and consistency in the application of the rules, students generally knew what the rules were and got on with their learning. The opposite was evident where there was inconsistency between teachers. It was even worse when the teacher him/herself was inconsistent with the application of the same rules within the class. Schools invested heavily in student behaviour management, providing professional learning development opportunities for their teachers, especially to live by the schools' ethos of mainly rewarding positive behaviour and witnessing compassion and forgiveness in a restorative reconciliatory environment. Nevertheless, students were held accountable and faced a hierarchy of consequences. However, there was a point and time when, notwithstanding these supports, the position of a teacher who could not or would not attain the required standard of consistency became untenable as the care and learning of students was paramount. The performance management system in several schools was particularly focused on student management and professional standards and these would highlight whether these standards were being met.

It was positive to note that the students were keen to share their pride in their schools. They had expectations to feel happy, safe and treated with respect. They expected that their property and that of others was safe. They had a sense of ownership of their school, wanting their environment and facilities to be treated with care. They expected to learn without

disruption or distraction from other students. They wanted to be taught by teachers who are fair, competent, supportive and understanding of their needs. They also realised that they had responsibilities: what they expected or wanted for themselves, then they had to be prepared to accord others. “Do unto others, as you want them to do unto you!” could not have been truer.

Staff induction into the charism and ethos of the school:

The Marist Brothers schools in Sydney (which are fee-paying private schools receiving a state capitation grant) offer a very strong and sound staff induction programme very ably supported by the Marist Centre in Mascot. This office is well staffed and caters for the Marist Brothers schools in the wider Sydney Archdiocese. Most schools offer a two day Catholic Life induction programme for new staff (teaching and non-teaching) particular to their own school run by their ‘Head of Mission’ and/or chaplain supported by a Marist Brother attached to that school. The schools are now being challenged with ‘teacher accreditation’ – where every teacher is being required to have an RE qualification and should have a number of hours of professional development each year to gain and maintain the foundation level accreditation. This seems to be moving towards becoming a condition of employment. The Marist Centre offers a range of courses to support this move and there is also a more in-depth two-stage 3 day residential course “Footsteps 1” run several times a year in Mittagong, then followed by “Footsteps 2” in the following year. Once a year, one of the more affluent schools offers to a long serving staff member a Pilgrimage trip to the Hermitage (France). From 2015, it intends to introduce a \$10000 research scholarship for staff to study the Marist charism and the school’s mission. The Senior Leadership team and other key personnel engage the new staff with the day-to-day matters relating to the immediate, practical and mundane. Each school provides a comprehensive staff manual (some in print, others electronically), which cannot be digested in a day or two. New teachers indicated that the staff manual was a reference resource that was accessed at the point when new procedures (e.g. report writing) were essential to be identified and followed. Most schools had ongoing ‘induction’ meetings with new staff to work on matters at that ‘point of readiness’.

The induction of staff in Ampleforth College (a residential boarding school for boys and girls) in the Benedictine tradition is somewhat similar, but definitely does not go to such depth and requirements. There are still 4 monks who work directly in the college, with 25 monks residing in the Abbey. The presence of monks has been pivotal and the college is now looking forward to its first lay principal. The chaplain (a Benedictine monk) runs the induction programme for new staff introducing these people to St Benedict, his rule and the AHRISE core values which the College supports across relationships and all its activities, underpinning the school ethos and culture. AHRISE stands for: attentiveness, hospitality, respect, integrity, service and equilibrium. These values encapsulate what Ampleforth is as an organisation and these values are visibly manifested and expected from staff and students alike.

The schools in Birmingham followed to some extent the same approaches: an induction day or two at the start of the school year for new staff covering the Catholic life and ethos of the school, with most of the induction centring on management and administrative matters that the teacher would need when starting in a new school. All schools had follow up sessions and staff could relate to the staff manual as a point of reference. Some schools in Sydney and England had a whole staff day on Catholic life, where teaching and non-teaching staff had an opportunity with external facilitators (e.g. Franciscan monks) to articulate what was significant in that particular school about Catholic life; how were people witnessing Catholic life; and what could be done differently to engage staff and students in Catholic life.

Implications for the SBC Charter, strategic and annual plans:

That the college:

1. continues to work on the induction programme for staff new to the college;
2. fully engages the 'tagged' teachers so that they become the first and foremost witnesses of Catholic Life in the college through their participation and mentoring of other staff;
3. places clear expectations on the 'tagged' teachers through specific job descriptions and performance management;
4. has a planned and funded staff development programme in Catholic Life that goes beyond the Marist Pillar day or half-day to ensure that Catholic Character is everyone's responsibility;
5. requires all staff (teaching and non-teaching) funded by the Board to attend the Champagnat in the Pacific forum, led by the Marist Brothers, within the first three years of their employment at the College, and this becomes a condition of employment;
6. re-opens the debate on PB4L as the medium for professional learning development to achieve consistency amongst teachers on the interpretation and application of student behaviour management procedures;
7. considers through timely and appropriate consultation the introduction of House based vertical tutor groups;
8. works out a policy with regards to BYOD;
9. continues to build on the strong home-school partnerships; and
10. provides sufficient professional learning development time and financial resourcing to make the above happen.

Benefits:

i. Links to issues important to the school:

- Catholic Life and ethos in the Marist tradition as identified in the school Charter and Integration Agreement
- Students achieving to their highest potential also identified in the Charter
- Student Behaviour Management and pastoral care that reflect our Catholic character
- Enhancement of the use of modern technology to improve teaching and student learning
- Building and maintaining positive relationships with different ethnic groups in our community through home-school partnerships.

ii. Links to the school's strategic or annual plan

All strategies/activities (key tasks, key indicators) across the different strands of the Strategic Plan underpin the maintenance and enhancement of the Catholic Character. Specifically in the 2014 Annual plan for the Catholic Character we want to:

- increase the profile and involvement of tagged teachers in leading the Catholic character focus of the college;
- have prayers at registration for all form classes; and
- provide a wide range of opportunities for events and activities that allows students to grow in their faith.

These objectives are followed by a host of strategies that need to be implemented to make these happen. However, what is critically important is the professional learning development provided for teachers (tagged and non-tagged) as all teachers have a responsibility to maintain and enhance the Catholic character and the ethos that witnesses this character. The induction programme for staff new to the school is an excellent starting point, but there needs to be ongoing programmes that support the staff to grow in their commitment to what a Catholic school stands for.

The Charter and Strategic Plan expressly identify areas of the curriculum and pastoral care as critical to the improvement of educational outcomes.

The College is discussing a curriculum review (areas of the curriculum, vocational pathways, delivery mechanism and packaging) and the Pastoral Care organisation (House based vertical tutor groups and Year level form classes). Over the years there have been small tweaks mainly resulting in a widening of the areas of the curriculum (e.g. Samoan Language, Drama) and changes to the streaming model (e.g. Years 9, 10 and 11). The school has also implemented a comprehensive ICT plan across the whole school (structurally) and in classrooms (technology and pedagogy). The achievement of students has been very good relative to the type of school that St Bernard's is. However, it seems that academic achievement has plateaued with yearly fluctuations of achievement rates depending on the cohorts. While the College can proudly report that 85% of its students leave with a minimum NCEA Level 2 qualification (Ministry target), it is a target that can be improved upon. Continuing to do exactly what has been done over the past 10 years would project very little change in these results, notwithstanding the hard work of teachers.

The school's strategic and annual plans directly address issues of student engagement, achievement, curriculum delivery and pastoral care. The PB4L philosophy and model should be seen as another strategy to gain student engagement, especially where the expected standards are articulated by all stakeholders, and teachers are assisted to define and agree upon, across the board, "what are the bottom acceptable lines of student behaviour?" and "how do teachers maintain a consistency in the application of these bottom lines?" Clearly, this approach needs phasing-in, time and resourcing for teacher professional learning development and work across classrooms and in form classes (or tutor groups) in pastoral care prescribed time, if consistency is to become a reality.

Therefore, it is timely to consider some fundamental changes so that the strategic goal of ensuring that every student achieves to his potential in a physically and emotionally safe environment is reached. Cognitive learning and affective learning are so intrinsically intertwined that packaging the curriculum, structural delivery of the curriculum (time-tabling and time allocation), planning of lessons, relationship building and enhancement, student behaviour management, expectations of staff and students alike, consistency in the application of standards, etc. have to be reviewed objectively and dispassionately in the best interests of the students in the care of the College. The fundamental questions that the Strategic plan asks are: "what do we want to do?" And "what must we do to make this happen?" The answers should not be so elusive, if there is a buy-in by the school community to make things happen.

iii. Links to personal and professional development

- Personal development – interaction with leaders of other Marist schools in Australia and Catholic schools in England would re-inforce international enrichment to the adherence to "the way" of Marist schools and Catholic Life
- Professional leadership – looking at establishing a PB4L leadership team; reviewing senior management structures and communication – learning from the practitioners of effective student behaviour management plans
- Professional leadership – maintenance and enhancement of Special Character, ICT development
- Curriculum planning and delivery – use of hand-held devices for information and communications interactive technology
- Pastoral Care initiatives – building House and family spirit.

iv. Links to current MoE schooling sector priorities

Positive Behaviour for Learning programme
Effective teaching (use of interactive ICT in the classroom)
Improved student outcomes (evidence based learning) especially for minority ethnicities
Achievement of boys
Achievement of Maori and Pasifika students

Conclusions:

Student behaviour management is a complex activity in all schools and it is a demanding ongoing task for all those involved to work out the best and appropriate way for their particular idiosyncratic school. The literature abounds with research concerning the processes and procedures surrounding pastoral care, relationships and student behaviour management. Each school in the study had similarities, but more importantly had worked out its own school rules and code of conduct. It is when there was open and regular discussion about how these processes and procedures (the what, how and why) are applied that the school had managed to get as much buy-in from staff and students alike, with a high level of consistency of application. It appears that those schools which had clear, succinct, open and transparent codes supported by a positive approach to managing student behaviour through affective relationships, high expectations, restorative practices and appropriate rewards and consequences did establish a caring culture and ethos, where the physical and emotional safety of the students (and staff) were highly valued. This would not be dissimilar from the philosophy that backs PB4L in NZ schools.

The visit to the Marist Brothers schools in Sydney was inspirational and aspirational. The founder's charisma, and the ethos and climate permeated across the schools. These were reflected in their induction of new staff, management structures, curriculum delivery and pastoral care processes and procedures. One knew the minute one crossed the threshold into these Marist schools that one was in a Marist environment and it could not be mistaken. St Bernard's College has a reputation of being an authentic Catholic school in the Marist tradition. The College has a caring ethos and many good procedures in place. Yet, we can learn from the Sydney Marist colleges that 'induction' is an ongoing process and there is an accountability. Mary and her charisms (the way of Mary) are fundamental in a boys' only school. And witnessing the ethos and charisms in everyday relationships speak louder than words, signs and symbols.

The visit to Ampleforth College in York and the Catholic schools in Birmingham, England highlighted the diversity of how schools go about maintaining and enhancing their commitment to Catholic Life. Clearly in an Order school, there were more visible signs and symbols representing the Benedictine way, while the Catholic ethos was generally very overt in all the Catholic schools visited. What definitely came through was that all the schools were part of the mission of the Catholic church and what was fundamental was their commitment to Gospel values crystallised and synthesised into one word: "respect". It was sad to discover that the old Catholic Schools Partnership had dissolved as its driving force was the common good and all the partnership schools, staff and students had benefitted from that partnership.

The discussion centring on BYODs was ongoing. While some schools were considering purchasing tablets for student use, others mandated that all students own their own device (make and model prescribed), or students brought their own (whatever the make of model). Other schools had not considered this technology at all or dismissed it; and others were grappling with the educational value of whether this device improved student learning. The issue that seems to be confronting the schools was that many students actually already owned an android smart phone or tablet and brought them to school. The challenge that faced

teachers was the availability (or lack of) professional learning development and sound research regarding the effective use of this technology as a teaching tool that enhanced learning.

The building of home-school partnerships via face-to-face parental engagement in school groups that met regularly was not necessarily seen as a priority in many of the schools. It was felt that the two-way communication (formal and informal) via newsletters, e-portals and school websites was sufficient to engage the parents with the school and vice-versa. Schools also offered the traditional parent-teacher-student progress conferences and in some instances the school was closed for instruction for two or three days to allow for effective conferencing. The Marist schools cultivated strong engagement with mothers reflecting the Marist charism of “in the way of Mary” and through Mary to Jesus. Establishing home-school groups based on ethnic backgrounds did not seem to be a priority given the demographic of the Marist schools. While the ethnic diversity in the Birmingham schools was highly visible and acknowledged through signs and symbols in these schools, few had made deliberate attempts to establish ethnic community links and relied mainly on the above mentioned media to communicate. In NZ, the situation would be different especially where there is a high concentration of diverse ethnicities (e.g. Maori, Pasifika, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, etc.) and the local research would support the view that having strong home-school partnerships for specific groups fosters a sense of school ownership which enhances the achievement of students.