

SUPPORTING BOYS TO LEARN AND DEVELOP

Sabbatical Report completed by Geoff Simes – Durie Hill School, Whanganui.

This sabbatical project was carried out in June 2014.

Supporting boys to learn is an area of personal interest and one that I wanted to explore for my sabbatical project.

In relation to this, I became aware of practice occurring in three schools which interested me. These schools were; Frimley Primary School in Hastings, Huntley School in Marton, and Hereworth School in Havelock North. I wanted to find out more about what was happening in each of these schools.

I decided to capture their principal's voice as to what was important to support the learning and development for the boys' in their school, and what was happening in their school to do this. I carried out visits to each of the schools and talked with each of the principals.

The points recorded within each school's section in this report are not listed in order of priority, but are rather a summary of points mentioned by each principal.

A meeting with Malcolm Dixon, the principal of Frimley Primary in Hastings

Frimley School is a state contributing school catering for boys and girls in Years 1-6.

What is important to support the learning and development for boys at Frimley School?

- **lifting the self-esteem** of boys - boys feeling valued as individuals, as learners, and as school members.
- **building strong relationships** - all staff being committed to building positive relationships and strong levels of engagement with the boys, their parents, and whanau.
- **physical activity** - including a variety and adequate levels into curriculum programmes.
- **identifying and responding to the learning needs and interests** of boys at a school, team, and classroom level.
- **curriculum delivery** - programmes involving a degree of prescription but also allowing scope for teachers to deliver programmes that respond to the needs, interests, and backgrounds of the students in their own class, for example, within the school-wide inquiry programme. The team approach to planning fosters collaboration, but also allows for flexibility for each teacher to plan and deliver a responsive programme tailored to the students in their class.
- **a Year 5-6 boys only class** and a Year 5-6 girls only class, along with mixed gender classes were in place. The selection of students for the Year 5-6 boys' class was made by a parent-student application, rather than by school staff. It was an option welcomed by many parents, and the class consisted of boys from diverse backgrounds, and with a range of interests and abilities. The boys-only class was not a set strategy to manage boys with more challenging behaviour, but rather was an option for all boys.

Year 5-6 boys only class - the teacher of the boys only class was also interviewed, and spoke about the following things as being important, and as working well within the boys-only context:

- **climate of trust and support** - establishing and maintaining the classroom climate;
- **engaging in conversation** - boys being comfortable to initiate and engage in conversation, and to let the teacher and other students in the class get to know them;
- **learning risks** - boys being comfortable to share ideas and to 'have a go' even when unsure;
- **encouraging innovation** – creativity and originality of ideas is encouraged;

- **forming positive relationships** and getting to know the boys as individuals and as learners - ‘what makes them tick’;
- **emotional coaching** – needed by some boys – mutual trust and knowing the student well is important for this;
- **sense of humour** - engaging with an individual’s sense of humour can help to build rapport, and can help to redirect, motivate (‘keep them going’);
- **class pride** - fostering collegiality between the boys and building pride in the class as a unit;
- **setting and maintaining expectations** - involving the boys to establish some classroom expectations – focus on desired outcomes by ‘catching them when they’re doing good work or when they’re doing what you want them to’, and reinforcing this;
- **communicating expectations** - expectations for the day are clearly communicated – ‘setting up for learning’;
- **a boys voice** – incorporating a boys voice into planning and learning, for example, tailoring learning contexts, topics, and reading content to the boys - always thinking about ‘putting a boys spin on this’. Also, including input from the boys when establishing class incentive programmes;
- **electronic learning** – the boys engaged well with the regular use of portable computer devices in the classroom.
- **physical activity** – the boys enjoyed regular and a variety of physical activity.

A meeting with Bradden Gay, the principal of Huntley School in Marton

Huntley School is an independent preparatory school catering for boys and girls in Years 3-8.

What is important to support the learning and development for boys at Huntley School?

- **respectful relationships** between all school members is expected and reinforced. Clear boundaries exist between staff and students, with the nature of interaction always based on being fair, reasonable, and respectful.
- **strong morale and pride** – the boys are proud of their school and feel a strong sense of belonging.
- **‘family’ and included** - a boarding facility brings a strong ‘family’ dimension to school. Pastoral care and student welfare is important – staff mentor and care for each boy’s overall well-being. Getting to know each boy well as a person (‘who they are’), and knowing each boy’s strengths and interests is important. Care is taken to monitor that all boys are included socially and involved in discretionary activity.
- **a holistic approach** to the school’s curriculum, with value on academic, social, citizenship, cultural, arts, physical, and spiritual dimensions.
- **school tradition** and history is talked about and is evident within the physical environment. A strong connection with past students exists, with many talking about the longer term bond. The boys learn about their school history, and about the traditions by living them.
- **special character** - a strong commitment to the Anglican faith is very important to the school’s philosophy and values. Staff, students, and family are expected to ‘buy in’ to the school’s philosophy, vision, and values.
- **student leadership** – students are selected to take on leadership roles and are tasked with carrying out additional responsibilities, but all senior students are also required ‘to step up to the mark’ and contribute. For example, all team members are required to present sports reports at

assembly, and, pairs of students are selected to 'sell' the school to prospective parents by showing them around and talking with them about the school.

- **role modelling** by staff, peers, and past students – student leaders and senior students are important role models for other students, and are expected to lead by example. Successful students inspire others. Past students are also invited to talk and spend time with the students.
- **expectation** - clear expectations are set and clearly articulated for the boys. There is a firm but fair insistence on boys adhering to social and behavioural expectations, to standards of work and application, and to their school commitments.
- **recognition** - a structured system to recognise students has evolved, and involves academic, arts, cultural, social, and physical dimensions. Personal character and citizenship is promoted. Systems acknowledge and celebrate excellence and success, achievement and effort. Colours, ties, and badges provide visual distinction and recognition. Boys respect the awards and those who receive awards, when they are deserved. Boys 'look up to' others and aspire to do the same. Recognition can provide incentive and motivation, and reinforces what the school wants for and from its boys.
- **competition** - opportunities are created for boys to compete individually against others, but emphasis is also on setting own targets and goals – 'personal bests' are very important in the school, and operate across a range of domains, for example, academic as well as sport. Strategies such as charting one's progress in their exercise books or on classroom walls are used.
- **contribution to team** – performing effectively as a team member is important. All boys are involved in houses, squads, and various other teams. Team events and activity provide group competition, can motivate and lift an individual's performance, and provides fun for the boys.
- **home-school connection** – parent involvement for all students is expected at school events, and wider family participation is valued. A high level of staff contribution and principal involvement with wider-school activity is also expected. Regular communication with parents occurs, through planned reporting processes, and less formally during on-going school events and activities. All parents of boarders are phoned in the first term by the principal, deputy principal, or a designated teacher.
- **reporting to parents** programme is comprehensive, with a high level of student involvement. A programme of regular written and verbal reporting to parents focussing on progress and achievement is in place. Recognition of effort is important and is reflected through two 'effort' reports each term to complement two comprehensive reports at mid and end of the year.
- **school organisation** - a well organised environment rubs off on the boys, and for this all staff must be on the same page and must know what's going on. Good communication and strong school and staff organisation instils confidence in boys.
- **preparation for secondary school** - consistency and the security of a form teacher is provided, with some subjects taught by specialist teachers. This helps for good transition to secondary school. Preparing boys with skills and capabilities is important, and preparing them mentally is also important - 'what to expect'.
- **student-teacher ratios** – resourcing decisions are made to achieve desirable student-teacher ratios.
- **ability grouping** – forms of ability grouping and streaming are used for some subjects and mainly at the senior levels of the school. This works well within the school environment, and the boys are challenged and are able to learn at their level.

A meeting with Ross Scrymgeour, the principal of Hereworth School in Havelock North

Hereworth School is an independent preparatory school catering for boys in Years 1-8.

What is important to support the learning and development for boys at Hereworth School?

- **self-esteem** - building each boy's self-esteem and confidence.
- **potential** - believing in each boy's potential.
- **valued** - each boy feeling valued and that their contributions are valued.
- **motivating** boys to improve, achieve, and excel through:
 - **competition** - engaging boys to compete individually, in teams, and within - striving to better yourself and to aim for 'personal bests' is very important;
 - **goal-setting** - the boys are encouraged to set goals and are supported to persevere to progress and attain goals. Longer term goals and aspirations are also encouraged;
 - **challenge and risk** - boys gain satisfaction responding to challenge and risk. Opportunities are presented which require them to face challenge and experience risk;
 - **recognition** - well established systems are in place to recognise students and their achievements. Formal recognition is given through presentation at assemblies and prize-giving, publicity in newsletters and website, and visually such as with Honours, Colours, and badges. Success is celebrated and applies to all aspects of the curriculum and school-life. Excellence, industry, improvement, team performance, citizenship, personal character, and leadership are recognised. Award criteria are communicated to the boys, and elements of history and tradition have been retained.
- **self-directed learning** and developing independent learners - goal-setting and self-assessment, self-monitoring, and self-organisation are important. Teachers support and insist on expected levels of self-management across all aspects of school life.
- **contribution to team** - performing well as an individual is important, as is contributing to a group. Houses and squads, and a range of team opportunities build collegiality, and provide structure for competition.
- **student leadership** within the school is promoted, with various opportunities allowing for the boys to carry out leadership roles and responsibilities.
- **purpose** - the boys work better when they understand the 'what' and 'why', and when there is good reason for it.
- **the 4 F's** - relationships and approaches are based on being firm, fair, friendly, and with an element of fun. The boys function well within a structured environment with firm and clearly understood boundaries. Firm and friendly is possible, and an organised environment can be a fun environment. The boys respect and respond to systems which are clearly communicated and fairly applied.
- **special character** - the school's Anglican character and Christian values are tightly woven into school life.
- **curriculum delivery** – the curriculum is structured and resourced to allow for:
 - **teachers' strengths and expertise** to be utilised;
 - **ability grouping** for some subjects, for example, streaming and cross-grouping;
 - **specialist learning and teaching** in some subjects – this makes good use of teacher expertise and allows for specific 'hands-on' learning which can be more difficult to provide in a regular classroom setting, for example, with some science and technology activities. The specialist approach creates interest for the boys – they like the different environments and the variety of

activity, as well as interfacing with different staff. This provision keeps them busy and keeps their week ‘ticking along’;

- **student-teacher ratios** – resourcing to allow this;
- **kinaesthetic and visual** learning styles;
- **physical activity** - high levels and a range of activities;
- **electronic learning** - regular use of electronic devices as learning tools - the boys respond and engage well with this;
- **preparation for secondary school** - a coordinated curriculum is designed across the years to prepare the boys for their next stages of learning, with special consideration to the preparation and transition from Year 8 to secondary school;
- **student mentoring** is used selectively to support some boys – students as mentors;
- **divergent thinking** – a supportive culture for the boys to take learning risks. Teachers encourage the boys to think divergently and value student willingness to share their thinking.

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