

Primary Principal's Sabbatical Report

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Title and Focus of the sabbatical

How leadership is structured, supported and developed in larger primary schools, 500+ students, and role of the principal in this leadership structure and support programme.

Acknowledgements

- Karori Normal School Board of Trustees for supporting and encouraging my application for sabbatical leave and allowing me to have time to reflect and refresh at a time when the school is dealing with a number of significant property initiatives.
- Karori Normal School staff, particularly those in leadership positions, whose continued professionalism and hard work enabled me to focus on my sabbatical knowing that the school was continuing to operate smoothly and thrive.
- Andrea Peetz who was Acting Principal at Karori Normal School in my absence. It was not an easy time to take over, with building projects and faster than expected roll growth taking place. Andrea managed all this, as well as ensuring that the focus remained on children's learning.
- The Ministry of Education and NZEI for the provision of Sabbaticals as included in the Primary Principals' Collective Agreement. It is important that school leaders have opportunities to refresh, reflect and grow. The time to do this is greatly appreciated.
- The nine primary and intermediate principals who hosted me in their schools and shared their practice and leadership visions with me. The opportunity to discuss each principals' school development journey and leadership at their schools was an integral and invaluable part of my project.
- The eighty-one principals of primary and intermediate schools of 500 or more students who completed an online survey which focussed on school leadership.
- The principals and school leaders who have supported me and encouraged me in my own leadership, particularly Norm Wright, Sister Marie O'Halloran, Graham Hawkins and Margot McGillivray.

About the Author

I am the Principal of Karori Normal School and have held this position since March 2011. Prior to this I was Principal of Discovery School for 9½ years and Principal of Korokoro School for 2½ years. In addition I have been Deputy Principal of 2 New Zealand Schools and was the Primary Head Teacher at an international school for 4

years. I have also spent 2 years teaching in London and 6 years as a teacher in Wainuiomata.

Purpose/s

The purposes of this study were to investigate:

- Leadership structures in schools of similar size to Karori Normal School (KNS).
- The support provided for middle leaders in these schools.
- The role of principals in the development of the schools' leadership structures and leadership support programmes.

In addition to the investigation above, consider the findings and possible implications for Karori Normal School.

Rationale and Background Information

Karori Normal School is a large full primary school situated in Karori, Wellington. The current roll is around 800 students in 33 classes. The school's current leadership structure comprises a Principal, 2 Deputy Principals and 5 Team Leaders. Team Leaders who have seven or more classes in their teams are supported by an assistant team leader. In addition to these leadership positions the following school wide leadership roles are in place:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two Literacy Leaders • Two Numeracy Leaders • Two Rich Curriculum Leaders 	<p>The Rich Curriculum, Literacy and Numeracy Leaders are leading a school focus on teachers using the core curriculum to support the rich curriculum and vice-versa.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three Special Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) 	<p>One of the SENCOs has oversight of the use of assistive technology</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two PE and Sport Leaders • Two Maori Curriculum Leaders • Two ICT Leaders • An ESOL Coordinator • An Arts Coordinator • A Library Coordinator 	<p>All school leaders including this group meet termly to ensure that new initiatives are understood and supported schoolwide and to ensure that expectations placed on classroom teachers are realistic and manageable.</p>

I have been principal at KNS since March 2011. The leadership structure and subsequent allocation of management units were reviewed during 2011 and a structure very similar to the one above was developed following this review. Understanding effective school leadership and continuing to develop my own leadership skills and knowledge has been an ongoing development for me since the 1980s.

The need to develop a distributed leadership model which placed value on the contributions of high-quality, learning focussed middle leaders has been an area of ongoing focus at KNS. The continued support and development of middle leaders, almost all appointed from within the staff, has turned a perceived area of weakness at our school into a strength, “Leaders and teachers have high expectations of themselves and colleagues. Improving each student’s achievement is prioritised. The well-considered, distributed leadership model is resulting in a more cohesive approach to delivering a seamless curriculum across this large school.” (KNS ERO Education Review Report 2015).

My reason for choosing leadership in larger primary schools as my area of focus is that my experience as a principal has covered a range of school size, from around 100 students to Karori Normal School which has around 800 students. Each of those schools has required a different approach to leadership and principalship. In larger schools there are a wider range of people involved in leadership roles, the current structure at KNS, outlined above, is an example of this. Although holding the position of principal of three schools, in each of these schools the role I carried out was very different.

The step to my current role as principal of a ‘large’ school by New Zealand primary school standards took a period of time to adjust to. I found that I could no longer ‘know’ everything that was happening in the school rather, I had to ensure that a strong leadership culture was in place along with quality systems and people who were knowledgeable and confident in their leadership roles.

To further develop my understandings and to widen my perspectives on leadership I wish to investigate how these leadership roles are structured, in a range of larger primary schools and how leaders are supported to enable them to fulfil their roles effectively. My area of focus would therefore be:

- How is leadership structured in large New Zealand primary and intermediate schools, i.e. school with a roll of more than 500 students?
- What support is provided for middle leaders in these schools to ensure that they are able to carry out their roles successfully?
- What is the role of the principal particularly with regards to the ongoing support provided to middle leaders?

Activities undertaken – Methodology

- A ten question online survey was sent out to 186 contributing, full primary and intermediate schools identified on the ‘Education Counts’ website as having rolls of 500 or more students. The following questions were asked:
 1. What was your school’s 2015 July 1 roll return?
 2. How long have you been a principal?
 3. How long have you been principal at your current school?

4. How many schools have you been principal of?
5. Please describe how leadership is structured at your school, e.g. DPs, APs, team leaders, curriculum leaders, SENCO etc?
6. Have you reviewed the leadership structure at your school in your time as principal? If yes what was the outcome of this review?
7. With regards to leadership appointments at your school in the past three years, how many have been internal appointments, i.e. the person appointed to the leadership position was already working at your school and how many have been external appointments i.e. the person appointed was not already working at your school?
8. Do you provide leadership training, mentoring or support programmes for those in leadership positions at your school? If yes can you briefly outline the programmes provided?
9. What do you see as your role as principal in supporting those in leadership positions at your school?
10. Do you have any other comments regarding leadership structure, support and/or development at your school or in general across NZ primary schools?

Eighty-one responses were received from principals.

- Visits to 9 schools with rolls of 500 or more students in the Central South area. In each of these visits I had made a 1 hour appointment with the principal to discuss the school's leadership structure and the support provided for those in leadership roles. Invariably these meeting went well beyond the time allocated. The topics covered in discussion were:
 - The school's current leadership structure
 - Whether or not the leadership structure had been reviewed recently and the outcome of the review
 - Whether or not recent leadership appointments had been internal or external
 - Induction programmes for those new to leadership
 - Mentoring and ongoing support for those in leadership positions
 - The role of the principal in the provision of leadership support and mentoring
 - The principal's perception of the differences between leading a large primary or intermediate and a smaller school
 - Any other comments
- Attendance at the Aotearoa/New Zealand Normal and Model Schools' Conference. One day of this conference was devoted to school leadership led by Dr. Cheryl Doig.
- Reflection on the responses to the online survey, the ideas shared at the Aotearoa/New Zealand Normal and Model Schools' Conference and my discussions with principal colleagues following school visits.

Findings

- **Online Survey – Key Points of Interest:**

- Eighty-one responses were received, but not all respondents answered all questions.
- School size ranged from 501 students to 1030 students.
- Principal experience ranged from 6 months to 30 years.
- Time as principal in the current school ranged between 6 months to 24 years.
- 16 principals were in their first principalship, 18 had been principal of four or more schools, 4 had been principal of 6 schools and 1 had held 7 principalship positions.
- 51 of the 74 (68.9%) respondents to the question regarding leadership structure included a SENCO/Learning Support position. This position was either included as part of the role of an AP or DP or as a separate leadership role.
- A wide range of leadership structures were described by principals however, most principals described a structure which included:
 - Deputy Principal/s and or Assistant/Associate Principal/s,
 - Team/Syndicate Leaders
 - A range of other leadership roles which differed from school to school including SENCO, Curriculum, Inquiry, Professional Learning, ICT/e-Learning, Appraisal, Enviro Schools, Sports, Whanau Liaison, ESOL, etc
- 69 of the 74 (93.2%) respondents had reviewed or were in the process of reviewing the leadership structure of the school.
- There were a range of outcomes from leadership structure reviews including; greater distribution of leadership, an increase or decrease in DP or AP positions, a ‘flattening’ of the leadership structure, and a change in roles or job descriptions.
- Leadership structure in Modern Learning Environments (MLEs) was an issue in some schools.
- The total number of recent internal leadership appointments across 74 schools was 267, an average of 4 internal leadership appointments per school. The total number of recent external leadership appointments across 74 schools was 132, an average of 2 internal leadership appointments per school. Internal appointments were double the number of external appointments.
- In 12 schools out of 71 respondents, leadership mentoring, support and training was internal including; the use of Professional Learning Groups (PLGs), mentoring, coaching and discussions.
- The majority of schools (83%) used external providers as well as internal programmes to provide leadership mentoring, support and training including; National Aspiring Principals Programme (NAPP), local cluster initiatives, PLGs involving other schools, a range of external consultants, University papers, conferences and courses.
- Principals saw growing leadership capability in others as a key part of their role. Leadership capability was developed in a range of ways including; mentoring,

coaching, role-modelling, supporting and sourcing professional learning related to leadership, as well as providing practical opportunities to lead.

- A range of other issues were raised including:
 - The need for the SENCO role to be separately funded.
 - The lack of quality leadership courses/training for middle leaders and principals outside of NAPP and the First Time Principals Programme (FTP). This was not the case in all areas.
 - Leadership development programmes should focus on leadership dispositions and skills rather than management capability.
 - Coaching and/or mentoring should be available for all school leaders.
 - The lack of system-wide leadership programmes catering for the needs of the range of leaders in schools, experienced principals, experienced middle leaders, those new to leadership etc.
 - Funding to promote leadership capability
- **School Visits – Key Points of Interest:**
 - Visits were made to 3 full-primary schools, 4 contributing primary schools and 2 intermediate schools.
 - All schools visited with one exception had a leadership structure which incorporated 2 Deputy/Associate Principals and team/syndicate leaders. One school's structure included one Deputy Principal supported by three Assistant principals and team leaders.
 - Principals each described the 'journey' the school had gone through to arrive at the current leadership structure. This had been a combination of formal and informal review sometimes necessitated by a change in personnel e.g. the resignation of a long-standing Deputy Principal.
 - The process of long term change and review had in most cases led to a 'flattening' of the schools' leadership structures.
 - One school had a clear set of leadership indicators/matrices which teachers could choose to be coached through.
 - All schools provided ongoing coaching and/or mentoring for staff in middle leadership roles and most had used outside support for induction and ongoing support for teachers moving into leadership roles. One local Wellington based provider was mentioned by a number of principals interviewed as delivering particularly high quality professional development programmes.
 - In a number of cases the same external provider was used for coaching/mentoring of both middle leaders and the principal. This was seen as a strength and promoted consistency of approach.
 - Deputy Principals were used extensively to provide ongoing coaching/mentoring to other school leaders.
 - One school ran a programme for aspiring leaders, with a programme generated by the school's senior leaders and aspiring leaders.

- Most principals indicated that the majority of team and curriculum leadership positions were appointed internally, school context and culture played a big role in these appointments.
- Curriculum leadership was often project or school priority based. There has been a shift over time away from curriculum leadership being mainly about resource management.
- A number of schools included the leadership of particular projects in the role of the Deputy Principals, often this was in relation to a school-wide professional development focus.

Implications for Karori Normal School

- To ensure that new leaders understand the context and expectations of leadership at KNS, continue to support those teachers who are new to leadership roles. Ensure that these teachers take part in an induction programme which ensures that they understand what the expectations of the role are and that they have a clear understanding of leadership and what this means at our school. This will enable us to continue to grow leaders who understand the difference between leadership and management as well as how their role fits with the school's vision.
- To enable leaders to develop the skills they need to carry out their roles effectively, ensure that all leaders, from those new to their roles through to those who are very experienced, are provided with ongoing professional development which meets their needs.
- To ensure that leaders have regular ongoing support available to them both formally and informally, continue to review the ongoing coaching/mentoring structures within the school.
- As most recent leadership appointments have been internal ensure that we don't become insular in our thinking by continuing to provide opportunities for leaders to participate in professional development with a range of outside providers.
- Consider the leadership structure, skills and dispositions required in the school's gradual move to Innovative Learning Environments including the associated shift in pedagogy.

Implications for the Wider Education Community

- It appears that the large majority of schools now consider the role of SENCO as a key part of a school's leadership structure, consideration should therefore be given to increasing the staffing allocations to include provision for this role.
- Internal appointments for school leadership roles were double those of external appointments. This may warrant further investigation as a lessening of the breadth of leadership experience across schools could lead to a risk of schools becoming too insular in their approaches to leadership. There is a huge wealth of leadership experience within schools which could and should be shared.

- Access to high-quality external support to help with leadership growth was not available to all schools. The provision of leadership support which caters for school leaders needs regardless of their experience, may be something the MoE or EDUCANZ wishes to investigate and develop.
- A large number of Principals described a key part of their role and the role of Deputy Principals as being about mentoring and coaching those new to leadership or in middle leadership roles. The MoE and/or EDUCANZ may need to consider providing opportunities for Principals and Deputy Principals to develop and improve their skills in mentoring and coaching others.

Conclusions

A wide range of ongoing support for middle leaders in larger primary schools, both formal and informal, was described by the principals of the schools I visited and the schools I surveyed. The need to ensure that schools have access to ongoing external support to enable middle leaders to continue to develop and become more effective is an important consideration for the future.

Larger schools seem to have self-review practices in place to enable them to adapt leadership structures to meet current needs and challenges. Principals described a range of review processes, some triggered by particular events e.g. an experienced leader moving on, and some a result of a change in context or school focus. A challenge for schools is to ensure that new leaders are encouraged and inducted into leadership roles ready to meet schools' needs.

The principals I visited all played a crucial role in the development of middle leaders in their schools. This was through directly mentoring, coaching and guiding as well as ensuring that leaders have access to ongoing professional development in a range of formats. It is important for all principals to consider the development of the next generation of school leaders as a key part of their role.