

Secondary School Principal's Sabbatical Report

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I am appreciative to the Board of Queen Elizabeth College for their support of my application as well as the Senior Management Team of the school who stood in during my absence.

I also wish to acknowledge the principals and staff of the following schools for allowing me to visit, and learn from, their schools:

- Rosey Mabin, Inglewood High School
- Kim Basse, Ruapehu College
- Peter Heron, Papakura High School
- Andy Fraser, Otaki College
- Helen Tuhoro, Tarawera High School
- Bruce Hart, Heretaunga College
- Tom Hullena, Makoura College
- Louise Anaru, Flaxmere College
- Nori Parata, Tolaga Bay Area School

I especially appreciated principals and other staff in the schools visited, giving part of their time to meet with me and assist with my research.

Purpose:

Investigating ways in which Queen Elizabeth College can further improve academic achievement, improve retention of students and ways to prepare students for moving beyond school into tertiary education, courses, apprenticeships or employment. This study had an emphasis on senior students (years 11 - 13).

To carry this out the sabbatical included visiting schools and looking at what they are doing in terms of curriculum design (including incorporating vocational pathways), keeping students at school and what programmes and processes they have in place to transition students beyond school. Also, the sabbatical would incorporate professional reading as well as relevant professional development.

Additionally, I undertook a survey with senior students at Queen Elizabeth College to gauge what helps students learn and what could the school do better to enable this to happen.

General Impressions:

All principals that I met with, shared the journey of change for the school. Prompts for change were primarily to improve student engagement and achievement. The need for a relevant curriculum was a consistent message and the vocational pathways model was seen as a key aspect of this. All schools had made varying degrees of change to the structure of the senior curriculum as well as the structure of the school timetable to enable the development of partnerships with tertiary and other providers to allow for a wider range of learning opportunities for students.

It is clear that there is no simple single solution. All schools employed a variety of strategies and approaches, building atop a foundation laid in enhancing relationships, with students, the family / whanau and the wider school community.

Key findings:

- Strong pastoral and support networks are important. These varied between the schools and included Academic Mentors, Academic Deans, Deans as well as new titles and roles for traditional group / form teachers.
 - This is important as part of the option selection process, involving staff, students and whanau. Information about the vocational pathways was often imparted through these staff members.
 - Course counselling as well as careers advice and guidance is critical.
 - Utilising regular tracking information to identify students that may require extra support with staff working together to find solutions and following up with the support.
- Developing individualised programmes was a key aspect of many of the senior programmes, with a holistic approach to the learning programme with differentiated teaching programme working on the student needs being effective.
- Many of the schools have worked on contextualised learning for their teaching programmes. Learning through relevant contexts has increased student engagement by meeting the needs of the students as well as opening up their world. Contextual learning fosters both Vocational Pathways and the principles of the Curriculum. This has included the incorporating the key competencies.
- Schools have adopted the Vocational Pathways model and many have interwoven this with the senior option subjects and included it in the Senior Option Booklets and subject information. Schools are making use of opportunities under the Youth Guarantee umbrella to maximise opportunities for students as well as preparing students for beyond school.
- Increased effective use of IT equipment (lap tops and Chrome Books) as learning tools to enhance individualised programmes.
- Many of the schools have developed partnerships with various tertiary providers (mostly polytechnics), Industry Training Organisations or iwi organisations to deliver or enhance programmes both on and off the school site. Secondary Tertiary Partnerships are valued and the partnership approach has resulted in programmes being developed to fit in with the school context.
- Creativity and flexibility in the structure of a school timetable is important to minimise the impact of students being involved in STAR, Gateway and secondary tertiary partnerships as well as academy programmes. The schools visited have acknowledged this and most have made changes to the school timetable ranging from longer periods and fewer options to having completely different timetables on the days of the week when students are involved in these programmes.

General Impressions: continued...

Key findings: continued...

- Changes in the senior curriculum are generally not implemented in isolation. Many of the schools visited also had made changes to their pastoral / student management system such as PB4L and /or Restorative Practices. The change in thinking for these changes was aligned to the schools having a greater student centred approach.

A summary of common themes in schools visited to enable success for senior students:

- Effective leadership (at different levels in the school) with a clear vision shared with the school community.
- Knowing the learners and having a focus on improved student achievement as well as providing various pathways facilitating success for all students.
- Willingness to trial and review new innovations / programmes / strategies focused on raising student achievement.
- Good support in the form of course counselling and careers advice.
- Affirmative encouragement of students coupled with high expectations for student success.
- It is important to have a cohesive approach to assessment contributing to qualifications helping the student towards their pathways through the senior school and beyond. Credit 'farming' is not beneficial.

Examples of Good Practice or innovations that could be considered by Queen Elizabeth College:

Timetable Structure:

One of the possible impediments of implementing changes to the senior curriculum is the traditional structure of school timetables. In particular many of the off-site opportunities for students (such as Secondary Tertiary partnership programmes, Gateway and Academy Programmes as well as some STAR programmes) operate usually a day a week, compared to schools that operate with periods and option lines.

Some of the schools have taken innovative approaches to timetabling to overcome this possible barrier.

Inglewood High School

The senior timetable has been modified, particularly for Year 12 and Year 13 students. The school has moved from a 6 day timetable to a 2 week timetable structure.

Year 12 and Year 13 students choose 5 options and one day a week (Wednesday) is a completely different timetable. On Wednesdays students involved in Gateway do their work experience. Students doing trades courses have another day.

Year 13 students not involved in Gateway have all of their study periods on this day. The students have flexibility on how they use this study day, with a number of students setting up their own study groups and meeting off-site for these. The remainder of the students in Year 12 have a Semester Day which consists of 2 double periods and 1 single period. The double periods are used for courses that would not ordinarily be offered in the timetable and include some STAR courses.

Examples of Good Practice or innovations that could be considered by Queen Elizabeth College: continued...

Timetable Structure: continued...

Tarawera High School and Flaxmere College

Both of these schools had two days per week which were available for full day courses. Both schools had students involved in trades and other academies as well as Gateway and other full day off-site courses on these days. Students remaining at school were also involved in whole day programmes, which also included traditional subjects.

Often teachers involved in the whole day programmes based at school volunteered for the longer classes. At Tarawera High School the Learning Pathways Coordinator was also the senior Biology teacher. He noted that having a full day of the subject enabled more flexibility in the course delivery. The day that I visited, he was preparing to take the students to the local stream to do a stream transect survey. Also the Performing Arts subjects were on a full day timetable. This enabled flexibility between the different disciplines of the subject.

Tolaga Bay Area School

Being a smaller school it is possible to have all Year 11 to 13 students attend trades academies at E.I.T. There are 7 different academies available which means that students have opportunities to pursue different pathways over the 3 years that they are seniors.

General Comments

For all of these schools, having different timetable structures on the days that Gateway, Trades and Academy programmes took place (mostly off site), minimised disruptions and absences for these students for their other school subjects.

Communication was an important aspect in facilitating these changes. The schools have worked with employers to have work experience opportunities on the same day and with secondary-tertiary providers to negotiate days and programmes which make it possible for the schools to have set days for different timetable structures.

Some of the schools have moved to having fewer classes each day and extending the length of each class. Three of the schools had introduced 90 minute periods. Principals of these schools commented on the longer periods allowed for much more productive time in class.

Changes in Senior Curriculum:

A number of the schools have made changes to what is offered as part of their senior curriculum. This includes changes in subjects as well as opportunities available to students through secondary tertiary partnerships, Gateway and STAR.

Many of the changes have reflected the vocational pathways and have increased the number of vocational options available for students. As schools have moved in this direction, they have looked at what strengths exist in the school (in terms of teaching and resources) and is supported through relationships with tertiary providers and in some cases local iwi enabling a wide range of options. Additionally, a number of the schools moving in the direction of vocational pathways have built connections with local employers to identify what the latter are looking for in terms of employee qualities and skills as well as areas of need in terms of employment. The input from employers has proven to be fruitful in terms of guiding what the school offers as well as opportunities for students through Gateway work placements.

Examples of Good Practice or innovations that could be considered by Queen Elizabeth College: continued...

Changes in Senior Curriculum:

Papakura High School

The school has altered options available in the senior school with approximately half of the school on a traditional timetable and the other half completing a vocational pathways course. Papakura High School has introduced a number of academies including the Health and Sport Science Academy, a Service Academy and a Construction Academy. Students are able to opt into these from Year 11 and can continue into a senior programme for Year 12 and 13 students. For some of the academies Year 10 students are able to get a taste through a semester course.

Papakura High School has utilised local businesses, iwi and other providers to fund the academies which has allowed more autonomy in the structure of the course. The school also works with tertiary providers to provide expertise, support as well as possible pathways beyond school. For example the school has close links with the Manukau Institute of Technology (M.I.T) and the Manukau Counties DHB.

Students in the academies have a structured component and are also able to choose other options to complete their programme. Students enjoy being a part of the academy programmes and students are very focussed, knowing how they are progressing as well as the learning pathway they need to undertake towards their identified vocation / career.

Makoura College

Makoura College offers five academies, some of which are delivered on site with school staff and some are delivered off-site by other providers. The academies sit on top of the school timetable and have been developed to meet a variety of student needs as well as covering various sectors of vocational pathways. The academies are a Dance Academy, a Service Academy, an Outdoor Recreation Academy, a Trades Academy and an agricultural option delivered by Taratahi Agricultural Training Centre.

Through the school pastoral system, individual programmes are planned with students and their whanau. The academies are an important part of the senior programme of Makoura College. Progress towards these goals is reviewed regularly and students are focussed on their learning pathways towards their identified vocation / career.

Otaki College

Otaki College offers a number of courses for Year 12 and Year 13 students, through U-Skills (UCOL) and Taratahi Agricultural Training Centre. As with other subjects in the senior school, the courses align with the vocational pathways.

Students enrolled in the tertiary provider courses have identified vocations / careers that they are looking to pursue, that the courses contribute towards.

The school intends to further expand what is offered to senior students by building connections with other local tertiary providers, particularly with respect to Level Three courses that could be offered in the future.

Examples of Good Practice or innovations that could be considered by Queen Elizabeth College: continued...

Changes in Senior Curriculum:

Heretaunga College

Unlike a number of the schools I visited, Heretaunga College has increased the number of options that students select in the senior school. All students have a total of 8 subjects in their programme.

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| Year 11 | An English subject and a Mathematics subject are compulsory. A Science subject is highly recommended. Students choose another 5 options. |
| Year 12 | An English subject is compulsory and students choose another 7 options. |
| Year 13 | Students pick up to 8 subjects, although most students have 6 subjects and the other time can be used for study or subject work. |

The timetable has 8 lines, with each line being 3 hours a week. Each course offers around 14 credits and there is a greater selection of programmes available in each subject area, with a movement towards the programmes being theme based. For example, there are 11 programmes available in English at Level 1 and 12 programmes available in English at Level 3. These include English for the Trades and English for Sport as a couple of the programmes.

At Level 3, Heretaunga College offers a School of Hospitality which is a full time course comprising practical and theory components. Students work towards a National Certificate in Hospitality (Basic Cookery) at Level 3.

The school solicited student voice as part of the review of the senior curriculum, particularly for students not intending to attend university.

The school has had positive feedback from the school community. Students enjoy the courses and there is a greater engagement as well as a higher interest shown by the students.

Greater range in programmes available allow the teachers to be concentrate in areas of strength as well as particular areas that they may be interested in. This is beneficial for staff and students alike and students have made comments that the teachers seem more interested in what they are presenting.

General Comments

All schools emphasized the need for the senior curriculum to offer a cohesive pathway through the senior school and beyond. The options put in place are not to 'credit farm' and the schools have put time into working with students and their families to have an overview of the whole learning programme for the student as well as their learning pathway through the senior school and beyond.

Schools also recognise the importance of utilising other providers to increase the range of courses and options available for senior students. For most schools this has included Youth Guarantee initiatives.

Academic Mentoring:

Many of the schools have an academic mentoring programme. The way that the different schools structured the mentoring varied, however regular monitoring of student progress and collaboratively with teachers in the interests of the students was key. For many of the schools, the year level Dean had this responsibility, while a couple of schools had a specific academic mentor role.

Through the academic mentoring, progress of students towards various levels of NCEA was a significant part of the role, particularly the progress towards NCEA Level Two.

Examples of Good Practice or innovations that could be considered by Queen Elizabeth College: continued...

Inglewood High School

Inglewood High School had an Academic Dean who has a target group of students that they work with and mentor. The Academic Dean also has some support staff assistance. Students in the target group are students identified that need some help to get 'over the bar'. The students are identified in Year 10 and followed through Years 11 and 12.

The approach is very much student-centred and the Academic Dean plays an important role in developing individualised learning for students.

The school believes that this is a very beneficial approach and has worked well for the students involved. Vital in the success is having the right person in the mentoring role.

Makoura College:

All students are assigned to a Waka Huia teacher who meets with them at least four times per week. The role of this teacher is to get to know each student and provide academic and pastoral mentoring. In Years 11, 12 and 13 the key focus is to provide mentoring support for NCEA and every student is to have identified a vocational pathway. The teachers establish goals with the students and then support them to work towards and achieve these goals.

The approach is student-focused, with all students developing an individual plan for their learning programme. Students set their learning and achievement goals with their teachers. This is shared with the Waka Huia teacher, which in turn is shared with the whanau at meetings between the Waka Huia teacher and the whanau.

The goal setting with individual teachers may include making a decision of how many assessments each student will be offered. For example, if a student is involved in a Gateway placement, they will not be present for all of their senior classes. In negotiation with the teacher, students can choose to complete fewer of the assessments that are on offer. The overall assessment plan is monitored by the Waka Huia teacher to ensure that the student has enough credits on offer to achieve the level of NCEA that the student is working toward.

Tolaga Bay Area School:

All teachers of senior students regularly monitor the progress of the student towards NCEA and work collaboratively to consider possible assistance to help students that are at risk of not achieving. This is referred to as A.R.O.N.A (at risk of not achieving). The school also has an A.R.O.N.A mentor who works with students and their whanau to develop individual and whanau success plans. Tracking student progress is completed regularly and the Principal is fully aware of the student progress. The Principal conducts achievement interviews with all of the senior students.

The school, with the mentor and the community organise academic wananga each year in the lead up to the external examinations. Each wananga has an academic focus and they enable decent blocks of time to be devoted to study / revision with the subject teacher.

General Comments

A collaborative approach amongst support staff, teachers, middle and senior management enables mentoring programmes to be successful. The various staff working together with the student at the centre facilitates productive progress as everyone, including the students, are on the 'same page'.

Examples of Good Practice or innovations that could be considered by Queen Elizabeth College: continued...

Senior Curriculum in Smaller Schools:

Three schools with a roll less than 300 were visited during my sabbatical. As Queen Elizabeth College also has a roll of fewer than 300, I wanted to see what programmes and strategies these schools employed to provide a valid senior curriculum to meet student need.

All three schools had slightly different approaches to curriculum delivery in the senior school. Two of the schools utilise vocational pathways as a useful tool in developing individual learning pathways for students, which was also reflected in the subject programmes. Possible career pathways are identified in Year 10 and this plays an important part in the option selection process as well as the learning pathways through the senior school.

Tolaga Bay Area School:

Tolaga Bay Area School has developed a school wide approach to the senior school programme structure. Vocational Pathways play an integral role in the programme development and all of the Senior Management Team has attended training in Vocational Pathways. Virtually all senior students head to Gisborne once a week to attend Trades Academies provided by the Eastern Institute of Technology (E.I.T) or block courses provided by other providers. As students progress through the senior school, they are rotated through some of the academies and block courses available so that they have a good breadth of training. Currently the credits on offer are at Level 2, but some investigation is being carried out to develop Level 3 qualifications.

Being a smaller school, the options available in the school programme are limited, with some composite classes being offered to make the subjects viable. Within these classes, students work at the appropriate level and effort is put into developing personalised programmes.

Makoura College:

Makoura College also has a comprehensive approach to careers education and a personalised approach to offer a range of career based learning opportunities. Every student is to have an identified vocational pathway and the school utilises five academies that sit on top of the option lines, which can assist students towards their identified pathway.

Also Makoura College has introduced a Year 13 Homeroom this year. The homeroom has a number of useful functions. One is to provide a space for students to work under supervision to overcome clashes in the school timetable or for students requiring more time in one of their subject choices. The room is resourced to enable students to work on their subjects. Students receive personalised guidance in which they are offered a range of career based learning opportunities. These include the STAR courses and the Gateway Programme.

Ruapehu College:

The school does not have close access to trades academy providers or tertiary providers offering Secondary Tertiary Partnerships. As a result many of the senior programmes are based at the school. To enable a wide range of options some classes are multi-level classes and others are provided through the Volcanics eLearning Community.

The Volcanics eLearning Community is a cluster of 17 schools that collaborate to widen their curriculum, remove subject clashes and link staff/specialist groups or deliver professional development around eLearning pedagogy. Delivery of lessons and resources to students is through a video conference once a week and other tools such as Skype, email, Google Docs, Google Site sand Ultrant are some of the tools used by eTeachers and eStudents for learning. To enable access for students the school has invested in laptops.

Examples of Good Practice or innovations that could be considered by Queen Elizabeth College: continued...

Senior Curriculum in Smaller Schools:

General Comments

Smaller schools have an advantage of knowing the students well and are able to get an overall picture of what students identify as possible future directions and what learning pathway needs to be undertaken. The downside of this often is the resourcing, particularly of appropriately trained staff and facilities as well as financial resourcing to provide opportunities for students.

All schools utilise a range of strategies and resources to enable as broad a senior curriculum as possible. This equated to accessing other providers to facilitate this, whether that be programmes of-site or distance programmes.

Access to technology was also seen as important so that students could work on their subject work independently (at least at certain times).

Next Steps:

All schools made a reference to being on the journey in terms of senior curriculum. As part of my investigation I asked principals what they believed the next steps were for their school as they continued on the journey.

Contextualised Learning

Learning in which students are able to construct meaning based on their own experiences.

While a number of schools have introduced contextualised learning into the planning of programmes, many schools wanted to expand this further across the school.

Often contextualised learning has been aligned to the vocational pathways as they almost naturally affiliate with contextualised learning. Schools are developing courses which have a real life context as well as relevance.

Service and Trade Academies are examples of providing experiences for students to build their learning on. For example, Service Academy students participate in a series of courses / activities that are facilitated by the New Zealand Defence Force. The Induction Course for instance is a two week intensive course on an Army training camp, giving students the opportunity to apply their team work skills, undertake physical challenges and develop their abilities in drill.

Collaboration between Departments

Severalp talked about having more collaboration in planning between different departments.

Often when planning a course, teachers generally look within the NZQA domain for their subject when researching possible assessment tasks. Sometimes assessments in another domain are more appropriate in terms of assessment tasks as well as context, which may be a benefit of more collaboration in planning.

Bringing together the skills and knowledge of teachers in different departments can be beneficial in planning courses, especially if tapping into an area of interest for teachers. Often teachers that are able to teach in an area of particular interest, demonstrate more dynamism and enthusiasm in the teaching, which helps to engage and motivate the students.

Next Steps: continued...

Collaboration between Departments continued...

Some current examples of this collaboration are;

- Otaki College have integrated Year 9 English and Social Studies
- Papakura High School has the POD Programme where 3 teachers are assigned to two classes.
- At Tarawera High School staff across a couple of departments are working together to develop a Forestry Course, which will be available in 2016.

Also, related to collaboration is the concept of developing themes for learning so that programmes delivered across different subjects are able to relate to a common theme. This was raised by Heretaunga College, where currently a couple of departments are working together for their programme planning.

Conclusion:

There are a lot of innovative programmes and initiatives taking place in secondary schools to keep students engaged in learning and achieving as they progress through the senior school and onto tertiary study, further training, apprenticeships or employment.

For many of the schools that I visited the key is knowing the learners and utilising resources that are available to meet their needs. Youth Guarantee has been a key part of this and vocational pathways have helped students to develop more understanding in the importance of programmes that they are undertaking and seeing the pathway of their learning through senior school and beyond. The vocational pathways have assisting in being able to offer students cohesive programmes

Coupled with this has been a change in thinking towards student-centred learning and making learning relevant with contextualised learning being an integral part of this.

I personally found the sabbatical very rewarding. Having the time to visit the schools and to process what I have seen has assisted me in identifying what could be useful for the students at Queen Elizabeth College. Also, I appreciate the opportunity for refreshment, which the sabbatical offered.

M Houghton

7 September 2015