

FOCUS: SCHOOLS AND THEIR E.R.O. RECOMMENDATIONS: a study of six Wellington area schools – May / June 2006

Sabbatical Report

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INTRODUCTION

This study is an investigation of the methods and approaches that six different schools in Wellington have used to work towards the recommendations in their latest Education Review Office report.

Each of the schools that took part in this study had an ERO review approximately 18 months ago. None of the schools required a supplementary ERO review. Two of the schools in the group had compliance issues that ERO required they address. These were included in the study but it was primarily the recommendations that I was interested in. Recommendations are ERO suggestions; there is no requirement that schools address them. They are, according to ERO, formulated in conjunction with school personnel and intended as suggestions for 'next step' development in each school's ongoing journey of improvement. Therefore it is expected that schools will want to implement them.

QUESTIONS INVESTIGATED

The following questions formed the basis of this study.

- What were ERO's recommendations? Were these similar or different from issues the school had identified through existing self review processes and strategic or annual plans?
- What specific school goals or development plans have been developed as a response to the recommendations in the school's last ERO report?
- Who was responsible for identifying these goals / formulating these plans? Who had input in the process? How were final decisions made?

- What specific actions, interventions or programmes has the school put in place to achieve the identified goals or development plans? Who has been involved? How were they involved?
- How has the school monitored progress towards the achievement of the goals or development plans? Who has had input into these reviews?
- How successful has the school been in fulfilling the recommendations now that it is approximately eighteen months until the schools next review? What data supports this? What methodology was used to analyse the data? Has the school's work in this area raised student achievement?
- What still needs to be achieved? How will these goals be reflected in the school's strategic and annual plans?

CONDUCT OF INVESTIGATION

ERO's Wellington office was contacted and provided a list of a number of Wellington Schools who had an ERO review team on site between September and November 2004. From this a cross section of schools were selected. Each school was contacted and agreed to be interviewed for this study. I visited each school in May or June 2006 to discuss and investigate the questions above.

THE SCHOOLS, THEIR REVIEW FOCUS AND THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. School 1 Contributing Primary School – Decile 7 – 280 students

Review Focus Areas:

- Assessment and evaluation: reading, writing and numeracy
- The quality of Board of Trustees self review

Compliance Issue

- The school must develop adequate school-wide implementation plans for the following essential learning areas: English and the Arts.

Recommendations

- The teaching staff, supported by the Board of Trustees, undertake a planned professional development programme in planning, assessment, evaluation and self-review.
- The board of trustees refine strategic and annual planning to provide a clearer focus for self review by ensuring goals and objectives are specific and measurable.

2. School 2 – Intermediate School – Decile 2 – 250 students.

Review Focus Area

- The quality of teaching and learning in reading and mathematics

Recommendations

- Senior managers and staff continue professional development in literacy to further enhance student achievement in all strands of the English curriculum and in numeracy to develop a consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics.
- Staff continue to implement formative assessment strategies in all classrooms and further explore teaching approaches that will engage students more fully in making decisions about their learning. Senior managers, using an appraisal system that specifically identifies individual teachers strengths and next steps for development, will assist this process.

3. School 3 – Contributing Primary School – Decile 3 – 310 students

Review Focus Area

- Quality of teaching and learning in reading and writing

Recommendations

- Set targets for improving student achievement in reading and writing based on the in depth analysis of identified learning needs
- Ensure all teachers assess and record student achievement against the national achievement objectives, and identify next learning steps for groups and individuals.

4. School 4 – Contributing Primary School – Decile 4 – 180 students

Review Focus Area

- Literacy, with an emphasis on writing and meeting the needs of diverse students.

Compliance Issues

- The school must take appropriate steps to meet all requirements for compliance with the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students.
- Ensure that the school fully develops and implements programmes in Technology in the New Zealand Curriculum.

Recommendations

- Senior Managers and teachers will develop a cohesive school-wide approach to formative assessment, which will include:
 - i. An outline of the expected progression in achievement across levels 1 to 4 of English in the New Zealand Curriculum for students in years 1 to 6.
 - ii. Provision of in-depth feedback to the students that will enable them to articulate their next steps in learning; and
 - iii. Ongoing professional development in the implementation of the school's formative assessment and good teaching practices.
- Senior managers will further strengthen assurance systems, including the process for appraisal of teacher performance, to support continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and learning.

- The Board of Trustees will review the curriculum reporting cycle to ensure that all learning areas are regularly explored and that reports enable the Board to be informed about choices made on future directions, teacher development, interventions and next steps in student achievement.

5. School 5 – State Integrated Catholic Full Primary School – Decile 10 – 120 students

Review Focus Area

-The quality of teaching and learning in literacy.

Recommendations

- The principal and board of trustees develop a more rigorous appraisal and performance management process for the principal and staff.
- The board of trustees, principal and staff continue to review assessment and evaluation practices in literacy. This review should ensure that meaningful achievement information guides strategic planning.
- The Board of Trustees, Principal and staff, as part of the strategic planning process for 2005 ensure annual goals and reporting targets in literacy reflect the potential of students at the school.

6. School 6 – Full Primary School – Decile 10 – 425 students

Review Focus Area

- The quality of teaching practice in literacy and how effectively it contributes to student achievement in writing.

Recommendation

- The school continue professional development to further refine literacy planning, review assessment practice in literacy and develop the use of new nationally standardised tools.

FINDINGS

School 1

Compliance Area

The school was told it must develop adequate school-wide implementation plans in English and the Arts.

My discussions with the principal revealed that the school did have implementation plans in place for English and the Arts. That these became compliance issues was a surprise to the school.

However the 2001 ERO report also stated that the school's English implementation document was inadequate and did not reflect the consistently high classroom literacy programmes. The report recommended the school develop a plan that was adequate. That they recorded the compliance on this in the latest review reflects the fact that ERO were still identifying concerns with this plan.

ERO's issues with the English implementation plan were that it:

- did not give adequate guidance for planning and implementation of curriculum across the school
- benchmarks and key progress indicators developed in different parts of the school for writing did not reflect a cohesive school wide approach to the sequential development of learning

The school has responded to this by initiating a review of the English implementation plan. This review is still in process and needs to be completed. The new document will provide greater guidance for planning, and implementation in the English Curriculum.

The benchmarks for writing that had already been developed in the different syndicates have now been refined and included in a school achievement statement which describes the expected levels of achievement for students and Year 2, Year 4 and Year 6. The achievement statement now reflects a more cohesive school wide approach to the sequential development of learning in English from years 1 to 6. It now provides teachers with greater guidance in their own setting of goals and targets to improve student achievement in their individual classrooms.

This achievement statement was developed by the teaching staff. The whole process involved considerable discussion and robust debate, taking some time to finalise and implement. The achievement benchmarks currently relate to the school's focus on writing through the AtoL professional development. Progress of students is assessed according to these targets and is reported to the Board of Trustees.

The school is currently checking what they have done to make sure it links closely with the strategic and annual plans. The teachers are now ready to complete the remainder of the achievement statement. It can now be completed reasonably quickly and will be a useful working document rather than an imposed requirement.

The Arts implementation plan is not referred to in the body of the school's written report from ERO. The principal says that the school's implementation plan in the Arts was not sighted by the review team during the on site review. The school had invested a lot of time into the development of a robust and detailed plan which had been praised by Arts advisers and used as a model by other schools as they developed their own implementation plan. The principal reported that subsequent discussion with ERO regarding the Arts plan resulted in ERO saying that if the school already had an adequate plan then the next ERO review would confirm that this was so. Therefore in response the school has taken no action in making changes to their plan.

Recommendation 1

The first recommendation suggested that a planned professional development programme in planning, assessment, evaluation and self-review be undertaken. This recommendation arose from ERO's view that, as yet, the school had not fully developed a school-wide approach to assessment and evaluation, especially for reading and writing. Elements of a school wide approach were evident – benchmarks for achievement at syndicate level, a policy outlining effective practice and a further policy guiding assessment practices for Maori students. There were clear directions for regular collection of achievement data and had been development of aspects of focused formative assessment. ERO felt that this could be further developed school wide. They suggested it could include in depth analysis of school achievement data to identify specific learning needs of individuals and groups and to plan future programmes and school wide targets and specific guidelines for teachers in implementing formative assessment practices in their classrooms.

The school had self-identified that assessment was an area they needed to work on and improve further. It was therefore no surprise that ERO suggested this as an area for development. The principal and staff discussed what needed to be done and explored strategies for school wide professional development in this area.

It was agreed that the school apply to undertake professional development through the AtoL project facilitated by Learning Media. This is a two year programme of professional development and is still in progress.

At the conclusion of this development the school plans to develop a school-wide curriculum action plan that provides clear direction for all classroom teachers and maximises the potential for improved student achievement. School staff are clear that they want the plan to achieve:

- Consistency of unit planning across the school with consideration given to multi level plans
- School-wide development of specific learning outcomes directly related to the achievement objectives of curriculum documents
- A review of all school implementation plans to incorporate progressions of learning from Year 0 to Year 6
- Direction to teachers in implementing assessment for learning principles in all classrooms
- Recorded decisions on assessment tools to be used school wide so patterns of achievement across the school can be carefully analysed and robust planning decisions and targets for future improving student achievement can be made.

These objectives were formalised in the 2005 school annual plan. Work has begun on this process. All teaching staff have participated in AtoL professional development sessions and have been implementing strategies and outcomes in their classrooms.

The school has undertaken targeted classroom observations to ensure that teachers are implementing these strategies. Huge changes in classroom practice have been identified, particularly in teachers' ability to link the planning, delivery and assessment components and in the students becoming more focused on their learning.

The school has introduced the AsTTle assessment tool for writing. Teachers have worked hard at moderating student work and assigning levels to pieces of writing. Teachers are finding the information gathered from this very beneficial for identifying the next learning step for individuals and for groups of students, and for planning to meet these needs in ongoing classroom programmes. Teachers have assessed each others moderation work and have found working with others to do this most beneficial. It is achieving a better understanding of the moderating process by all teachers. Teachers are seeking opportunities to work with others to moderate and assess student work. Initially the moderating process was quite time consuming but as teachers' understanding and expertise has improved the process is getting faster without compromising the quality of the assessments.

The school is in the middle of refining school wide assessment practices and record keeping. The school acknowledges that in the past record keeping has been cumbersome and didn't clearly show the progress of students as they moved from syndicate to syndicate across the school. The school is currently looking to develop a school wide record card which tracks student progress through best-fit levels. The school wants to develop a system that will integrate with Ministry of Education accredited school and student management systems. At present the Principal and Assistant Principal are working together to finalise the components of the system to be introduced school wide.

The school's self review of progress towards fulfilling this recommendation has been ongoing over the past twelve months. As the school reviews its progress, issues raised are discussed and procedures are put in place to solve these. A formal review of progress towards this recommendation had occurred just prior to a major change of teaching staff. The 2006 annual plan contains further objectives identified through the ongoing self review process.

The school acknowledges that they haven't yet succeeded in completely fulfilling this recommendation. One of the reasons for this is that there have been a lot of staff changes. Since the ERO review in 2004 five key and long serving teachers have left the school. Included in these five is the Assistant Principal, who had been responsible for doing a lot of the work in pulling school wide systems together. Staff changes have disrupted the school tackling these issues and, at one point, work towards this recommendation had to be halted so that new staff could be inducted into the culture of the school and brought up to date with the work the school had been doing in this area. The school correctly realises that, for this work to be successful and have a lasting impact on school wide practice, all teachers need to have both a detailed understanding of what is involved and have ownership of the development. It is only recently that the staffing of the school has become resettled, enabling meaningful progress towards this recommendation to be made once more.

In recruiting new staff the school has tried to ensure as little disruption as possible has been made to work in this area. Some of the new teachers had participated in AtoL professional development in their previous schools and one new teacher has worked overseas in a school that had implemented similar types of programmes to AtoL.

Recommendation 2

The second recommendation suggested that the board's annual and strategic goal setting become more specific and measurable. The intent of this was to assist the board to be better placed to more meaningfully review progress towards these goals. It was also suggested that the number of annual objectives be reduced to enable more manageable, and therefore more meaningful, self review to be achieved, and that it become clearer how existing syndicate and curriculum committee review links to overall school wide review. This is despite acknowledging that the regular cycle of school review includes syndicate-based review which provides information on trends and patterns of student achievement and assists the board to review and plan school achievement targets.

The Board of Trustees has worked to refine both the annual and strategic plans for the school. This has necessitated reasonably heavy input from the principal as the board members already face pressures from other demands in their lives. However School Trustees Association facilitators have helped to train board members to complete this work.

The number of annual plan objectives was a matter of discussion at the time of the ERO review. The school had produced a list of routine tasks that they needed to complete throughout the year. These were not areas of major focus but were recorded to serve as a checklist so the school could make sure they were completed. The school has now refined things and now labels the major focus goals as targets to reduce confusion. The school has only ever had one or two major areas of development for each year.

The school feels it has now reached the point where a formal review of progress needs to be made. The board has discussed engaging someone suitably qualified from outside the school to conduct this review, look at school documentation, what has been implemented in classrooms and report to the board on what work still needs to be done. This would give further direction to the school to completely achieve what is intended in the recommendations.

The school is confident it can fully achieve what is asked by the recommendations before the next scheduled ERO review in approximately 18 months time.

The school's self review process has recently identified issues regarding reading which they want to address. Once the current work on assessment, planning and self review is nearer to completion a major review of reading school wide will begin.

School 2

Recommendation 1

This recommendation suggested two actions. The school was asked to continue its work in literacy to further improve student achievement and to work to achieve a more consistent approach in teaching mathematics.

Since the beginning of 2004 the school had been involved in a Learning Media professional development programme in literacy. This focused on reading as the school was not happy with the level of achievement of its students in this area. ERO saw the results of the first year of this work. They were impressed with what had been achieved. Particularly noted were the use of achievement information to identify learning needs in reading comprehension; the shared understanding that teachers had of effective literacy practice and the positive impact this was having on classroom programmes; and the school's additional programmes that were in place to support reading.

ERO saw that the school could improve further in literacy by ensuring its English implementation plan specified learning outcomes related to achievement objectives at each level of the curriculum in reading and oral language; by providing guidance on critical thinking, processing information and exploring language; and by ensuring that oral language was planned for and taught.

The school continued its involvement in the Learning Media reading professional development contract in 2005 and is sustaining and embedding this development this year. The school has benefited from a deputy principal being fully released to lead literacy in the school, particularly since the Principal was on study leave for much of 2005. A person, fully released, and dedicated to this development ensured continued progress continued in the Principal's absence.

There have been a number of classroom observations in reading throughout the course of this development. These have been carried out by the deputy principal who has also modelled teaching strategies in reading. Following the observation sessions extensive feedback has been provided to teachers. Suggestions for improvement have been followed up in subsequent observations. The staff has welcomed this process. It has become part of the operational culture of the school to the point where staff are happy to ask for help and openly admit when they are unsure of what to do.

The staff has had discussions on how to improve the teaching of oral language and has determined that there needs to be improvement in this area. The school is at the

beginning stages of making changes in this area. Following that the school intends to look at the areas of critical thinking, processing information and exploring language. The school has also identified spelling programmes as an area for further development. As work is being done in all of these areas the English implementation plan will be adjusted to guide teachers in the school's expectations.

The school has prioritised the embedding of the reading professional development initiatives as its main literacy focus. They don't want to lose the gains that have been made by focusing on another area too soon. They have made great progress with reading and are committed to sustaining this.

Although they also use running records and the Probe test to inform teaching in reading, the school's main indicator of student achievement and progress is the nationally referenced STAR test. From this assessment teachers identify low achievers to become their target teaching group. Teachers have increasingly become more proficient in analysing the data to better identify these target students and their specific learning needs in reading. They are also teaching these students with much greater confidence.

The school realises it had been too optimistic in setting a goal of moving students two stanines as measured by the STAR reading test. Results showed that the majority stayed in the same stanine, which is expected and acceptable progress for this test. Close analysis of the data showed that the students had made measurable progress within their stanine. This progress was for all students, not just the target group. The specific school target for 2006 is to move students one stanine. This indicates the school is working to achieve accelerated progress for its students this year.

The biggest concern in maintaining and building on the reading initiatives is that the deputy principal who has been a key factor in progress to date is soon going on study leave. The school has identified some teachers who are achieving excellent results in their classrooms who will lead the development in the deputy principal's absence. The Principal is also aware that he needs to become more fully informed about what is happening in this area so that he can assist these teachers to drive this development to a successful conclusion and fully achieve all of the ERO suggestions in this area within the next eighteen months.

ERO concluded that the mathematics development the school had taken part in had been less effective than the literacy work. Although ERO acknowledged that classroom environments were conducive to learning; that students were questioned to justify the strategies they used; that students were encouraged to reflect on their learning; and that mathematical skills were used in practical contexts, they overrode this by saying that the quality of planning, teaching and assessment was variable. In short there was some good practice and some not so good practice evident in the school.

This was a surprise to the school. Before the review the Principal has been happy with the teaching of mathematics in the school. The school had previously taken part in two years of professional development with the numeracy project. After the two years of extensive work the adviser who had assisted the school with this work had visited the

school to keep in touch and to discuss any issues or concerns. The school was working to sustain this development.

The school's senior management team discussed this ERO finding. They thought that changes in staffing since the development may have partly explained the situation. Although the new teachers had participated in a condensed version of the numeracy project at a neighbouring school, they hadn't found this particularly satisfactory.

The senior management team decided that they would seek the assistance of an adviser in mathematics to help them further upskill new staff members. Teachers began working with the adviser from the beginning of 2006. The professional development has taken place on site and will continue for the remainder of the year. In total five teachers are participating. They are doing well and there is evidence that they are improving their classroom programmes.

The school collects achievement data in mathematics through the numeracy testing and interview process and through basic facts testing. The full numeracy test and interview is administered at the beginning of the year and partly administered in June and November. Basic facts testing takes place three times a year. Analysis of the data is showing that students are making progress in mathematics. The school has been concerned for a long time about the low level of achievement that many of the students enter the school at Year 7 with. They have supported these students by providing extra teachers to work intensively with these students in small groups.

The school has acted on this recommendation and is making progress with it. More progress is anticipated once one of the school's deputy principals returns from study leave shortly. This teacher has a passion for mathematics and will take over the leadership role, ensuring that mathematics development continues to have a high profile in the school.

This issue highlights the question of sustainability of school development over time and through changes of staff. From 2004 the school's main development focus has been reading. A lot of work and time has been invested ensuring the success of this development. ERO has acknowledged that impressive results have been achieved. As the school moves further forward in the years ahead will a future ERO review team praise work in another curriculum area and discover variable teaching practices in reading despite the school's efforts to sustain it?

How can schools ensure the long term sustainability of development and initiatives? Are time, staff changes and pressure of other work inevitably and naturally going to erode the gains made during the period of intense focus? Do schools need continued outside support to be able to sustain the gains they have made? Is the cycle of two years intensive development, then move on, which is perpetuated by Ministry of Education contracts counterproductive to sustainability? There may be no easy answers to these questions but they remain real issues for schools.

Recommendation 2

This recommendation suggested continued work on formative assessment and to build into this having students making decisions about their learning. Furthermore the school's appraisal system would be used to assist this process, identifying teachers' strengths and needs in this area.

The school has progressed in this area. Formative assessment has been an integral part of the continued school development in reading and teachers have improved in their ability to effectively implement these practices in their classrooms. As well as being used well in reading lessons formative assessment strategies are more evident in other curriculum areas.

There is more talk of student self-responsibility, in regard to their learning, between teachers and students. There is a lot of discussion about student goal setting and students are beginning to monitor their own progress towards goals. The work so far in this area is seen as a start by the school; there is still work to do to encourage students to take greater initiatives in making decisions about their learning.

The principal recognised that the appraisal system that existed when ERO visited lacked rigour and that it wasn't specifically linked to school goals and development. The school accepted ERO's view of their system and, over the last eighteen months, the principal and senior management have worked to make changes to it.

Teacher appraisal goals are now formulated with greater care and are closely linked to the school's professional development work and the subsequent expectations of teacher performance. In 2004 and 2005 the appraisal reviews and observations were focused on the school's development goals. Teacher strengths and their next steps for development are now clearly identified through the appraisal process.

In the eighteen months since their review this school has done a considerable amount of work on the report recommendations. They have continued their literacy work with considerable success, they have put procedures in place to strengthen the teaching of mathematics and have developed greater expertise in formative assessment. They have included students in decision making about their learning and made their teacher appraisal process more robust and reflective of school expectations of teacher performance.

They acknowledge that there is still further work to be done to more fully develop student goal setting and self-responsibility in monitoring their learning. They know there is work yet to be done in the areas of critical thinking and oral language. However, given

the progress they have made so far they will be confident they can move confidently towards addressing these areas over the next eighteen months.

School 3

Recommendation 1

The first recommendation suggested that the school set targets for student achievement in literacy based on the in-depth analysis of their learning needs. ERO noted that the school had excellent and reliable achievement recorded and thoroughly analysed. Students' learning needs and next steps were well identified and programmes were planned to meet specific learning needs. There were targeted interventions and programmes in place to cater for students with identified special needs and abilities. This school was clearly performing to a high level in this area and was assisting students to achieve and progress with their learning.

The recommendation was a minor suggestion for the school to link their annual targets specifically to student learning needs and therefore become more meaningful for the school. ERO considered the existing targets too broad and felt it was a pity that the school wasn't specifically using its existing, excellent achievement information to set targets.

While the school still sets broad, generic targets in its annual plan syndicates have now developed specific annual targets in reading and writing, based on detailed analysis of achievement data, for students at Year 3, Year 4 and Year 6. As well as these each syndicate has goals for the teachers to bear in mind.

For 2005 the junior syndicate reflected the teacher goals as the following key questions:

- Does our planning reflect the needs of the children?
- Have we moderated our data, written the strengths and next steps?
- Are we able to implement the next teaching steps, or do we need help?
- Are we reflecting on our own teaching practice?

Their reading target was 85% of all Year 3 children to be at or above their chronological age (from stanine 4 to 9 as measured by the STAR test.)

At the beginning of the year 68% of Year 3 students were achieving at this level; by the end of the year there were still 68% were achieving at the expected level. Deeper analysis showed students in stanines 4 to 9 had progressed well through the year but those achieving below expectation remained essentially where they were.

Their writing target was that at the end of Year 3 the children will be working at the lower end of Level 2. At the beginning of the year 9% of Year 3 students were achieving at this level; by the end of the year 17.5% were achieving at the expected level.

The syndicate had maintained overall achievement in reading and improved outcomes in writing. At the end of 2005 further goals for 2006 were set.

For 2005 the senior syndicate set the following goals for teachers:

- To use assessment to better meet the needs of the children within our syndicate.
- Accurately identify children who are gifted and talented.
- Deliver teaching that is focused on the next learning steps.
- Assessment used to motivate and drive learning.

Their reading target was to have 80% of all Year 6 children reading at or above their chronological age and 85% at stanine 5 or above as measured by the STAR test. At the beginning of the year 65% of students were meeting these targets: by the end of the year the number had risen to 90%. This success has led to the adoption of a target for 2006 to extend the majority of Year 6 students to stanine 6 on the STAR test.

Their writing target was for 65% of all Year 4 children writing at or above level 2 by the end of the year. The asTTle assessment tool was used. This target was achieved and has led to the adoption of a target of 75% of Year 4 students at this level by the end of 2006.

The school has compared its achievement results with neighbouring schools and with schools nationally. They find their students performing to higher levels in literacy than those in neighbouring schools and moving closer to national levels of performance. The improving results suggest teachers are working with greater focus in their reading and writing programmes. There are regular, whole staff and syndicate discussions on what steps need to be taken to link programmes even more closely to identified student needs.

The school welcomed this ERO recommendation. They had all the data; the suggestion has helped them to focus more closely on setting targets that lead to specific and measurable progress.

Recommendation 2

The second recommendation suggested that the school needed to record its assessments against achievement objectives. ERO considered this should enable identification of next learning steps for groups and individuals.

ERO recognised that formative assessment practices were becoming embedded in classroom planning and delivery; that high quality analysis of standardised and norm referenced assessment data provided teachers with comprehensive information about student learning needs; and that well analysed student achievement data was used to set next learning steps. However this was not specifically linked to the achievement objectives.

The school acknowledged that not all teachers were linking their assessments to achievement objectives. The school's main focus at the time was embedding teacher use of learning intentions and success criteria, along the lines of the AtoL development they were involved in. The school's Deputy and Assistant Principals had a long discussion with the review team about fitting everything in and linking to the achievement objectives.

The outcome of this is that the school is now focusing on planning programmes that are closely related to identified student learning needs but linking this planning back to the achievement objectives. The school acknowledges they need to link programmes to achievement objectives but they won't plan to them. Teachers plan according to the needs of their students and then fit their planning to achievement objectives where appropriate.

Since their review this school has moved on further. Staff and students are discussing the concept of life long learning and the need to work towards full understanding of all reading texts; not just a particular text. The school is beginning to view reading comprehension in relation to all learning within an integrated curriculum which is driven by student learning needs within the context of the imminent key competencies; not coverage of a list of achievement objectives.

School 4

Compliance 1

The school was told it must take steps to meet all requirements for compliance with the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students

This issue related to the school's enrolment of one student from overseas. The Principal maintained that the student could be enrolled domestically as there was a period of transition available to enable the parent to gain residency status in New Zealand and a work permit. He was correct. The Education Act allows students to attend a school for up to 28 days while the parent obtains the appropriate permits. After 28 days application to the Ministry of Education can be made for an extension but this is very rarely given. ERO's visit to the school was within the 28 day period so this compliance should not have been called. The parent obtained the necessary paperwork and the student is now classed as a domestic student. The student's younger brother is now also attending the school as well. There has never been a need for the school to comply with the code.

Compliance 2

The school was told to develop and implement programmes in the technology curriculum.

The school has done a little work in this area but, as they have other priorities which are of greater importance to the needs of their students, they haven't worried too much about this.

The staff has discussed how to incorporate the delivery of technology strands into their programmes and a redraft of the school's curriculum delivery cycle has included the area of technology.

Recommendation 1

This recommendation suggested the school develop a school wide approach to formative assessment. ERO wanted the school to include an outline of expected student achievement in English, to provide in-depth feedback to students that would enable

them to talk about their next learning steps and to provide more professional development to teachers in this area.

ERO acknowledged the good work the school was already doing in this area. They noted that the school's assessment data provided reliable information on student learning and that teachers used this information to inform their planning and to better meet student learning needs. They noted that student self assessment was encouraged and that teachers set high expectations for their learning. They considered these strengths represented the early stages of the development of formative assessment and advised the school to go further to develop specific learning outcomes for students, to share learning intentions and success criteria with students, to link oral and written feedback to learning intentions and to share next learning steps with children.

Since their review the school has worked towards this recommendation. However a little momentum was lost when a key staff member left. The appointment of a new Deputy Principal has resulted in a renewed commitment to pursuing this work further.

Teachers are now expected to communicate learning intentions to their students so that the children can understand and then articulate what they are learning. The Deputy Principal has been involved in assisting teachers, discussing with them how to do this and modelling the process for them. The school has some Montessori classes and these teachers provide a sound model for teachers of regular classes. The Montessori class children are skilled at articulating what they are learning and how they are working towards this. Professional development for teachers has looked closely at the practice of communicating learning intentions.

Appraisals of teachers include investigations into how well teachers are communicating learning intentions. Results of these investigations show that some teachers have found this process a little difficult. They have tended to try to implement too much at once and, as a result, have over-complicated the process for their children.

At the same time as extending formative practices the school has also been streamlining and dismantling some of their summative assessment practices. This has freed the teachers to look more closely at what they are doing with their children and to collect evidence of its effectiveness.

Work on developing formative assessment practices has some way to go yet. The school acknowledges that the students are not yet fully involved in articulating what they are learning and setting goals to achieve their next learning steps. Work is continuing in these areas.

Recommendation 2

This recommendation suggested that the school strengthen their appraisal system so that it was specifically linked to the improvement of teaching and learning. ERO stated that the school's systems for appraisal and monitoring of planning were well established but did not provide detailed feedback to teachers aimed at having them improve their

practice. ERO thought that this would assist the literacy leader's task of embedding a shared understanding of high quality teaching practice.

The school acknowledged they were ready to move forward to such a system. They had previously needed an appraisal system that emphasised simple expectations for their teachers as, at the time, the school had employed a large number of beginning and inexperienced teachers.

They have modified their existing system. This maintains some of the elements of the previous system that teachers expressed the desire to retain but is also more linked to improving teacher practice. A detailed document which includes the following features has been produced:

- Comments on programme strengths
- Comments on work done in school development areas
- A teacher statement on areas being worked on in relation to teaching, student and programme features
- Any special issues that are relevant e.g. special needs, behavioural issues
- Post observation comments
- Areas for development, enhancement and improvement
- Formal professional standards assessment
- Individual teacher appraisal goals

The new system was developed by the Principal in close consultation with the teaching staff. The modified appraisal system now addresses both school needs and the suggestions ERO made about providing teachers with feedback to improve their practice.

Recommendation 3

The third recommendation for this school related to the board of trustees reviewing its curriculum reporting cycle so they were better informed about all learning areas and could understand why the school made decisions regarding directions, teacher development and interventions to enhance high student achievement.

Prior to the review the board had gone away from a previous curriculum reporting cycle as they felt they were receiving written reports that were too long and not helpful to board strategic decision making. They still regularly discussed curriculum areas and school initiatives but they were no longer receiving the written reports.

The board were concerned that this recommendation may mean extra work for them. They wanted succinct reporting by the Principal and teachers that would convince them the school was doing well. They would be upfront in seeking clarification if they did not understand what was happening and they would inform the school if they were noticing any community reaction or concern about what the school was doing.

A succinct reporting system has now been developed. For each curriculum area the board is informed about what programmes have been taught, what the results of the teaching have been and what the school intends to implement as next steps. This has led to the Board of Trustees being better placed to make strong strategic decisions and to support what the Principal and teachers are working to achieve. Importantly, it has not detracted from the board being able to make time to debate more philosophical issues e.g. what exactly does it mean for our school to honour and reflect the Treaty of Waitangi?

The school has made significant progress in achieving the last two recommendations. Their reviewed appraisal system, in particular, is comprehensive and has the facility to provide specific feedback on teacher improvement. The nature of the first recommendation means that full achievement will be more of an ongoing process but the school has advanced its achievement a fair way in the eighteen months since the review. Work towards the second compliance issue may well become the topic of continued discussion between the school and the next review team in approximately a year and a half's time.

School 5

Recommendation 1

This recommendation suggested that the school put a more rigorous appraisal in place for both the Principal and the staff. ERO felt that the school's existing system did not provide a clear link between annual goals, professional development and appraisal. They also thought that teachers were not being given robust feedback.

The Principal concedes that the appraisal system lacked rigour and sees this recommendation being as a result of a comment made during the review that not all teacher appraisals had been completed and that the classroom observations of teachers had been a little superficial. The reason for this was that the school had been completing intensive professional development in the Literacy Contract with a focus on writing and participating in the AtoL project. Both of these things involved a considerable number of observations of teachers, some of which were being carried out by the Principal. Because of these experiences the Principal had decided that teacher observations in future should be more focused than previously.

There has been some change made to the appraisal process for teachers. The Principal has endeavoured to complete the appraisal process for all teachers but has not always been successful in doing so. In 2005 classroom observations were carried out in literacy and assessment. This linked the process to current school development in writing and in assessment. The appraisals also covered the learning climate in the classroom, the physical classroom environment and student on task behaviour and motivation for learning. The Principal followed up the observations with written comments for each teacher. Some teachers then had time to respond to these comments and the process was completed with a discussion between each teacher and the Principal. The Principal says that this discussion may not have been as rich as ERO may have envisaged but the observations and appraisal process revealed no issues that required detailed questioning and examination.

For this year the school is involved in a cluster group with other local small schools. This involvement includes the schools examining and reviewing performance management and appraisal systems together. There is currently a review of procedures related to teacher appraisal in process. This review includes input from teachers and is part way through being completed. A change that has been made is that teachers are now asked to formally reflect on how they are meeting the professional standards. A discussion about this between each teacher and the Principal is scheduled for Term 3 this year and

it is envisaged that specific goals for each teacher, if necessary, will be set as a result. If areas that are common to a number of teachers are identified these can become a school or syndicate focus.

While this has been going on the classroom observations for appraisal have been continuing. The Principal is up to date with all these so far this year. Both the observations and the ensuing discussion and dialogue have been of a more rigorous nature this year.

Over the past years a number of methods of conducting principal appraisal have been used. The Chairperson and immediate past chairperson have been used as have outside appraisers. The Principal believes that the most effective method is using an outside person and also involving the Chairperson in the discussion part of the appraisal process, that is after all the data has been collected and analysed. This way of completing the appraisal of the principal involves greater rigour and has been more beneficial for principal professional development. It is this system that the school is now in process of moving towards. It is based on the professional standards as well as the school's strategic and annual goals.

The school has made progress towards the objectives of this recommendation. What remains is to complete the appraisal review along with the local cluster of schools, to finalise what form future principal appraisals will take and to allow time for embedding the changed practice in this area, including making future modifications at the time that the need for these becomes apparent.

Recommendation 2

The second recommendation suggested that the school continue to review assessment and evaluation practices in literacy so that meaningful achievement information guides strategic planning.

ERO praised many aspects of school practice in literacy. These included an effective implementation plan for English which clearly defines a progression of skills, suggests learning contexts and expectations for effective literacy practices. Teachers were using achievement information to determine learning needs and their planning and teaching was focused on improvement. Teachers were also using a range of formative assessment strategies including sharing learning intentions, negotiating success criteria with students, giving excellent oral and written feedback to students that related to the learning intentions and involving students in self-assessment. However, they did conclude that the school's achievement information at the time of the review was not sufficiently well analysed to enable strategic direction with appropriate annual goals to be set. They felt that further analysis of achievement information would also help teachers to more accurately identify, and plan for, more specific needs of their students.

The school has carried on with its development in literacy. At the time of the review they were participating in a professional development programme run by Learning Media facilitators. The programme focused on writing. This programme was extended by a

year and the school has continued to participate. The school's formal involvement in the programme is now nearing a close but the school fully intends to continue refining the development they have already done in this area. They want to make sure that the changed teaching practice that occurred during the professional development becomes firmly embedded in classrooms. This process has begun with teachers now using similar teaching practices in their reading programmes. Extending this new professional knowledge to other teaching areas gives the school every chance of successfully embedding this teaching practice.

The school believes that their assessment in literacy was focused and led teachers to plan for the learning needs of their students. That the school was doing this was acknowledged in the ERO report which stated that students were aware of their learning needs and could discuss these with confidence; that teachers help students to identify next learning steps when each piece of writing had been completed and that these practices led to a high level of student motivation in reading and writing. The school does acknowledge, however, that the assessment overview chart, which tracked this work, was not always being followed. Following the ERO comments it is now being referred to more consistently.

Despite ERO praising the school's use of reliable, nationally referenced assessment tools to gather student achievement information, the school has continued to refine its use of these tools. Teachers are becoming more proficient in the use of the asTTle writing assessment tool. They work together to moderate and level student work and to identify next teaching and learning steps. The Principal and staff have found this work fascinating and of benefit to their work with students in writing lessons. In 2006 the school also stopped using the reading PAT test and introduced the asTTle tool to assess reading. This was at the instigation of the teaching staff. They have also used the asTTle mathematics tool to assist teachers to establish teaching groups at the beginning of this year while retaining the use of the mathematics PAT test. The professional dialogue that has resulted from teachers' changed assessment practices has been extremely beneficial for everybody. This change in practice has also enabled more detailed, accurate and honest student achievement information to be reported to parents and provided greater detail to Board of Trustees reports.

The school considers that achievement information is used sufficiently to guide strategic planning. Their achievement information is showing that students are achieving at or above national norms. They have identified a tail but often the children in this group are often achieving above the national tail. Being a small school they are wary about student achievement data being too detailed as, in doing this, there is a danger that individual students could be identified.

Currently the school's strategic plan refers to the following areas for improvement:

- Investment in people
- Student excellence in achievement
- Financial management
- School culture and environment

From these strategic areas specific annual goals and targets are set. For example, a goal relating to student excellence in achievement has been to improve surface features in writing across the school. This goal was identified because achievement information was showing that, while the deep features of children's writing were excellent, students' use of surface features was not so good. The school, while focused but not driven by this goal, succeeded in improving surface features in writing a little.

For 2006 the school has sought input from the Ministry of Education in formulating its annual plan and targets. This has resulted in the annual targets being tightened.

The school considers that the development of its annual plan and targets is an ongoing process and that next year what they do could well be slightly different. They are confident though that their students are achieving successfully to high levels – they are meeting their strategic goal of excellence in student achievement.

Recommendation 3

The last recommendation that this school received suggested that the school ensure that annual goals and targets reflect the potential of the students. There is little information in the body of the report to see exactly how this recommendation arose. However it does imply that the review team considered the existing targets set by the school to be insufficiently challenging.

The school does not believe that low or easy to meet targets have been set. The targets set have been identified through analysis and consideration of student achievement data and they are set to remedy areas identified for improvement. There are clear links between targets and student achievement data. The school has set targets in spelling, reading and writing to address areas for improvement. They are considering targets for fitness of students for next year as they consider fitness levels to be under what is desirable. They plan to assess the students in fitness this year to provide data from which some possible targets can be set. Thus these new targets will be linked to data on current achievement levels.

Some of the targets set by the school are expressed in generic terms rather than as percentage targets. This has been a deliberate action. The Ministry of Education input into tightening the school's goals and targets is ensuring these generic targets are as tight, as measurable and as specific as possible without becoming percentage based. ERO's recommendation may be suggesting the school's targets should be based on percentage point increases but the school intends only use this method when they believe it is appropriate.

School 6

Recommendation

The single recommendation that this school received suggested a continuation of their literacy development with a view to further refine planning and review assessment including the use of new nationally standardised tools.

The whole report for this school was very positive. Their work in literacy was praised. The teachers had strongly committed to the initiatives the English committee had introduced, assessment systems were consistent in all classrooms and students were achieving to very high levels. The majority of the areas for improvement identified in the report had been identified by the school and communicated to the ERO team during the review. The areas suggested by ERO amounted to minor adaptations of what was already in place.

The school has worked towards the recommendation but this has not been the primary focus of their work nor has it been particularly prominent in their plans. Literacy development has continued as the school fine tunes what is already in place.

The Deputy Principal leads literacy school wide and runs regular staff meetings, emphasising and modifying practices to be implemented by teachers. What is being implemented is primarily the Assess to Learn model – learning intentions, success criteria and next learning steps. The school realises this approach is in vogue and has been heavily promoted to schools for adoption. It is therefore a sound decision to implement current best practice.

To reduce the possibility for discrepancy between standardised and internal assessment results the school has introduced a practice of cross checking of teacher planning and assessment. Senior teachers check this, and then it is cross checked by the Assistant Principal, the Deputy Principal or the Principal each term. A register is maintained and signed off to provide a record.

One suggestion was to include writing as an essential part of each integrated unit. The school runs an integrated curriculum framework that is structured and is linked to the curriculum achievement objectives. Writing was always included in these units. Some writing naturally links from the literacy programme to the integrated units. However the school has made a decision that the morning learning sessions are to be used for literacy and numeracy and the afternoons reserved for the integrated units covering the

other five areas of the curriculum. They do not see literacy and numeracy as being a central part of their integrated units.

ERO considered that there was some variation in the quality of programme planning in literacy, especially in Years 5 to 8. The school's response to this is that all teachers were fully meeting the school wide planning requirements. Some teachers chose to exceed these requirements. The school believes that ERO saw this and then suggested that everyone should meet a higher expectation. Furthermore ERO see a very specific junior school literacy programme. Junior programmes need to be highly specific because of the foundation skills the teachers are establishing with the children. Although ERO may suggest that senior programmes should be planned to a similar degree, this is not readily possible due to the very wide range of student ability in this part of the school. The school also believes that there will always be variations in the quality of teacher planning. Teachers are at different levels of experience and have different approaches to recording their planning and total uniformity is extremely difficult to achieve. The school has not adopted this suggestion.

Another suggestion related to including time in their planning for students to reflect and to rework their texts before publishing. The school considers that they were doing this already and no further action has been taken. ERO also considered that the standard of student work in books was variable. The school has a standard for student setting out and care of books which is largely upheld by teachers and children. They consider that this suggestion related to a specific teacher and not to any trend evident across the school. Therefore there has been no whole school refocus on book standards.

In assessment the school has reviewed and overhauled its standardised testing regime in literacy. Running records have remained as an assessment tool in reading. The STAR reading test has been adopted and the school has been analysing and exploring the results. The nationally standardised asTTle assessment tools for reading and for writing have been introduced but teachers are still developing in their ability to administer these and to analyse the results. The school charter has set targets for numeracy and bottom line targets for reading this year and the school considered that the assessment materials needed to be both reliable and standardised for the results to have credibility.

As well as this work other school focus areas since the review have been:

- Reviewing the whole school approach to their curriculum plan
- Completing school wide implementation of the numeracy project approaches and strategies
- A statistics project with the support of a city wide educational achievement project
- A school ICT development project

The above things have been of greater importance for the school than their ERO recommendation.

CONCLUSION

Schools do respond to their ERO recommendations. Every school in the study has made progress towards achieving the intent of the recommendations. They have, however, gone about this task in different ways and to differing degrees of focus.

Some schools have made the recommendations quite central in their development plans and have worked consistently towards achieving them. Others have taken the different approach of being aware of the recommendations and finding they have made progress towards them while giving greater focus to other aspects of development. Their work towards the recommendations has been less deliberate but they have found that they have succeeded in achieving them.

Some schools have had setbacks in their work towards achieving the recommendations. It seems that, as well as schools encountering barriers to their students learning, there are barriers to achieving ERO recommendations. One such barrier is definitely changes to school staff. Often key staff leaving or being on leave from their school has significantly slowed work towards achievement of objectives. Also, new teachers arriving at a school need to be brought up to date with the work the school has already done before the school can move into new territory. In all cases the schools concerned are aware of these issues and have deliberately slowed the development process to compensate. It may even be that these barriers prevent a school from completely fulfilling the intent of the recommendations before ERO return to visit them in approximately eighteen months time.

In two cases schools have done no work towards compliance issues that really should not have been called. One related to non compliance with a curriculum implementation plan. The school had the plan in question but maintain ERO did not sight it during their review. The other case related to enrolment of an overseas student. The Principal knew there was a period of grace that allowed enrolment while parents obtained the required work permits or visas. I believe that both of these issues could have been sorted out immediately after each review – ERO could have sighted the implementation plan, confirmed the grace period for enrolment and then removed these compliances before publishing the reports. To have not got these things right is, I believe, not fair to both these schools.

The most interesting issue to arise from this study was that of sustainability. Schools sign up for development programmes on the understanding that, after the time period

where a facilitator assists the school, the work is sustained by the school. One of the schools in the study had completed some work on development in mathematics, then moved on to some very intensive development in literacy. They believed they were sustaining and continuing to implement what they had learned in mathematics but their ERO review found some issues in this area. This came as a surprise to the school and raises the following interesting questions:

- As schools and teachers focus on new work in one curriculum area does their ability to sustain previous development naturally decline? Should this be accepted as part of the natural ebb and flow of the life of the school and not be an area that schools can be made accountable for?
- Can schools and teachers be expected to continually work on new development areas while still maintaining other programmes at an intensive pace? Is the cumulative effect of piling development upon development creating too high a workload that is impossible to sustain?
- Should schools be actively encouraged, by both the Ministry of Education and ERO, to declare embedding years, where they work to consolidate previous developments? That many schools are beginning to do just this is an indication that they are becoming increasingly aware of this issue.
- Should contracts for professional development programmes be lengthened to allow facilitators of these programmes to assist and monitor schools as they work to embed their development?

There are probably no easy or immediate answers to these questions but they will definitely be areas that I will be reflecting on and discussing with others on my return to school. Sustainability of development may also be an appropriate future area for study for another principal fortunate enough to attain sabbatical leave.

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