

## **FOCUS:**

To visits to similar types of NZ schools to ascertain the extent to which they were offering opportunities to their students and thus form a better appraisal of the needs, and developments required, at my own school.

### **SABBATICAL LEAVE REPORT: JULY-SEPTEMBER 2005**

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**ASHBURTON COLLEGE**

I was fortunate enough to have a Board of Trustees that supported my period of ten week Sabbatical Leave in Term 3 2005. It was a time for some reflection and, as part of the period, a time for travel. The Ministry of Education required some aspects of study to form part of the time and, although they indicated time for rest and recreation as well, ten weeks was quite a short time to fit everything in.

#### **Executive Summary**

Leave comprised three phases –

- 1 Four weeks were spent in UK staying with daughters: my wife was with me for the holiday period of this time. Most of this time was in London or Reading, though we did travel south to Portsmouth, Bristol and across to Swansea in South Wales. Much of the emphasis was on family time but opportunities were taken to visit many of the features of London, especially those with history connections to the interests I have had as a history teacher. This was related too to my wife's role in a secondary school as a teacher of senior history. Some theatre and 'The Proms' were included.

It was also the three weeks of bomb blasts and bomb scares and their impact was considerable in terms of atmosphere. The ever present police in public places, the sounding of sirens, and the negotiation of security in every public place were features of this period. The collective effect was that although this was not the first occasion I had spent time in London the opportunity to be in a cosmopolitan environment with its diversity of activities, economic, social and cultural reinforced a belief that as Principals we need to be reminded of a world which is different from our community workplace. The anonymity of the experience was I have to say, a major delight albeit in a time of considerable tension for Londoners..

- 2 Following return to New Zealand, from the beginning of August to the end of September, I undertook visits to ten secondary schools. The premise for selection was size – similar to Ashburton College, or Decile 7. One decile 6 school and one decile 8 school was visited. The schools were located in the Manawatu area, Auckland and Nelson/Marlborough. and varied in size from 800 students to over 1800. All but one of the schools were co-educational. I chose three areas for my enquiries – The selection was in part a reflection of school types and location, links to Massey university travel and accessible family based accommodation to save costs to my school.

- (i) resource generation
- (ii) provision of opportunities
- (iii) steps towards meeting (identifying) gifted students.

This took the greater part of four weeks. I will comment further on observations but, in general, found:

- Decile 7 schools have difficulty in surviving financially without supplementary income, primarily overseas student enrolments if they are to maintain opportunities and sustainable class sizes.
- Relatively little resourcing from local sources, such as PTA, is raised by Decile 7 schools.

- Most Decile 7 schools, especially those of over 1100 students, provide a substantial range of curriculum choices and levels.
  - Schools are less preoccupied now with the assessment issues of NCEA and are now focussing on using assessment choices and flexibilities to create mix and match individualised course structures.
  - Most Decile 7 schools are extremely stressed by the demands of resourcing for IT. Although I had not set IT as one of my priorities it emerged as an ongoing area for observation and discussion.
  - Boys' achievement is an ongoing concern in most secondary schools.
  - Gifted identification varies, from two schools which have a documented and targeted programme to three which seem to have assumed their streaming programme and extended extra-curricular programmes meet the needs. The others are in an exploratory process towards extending opportunities and programme
  - I had not set out to focus on technology but in effect it became a significant focus, especially classroom and workshop provision to meet the changed requirements emerging in response to the curriculum and NCEA.
- 3 The third element of the time was supporting studies in Dispute Resolution, through Massey University. I attended a weekend course at Palmerston North for the paper on *'Advocacy and Evidence'* and completed two assignments for the paper which was examined in early November. I had completed an earlier paper *Introduction to Dispute Resolution*. Together these papers constitute about half a year's work for a full-time student. Both papers were accomplished successfully.

## Purpose

The purposes of the sabbatical leave were those set out in the proposal and can be summarised as

1. Some time for travel and refreshment
2. To allow time to make visits to similar types of NZ schools to ascertain the extent to which they were offering opportunities to their students and thus form a better appraisal of the needs, and developments required, at my own school
3. To have a less pressured phase of time in resuming academic studies at university, particularly mindful that the information management systems for accessing course information and materials had changed considerably since former periods of university study.

It will be observed from the executive summary that these objectives were the basis of what actually transpired.

Subsets of all these activities were opportunities to meet and talk with people about professional matters in a less intense environment, collect information that would assist the Ashburton College Board of Trustees and the staff of Ashburton College plan for future needs and challenges.

As the visits to schools took place a number of contingent issues emerged as well. Of prominence were three

1. Comparing the physical environments in which teaching and learning takes place – comparing the "front door" with the buildings and plant that sits behind, and observing the manner and demeanour of students and staff in the schools.
2. The provision of IT support for students and staff

3. The state, and comparative provision of technology facilities to meet current curriculum requirements as stated in the curriculum documents and as they meet the requirements of NCEA level provision.

## **Background**

The background to selecting these focus areas for sabbatical was

- Twenty plus years of principal leadership largely in one school
- A need to resume studying a new area to plan for life after being a Principal.
- Recognition that Ashburton College is seen as a sound provider of opportunities, as identified in successive ERO reports, but an awareness that new direction is needed
- An awareness that many NZ schools have sustainable good practice that needs to be seen and shared
- Recognition too that at this time Ashburton College could function effectively without a Principal due to the experience levels of the BOT and senior and Middle management – a good time to take leave.

The selected areas focused on personal development and refreshment – travel to UK, the needs of Ashburton College and professional extension – university study in an area allied to the work of a principal

## **Activities & Methodology**

While there were three elements to the time on leave, two of the activities were self evident as far as activities and methodology.

Travel and activities in UK were consistent with most overseas ventures with a blend of social and visitation. University study for an extramural course was consistent with the Massey University requirements including five full days on the Palmerston North campus and using the Library facility for legal studies.

The specific schools focused activities constituted the main body of time in July and August integrated with travel requirements to Palmerston North for the Massey studies. Ten schools were selected for visits and all schools from my first list of ten responded positively to my request to visit. This was more than anticipated. Preliminary letters were sent during the preceding term, details and dates confirmed by email or phone and the intended approach for the time during the visit was outlined in a second letter. Travel was planned around the confirmed dates and the final itinerary was based on a school visit on one day, and because the schools were selected in regional clusters, two or three visits in one week with time for travel meant in the end ten days for visiting and six days travel were accounted for. college Board had agreed to fund all my domestic expenses during the sabbatical ( though made no contribution to my overseas travel - none had been requested ) Rental vehicles from second tier rental companies proved efficient means for travel apart from the flights which were prebooked at lowest level fares.

For each visit a range of questions and prompts was prepared for each of the areas of interest. Prior preparation included reading the latest ERO Review for the schools though care was taken not to use this as a basis for any question areas. The purpose was to share information and not make judgements. Selected areas were school resourcing, student opportunities and provision for the gifted and talented. This was not a specific questionnaire as I had anticipated, and as it eventuated, that the way each visit evolved varied from school to school. It was essential to have the flexibility to explore issues rather than to produce a systematic analysis for comparative purposes. The intent was to provide a structured discussion or conversation. In most cases I had previously met the Principal though anticipated that significant amounts of time in the schools would be with other people and I was therefore bound to accept that the information presented would vary from school to school not only in its information but also in the perception. I planned that each conversation would have about an hour with three hours in each visit anticipated. This proved to be workable and none threatening to the schools visited and allowed time also for their questioning of me. I

believe that this was an essential part of the sabbatical process and only fair anyway in that they were sharing time and presumably my experience had something to offer.

As it eventuated the structured part of each visit occupied a morning and afterwards informal time with colleagues occupied another hour or more. In most respects this was of great value and focused on current priorities in their school related to patterns, responses, building programmes and current problems. In each case visits included a site walk and especially observation of new teaching environments or building programmes. A visit accounted for almost a full school day in each case. IT demands was a common discussion point.

The accumulated material comprised responses recorded in my notes supplemented by considerable material given by way of course booklets, prospectus and handbook material and in some cases CD material. The goodwill of schools visited was considerable. It took several days to read the material and attempt some analysis. Much of the material was relevant to self review of our own practice or could be compared to current situation or problem solving at Ashburton College. Indeed one outcome was a property summary for the Board as a tool to evaluate the next phase of the ten year plan.

## **Findings**

For part of the time, i.e. the overseas travel, there are no findings included in this report. Suffice to say it was a welcome opportunity to be in UK during a summer season albeit a time of trauma in London.

For the university study which focused on *Evidence and Advocacy* as part of disputes resolution qualification the paper selected has some application to the work of the Principal. Increasingly Principals are exposed to potential issues which have a basis in the law and human resources best practice requires some greater understanding of effective processes towards resolution. Knowledge can prevent crises from occurring. The paper therefore provided useful insights into key legal concepts and is a companion study course for others in the dispute resolution programme. Disputes in my experience need to be resolved as quickly as possible in managing a staff if a collective focus is to be sustained. In summary this paper, with the previous one studied, *Introduction to Dispute Resolution*, enhanced my knowledge of the law and of current practice. I believe some aspects of these concepts would be useful factors in most principal's professional development.

The primary area for which findings are provided relates to the schools visited. Four elements of findings can be offered keeping in mind that the context of the observations was the experience application to the Ashburton College.

### ***School Resourcing***

Eight selected schools were decile 7 and one a decile 6 with a very similar community profile to that of Ashburton, and one a decile 8 of almost identical student enrolment profile. Three had a city or suburban setting; four were in smaller NZ cities while the remaining three were community based schools. One was a single sex boys' college. Seven were in the North Island.

All schools visited supplemented their entitlement staffing from their operations grant or supplementary resourcing. In total over the ten schools this aggregated to almost fifty Full time Teacher Equivalents. If this is representative of schools then NZ does not have shortage of teachers but a demand that is in excess of current formulae. All the schools supplemented their formula entitlement funding and the most common source was income from overseas foreign fee students but each agreed this was increasingly vulnerable and due to compliance requirements and enhanced support for those students the realisation of substantial profits was a thing of the past.

For most schools little substantial funding was raised from PTA sources and there was variation in the amounts collected from school fees. Fees ( voluntary levies ) from 70\$ per student to \$200 but almost all allowed family maximum Collection ability varied but 70 – 85% were quoted but each could identify there were families for whom school fees could not be recovered.. What this is spent on varied though in the main it was deployed for student activities. Consequentially schools had varied policies and practice which had subject fees. Only a small number charged recovery costs to Y9/10 but in Y11 -13 recoveries is common and the greatest fees were sited for Art photography and specialised activity courses. Most recover these fees by invoice to parents or caregiver. All agreed that subject recovery of costs was increasingly essential to maintain programmes with sufficient resourcing especially at NCEA levels.

Old pupil organisations seem to be minor activities for the schools visited and are not a significant source of funds. Community based schools indicated that a focused activity such as a sports trip would generally have success in raising funds from the community but it was increasingly difficult to raise funds unless it was focused on a specific activity for which student participation was a prerequisite. Most schools now make regular applications to community trusts for both programmes and activities. Most reported a prize list with sponsors and there appears to be a growing trend to wards locally funded scholarships for current students and school leavers.

Annual accounts were generally perceived as satisfactory on a cash basis but when provision was made for depreciation the situation was more tenuous. Almost all reported a deteriorating situation and were fearful of what might happen if overseas students were reduced. It was common in each of the schools to fully expect to budget without any surplus and several anticipated deficits. The commonly stated concerns – compliance requirements, increased costs for non teaching staff, the salary agreement for teachers, inflated costs arising from local trades services, the costs of technician expertise for IT and the costs of IT itself. Photocopying costs had rationalised with improved plant but the requirements had increased as well with growing proportions of teacher preparation requiring photocopying and the new demands of NCEA had increased pressure as well.

There is clearly a variation in property funding between the roll growth funding for new building and funding to replace existing buildings when roll growth is not the generator. There is also variation between schools about their identification of priorities. This is well illustrated between schools who have upgraded administrative support spaces and those which have enhanced teaching environments. Most indicated they felt that the five year component funding would need to be supplemented from other sources to fully align their buildings with what was really needed. Several had experienced some frustration in maintaining effective dialogue about property with their local MOE regional office due in part it seemed from differing information over time, response time to requests and changes of personnel. One school in particular was especially frustrated by the local educational review which had really embargoed expenditure for significant upgrades.

Schools generally seem to have purchased rather than leased equipment especially with regard to IT provision though leasing had been considered and rejected. The general feeling was that PC costs had come down a lot but under a lease the time frame for replacement was attractive but the life expectancy in most schools for the equipment purchased outlasted any lease provision. Purchase gave the schools the option of a greater life per unit. Clearly this is an area for debate for older items of IT need more technician support. Technical support for IT is a concern for schools and may well be the factor that will persuade them to lease in future years. It is not uncommon to have a cheaper technician on site because of specific circumstances but overall technical support is a cost concerning schools. Laptop provision varied. While all schools did have teachers using the MOE laptop scheme it varied greatly in other aspects. Some schools fully fund with no cost to the teacher, some partially fund and others expect the teacher to meet the expected cost. Most principals favoured that ultimately the school would move to meet all the costs. Take up for laptops varied from less than half the staff to almost all the staff. There seems however to be a correlation between take up and the overall presence of IT activity evident in schools. However a perception is that laptop provision all or in part is one of the most significant factors in changing teachers' attitudes to IT and to their own PD.

It was noticeable that schools with a proactive attitude evident with laptops also had a closer link to IT provision as part of the library in the school. Several schools had completed or were completing extensions to libraries that allowed active teaching using computers as part of the library spaces generating a research attitude for students. While some schools still retained a computer room focus for some teaching several were developing or evaluating pods adjacent to clusters of classrooms or more computers based in all classrooms. Schools with the more active IT focus are also developing partnerships with local companies as part of their ability to keep pace with change.

### **Student opportunities**

Decile 7 schools are very conscious of their need to meet a wide spectrum of student needs. The characteristic catchment area for these schools is a community i.e. students are representative of all sectors of the socio economic distribution of families. Even the larger urban schools visited identified their catchment as a cross section of a wide community mix. Accordingly this is reflected in the stated philosophies of the schools. This determination to identify and meet a wide range of needs is most evident in smaller towns'

colleges who maintain that they have an obligation to meet needs in ways comparable to more urban based schools. I discerned too an element of competitive response in meeting needs. Schools seem very conscious of what alternative providers offer to the students drawn from their catchment and especially that parent choice may be a factor in choosing or rejecting attendance at the local community school. Hence an emphasis of perception in promoting schools which has become a significant issue. What schools provide in terms of the range of academic with co-curricular activities was a strong factor in the schools visited.

Each school visited provided students with detailed handbooks and publications including CD discs promoting and explaining the ranges of courses and opportunities available. The range did vary with the size of the school though in the end most had comparable choices or opportunities available to their students. Quite substantial handbooks outlining academic programmes in Years 11 – 13 with details of Achievement standards and Unit standards available either within the schools or through linkages with other providers. Course outlines and achievement requirements were features of these publications. One wonders at the expense each school had gone to produce the publications and in many cases there were very similar from school to school. Each year they are updated to take account of NCEA changes and this activity seems to be a major focus of a senior staff member in each school. In a sense it raises a question as to what responsibility has been assumed by each school given that NZQA clearly does not have parallel publications that does the task for schools. The schools' response is a promotional one on the one hand but equally there is an element of "covering the schools back about assessment." Such are the duplicated expectations of both NZQA and ERO clearly schools are very sensitive about this. In the end the result is that schools produce a very comprehensive range of materials to promote their opportunities and detailed outlines of NCEA requirements. The public statements too often offered that NCEA is not understood in the community cannot be blamed on schools if decile 7 schools are examples.

The number of entrants at Y9 in the schools visited varied from 180 to over 450. Class size ranges in their Y9/10 classes were generally in the range 25/26 and each school had a policy of keeping class sizes as much below the thirty that GMFS staffing could allow. Settings varied from ability, interests, identified needs, broad banding mixed ability but most common appeared to be some recognition for identified higher ability and general mixed ability classes. Timetables varied but were dominated by the fundamental question of how much could be fitted in and general agreement that there was too much if a broad all inclusive curriculum was attempted without compromising time on literacy and numeracy. Almost all the schools still taught a subject based curriculum but most were questioning whether in the longer term it was the best for students. The resultant timetable configurations varied from two week 49 period allocations, 27 periods in a week to six day 30 period mixes with only two maintaining a 25 period's hour timetable.

All schools had experimented with time allocation to allow a range of semester programmes in meeting the requirements for languages, technology and the arts. None it seems had the equal balance of time to all seven areas. Language was for most schools still an elective areas of the curriculum including Maori and tikanga – a surprise given my experience in two secondary schools where since 1980 it has been a core curriculum element for Y9. It was offered as a semester course – the labels varied - in the majority of schools. When electives were offered in y9 or y10 there were differences in how students fitted the electives – parent choice or school enrolment seemed to be a factor in about four of the schools while in others student election was predominant.

There were differences in recognition of students needing additional support. Three colleges still maintained a class which had identified less able students but others had a withdrawal support programme. Schools which had as part of their campus a significant component of ORS provision and a specific programme with facilities seem to have more likely to have developed a withdrawal and support culture as opposed to a banded class culture. Acceleration was not common with the majority favouring lateral expansion across a range of opportunities. Two schools focused on subject based acceleration in mathematics. Having said that,, schools with an able set tended to promote acceleration within that group. All schools promoted extra curricular participation for junior students.

Decile 7 schools visited regarded NCEA as their major senior school focus but one school was considering "*Cambridge*" for 2006. All had unit standards and achievement standards, though one, a boys' college has a significantly greater range of unit standards with a high profile focus on alternative certificate pathways. This no doubt parallels a general concern about boys' achievement and strategies required to encourage boys to commit to staying on, and to academic studies.

There was consensus that NCEA has improved teaching learning and assessment and that the preoccupation with assessment is over and “we have moved on” to identifying pathways for students that best meet their needs. The majority of schools offered six pathways (the notion of a set of achievement standards often under a subject banner ) Subject lines are the most common arrangement but in larger schools some really interesting mixes of standards from differing domains to produce a interest course is an emerging approach.. Class sizes vary but most schools are endeavouring to prop up the range of opportunities from locally funded additional teacher positions. Unit standards are more common in level 1 and 2 and especially in technology where students seem to favour still the “make and build” approach in preference to the demands in the achievement standards. Multi level opportunities are emerging in most of the schools as teachers have begun to understand the requirements and opportunities available in NCEA. Most students in Y11 focus on Level 1, in Y12 the main focus is on Level 2 but in Y13 students are much more varied with a significant proportion pursuing a mix of levels.

Close relationships with other providers seemed more likely in larger urban schools but most commented that this was a much more difficult exercise due to coordination and liaison challenges. It seemed to vary according to the degree of pro-activity from the local polytechnics. There was an identifiable preference that schools should be able to use STAR to replicate the courses rather than move students in and out of neighbouring providers. Only one of the schools ( decile 6 ) visited was eligible for “Gateway “.A concern expressed several times was the vulnerability to such links arising from full employment, students commencing programmes and then finding a job, personalities involved or changes in staff.

Student guidance is a major priority in all of the schools visited. Planning and coordinating student programmes, the greater degree of individualising programmes for students, the knowledge required to anticipate consequences of decisions and the need to ensure students are not disadvantaged by their decisions as well as ensuring perquisite and literacy requirements are met as well as pathways to tertiary institutions are defined are all considerable demands identified in all the schools visited. Schools have different mixes in time allocations, roles for guidance teachers or Deans and careers counsellors. But all require professional development time to ensure students are appropriately directed. Teachers need to be well informed for this guidance role.

One of the key issues seems to be over commitment of students. This seems to arise from three elements. The first is an overloaded curriculum demand for students attempting too many achievement standards – some able students are achieving up to 150 credits a year when 80 is sufficient. The second reported in all schools is the demands students have placed on them as a consequence of working hours in varied employment. Finally sport and cultural activities in schools as well as leadership challenges in Y13 stretch the time students have available. In each school Principals observed that the majority of students especially in Y12 & 13 were stretched in managing time. Student achievement levels need to factor in the range of achievements students accomplish.

The range of diverse programmes in sport and cultural activities in decile 7 schools is extensive. .Sports coordination and related Arts coordination is now a significant element in managing secondary schools. The range of arts and cultural festivals has in recent years intensified the demands front the old notions of an annual production with a consequence that students are focused for most of their time in school, certainly for Terms 1 & 2, on a variety of involvement especially if they are seniors. Sports weeks have replicated this for a number of codes with national achievement expectations. The consequence is that all larger schools aspire to compete in a range of these activities and decile 7 schools are in a delicate situation of having expectations, but not necessarily the resource base of higher decile schools or independent schools that promote these activities as features of quality education. Applications to local funding sources and sponsorship are increasingly a feature of school activities. This necessarily impacts on schools to fund shortfalls in other areas by generic fund raising activities. A feature of this activity is its dependence on volunteer coaches, often teachers, but more likely to be from the community. Top performing groups in schools at national levels require top level coaches and some now need to be paid. The initiatives for paid coordinators has been welcomed, but support for coaches and producers is an emerging concern.

On balance Decile 7 schools offer an extensive range of curriculum opportunities and co curriculum extensions that allow the motivated and capable student to get a very broad and balanced range of experiences. The schools that are community focused in that they are more isolated from neighbouring schools are motivated in part by the need to meet a range of opportunities that enable students a quality of experience comparable with any in schools in larger centres whereas the decile 7 schools in urban areas are more likely to present the opportunities as a consequence of size. However in both it comes at a cost.

Almost all principals feel pressured by resource limitations and affirm that the opportunities cannot be sustained if resourcing levels were confined to those generated from GMFS generated staffing or funding. In each case supplementary resourcing from community raised funding or overseas student enrolments plays a part in ensuring the diversity of opportunity is sustainable.

### ***Gifted and talented provision***

This aspect was selected for enquiry as a consequence of the now mandatory requirement that schools have identifiable provision for gifted and talented students. This aspect showed some variation between schools. While none of the schools would admit they did not make provision for gifted and able, the degree to which there was obvious specific extension varied a good deal. In fact it would be true that clearly many very able students prospered under conventional provision or by participation in the diverse opportunities had extended opportunities. However some of the schools had made more progress than others in identifying specific programmes under a banner of gifted provision. Five of the schools had a documented separate statement of policy while each of the others was making progress with a draft or consultation or professional development programme.

For all of the schools the key issues were defining their perceptions as a school as to what students constituted gifted or talented. In almost all cases the initiatives to focus on this area was driven by the Principal. IN three schools a specific senior position had been established to lead the initiatives though none was a member of senior management. The role of the identified staff member was focused on students rather than on staff leadership. A modest time allowance or unit was provided. The staff member was in these schools generally supported by a small working group of staff. Most schools indicated that this was an area for further development and while they acknowledged the NAG they were focused on it anyway and their initiatives had predated the NAG. In several of the schools identification of more able student was a specific expectation of the guidance team of Deans but all admitted that in the main the students most likely to be identified were in the streamed more able classes.

Identification criteria seemed to be major issue for both policy development and staff development. There was some acknowledgement of the MOE publications but more frequently the key player seemed to be a staff member with a specific interest arising from their studies or by delegation by the Principal. Most PD seems to have been accessed through the work of the local College of Education or its equivalent. Few reported full staff development activities for whole staff training though all indicated it had been a staff discussion issue in various forums across their schools. In three schools there was a formal group called a GATE committee or an equivalent. In two cases this was faculty representative based, in the other a group of interested teachers. For all that the most documented and perceived programmes had a focusing staff member.

The difficulty in establishing a definition was also reflected in the kind of provision being made. Academic measures still seem to be the key criteria. Only when talking to the really focused staff did I sense that identifying gifted or talented students who may well be underachieving, or not already in high ability groupings, was a consideration at this stage. Lateral extension opportunities through co curricular involvements were acknowledged as appropriate for more able students but clearly this is hard to measure. Almost all the schools favoured lateral extension but in several schools acceleration programmes operated in some subjects such as mathematics or sciences. Few students seem to being accelerated ahead of the age peers. However most schools are identifying challenges such as subject competitions for their students and exposing able students to competitive opportunities that do demand more from them. The larger schools especially are able to challenge most able with ranges of ability activities or programmes and in several specific tracking and mentoring so that able students are advised and directed into accelerate opportunities sometimes allied to university studies. Proximity to tertiary institutions is a factor. Several schools are encouraging more able Y109 students to complete NCEA level Achievement Standards in subjects like Mathem,atics ,Science and English. Student leadership at the senior level is regarded by several schools as an extension for talented and able.

Several of the schools are working with the contributing schools to better identify the able students including those who may be gifted. Staff consultation seems the most common basis for identification though over half the schools made reference to extending the application of AsTTLe to identifying student capacities. Within the schools own staff there was a general expectation that effective teachers would extend more able



students – how real this was would I think vary a good deal. Recognition of more able occurred through the celebration activities that occurred as part of the general recognition of student achievement.

The most active programmes for students who had been identified and this varied a good deal from school to school revolved around mentors. In urban based schools with neighbouring tertiary institutions links meant that students in small groups or individually had opportunities for visitation or participation in extension activities. Mentoring within the school was encouraged with staff mentors or people from the community being involved. This was a particular feature in two urban schools. One rural school with a part time teacher had promoted a space where able students could go regularly to discuss their interests and abilities with other students of similar aptitude – this club type approach was a counter to peer negativity often a feature related to underachieving students especially boys. One school regularly convened a Dean's group to focus on the more able students in order to monitor and mentor them into extension opportunities which varied according to the students age and mix. When integrated with the wide range of programmes on offer both in the academic curriculum and the extended co curricular activities most schools would contend that able students have a wide range of challenges they can select or be encouraged to participate in.

Overall though there was consensus that in terms of identified targeted support schools find it more difficult to match the provisions made for students identified as high needs or special education. TEFA grants are invariably called upon to support students behind their peers and the overall staffing allocations are utilised where possible to maximise student choices. In the schools' promotional materials most schools made a generic mention of opportunities for more able students though it was one of many areas commented on within the broader range of needs.

### ***Other areas observed***

Among other areas which became a focus of time during visits were

- Technology provision – especially the ways schools had made property response to new curriculum requirements and especially the integration of design with workshop programmes.
- Technology curriculum especially the schools' experience with technology achievement standards and directions schools adopt to make technology relevant and the drift to Units standards at levels 1 2 and 3 NCEA
- IT especially the funding required – as a general observation most schools visited are struggling to keep up with the necessary hardware provision to match the software capacities required, and to service the hardware and software they have invested in – most estimate that over 12 – 15 % of their budget is IT related expenditure. Schools which are close to a sponsor or who have been lead project schools in relation to contracts seem to have fared better but still claim that the reourcing levels are a frustration. It has certainly become a focus in most general classrooms, technology areas and libraries.
- Facilities for secondary education vary a great deal – older schools and schools without significant roll growth are finding it more difficult to adapt their buildings than those which can incorporate improved environments with a new development as a roll grows. Many classrooms have changed little in twenty years and school furniture is in many classrooms very basic. Electronic and IT visual displays in classrooms are still comparatively rare or are still being trialled. Many teachers and technicians aspire to improvements they know are available but are frustrated by budget limitations. School administration areas have moved into IT extensively but then the amount of administering has increased and this is reflected in many schools having greatly expended the office and administration spaces for staff to manage data and maintain student support. Several teachers repeated to me the comment that many students have better access to IT at home than the school is able to provide. Library upgrades seem to focus on extensions to allow students access to information technology with new challenges for its management.

## **Implications**

### *Personal*

I was affirmed in many of the strategies and initiative underway at Ashburton College which I have made a major focus of my time as Principal. I was impressed too by the commitment of colleagues in all the schools. I think we have some really good schools and their quality is not always fully appreciated by critics of state education. My university studies and travel provided an alternative focus. I have a basis established for further study.

### *My school*

I felt that the staff quality at Ashburton College stands favourable comparison with any of the schools visited and the school tone with Ashburton College is positive but there are initiatives which can be taken to focus on some development areas, both physical in building improvements and some initiatives in the curriculum. I was reaffirmed about the steps we had taken to prioritise a major upgrade of the technology block at Ashburton College. Schools with modern facilities have generally reconfigured with roll growth money – but most would envy Ashburton's community fundraising commitment. The S68 schools visited were finding it most difficult to reconfigure. Wooden buildings were more easily adapted but sometimes with the effect that much has been crammed into a floor space with loss of space – corridors, lockers areas etc all absorbed. The most effective arrangements featured a lot of glass walls between working areas. One reconfiguration had not worked at all well, attributable it appears to too much of the planning being confined to the views of an individual, and needed reworking completely.

### *Broader context*

State education is a very efficient operation at the school level. The community gets value for its investment because of the quality of teacher and support staff efforts. In each school staff were positively represented by the Principal.

### *Balanced time out*

Many staff in schools are over committed to their work by the nature of the tasks expected of them. It is not an issue of curriculum or assessment workload but the plethora of activities and responsibilities expected of teachers and the community expectations fostered by successive government initiatives. While there have been improvements teachers need time to implement each wave effectively professionally and be acknowledged for their successes. I note especially the general support for NCEA in all the schools, a view that appears to be in contradiction to media hype. Yet it was teacher effort that made NCEA possible. We need to sell state school achievements more comprehensively.

## **Conclusions**

I am not sure that I did not over-commit myself during this time but it has provided time for reflection. I especially enjoyed travel, both in UK and New Zealand, and time to meet people. Nonetheless with the time in NZ after return from UK, the time about seven weeks was fully consumed with visits, travel and university study. Certainly I felt I committed more time to the study component and the visits than the expected allocation time suggested in briefing notes for the sabbatical. University study alone proved to demand about 20 hours a week. But it was good to be free from regular evening meetings albeit only for a term.

The opportunity proved valuable and enabled a review in a number of areas, both personal and related to the college of which I have been a Principal for over twenty years. Had the opportunity been accessible earlier then it would have enhanced both my Principal Development experience and the perspective about the school in which I worked and as well enhanced my appreciation of other professional's work. What it did confirm was a long held belief that NZ practice needs to be shared. Overseas visiting, in my experience of several visits in a number of countries, has limitations in that while one can observe and learn not all of it is transferable or relevant. We should take advantage of the evidence that many NZ practitioners have really high quality expertise with local application. We need to ensure NZ principals visit each other more and observe at first hand the good practice of colleague professionals. The resultant exchange of ideas is both affirming and stimulating and in turn generates the spread of opportunities for students.

The reception in all schools visited was welcoming and without exception I believe the visits were positive exchanges about common aspects of school leadership and school development. I would like to record my appreciation of the considerable support which if quantified was worth hundreds hours of professional exchange and well worthwhile. In that respect it was quality professional development.

Ashburton College has as a result received many good ideas for sharing with Board and staff and which will be the basis for future evaluation of student opportunities. It also affirmed that the practices within the college are more than comparable with the schools visited and in many respects offered strengths that could be shared.

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Principal 1988 - 2006