

# **Geraldine Travers, Hastings Girls' High School**

## **Sabbatical Report**

### **Terms One and Two 2016**

#### **Ten weeks**

One of the great successes of the New Zealand education system over the last decade has been the increasing extent to which students are willing to engage in five years of secondary education. In days gone by the only students who chose to study in Year 13 were those who intended to study at University or other tertiary institutions. I chose to focus on State Girls' Schools of mid decile and below as I believed that they would have the most relevant experience which would illuminate our thinking. I believe that boys' schools may have been dealing with this for some time as there have always been non-academic boys who have chosen to stay on at school for sporting reasons. For girl's schools, the necessity to provide courses for this group is relatively new.

It is perhaps helpful to look at the reasons that students choose to stay for five years rather than leaving after 3 or 4 years as has happened in the past. One of the main reasons is that they have experienced success and that schools in the main have been providing courses that students want to study. The relatively fluid nature of NCEA has meant that students are able to study at the next level without repeating work with the only exception being Literacy and Numeracy. Another reason that students have chosen to stay on are the numerous leadership opportunities that senior students have and the more adult way they are treated. Not to mention the extra privileges they have, including often a different uniform or mufti and the ability often to start and finish either early or late if their day starts or ends with a study period.

A further reason is the opportunity to get to the highest level in Sport and Cultural activities. Research says that there is a large dropout of girls from Sport following their leaving school and the chance to play in an 'A' team is important to some girls as is the chance to be a star in Stage Challenge or a production. It is good for society for this to happen. Of course once you reach a critical point, the other important reason for school retention becomes to be with your friends. The more members of a friendship group want to stay on at school then the more likely it is that other members of the friendship group will want to do so as well.

Undoubtedly this increased engagement in education is a societal good as research tells us that every extra day that students stay at school leads to positive life outcomes. In the case of girls, this means that they will produce children who will undoubtedly fare better in the education system because their mothers will have an expectation of success and engagement.

I chose to visit 8 State Girls' High Schools of mid-decile and below and who were not in high population areas.

The schools I visited were:

Whangarei Girls' High School

Rotorua Girls' High School

Gisborne Girls' High School

Wanganui Girls' College

Timaru Girls' High School  
Waitaki Girls' High School  
Queen's High School  
Southland Girls' High School and  
Methodist Ladies College in Perth, Western Australia

All schools New Zealand reported that they were grappling with the same issues and were actively engaged in seeking solutions to the problem. All of the schools nominally had a brother school which was often geographically close. This meant they were able to capitalise on sharing senior academic subjects which otherwise may have been uneconomic, thus reserving some of their staffing for broadening the senior curriculum. For this to work the geographic proximity as mentioned earlier is necessary as well as an enabling relationships between the principals and a mutual confidence.

Our National Curriculum gives us the ability to provide a curriculum which is appropriate to our local community. As I travelled the length of the country, it was interesting to note how different communities are in the interest in various parts of the curriculum. An example of this is that Hastings Girls' High School has just introduced Horticulture, whereas in Timaru and Whangarei, Horticulture is rejected by students in favour of Agriculture. In Timaru in particular, the girls were seeking Agriculture in association with Economics as a pathway to farm management. Only once in the past decade can I recall one of our students expressing interest in this as a future career.

### **Gisborne Girls' High School**

Gisborne Girls' High School is operating a Pathways course not unlike our Horizons course. The girls work online so that their work doesn't get lost. In this course they are more concerned about experiences and skills than gaining credits. The girls do lots of Star short courses, Redshirts and the parallel courses offered by Briscoes and Rebel Sports. They work with a group called Vertical Horizons for Health and Safety courses which they say are very good and are looking forward to the girls being able to gain credits for gaining their Learners' Licence. A number of their staff access standards through Instant and they discovered that it was cheaper to pay Instant \$6000 than each department accessing the standards individually.

Other unique solutions that some schools have arrived at include Gisborne Girls' very successful Military Academy which has been a worthwhile pathway for some of their students. In later school years they have also been willing to enrol boys from their brother school into the academy. That this has been able to thrive has been very much made possible by the extensive support from the Armed Services as many of the students involved come from homes where they would struggle to resource camps and other experiences. It was also helpful to build on the proud history of 'C' Company of the 28th Maori Battalion. Part of this course is 12 days at Waiouru and it is completely free apart from the cost of transport. This course starts at Year 11 where it represents one line in the timetable. This at the 3 levels is staffed by one teacher and 2 ex-army personnel who both hold LAT's (Limited Authority to Teach).

They also operate a Level 3 and 4 Business course which they access through Vertical Horizons which has 40 Level 3 and 4 credits. They put their prefects through this course also. Gisborne Girls' High School are also set up for an officer training course and can claim that 32 girls have got into the Armed Services or Police Force. They also offer a Year 10 taster course at the end of the year after the seniors have left to raise awareness.

Other parts of pathways include Outdoor Education which can lead into the fitness industry or tourism. Performance Music is also offered with standards in areas such as PA systems. Early Childcare is also taught in Years 12 and 13 with one of their teachers able to deliver this. They also teach Psychology which is assessed in Unit Standards. These do have endorsements but it is not a UE subject. 21 girls study this this year.

In the Technology area, Gisborne Girls' High School teaches Level 3 Food and Nutrition and Home Economics, at Year 11 Food and Nutrition and at Year 12, Catering and Food and Nutrition.

The other thing I found interesting is the way in which they set out their course information book. The subjects are arranged in their school level but within that each department clusters their subjects together regardless of whether it is an academic course with prerequisites or an alternative course. This is based on the belief that the student will first choose what they're interested in before choosing the appropriate level of study.

### **Rotorua Girls' High School**

Rotorua Girls' High School has had to deal with a catastrophic roll decline over the past few years and this has had a big effect on their senior offerings. Their membership of a cluster allowing study by VLN is very important to them and they include all the subjects on offer in their regular course information book to completely normalise this method of study. They have a good relationship with the local Police and heartily endorse a programme they offer called Cactus. The Police work with a group of students from 5.30 am three times a week where they drill like the army wearing sponsored gear. This is an 8 week programme and is transformative of student's attitudes. The 2016 Head Girl is a graduate of last year's course.

They operate a Vocational Studies programme and send students to their local Trades Academy. Other areas of interest for their students are Health and Business.

### **Wanganui Girls' College**

Wanganui Girls' is a Decile 3 school of 350 students which presents difficulties in covering the senior curriculum.

The local council has been very proactive in terms of trying to ensure a positive outcome for all Wanganui students. Their logo is 100% SWEET which means 100% of Students in Wanganui in Employment, Education or Training. I believe the Ministry of Social Development help with this goal.

The school is very old and is turning 125 in October. Their motto is *Ad Astra* and they use this terminology for some of their programmes. Every Tuesday for half an hour the students go to Astra classes where they are exposed to a variety of guest speakers and learn specific skills such as changing a car tyre or writing a CV.

They are very involved in Academic Mentoring and twice a year the parents come in for a 20 minute meeting where they set and then review three goals - academic, pastoral and attendance.

The school holds a graduation ceremony in mid-December and students have to have met certain criteria in order to graduate. In the senior school, they offer a lot of multi-level courses. 50% of Year 13 students gain University Entrance. The students are very closely monitored by their Dean. They believe their size is an important factor as all of their girls are known. Their reputation is improving as they took a hit a number of years ago because of some negative publicity.

### **Timaru Girls' High School**

Over recent times Timaru Girls' has achieved excellent NCEA results. They have identified their 30 most at risk students and 115 teachers take 2 students each and provide mentoring. They put their improved results down to better tracking. Subject wise, their girls are attracted to what they call the 'Holy Trinity' - PE, Tourism and Outdoor Education. They have some links with both CPIT and Aoraki Polytechnic.

They are actively attempting to dissuade girls from studying Hair and Beauty and Early childhood as they believe this is a fast track to low wages. Approximately a third of

their students go to Polytechnic following school. Beginning in Years 9 and 10 they attempt to expand the girls thinking about non-traditional occupations. Currently, a lot of their students go to Otago University to study Health Science. They do not teach Food Technology as they have decided that Home Economics meets the girls needs better and the subject is very popular. They have a mentoring programme for top Year 13 students where the mentors are local business women.

### **Waitaki Girls' High School**

A very high proportion of the students go to University with 70% gaining University Entrance. The staff are very accommodating to the needs of the girls. There are a significant number of Tongan students at the school whose families were originally attracted to Oamaru by the freezing works. They have good relationships with the local polytechnic particularly CPIT. They have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with St Kevin's which is a Catholic Co-Ed High School in Oamaru and Waimate and they are jointly teaching Agri-business. This does make them lose staffing but they get some cash back. They operate what they call 'Flexible Friday's' where some girls stay in Oamaru, some go to Timaru and some work on farms. They currently have 20 students studying subjects that they don't offer by VLN.

They spoke very highly about a programme that their Year 13 students took part in called 'Turning Point Bridge'. It has been offered to 30 students at every secondary school in Otago through funding from the Otago Community Trust. It combines personal development skills and business skills with up to date industry and career information and apparently has made a positive difference to the students who took part. They also spoke positively about a programme in youth resilience called 'My Friends' which they accessed through the Ministry of Education.

### **Southland Girls' High School**

A number of years ago Invercargill education had a large review leading to the closing of all Intermediate schools and some secondary schools. As a consequence, all of the secondary schools cater for Years 7-13. The school has 1100 students with 100 students in the school hostel. 135 of the school are Maori with a tiny percentage Pasifika. The school claims that it organises girls according to ability, needs and interests not age and that this is of benefit to the intermediate age girls who can access subjects from the secondary part of the school. 72% of their Year 13 students go on to university or other tertiary providers with 10 -12 each year opting to do a gap year before embarking on further study. Over recent times the GDP of Southland has halved from 18% to 9% because of declining dairy and aluminium prices. There is still a huge demand for workers in the dairy industry.

All alcohol outlets in the city are controlled by the Invercargill Licensing Trust whose huge resources really benefit the community. They have been big supporters of education and in particular the Fees Free campaign of the Southland Institute of Technology.

They have developed Personal Learning Conferences which is academic tutoring or mentoring. They take one day per term to do this and hold a 20 minute interview with each girl and her family. They say they have approximately 90% attendance at these.

The principal is in charge of Careers and Guidance and the key issue of how to support those at risk of not achieving. They have good community ties with the usual programmes of Incubator, Redshirts, Blue Shirts and a similar deal with McDonalds. They interview all Year 12 students at risk of not achieving. They also have an engagement with a local Trades Academy which is managed by SIT.

They work with an organisation called Frontline Training Consultancy who provide programmes for receptionists, office work and time management. Southland Girls' also work with a variety of ITO's including building, electrical and agriculture. They also

engage with Venture Southland who have a programme called 'Paddock to Plate' based on the Incubator programme.

As they are a larger size school they have a bigger curriculum however they still have to offer individual programmes which they call 'Outside the Square'.

One thing I found particularly interesting was that most departments have arranged their programmes according to the Vocational Pathways so that students can identify which standards will help them achieve a completed pathway.

Another organisation they have linked into was Lincoln University through their 'Soil Makes Sense' programme. Other organisations that they have got courses and standards from are: The Learning Place who offer courses which link into the Vocational pathways, The International Travel College, the Queenstown Resort College and PIMS from New Plymouth. They also offer the Certificate in Supported Learning using standards from Supported [learning.com](http://learning.com)

### **Queen's High School Dunedin**

Queen's High School is able to capitalise on the fact that they have King's High School on their back boundary and King's High School has had a huge increase in popularity over recent times. They were still getting over the consequences of a large flood from last winter which inundated the school. They only allow Year 12 and 13 to go to shared classes and there have to be at least 2 girls in a class for them to allow it to be a shared class. King's High School has 3 classes of Year 12 Physics which Queen's High School girls can slot into. It is through sharing that they are able to offer subjects like Media Studies and Classics. King's High School don't teach Dance so that is an area that Queen's High School can help them with. About 30 students per year go to and fro.

### **Whangarei Girls' High School**

Whangarei Girls' High School is a large school of 1350 students of whom, 62 live in the hostel. Whangarei has seen a great deal of educational turmoil with the building of two charter schools and two of the secondary schools falling out of favour and they have had to work hard not to disadvantage other local schools. It is a very old school - one of the oldest girls schools in the country and is engaged in a large rebuilding programme. They currently have 200 Year 13 students and the trend is for this to increase as girls opt to do the 5 years of secondary education. 50% of Year 9 are university bound. It is a difficult environment for alternative programmes because the local polytechnic is not in a very healthy state and they are victims to the distance they are from everywhere. They see interesting trends amongst their girls. Horticulture is not at all popular as an option, the girls preferring agriculture because they estimate that about half of them want to be Vets.

They were very complimentary about the Whakapiki Ake programme delivered by Auckland University which mentors Maori students interested in a career in Health including live ins and mentoring.

They offer an encyclopedic course information book which again organises subjects according to faculty regardless of whether they are 'academic' or 'alternative' subjects. I was interested to note that Food was not considered part of the Technology department because they teach Food and Nutrition as they believe this suits the needs and interests of their students better. They also teach hospitality.

### **Methodist Ladies College Perth Western Australia**

MLC is a fee paying school which educates girls from pre-school right up to the end of Year 12 (final year of Secondary School). The interesting curriculum differences I noted for their Year 12 students or our Year 13 students were the separation of English and Literature, Politics and Law, Philosophy and Ethics, Psychology, Marine and Maritime Studies, Human Biology, Children, Family and Community, Career and Enterprise.

## **Conclusions**

The relative lack of engagement with Vocational Pathways was interesting with most expressing the view that they have no particular plan for any girl to achieve a pathway and if it happens, it happens more by accident than by design. Southland Girls' was the only school who consciously gave girls information about standards offered and how they fitted in to the various pathways. One comment was that parents seemed quite interested in the concept if only to make some sense of the multiplicity of standards that their daughters had gained and also that it might provide a pointer into potential interest areas for future study or careers.

I was interested in the way in which many schools were making a real effort to personalise learning and were willing to meet regularly with girls and their families to ensure continued engagement. The concept of academic mentoring is one that was widespread with staff of the school taking personal responsibility for 'overseeing' or 'gatekeeping' with students.

There were interesting disparities between schools often as a result of historical factors eg EDI's and mismanagement by previous Principals. The level of resourcing available to the differing schools was very apparent and the role of the local Ministry offices in either supporting or stifling development was very apparent. Some Principals obviously have been very skilled at negotiating deals for their schools.

I perceived that schools that have had a high turn-over of Principals have been somewhat disadvantaged and parts of their school have become disjointed as a result. It is obviously important to have a plan for school development and 'good taste' so that the school looks unified and cohesive.

I was very grateful to all the Principals I visited for their generosity of time and hospitality and particular thanks to Di Carter of Queen's High School who shared her home for two nights.

The term was a good reminder of how incredibly busy and taxing the role of the Principal is and how important it is to have a team with whom one can share decision making.

G B L Travers MNZM JP  
Principal

14 June 2016