

2554 State Highway 10
R D 1

Mangonui 0494

Phone (09) 4060300

Email: office@oruaiti.school.nz

www.oruaiti.school.nz

ORUAITI SCHOOL



ORUAITI SCHOOL
Caring, Responsible, Confident

Primary Principals' Sabbatical - Term Three 2020 Diane Bates

Investigate current years 7–8 programmes to ensure we provide, both academically and socially, for a smooth transition of students from our small rural primary school to larger secondary schools.

Acknowledgements

- *Oruaiti School Board of Trustees for supporting my application*
- *The Ministry of Education for providing the Sabbatical opportunity.*
- *The Oruaiti School staff who kept the school running smoothly. Especially Kaiya Lafotanoa who assumed the Principal duties in my absence.*
- *The students, parents, and secondary school staff I spoke with about transition.*

Purpose

Oruaiti School is a relatively small rural Primary school. Our year eight students move to a range of secondary schools which are quite large and cater for students from a variety of backgrounds, both rural and urban. Some students also transition to boarding schools. Are our current programmes in the senior school preparing our students to ensure they have the skills needed to make transition as smooth as possible.

Background

In the publication by ERO looking at 'Transitions and adolescent development' they identified the following areas to consider:

The transition to secondary school often coincides with important social, emotional and physiological changes in the lives of adolescents. The National Middle School Association (1995) identifies five key aspects occurring when adolescents move from childhood to adulthood that are useful to consider when thinking about the provision for students at transitions. The table below outlines the changes ERO has observed and includes possible implications for schools' practices.

Aspects	Characteristic	Implications
Intellectual	<i>Young adolescent learners are curious, motivated to achieve when challenged, and capable of critical and complex thinking</i>	<i>Students have opportunities to be curious and to have their thinking extended and challenged.</i>
Social	<i>Young adolescent learners have an intense need to belong and be accepted by their peers while finding their own place in the world. They are involved in forming and questioning their identities on many different levels.</i>	<i>Students' need to be social and to know about themselves, is met through a culturally responsive programme and a classroom culture that celebrates diversity.</i>
Physical	<i>Young adolescent learners mature at varying rates and go through rapid and irregular physical growth, with bodily changes that can cause awkward and uncoordinated movements.</i>	<i>The programme caters well for students' needs to be physically active.</i>
Emotional and psychological	<i>Young adolescent learners are vulnerable and self conscious, and often experience unpredictable mood swings</i>	<i>Teachers are sensitive to the emotional and psychological changes that are happening to students.</i>
Moral	<i>With their new sense of the larger world around them, young adolescent learners are idealistic and want to have an impact on making the world a better place.</i>	<i>There are opportunities for students to participate in decision-making that affects their life within the school.</i>

Research of Practises in small schools.

What are we doing to produce young people who add value to their local and wider communities? Ann Allain (2017) points out some of the benefits that can be evident in students who are part of smaller schools.

- *Students at small schools develop strong relationships with their peers and their teachers;*
- *Small schools are able to tailor instruction to meet the needs of individual students;*
- *Teachers at small schools report higher levels of job satisfaction;*
- *Small schools foster citizenship, leadership, and social emotional skills.*
- *Students in a smaller school context are more likely to participate in representative sports teams, performing arts activities, and other inter-school competitions. This is simply a supply and demand situation where competition for places can limit participation in a larger setting.*

What are our current practises which show evidence of these points?

- *Students in years 7/8 attend tech fortnightly at an urban intermediate school.*
- *All students in year 8 attend the Hillary Outdoor Pursuits centre for a week long camp focussing on*
- *Student leadership programme in school for year 7/8 students with skills and activities to complete demonstrating our school values of Caring, Confident, Responsible.*
- *Year eight class programme designed to encourage students to develop independence.*
- *Physical activity programme for students to develop fitness as well as self discipline in this area. Students also encouraged to be Physical Activity Leaders providing fitness programmes for all other students.*
- *Tuakana/ Teina encouraged throughout school, buddy reading, enviro projects and passion projects.*
- *We are part of a Kahui Ako which includes two of the schools where many of our students transition to. Sharing achievement challenges with these schools means that we have similar goals for our students.*
- *Being part of the Manaiakalani Outreach programme our students use the 'Learn, Create, Share model that is integral to this programme. One of the schools where many of our students transition to is also part of this programme, meaning our students are able to 'carry on where they left off' in relation to learning with a digital platform. Blogs are able to be continued, showing progression of learning.*

Survey Results

To help determine what we are currently doing well and what we could do better. I surveyed current and past students as well as their whanau, and also school leaders of the schools our students usually transition to.

There were some limitations with surveys. Due to the fact that we reverted to Alert Level Two for Covid 19 it meant that I was not able to visit some schools and ask questions face to face. I had to rely on the comments received via email and online surveys. It was difficult at times to get responses from some cohorts.

From the students who choose to come to Oruaiti School for year 7/8 some reasons were:

- *to give the students another two years to 'grow and develop maturity' in a smaller school before having to cope with the challenges a larger school might bring.*
- *'Friend related' reasons, either wanting to stay with friends or possibly move children from relationships which may have been having a negative effect.*
- *Opportunities provided for students in year 7/8 relating to leadership are also a 'drawcard' including the opportunity for all students to attend the Hillary Outdoor pursuits centre in year 8.*

[link to survey](#)

Some things students/whanau felt helped with their transition to secondary school were:

- *Having different schools come in and talk with students and answer questions they may have.*
- *Opportunities in year 7/8 to develop leadership skills, being part of a student leaders group and possibly become 'Head Student'*
- *To become confident and responsible within their 'self' and develop the ability to make friends.*
- *Up to date learning opportunities.*
- *Friendships.*
- *Strong emphasis on school values - Caring, Confident, Responsible.*
- *Sharing aspirations and strengths.*

Suggestions from students and whanau for how we could strengthen our current programmes:

- *More examples of what the work at secondary school might look like.*
- *Some examples of rules and expectations from the various Secondary schools.*

- *Organisation and self discipline skills, the need to be more independent at secondary school.*
- *Prepare them for the 'culture shock' - secondary school is very different to Oruaiti School, students need to be prepared for the differences and extra responsibilities.*
- *Share examples of timetabling, moving classes at secondary school.*
- *Skills to deal with different learning styles - different teachers, teaching in a wide range of different ways.*
- *Some curriculum areas could be strengthened - Science, Social Studies, Maths especially algebra.*

[**Link to survey from past students and whanau**](#)

Feedback from Secondary school Leaders and Teachers. Strengths of students from Oruaiti School/ Areas to further develop.

- *It is difficult to say if there are curriculum areas of strength or weakness as all students come with different abilities.*
- *The timing of students' arrival means that they have quite a bit of 'growing up' still to do and are often overwhelmed by the number of students at secondary school. Students seem to 'come right' from year 10 onwards.*
- *Most schools students transition to promote similar values to Oruaiti School which makes it easier for them to 'slot straight in'*
- *Students take time to 'find their way' with a new and different cohort of students.*
- *Independence, initiative and resilience are skills that depend on the individual maturity level of the students entering.*
- *Some ways that we might help students transition would be - more school visits, practise with timetabling.*
- *Developing year nine programmes which 'ease children into' all of the suggestions above.*

[**Link to questions asked of secondary school leaders and teachers to secondary school**](#)

Current Transition Process

There are two main schools that our students usually transition to, and three other schools where smaller numbers of students may go to, The current transition process for year eight students involves:

- *A visit from students and the school dean from three of the schools our students transition to.*
- *Day set up for students to attend the secondary school they will transition to. This happens with all of the schools.*
- *Two of the schools make contact with us for academic information regarding the students.*
- *One school arranges for a face to face meeting with senior leaders from schools to talk about any special requirements students may have and also possible groupings of students who are transitioning.*
- *One school invites our student leaders to the powhiri at the start of year to welcome transitioning students.*
- *Two of the schools our students transition to are part of the Kahui Ako we are in, this means we have a shared achievement challenge.*

What would a positive transition to secondary school look like? (from The Education Hub 2019)

Evidence from successful school-based transition programmes identifies two major components. First, they include parents, teachers and students across primary and secondary school settings, and second, they take place over the course of the whole school year, with preparation beginning several months before the transition and support continuing well into the new school year. Six key factors signal whether students have experienced a successful transition:

- *Students experience a sense of belonging and are included in school programmes and activities*
- *Their teachers show an interest in them and their interests, and recognise their strengths and areas in need of development*
- *They feel their culture is valued and acknowledged*
- *They are offered opportunities to try out new interests and skills*
- *They make progress academically*
- *They can envision where their learning pathway leads beyond secondary school*

Changes we will make

With the research I have undertaken and the feedback from students, whanau and secondary school teachers, it is evident that there will not be changes in the form of 'one size fits all' We will be able to make some 'across the board' changes, however we will also need to consider changes for individuals.

Below are what these changes may look like:

- *Curriculum expectations, at the start of each year we need a basic outline of the year 9 programmes, what will be covered and what we can be doing to ensure we are preparing students for what is to come with some prior knowledge.*
- *Meet with the teachers in year nine in all schools children will be transitioning to, possibly with the students and their whanau and give in depth insight into the students strengths and areas for improvement, teaching styles that suit them and any other relevant information. (This may need to be more confidential if there are sensitive issues)*
- *Share students aspirations (and those of their whanau) this may also include current ideas relating to possible career pathways.*
- *Continue to be part of the Te Hiku Kahui Ako, work more closely with the schools our students transition to, on our shared achievement challenge and work streams.*
- *Provide more opportunities for students to visit the school they will be transitioning to, this could even be as often as once a week for term four before their move. Get to know teachers and other students and also become familiar with the school layout and the differences in timetabling at secondary school.*
- *Complete our updated Graduate Profile which will have input from students, whanau and the wider community, providing a shared understanding of qualities and attributes we would like students to leave Oruaiti School with. Share this Graduate Profile with transitioning schools, giving them an understanding of what our students have been striving for,*
- *Continue to strengthen and develop leadership programmes within our school. Providing opportunities for students to demonstrate independence and confidence.*
- *Share student blogs with schools students are transitioning to, giving teachers the opportunity to 'get to know students' before they actually start school.*

Conclusion

Our current programmes provide for students in a range of ways. Our school environment is friendly and nurturing. This is often the reason why whanau choose to send their children to Oruaiti School. This is something we do not want to lose, however we do need to ensure our students move to secondary school as well prepared as possible.

Constant talking with other schools is the way we can ensure the transition of our students is as smooth as possible. Giving our students more opportunities to become familiar with and 'part of' their new school environment before they actually start as year nine students will do this. We all know that relationships are key to success in so many ways, if students are able to build relationships with teachers and other students of the schools they are transitioning to it will be of benefit to all those involved.

This is something that needs to be ongoing. We need to continue to look at our students, their needs and strengths and share this on a regular basis.

With the development of a graduate profile, which students start working towards from the day they start at Oruaiti School, students will be equipped with the skills and attributes to ease their transition. Building resilience and the ability to accept and adapt to change, as well as having a strong sense of values will be paramount to their success.

References

The Education Hub 2019 - theeducationhub.org.nz/category/school-resources/

Ann Allain St. Andrews School Rhode Island (2017) Why small schools do so much more than improve test scores <https://www.standrews-ri.org/news-detail?pk=873026>

Education Review Office (2012) Evaluation at a glance: Transition from Primary to Secondary School

<https://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/evaluation-at-a-glance-transitions-from-primary-to-secondary-school/6-transition-from-primary-to-secondary-school/>