

PRINCIPAL REPORT TO THE BOARD: **TEACHING IN NEW ENVIRONMENTS**

As a school we are exceptionally fortunate to have supporting scriptures that are there to support our organisation, and the groups and individuals within it in their daily lives. They are there so we may be Christlike in our conduct no matter the environment or situation we may find ourselves in. State schools don't have this ability and indeed words, actions, thoughts and deeds often come from self-centred aspirations and/or a desire to manipulate situations and outcomes for small interest groups without any consideration for the greater good. But we are different, we have the word of God that binds us together; that informs our actions, thoughts, word and deeds. So, as I bring to you the summary of developments regarding our transition to Blake Road from a principal's perspective I ask that we keep a very special and pertinent passage of our school's supporting scripture in mind:

Philippians 2:1-11:

- If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.
- Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
- Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

During September last year I was shared a vision. A vision of a school that had Christ as its centre and one where the students and staff of that school were waiting to be led to a destination far greater than what they had and possibly far greater than they could imagine. It was a vision that grabbed me from the start and it was a vision I was wanting to share if the Lord so desired. Four terms into the 2018 and I thank him every day for placing me where I am now.

One thing that I have learned over the last 4 terms is not to question his timing. Sometimes the vision of this new school that is going to overlook Pukekohe has seemed so far away and other times it feels like its just around the corner and I have had to rely on the assurance of Ecclesiastes 3:1 which reads "There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the sun" to provide me with a constant understanding that whatever occurs it's in His time and his time is the right time.

So, let me fill you in on the first 2 terms and 8 Weeks from my perspective as principal - I can do this in probably 100 words or less.

- As a teaching principal there very little that I was required to do and there was very little time that I could do anything I may have been required to do anyway. During this 28-week period there was much work going on behind the scenes of which Chris and Warren can and have spoken of in greater detail in the past. Again, as I reflect I think of the timing, how the needs of the school were seen to over the 28-week period and how it is at this point in time (being released from the classroom) that my input to the new school development has increased.

Since week 8 term 3 the staff have been on an incredibly steep learning curve and it will continue for some time to come however I'd like for you as Board members to be part of that learning as well.

As developments were made in planning for the school Warren and Chris asked the staff to prepare to be consulted in regard to how they wanted to teach in the new Blake Road environment. Staff were given access to the architect, project manager and builder on two occasions, while Rachel, Gina and I have all been out into the community and viewed examples of what are now called "Flexible Learning Environments". You may raise your eyebrows and think "Just another name for the exactly the same thing.... nothing's changed". Well I can assure you it's not the same thing and things have definitely changed. Experience in this business is paramount and as we prepare to build we learn from the experiences of others. I can genuinely say that we are in a position to provide an education second-to-none if we stay on the journey we are now on.

I want to let you in on my personal perspective for a start. When MLE's or Modern Learning Environments were first introduced as the direction education was taking by the government I was sceptical. Most of the horror stories that you know about MLE's comes from this time, and almost every parent has heard one and most teachers know someone has been in one. New schools were being built and teachers were given little to no scaffolding as to how they should teach in a new environment- particularly one they had little to no input in creating and designing. I actually saw a real benefit for bigger class space but didn't like the attitude that the baby was being thrown out with the bath water in terms of how we were to teach. To cut what could be a very long story short I believe that the education sector has now got it right. Teachers are listened to in regard to the now symbiotic relationship between pedagogy and environment and parents have been listened to in regard to providing an environment that can provide for their student, the neighbour's student, the student who lives 2 streets over.....in fact all students, and one that can offer all types of learning and in a variety of settings.

I appreciate that just as there are those parents and caregivers that are joyful in the movement to a new environment and the adaptation and adoption of teaching new teaching strategies that there are those parents and caregivers who are fearful, who are worried that their child will be lost or uncatered for in the new environment and it is this latter group of stakeholders that we as a school staff and board need to reassure that this is not going to be the case. Let me make it clear right and here and now, 15 months out from what is our potential transition date that I do not have all the answers and where I don't I'll do my best to try and find the answer for you. What we do have though is 15 months to ensure we are prepared both in resources and pedagogy so that we can transition to the new sight as seamlessly as possible.

You've heard me use the word Flexible Learning Environment so let me explain what that is.

- A flexible learning environment is one where the school adapts the use of resources such as staff, space, and time to best support personalization." So, what does personalization mean? Well, it's a combination of different structures, instructional strategies, and curricular approaches that allow a child to have access to what they need when they need it, to know what their next steps are in their learning, and to pursue areas of strength and interest. We use the terms flexible learning environments, customized pathways, and competency-based progressions to frame our understanding of the elements necessary to create a personalized experience for children.

Through visits to other schools who are on their FLE journey I feel comfortable in stating that we are building a new school at the right time and this is reflective of what I witnessed particularly in schools that were taking out walls between traditional classrooms and calling them FLE's. The inherent problem here is that the space is not built for purpose. For the best part the teachers and students made it work and work well, but I couldn't shake the feeling that it was just not quite right. It was like putting a mustang engine in a Morris minor. A modern engine in an out-dated shape. The car would run like a dream, but it would never-ever feel or look right, all the time knowing full well if all the parts of the car had been purpose built it would've been second-to-none. And that's why our teaching pedagogy needs to adapt as we transition to Blake Road. By inserting traditional, teacher-centred industrial age teaching pedagogies as the sole form of the transmission of knowledge into an environment that is designed to offer flexibility in what we teach & learn, how we teach & learn, and where we teach & learn is simply not going to be effective and a colossal waste of resources. Stonefields school that Mis TJ visited showed her just how powerful purpose built FLE's can be when structure and organised correctly.

Let me summarise where we are at on our journey for you right now

- Staff have spoken to the builders, project manager and architects of the Blake Road build and have input into the floor plan of the teaching spaces.
- Some staff have been to look at school's that are using FLE 's and associated pedagogies. The intention is that all staff over the next 15 months will have had viewed schools of this nature.
- Teaching staff have agreed that our pedagogy needs to change/develop to adapt to our new environment and all are on board for doing so.
- The parent community has been surveyed for priorities and the staff being prepared for the 2020 and keeping the parent body informed have been recognised as very important.

Where to from here

- Staff continue visiting and learning from other schools' experiences
- Teacher receive PL&D from professionals experienced in the area
- We start to collectively plan together (that is use processes and procedures as we would in a FLE)
- We slowly start to adapt and use FLE pedagogies into our classroom teaching strategies this year.

I would like to leave you with paragraph from Principal Lesley Murrhoy of Amesbury School in Wellington.

- From my perspective, Flexible Learning Environments are not about doing teaching and learning in a particular way, but about doing it in whatever way is needed to meet the ever-changing needs of students. It is about having a broad range of approaches (including the most effective from traditional education - explicit teacher instruction, for example), programmes, processes, tools, teachers and spaces that can be utilized as needed in response to students' needs. Like all schools, we have students with quite a range of special needs including students with high sensory sensitivity, high anxiety, ASD, processing disorders, sight and hearing impairment etc. A flexible approach to space, learning and people, enables us to meet the needs of these students. We can create calm spaces, for example, for students with ASD, high anxiety and high sensory sensitivity - without them feeling isolated from the rest of the students. We have pop up tents within the learning spaces, so that students who need to can work without being visually distracted but still feel part of the hub. Whether traditional classroom spaces, or MLE, no environment perfectly meets the needs of every student. We all have to problem solve to overcome limitations and create the teaching and learning environment required at the time. However, greater flexibility in architecture and in the ways we think about space and flexible pedagogical approaches do assist schools' ability to do this