

BELFAST SCHOOL

Belfast, Christchurch

Full Primary

Decile: 5

Roll: 377

Ethnicity: Pakeha: 76% Maori: 15% Pacific Island: 3% Asian: 6%

Principal: Peter Simpson

History

1997 was a difficult year for Belfast School. There were a number of suspensions, a group of boys was causing widespread trouble in the school and a significant number of students left for other schools. The Principal and the Board felt that they were responding to the crisis in a reactive rather than a pro-active manner, and that creative thinking followed by decisive action was required of them. A parent meeting was called. A strong letter advised that the meeting would be very important and that all parents needed to be there – consequently attendance levels were very good, and, with the support of parents, a process began which led to the current, very successful, school-wide values programme.

At first the programme was referred to as a “behaviour recovery programme”. It was designed to meet an immediate need with specific features to deal with the current group of students exhibiting anti-social behaviour. As this aspect of the programme achieved results, however, the programme modified and evolved into a school-wide culture change that is firmly based in the school’s **Golden Rules: Care Share Learn and Grow.**

Systems

- The Board and Principal were sufficiently concerned about the need to deal decisively with the patterns of anti-social behaviour among some students, that they decided to go against what has been considered best practice by creating a withdrawal class. The students were sometimes with their own classes but a mixed level group was formed with a view to concentrating almost entirely on literacy, numeracy and social skills. The students in the group, which numbered between 10 and 14, were all boys, the predominant group being from Year 4.

- Teacher Aids assisted with the withdrawal class, and the Deputy Principal was freed up to work with the students full-time. Every student was on an individual programme.
- A regular fortnightly meeting was held with the parents of the students in the class – the agenda included information, discussions, sessions on parenting skills. This parent group was very supportive of what the school was doing.
- “This behaviour is not acceptable and here are the consequences” became the basis of a major culture change.
- As results were achieved with the primary troublemakers, a more positive “strand” was added to the system in order to shift attention to the wider school. The school decided on a programme of what they have come to refer to as their “Golden Rules”, using the key statement: **Care Share Learn Grow**. This is presented in a variety of modes all over the school, including posters, and is well known and understood by all students.
- A detention system was set aside as being too negative at this stage, and was replaced with a Referral System. This operates across the school. It begins with a comment from the teacher drawing attention to the behaviour and linking it, if possible, with the Golden Rules. If that is not enough, the name goes on the board, again referring back to the values. At this stage if improvement is achieved the name is rubbed off. If not the child may be required to sit and reflect on the behaviour that has caused the trouble and fill in a Referral Sheet where they must write out what it is they have done and what their time of reflection has led them to realise. Three referrals result in the cancellation of treats such as trips. Further interventions include meetings with parents, and the signing of good behaviour contracts.
- While none of the detail in the Referral System is in any way unique or new, it is managed well, with clarity and simplicity resulting in the whole school community knowing exactly what is expected and what the sanctions will be. The Principal exercises clear leadership, making his view well-known that he will not tolerate other students’ learning being disrupted by anti-social behaviour among their peers.
- Staff are supportive of the programme. There appears to be efficiency and consistency in their management of it. At appointment it is made very clear that support for the programme is essential. Teachers may use their own techniques and methods in the classroom – the Principal is keen to encourage this – but the basic requirements of the referral system and the values must be followed. Once the child’s name is on the board it is expected that the school-wide system operates.
- The “positive strand” has been developed further in recent times with a school song adding expression to the Golden Rules. This is sung regularly at assemblies and other events. The school environment provides frequent reminders of the values, and behaviour expectations. A “Climb the Mountain” chart is displayed in the lobby of the Administration building, featuring names

of children who have been seen demonstrating the values. They receive certificates and work their way up the levels of the mountain in a points system. Prizes and draws are attached to their progress, on a twice-yearly basis. This reward system is very popular and has contributed to the culture change for which the school has achieved national awards. There is a regular programme of workshops and information sessions for parents.

- Social skills and manners were observed as being very positive, and in the classrooms that were visited students were on task, in a cheerful and happy working atmosphere.

Results

- The school's financial position was negatively affected following the setting up of the withdrawal programme with the attendant requirement for extra teacher support. This took some time to rectify and was achieved with the support of sponsorship, a factor which not only rescued a difficult situation for the Board and Principal, but also signalled community support for what was happening at the school and its values.
- The Principal spoke of his "gut feeling" and regular anecdotal evidence that the culture of the school is significantly improved. Ero in 2004 referred to a "positive" tone in classrooms "with teachers setting high expectations for classroom behaviour." "Teachers follow sound classroom management routines that are resulting in few instances of disruptive behaviour." "...students said that they knew what was expected of them and understood the consequences for inappropriate behaviour. They said that while isolated instances of bullying exist at the school, they are provided with strategies and support for dealing with these. A strength of the school is the level of pastoral care that exists among staff and students and the focus on ensuring that students are able to work and interact in a safe, supportive environment."
- The number of referrals, stand-downs and suspensions is right down.
- The school's reading targets are being met.
- After the initial loss of students that occurred in 1997 there has been a trending back up in the school's roll. There are now a number of foreign fee-paying students on the roll. The parent community is supportive of the values programme and happy that their children are in a safe environment.

Key Features

- This is a school which has made very big changes to its tone and culture, its reputation in the community and the learning outcomes of its students through a well-managed and consistently applied values programme.

- The Principal talks about the values programme, his school and his ideas for its development with energy and enthusiasm. His leadership is a key factor in the success of the values programme at Belfast.
- Simplicity, clarity and consistency are the features that make this school's system work well. While none of the particulars of the programme are original, Belfast has found systems and ways of articulating their values that work for them. They have had the courage to proceed in ways that they have felt is right for their community and its needs.