

REPORT ON VALUES EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS

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The Brief

To visit a group of nominated schools in order to verify that each school has a values programme operating that is making a difference to teaching and learning and to the culture of the school.

No set values programme is specified, but the system in place must be referred to in school as a values or character or virtues programme.

The intention is to set up a range of schools with successful values programmes in operation, as models for other schools.

The report is to be prepared in such a manner that it is suitable for publication to different sector groups.

Introduction

Sixteen schools were visited from Whangarei in the north to Dunedin in the south. They include full primary and capped primary schools, state, integrated and independent schools, schools with a long tradition of Christian values emanating from a church foundation, and secular schools. There are variations represented in ethnic groupings, and decile ratings. Most of the schools represented are primary or composite. All schools self-nominated or were nominated by someone who knew of a values programme they believed to be successfully in place.

While the number of schools surveyed for this report is small, the information gathered is likely to be useful as an indicative sample of what can be done to implement an effective values programme in any school. All schools visited have indicated an interest in helping other schools who may wish to investigate or implement similar programmes.

While the brief limited this report to the nominated schools it is clear that there are other schools which have effective and well-established programmes in place. In the light of recent indications that the Ministry of Education intends that values be given a renewed focus, a wider survey may be useful in order to achieve a clearer picture of the breadth of work in this area that is being carried out in New Zealand schools. This

information fell outside of the current brief, but would seem to be of importance going forward.

We would like to thank all the principals, deputy principals and chaplains we visited, for their time, efficiency and the warmth of their hospitality. We were privileged to enjoy a series of interesting conversations with enthusiastic and committed professionals who are making a difference in their schools.

Method

In every case an interview was conducted with the principal, the deputy principal or the chaplain. In some cases more than one staff member was involved in the visit. A tour of relevant aspects of the school was included in most visits.

The interview was organised around a consistent set of questions. These focused on:

- The history of values in the school
- How the current system was devised and established.
- Current methods and systems for its management
- Results achieved
- Future plans for further development of the programme
- Any concerns the principal or the school might have or be working on

Each school report also includes a brief summary of key features that characterise its programme.

THE REPORTS

Executive Summary

Introduction

A clear pattern emerged that was evident in all schools. Whether the school has a long history of Christian values derived from a church foundation, or the current values programme began with someone attending a seminar and being impressed by an established values system, all the programmes observed are evolutionary in nature, very active in a day-to-day sense in school and are modified to meet the needs of that school's community and the times in which we live. All the values systems observed had their beginnings in a known and established system. None, however, has implemented an established system literally or in its entirety. It is the modifications to the established system that give each school its own character. These schools all have well-developed language systems for their values with terminology that is constantly in use and well-understood across all age ranges. All schools demonstrated a depth and inclusiveness of commitment to the programme across the school community, drawing in staff, Board and parents.

Conclusions

- The principal is central to the on-going success of any values programme. In our opinion this point cannot be over-estimated. The values of the school emanate from the role-modelling and the enthusiasm of the principal, whose hands-on approach is necessary for the continuing liveliness and evolution of the programme. They use assemblies and reward programmes to actively involve themselves. They make regular use of professional development for staff. Most of the principals we interviewed see ways of linking other developments in school, such as thinking programmes, student management programmes and community programmes to the school's values. They draw in a breadth of material gleaned from their reading to give their values programmes freshness and currency.
- Board support for the programme is an important factor in its success. We noted wide-spread active involvement of boards in the values in these schools. This means having a clear understanding of the values that the school seeks to promote, probably because they have been actively involved in the creation of the school's values system, and integrating them into their own activities. One school reported that their board works on the principle that "it starts with us".
- All schools visited began with a standard established values programme and have, over time modified it to suit their needs. A common pattern historically has been to start with quite a literal interpretation that is formal in nature with carefully set procedures that separated the values programme from other school activity. Gradually this formality has given way to a more natural system where the values are well-integrated into all school activity so that

everyday school life becomes coloured by the values, and less discrete focus is required.

- Parent involvement is variable, and depends on the individual school's community. All schools consider informing parents of the school's values as of central importance, but choose a variety of approaches to the active involvement of parents. All schools use the regular newsletter as a means of keeping parents informed of values-related activity. Several schools reported very active parent involvement. This often includes parents using the same values terminology at home and trying to carry on the school's approach as part of family life. All schools reported that parents are very happy with their values programmes. But some schools actively separate home from school particularly in the matter of the link between behaviour modification and values. Some schools involved parents in the setting up of the values programme, conducting surveys before establishing a set of values. Some schools surveyed parents later to seek feedback. Some schools, particularly schools with a long history of Christian values, did not survey parents or involve them because they consider that there is a clear expectation from parents in choosing the school that the values will be Christian values. Some schools have excellent documents specifically designed for parents about the school's values.
- Terminology is a crucial aspect of a successful values programme. The words must be clear, consistently applied and regularly used. We found a variety of "values languages" in use, some very cleverly devised to suit a particular school and its community. (The "bug word" is an effective example, in use at Te Papapa School). In all cases principals reported that even the youngest children could learn the values words and how to apply them. One principal spoke of the psychological concept that states that if you change a person's language you change their behaviour. We saw that concept working effectively in a number of schools where behaviour modification was successfully going on among students who were being encouraged to reflect on inappropriate behaviour using the values language of their school.
- All schools reported a significant link between their behaviour modification practices and the values they promoted in school. We visited schools that had been turned around with the implementation of a values programme that underpinned their student management programmes. The advantage of linking "discipline" with the values is clear. Working with students who need to change their behaviour can be non-punitive, and can emphasise a positive approach through giving a teacher and the child a common language with which to reflect on what has happened, who has been affected and what needs to change. These schools all reported that a change had occurred in the nature of the relationship between the adults in school and the students. They all reported much less necessity for more formalised discipline and punishments. They all noted an emphasis on the positive that is provided by an active values programme.
- The physical environment of the school is affected by the values and becomes a demonstration of them. Respect for others and the environment is reflected

in bright, attractive classrooms with values displays in evidence, and in clean, child-friendly outdoor areas, often with values-related projects in evidence such as the creation of gardens by students, or a “no bins” policy. We saw students painting murals, involved in re-cycling projects and conservation projects, or creating their own values-based rules and guidelines for the use of outdoor spaces. The school environment is well-used in the schools we visited as a practical exercise for their values.

- Most principals indicated that measuring the success of their programmes is not easy to do, especially in terms of statistics. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence such as positive parent and community feedback that indicates that providing a values foundation for a school will have positive effects on what goes on in the classroom. In every case, though visits were of necessity relatively brief, the overwhelming impression was of calm, orderly, respectful and pleasant school environments. ERO reports of these schools support this impression. The obvious conclusion is that if classrooms are orderly and children respectful then learning is likely to be enhanced. In several schools a strong point is made of the need for children to learn that behaviour which disrupts the learning of other children is unacceptable and respecting the right of other students to learn is very important. Some principals referred to their various learning goals, usually relating to literacy and numeracy, being attained or exceeded. Others spoke of roll growth and parents keen to secure a place for their children because it is known that children will do well in their schools. Most values programmes include values relating to the importance of hard work and making the most of learning opportunities. Some values programmes make clear links between the curriculum and values concepts so that integration appears seamless. Thinking skills can be worked in very effectively and there are schools that are well ahead in this area. This subject is where some of the newest thought is to be found and is one that may be of particular interest to other schools, even schools which already have some kind of values system in place.
- There are strong indications that the most successful schools are those that constantly evolve and review their programmes. They want to ensure what they do remains fresh and lively. They want to keep up-to-date with community expectations and the times in which we live. They see new developments in learning and pedagogy in terms of their values. The best values programmes are those which retain the base values and traditions but constantly look out for ways to improve the delivery.
- Most of the schools visited were primary and intermediate schools. We share the concerns expressed by some of the principals: “What happens when they leave us?”

