

GEORGE STREET NORMAL SCHOOL

Location Dunedin

Primary (Years 1 to 6)

Decile 9

Roll 400

Ethnicity Pakeha 78%; Maori 6%; Pacific 3%; Asian 8%

Principal Rod Galloway

History

The current principal, Rod Galloway, was appointed to George Street Normal School at the start of this year. Previously he had been at Weston School where he introduced most successfully a values programme based on the Cornerstone Values approach to building character. When he came to George Street he had Board approval to introduce a similar programme immediately. There was no consultation with staff or parents. He started on the first day, by asking the staff for their support.

Mr Galloway now uses a modified version of the Cornerstone Values approach with the addition of his own material. For example he uses songs, which have always been part of the Cornerstone approach, to support the values. The programme is referred to as Character Education, and the aim is to build strength of character in students. The belief is that character education is about behaviour outcomes, because students are provided with information and practice in making informed decisions about their behaviour. The programme is also about shaping a school culture.

Mr Galloway believes that groups of schools working together on the values programme provide very valuable support and offer useful opportunities for shared ideas and resources. His reasons for choosing to introduce the Cornerstone approach to building character in his schools rather than other values programmes are as follows:

- Character education is good practice
- The Cornerstone approach is well researched and well-established.
- Twenty-eight of the world's most successful societies have eight values in common – these are the values that form the basis of the Cornerstone Values. They provide the foundation for a society, and a code of behaviour.
- A school is a mini society.
- The Cornerstone approach has its origins in the work of CS Lewis, though modern terminology is used to make the material more accessible to young people living in the twenty-first century.

- The system has a focus on the conservation of good in a school. The idea is that if the good elements are prevented from deteriorating then restoration is less necessary.

Mr Galloway speaks at Dunedin College of Education. He organises conferences on the Cornerstone Values approach to building character, is the Chairman of the New Zealand Foundation for Character Education, and has undertaken a sabbatical for a year during which he researched the effectiveness of the Cornerstone approach at Weston School. He has also visited the Colombine schools in the United States. His research, “The Purpose and Place of Character Education in New Zealand Schools” is on the New Zealand Foundation for Character Education website: (www.cornerstonevalues.org)

Method and Systems

- The principal gives teachers a Cornerstone Values resource folder each term with material in it relating to the term’s value. The content of this folder is non-negotiable and forms the basis of the values work for the term. Teachers must teach a lesson on the current value, engage in the teaching and learning related to it, include the value in their lesson plans, provide displays in the classroom and teach the song.
- The principal reinforces the concepts relating to the value in assemblies and newsletters. Full details are supplied at the start of each new term, and then more material follows each week.
- The principal puts out a CD each term with four songs on it, a waiata, a “modern” song, a fun action song and a song which celebrates the value of the term.
- Clear expectations are set down for social behaviours – for example how students will greet one another and staff.
- There are no set “discipline” procedures. All behaviour management is a part of the values programme.

Results

- A survey of parents was undertaken one term after the programme began at George Street School. When asked what they liked the response was that they liked the caring atmosphere in the school, and they liked the principal’s value of the term.
- Anecdotally the principal reports that the programme is already having a very positive effect on behaviour.
- The Cornerstone website (www.cornerstonevalues.org) provides information on a survey that was done in thirty-one New Zealand schools with positive results.

Key Features

- The principal's leadership is central to the success of the programme.
- Teachers are well-supported with detailed information to assist in their work with students.
- The concept of groups of schools working together is suggested as an approach to provide support and consistency of approach.
- The Cornerstone programme is well-documented, some research into its effectiveness is available, and it is now well established in a number of New Zealand schools.