

KARORI WEST NORMAL SCHOOL

Location Wellington

Full Primary (Years 1-8)

Decile: 8

Roll: 336

Ethnicity: Pakeha: 55%; Maori 15%; Asian 14%; Pacific Islands 12%

Principal: Janice Shramka

History

In 2000 a staff member from Karori West Normal School attended a seminar on the Virtues Project and undertook the training. She returned to school sufficiently impressed and committed to persuade the Principal and the school to begin implementation. Later she was appointed teacher-in-charge of the Virtues programme.

The school has a community that is culturally, socially and spiritually diverse. It was important, therefore, to find a system that was universally acceptable. A community survey in 2003 resulted in a higher than usual level of response from parents, and the feedback was extremely positive in support of the virtues. Pacifica parents, particularly, demonstrated high approval because they felt that the system reflected what they tried to do at home.

Karori West felt that they had a good student management programme prior to setting up the Virtues Programme, but they were keen to implement something that led to more internalised behaviour decisions. Rather than well-behaved children as a result of imposed discipline they wanted children to be able to make good decisions, choosing appropriate behaviours that they value for themselves rather than because they will win a material reward. Consequently the school has moved away from prizes and rewards in favour of praise and encouragement for good behaviour choices. Even the youngest children are able to name the virtue and have a discussion about what they can do to reflect a virtue, or sort out a problem where a virtue is missing.

The language of the virtues is used across the school and is well understood. Three of the five strategies are in regular use: Speak the Language; Set Clear Boundaries; and Make use of Teachable Moments. The school's anti-bullying procedures have benefited from being brought into line with the virtues programme, particularly the aspect of ensuring that bullying is reported and brought out into the open. Peer Mediation (Cool Schools) is another aspect that works well within the virtues programme. The Peace Foundation (www.peace.net) has also been a source of useful and easily assimilated material.

As with all other schools running successful values programmes, Karori West Normal School does not attempt to teach values separately. The virtues permeate everything that goes on and provides a firm foundation for decision-making. The virtues are an essential aspect of their Mental Health Programme, however.

Systems

- Staff decide from the list of 52 virtues, those which they want to focus upon as a school.
- Many visual examples of the virtues are displayed around the school and in classrooms.
- Teaching staff work the current virtue into day-to-day teaching material wherever it is appropriate.
- The management and teachers work on the principle that you must create the environment first and then seek to achieve buy-in from the community. It does not work, they say, to try to implement values and then seek to model them. They set themselves the goal of being a caring school first, then found they had strong support for their virtues programme. “We’re a whanau where we look after each other”. Examples include the fact that children are fed when necessary, with no questions asked. Teachers are called by their Christian names in an optional system that aims to acknowledge that the school is a family. This, they say, does not result in a de-valuing of the teacher or lack of respect. The Principal is referred to as Janice even by very young children. During our visit we saw many instances of warm, kind and open relationships with children. We saw students who were friendly, polite, happy and confident.
- Parents are kept informed of the virtues work that is going on in school. There is a parents’ guide to the virtues which some use.
- The school has moved away from an emphasis on material rewards for good behaviour. Still in place is a system of certificates that constitute formal acknowledgement of the virtue. The students who win these have morning tea with the Principal. Also at the end of each term this is an Outstanding Student’s Award – usually won by the “salt-of-the-earth, quiet contributors”.

Results

- The Principal reports that students are much more able to be intrinsically responsible for their own behaviour. They do not need imposed discipline or rewards. While there will still be issues around inappropriate behaviour, there is a complete understanding that there will be a discussion and fair consequences.
- The school has a growing roll and strong parent approval.
- A recent ERO report says: “A school-wide virtues programme supports teachers’ expectations for positive attitudes and behaviour. A range of effective and appropriate teaching practices is evident in many classrooms. These include maintaining positive and affirming interactions with students...students are friendly, happy and confident....they clearly articulate

the school's expectations for positive behaviour and confirm that their school is a safe place to learn and play.”

Key Features

- Strong leadership from the Principal who demonstrates the virtues in a particularly warm and caring manner.
- A teaching staff who strongly support the virtues programme and are now experienced at effectively integrating the virtues into their daily practice.
- Karori West has taken an established programme and used it intelligently and confidently in order to formulate a system that works well for their community.