

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AT HRC

Determining the WHY and WHAT

This paper outlines the proposed plan for undertaking an extraordinary and notable strategy development exercise at Halswell Residential College (HRC). It is highly likely this process will lead to a significant change in the school curricula delivered at HRC.

As Board members, you share a common purpose of ensuring all students receive the best possible education. The main responsibilities of Boards are the future of the school and improving student achievement. As such, your feedback on this proposed plan is welcomed.

1. BACKGROUND

Historically, residential schools played a very different role in society to the one they play now. In the 1980s the key function of Halswell Residential College was to manage special needs students who could not be catered for in mainstream schools. Students were enrolled and completed the majority of their education at HRC, with some staying over a decade. Gradually, mainstream schools became better equipped to meet the needs of learning support students and it was recognised that long periods at a residential school could lead to institutionalisation.

After the closure of Waimokoia Residential School, the Ministry of Education transferred the funding into a new wraparound service to cater for students in their local school. In 2012 the Ministry argued that there was no longer a need for residential schools in New Zealand and all student needs could be met with wraparound services. The community did not agree and 94% of the submissions regarding the planned closure supported the schools remaining open.

Soon after, the notional roll for HRC was reduced from 90 to 64, and then 32. This required 39 redundancies and the restructure enabled an opportunity to rethink how HRC operated. In the early days of residential schooling, the residences had provided a type of boarding service for what was perceived to be the more important, day school. During the 2012 restructure at HRC, a focus on 24/7 education 'Where Living is Learning' was developed. Residential job descriptions were changed to reflect a stronger emphasis on education in the residences. A new residential curriculum highlighting the development of adaptive behaviours and social skills necessary to live independently in society was introduced. The lead worker for each Individual Education Programme (IEP) was no longer the

classroom teacher but a residential IEP co-ordinator. Staff with qualifications in psychology and education were recruited, moving from the previous focus on social work qualifications.

HRC, Salisbury School and Westbridge Residential School then became part of the Intensive Wraparound Service (IWS) and student enrolment became via the IWS pathway only. Tenures average one year. IWS students are drawn from the top five percent of the most complex and challenging in New Zealand. This has changed HRC's cohort. The previous cohort comprised a few extremely challenging students amongst a majority of special needs students with some behavioural issues. After IWS became HRC's referring group, the majority of the cohort consisted of students presenting with extremely complex and challenging behaviours and significant mental health issues.

Like any school, HRC has attempted to modify its programme to provide the best-practice evidence-based programmes that address the needs of its cohort. However, there is now a need to move beyond strategic-tweaking to a thorough strategy development process. Strategy development is not the same as strategic planning. The latter occurs annually as the Charter is developed. Strategic development, however, addresses the risk that a school becomes a 'Christmas-tree decoration school' - a term used to describe a school that runs a variety of programmes with no overall co-ordination but built when a school continues to implement a number of new shiny things they see.

IWS recently introduced measures they have identified as critical to student success. The 'IWS Life Predictors' are based on the Predictors of Life Outcomes from the Dunedin Longitudinal Study. IWS now targets and measures five dynamic factors that predict life outcomes and influences these to improve long-term life outcomes. These include: 1. Self-control of behaviour and emotion. 2. Social competence and interpersonal skills. 3. Attitudes, values and perceptions. 4. Relationships with family and/or caregivers; and 5. Access to, and achievement in, safe and pro-social environments.

Residential schools are part of IWS, but their curricula are not entirely aligned with the IWS life predictors and measures of student success (which are therefore also the residential schools' measure of success).

Given the change in residential school purpose, cohort needs and success measures, now is the time for HRC to consider exactly what we aim to achieve with students within the short window they are at the residential school while working in conjunction with wraparound services supporting the whanau and community. Residential schools are in a unique position to provide a unique curriculum. Providing potential programmes that are not available in mainstream schools also adds weight to the reason why residential schools exist, and future-proof the schools against another review.

2. STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Rachel Curtis and Elizabeth City (2009) in *Strategy in Action: How School Systems Can Support Powerful Learning and Teaching* argue that there are particular characteristics that demonstrate the differences between strategic planning and strategy development in education. These are identified below and highlight how the strategic development process provides an opportunity for a school to evaluate the ‘why’ and ‘what’ of their curriculum.

STRATEGIC PLANNING VERSUS STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT: TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS IN EDUCATION

<i>Strategic planning</i>	<i>Effective strategy development</i>
<i>Status quo:</i> tends to focus on organizing current work; often approached as a compliance activity	<i>Innovation:</i> draws on research and best practices and pursues new, promising ways of accelerating improvement; builds organizational conviction
<i>Emphasis on external audience:</i> written for external stakeholders and serves as the public document outlining the system’s work	<i>Emphasis on internal audience:</i> developed to drive how the system focuses the work of its staff and deploys its resources
<i>Broad and incremental:</i> responds to a wide array of needs; there’s something for everyone; focuses on slow and steady improvement	<i>Deep and intentional:</i> focuses on doing a few things well; aims for a mix of incremental improvement and growth realized in leaps and bounds
<i>Discrete:</i> includes a series of distinct initiatives that have limited relationship to one another and can each be pursued and measured independently	<i>Interdependent:</i> integrates a few key initiatives that require cross-functional team collaboration; when executed together, they yield powerful results
<i>Easy fit:</i> fits within the current organizational structure and ways of doing business	<i>Demands change:</i> requires organization to function differently to execute; the focus is on being intentional and working together to do something big that no single person or department can do alone
<i>To-do list:</i> lists initiatives and activities with timelines that, if tracked, are checked off as things “done”	<i>Ways of thinking and being:</i> develops the capacity of staff to think systemically, plan intentionally, track and evaluate work in light of data, reflect on experience to learn, and continuously look for ways to innovate and improve
<i>Static:</i> completed at a moment in time; revisited for the purpose of reporting on progress but seldom in response to new learning or data	<i>Dynamic:</i> developed on the basis of the best information available at that time; continually reconsidered and adapted in light of new learning and research, implementation experience, and qualitative and quantitative results

In a lecture I attended at Harvard University last year, City stated that Boards and Senior Leadership Teams must ask themselves, ‘What is our 2-minute talk we would say if we were in an elevator with a stranger and they asked us what our school’s strategy is?’. I am not convinced all the staff at HRC would say the same statement about what we deliver and why we are delivering it. I am also not convinced that it would be the same statement the BoT, MoE or parents would make. City argues that businesses are good at articulating why they exist. For example, ‘We make donuts’, ‘we clean cars’, ‘we build houses’. Educators need to all know what we are doing, but even more importantly our message should contain the ‘why’ of what we are doing because the strongest and leading

companies always include the 'why' in their statements. Planners must ask 'why' not just 'what' and 'how'. 'Why are we doing this?' is a key question that needs to be asked repetitively. City argues that educators get caught up on 'what' they need to do and 'how' they need to do it, but the key is 'why'. We are not just doing this because 'the System' says so and nor should our staff feel that way.

One disadvantage of not being specific about our purpose is that our purpose is then open to interpretation by others. For example, HRC is often mistaken as a place that offers respite care, or a placement for students who don't have a stable home. Unfortunately, at times referrers have viewed residential schooling not as an intervention to achieve specific goals, but a school placement at the end of the road when everything else has failed and no further options are available.

3. WHY?

HRC exists for a number of reasons. Here are a few that we currently do not articulate to stakeholders, referrers, or parents/caregivers, but are highly relevant:

- HRC exists to provide specially designed curricula, facilities, and highly trained staff to support students with learning needs and assist them to develop to their full potential.
- HRC exists to offer behaviour programmes that are specialised and applied consistently across the residential and school settings to enable accelerated behaviour change.
- HRC exists to offer stability and routines for students who are falling behind in education because their basic needs (food, sleep, etc) are unmet and consequently learning cannot be undertaken.
- HRC exists to offer a variety of different treatment modalities and teaching methods, designed to reach students who have not engaged in or had success with traditional methods of instruction.
- HRC exists to offer a holistic approach to education that develops skills in areas not offered by mainstream schools.
- HRC exists to offer students with complex and challenging behaviours and an intellectual or learning disability, immersion in tikanga, so that they may develop a connection to, understanding of and skills in their cultural heritage and consequently a sense of pride in who they are.

The 'why' needs to be explored further as part of this planned process. It needs to guide our 'what' and they both need to be encapsulated into a new mission statement.

4. WHAT?

As highlighted earlier, HRC enrolls a student for one year on average. Potentially during that year there could be less focus on academics than in the current curriculum or at other schools. That is not to say reading, writing, mathematics, health and fitness/Special Olympics would be removed from the day school curriculum as the benefits of these on student well-being and success has been strongly evidenced, however, removing some subjects could free up time for more focus on other areas essential for learning. Effectively, there is no point teaching a student science if they haven't first been taught how to learn.

As part of the review into 'why' and 'what', we will investigate the merits of:

1. Remodelling as a Therapeutic Boarding School (TBS); an educational institution that not only serves a therapeutic role, but also has a residential programme. Therapeutic programmes not only support students with behaviour concerns, mental health issues, and severe learning challenges but also aim to help students attain their highest educational potential. Therapeutic programmes offer students an academic programme that also includes psychological counselling. Other options for investigation include emotional-growth schools and residential treatment centre schools.
2. Investigate new programmes to support our 'why', for example:
 - Ready to learn programmes – to re-engage students who have been out of schooling for a long period or have not learned the skills required to learn. This may include play-based classroom learning for students with low cognitive function.
 - Anger Management programmes – evaluate current approach and investigate anger management programmes including mindfulness (including breathing, relaxation, well-being, etc) strategies daily for the whole school.
 - Social Skills Training – evaluate current approach, implement ENGAGE programme and investigate other social skills training programmes.
 - Independence and Adaptive Functioning Skills – evaluate current programmes based on ABAS and life skills focus (e.g.: catching a bus, reading a map, washing clothes, cooking a simple meal, etc.).

3. Investigate having one foot in Te Whāriki (Early Childhood Curriculum), as well as the New Zealand Curriculum as we develop our new curricula. In many respects the Te Whāriki curriculum includes much of what a child would experience at home in relationship with parents and family and community – for example, able to have a strong sense of belonging, well-being, making contributions, communicating, and exploring through play and family activities. This could be replicated in residential schooling.

4. Investigate implementing the Purposeful Use of Daily Life Events and Measuring Outcomes That Matter (DLE) framework. DLE is designed to help direct care practitioners so they become more pro-active and effective in daily interactions with young people and families. It involves a framework for recording and reporting the weekly achievement of resilience outcomes by children and young people in out-of-home care. This recording format employs the Circle of Courage framework of *Belonging, Mastery, Independence* and *Generosity* to cluster 20 developmental outcomes and aligns with the Te Whare Tapa Wha model.

5. THE PROPOSED PROCESS

This project has been developed using these four phases:

1. Initiation Phase: Identifying how to proceed.
2. Planning Phase: Determining the why and what of the curricula.
3. Implementation Phase: Roll-out of the curricula and staff training.
4. Embedding Phase: Use Teacher Inquiry Process to embed curricula.

Below is a proposed plan for the Initiation and Planning processes only.



6. CONCLUSION

The Education Review Office identify in their national evaluation report *Evaluation at a Glance: Priority Learners in New Zealand Schools* that, generally, schools are not developing and managing their curricula in ways that are responsive to learners. They noted that “in the most successful schools, the trustees, leaders and teachers have an uncompromising focus on fostering students’ interests and strengths, and on addressing their learning needs. They understand that their role is to serve students. Their philosophies about how students should experience education are lived out in rich learning programmes, thoughtful management of the curriculum, positive school cultures, and in effective leadership and governance practices. A synergy and coherence exist between these aspects that contribute positively to the whole experience of being a learner. Importantly, there is an ethic of care for students’ current and future success.”.

It is the intention of this proposed plan to ensure the HRC curricula serves our unique cohort. That it enhances learning outcomes for the very vulnerable students that enrol briefly at our school. As with the many collegians who remain in contact with the school well after they leave, we want to ensure a student’s time here is not only enjoyable but that they learn the skills that they may not otherwise acquire, skills that could change the trajectory of their life and serve them well for their future.