

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL  
Report to the Board of Trustees of  
Waitaki Boys' High School  
June 2014

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**Introduction:** This report should be read in conjunction with the Terms of Reference for Issues Investigation 12 June 2014, and the associated letter to the board from the Ministry of Education.

I was approached in June 2014 by the Waitaki Boys' High School Board of Trustees to conduct an independent issues investigation as identified by correspondence and discussions between the board and the ministry.

**The Investigation Process:** I travelled to Oamaru on four days (11, 12, 17 & 23rd June) and conducted 28 face to face interviews at a local hotel meeting room. I also held 7 telephone conversations and conversed through several emails. This included [ ] current staff, [ ] ex-staff, [ ] parents, plus a number of community members. Email conversations were also with staff, ex-staff, parents, students, and outside community members.

Each interviewee was shown the scope of investigation areas and a set of interview protocols which I asked them to agree to before proceeding with the interview. Handwritten notes were taken at each interview and I will retain these for 28 days, post meeting with the board, before destroying. These interviews were followed by meetings with the ministry and NZSTA before production of the report.

A number of interviewees offered supporting documents; some of these have been retained with others returned. The school also provided me with a large amount of documentation.

The report has been formulated as reflections of what I heard in the interviews and particularly areas that were repeatedly made. It is written against the scope areas however it also contains a number of other repeated allegations and concerns that do not fit easily into these but are, in my professional opinion, of significance.

This report has now been presented to the board chair and ministry of education via email; I will then meet with the board to discuss any facet they consider necessary and answer any questions as appropriate.

## The Investigation Findings:

### 1. You are requested to investigate if there is a culture of bullying in the school.

All persons interviewed shared opinions on this matter as reflected below:

- **Student to Student Bullying.** Those who shared on this point all accept that there is bullying prevalent between students at the school, with many claiming that it is not beyond that which is typical at these year levels. Others insist that there is a serious culture of student bullying including physical and emotional incidents. Management agree that there is bullying but they do not tolerate it and act on it, but that there is a natural 'silent culture' amongst boys who do not wish to be 'narks' or appear vulnerable, and so management do not necessarily hear of incidents. [

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- **Student to Staff Bullying.** Many complainants claim that there is significant deliberate and ongoing harassment of teaching staff by students, mostly based on the students' belief that there will be little or no consequences for their behaviour. Although the KAMAR and some form of referral systems are in place some teachers felt they are discouraged from fully utilising the process as 'it reflects on their inability to control or gain respect in the classroom'. [ Staff to Student Bullying. Some parents and management allege there to be a number of teachers who act inappropriately and have very poor classroom management skills, which have included bullying and singling out of students in an intimidatory manner. [

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- **Staff to Staff Bullying.** There would appear to be 2 'camps' formed in the staff of the school and there are allegations both ways of intimidation, bullying and ganging-up occurring. This would appear to be growing with the turnover of staff. [



**2. You are requested to investigate, has the turnover of staff been significant and why and has this had any noticeable effect on students and staff?**

The staff turnover in the past 12 – 15 months would be deemed as very significant in any organisation and is seen by many of the remaining staff, ex-staff, parents and wider community members as of high concern, and that it reflects much of the school's present culture.

School management have supplied a list of those who have left with simple explanations as to their reasons, however these are not necessarily the claims of those spoken with, including present and past staff. Most of these claim the above-listed culture of the school working environment as their underlying reasons for resignation. No exit interviews have been held to my knowledge and so this discourse remains.

However the perception of the wider community, including those potentially boarding families, is allegedly that most of these staff members were of a high quality and that the school must have serious problems within. This perception, fuelled by media attention, will be adversely affecting the school's reputation and potentially its enrolment numbers.

There are mixed feelings as to the overall effect on staff and students however a majority of those interviewed and conversed with consider that the amount of change is affecting student learning, staff culture, experience levels and institutional knowledge. I have also received some very positive remarks concerning some of the newer teachers in the school.

**Conclusion:**

The high turnover of particularly teaching staff at WBHS needs to be recognised as significant. The planned ERO visit in August may best determine the effect this is, or is not, having on student engagement, progress and achievement outcomes. However there is both staff and public perceptions that need addressed. The ERO report, once finalised, may support the school in public and media relations but much consideration is needed in regard to the staff turnover perceptions and disagreements.

**3. You are requested to investigate, do staff feel unsupported and if so how may that be remedied?**

There is a definite division amongst the staff, in that, there are those who express good levels of support from management and the school structure but also many claiming a total lack of support.

Key 'unsupported' areas expressed were:

- Student behaviour management. This area was discussed in every conversation held through this enquiry and stands out as a major point of concern. This dismantling of the previous system, although often acknowledged as needing an overhaul, without reputedly any adequate replacement has caused a significant rise in classroom misbehaviour, loss of all student to teacher respect, breakdown in effective discipline, defiance from students through to chaos and heading towards anarchy the interviewees have suggested. Management believe that matters of classroom behaviour management and systems are improving in 2014, and that the poor areas are within a small amount of classrooms. Staff, and some parents, interviewed express very little support in this area.
- Staff consultation. Many of those interviewed feel unsupported and undervalued through an inadequate amount of staff consultation by the management staff of the school. They speak of a lack of collegial working, with little to no real consultation but an atmosphere of directive and autocratic instruction.
- Board of Trustees. Many staff stated that they presently have no faith in the board of trustees and that it has 'swept most issues under the carpet' and that they have no effective channels of communication with the board as their overall employer, particularly when feeling unsupported or aggrieved with the school management. [

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How may this be remedied? There is unfortunately some staff who do not feel this can be remedied and have either 'resigned to this being the norm' or who are seeking employment elsewhere. Generally there is a feeling that the style of management needs to become more collegial, consultative and open to professional debate with 'safe' channels of communication developed.

Mostly those concerned would seek an open review which includes staff in the student behaviour and welfare areas.

**Conclusion:**

There is a divided staff in the school with many feeling great frustration particularly around supportive systems and management in student behaviour and welfare, but also in having an open collaborative atmosphere to work and meet in. I accept that the management are working on and continuously reviewing the behaviour procedures.

**4. You are requested to investigate, has information given to parents regarding funding of scholarships in the boarding establishment been accurate and adequate?**

There were not many people who expressed concerns around this issue however those who did remain frustrated at what they consider defensive and inadequate information. The parents, of whom some have contacted the board via written complaint, feel they were misled in the first instance but not being aware of the scholarships funding. They accept that the hostel may owe monies to the school previously loaned, however are not satisfied with the board chair's letter of 25 February 2014 or the recent letter from the board of trustees regarding their complaints and this investigation. The complainants are still adamant that they receive a full breakdown of hostel fees and some consideration toward reimbursement.

Their feelings and the public announcement of this situation has caused discontent, mistrust and again a negative public perception which the hostel and school can ill afford.

**Conclusion:**

Rightly or wrongly, this discontent amongst parents will be having an effect on the school's reputation, and potentially on student and boarding numbers and therefore need deliberate and considered reflection by the board and management. I do not feel that the awaited auditor's report will alleviate this tension and mistrust; I do feel that some 'opening of the books' and open korero would assist.

**5. You are requested to investigate, are claims of criticism of other schools in Oamaru valid?**

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Management also have spoken openly in my presence, at meetings with the board and in an interview, particularly critical of the local intermediate school.

There was also expressed concern at a perceived lack of willingness by the rector and school to work collegially with the other schools in the area and that much could be gained through this. There is a feeling that some publicly expressed 'plans' of WBHS would be far better received with some effective consultation before pronouncements are made.

**Conclusion:**

It would take quite some investigation to be able to fully determine if these criticisms are valid and would serve little purpose. Better professional relationships with the contributing schools and with the other secondary schools in collegial planning and community events would have a far more effective outcome to the current impasse. If the school is concerned at the entry levels of students from particular schools then a trusting relationship with these schools should be developed.



**Other areas of concern raised in discussions:**

A number of other matters were discussed during the interviews, telephone calls and emails which do not easily fit into the scope criteria but are of a significant enough risk for me to raise with the board. Those listed below are a summary of concerns raised by a number of people rather than an individual only.

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- Community engagement/communication. Many parents are concerned that there is poor communication with parents/whanau as a whole but in particular surrounding student behaviour and discipline. They do not feel involved well in the pastoral care or restorative practices performed at the school.
- KAMAR system. Many concerns were shared at the KAMAR system having no 'face' to it and that the staff have not been well trained in the student behaviour area. There were some frustrations also surrounding other school system structures.
- Board of Trustees. A large number of those interviewed shared that they would not approach the school's board as they feel they are not trustworthy, 'in the rector's pocket' and compromised. Some also feel the board is regularly used as a threat by the rector and management toward staff and students.
- State of property, buildings, rubbish, cleanliness. Many people expressed dismay at the current condition of the school property in particular a falling away of standards surrounding cleanliness and rubbish collection. Some claim the school 'smells'.
- Drugs. Many parents and staff talked of a growing drugs culture in the school and board establishment.
- School reputation. A lot of concern was shared regarding the school's present reputation and the potential lack of new enrolments in 2015. All areas covered in this report are considered the contributors to this loss of reputation.
- Lack of overall pastoral care for students and staff.
- Not an 'inclusive school, particularly for high needs and vulnerable students.

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- Other agencies shared concerns with me particularly surrounding student and staff welfare.

## Recommendations:

Having completed the investigatory side of this I have been able to reflect on all that was raised in order to offer my professional judgement through recommendations as below:

There is an urgent need for all these to be investigated or reviewed as listed from the 'inside-out' rather than this report from the outside perspective only.

That:

- The board of trustees immediately seeks and contracts an appropriate person or persons with adequate delegated powers and protection to fully investigate all the reported matters. If the board does not feel it has the capacity to administer this then consideration of requesting a statutory appointment should be considered.
- A review of all school based systems including student achievement, learning support and associated administration be performed for the board of trustees; much of this may be covered by the ERO visit in August.
- A full review of employment processes including policies, procedures, appointments records and associated administration be carried out. NZSTA has a newly formed HR Division which may be able to perform this including their comprehensive HR Audit Tool.
- A full review of staff welfare including policies, procedures, communication channels and associated administration be conducted which includes full consultation and involvement of staff at all levels.
- A full review of student welfare is performed including policies, procedures, KAMAR, community engagement and associated administration. This should include wide consultation involving staff, students, parent/whanau and outside agencies.

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- Staff who have resigned in the past 12 months are contacted and offered an exit interview, so as to clearly identify any areas for further investigation or review.
- A full review is performed regarding the governance practices and performance of the board of trustees. This could be assisted by NZSTA or internally with the ERO evaluative indicators for governance.
- A complete and satisfactory processing of all formal complaints received by the board toward resolution is immediately ensured.

### **Overall Conclusion:**

In my professional opinion Waitaki Boys' High School is certainly at a point of crisis and needs immediate and comprehensive commitment to rectifying a number of significant risks. The board of trustees is charged through the Education Act 1989, and via its own policy framework with ultimate accountability in all areas of the school and must take the leadership role of alleviating the serious concerns contained in this report. If these are left unattended there is a very high likelihood of seriously negative affects in student achievement, student welfare, staff welfare, staff turnover, plus health and safety complaints and personal grievances. The school's reputation and roll numbers are also seriously at risk.

I would recommend that the board of trustees perform deliberate reflection on this report, and also discuss their capacity and capability in handling these matters; and consider outside professional assistance or requesting a statutory appointee.

In all the interactions I had with staff, ex-staff, parents, management and other persons I would conclude that all persons expressed a passion and 'love' for Waitaki Boys' High School and that I found no persons whom I would consider vindictive or vexatious toward the school. As such I have no reason not to believe that the areas in this report are evident in the school and need immediate attention.

Cleave Hay

27 June 2014