

## **Amuri Area School Timetable Review**

### **Background**

1. In late 2011 a decision was made to trial a new timetable structure in 2012. If the new structure was not successful the school would revert to the old structure in 2013.
2. In the 7 October 2011 newsletter the principal outlined three main reasons for the changes. These were:
  - Disruption caused by students being taken out of regular classes so they could participate in programmes in areas such as Outdoor Education, Recreation, Gateway, Carpentry, Employment Skills, Rural Skills, and Hospitality.
  - The opportunity to meet the needs of subjects that would benefit from longer blocks of time – typically subjects that have large practical components.
  - The opportunity to offer two new subjects through Government initiatives – Multi-Trades and Primary Industries. Both these courses are offered in Christchurch on Thursdays and Fridays.
3. In the newsletter the principal stated: “We know of no other school that works like this – we are aware of schools that run two hour periods – but the new curriculum encourages and supports new thinking and ways of doing things”.
4. A review process to evaluate the effectiveness of the changes was set up in July 2012 and this document is the result of that.

### **Methodology**

1. Students, staff and parents were invited to meet with the reviewer over two days, on August 7 and August 10.
2. The reviewer met with the principal, deputy principal, timetabler and 12 teachers; nine individual students in years 11,12 and 13 and one year 12 class; six parents including the Board Chairperson.
3. Participants were invited to complete a questionnaire – results are outlined below.
4. Because the academic year was incomplete and because of very small numbers the review has focused on qualitative rather than quantitative data.

### **Questionnaire**

Participants were invited to complete a simple two question questionnaire. 13 staff members completed this. The results of this are as follows: (numbers in brackets after each option)

1. Do you think the changes introduced to the senior timetable this year have produced:

Significant benefits which outweigh disadvantages (5)

Probably more benefits than disadvantages (6)

Some benefits but probably more disadvantages (2)

No clear benefits (nil)

2. Next year would you like to see the changes that were introduced this year:

Continued in their present form (4)

Continued but modified (6)

Not continued (2)

Participants were also invited to add comments and a wide range of these were received. Comments from parents and students were collated alongside these.

### **Student Comments**

Student responses were positive about the concept and no student wished for a return to the previous model. There were aspects of the changes they did not like but the positives outweighed the negatives.

Positive comments:

- I can work in my own time
- We no longer waste as much time getting ready and packing up.
- In practical subjects students expressed approval about being able to focus on a project for four periods.
- Teachers sort out discipline problems faster when they are with the class for longer periods.
- Don't miss so much time in other subjects for events in areas such as Outdoor Education.
- A realisation that the school was working hard to meet their needs.
- Don't have to carry around lots of books.

Interesting comments:

- Absence from school creates bigger problems because you miss four hours of a subject.
- Course work for the year nearly complete (several subjects)
- It is more like the real world

Negative comments:

- In subjects with an academic focus there was less enthusiasm for four hour periods. Two hour periods were generally seen as a more favourable option.

#### Positive comments:

- It is less stressful not having to teach several subjects in one day.
- There is more opportunity to respond to 'teachable moments'.
- There is more group than individual work.
- Students tend to be self-regulating about when they have breaks.
- Teaching has become less autocratic.
- Students are more aware of attendance.
- Teachers from practical areas which need full days no longer feel guilty about taking students out of other classes.
- Completion of year's work early – teacher now able to offer 30 credits rather than 18.
- Opportunities for more work in the community.
- Student peer pressure seems to be more positive as opposed to negative in the old system.
- Good for work exploration.
- Will suit Hospitality when level 2 students have to go to Rangiora for assessment.
- Teachers giving more thought to how they teach.

#### Interesting comments:

- You cannot get away with minimal preparation. The stakes – good and bad – are higher.
- You need to be flexible.

#### Negative comments:

1. Year 11 students have found the transition more difficult.
2. "Lost Fridays". (This was a common comment)
3. Leaders out of the school two days a week.
4. Correspondence students having four study periods in a day is not working.
5. Academic subjects in four hour blocks seen as probably the major disadvantage. Two hours is seen as good for practicals but this is negatively impacted on by lack of laboratory space.
6. Language teaching is best when classes are short and frequent. This model produces the opposite and makes teaching languages very difficult.

#### Parent Comments

All parents spoken to were enthusiastic and positive about the new timetable and clearly saw benefits outweighing disadvantages.

### Positive comments

- Practical subjects much better in this model
- Appreciation of opportunities to do courses in Christchurch.
- Students reluctant to take days off school.
- Programme meets daughter's needs
- School – student – parent triangle strengthened.

### Negative comments

- Length of time in academic subjects makes it hard to concentrate.

### Recommendations

1. Overall the timetable changes are seen to be successful. While there are problems there is a clear consensus that the model be continued in 2013.
2. The model was developed with a focus on practical subjects and off site opportunities. The teachers of academic subjects that have been included in the four hour blocks, as well as students, find the time too long. Methods of addressing this need to be investigated.
3. Lost Fridays are an issue for many teachers. It seems this can be resolved for the remainder of this year and for next year.
4. The experience to date shows that in some practical subjects, course completion will be well before the end of the year. This provides a range of opportunities for enrichment, extension or enhancement and these should be investigated.
5. Successful teaching in two and four hour blocks requires careful planning and delivery. There is opportunity for professional development in this area so that teaching is as effective as possible.

### Conclusion

A radical change in the timetable has been implemented because of the good will and trust that exist in the school community. Several teachers who expressed reservations about its impact on their area were clearly enthusiastic about the wider benefits of what was being offered. There was a very clear understanding that benefits to students were the first priority.

I enjoyed the opportunity to work with the school community and I am sure that this model will attract widespread interest in similar schools.

Neil Lancaster

11 August 2012