

2018 Exit Interview Report

Hutt International Boys School

April 2016

BACKGROUND

Hutt International Boys School was interested in seeking the views of parents of departing students to determine a more comprehensive understanding of some of the school's strengths and possible areas for future development. The principal saw benefit in the engagement of an external consultant to oversee the project.

This report succeeded a similar survey completed in April 2016

The specific purpose of the interviews was to determine:

- The programmes and practices that have worked well for students
- The programmes and practices that have not been working well
- The ways the school could improve its existing programmes and practices

The school was asked to provide the names and contact numbers of all families of boys who had left the school at the end of 2017. The consultant was given a comprehensive spreadsheet of 104 boys in this category. Of these only 5 were recorded to have left before the end of Year 13 (this compares with 12 in 2016). In total 31 individual parents were contacted to express their views about the school.

The interviews were conducted during February / March 2018 when a randomly selected parent of each boy was contacted by phone. Although it was mothers who usually responded to the interviews, there were also a good number of fathers interviewed. Phone calls ranged in length from 10 minutes to 45 minutes.

It is very important to note that all parents were very keen to share their experiences of the school and were highly receptive to the questions being asked. Some requested return calls. As a number had boys in other Year levels or children at other schools, the information was invariably rich and informative. Some were aware of the survey completed in 2016 and most expressed their appreciation for the opportunity the school had provided for this discussion to take place.

The initial questions asked of parents were, "What is the school doing well?" and "What could the school be doing better?". When particular common themes emerged, more specific and targeted questions were then posed.

The results of the interviews were grouped in the following way:

1. Obvious Areas of Good Performance
2. Qualified Areas of Good Performance
3. Areas of Concern or in need of Development
4. Additional Points of Interest

RESULTS

As was expressed in the 2016 report, the difficulty in compiling the results of a survey of this type is to establish which of the comments and judgments parents made were general to a number of families and which were specific to a particular individual's circumstances. This report sought only to identify relatively common themes of good practice and general areas for development. As such, if only one or two parents expressed a particular point of view that was significantly contrary to the views of others, that view may not have been included in this report.

1. Obvious Areas of Good Performance

School leadership:

Senior management is universally well regarded by parents. Since Mike has taken leadership of the school improvements have been noted. Specifically mentioned has been the progress made in the focus on student academic performance, which has continued to improve in recent years.

The leadership team is viewed as being highly inclusive, collaborative and cohesive with Mike appearing to encourage shared leadership opportunities and responsibilities across his staff. Parents feel he is always trying to improve things for his students and their families, and his influence and respect among parents, within his principal position, has commensurately increased in recent times.

Parents clearly acknowledge that Mike is committed to the school, interested in the students and approachable to parents. He communicates well through school newsletters which remain regular and informative.

“Mike’s a great leader” “He’s a bloody good man”

Students:

By the time students leave HIBS in Year 13 they have become a very loyal and tight knit group. They have shown a great sense of commitment to the school and pride in its achievements. Significant in this is that this level of attachment and connection with the school increases as the boys move through the year levels.

Almost all parents observed that their boys were always happy to come to school and that they felt safe and supported at all times. No obvious bullying culture was mentioned. Students were encouraged by staff and peers to be who they were and become what they wanted to be. There were many stories told by parents of students lacking in confidence in their earlier years but blossoming later within the close friendships they made and under the positive culture that prevailed.

The school fostered and encouraged a wide variety of leadership opportunities, especially among the older students. Systems and structures have been established that have enabled older students to support their younger schoolmates (Tutor group model). To some extent, this has contributed to the college’s high level of academic achievement and to the respect and understanding seen among students across and within the various year groups. The notion of the school as a ‘family’ was seen as being fostered.

Parents acknowledged that their boys were well situated with the study and life skills they would need for future study and work opportunities and experiences (Resulting in the confidence given to a number of boys presently completing a gap year in England).

“He did better at secondary school than we thought he would”. (*common theme*)

“Bar was set high by his peer group”

Teaching:

Parents were united in their understanding of the consistently high quality of teaching their boys received throughout their time at HIBS. They felt that teachers were very responsive, were helpful and provided good guidance to their pupils when this was required. When dealing with parents, teachers were thought to be appropriately positive and appeared always receptive to parental feedback. With very few exceptions, teachers were seen to be very caring and understanding of the needs of their students.

The curricular and extracurricular opportunities provided were adequate and appropriate. School resourcing was good. Appreciated by parents, there has been in recent times a stronger focus on the delivery of Maori programmes.

Teachers have high expectations that students will strive for excellence. The academic performance of its students is a priority school-wide. Classroom programmes respond effectively and suitably to the various skill levels and interests of all students. Teachers know their subject areas well. Gifted and talented students, and students with special needs, were well catered for. The curriculum content and approaches to delivery were responsive to the diversity of student interests and abilities. This was the case for sporting and cultural pursuits as well as academic achievement.

Communication between teachers and parents was generally strong and continued to improve each year. Teachers provided students and their parents with quality time to discuss issues as they arose. They were accessible, approachable and forthcoming. Parent teacher meetings were always very effective, and teachers were attentive to parental expectations when these needed to be expressed.

Many parents commented that it would have been unlikely if their son had achieved the levels of his schooling potential had he gone to a different college. They also applauded the school for enabling their boys to have acquired the skills, knowledge and attitudes to confidently transition with ease and seamlessness into their chosen tertiary study options and work experiences.

Awa's story

Awa came to HIBS from a full Maori immersion unit at his Wainuiomata primary school. His parents felt his English needed improving. Understanding what HIBS had on offer, they were happy for him to initially focus on his English language skills. When Awa was to move to Year 11 his parents asked the school if he could do NCEA Te Reo Maori by correspondence. The school obliged and for three years he was the only student enrolled in the college doing the course. The support the school gave proved very successful for Awa. Acknowledging the ongoing need for a receptive curriculum, the school now provides Te Reo Maori to other students and has employed a Te Reo Maori teacher to oversee the courses across the school. Awa's parents believed the school was highly supportive of their son's needs and could not have done more.

Special Character:

HIBS was strongly defined by its special character. This character encompassed a variety of values and attitudes that parents believed had come to define the school's culture and tone.

Teachers upheld strong standards for student behaviour and engagement. There was an appropriate focus on safety and programmes to support student well-being. For many, an obvious and positive spiritual component pervaded the school. A number of parents noted that the school taught, encouraged and lived Christian values. School structures, such as the House system, supported the development and perpetuation of the school's special character

Some of the specific comments made by parents:

- Does very well at supporting values teaching that address adolescent issues
- Like the strictness
- The single-sex model meant boys could work better without the distraction of girls
- Very strong and respectful relationships between teachers and students
- Strong peer groups
- Healthy competition among the students
- Pastoral care is fantastic
- Nurturing environment
- Encouraged values and behaviours of pride and respect
- Strong encouragement of boys to be involved in community services

Parents generally felt that they were more involved in the schooling of their boys than might have been the case had they gone to a different college.

Cultural opportunities:

There was a clear understanding by all parents that the cultural teaching aspects of the school were as valued by staff and students as any other component of the curriculum (eg. sports)

The Performing Arts programme and the opportunities this provided were seen as strongly supported across the school. There was a lot of focus and importance placed on the Arts curriculum and expectations for achievement were high. The school's Drama programmes, and the school productions specifically, were positively mentioned a number of times. Debating was seen as a highlight for some students.

Students with skills and interests in areas other than sports and academic pursuits had been well catered for through the various programmes on offer.

Sport

The school continues to place a high value and considerable resourcing in the development of the sports programme. Parents noted that there were ‘wonderful’ sporting opportunities available to the students. In recent years this focus has remained important to school management and there has been no lessening of its focus. Sport is seen to be as strong as it ever has been.

With the significant school expectation for student participation, this has led to continued high levels of student enthusiasm, involvement and success in sport. Parents of particularly talented sportsman have commented that the school also caters well for the elite achievers, with opportunities for club and national representation being supported.

HIBS provides a wide range of sporting codes, many involving trips to events nationally.

2. Qualified Areas of Good Performance

There were very few qualified responses from parents related to the school’s performance and what it was able to provide for their boys. Almost all parents were unreservedly and highly supportive of *everything* the school did for the students. There were no strongly critical voices heard.

However there were some aspects of the school’s operations, when parents were really quizzed, that resulted in a few “*Good but*” responses. These are mentioned below. However it needs to be noted that these may have only been expressed by one individual or a very small number of respondents. They are included here as interesting information and not to be taken as general suggestions for change.

- Academic boys hold sway over the jocks
- Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme is a great programme but should be extended to silver and gold levels
- Excellent value placed on sports but more consistent and obvious support from the school would have been encouraging within the lower sports level teams.
- The provision of work experience opportunities was very effective (eg mechanical) but greater career subject guidance, such as a wider choice of vocational training courses, could have been provided for some non-academic boys.
- Possibly more provision for the teaching of practical subject content (eg. financial literacy, driver licence training)
- Although sports is a very important component of the school’s extracurricular programme there remains politics that a few find is a difficult ‘game to play’
- Some coaching and team organisations have been problematic in recent years but the new appointment of a sports coordinator will alleviate some of this.
- The pursuit of excellence is great but for a small group of students this focus can be a bit too overwhelming. Not a criticism of the school but one size doesn’t always fit all.
- The importance the school places on Christian values is obvious but the teaching of Christianity itself could be stronger
- Although the school’s reasons were understood, the organisation of students to stay in the same class cohort from Years 7 – 10 is seen as sometimes limiting.
- Although highly talented sportsmen, at the discretion of the school, are able to participate in club teams, there may need to be published school guidelines that give greater transparency to such decision making.
- There are ample opportunities for students to be involved in a wide variety of curricular and extracurricular activities but the school needs to place a greater importance on encouraging all students to participate and take full advantage of great opportunities on offer.

A small number of parents noted that the unique character of the school, understood as defining its difference, and in some instances, its appeal (eg. small class sizes, limited enrolments, core curriculum focus, high fees / donations, single sex) sometimes led to the portrayal of the school as elitist and lacking in diversity, and the boys as ‘soft’ and entitled. However no one seriously suggested that this was any reason for it to change.

3. Areas of Concern or in Need of Development

There were no common or consistent themes or concerns identified by any significant group of parents where they felt the school could or should improve on what it presently offered to its students. In fact most parents made it very clear that there were *no* improvements that the school needed to make. They were happy with everything.

PROGRESS MADE ON THE AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT AS NOTED IN THE 2016 SURVEY

Evidence suggests that the school has made a great deal of progress in recent years to address areas for improvement from the last survey of parents. Of the Areas for Development noted in 2016, *none* now were seen as a concern that warranted any further recommendations:

2016 School leadership:

- It appears to a few parents that sometimes vocal parent agendas can be quite powerful in influencing school management decisions.
(Not mentioned by any parents in 2018)
- There is a sense by parents of the younger students that there needs to be greater clarity and transparency around the enrolment and selection process for students.
(Not mentioned by any parents in 2018)
- Those parents of students in Year 7 and 8 particularly felt that they would have benefited from more contact with other families. The boys come from a very wide geographic area and parents saw value in the school facilitating opportunities for family social get-togethers.
(Not mentioned by any parents in 2018)
- Although bullying was not seen as a problem, a few parents were not sure how this would ever be addressed if it was to happen. More procedural transparency would be useful for some.
(Mentioned only by one parent in 2018 and this was in reference to another student, not her own)

2016 Students:

- Although the school does not have a significant cultural mix of students (76% European/Pakeha, 7% Maori, and 17% other, according to the last ERO report) there was a feeling by a small but significant group of parents that more could be done to foster cultural diversity in the school's programmes and celebrations.
(Mentioned by some parents in 2018 but all qualified this by noting that this is what the school is and what all parents understand that they have 'bought' into)
- For those parents keen to make contact with other families, some had the suggestion for the development of a student register of parents with the contact names and numbers of other students in the same class level.
(Not mentioned by any parents in 2018)

2016 Teaching:

- A few parents with knowledge of other single-sex boys schools (eg. Silverstream) suggested that teachers could be more proactive and effective in sharing information with parents, especially at the junior level, using methods such as on-line 'weekly notes' or regular and scheduled emails.
(Not mentioned by any parents in 2018)
- Some sports and cultural activities struggled to get parent support to manage teams and groups. A few parents felt that teachers could take a greater and more active role in the organisation of extra-curricular student activities.

(Not mentioned by any parents in 2018)

- A significant group of parents, possibly more than half, acknowledged that there were one or two experienced teachers that, in their view, were of doubtful competency and were not as forthcoming with information when it was requested.

(Still mentioned by a small number of parents in 2018, in reference to one or two teachers, but not with any significant level of concern)

2016 Sports:

- Some parents felt that only the best in sport was celebrated. A few students felt they wanted to have more opportunities for sport at lunch times. For some, communication with the sports department could be difficult

(Still mentioned by one or two parents in 2018 but there has been obvious improvements)

CONCLUSION

Parents are united in their understanding that Hutt International Boys School is a very good all round college that caters well to the expectations of its demanding parents and the social, academic and cultural needs of their boys. It is a school that places great importance on setting high expectations. It provides a varied and effective curriculum that is supported by high quality teaching and resourcing. Opportunities for the boys to excel in areas other than academic studies are fostered and provision is made and offered for a wide variety of cultural and sporting interests and pursuits. The special character of the school supports students to engage and achieve. Parents are well communicated to and feel that teachers and school leadership are accessible, understanding and responsive to student and family needs.

Parents believe that there are no significant areas where the performance of staff and students, or the opportunities the college provides, could improve. This is indeed a wonderful testament to the way the college has developed and continues to evolve, and the close connection it has developed with its broader community.

General parent comments that summarise the views of the majority:

- “Very good value for money”
- “He had a great High School experience”
- “The school is going in the right direction”
- “Plenty of opportunities for students to do so much, as such there were high levels of student involvement in all provided activities”
- “Very balanced offerings”
- “The school has given the boys a step forward in life”
- “Lifelong friendships have been made”
- “School develops well rounded individuals”

As one boy noted in a communication to his parents:

“Thanks mum and dad for sending me to the greatest school ever!”