



Breens Intermediate

MLE CASE STUDY

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Schools all around the country are embarking on new and innovative teaching and learning approaches to respond to the major shifts in the use of technologies and the way students are learning. This publication is one of a series which aims to showcase how schools are adapting to keep up with the pace of change throughout the world. This issue looks at Breens Intermediate in Christchurch.

BREENS INTERMEDIATE is a decile six school that caters for years 7 and 8 students. It has 268 students and the ethnic composition includes 191 Pākehā and 29 Māori students. Other ethnicities include Pacific, Indian, African and Chinese. The school operates out of prefabricated relocatable buildings that were all built around 1976.

Inspiration for change

Five years ago the school was inspired to change, having noticed a great variance in teaching practices across the school. Breens Intermediate was inspired by teaching philosophies that emphasised a clear and transparent learning model focused on teacher sharing and collaboration to support education delivery. The school has started to modernise its facilities along the Modern Learning Environment guidelines by using its own resources and being creative in times of constraints.

The journey

The school focused on reflective practice. They started changing the management structure to a more coaching and mentoring lead teacher model each with their own strengths. The school participated in a lot of professional development, but were also proactive about things like teachers providing feedback to each other. They started to break down some of the physical barriers to change, for example, they took out the storage rooms and lockers that weren't needed and put windows in walls between classrooms. In this way learning became transparent. Breens bought cheap furniture from Trade Me. It lowered desks to create varying work spaces and tried to create different environments to explore and learn on, including using bean bags. Teachers started to learn from each other and sharing became the default.

“*The foundation of our thinking was that it is all about the learner and that we can all be better teachers.*”

BRIAN PRICE, PRINCIPAL



And now...

The school's journey is ongoing and has resulted in improved student and teacher engagement and motivation. There has been a significant decline in behavioural issues. OTJs (Overall Teacher Judgments) have become real life opportunities instead of punctuated events. Planning lessons is now a collaborative exercise. Teachers are energised and do not want to return to old ways of teaching. Students have a wider variety of teachers to learn from and with whom to build rapport. Teachers feel more supported. There has been a reduction in staff sickness. Staff turnover is at a minimum and high achieving students are achieving at an even higher level.

They see their strong values based vision (see image 1) as a strength. At Breens Intermediate, everything is based around what's best for the students' learning and is grounded in the New Zealand Curriculum. They encourage their students to be the BEST – Better Every Single Time. The values of the school also reflect this motto and are based on the Breens Tree of Values. The values on the tree encourage the students to be brave, brilliant, bold, beautiful and to show belonging (see image 2). The Totara is an important symbol for the school as, years ago, there was a forest of Totara trees in this area. The tree also symbolises the growth and development of students in a nurturing and supportive environment. Breens Intermediate students are encouraged to incorporate the Breens Values into their day. Many students have created presentations for the school assemblies, explaining what the tree means to them.



Lessons:

- Break down physical barriers by creative use of space and furniture
- Trust and back your staff. Allow them to be learners. It's actually simple. The focus is on relationships.
- Adopting the power of three based around defined roles rooted in values.
- Create a culture where there is freedom for teachers to explore. The job of the principal is to allow this and to focus on what works.
- Teachers don't function in isolation anymore and are holding each other accountable for learning. It is part of a collaborative approach in a high trust culture.
- Go slowly to give everyone a chance to buy in.
- Set a very clear vision around learning. Take all staff and show them how it is done elsewhere so that they can form their own individual ideas about what they want the school to look like.
- Find the power brokers and influencers in the community and focus on the good, not on those offering resistance.
- Be transparent to parents and to the board.
- If change is research based, makes sense and will benefit the students, parents will not protest.
- Invite parents to see the school in action.



Image 2

Children will understand the changes because the school will be better. The whānau and parents may take time to adjust but when they see their child is happier, more engaged, achieving higher – then they will understand. It's more than just open plan on bean bags.

A challenge for teachers may be students coming out with the ideas on how to improve their learning.



Image 1

"We are all (teachers, students, parents, etc.) learners together and are always striving to achieve our values. Coaching and mentoring forms a significant part of the culture for everyone, from the BoT to the learners. In this context we have adopted values like "servant leadership" and a strong "predict and prevent" stance. Everything at the schools is grounded in key competencies, not just about learning areas, so that we do not forget about developing the whole person."

BRIAN PRICE, PRINCIPAL

<http://www.breens.school.nz>

For more information on modern learning environments visit www.mle.education.govt.nz