

# Wellington Activity Centre Special Review Report

08/06/2005

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## Background

### Introduction

A Special Review is a review of particular areas of performance and is undertaken to specific terms of reference. Special reviews may report on particular issues raised from external sources.

This special review report was prepared in accordance with standard procedures approved by the Chief Review Officer.

### Terms of Reference

This special review is based on an evaluation of the performance of the Wellington Activity Centre Board of Trustees and management in relation to the terms of reference for this review. The terms of reference are to evaluate:

- educational outcomes for students;
- educational programs and learning resources;
- accountability and reporting arrangements;
- centre management systems;
- provision for student support;
- physical and emotional safety of staff and students; and

- any other matters that arise during the course of the review.

## About the School

Location	Kaiwharawhara, Wellington
Ministry of Education profile number	6128
School type	Activity Centre (attached to State secondary school)
Decile rating	1
Teaching staff:	2.0
Roll generated entitlement	3
Number of teachers	
School roll (at the time of the review)	18
Gender composition	Girls 11 Boys 7
Ethnic composition	New Zealand European/Pākehā 7 Māori 7 Pacific 4
Special features	Attached Unit of Wellington College
Review team on site	March 2005
Date of this report	8 June 2005
Previous ERO reports	Accountability Review March 2001 Reviewed as an attached unit of Wellington East Girls' College October 1997 Reviewed as an attached unit to other Wellington secondary schools in 1995 and 1991

## The Education Review Office (ero) Evaluation

The National Manager Reporting Services has authorised this special review as part of a cluster of activity centre reviews to be undertaken by ERO in 2005. This report is based on an evaluation of the performance of the Wellington Activity Centre Board of Trustees and management in relation to the

terms of reference for this review.

The Wellington Activity Centre currently operates as an attached unit of Wellington College. The host school responsibility transferred from Wellington East Girls' College to Wellington College in 2003 by mutual agreement. As an attached unit the centre is responsible to the board of trustees of the host school, but has a high level of operational autonomy. The activity centre is located in a residential suburb of central Wellington that students can access by public transport.

The centre has a nominal roll of 20 students drawn from the ten schools in the Central Wellington secondary school cluster. Students are referred to the centre as a result of ongoing concerns about their learning and behaviour. Some students have previously been suspended by the boards of their referring schools and are seeking a second chance education. Others need time-out from mainstream schooling and an opportunity to re-engage in learning.

Students remain enrolled in their referring school and attend the centre for varying periods of time from six months to over a year, with the approval of the centre management committee. At the time of the review, 18 students were attending the centre, ten of who were continuing from 2004 and eight others who have enrolled since the beginning of 2005. Enrolment numbers are typically high and the centre currently has a waiting list for places in Year 11.

During 2004 a total of 27 students attended the centre. The total number of students enrolled each year has been declining due to increasing periods of time that students are staying at the centre. The director has collated data on student destinations that indicates that while fewer students re-integrate into mainstream education, the majority are assisted to find alternative education or further training programmes. This information is consistent with the stated aims of the centre.

The centre has a positive and supportive relationship with its host school and is well served by a management committee whose members have a range of useful expertise and contacts with the referring schools' cluster. The director is highly regarded by students, parents and the management committee. The director works actively to attract local funding for the centre that is used to employ administration and literacy support staff, and two youth workers, in addition to the two-teacher entitlement provided by the Ministry of Education.

The 2001 ERO report acknowledged the good practices evident in centre organisation and recommended improvements in self-review systems and the provision of careers education. The director has addressed aspects of these requirements. Significant improvements have been made since 2001 in strategic planning and financial management, and in planning and reporting against student achievement targets.

The Ministry of Education has recently approved major property improvement plans and these developments were being well managed by the director and host school at the time of the review. The significant upgrade in the facilities will greatly improve the appearance of the centre, improve health and safety, and enhance the teaching and learning environment for staff and students.

This report commends the efforts of staff in supporting students to re-engage in learning and acknowledges the work of the director and management committee in strengthening centre operations. Strategic planning and accountability to the host school and the management committee would be enhanced by the development of an action plan giving effect to the annual goals.

Other recommendations in this report include the need for improved teacher planning and assessment, particularly in implementing students' individual education plans. The board must address health and safety requirements identified in this report and should consider its responsibility for ensuring that performance management systems are implemented.

## Future Action

ERO is confident that the director and management committee can manage the centre in the interests of the students and the Crown and bring about the improvements outlined in this report.

Therefore ERO will review the centre again as part of the regular cycle of activity centre reviews.

## Findings

### Background

The Wellington Activity Centre received a generally positive ERO review in 2001. The centre had a clearly defined purpose. The needs of students and the focus on reintegration to mainstream schooling were the basis for strategic and annual planning. The centre operated effectively and benefited the students who attended.

At the time of the 2001 review the host school was Wellington East Girls College. ERO commended the teamwork of staff, the design of the programme in meeting students' developmental needs and the provision of a broad range of learning experiences. Expectations for academic achievement and social development were clearly linked to the centre's goals.

In the past three years the centre has experienced a number of changes. A new director was appointed at the end of 2002 and in 2003 the host school responsibility transferred to Wellington College. New teaching staff have been appointed, including a literacy tutor. A strategic plan has been developed and planning and reporting systems are now linked to student achievement targets.

The cluster of referring schools has developed a succession structure for rotating the host school responsibility every three years. This system has broadened the responsibility for, and increased awareness of, the centre's operations amongst the cluster of schools. The next planned transfer of responsibility to Newlands College in 2006 is being carefully managed with the view to ensuring a seamless transition.

There have been only minor improvements made to the property and the buildings in recent years.

However, in 2004 the board of Wellington College negotiated a major property upgrade with the Ministry of Education. The \$250,000 allocated by the Ministry for these large-scale improvements will enhance the property and improve the teaching and learning environment.

The findings of this review are reported under the following headings:

- learning programmes and resources;
- student support and interactions; and
- governance and management.

Under each heading, areas of good performance are identified and areas for improvement are outlined.

### Learning programme and resources

#### Areas of good performance

Varied programme of learning. The centre provides a varied learning programme that includes academic courses, appropriately emphasising improved literacy and numeracy. In addition, students have opportunities for physical activity and life skills. Shared books, sustained silent reading and trips outside the centre are regularly timetabled. A variety of interesting speakers complement the formal learning programme.

Education through The Correspondence School. The morning programme is centred on courses provided through The Correspondence School. All students take English and mathematics and select a third subject with the emphasis on science for Year 9 and 10 students. Teachers monitor the quality of student work and record the completion of correspondence sets of work.

National qualifications. In the last two years a number of Year 10 and 11 students have taken National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) courses through The Correspondence School and have gained credits on the National Qualifications Framework. The accumulation of framework qualification has provided effective motivation for students to re-engage in learning at this level.

Learning routines. The centre has appropriate learning routines, particularly for the morning programmes. Teachers and youth workers supervise and assist students to complete sets of work. Students settle to work quickly and understand teachers' expectations. They work independently with teacher support and are rewarded for completing set work requirements.

Specialist support. The centre employs a tutor to support student literacy development. Diagnostic tools are used to assess student reading, spelling and comprehension levels and to determine individual literacy learning needs in consultation with The Correspondence School. The school has a small library, a science laboratory and computers to support student learning.

Reporting student information. The director reports information about the students attending the centre and tracks their destinations in the year following their transition from the centre. Of the 27 students who attended the centre in 2003, six returned to mainstream schools, nine entered alternative education or further training and seven returned to the centre at the beginning of 2004. Of the 27 enrolments in 2004, eight returned to school and ten returned to the centre.

Planning and reporting. The director has developed a systematic process for planning and reporting student achievement targets. The targets for 2004 included improved attendance and increased National Qualification Framework credits. In both target areas the centre demonstrated improved outcomes. An additional goal to improve individual reading levels has been added for 2005.

## Areas for improvement

The selection of diagnostic assessment tools. The use of diagnostic assessment strategies could be extended. As the curriculum leader, the director should consider using a range of reliable assessment tools in order to identify students' specific learning needs. For example, it would be useful for teachers to develop skills in using the New Zealand curriculum writing exemplars to determine the deeper features of written language and examine the possible use of asTTle (Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning). The host school board could investigate how the activity centre might independently access these assessment tools, and other programmes such as Careers Quest, from the Ministry of Education's website.

Analysis of data. The collated information about student destinations is valuable but could be used more effectively to reflect on centre goals and objectives. Further analysis could be useful in identifying centre practices that impact on successful reintegration into mainstream education, vocational training and employment as stated in the centre's mission statement.

Assessment and reporting. Teachers' planning and assessment of the afternoon programme should demonstrate closer links to national curriculum objectives and expectations for student learning. The host school should ensure appropriate professional development opportunities are available to meet the needs of teachers for improved planning and assessment.

Curriculum review. The curriculum review goals of the strategic plan should be clarified. While the 2005 strategic plan identifies planned reviews of literacy and health and physical education, there should be an action plan to facilitate this process.

## Student support

### Areas of good performance

Behaviour management systems. New systems introduced by the director reinforce positive behaviour and engagement with learning. The system involves merit awards and student incentives and is consistently applied and effectively communicated. The system provides immediate and tangible feedback to students on improved behaviour and learning.

Supportive environment. Staff have created an environment that is welcoming and inclusive. They are empathetic towards students and support their physical and emotional well-being. Students have ready access to staff and a sense of confidence in knowing that their needs are understood. As a result, students report that they enjoy attending the centre. This is likely to be a factor in the generally high levels of attendance.

Diverse staffing provision. The centre employs a diverse range of staff, comprising teachers, youth workers, a literacy tutor, and an administrator. In addition, a number of volunteers regularly assist in the programme. The director has actively sought funding to retain these positions. Students benefit from the variety of personnel available to support their development.

Celebration of success. Staff emphasise and celebrate student successes. They use frequent opportunities, including the daily briefings, annual prize giving, weekly on task rewards and written reports to parents to acknowledge individual and group achievements. Teachers share models of good performance and expectations of high quality work and learning behaviours with students.

Contact with referring schools. The director maintains links with each student's referring school through the provision of regular written reports. The reports effectively outline the goals selected by students and their progress towards achieving them. The centre has prioritised contacts with the referring schools to support the potential of successful re-integration.

Support agencies. Effective use is made of specialised support provided by local agencies such as Well-Trust. A number of other agencies support individual students and communicate with the director to monitor their progress. Links with the referring schools' counselling services and learning support teachers maintains an ongoing relationship between the students and their referring school.

Referral procedures. The director endeavours to accept all students who are referred to the centre and is strengthening the referral process to ensure that the centre can best cater for student needs. The director recognises that the referral is a key transition point and is making expectations of the referring school more explicit. The identification of a key support person who maintains contact with the student and their family is a very useful strategy.

## Areas for improvement

Records of student progress. Staff act as liaison teachers for an assigned group of students with whom they meet to review progress. This role is critical to maintaining the focus on learning and behaviour goals identified at the time of enrolment. The expectations of the liaison teacher and the review process should be formalised. Records should be kept of the review outcomes and of the progress each student is making.

Individual Learning Plan. Learning and behaviour goals should be selected in consultation with the student, the referring school and parents. The goals should be used to develop an individual education plan (IEP) and monitored regularly. Currently, staff monitor and report on student

attendance and correspondence work, but not necessarily on issues that led to the referral.

Enrolment period. The management committee should consider the implications for the longer enrolment they are affording increasing numbers of students. Ten students, who constitute half the nominal roll, returned to the centre in 2005. Most of these students had made satisfactory progress in 2004, but are using the centre, not as an opportunity to re-integrate into mainstream education, but as a long-term alternative to mainstream education. This practice is likely to be impacting on the potential of the centre resources to serve the needs of a wider clientele.

## Governance and Management

### Areas of good performance

Memorandum of understanding. The centre management and board of trustees have developed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Education that sets out expectations of all key stakeholders and clarifies the purpose of the centre. The centre's stated aims are to return students to mainstream education or to employment following a short term stay at the centre of up to one year. These are useful guidelines on which to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme and the enrolment practices.

Centre management. Management documents have been reviewed and are up to date. Centre policies are aligned with those of Wellington College and have been incorporated into the staff handbook. The management committee meets each term. Members of the committee bring valuable expertise to their roles and have been supportive in providing guidance and advice for the director and assisting with self review.

Planning and reporting. Since the 2001 ERO review, the director has introduced strategic planning systems and annual student achievement targets. The targets are based on identified areas for improvement and allow the director to report on the success and variance in meeting the set targets. Annual reports to the board are increasingly informed by analysed student achievement information.

Financial management. The centre has considerable autonomy from the board. The management committee approves the budget and the financial accounts are audited separately from those of the host school. The centre had an unqualified auditor's report in 2003 and is accountable for Crown and locally raised funding.

Property development. The board of Wellington College has provided considerable support for planning and managing the property upgrade that is currently taking place. The property had received little attention in recent years and the facilities were in poor condition. The upgrade will significantly improve health and safety matters and enhance the delivery of learning programmes.

Involvement of referring schools. The centre is well used by the consortium of referring schools and the roll is usually close to the maximum of 20 students allowed. Schools makes financial contributions of \$200 per term per student which enables the director to employ support staff. The rotating host

school responsibility promotes an understanding of the centre's goals. It would be useful however, to ensure that the composition of the management committee continues to include a board and senior management representative when responsibility is transferred to the next host school.

## Areas for improvement

**Management planning.** The director should develop an annual management plan that incorporates the strategic goals and annual achievement targets. A management plan would ensure that strategic and annual goals are aligned and form a useful basis on which to report centre improvement to the management committee and the board. The annual plan should identify responsibilities for the intended outcomes and a timeframe for completion.

**Systematic policy review.** Ongoing policy review should relate to long-term planning and should anticipate changes in transferring responsibility to a new host school board. Policy review should be systematic, linked to the annual management plan, involve staff consultation and should evaluate how effectively the policy is being implemented.

**Performance management systems.** Procedures for appraising the director and teaching staff do not fully meet requirements. The director and teachers should be appraised against the appropriate professional standards. They should have signed copies of their written appraisal reports, classroom observations and professional development goals. The director's appraisal should also encompass strategic and annual goals.

**Support for beginning teachers.** The director should implement a specific programme of advice and guidance to support the beginning teacher. This is a significant management responsibility that requires time for classroom observations and mentoring. The board has a policy and staffing allowance for supporting beginning teachers that should be used for this purpose.

**Health and safety compliance.** The host school has a number of health and safety policies that are not clearly implemented through centre practices. These relate to expectations for managing hazards, approving education outside the classroom, recording accidents, handling complaints, and implementing harassment legislation.

**Staff codes of conduct.** The director should consider developing clear expectations for professional staff and student interactions. With the high number of adults working in the centre it is important that all staff have shared understandings of appropriate procedures for working with 'at risk' students.

## Actions Required

In order to meet its agreed accountabilities, the board of trustees of Wellington College must ensure that:

The director implements board policies on health and safety, trips outside the classroom, hazard

management and harassment legislation.

[National Administration Guidelines 5(i) 1999, Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992, Education Act 1989, Ministry of Education Health and Safety Code of Practice-revised 2003]

Procedures for managing the performance of the director and teaching staff include opportunities for self appraisal and identification of development objectives, and include an annual written appraisal report.

[State Sector Act 1988, s77C]

The director implements an appropriate programme of guidance, advice and professional support as required for beginning teachers.

[Education Act 1989, s120-139].

## Recommendations

ERO recommends that:

Staff seek professional development opportunities to strengthen individual goal-focused educational planning; and

The board consider appropriate external expertise to strengthen procedures for managing the performance of the director.

## Future Action

ERO is confident that the director and management committee can manage the centre in the interests of students and the Crown and bring about the improvements outlined in this report.

Therefore ERO will review the Wellington Activity Centre again as part of the regular cycle of activity centre reviews.

SIGNED

Lane Mohi  
Area Manager

for Chief Review Officer

8 June 2005

8 June 2005

To the Parents and Community of Wellington Activity Centre

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When ERO has reviewed a school we encourage boards to inform their community of any follow-up action they plan to do. You should talk to the board or principal if you have any questions about this evaluation, the full ERO report or their future intentions.

If you would like a copy of the full report, please contact the school or see the ERO website, <http://www.ero.govt.nz>.

SIGNED

Lane Mohi  
Area Manager

for Chief Review Officer

Decile 1 schools draw their students from areas of greatest socio-economic disadvantage,  
Decile 10 from areas of least socio-economic disadvantage.

## Actions Required

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## Recommendations

## Future Action