

Blue Mountain College Education Review

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1 Context

What are the important features of this school that have an impact on student learning?

Blue Mountain College provides a positive, supportive learning environment for students from Year 7 to 13. Teachers prepare students for life within and beyond the school, to have a 'rural view' and 'wider vision'.

The school is located within the farming area of West Otago. Students have access to much learning from within the local area. School events and student successes are widely supported and celebrated.

School leaders are committed to ensuring all students experience success and achieve highly. The challenges of the school's isolation are well managed. Close liaison with other schools provides depth and breadth of learning opportunities for students. This includes pathways to tertiary learning and travel overseas.

The size of the school means students of all ages get to know each other and their teachers well. Students benefit from close monitoring and support, with a strong focus on their individual achievement and wellbeing.

School leaders are building an environment that promotes innovation and collaboration. This includes the way they expect the new school facilities to support a range of modern approaches to learning, to support collaboration with other providers, and to help provide experiences and resources for learning outside of the school grounds.

The school has strengthened the areas identified for development in the last ERO review report.

2 Learning

How well does this school use achievement information to make positive changes to learners' engagement, progress and achievement?

The school uses information about students' learning and achievement well. At the classroom level students are supported and challenged to extend their learning.

Teachers use the results of assessment to inform their planning and to help students set and achieve their goals for learning. Students who need to make accelerated progress in their learning are closely monitored and receive well-managed support in and out of the classroom.

Teachers and curriculum leaders use learning information well to respond to students' needs and interests and provide programmes that are relevant and meaningful. In the senior school students' achievement is closely monitored and students are well supported to manage their own learning and goals. This close individual support is being extended to students at the Year 10 level.

Teachers use a range of assessment to ensure that their judgements about how students are achieving and progressing are reliable. Teachers of Year 7 and 8 students have developed their assessment practices in relation to the National Standards. In 2014 the overall levels of achievement in writing and mathematics improved significantly compared to 2013.

Students in Years 9 and 10 are appropriately assessed against the New Zealand Curriculum. Their learning is also closely monitored by the teachers and curriculum leaders.

At the senior level, the school has maintained a positive growth over time in students' achievement of NCEA. A very high percentage of students achieve certificates in NCEA Levels 1, 2 and 3. In 2014, a high percentage of students gained UE. Students are well supported toward purposeful and diverse pathways when they leave school. A current focus for senior students is to increase merits and excellences.

School leaders use achievement information to help inform decision making and to set the school's strategic goals and targets. They are well informed about the achievement of student groups and year levels. They have strengthened their expectations that curriculum leaders can show how they are improving achievement for groups of students.

Next Steps

Students in some classes at Y7 to 10 know the expectations for their learning and receive specific feedback and next steps in learning from their teachers against these expectations.

However, these practices were not consistent.

Leaders and teachers need to:

- ensure all students are more involved in knowing about and tracking their own progress and identifying their next steps for learning
- improve the clarity of reporting to parents about their child's overall level of progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards
- ensure teacher plans and department reviews evaluate how well the strategies identified for improving the achievement of at-risk students have worked and as a result identify what can be built on, changed or improved
- show progress over time of Years 9 and 10 students as groups in reports to the board
- monitor and report during the year the school's progress towards meeting the annual targets for achievement.

3 Curriculum

How effectively does this school's curriculum promote and support student learning?

The school's curriculum effectively promotes high levels of student engagement and achievement. Close relationships are a core feature of the school's curriculum.

Students learn the value of cooperating and collaborating with each other, in and out of the classroom. Older and younger students have many opportunities to work with and support each other in a range of learning activities. A highly valued experience for all students is their joint planning and fundraising over a three-year period to enable them to visit other countries.

Students appreciate a strengthened emphasis on recognising positive behaviour. This includes consistent reinforcement of the school's values of respect, responsibility and inclusiveness. Students appreciate that their positive attitudes and support for each other are noticed and celebrated. Senior students acknowledge that this helps them to experience success at school and prepare to confidently engage with life beyond school.

Teachers plan programmes that are linked to students' lives and interests. They regularly share learning and other information about students and find ways to respond to each student's individual needs. Student opinion is sought and used to help ensure programmes are engaging and meaningful.

Staff know each other well, work cooperatively, and quickly respond to meet student needs. They regularly share their specialist primary and secondary knowledge and skills. Students receive highly individualised monitoring and support to help them achieve.

Effective use is being made of the school's newly built learning areas. This includes increased personalised learning through flexible use of available spaces and digital technologies. In particular, some subject teachers have worked cooperatively to make learning and assessment more efficient, relevant and purposeful.

How effectively does the school promote educational success for Māori, as Māori?

Māori students are well supported to engage and achieve in their learning. Their progress in learning is closely monitored by their teachers and school leaders. Students who need extra help are identified and supported.

The school has strengthened how it supports and promotes Māori language, culture and identity. A larger number of Māori students have recently enrolled at the Year 7 level. Students in Years 7 to 9 learn te reo Māori through their classroom programmes. The

concepts of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga and tuakana-teina are integral parts of the school culture.

There are increased opportunities to attend and participate in cultural events and visit marae and other places of significance. Senior Māori students are supported to take opportunities for leadership and access initiatives that promote Māori success.

The board consults regularly with whānau of Māori students. A Māori community member helps guide the board's decision making and aspects of teacher development.

Next step

The next step for school leaders is to develop teachers' capability to promote Māori success across the school. This includes supporting teachers to use te reo and tikanga Māori in the daily learning in meaningful ways by providing professional development.

4 Sustainable Performance

How well placed is the school to sustain and improve its performance?

The school is well placed to continue to improve and sustain its growth and development. Its vision for students is known and well supported by staff, students, trustees and the wider community.

Trustees are effectively achieving their goals to:

- maintain the school's high levels of NCEA achievement
- ensure a relevant range of learning is available to students
- maintain strong connections and collaborations with the community.

Trustees are kept well informed about how well students are engaging, achieving and progressing in their learning. They are continually seeking ongoing development to benefit students.

The principal and board relate well as individuals and work constructively together. They have a shared respect for and understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They continually seek to strengthen their knowledge of stewardship and leadership.

With the support of trustees and other leaders, the principal has created a positive school culture for student and staff learning. She is creating an environment that supports collaboration among teaching staff and promotes innovative practice. She is well known and regarded by students. She has the trust and support of teaching staff.

The board has an effective process for the review of policies. Trustees are seeking to improve monitoring of the annual goals and targets. This includes seeking more useful and timely information from departments.

ERO agrees with the board's focus to more clearly identify what has worked best to achieve the school's annual goals and the board's targets for achievement.

Next Steps

The next steps for school leaders are to:

- strengthen teacher-inquiry and department-review processes by better linking these to performance appraisal and quality-management processes

- ensure that annual department reviews include an evaluation of what worked best in teaching and learning and how this has impacted on students in terms of outcomes.

The next steps for the board are:

- closer and more timely monitoring of the school's goals and targets
- making greater use of student and adult voice to affirm the positive impact of the school's initiatives
- reviewing policies and procedures against desired student outcomes.

Provision for international students

The school is a signatory to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students (the Code) established under section 238F of the Education Act 1989. The school has attested that it complies with all aspects of the Code.

At the time of this review one international student was attending the school. The student was living with a homestay carer.

The education, involvement and integration of international students in the school and community are closely monitored and supported. They benefit from a high level of individual pastoral care.

Board assurance on legal requirements

Before the review, the board of trustees and principal of the school completed the ERO Board Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklists. In these documents they attested that they had taken all reasonable steps to meet their legislative obligations related to:

- board administration
- curriculum
- management of health, safety and welfare
- personnel management
- financial management
- asset management.

During the review, ERO checked the following items because they have a potentially high impact on student achievement:

- emotional safety of students (including prevention of bullying and sexual harassment)

- physical safety of students
- teacher registration
- processes for appointing staff
- stand-downs, suspensions, expulsions and exclusions
- attendance.

Conclusion

Blue Mountain College provides a positive, supportive environment for learning. Its small size means staff, students and parents get to know each other very well. Students learn the value of cooperating and collaborating with each other. They benefit from many opportunities for learning in and out of the classroom. Senior students achieve highly in NCEA. They benefit from the school's close partnerships with other schools and learning providers, and the local community.

ERO is likely to carry out the next review in three years.

Chris Rowe

Deputy Chief Review Officer Southern (Acting)

11 February 2016

School Statistics

Location	Tapanui, Clutha District	
Ministry of Education profile number	391	
School type	Secondary (Years 7 to 13)	
School roll	231	
Gender composition	Boys: 55%	
	Girls: 45%	
Ethnic composition	Pākehā	78%
	Māori	17%
	Other	5%
Review team on site	November 2015	
Date of this report	11 February 2016	
Most recent ERO reports	Education Review	August 2012
	Education Review	November 2008
	Education Review	June 2006