

# SCHOOL REBORN 2020 : PART 7

Decisions are made By Richard Wells

The world is a complex place and redesigning a school to represent our planet is a complex procedure. Literally hundreds of influences apply themselves to the debate and decisions that take place. Official government initiatives, technological, social and political news and research, and people's feelings and opinions all apply influence on this process. Although nobody can understand all these complexities, and most certainly don't know exactly what we should be doing about high school education in 2018, the vast majority of our school community have expressed some understanding that something needs to be done.

We are halfway through our two-year redesign process and after setting a timeline at the beginning, it is nice to see that we are on track. It is in fact this timeline that has become a crucial element in moving the debates forward as of course they could continue forever. This month the school senior leaders had a day to review the progress made so far, weigh up all the priorities presented to us by the process, and make some final decisions on how these priorities could be structured within the confines of a standard high school.

## 3 Big Decisions

### 1. INTEGRATED CURRICULUM (STAGE ONE)

A team produced an example unit to help teachers visualise the placing of curriculum and individual assessment. The details in this example wouldn't necessarily be used.

Right from the outset, we had always agreed on some form of integration of the existing high school subject silos. There was a huge amount of formal (exams) and informal (classroom) evidence that showed students often fail to see the bigger picture, make connections between these

traditional subjects, and transfer knowledge and skills from one context to another. It was also clear that the focus on isolated topics within subjects encouraged teaching to the test and lack of development in soft / life skills. Some of these I have covered in previous posts.

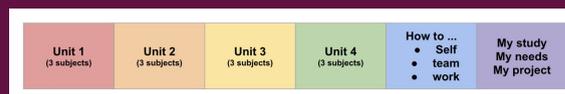
in making a decision around integration we had to balance the need for creating rich learning experiences with the reality of how most high school teachers understood their role in school presently. Although in the long term learning at school will almost definitely be a radically different experience, it was agreed that in these first stages, high school teachers needed some sense of how their existing subject would be placed in an integrated curriculum. For these reasons, and allowing for the fact that it might and probably will extend in the future, we agreed for now to integrate subjects in groups of three. We took into account the structural difficulties of integrating more than this but also that asking just two subjects to work together would not encourage rich enough learning experiences.

We almost came to the conclusion that one of four integrated units in the timetable for every student could be left as a choice unit to allow students to specialise in certain curriculum areas, but this was a timetabling challenge. It was decided that given that we are also timetabling so much time for personal development, mentoring, and passion work, that Predetermining all the integrated units that the students would carry out would be okay, calming some fears around controlling student access to what was seen as vital curriculum. That being said, the guidelines behind the design of every integrated unit would cater for personalisation, culturally responsive pedagogy, and

formative assessment based on curriculum levels (progress) rather than pass/fail grades.

### 2. VALUING WELLBEING AND KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

One's life and values are defined by what we pay attention to and dedicate time to. Success at school is decided by multiple factors and influences that exist inside but predominantly outside the classroom. The events and support that young people are exposed to outside school are shown to have a much longer lasting impact on success at school. This is because the larger amount of support and experiences that more privileged children are exposed to develop a wider set of practiced skills but also a stronger sense of confidence and self-worth that makes school grades seem achievable and worth working for. To be fair to all young people, it is important for schools to not simply hope that life skills and self-esteem develop while staring at subject material. Schools need to display their valuing of individuality, wellbeing, and general life skills by timetabling them equally.



These were some of the considerations that resulted in us timetabling significant (4 hours a week) to the development of life/soft skills and a further 4 hours to self-managed study and/or passion development. This will allow students to better plan, work collaboratively, grow confidence, and practice showing initiative. We expect this time to offer all students the chance to lead and be part of bigger projects that feel more personal while also allowing them time to plan, understand and prioritise what they need to be working on in their integrated curriculum units.

2020		1:30	2	1:30
Years 7-10		9 - 10:30	10:55 - 11:55	11:55 - 12:55
M	Form	1	2	3
T	Form	5		6
W	Form	2	3	4
T	Form	1	6	5
F	Form	4		3

### 3. FAIL = FIRST ATTEMPT IN LEARNING.



In New Zealand we have a national and official system of curriculum levels that outline student development in each of our eight curriculum learning areas. Although these have been around for some time, many New Zealand high schools have struggled to shift out of old habits of grading students on

individual tests with fail, pass, or some form of extra merit and distinction. It is hard for anyone to define the learning development between the gaining of distinction in geography at the age of 13 and then again at the age of 14. The difficulty with pass/fail is that it is very difficult to visualise one's long-term progress. It was for this reason that the senior leaders made the rather easy decision to fully adopt the official New Zealand curriculum levels and assess and report to parents on these. This will allow us to clearly display to our students and their parents that progress is being made and that they are not just jumping through randomly assigned hoops each year.

### NEXT: Putting together the jigsaw in 2019

In the next post I will explain our current planning for staff and students to work together next year to lay down the details and processes within the integrated curriculum units.