



Canterbury Primary Principals' Association

Leaders are stronger when leading together.
We collaborate; We celebrate; We connect

Principal Mentoring and Support Annual Report 2020 *Presented December 2020*

Attention:

Shane Buckner, President, Canterbury Primary Principals Association
Garry Williams, Support Manager, Ministry of Education

Terms of Engagement:

The Canterbury Primary Principals Association (CPPA) in conjunction with the Canterbury Ministry of Education (MOE) have contracted two past principals to work alongside school leaders in a supportive collegial mentoring role. This report summarises the work of the mentors in the year ending December 2020.

The position was held by .5 Pete Bradley and .5 Maureen Kerr. It is with great sadness that Pete passed away 19 September 2020 and he has been greatly missed by principals across the region.

The mentors provide confidential support to principals, relief and acting principals and senior school leaders. Contact is made through courtesy calls, response to personal requests, referrals from colleagues, MOE or other outside agencies from time to time. It can involve face-to-face site visits, email, phone conversations or text messages and includes general networking at CPPA or other professional functions. The mentors have established connections with MOE, NZEI, EA and NZSTA. They meet regularly with the CPPA president and provide a monthly written report for the monthly CPPA Exec meetings.

Key Findings from 2020:

While this report tends to focus on the challenges, concerns and issues school leaders have faced this year, it is also important to acknowledge the many wonderful learning opportunities and experiences being provided for students on a daily basis by school leaders throughout Canterbury. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to share these success stories and celebrations with our principals.

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown had a huge impact on school leadership this year as principals supported staff and families to understand and engage in online



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learning. Most principals reported they coped really well and were able to identify positive outcomes, implement new thinking for teaching and learning and ensure operational planning for any future emergencies. There was genuine appreciation for the communication from local and national Ministry of Education. However, there is still an ongoing COVID impact affecting school. Principals and staff have observed evidence of uncertainty, anxiety and heightened emotional behaviours and responses from parents and students resulting in increased stress and tension for the principal.

Principal well-being has obviously been a major focus for the mentors. The additional pressure resulting from the pandemic was very evident. Plans, professional development and timeframes changed; new directions emerged e.g. improving digital competency and capability of staff and learners; maintaining high expectations and accountability of all staff; coping with community demands to meet their expectations especially for senior students; and ensuring they were well placed in the event of another lockdown.

Where principals were faced with other demands such as student mental health and inappropriate behaviours, property, staff under performance or behaviour, difficult trustees or parents their workload increased dramatically. Implementing changes from the support staff employment contract was also very confusing and challenging new work.

Career pathways for principals were often discussed with an increasing awareness many DPs are being appointed to larger schools ahead of more experienced principals.

Meeting administrative and operational matters was demanding often with short turnaround times for requests for applications or information. This is particularly hard for principals in smaller or rural schools. For a number of principals, they feel at times they are “surviving not thriving”.

Staff well-being and underperformance was a concern for many leaders. While principals encouraged and supported staff to take self-responsibility for themselves, they were aware underlining mental health including stress and anxiety created tensions within their teams. Dealing with staff accountability was another really difficult issue for principals particularly accessing appropriate lines of support when NZEI, NZSTA, lawyers, outside agencies (MOE, Ombudsman Office, Human Rights) and personal insurers became involved.



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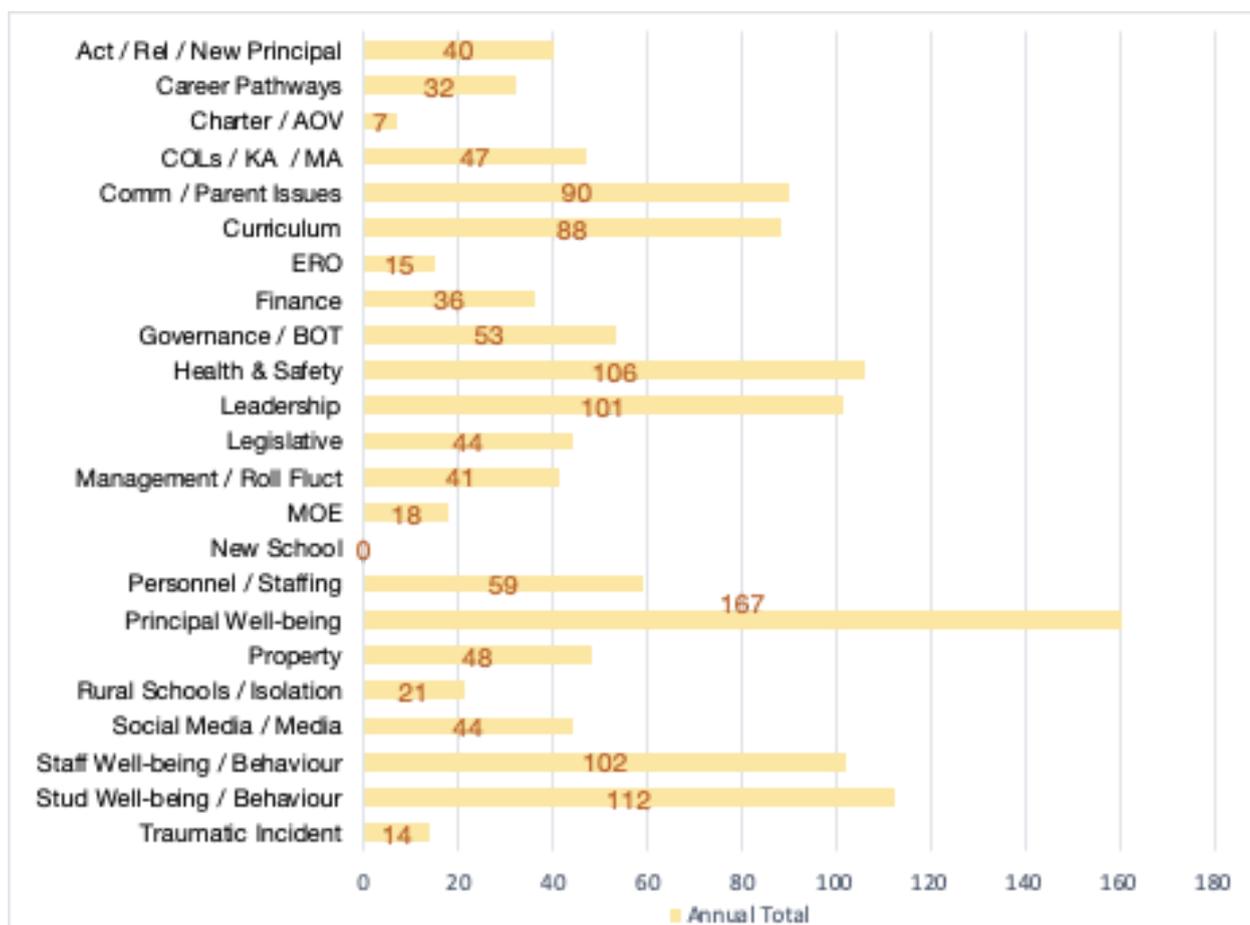
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Principals are concerned with the increasing number of students across the school presenting with learning, mental and social behaviours. Successfully accessing appropriate support for these high priority students is variable and also multifaceted. Many schools have very good systems and structures in place and are managing this well. For others it is a real challenge. Where schools are implementing PB4L and / or restorative practice, Principals have found they need to be working constantly with their staff and parent community who do not understand the principles, and demand consequences and more punitive action.

Challenging parents and trustees also consume a lot of time and emotional energy for school leaders. Again, accessing the right support, following policy and process and dealing with the issue especially with heightened emotional reactions and responses is critical and very difficult.

Summary of Issues:





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NB:

Every school visit generates a range of discussion topics each of which have been marked separately, so for example one visit may include 4-5 items recorded. Principal well-being is usually the highest and includes a wide array of matters, personal and professional advice, guidance and reassurance. It is important to note these are not necessarily always negatives

Total Contacts 2020: 276

Maureen Kerr
CPPA Mentor and Support
December 2020