
ROUTINE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION OF
WESTBRIDGE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

REPORT TO THE JOINT BOARD OF TRUSTEES FOR
HALSWELL RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE AND WESTBRIDGE
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

July 2020

SAMS Standards and Monitoring Services

Team: Christine Wilson, Ph.D. (leader) and Julie Senescall

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Background

SAMS has had previous involvement in reviewing the provision of residential services at Westbridge Residential School with a review commissioned by the Ministry of Education in 2016.

The current developmental evaluation was designed to review the residential service at the school, consider where the school is performing well and suggest areas for further development.

Westbridge had a school roll of 13 out of a possible 32 at the time of this evaluation. The numbers in each cottage included:

- Te Puna – new entrance students – three boys
- Puawai – three boys
- Kowhai – senior students – five boys and one girl
- Pohutukawa – currently closed.

The roll at Westbridge varies throughout the year as students enter and others exit after successful completion of their tenure at the school. This is achieved by obtaining set goals and transitioning to their next placement (school, home, work) back in their home community. There are 50 staff employed at the school (including managers, teaching staff, youth workers and support staff).

Executive summary

Westbridge Residential School (WRS) is located in a rural area west of Auckland. It provides four residential cottages and a school with a capacity for 32 students, a gym, pool and other assorted buildings. There are also playing fields, a BMX track, tennis/netball courts and a large sand-pit.

The students entering the school are young people who are described by the Ministry of Education as having ‘social, behaviour and/or learning needs that are highly complex and challenging’. Until recently all students arrived as a result of recommendations from the Te Kahu Tōi Intensive Wraparound (IWS) service. This service has psychologists located throughout the country who provide a holistic approach to assisting a student in partnership with whānau to learn skills and behaviours to successfully transition back to their home, school and local community. IWS will sometimes recommend a student to Residential Special Schools (RSS) after all other options had been considered and/or failed. Ideally IWS attempts to support a student in situ (where they live). As IWS was the only avenue for enrolment, the rolls in RSSs have remained well below capacity (approximately a third) and, for this reason, the Ministry of Education has allowed a new avenue (RSS pathway) for enrolments. Students entering the school using this new pathway are still required to indicate a need for a placement of this type but without IWS involvement this brings less funding. The RSS pathway is relatively new and only two students at Westbridge were utilising this avenue when the Evaluation Team visited. The student roll remains low (12 students) with only three of the four residential cottages in operation.

Over the past twelve months there have been a number of changes at Westbridge that are part of a move toward more therapeutic practices. For example, ‘zones of regulation’ involve assisting students to recognise their current mood within one of four simple mood zones as a method of assisting self-regulation. Likewise, ‘trauma informed practice’ recognises that most students who are having difficulty with self-regulation have experienced some form of trauma in their past that may have a significant impact on their ability to interact with others successfully. Westbridge itself also indicates an ongoing commitment to Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) approaches and has also utilised mindfulness methods and restorative practices, especially with regard to its senior students. The school also recognises that students who have various syndromes (Autism, FAS, ADHD etc) may have particular learning and social challenges that may be complicated further by trauma events.

With these tools/models in mind, Westbridge has made a concerted effort to shift toward therapeutic approaches rather than solely relying on behavioural methods. It is noteworthy that the school made it an aspirational goal to eliminate the use of restraint. A move toward the complete elimination of restraint would be ideal but would require an entirely individualised approach that is well informed and person-centred (and preferably, person-driven). It would be desirable if the school considers the Enabling Good Lives principles in the development of protocols, procedures and practices.

Other changes at WRS have involved a restructure at management level and some personnel changes. For example, a new Student Pathways Coordinator has been appointed (to coordinate with whānau and assist with transitions) and there was a popular promotion of a Cottage Manager to the Deputy Principal – Residential position. Some of the residential staff have been working at Westbridge for many years and some have made the move from other approaches. The intended philosophical shift toward more therapeutic approaches brings with it a necessary change in practice and culture within the staff team. It was reassuring to note that the majority of staff indicated an understanding of the new directions being taken by the school and the importance of positive debriefing at shift changes between staff and after significant incidents had occurred with managers. There is an understanding of reflective practice and some staff talked about having ‘courageous conversations’ with colleagues. In support of the changes, Westbridge has provided training (professional development) in trauma informed practice and zones of regulation, as well as syndrome-specific training (for example, Autism). Some of the residential team have completed a diploma in youth work and another group (around 15 people) are about to undertake the same course. The school continues to provide group supervision twice a term and offers individual external supervision as needed.

During the evaluation, the Evaluation Team talked about recognising the professional status of residential staff given their complex role. Professional status indicates a highly skilled team of people who are able to work consistently and thoughtfully, and who understand the philosophical and practical aspects of supporting young people with complex needs. Key areas for continued development may include:

- individualised approaches,
- further exploration of PB4L with a focus on the students being supported at Westbridge,
- further specialisation of the Personal Key Worker (PKW) role especially with regard to integrating IWS, IEP and person-centred planning goals,
- ongoing training in trauma informed practice,
- syndrome-specific training and training relating to each person, and
- annual training in child protection, medication and school safety practices.

During the recent COVID lockdown online training was provided in child protection, including methods of handling disclosures. SAMS has reviewed the Westbridge ‘Child Protection Procedure 2020’ (draft) that outlines the various definitions of abuse and methods to follow as the result of a disclosure. We suggest including external avenues for reporting abuse in this document. Likewise, review of the complaints process is suggested. The school has policies and procedures for assisting with child safety which were seen to work effectively in practice. Westbridge is already in the process of reviewing the Child Protection procedure with Safeguarding Children (as well as staff training). SAMS suggests the school considers adding to this by including methods for students to have a voice (e.g., student council) and the introduction of external advocacy for students.

Each young person at the school has his or her own bedroom and each residential area has two bathrooms. The school has been coeducational for some years and the small number of girls that pass through the school have been housed in mixed cottages. The buildings at the school are dated and require constant repair for a variety of reasons. The décor is functional but also dated and somewhat institutional. The living spaces provide few areas where students can find a quiet space or undertake projects (for example, art, assignments, music etc). Despite this, there have been efforts to personalise or decorate the living areas and students are able to personalise their bedrooms.

Westbridge Residential School has effected fundamental changes to both its structure and its methods of supporting students to make the best possible gains they can in their time at the school. There is a strong and consistent link between school and residential staff with some personnel working in both settings. WRS has made some links with the local community. Most notably joining the local COL (Community of Learning). We heard how this had been beneficial for student transition and networking.

There is a good gender balance amongst the staff team in the residential area including positive male role models for male students, and the mix of cultures within the team provides a positive context for students from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Developmental evaluation methodology

SAMS is an organisation that is run by stakeholders of the service sector (particularly disabled people and their whānau). Over the past 30 years we have formulated, refined and developed the process of providing developmental evaluations. Developmental evaluations focus on where a service is performing well (not just within minimum standard criteria) and consider areas for further development.

Developmental evaluations aim to provide information about service practices and the quality of life of people using services. It identifies positive and innovative approaches occurring within the service and provides a catalyst for ongoing learning and continuous improvement. This evaluative approach will include the perspectives of a range of stakeholders and take into account wider influences within the community and the health, education and disability sector.

The current evaluation was informed by a number of developmental tools used by SAMS. These tools take into account multiple perspectives from a range of stakeholders – school/service, individual, families/whānau, staff, funders, professionals and the community.

The developmental review at Westbridge Residential School (WRS) was commissioned by the Joint Board of Trustees of both Halswell Residential College and Westbridge Residential School. A separate review of Halswell Residential College was finalised in June 2020.

During the Westbridge evaluation, the team interviewed 17 staff associated with the residential cottages, six staff associated with the school, Ministry of Education representatives including two IWS psychologists, a professional supervisor for the school, three family members and the senior management team (both together and separately). We also spent time in the school and the residential cottages and had opportunities to speak with students. During evaluations we also rely on documentation, particularly contact notes (for example, etap general notes and behavioural events), staff meeting minutes, personal planning documents and reviews, staff development plans and student records. In total, the wealth of information provided to us during an evaluation guides our conclusions.

In the interests of fairness and accuracy, SAMS provides draft reports to a service or school for their consideration and we negotiate any suggested changes. Areas where we do not agree may be highlighted in the report. The report is then provided to whoever funded the evaluation for their consideration and comment, and ideally other stakeholders such as whānau and staff members.

Findings

- The Westbridge Way emphasises a token economy or band system that permeates life at the school.
- The school has recently introduced more holistic approaches, such as zones of regulation and trauma informed practice.
- Other systems utilised include PB4L, mindfulness, safe crisis management (positive behaviour support and guidelines for use of restraint), reflective practice, courageous conversations and restorative approaches.
- Staff training has included zones of regulation, trauma informed practice and syndrome-specific training, and the staff are being supported to complete a diploma in youth work.
- The school is in the early stages of a culture shift since the introduction of zones of regulation and trauma informed practice, changes in personnel and a move toward reducing the use of restraint, eliminating 1:1 supervision after a serious event (as it was seen as punitive) and the development of the PKW role.
- Individualised approaches have included an emphasis on the triggers of certain behaviours and methods to avoid escalations and learn adaptive responses to personal stressors.
- Individualised approaches are also used in some personal planning, especially IWS and IEP goals and personal goals for senior students. These methods indicate a move toward some person-centred approaches.
- The Student Pathways Coordinator is working with the student and whānau as they transition back into the mainstream. There are good links with schools in home communities.
- There are positive connections between the school and the residential cottages with some staff working in both settings. There are also opportunities for joint personal development at certain times throughout the year.
- There are positive and on-going avenues for communication between the school and the residences.
- The school has integrated student safety measures into its practice, including provision of the key workers who can provide an avenue for student concerns, continued access to whānau and people from outside the school (mentors, psychologists, gym instructors, sport teams, and other community members) and provision of safe environments with around the clock supervision, clear boundaries and expectations.
- There are many opportunities for kids to be kids through the equipment provided at the school, community activities and opportunities for levity with other young people and adults.

Recommendations

1. The school further specialises the PKW or key worker role.
2. Westbridge continues its attempts to integrate IWS and IEP goals and build in person-centred (and driven) aspirational goals. The school may also consider providing training in areas such as the use of person-centred and person-driven approaches to personal planning and Enabling Good Lives approaches.
3. Westbridge seeks more professional development opportunities for the staff team to extend their understanding of trauma informed practice and individualised approaches to support.
4. Etap behaviours (incidents) be considered in greater detail in order to understand patterns in behaviours (i.e., triggers and stress points), make greater use of functional analysis of behaviour and assist in the on-going adjustment of personalised approaches.
5. Management makes written responses to etap behaviours (incidents) as a form of follow-up.
6. The Board revises the complaint policy and the school continues to its process to revise the child protection procedures.
7. The school continues to provide annual training in areas such as child protection¹ (including abuse and neglect and disclosures), and includes annual training in medication management and safety practices.
8. The school considers introducing external advocacy for students and extending opportunities for students to have their own voice in the school.

¹ As suggested in the Principal's report April 2020, and the Annual Plan 2020

Westbridge and the structure of this report

The discussion in this report highlights the positive changes Westbridge has been making in a number of areas. In particular, the school has been building greater emphasis on therapeutic approaches, while at the same time maintaining methods of creating clear boundaries and expectations. There is good data on student outcomes both during their tenure at the school and after they had returned to their home communities. There are also some excellent examples of community involvement by students. The school-residential team work well together and there are consistent practices between the school and residential settings.

Whanau (three) and IWS psychologists (two) who were interviewed during this review were very positive about the school and the work being done to assist students stabilise into positive learning routines. Records also indicate positive gains on IWS goals that occur progressively throughout the student's tenure at the school.

This report is structured to provide a description of the balance between what is happening or available in the school, where it is devoting its resources (see references to annual plans, principals reports etc) and where it may continue to progress into the future. It is a progressive discussion from what may be considered older but at times necessary practices to maintain student safety, toward the introduction of therapeutic practices, reinforcing positive behaviour strategies (including functional analysis) and considering more individualised and person-driven approaches being advocated in the literature.

The Westbridge Way

The school provides a booklet entitled “The Westbridge Way” that includes descriptions of therapeutic methodologies and approaches such as trauma informed practice and positive behaviour for learning (PB4L). At its core, however, the booklet highlights its ‘band’ system, described as the “cornerstone of our behavioural and social skills programmes”. This band system is designed using behavioural techniques (particularly token economy) based on incentives and rewards. These include successive coloured bands that progressively assist students to progress through the cottages as they learn skills to self-regulate their behaviour and interact positively with others. The goals in each band are the same and are based on the values of the school: safety, responsibility and respect. To progress through the bands, students must achieve a certain percentage of achievement in each of the four goals for a specified period of time (both percentages and time increase with each band). The four goals include:

- following adult instructions with respect
- communicating pleasantly and politely
- actively participating in the programme
- keeping my hands and feet to myself.

The third goal relates to the activities structured into each block of the day. There are six school and five residential blocks on week days and six blocks on each weekend day. At the end of each block, the students will hui with a teacher or cottage leader and recite the goals and how they believe they scored or performed on each goal, with some examples. Points are awarded for each goal (up to 4) in each block. As well as these points, students can be awarded bonus points that can be used to ‘buy’ items from a rewards cupboard once a fortnight.

We have explained the system in detail as the band system appears to permeate every activity at the school. We heard that it was particularly important for new entrants as they learn the routines of the school and it provides clear boundaries for individuals who may not have experienced boundaries often in their lives.

The routines of residential life are predictable and based on a timetable of events. Students rise at a given time, shower at set periods of time, carry out chores at specified times, have specific periods of time allocated for leisure activities, and have allocated times for bed-time or use of devices or other media and so on.

The culture within the wider school may be influenced by the “band system”. This system involves routines and rules, while providing boundaries and control, and can work against the new approaches being implemented. This is a top down approach to learning support. This creates a dilemma for the school as many of the students are unable to self-regulate their own behaviour, especially at the new entrant level. In response, the school is adopting other methods of support that are informed by individualised

approaches, these start with individualised plans (safety plans, IWS goals, IEP goals etc) already in place but may also include more student driven or aspirational approaches, especially as students' progress through the school. We believe this is a desirable approach.

The adoption of zone of regulation has fitted into the band system seamlessly since students are assisted to self-regulate their behaviour by identifying their present mood state and considering where to next if they are in a more unstable mood state. Zones of regulation are taught in certain blocks in the residential cottages through discussion, role play and activities designed to help students understand their moods. Particularly at the senior level (Kowhai Cottage) students are also taught mindfulness techniques that also assist with understanding themselves and self-regulating their behaviour.

The introduction of trauma informed practice and a greater focus on particular syndromes and how these can influence the lives of individuals create another layer of skill for youth workers and managers. Unlike the applied behavioural techniques listed in the band system, considering the hurdles individuals encounter in their everyday life and the impact these have on both their cognitive and developmental abilities is complex. For example, trauma informed practice often involves six core elements associated with individual development. Notably, developing a sense of personal safety, creating trustworthy and transparent relationships with both peers and adults, providing avenues for empowerment and self-determination, building positive peer support and addressing cultural, historical and gender issues that have inhibited positive development. These principles are designed to build self-esteem and create positive pathways for individuals. It is notable that the core principles of trauma informed practice are similar to Enabling Good Lives principles developed by disabled people and whānau in the disability sector. The aim in both cases is toward empowerment and person-driven approaches to support.

Laying the applied behavioural approaches alongside the cognitive and developmental approaches is conceptually difficult. It is particularly difficult for front line staff who are utilising a routine and rule-based system that is group-orientated rather than individualised. The school is attempting to develop individualised approaches in the senior cottage where students who are scoring rather well on the band system are able to focus more on new goals of their own. WRS is also developing the key worker roles² that allow students to work with a youth worker they know and trust, especially with regard to their goals. This role could ideally be specialised further with focused training especially toward individualised approaches and the overview of personalised plans (including IWS and IEP goal plans).

The plans provided for students (apart from the band goals noted above) include IWS and IEP goals. Students in the senior cottage (Kowhai) are also able to work with key workers to develop their own goals that tend to be related to learning (e.g., self-regulation,

² Annual Plan 2020

social interactions etc). Personnel at the school talked about integrating all the goals into one cohesive document and perhaps streamlining goals so that they are not overwhelming in content. Generally, except where school-based teaching is involved, the number of goals are best limited simply to do them justice; fewer goals are more achievable. At some point the school may wish to review aspirational goals, those owned and driven by the individual which may have little to do with becoming a model student but have more to do with what the person really enjoys in life and what they want to do.

Professional practice

Recognising the professionalism needed for youth workers and PKW roles is important. There have been some significant conceptual or even work culture shifts required of many of the staff who have utilised less trauma informed approaches in their previous work. In this we specifically refer to personnel who have come different professional backgrounds or even longer-term staff who have needed to make a series of practice changes over time, most especially over the past twelve months. The fact that the majority of the team were able to articulate the shift toward more therapeutic approaches and provide examples was admirable. It was also noteworthy that the school has provided targeted training in key therapeutic approaches (i.e., trauma informed practice, zones of regulation, PB4L etc)³ and has supported formal training toward a diploma in youth work for around 15 staff members (some had already completed this diploma). The changes in the past year have also been accompanied by changes in the management team, including the introduction of the Student Pathways Coordinator (who works with whānau and assists with transition) and a popular promotion of a Cottage Manager to the Deputy Principal – Residential position.

Other methods of improving or focusing on practice include debriefs at shift changeovers and opportunities for ‘courageous conversations’ with peers regarding practice. In utilising reflective practice, individual staff members are able to consider what they are doing in their practice and why they are doing it. It is also important to reflect on practice with regard to individualised systems of support. Team-based supervision is offered twice a term and EAP is made available to individual staff, providing group supervision more frequently, especially as changes are becoming embedded and the team needs to make practice adjustments would be ideal. External supervision is also made available on request for all team members (including managers).

The school provides fortnightly team meetings for cottage staff and similar meetings for managers. Professional development opportunities are built into the school calendar with two days provided at the beginning of the year and time provided weekly for different groups of staff throughout the school. Again, extending the time available for staff to integrate new approaches would greatly assist this period of transition.

³ Noted especially in the Strategic Plan 2020-2021 and in personal development training plans.

There are positive and professional relationships between school and residential staff. Many teaching assistants also work in the residential cottages and there are opportunities for school staff to talk/debrief with residential staff before and after school. This transition is important as personnel from both settings would benefit from discussions on how a student was prior to or during school. It has been noted elsewhere that there are also opportunities for the school and residential personnel to meet or train together. This is obviously very important in providing consistent approaches across both settings. Building a greater understanding of PB4L, trauma informed practice, mindfulness and individualised approaches can also contribute to this team approach.

It is noteworthy the combined schools at Halswell and Westbridge commissioned a literature review of best practice in residential special schools in 2018. Highlighted in this work is an emphasis on providing safe and positive environments for young people with skilled staff who are able to develop relationships of trust and provide positive role models. Emphasising the professional status of residential staff will be useful as Westbridge continues to build on its therapeutic approaches.

Behaviour support

The young people at Westbridge Residential School arrive with specific personal social, behaviour and/or learning needs that are highly complex and challenging. This may directly impact on learning and may have resulted in exclusions or stand-downs from one or more learning environments. Many of these young people may have experienced trauma in their lives and some may also experience syndromes that create their own challenges (for example, Autism, dyspraxia, FAS, ADHD or a specific learning disability). When they arrive at Westbridge, there may be issues of relating to self-esteem, self-regulation and locus of control that are learned and embedded. Providing a safe and positive environment from the outset does include the creation of consistent approaches and boundaries that are common across both the school and residential setting. Understanding of trigger events and stressors may be unclear when a student first arrives at the school.

We observed in the etap records some examples of where the rules applied may have inadvertently created an escalation. Boundaries and routines need to be rational, consistent and fair. Creating boundaries where few were previously present may result in extinction responses whereby the individual challenges the boundaries that have been imposed. Individuals may also respond to different triggers or stressors in their new environment in challenging ways. The young people at WRS also have personal challenges that may be exemplified in learned responses to personal stressors.

There are times when a young person's responses may be so extreme that safety precautions will need to be put in place both for the person and for other people. In extreme situations Westbridge has adopted methods to limit risk by removing others from the setting, ensuring the immediate area is as safe as possible and responding to the individual calmly. There was a huge emphasis on recognising early warnings and on methods of de-escalation when talking with staff⁴. In situations where there is immediate risk of harm, staff have been trained to use approved methods of restraint. Examples in the use of restraint in this way are evident in the etap behaviour (incident) notes. Since the beginning of this year, there has been a concerted effort to reduce the use of restraint with a view toward elimination in individual cases. School-wide elimination in all cases can be more challenging. Westbridge requires that only staff trained in safe crisis management may utilise restraint, and all examples of when restraint is used are recorded in etap and made available to the Board of Trustees. The school may wish to review the restraint minimisation documents created by the Ministry of Health for people living in residential settings⁵.

⁴ As per training in Safe Crisis Management (SCM)

⁵ [NZS 8134.2:2008 Health and Disability services \(restraint minimisation and safe practice\) Standards \[PDF, 3.5 MB\]](#)

The school stopped the use of one-to-one supervision at the beginning of term two this year. This was used to maintain intensive supervision of a student for a period of time after a traumatic escalation but the school had concerns it was being seen as punitive.

The etap records are detailed, well written and provide a rich source of material in terms of triggering events. These notes could benefit from skilled analysis of patterns of behaviour with regard to the function of a behavioural event. For example, a reviewer may recognise a pattern of issues arising after a young person is asked to disengage from a device or may note that being asked to shut a bedroom door creates an escalation. The team did note discussion of what may be causing events in both weekly Personal Programme Plan meeting notes and case notes. A functional analysis of the student's behaviour may discover methods of avoiding or preparing a person for stressors, teaching alternative responses or may question rules that serve no purpose⁶.

Etap notes could also be improved by indicating how managers debriefed and responded to significant events and how collective debriefs considered the situation (such as team meetings).

The use of restraint requires careful consideration within any environment since restraint serves no therapeutic purpose and may serve to reinforce trauma in the person's life. This is a view supported by the school in its attempts to eliminate the use of restraint.

⁶ Exploring functional behaviour analysis is a goal of the Westbridge Annual Plan 2020.

Student safety and staying connected

In 2016 SAMS was commissioned by the Ministry of Education to conduct a literature review regarding the safety of young people in residential school settings⁷. The literature consistently indicated a set of criteria that would positively assist with student safety regardless of the setting. The criteria has resonance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and with common sense methods of ensuring those rights are maintained. A primary consideration is to treat each person as an individual, provide an avenue for that person to be heard and taken seriously, and provide a safe and nurturing environment with people the person can trust. The literature outlines the following key steps that will enhance safety:

- Treating the person as an individual: Westbridge creates individualised approaches with regard to the development of IEPs and responses to IWS goals. It recognises specific strengths and encourages people to be involved in activities they enjoy. This report has indicated other areas where individualised methods can be developed further, especially with regard to therapeutic approaches, and developing more individualised goals that integrate personal, IEP and IWS goals into a cohesive and easy to use approach.
- Being heard and taken seriously: The Children's Commission of New Zealand has provided a number of reports based on conversations with children including children in out of home care situations⁸. The key worker role at Westbridge is important as it allows young people to have an opportunity to talk with someone about their views. This may also be achieved through other avenues such as other youth workers and teachers, IWS psychologists and external counsellors. Providing a student voice at management or Board level can also be explored (for example, a student council or student representative).
- Providing external advocacy and contacts: Westbridge students can call home in the evening and at other times as needed. Students may also be safeguarded at the school through their contacts outside the school. Some students have a mentor through IWS who can provide positive role modelling and another pair of ears. Involvement in the community prevents isolation within a particular environment and contributes to developing healthy relationships. Further advocacy can be fostered through providing ready access to external advocates who may visit the school from time to time, clarify the rights of children and young people, and make themselves and their role known to the students.

⁷ Based on a literature review conducted by SAMS for the Ministry of Education: Parker, A and Wilson, C (2016). *Evaluation of the safety of children in coeducational residential special schools*.

⁸ *What makes a good life? Follow-up report: Views of children and young people in care on wellbeing and A hard place to be happy*.

- Allowing privacy: The research has indicated that young people (like anyone) need private time and space. Young people at Westbridge can have private time in their bedroom where they are not constantly monitored (and even when this is the case staff members will remain outside of the room). Each student has also chosen a 'safe place' where they can go if they feel they need to calm down or get away from a situation that may be causing distress. In these heightened situations, there is a need to continue to monitor the student discretely, either from a distance, through monitors or closer if this is desired by the person.
- Having trusting relationships: Having a person to talk to who the student can trust within the school environment. Primary Key Workers are chosen by the student within each cottage as the main person a student can go to. The student can change key workers if the one they have chosen is not working out.
- Providing a safe and nurturing environment: environments include both the physical and psychosocial. Westbridge has a number of systems and processes in place that include having eyes on each person at all times (except when they are in their bedrooms or bathrooms) and having eyes on staff at all times. There are cameras situated throughout the school and residential environments and these are used on occasion to review events that may have occurred or to monitor a student who is needing space to de-escalate. Staff members will tap in and tap out when they are feeling stressed or a situation requires a change of face. Staff members will also keep eyes on each other for safety purposes. Nurturing environments are created through positive and safe relationships with peers and adults.
- Providing a professional team and avenues for reviewing practice: We have already talked about developing and recognising professionalism in the workforce. Handling students in a professional manner requires staff not to make value judgements or relate the student's life and circumstances to their own or their own familial practices/traditions, not to take events personally and knowing when to exit (tap out) a situation. This is central to developing a positive relationship with each individual student. Westbridge has checks and balances for staff who are becoming stressed and there are indications that managers are able to spot stress (such as a staff member coming to work after a difficult time at home) and assign work where they are not immediately interacting with young people who may be challenging. There is also talk of courageous conversations and including these at debriefs. There were occasional indications during interviews where examples of poor staff practice were indicated such as talking down to a student or ridiculing. Such practices, if they are occurring, constitute a breach of basic rights but also will reinforce trauma, maladaptive responses to trauma and poor self-esteem.

Westbridge has policies and procedures concerning safety that include checks and balances. Core policies are available on the website, and include the Child Protection Policy, protected disclosures and complaints. Procedures such as the Child Protection Procedure (currently under review) are available at the school. The evaluation team supports review of Child Protection Procedure

and also suggests review of the complaints policy in line with the guidance provided by the ombudsman (see especially pp19)⁹. Provision of a flow diagram for progressing concerning or complaints would also be useful in relevant documentation¹⁰.

The buildings at Westbridge are dated and in need of upgrades. There appears to be constant maintenance issues throughout the school, many of which are brought about by aging buildings and utilities. The residential buildings are functional and warm but are institutional in design with non-stimulating décor, long corridors and aging facilities. There are few spaces, other than bedrooms, where students can retreat to find a quiet space away from others or engage in hobbies, assignments or chat privately with whānau and other visitors. The living areas do appear comfortable and each cottage has a large television, notice boards (which were recently revamped) and comfortable (albeit aging) seating. Positive environments enhance the mana of the people who live and work in these settings.

Each student has a safety plan that is up-to-date and detailed. The campus has cameras in most key areas and the school is in the process of adding more, especially to those places that students have named as their safe place (for example, the gym and playing field). Medications are securely stored in locked cupboards in staff rooms and non-liquid medications are blister packed. Two staff and the young person for whom a medication has been issued sign the medication book. The service follows appropriate medication protocols (right person, right time, right medication, right dose etc). The school may wish to consider the regulations regarding the safe storage and monitoring of controlled drugs (available on the Ministry of Health website). Annual training is suggested in medication training (in keeping with guidelines suggested by the Ministry of Health for residential services), child protection (including definitions and example of abuse and neglect and disclosures) and safety practices.

The residential cottages, school and related buildings have built in smoke detectors and sprinklers. Fire safety equipment was evident in the staff room. Fire drills are reported to be practised at regular intervals (although we did not review documentation relating to fire drills or building fire safety reviews or warrants of fitness during the visit due to our own time constraints).

⁹ <https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/sites/default/files/2019-03/Effective%20complaint%20handling.pdf>

¹⁰ One was cited in the residential handbook (pp 42).

Enabling a good life

The title for this section is taken from the Children's Commission reports and several references to enabling good lives in the trauma informed practice literature. It is also, coincidentally, the title of the principles developed by disabled people and their whānau with regard to their relationships with the service sector¹¹. In older terminology we would have referred to quality of life but this concept was not necessarily driven by the people being supported. In other terminology, already used in this report, it may also refer to positive and nurturing environments, trusting relationships and positive experiences.

Being allowed to be children (or young people) and have fun with peers and adults is central to living a good life. Westbridge offers a range of activities both at the school and in the community where young people can be involved in activities that are fun and fulfilling. On-site the school offers a pool, BMX bikes and a BMX track, playing fields and tennis/netball courts. There is a gym that is popular and there are favoured animals (dogs at the school, ducks on the fields and last year a pig that adopted the school as its home for a time). There are also good relationships with the neighbours (where the pig came from) that include encounters with horses. The young people can have media time (DVDs, games etc), play board games, bake goodies for everyone and get engaged in artistic activities.

Enabling a good life in the disability literature refers to enhancing the mana (self-worth) of the person and their whānau. This has resonance with trauma informed practice, PB4L and methods of ensuring student safety. It is also important in terms of focusing on the person's culture, spirituality, values, interests, aspirations and connections (whānau, friends, acquaintances etc). It is noteworthy the ERO report (site visit was late 2018) highlighted:

strengthening cultural responsiveness to promote identity, language and culture for Māori students and bicultural perspectives of Aotearoa New Zealand for all students.

The staff team represent a variety of cultures but most prominently Māori and Pasifika. There is involvement in cultural activities at planned periods of the year (Māori language week, Matariki, Pasifika week) and whenever a situation presents itself. Karakia is practised at meal times and greetings are used at important hui (such as the weekly assembly). Male staff in the school are able to provide a positive role model for many of the boys

Establishing and maintaining strong connections with whānau is not only an important safety tool but important for both the young person and the whānau. The school provides frequent posts on SeeSaw for whānau to follow student work and achievements and students are able to phone home (as has already been stated). The school also makes provision for whānau to observe residential life both prior to entry and during induction. Students can go home for weekends (or out for an evening) if this is and whānau are

¹¹ <https://www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz/>

welcome to visit the school. IEP and IWS goals are reviewed and discussed with whānau at monthly intervals, either in person or using electronic media. When students were at home during the recent COVID lockdown, the school had daily contact with the student and whānau.

In the community, students have been involved with a local gym (run by one of the youth workers), gone to dance classes, played against other teams in various sports or belonged to a sports team outside the school. The students have also volunteered their time at the local Salvation Army and notably donated goods from their own accrued rewards.

WRS has continued to foster successful transitions for students back into their home communities. The school, in partnership with IWS, also attempts to reconnect students back into the mainstream gradually, especially if they are within the Auckland area. Transition planning is crucial for students to settle into mainstream routines after being absent for some time. Setting up supports around the student as they also negotiate home life and social interactions with peers is also important. Data from the June 2020 Principals report states that since June 2018 14 of the 17 school leavers were enrolled in mainstream settings. The Student Pathways Coordinator has been key in liaising between students, whānau, schools and IWS, especially with regard to transition plans.

There are a number of areas the school can explore with regard the concept of enabling good lives. A core element is positive and trusting relationships that enhance the mana of both the student and whānau. In this report we have focused on individualised approaches, increasing the emphasis on therapeutic rather than applied behavioural approaches, continuing to work toward the reduction and elimination of restraints, empowering students (student voice, cultural recognition, aspirational and transition planning), improving the professional status of the staff team and increasing opportunities for training, improving physical and psychosocial environments, and providing clear avenues to respond to concerns/complaints. We suggest WRS considers the recommendations in this report alongside enabling good lives approaches.

Documents reviewed

Westbridge Residential School website: access to school newsletters, annual report, policies (i.e. child protection, complaints, behaviour support, protected disclosures, health and safety, equal opportunities, staff appointments, employment and personnel, fees and expenses, financial)

Other policies and procedures and key documents: Philosophy of Care, Staff Code of Conduct

Student files: safety plans, legal documents (e.g. birth certificates), risk analysis, previous safety plans, permission forms, cyber safety agreement, health documents, medication administration records (non-current), Section 9 agreement and extension documents, IWS plans, funding agreements, home goal books, behavioural documents (e.g. traffic lights), Personal Programme Plan (PPP older documents), progress reports (various)

The Annual Plan 2020

Personal Development (2019-2020) summaries

Etap records (behavioural and general) and online records for each student

Cottage shift summaries and log-books

Case coordinators meeting minutes 2018, 2019, 2020

Analysis of variance (outcome expectations, reading, writing, mathematics and progress in band system)

Westbridge Residential School Charter: includes Strategic Plan 2020-2021, Annual Plan 2020, Student Achievement Targets 2020, Annual Plan Evaluation 2019, Student Achievement Targets 2019 Evaluation

Medical Handbook

Residential Handbook

Staff training booklet SCM (Safe Crisis Management)

The Westbridge Way (booklet) June 2020

MOE Understanding Behaviour, Responding Safely: Trauma Informed (slide show presentation format)

Confidential to the Joint Board to Trustees: Halswell and Westbridge Residential Colleges and subject to the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

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IWS Life Predictor Outcome data

Job descriptions: all staff

Data: number of incidents resulting in restraint 2019, 2020; number of stand-downs or exclusions 2017-2020

Principal's reports to the Board 2019 and 2020

2018 and 2019 leavers data

Responses to the draft evaluation report

Response from Westbridge Residential School

Board of Trustees Response

Westbridge Residential School Response

Response from evaluators
