



**Takanini School, Auckland  
2017**

## Turnaround pilot

### Takanini School, Auckland

#### Background

In 2016 Springboard Trust began its close association with Takanini School following the appointment of one of our alumni, Margaret Aikman to the principal role. The school was beset with challenges: student achievement registering the lowest level in the country, bullying and violent behaviour by children at school, traumatized children, poorly performing teachers, truancy and absenteeism, hostile parents and disengaged board members. Springboard Trust set out initially to provide coaching support to the principal to enhance her resilience, but ultimately provided a comprehensive set of services to assist the school leadership in turning around this school and improving the learning outcomes for its children.

The school was under statutory management when the project started, and a Limited Statutory Manager (LSM) was in place. Some of the success measures used to assess progress against the various aspects of the challenges facing the school included:

- No further requirement to employ a LSM
- Ability to bring visitors to the school with confidence that teachers and students would be in their classrooms engaged in learning
- Quantitative improvements in student achievement

**“Initially just listening was important for me ... Without spending the time understanding things, my energy and approach would have been misdirected.”**

**Volunteer coach**

- Principal defining programme of personal activities that built resilience
- Development of a coherent school strategic plan
- Funding for a community liaison full-time employee
- Effective leadership team development.

#### The project

Initially coaching support for the principal was put in place to help build resilience during the very challenging period at the beginning of her tenure.

According to the volunteer coach:

“Initially just listening was important for me. Getting into the principal’s shoes and being able to empathise was really challenging given the seriousness and scale of the issues... Without spending the time understanding things, my energy and approach would have been misdirected.”

The coach employed techniques to help the principal build resilience and enjoy life outside of school by planning a routine of physical activities which enabled her to enhance wellbeing and build resilience.

Springboard Trust proceeded to provide a range of support services and source more volunteer resources. The strategic plan was re-drafted and funding secured for the Kaitakawaenga (Community Engagement) role. Human resource advice was provided in drafting the position description and developing a recruitment strategy. This role has been critical in creating an open and safe environment for the predominantly Māori student community and their whānau to identify positively and engage in learning activities that are cultural inclusive. A volunteer working in the Inclusion and Diversity space has provided mentoring for the Kaitakawaenga and input into the emerging community engagement strategy.

Our volunteer coach facilitated a couple of workshops with the principal and the leadership team to help them work better as one team. Springboard Trust also enabled the leadership team to participate in a tailored version of our High Performing Leadership Team programme in which another facilitator helped to develop a cohesive team dynamic and surface the relationship issues and leadership challenges as well as continuing to press for greater strategic focus, alignment and action.



There is still much work to be done but significant progress has been made over two years and the sense of crisis is over. One of the key lessons learned from this project is that some schools need more than the Strategic Leadership for Principals Programme to set them on the road to success, regardless of the capabilities or experience of their principal. The community context and the quantum of change required is significant and real transformation involves people reframing their mindsets and developing the requisite leadership capabilities to overcome obstacles. Our Alumni support services needed to be ramped up to achieve the turn-around that is evidenced below.

## Outcomes

The most significant change was the removal of the LSM after a tenure of one short year and the confidence of the principal to grow in her critical leadership role lead: The volunteer coach reported that he “saw in Margaret’s eyes the confidence coming back. Seeing her then do things over the months that decreased stress, improved her wellbeing and her taking the leadership reins with assurance and skill made it all worthwhile.”

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A recent ERO review has shifted the review period from 6 months to 3 yearly, which is appropriate for schools that are stable where effective learning is taking place consistently. The student achievement levels have been transformed: 40% of year one students are now achieving national standards, 60% at year two level, and 80% at year three. This means that the learning deficit that children have as school entrants has effectively been overcome within 3 years.

The school environment is calm and teaching and learning is taking place in every classroom in every teaching hour. A recent unexpected visit to the school by local faith leaders, saw the principal happy to take them around the school premises without hesitation, such was her new-found confidence in the teaching staff and the learning rhythm that has been embedded.

The principal is looking for more stability in the senior leadership team as the foundation for completing the High Performing Leadership Team programme to support a more capable and effective leadership team.

The team intends to build on the foundations of ensuring that basic learning is taking place in each classroom to bring more modern pedagogy to the school and ensure that children are developing future-proofed capabilities

Plans are also underway to further develop the community engagement programme so that the school can become a hub of learning and capability building for the challenged community in which it is situated.