

Review of the Melville Schools' Restructure 2022 - 2023

Clive Hamill

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Introduction

At the end of the year in 2023, adjacent schools located in south west Hamilton were closed by the Minister of Education. The schools, Melville High School (MHS), with Year 9 - 13 students, and Melville Intermediate School (MIS), with Year 7 - 8 students, had served their community for 60 years. The following year, a new Year 7 - 13 school, Mangakōtuketuku College, opened on the two sites. All the staff of the two Melville schools had their employment terminated at the end of 2023.

The establishment of the new school began independently of the two existing schools in July 2022. By Term 4, a full complement of teaching staff was employed at the College in preparation for the new school year.

This is a review of that process six months after the new school, Mangakōtuketuku College, opened for students in 2024 from the perspective of the MHS principal, Clive Hamill.

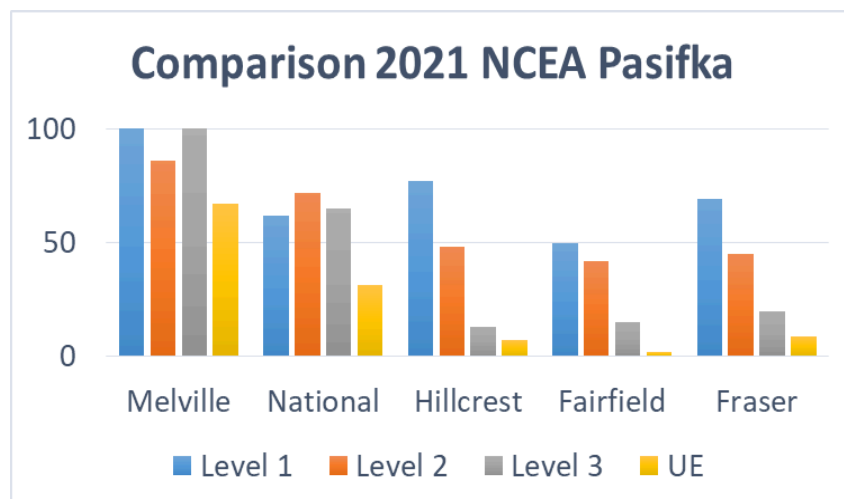
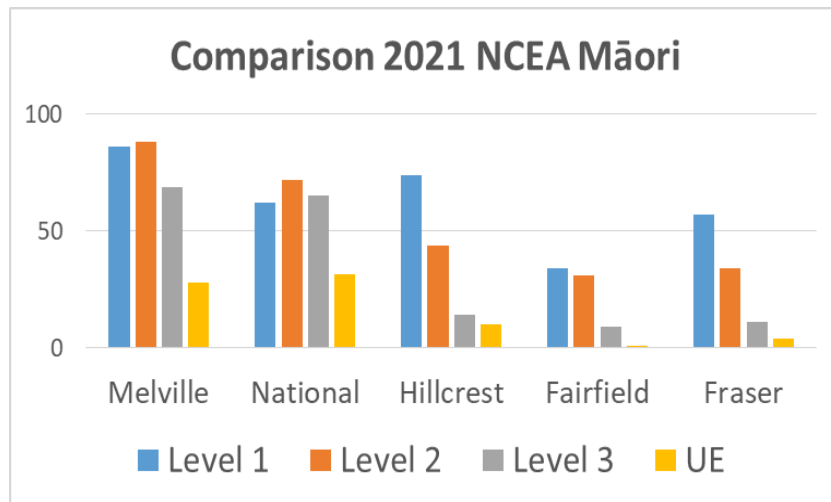
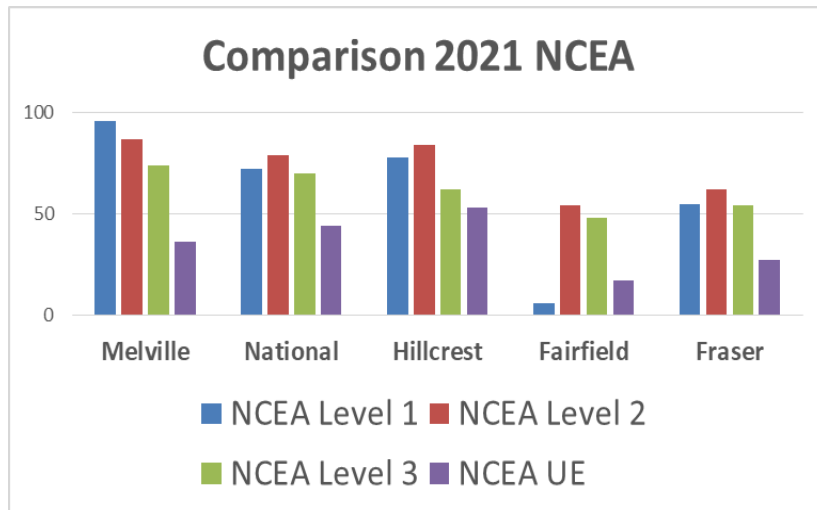
Background

Schools and school structures have been the subject of review and restructure for many decades. Harris and Martinez-Pabon (2022) noted that *"The decision to close or restructure a school is one of the most contentious and wrenching that education leaders ever make."* (p.1).

Melville High and Intermediate Schools served a low socioeconomic community. Melville High was a co-educational state-funded secondary school that catered for 600, 13 to 18-year-olds, in Hamilton, New Zealand. The school had a low socio-economic parent community with a 55% Māori roll.

The schools were functioning at a high level and received strong support from their whaanau and community. Melville High School, a school of 600 students, in the year before the restructure process began in 2021, accomplished some of their best ever NCEA achievement results.

Melville High School 2021 NCEA Data and comparisons with some Hamilton co-ed secondary schools.



This data was sourced from NZQA. Achievement in NCEA and UE: Melville High School PR2 - Enrolment Based Cumulative Overall Results - Generated 7-Apr-2022, and individual schools' 2021 NCEA Statistics made accessible to all schools on Wednesday, May 4, 2022.

A critical reason for this impressive student achievement was the professional development programme (PLD), undertaken for over a decade and a half with MHS staff to build [culturally responsive and relational pedagogy](#).

This practice built relationships, made learning a collaborative process and improved the quality of teaching. MHS and indeed secondary schools across Aotearoa owe a debt to Pounamu Education Research and Development Centre and its many precursor organisations, which provided “*years of iterative New Zealand research, amplified by the voices of Māori students, their whānau and education professionals. It reflects the bicultural nature of New Zealand society*”.
<https://poutamapounamu.org.nz/about>

I would like to acknowledge Dr Mere Berryman, Russel Bishop, and the Team at *Poutama Pounamu* for their synthesis and support during this period. Their leadership to education across Aotearoa has helped schools address the marginalisation and end the disparities faced by earlier generations of Māori children because of the failure to acknowledge the impact of colonisation on the educational system.

2018 also saw the implementation of *Tracking*, a unique monitoring and mentoring support programme for senior students, which helped improve student achievement further. This was part of a programme facilitated by [Dr Linda Bendickson](#), which MHS developed while working with her on a Schooling Improvement initiative project during 2018-21. This programme monitored every senior (Year 11 - 13) student on a three-weekly basis, and resulted in positive interventions to improve student achievement or address social or psychological barriers facing these students.

Indeed, Bendickson (2022) made reference to this successful programme in her recent book, [It's not Rocket Science](#).

The MHS NCEA achievement results were quite significant too when consideration is given to the literacy levels of students entering Melville High School at Year 9. In March 2021, 76% of MHS Year 9 students were assessed using AsTTle as reading below or well below their chronological level. This was not an atypical year, and this data was shared with Mangakōtukutuku College as early as 2022.

Further, Ministry data, shared as part of the restructure process, indicated that Melville High School only gained 34% of the eligible secondary students in its catchment area. A majority of the students bypassed Melville High School to attend other secondary schools or kura.

Three other MHS strategic practices that supported the positive learning environment were:

- School-wide use of [Restorative Practices](#) as the foundation behaviour management strategy
- Recognition of Aotearoa's dual cultural heritage
- Valuing the contribution of every student

The beginning

The quest for the best learning environment for Melville rangatahi has been a 60-year journey for the MHS school community. In early 2018, the principals of Melville High and Melville Intermediate approached Alison Harold, Regional Manager, Ministry of Education, to find a pathway to provide their schools with Modern Learning Environments and better resources for the southwest Hamilton Community because of the inadequacies of their school sites.

The Melville principals looked enviously at the modern schools in north Hamilton and requested advice from the Ministry about when they would be entitled to see such facilities at their Melville school sites. While they received a sympathetic hearing, no solutions were identified.

The situation changed significantly when the Hamilton City Council outlined their urban development plans. [*Hamilton City Council received funding from the Government's Housing Infrastructure Fund, made up of a \\$180.3M 10-year interest-free loan and \\$110.1M of Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency subsidies. This resourcing accelerated development of 3750 homes, which will occur in Peacocke with a total of 8400 homes developed in the area across the next 30 years.*](#)

One year later, with the distribution of the [Ministry of Education's National Education Growth Plan 2030 - Waikato & Hawke's Bay / Tairāwhiti May 2019](#) (see Summary p 7 – 8), the Ministry acknowledged that they needed to provide schooling for this increased population in south-west Hamilton.

This provided a potential pathway to improve the educational opportunities for the greater Melville community. The Growth Plan identified that the Ministry would be working collaboratively with both Boards because of their need for additional facilities to meet predicted roll growth. Provision was made for new primary schools in the new development, and with the lessons of Rototuna/Fairfield College 'ringing in their ears', the Ministry solution was for a repurposed facility on the existing MHS/MIS site.

With the promise of significant infrastructure funding and improved education and community facilities and outcomes, both principals were very receptive to this opportunity. Both invested significant time and energy in consulting with their community over this proposal and actively supported it.

At the same time, in mid-2019, the Boards of Melville Intermediate and Melville High invited the Ministry of Education to consider redeveloping our two schools to accommodate the population growth expected in South West Hamilton. Initial community consultation by the schools indicated support for change. The MHS Board, kaumatua, and senior staff visited Rototuna Senior, Tarawera College and Haawera schools as part of careful consideration of this opportunity.

The subsequent extensive consultation by the [MHS Board](#) showed that the MHS community was overwhelming in support for a merger of the two schools, with the preference being governance under one of the existing Boards. This would have involved staff of both schools being part of a single new Year 7 - 13 school.

The motivation for a merged school by the MHS Board was in part based upon the recognition that the school's growing student achievement was founded on the relationship focus and the culturally responsive pedagogy philosophy, which had seen significant improvement in students' academic, social and cross-curricular success. A merger would retain the leadership, staff, and kaupapa of a successful school and the positive relationships between staff and students and whaanau.

The involvement of the Ministry, which now took control of the restructure process, was initially very supportive. They had recent experience of school restructure, and clearly in south-west Hamilton this undertaking was immersed in a community that was very much in favour of the restructure.

Historically restructures in schooling was generally prefaced by issues such as roll decline, achievement failure, student safety concerns, fiscal or governance mismanagement, or, in the case of Christchurch, natural disaster. None of these factors were present in this restructure.

The Ministry established a process which involved all parties, was transparently structured with timeframes and milestones, and they embarked on inflexibly implementing it.

Expectations were high, and promises of significant capital funding identified a clear pathway to achieving the desired modern learning environments for the communities rangatahi. At one public meeting, Ministry officials stated that there would be a minimum of \$40 million available for the 'reorganisation', and at another hui, the figure of \$65 million was identified as a ballpark figure for the upgrade.

While these were potentially exciting times, it was also a time of anxiety for all staff, students, Boards and whaanau across the two schools as they reflected on the huge potential personal impact that the restructure could bring.

In February 2022, the Minister of Education decided that both Melville High School and Melville Intermediate School would close at the end of the 2023 school year. A new Year 7-13 school, later to be called Mangakōtukutuku College, would open for the community at the beginning of 2024. This decision was unsuccessfully challenged by the MHS Board.

The onset of the pain

With the Ministry now driving the restructure process, the schools were closely managed and directed to undertake a host of requirements and compliance obligations. This brought about a huge additional administrative workload on top of managing the daily requirements of leading a school while undergoing a stressful restructure process.

One example of this compliance overload was for MHS, with a total staff at this stage of 92 employees, having to rewrite every employment agreement and re-negotiate every Job Description for every staff member. A process that also involved unions, the New Zealand Trustees Association (NZSTA) and the Ministry and it took an inordinate amount of time.

It was made more challenging as MHS was also Lead School/Fundholder for the Hamilton School Alternative Education Programme (12 schools), local Kaahui Ako Cluster (7 schools) and the Volcanics/[Kotui Ako](#) eLearning Community (at that stage, 120 schools).

Another aspect of this direct supervision was the requirement for a Ministry Financial Adviser to attend all Board Finance Committee meetings during all of 2023. MHS was fortunate that the delegated Ministry finance official had a good understanding of the additional school responsibilities as outlined in the previous paragraph, understood the goal of the additional spending the MHS Board had budgeted to manage the transition (\$700,000), and became a genuine partner in managing our finances. The Ministry from the outset appeared to have a deep concern about the schools acting unprofessionally and using their assets and cash resources inappropriately during the closure process.

However, the biggest challenge for MHS was the Ministry directives regarding personnel. As a result, MHS was unable to appoint permanent staff since mid-2022. This meant that staffing became a huge issue. All fixed-term staff were not entitled to any redundancy or severance payments, even if they remained until school closure. As a result, there was a minimum number of applicants for vacant positions, and sometimes none. Applicants were almost all [Provisionally Certificated Teachers](#) (PCT), year 1 or 2 teachers or untrained teachers who had [LAT](#)'s (Limited Authority to Teach).

As a consequence, in 2022 and 2023, over a third of our teaching staff were PCT or LAT staff. Further, the overwhelming number of the PCT's were foreign-trained. During this period, a total of 43 - 46% of teaching staff were fixed-term (non-permanent). Further, the entire MHS Senior Leadership Team, except for the principal, were all new at the beginning of 2023. The restructure clearly destabilised staffing at MHS and made facilitating learning and maintaining appropriate standards of student behaviour a major challenge.

Staff turnover had an impact across the school. In 2023, for example, MHS had three different Year 9 Deans. The role of Deans is vital in supporting the pastoral care for students and for building strong relationship partnerships with whaanau. Traditionally, Year 9 had been the most challenging year group as MHS inducted these new students into the culture of MHS.

Further, MHS had no applicants for several positions and, of greatest concern, no applicants for the Head of Health and Physical Education. This necessitated that an Assistant Principal, new to the school and managing a huge workload, had to take on this additional responsibility for three terms. There was only one permanent staff member in her team.

As a result staff stability plummeted and there were numerous teaching staff changes. Staff leaving to seek the security of permanent employment was a major driver. There was no malice or concern expressed to these staff, because everyone understood the challenge of having no job at the end of 2023. Couple this with an inability to employ teachers with experience in the [New Zealand Curriculum](#)

(which sets the direction for student learning and provides guidance for schools as they design and review their curriculum) and NCEA, and the impact on student achievement was severe.

While our 2021 NCEA Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 results were at record levels, our 2022 results were devastatingly poor. [MHS's NCEA results plummeted](#). With falls in achievement levels varying from 22 to 47%. Tragically, it was Maaori and Pasifika students who suffered most. Interestingly, this was not the case at Haawera High School where NCEA results in their penultimate year were 'normal' in comparison to the previous year.

Part of the challenge for many of these teachers was that they were new to teaching in Aotearoa and they were unfamiliar with the cornerstone aspects of MHS. Culturally Responsive and Relational Pedagogy, Restorative Practices and the school culture of care which were vital aspects of the school values and very few of the new staff had any experience of these.

Preparation for change

While disappointed about the Minister's governance structure decision both principals began a deliberate strategy to help lead their two schools through this major change process. Indeed the principal of MHS placed the following affirmation, attributed to Benjamin Franklin, on his office wall.

By failing to prepare you are preparing to fail

MHS Senior Leadership Team (SLT) joined Board members in visiting schools that had undergone restructure. Visits to Tarawera College, (formerly Kawerau High School and Kawerau Intermediate) and Haawera which provided invaluable information and heightened their desire for the restructure and the opportunities it would provide.

In 2022 the MHS principal twice visited Haawera schools in South Taranaki which were embarking on a similar schooling restructure in 2023, one year before Melville. His first visit, unsanctioned, at the beginning of August 2022 was hugely enlightening and he acknowledged the depth of knowledge and assistance Acting Principal of Haawera High School, John Rhos, provided him. This visit ensured MHS had an appreciation of many of the challenges and opportunities that the restructure could have, and enabled him to draft what was to become an effective plan for managing the transition to 'our new school'. The choice of this phrase 'our new school' was a deliberate strategy to both endorse MHS's support for Mangakōtukutuku College and to affirm the expectation that the college was the community's new school and that all MHS students should be enrolling at the college.

While there were several invaluable lessons from the 'Haawera Experience' there were also major limitations brought about because of the two different settings. In the subsequent transition [plan for 2023](#) the MHS principal noted the following differences between Haawera and the Melville schools:

Among the challenges facing the existing Melville schools are:

- 1. Within a 45- 50 minute travel radius of our Melville schools, there are 28 secondary schools, 15 intermediate schools and 26 full primary schools. There are potentially a huge number of potential employers at hand for our current staff. This was not the case in Hāwera where they have 3 High Schools within that radius.*
- 2. We have lost an Assistant Principal, three heads of department and 5 teachers since Term 3 this year (2022). Each has identified the impending closure as a major part of their justification for departing. We also have 2 staff attending interviews over the next few days and four are awaiting feedback on their interview status*
- 3. The current employment timeframe for 'our new' school is two terms longer than that used at Hāwera so the impact, especially on a lack of leadership will be prolonged.*
- 4. Further, being unable to appoint permanent teachers since June this year has made recruitment particularly difficult.*
- 5. The impact of the loss of some of our SLT and Leaders of Curriculum will be profound as it could be for 3 terms.*
- 6. At MHS we have 14 Provisionally Certificated Teacher (PCT) teachers. These beginning teachers make up over one-third of the MHS teaching staff. They require additional support and encouragement from our curriculum leaders to help them overcome their shortfalls and grow and develop their skills.*

These teachers are overwhelmingly foreign trained and almost all new staff have had no experience with implementing Culturally Responsible and Relationship Pedagogy, the cornerstone pedagogical philosophy of our school.

Further they are new to teaching and have no experience with delivering NCEA.

- 7. MHS is having a significant challenge in employing migrant teachers because they are requiring permanent status to support their goals of residency.*
- 8. The new principal for the new Melville school has no principal experience. Conversely the principal of the new school in Hāwera [Te Paepae o Aotea] was the principal at Hāwera High for 5 years.*

A pivotal feature of this transition plan was the absolute support of the MHS Board and extensive additional resources they provided in an attempt to ameliorate the challenges the school was going to face. Further had the Board not been so fiscally prudent over a number of years previously, they would not have had the financial capacity to fund these initiatives, which included several additional teaching and support personnel.

The draft plan, after input from staff, was shared with the Ministry, Mangakōtūkū College, MIS, and Boards in late October 2022. In late November a significant formal delegation from Hamilton

including Boards, principals and senior leaders, Ministry and other personnel visited Haawera for an intensive visit over two days. The draft plan was reviewed in the light of this visit and then shared with staff, students and our school community. The feedback was that this initiative helped allay their anxiety about how MHS was going to manage the final 12 months.

Upskilling Staff in preparation

In 2021 MHS began a Professional Learning and Development (PLD) programme utilising the services of Dr. Mark Osborne from <https://leadinglearning.co.nz> to explore modern learning environments and what the Future Schooling curriculum and pedagogy could look like. This two year intensive PLD programme, which included Intermediate staff, explored pedagogical frameworks, models, and included numerous visits to schools that were applying aspects of this philosophical scaffold to their school organisation and curriculum delivery.

This was part of a deliberate strategy to prepare staff for the opportunity that a significant modernisation of the school campus would provide students. Knowing that unless staff pedagogical practice changed, just modernising classrooms alone would not bring about a qualitative change in learning outcomes.

The leadership and nurture that Mark provided was impressive and helped develop collaboratively the schools' capacity to grow and learn about the opportunity and limits of such learning environments. This was a significant investment of time and energy which the staff and Board found invaluable.

Collaboration

Between November 2022 and 2023 the three schools met on eight separate occasions as part of the transition preparation process. There were various shared documents and sharing of information between the three schools. These were brokered by the Ministry-appointed Change Manager/Governance Facilitators who worked exceptionally hard to support preparations for the new college and chaired collaboration hui between the principals and senior leaders of the three schools.

These change managers also problem solved, actioned Ministry directives and attempted to build positive relationships between the schools. Their prime responsibility was to support Mangakōtukutuku College, and also to assist both MHS and MIS through the transition process. By the end of 2023 the schools were working with their third different facilitator.

A Melville Schools Collaborative Transition Plan 2023 for the three schools was established and was used as a collaborative planning tool. Both closing schools readily allowed their facilities and communication networks to be used by the new school as they began their promotional activities.

The visit to Haawera identified two key strategies that all present agreed were of great value. The first involved '*flexibility in staffing*', where staff appointed to the new school who were either from the Intermediate or the High School would work in both schools for a transition period to allow for minimum disruption to senior students' learning.

While at Haawera the Hamilton schools saw an effective strategy to build positive relationships between staff and students in preparation for the new school opening in 2023. In December 2022 and again in late February 2023 all three Melville schools made a commitment to use this strategy at year's end.

This part of the 'Haawera Plan' included an organisational change in the final term of 2022. For three days each week Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday there was 'normal school' with staff teaching their existing classes. Then, on Thursdays, they had a combined fun activity day where all students and all staff were mixed together into thematic-based activities. This was a very popular programme. The week culminated on the Friday with the staff of the new school taking over the curriculum delivery for all Year 7 – 10 students and staff who were not going to be part of the new school having release time to plan their next employment steps, tidy up, and other tasks.

This strategy appealed to all the staff and Board members from the Melville schools who were present. They saw it as a concrete approach to help build vitally important relationships between students, and between students and their new staff before the new school opened. It would also familiarise students with their 'new' campus.

In November 2022 and again in February 2023, the three schools agreed to use the Haawera schools' model for flexible staffing and the collaboration relationship-building strategy in 2023.

However, back in Hamilton 'the Haawera Plan' was abandoned by Mangakōtukutuku College by the beginning of Term 2, 2023. The first issue was the impact that this decision had on the lack of staffing flexibility. This was to provide MHS with numerous challenges. One significant effect of this decision occurred when in Term 1 2023 all the Art faculty were appointed to the new school, departing MHS in week 3 of Term 2. They would not begin teaching students again until February 2024.

MHS had a huge challenge to sustain curriculum delivery for these senior students. Only magnificent leadership by the Head of Technology and especially the Head of Digital Technology averted disaster. While sustaining her Digital Technology role the Acting Head of Art led the Art team. They were all new to the NCEA Art curriculum and with a Year 2 year teacher with only PE teaching experience, and an ex-head student untrained teacher (LAT) this team, after tremendous effort, managed to successfully support these rangatahi through their NCEA assessments.

This was one example of the magnificent efforts by middle leaders in supporting student learning and welfare. Their fundamental role was to nurture and grow their inexperienced colleagues while the school underwent almost impossible staffing challenges. The Head of Science worked exceedingly hard in leading and managing her inexperienced team including four PCT staff. She closely supervised planning, assisted with assessments, co-taught classes on numerous occasions and much more. Other Curriculum leaders overcome the challenge of having a minimum of two PCT teachers in their staff too. These middle leaders utilised a variety of support strategies for their team members, they worked very hard and were of great help and assistance to each other.

Sadly, the Term 4 Haawera programme to build relationships was abandoned by the college and replaced by a series of assemblies and classroom presentations by Mangakōtukutuku staff in late November 2023.

During this transition process both closing schools continued to share resources, made staff available and provided generic summaries of key areas of the school organisation to the college. They both supplied detailed notes about the wide range of abilities and needs of their atypical students. In particular MHS expressed disquiet about how the college was proposing to meet the needs of the large number of students who were being supported at MHS with their learning and behaviour needs.

This initial concern escalated when staff of the college shared with MHS in August 2023 that almost all students, except for a single class up to 12 high need students, would be mainstreamed as *“the use of the homerooms had implications that MHS is not inclusive.”*

At this time Melville High School had a very effective [Learning Support programme](#), affirmed by the Ministry and other social agencies. This initiative was built upon MHS’s long history of innovation and support for students who had low literacy levels and high learning and behaviour needs. This decision was of great concern.

The MHS special needs programme had 6 homerooms, where students spent most of their time at school with one teacher in the same classroom. These students had transparent access to the broad range of individual and small group support programmes available at Learning Support, a separate specialist facility. MHS also used 14 experienced teacher aides to support these students in their classrooms. The goal was to provide a stable environment, where these students had experienced teachers that had good understandings of their individual students’ strengths, learning and behaviour needs. These teachers taught across the curriculum and as a result of this programme not only did students grow and build their resilience, but the overwhelming majority made dramatic growth in their learning.

Had they been in mainstream (normal timetabled classes) these students could have easily faced six changes of classroom and teacher each day, totalling up to nine different subjects/teachers a week. Further, their teachers may have been inexperienced and therefore lacking an understanding of the students’ learning and behaviour needs. With an extra two years of learning in this ‘sheltered’ environment most of these students were able to rejoin mainstream by Year 11.

Foreshadowing potential challenges

The impact of this ministry decision to close both schools was widespread. The driving reason for expressing concerns was because the staff and Board had worked exceptionally hard over many years to make a positive difference for the students of MHS. They had invested a huge amount of effort, study, energy, and care into raising standards of student behaviour and achievement. It was this concern for the students’ future that drove the motivation to share their disquiet.

This apprehension was amplified when MHS staff shared their personal experience about the college's personnel and appointment processes after applying for advertised positions over MHS's final year. Less than a quarter of MHS staff were successful at gaining positions at the new school.

Throughout 2023 the MHS principal and Board of MHS shared their concern with Mangakōtūkūtū College about the impact that the restructure was having on the quality of learning at MHS. The lack of experience of MHS teaching staff, the dislocation this caused and the resultant challenge to MHS's ability to maintain high standards of student behaviour, were repeatedly shared with the Ministry and Mangakōtūkūtū College.

In particular MHS repeatedly requested dialogue about how students with learning and behaviour needs would be supported. MHS shared data about MHS's low literacy entry levels of students and amplified this concern when in Term 3 MHS was informed that the extensive support structures and strategies that MHS had established for these students were identified as being inappropriate for the new school.

As previously mentioned, staff stability was an increasing challenge, particularly the lack of experienced staff, especially in teaching NCEA. As a consequence many of the PCT teachers were allocated a number of junior classes. While this supported senior student achievement the principal was only too aware that it was a double edged sword.

As a consequence inexperienced teachers were teaching too many challenging junior classes and junior students were having a significant number of inexperienced teachers. As a result, when there were further teaching staff changes and a high rate of sickness among staff during Term 3, with the consequent high number of relievers, student management became an issue.

In response to these issues the school implemented the following.

- A Teacher Only Day, after school and half day professional learning opportunities were used to review and amplify consistent expectations and strategies for behaviour and relationship management. These forums were followed up with brief end-of-day review sessions.

This process also elaborated on all the special and unique positive attributes of MHS and reinforced the broad range of positive reinforcements available to staff.

- Some staff received additional support and several were paired with an additional teacher or received additional teacher aide support.
- Provision was made for additional positive rewards
- Experienced Teacher Aides were utilised to supervise and support students who were out of class to return them to where they were supposed to be.
- There was an increase in family hui with students.

- Security staff were employed to supervise the school entrance.

While the Collaboration hui was a potentially successful conduit for sharing information and access it was not that effective at resolving issues. As early as February 2023, twelve months before 'our new school' was to open, the MHS Board identified concerns about the restructure process and the impact that it was having on MHS. They wrote to the College Establishment Board, the principal, and the Ministry sharing the following concerns about their:

- *inability to employ teachers with experience in the NZC and NCEA*
- *inability to make permanent appointments*
- *high staff turnover*
- *Challenge of having whole learning areas being staffed by Year One or Two teachers, with one third of the teaching staff being PCT teachers as a result.*
- *huge decline in MHS NCEA achievement (down 22- 47% in 2022).*
- *concern about the lack of collaboration especially about 'flexibility of staffing'*

In July 2023 the principal of MHS unsuccessfully attempted to meet with the principal of the College and the Governance facilitator to discuss some of his serious concerns and possible solutions. He subsequently met with the Establishment Board Presiding member, and the Regional Director of the Ministry and identified the following major issues about what was happening at the college. He identified the following:

- *Concern about the College's appointments processes*
- *Absence of a strategy for addressing the requirements of catering for high-needs students*
- *Impact of the restructure on learning at MHS*
- *Breakdown of student-student and student-teacher relationships at MHS and the legacy issues caused by having so many foreign-trained PCT staff.*

At the schools' September Collaborative hui the MHS principal again shared these challenges and outlined the strategies MHS had adopted to address the increase in disruptive student behaviour.

MHS's apprehension about the degree of disruption to historical practice (pre-restructure), the lack of a clear plan to meet student needs, and the potential negative impact on learning were shared again with the College in November 2023.

Property Bombshell

The technical aspects of the restructure process proceeded as identified by the Ministry. However all schools were devastated by what occurred at a combined consultation hui between the three schools and the Ministry on October 18 2023. There Peter Hannam, Ministry of Education Regional

Infrastructure Manager, announced that there was **no additional money** allocated for the new buildings for 'our new' school.

Further he agreed, when challenged, that it was unfair and inequitable that Mangakōtūkū College, opening on the existing Melville High and Intermediate school sites, would not get the facilities that North Hamilton Schools enjoy on a daily basis. This was one of the key motivators for the principals, community, staff and whānau for endorsing the push for the restructure.

The MHS principal was gutted by this about-face by the Ministry and [apologised](#) to the Melville school community for driving the dream of modern learning environments for the rangatahi only to have the Ministry to renege on their assurances.

Beacons of light amongst the gloom

While the buildup to closure was largely a series of challenges and additional administrative work, MHS and MIS took time to celebrate the schools' history and other positive milestone events.

The first of these was the mid-year Melville Schools' 60 Year Celebration. It recognised that the end of 2023 would be the 60th year for MHS and MIS, and their final year of existence. Over 250 people attended the various weekend events of this 'jubilee'. To quote the Celebration Booklet, *The '60th celebration is a little like a special birthday. It is a time to acknowledge the myriad of people, the many, many staff, governors, Board members, kaumātua, parents and students, community members, and extend whānau, who all came before us and who all worked to shape our school's physical and social and academic environment. They all helped lay a foundation or a base for our school today and our school of tomorrow.'*

The community were eager to share their love and care and to affirm their positive relationship with these community schools. They also asserted their ongoing support for 'our new school'. MIS principal David Cooke chronicled in his [60 Year Celebration statement](#) the inextricable links, since their inception, between the two schools. This unique partnership, their links with the University of Waikato and their proud history of initiative and students cultural endeavours were celebrated through the huge pictorial displays. David also reminded everyone that in 1991-1993 both schools undertook their first unsuccessful attempt to merge.

The last year also saw some genuine innovative curriculum delivery in technology with MHS students winning regional and national recognition for their senior students who were involved in the [EVelocity](#) programme. It saw Year 12 and 13 teams and individual students build innovative bikes and 3+ wheeled vehicles powered by standard 350W electric motors, controllers and two 12V gel cells. They then had to explain their project development, including challenges and solutions, and the event culminated in a range competitive events,

2023 saw the MHS heavily involved in the establishment of a national eLearning organisation, [Kootui Ako](#), which was in part built out of MHS's involvement in [Volcanics](#) since 2006. This online learning community now provides e-learning courses to over 1990 school students. MHS students gained NCEA credits in a variety of subjects including Psychology, six different languages, and unique subjects like Equine Studies using this opportunity eLearning opportunity for over 16 years.

Last year saw another milestone legacy event which was the refurbishment of Te Manaakitanga the MHS school Marae. Since the announcement of the restructure, MHS access to the schools strategic property (10YPP) was denied, however fortunately Ministry funding, outside the 10YPP framework, was available to support this project and with additional resourcing from the Board the restoration was completed to a high standard.

Te Manaakitanga was the first marae built on a state secondary school in Aotearoa. It was a significant project which involved modernisation, carving and weaving restoration and the installation of a kitchen with the up-to-date marae catering facilities. It was a tremendous community effort. MHS acknowledges the support of mana whenua, Ngati Mahaana in this regard and for their widespread assistance over the last few years.

Response to Misleading Statements

The following are the MHS principal's responses to a number of public criticisms made of the Melville High School that to date have not been challenged by MHS. Many of these public statements deeply hurt the staff and Board of the two schools.

In 2023 criticism was made about the state of property situated on the MHS site. This occurred at a public meeting in July where statements were made that the MHS Board had neglected their property portfolio and that was why the MHS site was in poor condition.

The MHS Board rejected this criticism and explained the situation as follows

Managing school property is facilitated by the Ministry through a 10 Year property plan (10YPP) cycle. Once the 10YPP was signed off, generally after fierce negotiation, schools had the responsibility to implement it within the agreed timeframes and the financial limits. MHS utilised an experienced Property Consultant to guide it through this process. This strategy however made no provision for improving older school sites.

MHS's last 10YPP was abandoned by Ministry of Education after they identified additional priority needs. These projects were to take precedence, and the costs were met out of the school's existing funding provision.

For Melville High School this meant that capital works money was directed to be spent on asbestos removal, major upgrades to the electrical infrastructure, and an additional half million dollars was allocated to alarm and security upgrades. As a consequence, over the period of the last ten year

property planning cycle little money was spent in classrooms. Some of these rooms were last refurbished in 1988. This resulted in several parts of the school campus being 'very tired'

Further, because of the restructure MHS was frozen out of access to its 10YPP money and urgent issues, including the repair and refurbishment of students toilets and ablutions, were mothballed over the final two years.

During this period MHS was also directed not to enter into a new 7- year painting contract.

It is in this context that the promise made by Ministry personnel that *"Schools that are reorganised come with a serious chunk of money"* and *"Over \$40,000,000 will be available for the re-organisation. It will be much more than just a coat of paint."* made in July 2020 filled everyone with hope for the future.

Statements reported in the [press](#) that the transition process was done too fast, without a plan or proper plan, were incorrect. The preparations for the opening of Mangakōtuketuku College were much longer than the last restructure in Haawera (2022), indeed the Melville schools had an additional two terms (40%) more time.

The involvement of the Ministry key personnel, both centrally and regionally, and governance facilitators meant that there was appropriate support during the development process and there was ample time to plan the transition to Mangakōtuketuku College opening. **However, the real issue was whether the implementation plan was appropriate for this restructure process.** The development process followed a script that the Ministry had developed in earlier restructures and was not modified except for timeframes.

The teacher, support and cleaning staff Collective Agreements provisions for school closure were applied rigorously. However, following all the 'right processes' could not address the hurt of losing a school, and the loss of a job that many people had poured their heart and soul into over many, many years. This anxiety grew as the deadline for closure drew near.

Other statements made in February 2024 by the [new principal](#) after an issue of student fighting were at best, misleading. These included that there was a *"serious need to address the culture of what schooling has been like in the past in this area.*

While attributing these issues to MHS, it should be noted that references were only made regarding Year 7 - 9 students' behaviour, and was not appropriate because none of these students ever attended MHS in 2023.

In response to the principal's comments about the *'Larger than expected enrolment, late enrolment and poor paperwork were the main reasons'* for the challenges the college was facing was an issue both MHS and MIS principals had warned the new principal about. Indeed in the previous six months

they had offered support, details about their historical experience regarding a host of issues, including special needs, whaanau engagement, and behaviour management.

Specifically they identified that their community had historically had difficulty in getting enrolments completed before school began. They noted that roll numbers were often not confirmed until mid March. They also identified strategies they had successfully used relating to enrolment including pre-enrolment procedures, direct dialogue with whaanau, staffing plans and limiting initial class sizes to mitigate this challenge.

While the school community underwent significant social dislocation and fiscal challenges over the previous few years, and this was reflected in the school, management of behaviour was not a major issue. Only with the impact of the severe staffing restrictions caused by the restructure, the inability to quickly establish quality relationships with students by the large number of new staff, and the general uncertainty about the future, did behaviour become more of an issue. This development was shared with the college in September and again in November 2023. MHS also shared the successful strategies that they utilised to address this challenge. This experience appeared to be ignored.

Further, the comment that *'We weren't actually allowed to come on to the school sites, except for Mr Cook who did allow us to come and we made some good progress with those children'* is completely false.

Numerous offers were made to the principal of the college inviting their staff to visit the MHS campus. Many did so. MHS asked that they follow MHS Health and Safety procedures, (signing in, locking classrooms when they departed etc). Further MHS actively and positively supported 'our new school' as this excerpt from the MHS September 4 2023 newsletter attests.

- *While the Ministry announcement was not what the MHS staff and Board preferred, together we are committed to supporting Mangakootukutuku College in fulfilling our aspirations for a modern 21 century school for our rangatahi.*
- *Over the last two terms we have hosted a variety of poowhiri, meetings and interactions for Mangakootukutuku College staff. We have welcomed this opportunity. All three schools have held collaborative hui to work through opportunities and challenges. This has been done in a positive and productive manner.*
- *Mangakootukutuku College staff will be in attendance to answer questions and queries at our Academic Counselling Conferences, being held over two days later this month*
- *MHS is not allowed to give students information to Mangakootukutuku College. Therefore all students wishing to attend the college need to enrol using the Mangakootukutuku College enrolment form. This will be able to be done at the ACP conferences.*
- *MHS also distributes all Mangakootukutuku College newsletters to our parents and whaanau.*

- *Mangakootukutuku College prospectus and enrolment forms are available from the Melville High School front office.*
- *Please feel free to contact the College at, enquiries@mkt.school.nz. Phone. 07 899 8057 or access their [Facebook page](#),*

The only time that college staff were not welcome at MHS was when at short notice, in late November, the day before a scheduled school wide student celebration event, the college requested to visit all the MHS classrooms and related facilities. MHS teachers would not be present at this time. The college's stated purpose was *'to view resources/furniture etc, to identify what was to be kept, and what was to be dumped'*.

MHS staff were understandably apprehensive about this because many had personal resources, equipment and related items still on display in their classrooms and work environments which were not identified as such. They were following their principal's directive to *'continue teaching, engage students in appropriate learning activities right up until the final days of the school, and to ensure that their classrooms reflected this'*

However, on that date college staff were provided access to non classroom areas, the hall, gymnasium, caretakers facilities, the library etc. Other alternative times were made available for college teachers to visit classrooms when MHS staff were present.

On other occasions MHS willingly accommodated requests for access to the school site for equipment and service providers. In one week in late August 2023 for example, MHS accommodated 17 personnel from 8 different potential Mangakōtutukutu College providers. Each group required a guide around the facilities, staff to answer 'technical details' and a host of additional information. Most visits were for a half day or longer and four companies returned the following week to seek out further details.

Other requests in the last week (December 8) for MHS staff to provide significant data were also not able to be met.

In contrast, it was also pleasing to get some unsolicited 'support'. In particular the MHS principal acknowledged [Dr Mere Berryman](#) who outlined a strategy to help address the challenges facing the college. She identified that the first step was to change the *"hearts and minds of educators about their own agency"* identifying that *"research shows that if we go in with deficit views of the other, then that is what we will perpetuate. However, if we go in feeling that we have some agency to actually create systems and cultures that celebrate all learners, then we might begin to get a different response."*

This affirmation statement was welcome. As early as February 2023 the principal of MHS shared with 'our new school's' principal a brief summary of [Culturally Responsive and Relational Pedagogy](#)

because of its cornerstone role in understanding the culture of MHS. It summarised the programme, the goals and strategies involved, and how MHS utilised this programme to support Maaori, and indeed all student achievement.

Numerous invitations were extended to Mangakōtukutuku staff, especially the middle leaders appointed in April, to visit MHS. Some took up these offers while many waited until late November or early December which was problematic when MHS staff's employment was terminated on December 8 and all staff had vacated the school.

The unsung heroes

The MHS principal acknowledged that the unsung heroes of the restructure process were the staff of the two closing schools. He recognised the effort and support of the MHS employees in particular, specifically the Senior Leadership team, new in their roles in 2023, whose performance was magnificent. He identified the role of the Leaders of Curriculum who he said were outstanding in holding their inexperienced teams together and focused on student achievement. He recognised the role of the Pastoral Deans, the teachers, administrative and the Support Staff Team. Noting that they all worked tirelessly to make a massive difference for the rangatahi. Among the chaos and dislocation of the closure these people made an amazing contribution to provide stability and care for the students.

There were numerous staff who made great personal sacrifices to assist the school during the closure period. Without such extra and additional contributions managing the challenges would have been impossible. Most had a historical link with the school, others had an empathy for the students and the difficult time that MHS was undergoing but resolutely they all made a huge positive difference.

This effort was well supported and strengthened by the Board of Trustees who too worked hard for our school and our community.

The MHS principal also acknowledged the contribution that his Intermediate school colleague, David Cooke, made during the restructure process. The pair worked closely, shared information and their apprehensions and frustrations, but consistently tried to support and build the transition process. This positive collaboration, originally motivated by hope and dreams, helped sustain their focus through the numerous challenges and disappointments with both leaders remaining professional and resolute to the end.

Perhaps the last word on this topic should go to one of the final statements made on the [MHS Facebook](#) page in this statement to MHS Staff.

Thank you for being a pillar of our community.

You are the stones that stood erect, holding the roof that sheltered our rangatahi as they grew and blossomed. The world threw everything at you and whilst all around was collapsing, you stood fast, keeping that shelter aloft. Without you our rangatahi would be battered and bruised, crushed under the tiles that once protected them. You did not falter in your service. You did not falter in your work. Though the shelter must now inevitably come down, we know you will go on to be the pillars in other communities, nurturing the youth of today, the leaders of tomorrow. Melville owes you a debt of gratitude. A debt so priceless it can never be paid.

Hei awhina hei mahi. May you embody these values wherever you go.

Lessons of the Melville Restructure

The Ministry of Education drove this restructure process. While the theoretical framework was to meet the educational needs of the existing school community and the new suburb centred around the Peacockes residential development there were most probably other motivating factors, possibly fiscal, that were only known to them.

Evidence reported by the Office of the Ombudsman (2017) report, [Disclosure](#), into the review of the schooling restructure process in Christchurch, identified that *'at the same time school communities were engaged in contributing to visible development of the Canterbury Education Renewal Recovery Programme (CERRP), there was a concurrent 'invisible' process being conducted on a different administrative level'* p 8. Hence this caution about what was the full extent of the Ministry's motivation.

Nevertheless the motivation of the local people involved in the restructure was of the highest level. While the MHS principal naively believed the rhetoric about the promise of a modern learning environment, the wider Melville community were motivated by the desire to have a better learning and community environment, as seen in north Hamilton, for their rangatahi and mokopuna. This desire is still strong.

Clearly before eliciting support for such a massive undertaking in the future, it will be imperative that contracted agreements are undertaken to ensure that the dislocation and potential for harm through restructure are mitigated by guaranteed outcomes. This lack of trust in the Ministry will linger for a long time in the minds and hearts of those involved in the restructure.

The Ministry's lack of care for the learning outcomes for a whole cohort of MHS students (2022 - 2023) is of grave concern. The legacy of this failure will rest with these students and their whaanau for many, many years to come. They deserve additional ongoing support.

The culture of MHS was built on trust, culturally responsive and relational pedagogy, restorative relationships, and care. This combination was unique and very effective. The Ministry staffing straight jacket (personnel requirements) created an employment environment which caused a breakdown in relationships and innumerable obstructions to staffing, wellbeing and student achievement.

The Ministry's inability to be flexible in applying their restructure framework, to adapt to developments and amend strategies, was a worry too. Despite being alerted to the significant difference in the Haawera and Melville High School settings, the Ministry continued with their standard restructure framework. The 2021 and 2022 NCEA data of the two High Schools, [Haawera and Melville](#), showed vastly different achievement outcomes for their students in their penultimate years as a result of the restructure. The impact on Maaori and Pasifika student achievement at MHS was of particular concern.

This evidence gave well over twelve months' notice, before the opening of Mangakōtukutuku College, that there were significant limits and significant negative consequences of the 'Haawera model' being arbitrarily applied to MHS.

Further, the Ministry's failure to intervene when in July 2023 they were presented with overwhelming evidence of fundamental organisational and relational inadequacies at the college, was inexcusable. There was a host of other corroborating data indicating that things were not going well in the restructure development process. The Ministry's appointment of their second and third Governance Facilitators clearly provided them with 'inside evidence' that things were not working and why.

Where was the Establishment Board in this development process? This body of well meaning members of the community, appointed by the Ministry, clearly had challenges exerting their governance responsibilities. Was this because of a lack of training or because of the nature of the model? Was it because of personnel issues? At this time there is no evidence available to make a determination about this, however, there certainly was enough time to make adequate preparations.

A new Board is in the process of being elected by the Mangakōtukutuku Community as this paper is being drafted.

While there was widespread community support for this restructure, this was not the case in the previous restructures in places like Kawerau, Invercargill and Christchurch. While not unreserved this advocacy was prefaced by a belief that recognised that while there would be dislocation during the process this pain would be more than compensated by the modern school learning environments, even better aakonga outcomes, and related expenditure on additional community facilities. The community is yet to see the gain of this pain.

Having taught in the Melville community for several decades both MHS and MIS principals have long and strong connections with the parent and broader community. It will be such support, and the historically strong community care and involvement, which will ensure that schools in Melville grow and their rangatahi flourish. However, if the Ministry continues to use dated, rigid blueprints for school restructure, the pain endured in the greater Melville community will be replicated elsewhere and there will be many more tamariki sacrificed in the process.

Perhaps the best way forward for restructure is reported by Newmann and Wehelage (1995) who identified *'that the recent education reform movement gives too much attention to changes in school*

organization that do not directly address the quality of student learning. Student learning can meet high standards if educators and the public give students three kinds of support - teachers who practice authentic pedagogy, schools that strengthen professional community, and supportive external agencies and parents.” p.1

Kia ora

Clive Hamill

June 2024

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About the author

Clive Hamill was a school principal for 38 years, leading primary (Years 1-8), Area (Years 1-13) and Secondary (Years 9 – 13) schools. Two decades previously Clive was a resource person for the Ministry, meeting and supporting communities in Murupara - June, 2002 and in Turangi - August, 2003 that were undergoing an Education Development Initiative (EDI). A process where schooling in a region was restructured due to roll decline.

In 2019 he was part of a school community push to merge the adjacent Melville Intermediate School with Melville High School. Clive was principal of MHS for 18 years. His employment was terminated along with all staff at both Melville High and Melville Intermediate Schools at the end of 2023 school year.

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