
FOLLOW UP REPORT ON THE SUITABILITY OF
HALSWELL RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE AS A
COEDUCATIONAL RESIDENTIAL SPECIAL SCHOOL

Report to the Ministry of Education

28 July 2016

Standards and Monitoring Services

Response from evaluators.....29

- The school continues to use reflective learning techniques for all staff directly involved with students. These methods review how situations were handled or any specific observations concerning students both with peers and through professional supervision.
- The school has multiple safety systems in place to track the movement of students and to minimise or prevent escalation in behaviours, including those that affect other students.
- The school utilises restorative practices when reviewing incidents that involved other students or staff with a student; using incidents as a learning device aimed toward improving interpersonal interactions.
- The students have ready access to visiting advocates and most have access to professional psychologists (either through the school or externally), speech language therapists, occupational therapists, the school nurse and other medical specialists.
- Good communication and regular contact with families/whanau or legal guardians provides added security.
- The students at the school are engaged with multiple community groups with appropriate supervision.
- The school has comprehensive policies and procedures concerned with the safety of students, abuse prevention and recognition and handling of disclosures.
- The villas are currently single sex only, although the 'family' culture of the school has seen both genders engage in social and recreational activities without incident.
- The school is committed to cultural and spiritual safety and provides multiple opportunities for student engagement in Māori and Pasifika Tikanga.

Many of these safeguards and processes reflect current best practice in terms of safeguarding students in coeducational residential special schools¹ or are unique to this College. The Evaluation Team believe the school provides the multi-level safety measures needed to prevent abuse occurring either between students or due to the actions of staff (internal or external to the school). The literature² is clear that the greatest threat of abuse (regardless of type) is between students. Many students come to Halswell Residential College with significant deficits in interpersonal behaviour and many have behaviour support plans in place. The school has as many safeguards as possible with regard to inter-student incidents and provides appropriate follow-through should an incident occur. However, the greatest success to date is developing a 'family' culture in the school where students treat one another like siblings to provide clear boundaries for intimate relationships. This culture has effectively minimised affective interactions between students. The incident reports for the past eighteen months have highlighted some examples of bullying and a few examples of low level (in terms of severity) sexualised behaviour but none have shown examples of sexual abuse or harassment between students. All types of behavioural incidents were dealt with immediately and thoroughly.

¹ Parker, A. and Wilson, C. (2016) Evaluation of the Safety of Children in Coeducational Residential Special Schools: A literature Review. Prepared for the Ministry of Education, New Zealand

² *ibid.*

Background

In 2013 Standards and Monitoring Services (SAMS) was asked by the Ministry of Education to review the suitability of Halswell Residential College (HRC) as a coeducational residential special school. This followed the judgment of Dobson J which found that the Minister of Education failed to take into account the vulnerability of Salisbury School's students if they were to be placed in a co-educational setting, and in particular at Halswell Residential College.

The purpose of the current review is to provide a follow up to the 2013 SAMS report to determine the continued suitability of the College for coeducational purposes, the safety of students and the College's response to the 2013 recommendations.

The definition of safety in this context is broad, with a focus on the emotional and physical safety of all students, with a particular focus on measures in place to prevent the risk of sexual or physical abuse of them in a coeducational residential setting.

Halswell Residential College's stated purpose is "to provide special education in a residential setting for students requiring curriculum adaptation, due to their complex needs. HRC partners with the Intensive Wraparound Service (IWS) who refer students for residential intervention where it is in the best interest of the student"³. There is currently a roll of 14 students, including four girls. The school reports that all students have an individual educational plan (IEP) and tend to stay between one term and 18 months. The Intensive Wraparound Services (IWS) provides referrals to the school and has the intended purpose of assisting students when they return home (either once they have completed their tenure at the school or during holidays) or when they move onto other schools and/or residential options; ideally providing consistency in the support plans and goals instigated by the school. This multi-level approach aims to provide a seamless approach to ongoing support.

HRC has a maximum roll allowance of 32 students. The total number of students attending the school over the course of the year in 2014 was 29 and 32 in 2013. The school Charter states there are 65 full and part-time staff. Obviously the cost of running a school of this type is high and the 2014 ERO report expressed concern about the ongoing viability of the College in stating the "school has a substantial budget deficit which means it would not be able to sustain its operations beyond 2014". Clearly, the school has survived this crisis and the Chairman reports the Board is committed to investing in the future of the school. The current Board reports it is in continual negotiation with the Ministry of Education regarding funding. For their part the Ministry of Education has invested in the infrastructure of the school in terms of the current building project to provide new residential villas. The four new villas will be set around a whare designed for mihi and other meetings. This building project is concurrent with repair work undertaken in the day school following the Christchurch earthquakes.

³ The Halswell Residential College Charter 2016, pp 5

Findings

As noted in the executive summary, “the Evaluation Team believes Halswell Residential College provides an environment that minimizes risk for all of its students regardless of gender and on this basis believes the College would successfully support a coeducational roll”. It bases this view on the following observations:

1. All stakeholders (students, family/whanau/caregivers, school and residential staff, professional staff, advocates, independent advocates and professionals and IWS personnel), including some people who previously held reservations about the move, have wholeheartedly viewed the integration of girls into the school as a success both in terms of their safety and security and in terms of their achievements.
2. The school has put in place multi-layered safety Policies and Procedures that are continuously reviewed.
3. All staff in the school are engaged in reflective practices that focus on all incidents involving students, 24/7 learning processes, behaviour support issues, cultural considerations and observations. This process allows staff to constructively review their own and each-others practice and provides a venue for monitoring safety issues.
4. All staff have supervision sessions and are able to have private supervision as required.
5. There is an understanding that all students will be under constant supervision. This is practiced consistently.
6. The school has developed a ‘family’ culture within the College where having a boy and girl friend is actively discouraged.
7. There are multiple avenues for students to access external supports such as family/whanau/caregivers, the school advocates, psychologists, medical staff, speech language and occupational therapists, community groups and organisations (rangers, scouts and rangers, special Olympics, marae visits, sports groups etc) should an issue arise in the school.
8. There are active anti-bullying rules in the school and continuous learning opportunities (both formal and informal) with regard appropriate interpersonal relationships and anti-bullying.
9. The 24/7 learning model focuses on essential aspects of adaptive behaviour, including building healthy relationships.
10. The school encourages the use of incidental learning whereby individual students can reflect on their actions and how their actions can impact on others. Incidental learning is also a valuable tool in developing specific curriculum skills.
11. Where there have been issues between students the school uses ‘restorative practice’ sessions to reflect on the incident and rebuild positive relationships.
12. The school utilises positive behaviour support methods and consistently applies behaviour support goals across the residential and day-school.

Governance

There is now a Government appointed Board of Trustees that has joint responsibility for both Halswell Residential College (Christchurch) and Westbridge Residential School (Auckland). The new Board was appointed in 2014. The Board consists of six highly skilled professionals and advisors that are more than capable of providing the expertise needed to govern two complex schools. The Board is also represented by both principals and has one elected staff position. There is a very necessary cultural representation and expertise on the Board, and a number of experts in special education.

The Board Acting-Chairperson reports that the transition to the new Board has been successful and they have been able to preserve the unique character of each school in their deliberations. He also reports there are on-going discussions with the Ministry of Education to maintain appropriate funding for the schools to provide for their various strands of support. At Halswell Residential College this specifically refers to the provision of the Kaupapa Māori villa, providing a 24/7 learning environment (both residential and day school), supporting the IEP coordinators, developing a co-educational environment, providing specialist support services and so on.

The Board continues to focus attention on the safety of the students and staff at Halswell Residential College and has enlisted professional support in the ongoing review of the Policies and Procedures documents. The Policies and Procedures clearly state that any allegations of abuse (including sexual abuse) and disclosures must first be reported to the principal of the College and then the Board of Trustees. The Policies and Procedures take into account allegations or disclosures that may involve the principal or members of the Board. Procedures indicate when outside authorities should be notified and/or involved.

The Board is also notified in cases where formal complaints have been filed and where serious incidents have occurred in the school. Serious incidents are defined as assaults on others (i.e. staff, other students etc), absconding, significant damage to property, other unlawful events (e.g. theft, illegal entry) and use of manual restraint. Oversight of such incidents is essential to keep the Board informed, reflect on procedures and monitor trends.

The Acting Board Chair reports the introduction of girls in the College has been “very positive” and without incident. The current gazetted single-sex boys' school status has limited the number of girls able to enroll to 40 percent of the male roll. This has meant the school has needed to reject perfectly acceptable candidates from entry to the school. The Board, and the rest of the school, is eager for the Government to officially gazette a co-educational status at Halswell Residential College.

in the night books; such as a student appearing restless and/or getting up frequently. The 2014 ERO report notes that “specific supervision during night time hours strongly supports the safety and security of all students”. The Evaluation Team supports this view.

Policies and procedures

The current Policies and Procedures documents include the NAGs and the procedures listed under the special character of the school. The 2013 SAMS report indicated the Policies and Procedures were being “revised to meet the requirements of a coeducational residential school”. At that time the school had employed a team of experts to focus on the school charter for the new Board of Trustees, human resources, sexuality and relationships policies and procedures, health and safety, and risk. This work was completed and Policies and Procedures continue to be reviewed (as is good practice) by an external expert. He describes the current school policies as the “most comprehensive [he’s] ever seen”, noting that none of the current policies will need major alteration. The procedures under the special character list procedures such as, outings, absconding, police involvement with students, relationships between students, haircuts, student birthdays, complaints and so on. The Evaluation Team agree that there appears to be a well thought-out procedure for almost any situation.

Policies and Procedures documents (including the NAGs and special character procedures) are available on eTAP, the intranet system which is accessible to all staff. Training in Policies and Procedures occurs as part of the induction of new staff⁴, through PD events and are available for discussion during staff meetings and supervision.

The Policies and Procedures relating to the bid for co-educational status mirror the practice in the school of discouraging intimate relationships between students⁵ and include safeguards relating to abuse (including sexual abuse) and disclosures⁶.

⁴ Induction Procedure Checklist (NAG 3)

⁵ Special Character Procedures - relationships between students, Student Code of Conduct.

⁶ Current Policies (document) - allegations of sexual abuse (staff), Policies and Procedures - allegations of sexual abuse, protected disclosures (under review), child protection policy and child protection guidelines, NAG 1 – child abuse, suspected or disclosed, NAG 3 – staff safety procedures, Special Character – student rights procedure, relationships between students procedures.

Cultural connections

Looking through the College magazines over the last two years it becomes immediately apparent that the College attempts to immerse students in Māori art, Tikanga and Te Reo whenever possible or desired. Matariki and Māori language week is celebrated each year, with stories, art, waiata and Te Reo. Last year Te Puna Wai o Te Reo (the Māori language class) made a special trip to Timaru to the Māori Rock Art Centre and were able to visit some rock art sites during Matariki. They also made pakau (kites) and learned about the constellation.

The Kaupapa Māori unit, Te Whare a Tauawa, practices Tikanga Māori under the guidance of a Kaiwhakahaere (Villa manager). The 2014 school magazine described the villa as, “incorporating Whai Korero, Tauparapara and basic Te Reo including karakia and Pepeha into our daily Kaupapa”⁷. The young men in this villa are responsible for laying a hangi at key celebrations (e.g. Matariki and Māori Language week) and there is a goal to achieve tuakana (older brother) status within the villa. Encouraging young men to take a speaking or lead role in mihi, on the marae or at social gatherings is an important aspect of developing cultural identity and self-esteem. Young women have also been supported to take the role of Karanga, calling people on to the paepae.

As well as the immersion experience of Te Whare a Tauawa the school provides Te Reo classes and art is often focused on Māori carving and design. The school magazines publishes photos of many of the carvings produced and some were on display when the Evaluation Team visited McRae Villa.

The Pasifika caucus is supported by an IEP coordinator. There are three Pacific island staff members at the College and all assist students to access the Pasifika Trust (where they can go to barbeques and other social events), a local youth group (to assist their spiritual needs) and to learn umu (the traditional way to cook food). Pasifika students are involved in a language week and will learn a word a day for the week.

The 2014 ERO report is highly supportive of the attempts the College has made to support both Māori and Pasifika students and notes “Māori and Pacific culture, language and identity are valued by staff”. The Board of Trustees is well represented culturally and has included a commitment to celebrating Māori and Pasifika cultures in its strategic planning⁸.

⁷ Whakarangatirahia: Be the best you be. Halswell Residential College 2014, pp 7

⁸ Strategic Plan 2016-2018, goal 5 “Safe and Inclusive Culture”, point 3

training in two-person restraint holds, which the school states is used only as a last resort. The Evaluation Team noted instances of restraint used in incident reports and were satisfied that the situations described warranted the use of restraint, restraint was used appropriately, the staff and students concerned engaged in reflective debriefing after the incidents (or restorative practices), the incidents were discussed at relevant meetings and posted on eTAP to inform all staff and relevant parties (e.g. family/whanau/caregivers or IWS psychologists) of the incident(s).

The College has two safe rooms that are used in cases where students need some time away from other students in order to manage behaviour. There are clear guidelines that the safe rooms are not to be used as punishment. A staff member will remain outside a safe room at all times; the door physically cannot be locked. In some instances students will take themselves to the safe room but in others students are escorted by staff. Incident reports are completed when there are significant incidents that result in students being escorted to the safe room. The school reports that the safe room log is completed on eTAP every time the room is used¹⁰.

As well as the two safe rooms the school has Te Whare Whakata which is a calming room used voluntarily by students as a tool for self-regulating their own behaviour. The room has the same supervision requirements as the safe rooms but is considered a tool to circumvent the need for higher level interventions¹¹.

The school has sufficient expertise in supporting people with complex behaviour support issues and has the additional expertise of IWS psychologists.

¹⁰ Special Character – safe room procedures, incident reports, staff interviews.

¹¹ Special Character – Te Whare Whakata procedure.

The 2013 SAMS report made the following observations regarding school policies relating to sexual abuse and harassment:

The code of ethics says, among other things, that workers must not condone sexual harassment by others, and must 'ensure protection from physical, emotional and sexual harassment or abuse by peer and others'¹⁵. All student disclosures of a sexual nature must be reported through an incident form¹⁶. Students who have a history of sexualised behaviours compromising the safety of others cannot enrol at the College.

The College sexuality policy is included in the Code of Conduct for students and also the Code of Conduct for staff. Staff have had regular training in sexuality. Claire Ryan provided staff training that included policies and procedures more suited to a coeducational residential environment in December 2012.

Sexual harassment is defined in the residences code of ethics as 'verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is

- (a) unwelcome or offensive to the victim
- (b) serious in nature or persistent to the extent that it is detrimental

The policy is intended to cover extremes from rape to persistent sexual jibes or innuendo¹⁷.

We saw the HRC policy on inappropriate sexual behaviour. Appropriate sexual behaviour is defined as 'solo sexual activity that does not attract attention and is done in privacy'. Students are informed on admission what is and is not appropriate. Inappropriate sexual activity is described as occurring at three different levels:

1. Inappropriate solo behaviour, which may mean masturbation that is apparent to others, accessing pornography or unsanctioned exposure of body parts. Parents are notified of these incidents as part of the regular reporting at the end of term. Recorded behaviours of this type during 2015 include pulling pants down in front of other students and of looking at other boys while they were on the toilet.
2. Non-coercive mutual behaviour, where consent may have occurred. Parents and the College Principal are notified immediately. We found no records of this type of behaviour during 2015.

Coercive non-consenting abuse, defined as any sexual contact where compliance is due to intimidation or exploitation. Police are notified immediately and parents are notified as soon as possible. All formal interviewing is left to the Police. Sex offences at level 3 might occur once a year and are treated with zero tolerance, resulting in immediate expulsion. No incidents of this nature appear to have occurred in 2015.

¹⁵ Halswell Residential College Residences Code of Ethics, p 19

¹⁶ Halswell Residential College Residences Code of Ethics, p 33

¹⁷ Halswell Residential College draft policy, Inappropriate sexual behaviour - Students

Student rights and complaints

The College has a clearly student-centred approach through the development of person focused IEP goals and behavior support plans (including Functional Analysis Plans). The IEP Coordinators act very like case managers and will be a pivot point in all communications with and about a specific student. Individual IEP meetings are described in a plain language resource for students which describes the purpose, venue, people involved and announces that chocolate and orange juice are provided during the meeting.

The current three villas at the College are aging and bedrooms have been converted from multi-bed dormitories. The new villas, currently being built, will have purpose built individual bedrooms with bathroom facilities for every two students. Like the current villas the new buildings will have a communal living and dining area and there will be a separate lounge/reading room in each villa. There are plans to build modern alarm systems into the doors for each bedroom to detect student movement at night and video monitors are planned for hallway areas (these are still in the planning stages and need to take into account potential rights concerning privacy and safety issues).

The students have access to two advocates who visit the College regularly and spend time with the students in each villa. They report they have freedom to build a rapport with students and talk with people privately if they desire (but within visual range of another adult). Advocates will support students if they have issues with staff. The advocates report directly to the principal and meet with her every month. As well as their informal meetings with the advocates most students have personal counselling through the school or external psychologists. Other outside agencies involved with students in the school include Nurse Maude who provide the school nurse, speech language specialists who also run a community based social language group, occupational therapists and general practitioners.

Student records meet the requirements for privacy of personal information. Records are kept on the Ministry-approved eTAP software package which has multiple levels of access for teaching, pastoral staff and confidential areas.

The group of student representatives the Evaluation Team met with were relaxed and open in their communication. They understood how to make a formal complaint if they desired and we saw evidence where a student had made a complaint and the processes that were followed. There have been eight formal complaints since August 2014, two involved a student complaining about staff (both were investigated thoroughly and were unsubstantiated), one involved an issue between staff and one involved a complaint from a member of the public about alleged unsafe driving.

Students' rights are also described in their code of conduct which is displayed in prominent places around the campus. It explains in plain positive language how to behave at the College, emphasizing values of kindness and respect and advising that hurting others, swearing, verbal abuse and bullying are not acceptable. It also says, 'sexual behaviour will not affect or involve any other student'. Students are advised they can only visit websites acceptable to staff.

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Current perceptions of risks of moving to a coeducational environment

During the 2013 evaluation the SAMS Team asked all the people they interviewed what they perceived as the risks of Halswell Residential College becoming a coeducational residential special school. Most people could not perceive any major issues, although a number were concerned about interpersonal relationships. The current Evaluation Team also asked many of the people involved in the interviews what they felt about a coeducational environment now that the school has had girls since 2014. Without exception people believed the inclusion of girls was a resounding success and believe the girls have been a moderating influence on the boys. Here are some of the comments on the school and the inclusion of girls:

Personally I think it's been brilliant... it is also teaching them what is normal. (Advocate)

I'm quite delighted. In my eyes it's been a total success. (Advocate)

It [the school] provides a complete rounded social picture they won't get any other way. (Advocate)

Together we can train appropriate social interaction... it can be a lifetime impediment if we don't address it at this stage. (IEP staff)

[talking about one student] she absolutely loves it there... it's a very loving warm and supportive environment... It's a very good tool for preparing them for life outside Halswell. (IWS psychologist)

I haven't had any difficulties... the boys and girls have understood it's like a big family... brothers and sisters. (IWS psychologist)

It's been life changing for X. Safety is number one for me, I don't have any issues at all... we chose coed for X... I think 50% of the population is male and female anyway... you need to learn to be appropriate. We've never had any issues... they are never left alone. (Parent)

Just before the SAMS visit (and before the school knew the SAMS Team was to visit) the school conducted a survey of all current students (plus one past student), parents/whanau/caregivers, staff, IWS psychologists and specialist school staff and professionals associated with the school. Of the 98 people who returned the survey 100 percent believed the school had successfully managed the safety of girls since they arrived at the College and is capable of continuing to manage the safety of girls even if the numbers increased. All but one supported the application to become coeducational ("only because I prefer single-sex schools") and none of the parents/whanau or caregivers of the girls had any concerns about their safety around boys at the College. The comments from the students focused on these areas:

- The staff watch them constantly

College responses to the 2013 SAMS recommendations

The school has made the following responses/changes following the 2013 SAMS recommendations.

Recommendation:

1. The College is not put at risk by admission of children with severe behavioural problems without intellectual impairment or children with severe attachment disorders.
2. Consideration is given to the implementation of a three month trial to prevent the need for expulsion of students who don't fit, as this has consequences for further education.

Much has changed since the school began working with the IWS. The school roll is small and the IWS is rightfully attempting to keep children with less severe issues in their own homes, school and communities. The College states it "has successfully managed more complex and challenging students than before, [although] regrettably, management of these students has ended on one occasion with exclusion". On the issue of the three-month trial the school indicates it is comfortable with current processes where the College can work in dialogue with IWS. The school states, "this process is not always successful in identification of students who do not fit. [Although], we cannot be certain that a 3-month trial would be any more successful".

At the present time the Evaluation Team believe the College needs to continue to closely monitor the proposed enrolments from IWS with a view to the overall safety requirements of other students in the school and the long term safety of the proposed students in terms of their psychosocial wellbeing and academic record (should exclusion be a possibility).

Recommendation:

3. Staffing levels are maintained at the existing levels to provide adequate supervision.
4. All staff are trained in the new policies and procedures so all are equipped to deal with the changing environment.

There were a number of professional development (PD) events in between 2013 and the present that have highlighted/referred to the new policies and procedures as they relate to coeducational environments. The school states, "regular quality training in policies and procedures is viewed as fundamental". With reference to the staff levels there has been on-going discussion with the Ministry of Education about staffing ratios especially in the residential villas. The College states:

Numerous discussions with the MOE have continued as both parties have recognised that effective supervision is essential for successful management of students in a residential school. We anticipate that the rebuild of our new villas will enhance the level of supervision that we can provide. The MOE are still working with HRC regarding adequate funding.

Documents reviewed

Halswell Residential College Newsletters 2015, 2016
Communication books – night book, day book, villa diaries and night movement monitoring sheets
Incident reports for 2015-2016
Residences Code of Ethics (based on the NZ Association of Social Workers code of ethics)
Staff code of conduct
Student code of conduct
Student IEP reports
Plain language resource – What is an IEP Meeting?
Positive behaviour for Learning
Residential curriculum
ABAS pre and post tests
Minutes for Villa Student Council meetings
Get safe
Help chart for students
Students' complaints and grievances policy
Complaints register 2015 to 2016
Policies and Procedures
Current Policies
NAGs 1-6
Halswell Residential College School Charter 2016
Strategic Plan 2016-2018
Annual Plan 2016
2014 ERO Report
2013 SAMS Report
Halswell College Website
HRC year books, 2014 and 2015
HRC quarterly newsletters Feb 2015 – May 2016
Te Kaupapa o te Whare a Tauawa
Complaints Register
HRC Guidance Report
Professional Development Plan 2016
PD Plan January 2016
Self-review action plans

Responses to the draft evaluation report

Response from Halswell Residential College

(Following the draft evaluation report being sent to the College for comment)

We were pleased to welcome the SAMS team to review our College. As a College we are constantly wanting to learn and improve in all areas. We believe that this very positive report is an accurate reflection of HRC. We look forward to the school becoming co-educational and providing the best possible educational and social outcomes for boys and girls.

Response from evaluators

(Following the provider's and stakeholders' comments being received)