

The Bridge Academy

Question 1

Please confirm what you believe to be the value you are going to add to the existing school network

In the Howick/Pakuranga area, the existing school network comprises a range of mid/high decile state schools, several integrated and one independent school.

All these institutions have large (20 plus students) classes in which numerous students with diverse needs struggle to achieve.

This is the personal experience of all our staff, both through referrals to The Bridge Academy and David House (see appendices for stories and testimonials), and through personal experience of teaching in some of these schools.

The PSKH proposal states its target group of priority learners as “Māori, Pasifika and special needs learners and those from low socio-economic backgrounds”, those “who have not been well served in the current system.”

These are precisely the type of students who have sought our help in the past-ALL of whom have been lifted, not just academically, but socially and emotionally as well.

Moreover, many of the children with whom we have dealt have come to us broken and damaged from continual bullying, which is at epidemic levels in New Zealand. Large schools cannot ‘police’ this. Ours is a ‘values based’ educational system, where children are taught and encouraged to be caring and inclusive. There is tight monitoring of interactions between pupils and problems/complaints are dealt with promptly, reducing the risk of longterm damage to the child’s emotions. Help is given to any child who needs social prompts or who fails to understand these interactions. Delinquency and even suicide are at an unacceptably high level in New Zealand; young people need to feel safe, loved, supported and valued. This is what we offer.

Thus, the value we are going to add to the existing school network is the opportunity for struggling learners in our community, who cannot afford expensive options such as after-school tuition or high fees, to find an alternative where their needs can be addressed and they can start to achieve.

Question 2

How will your teaching and learning programme support priority learners (please provide evidence)

Our proposed PSKH school will provide small classes and individualised attention to every young person enrolled. There is a firm commitment for every child to succeed-our teachers meet them “where they’re at” and accompany them on the journey of experiencing success.

In particular, we believe our personal/relational approach is ideally suited to Maori/Pacific Island students.

The Te Kotahitanga (TKH) initiative is a research and professional development programme that enables teachers to “create a culturally responsive context for learning which is responsive to evidence of student performance and understandings” and aims to change school structures and systems since school-wide implementation has proved to be most effective.

Research has shown that the “quality of relationships and interactions between the teachers and Māori students was a key factor to improving student achievement.” (Retrieved, May 15, 2013 from <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/9977>)

Whilst very successful, it is however, very expensive to run as a government-implemented programme.

At The Bridge Academy the values and approaches adopted by TKH are inherent to our design. Two of our staff recently completed teaching qualifications at Waikato University where there is a considerable focus on Maori learning and achievement. They were able to incorporate their learning during that time into the development of their own, and the school's, pedagogy.

In addition, it is our opinion that Maori/Pacific Island learners will find more accord with our approach to teaching science than is currently the case with the New Zealand curriculum. Because a biblical Christian worldview undergirds our teaching, we address science more holistically, presenting both a creationist and evolutionary perspective. Because we understand and accept differing belief systems, we feel we are better able to address misconceptions in science and teach the subject in a way which, whilst ably preparing learners for higher scientific study, at the same time respects their fundamental beliefs about origins.

A key expression of TKH is communicated through “The Effective Teaching Profile”, which consists of six elements:

- “1. Manaakitanga – teachers care for their students as culturally located human beings above all else.
2. Mana motuhake – teachers care for the performance of their students.
3. Nga whakapiringatanga – teachers are able to create a secure, well-managed learning environment.
4. Wananga – teachers are able to engage in effective teaching interactions with Māori students as Māori.
5. Ako – teachers can use strategies that promote effective teaching interactions and relationships with their learners.
6. Kotahitanga – teachers promote, monitor and reflect on outcomes that in turn lead to improvements in educational achievement for Māori students.”

(Retrieved, 15 May, 2013 from <http://tekotahitanga.tki.org.nz/About/The-Development-of-Te-Kotahitanga/Effective-Teaching-Profile>)

The Bridge Academy's proposal clearly incorporates all these elements, either explicitly or implicitly.

We look at the children in our care as being multifaceted individuals with a mind, emotions, a will, a spirit, a brain, a body and a life outside of school. Our holistic approach seeks to care for, guide and educate, nurture and encourage the young people in our care. This may involve a team of people, family and outside professionals.

We believe in early intervention and our educational plan for each child is based upon their needs and delivered in a manner that best suits that child's learning styles. We have a flexible approach and can regularly assess the methods which are working well and those that are not. Each child's education is personal, the teacher knows him/her well and regular communication with each family is sought so that issues can be nipped in the bud and bonds can be fostered.

We endeavor to actively involve parents, family/whānau and community so that they are encouraged to actively support the achievement of high educational outcomes in the children.

Problems can be addressed early in our primary learning centre and many issues dealt with, and programmes put in place, before the child reaches our middle school. If issues are addressed early and the child has a happy and healthy time during these very formative years, he/she is not going to become one of the 'one in five pupils leaving school without basic literacy and numeracy skills.'

The best evidence we can think of to support our confidence that our teaching and learning programme will "support priority learners" is the testimonials and stories obtained in our appendices. Many of the parents have said they are willing to be contacted by you for verification of information.

Our previous ERO reports would be another source of evidence to consider.

Should you have any other form of evidence, please advise and we will endeavor to provide it.
