



N E L S O N
C O L L E G E

Boarding Newsletter February

MESSAGE FROM THE HEADMASTER

As I begin my third year in the position as Headmaster I would like to use this newsletter as an opportunity to reflect on the changes which have been put in place in the College and in Boarding in particular.

In 2008 Boarding experienced its 9th year in a row of declining student numbers from a high of 224 in 1999 to a low of 144. I am pleased to report that we are starting 2009 with a boarding roll of 153+ and a significant growth in the numbers entering Year 9 and 10.

The decline of student numbers and a degree of dissatisfaction amongst parents and students was clearly a reflection of a number of factors, some of them external and beyond our control, but a significant number have been within our control and we have gone a long way in addressing them in the last two years.

I would like to comment on these factors and the restructuring / interventions that are in process or have been completed over the past two years.

a) Inconsistent application of rules and expectations / standards between the three Hostels and a lack of a clear governance structure.

I believe this contributed significantly to student behaviour and attitudes which put individuals and others at physical and emotional risk and also contributed to the academic performance of senior boarding students lagging behind that of their day school peers.

Note-

In 2007 14 senior boarders were suspended from and removed from Boarding. Their offences were not minor, they included involvement in institutionalised and sustained physical/emotional bullying, abuse of cannabis and alcohol, possession and use of BB guns and dangerous use of cars.

In 2008 only 2 boarders were suspended from Boarding (for persistent disobedience). This is just one of several indicators of a more positive, and settled culture in Boarding which I am sure will continue to be strengthened throughout 2009

To facilitate this, the overall management of Boarding has been under the guidance of Mr Tim Tucker Deputy Principal since February 2008.

His initiatives on a number of fronts have made major inroads into the work that needs to be done in Boarding.

I would like to thank all Boarding staff and particularly the Housemasters for their dedication and energy in providing such a high level of care and energy in fulfilling what is a complex and stressful role.

b) Physical environment – the Buildings & Grounds

A lack of investment in the physical environment in Boarding was very apparent in 2006 and was commented on by many Old Boys during the 150th Reunion.

The College faced a significant challenge and balancing act (and still does..)

- to maintain Boarding as a self funded private institution meeting its annual operating costs along with
- the need to invest in Capital improvements to ‘catch up’ and modernise the facilities.

Clearly current parents can not be asked to fund such a ‘catch up’ (hence Boarding fees having been increased only by the COL % each year and in fact in 2007 Boarding fees were held at the 2006 amount)

I can assure you that you are not funding the current dormitory & grounds improvements.

As you may be aware the College, through the Trust Foundation has sold some land and art/book assets to establish an investment fund to secure the College’s future financial viability. A Capital injection from these sales has been used this summer paying for the dormitory upgrades. The remainder has been invested in an Endowment fund ... the annual interest from this fund will be used in continued Boarding infrastructure development over the next few years.

c) Concerns about the quality / variety of Dining Room food

A major achievement in 2008 has been the restructuring of the Dining room staff and procedures resulting in changes in the variety and quality of the food being served. This has been accompanied by a corresponding improvement in the warmth and ambience of the Dining room and the interactions between the boys and the staff.

d) Concerns about the quality of adult support in the Hostels

The pastoral care of the boys in the Hostels is the predominant role of the Housemasters and tutors and is seen by us as crucial to the emotional / physical safety and academic success of the boys.

During the school day boarders receive pastoral care support from teachers (incl. homeroom), coaches, guidance counsellors, the Year level Dean and the College’s senior management team.

It is the time the boys are in Boarding and away from the day school that necessitates ensuring Hostel staff are of the very highest calibre.

It is the Housemaster and tutors through the tutor group system, the mentoring by senior students, the interactions between them and the boys in the evenings, at Prep, and throughout the weekends which forms the backbone of emotional support for boarders.

Our new appointments of tutors into the three Hostels for 2009 are extremely strong and all have significant links to the day school as teachers / sports coordinators / administrators or teachers aides.

We are very fortunate to be able to secure their services.

As part of the support staff re structuring in both Boarding and the day school a decision was taken to modify the role matrons have in each hostel. This was an industrial personnel issue which precluded extensive consultation (other than with Housemasters and the matrons themselves)

This process examined the best use of human resources and the benefits to the welfare of the boys and was not merely a cost saving exercise.

I know parents would have liked a direct input and we do welcome your comments as the new regime becomes embedded in 2009.

Communication of such changes are difficult under employment law and inevitably lead to situations of misinformation, however the College will examine how we can improve our communication channels with you and I apologise for any uncertainty and distress caused by these decisions.

As with any re structuring an evaluation of the changes will be made in consultation with the new matrons and the Housemasters, led by the Deputy Principal.

During this process, new matrons were appointed to Rutherford and Fell in December 2008.

Due to a change of heart on the part of several applicants and the nature of attempting to employ personnel over the holiday break, Barnicoat began the school year with a temporary matron and a shortage of cleaners.

By the time you receive this newsletter the matter should have been rectified and be assured that it has been treated as a matter of urgency by the College administration.

I have interviewed all of the Year 13 boarders and had them complete a goal setting exercise.

We discussed the year and their potential contribution to improvements in boarding and in the College as a whole.

Their comments were positive and enthusiastic. They were supportive of the changes in boarding culture in the Houses (particularly the food!)

NCEA 2008

I am pleased to report not only the strong results gained by the whole senior school in 2008 (as detailed in the main newsletter) but for the second year in a row, the academic results of the boarders were on a par with or above (at Year 11) those gained by day students.

Whilst the gap in the past 7 years has been small and has favoured the day students this has not been the case in 2007 and now in 2008.

This is a significant achievement with our overall results placing us firmly in the top echelon of schools in the country and the strongest State educator of boys in the South Island.

I am convinced that the structured examination study time for boarders set up in 2007 and continued in 2008, strengthening of the quality of Tutors employed in the Hostels and a general improvement in the academic culture and tone of the College have been significant contributors to our examination success.

I am looking forward to a strong year in the academic and the co curricula life of the College and I thank you for your anticipated support as we strengthen boarding and provide the very best education for your sons.

The Management & Governance of Boarding

Governance

Boarding Committee of the Board of Trustees
BOT Chair Hugh Riley
BOT Dep. Chair Warren Westenra
Deputy Principal T.Tucker tk@nelcollege.school.nz

Management

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Overall Management
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Housemaster Brian Erlbeck ek@nelcollege.school.nz
Housemaster Michelle Rutter rr@nelcollege.school.nz
Housemaster Sharon & John Gully sg@nelcollege.school.nz

If you have concerns or issues concerning any aspect of your son's education please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Gary O'Shea MEd(Admin)
Headmaster

Important Notice

A College newsletter will be mailed to all parents on Friday 20 February. In future College newsletters will only be mailed to parents unable to get it online at www.nelcollege.school.nz
Please advise your Housemaster if you are unable to get information online.