

Christine Brown - Leadership profile

Christine is the principal of Raroa Normal Intermediate in Johnsonville, Wellington <http://www.raroa.school.nz>.



Raroa Normal Intermediate is a decile 10 school with a roll over 600 students. Prior to Raroa Christine was the principal of Linden school.

What advice would you give to a new principal or senior leader going into a new school setting?

- **Recognize that it is different.** One of the biggest dangers is to assume that what worked in your last setting is going to work in the new setting. Don't come in with set ideas, but with an attitude of inquiry.
- **Take time to find out what is happening and how things work.** One of the best things I did when I arrived at Raroa was to make the time to speak to every staff member. I asked them to come prepared to answer two simple questions: "What are three things you love about the school?", and "What are two things you would like to see change?" Although I kept specifics confidential, I was able to feed back patterns and trends. These became our shared platform for improvement.
- **Enjoy the difference.** It is great to be with a new group of people. It is important to take time to discover their strengths and build off these. I am also a great believer in not sweating the small stuff!

What key principles underpin your approach to leadership?

- **Student's should always be at the heart of the matter.** All decisions made in the school need drive from what is best for the students of the school. They are the reason we exist as teachers.
- **Invest in people.** One of the aspects I find really enjoyable about principalship is that of identifying, developing and building on others strengths. Professional development is critical here, as well providing opportunities for others to lead, and grow their leadership.
- **Build the culture.** I think we do this by demonstrating integrity and honesty in all interactions, and by listening carefully to teachers and others we lead. Often it is about picking up on small cues and being pro-active if there are misunderstandings or a lack of clarity. Last year we (the senior leadership team) also worked through a 360 degree

feedback process whereby we got feedback from the staff on our leadership approach. I guess this models transparency and also provided us with some valuable insights that have cemented how we work as a senior leadership team.

What is your approach when members of the team are struggling with change?

- **Be realistic yet positive.** You always hear that it is important to get everyone on board and part of the visioning first, and while I agree with this, the reality is that it is not always possible. There will be some, who no matter what, want to stay doing what they have been doing and what feels safe.
- **Stay the course.** It is not always easy, but critical that you stay focused on where you are going and why it is important. You have to keep pushing through. Expect early adopters and late adopters. In a bigger school, it is highly unlikely that you will ever have everyone on board at all times.
- **Look for small gains.** Sometimes this means that staff are at least complying with expectations. You may not have their heart, but you have at least got the action that supports the desired direction. My experience is that teachers change fastest when they can see how the changes are making a difference for their students.