

*Our Rural State-funded
Area School Education -
What it offers
our Children.*

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**for Primary Industry Council / Kellogg Rural Leadership
Programme**

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Executive Summary

Our families are our most important asset. We as parents want to give the children we are blessed with, the best start in life they can possibly get.

Education, after family life, is the main way to give them that start. As children advance through the primary system secondary education is uppermost in parents minds.

There appears to be a perception in rural communities that rural children should be educated in an urban school to do what is "best" for their schooling.

It is my intention through my project to collate evidence as to what rural educated children do in fact receive from these Area Schools. This decision in education is so important I believe that some researched evidence is needed so rural parents can make a more informed decision.

Objectives

- Survey Area Schools in New Zealand and ascertain what they offer their students in areas of : school / class size, subjects and teaching methods, additional opportunities, staffing, community and business support the extra facilities they provide.
- Survey classes of past Area School students to find out : how they viewed their schooling the influences it had on their lives whether they thought that schooling should prepare one for life did their schooling prepare them for life.

Main Findings

- Our Area Schools are small, rural and family orientated. Being smaller gives many advantages for students eg. leadership, cultural and sporting opportunities, more individual teacher assistance etc. The schools offer as wide a range of subjects as possible, excellent support of students and gave the students the privilege of living in a rural environment.
- Agriculture/ horticulture are taught in very few of the Area Schools raising a major concern to me about the lack of positive promotion that the agriculture industry and the people involved in it must be giving to the younger generation.
- Home life is extremely important to students, it was highlighted to me the importance of a student returning home each night to a family environment. The child's right to return home each night almost over rules their education.
- The past students highly valued their rural education and the benefits it gave them

It is my belief after reviewing the results of my surveys, researching information and talking to past students, teachers, parents, employers and lecturers that a rural education is a wonderful grounding. The perception held by some people that the only way to gain a quality education is in an urban school, is in fact false.

An upbringing in a rural environment is a privilege and after this study I have had confirmed that an education in a rural school is also a privilege.

Recommendations

- Area Schools positively and regularly advertise themselves, their students and their achievements to the general public, particularly to their own primary school families and their contributing schools. This can be done through school newsletters, contributing schools, local newspapers and regional newspapers, A&P shows etc.
- Appoint a publicity officer to write articles, take photos etc.
- Profile past students on a regular basis in newsletters, school magazine, or newspapers.
- Get a past student to speak at assemblies, school events, prize givings.
- Agricultural Industry organisations and tertiary institutions promote a career in agricultural and related industries as a stimulating career choice at rural secondary schools. Support rural schools by any means possible eg. sponsoring a prize for agriculture/ horticulture at end of year prize givings, offer scholarships to rural schools, promote agriculture to career advisors in schools, include agriculture in subject lists for entrance to university agriculture courses.

You can augment education throughout

life

BUT you can NEVER replace family life.

Our State Funded Rural Area School Education - What it offers our children

Introduction

During the primary schooling years most people are happy to have their children at their local school, but as they move up the school ladder parents start thinking about what to do and where to send their child for their secondary education.

In rural areas this question seems to take on a greater emphasis, as options are limited. There are two choices :

- the local school or
- an urban school either private or state but both involving boarding of some description.

A question considered by parents, "Can our small rural school provide what a large urban school can offer in terms of quality education, sporting opportunities, social contacts, leadership skills, life skills, subject choices?"

The final choice is a personal one..... is it always an informed one?

There are many perceived ideas in rural communities about local schools, often incorrect. Parents can sometimes overlook the many advantages of the local school in the assumption that they know all about the school because their children have either attended it or they have heard about it from other people in the district.

Harder questions that parents should ask could be,

"Is sending them away from the family to a town school the best for this child?"

"Will our child's peers in town be a positive influence on them? How will we know for certain?"

"Will we know what they are up to between the end of school and the time they are to be back at the boarding house or on 'stay in' weekends?"

"Do we want to be the first people to hear of those triumphs/ tragedies everyday, that are part of all children's lives?"

I wanted to investigate some rural schools and find out what they had to offer our country children in the areas of :

- school and class size, levels students leave to attend other schools and reasons
- subjects available and the teaching method for those subjects
- additional opportunities (sporting, cultural, leadership etc)
- staffing
- support from community and businesses
- facilities available.

The reason I chose Area Schools was because :

- they are often rural, small, isolated and lose a percentage of their students to their urban counterparts
- our 5 children attend one and
- I am involved in the school as a member of the Board of Trustees.

As part of the same project, I also wanted to canvass past Area School students to ascertain :

- how they viewed their schooling
- the influences it had on their lives
- whether they felt that schooling in general should prepare one for life
- if their schooling actually prepared them for life.

I felt this would give me more of an idea of the way people who had 'gone through the system' viewed their own education in a rural area and the influences it had on their lives after leaving school.

After family life, education is one of the most important things you can give to your children. "Parents want to know :

- that their children will be in a safe environment at school,
- they want them to reach their academic potential, and
- they expect them to come out of their education well prepared for work or further education."(Rural Education, Winter 2001, p. 1, Education Review Office)

Family input does not always seem to be thought about, in conjunction with education, especially when children are 'sent away' to school.

I found out that Area Schools :

- are generally small in overall student numbers and have small class sizes, especially in the senior levels.
- They offer as wide a range of subjects as possible, with some of these being taught by alternative means.
- Area Schools give students many opportunities to represent their school in sporting and other fields. " 75% of Area School students - 37 schools included - compete in representative sport for their school." (New Zealand Secondary Schools Sports Council study 1990-2001).
- Students are well served by the careers and pastoral care teams at their schools. This service is often enhanced as the staff know the pupils so well.
- Staffing recruitment is not a major problem yet, but there is a national area of concern with secondary teachers in short supply.
- Rural communities and businesses generally are supportive of their local schools and
- most extra facilities eg. gymnasiums, computer suites, technology rooms etc are available in the majority of the schools. Although not always up to standard.

The past student survey findings were revealing in that :

- the family and the support it gave were of the utmost importance to the students no matter what age the person is now
- teachers were high on the list for providing a positive influence and many respondents spoke of them with fondness, along with family and friends.
- those that took subjects by correspondence found the discipline it taught them was beneficial in their after school years
- many took advantage of the leadership and sporting opportunities
- their rural schooling has been a positive influence on their lives
- there was a variable response to the question on whether schooling should prepare one for life and if their schooling prepared them for life. This could be due to the fact that family history has a much stronger influence on the outcome of this than strictly school alone.

For both surveys I have reported on the method I used to achieve the survey, find its recipients and the number posted / returned. I have then collated and written up the results and concluded with a discussion on the individual surveys then a final discussion.

I have had no experience in writing up or collating surveys. I have done this project to extend myself and to gain information about a subject that I am passionate about in my capacity as a parent who has kept our five children at an Area School and as a chairman of an Area School Board of Trustees who sees and gets frustrated about other parents in our area sending their children to an urban school for their secondary education.

It would be wonderful to do this study, particularly of past students of an Area School education on a national scale rather than students from only one school as I have done. I found I was limited in finding the resources (human, time and financial) to do this study on a larger scale. The sourcing of addresses would be a huge challenge even if the number of classes were less than I chose (not insurmountable though).

I would like to acknowledge the support of the numerous people who have assisted me in completing this report.

Rural Schools

According to the Statistics New Zealand definition, a school is classified as rural if the mesh block in which it is located has a population of less than 1000. These are further broken down into two categories of schools in :

- *rural settlements* with a population between 300 and 999,
- *a rural area* (where there is no settlement) with a population of less than 1000

In New Zealand one third of schools are described as rural, they have about 10 percent of all students. There are 32 Area schools (years 1 to 13 students) these have about 1.2 % of all school students. (Rural Education, Winter 2001, p.1, Education Review Office)

The graph below shows the small numbers of students that attend the survey respondents' schools. The school that stands out in the South Island is a school that is closer to a major city. Because of this proximity, it has a lot of surrounding lifestyle blocks and therefore a higher population to draw from. The North Island schools that responded have a higher roll than their South Island counterparts.

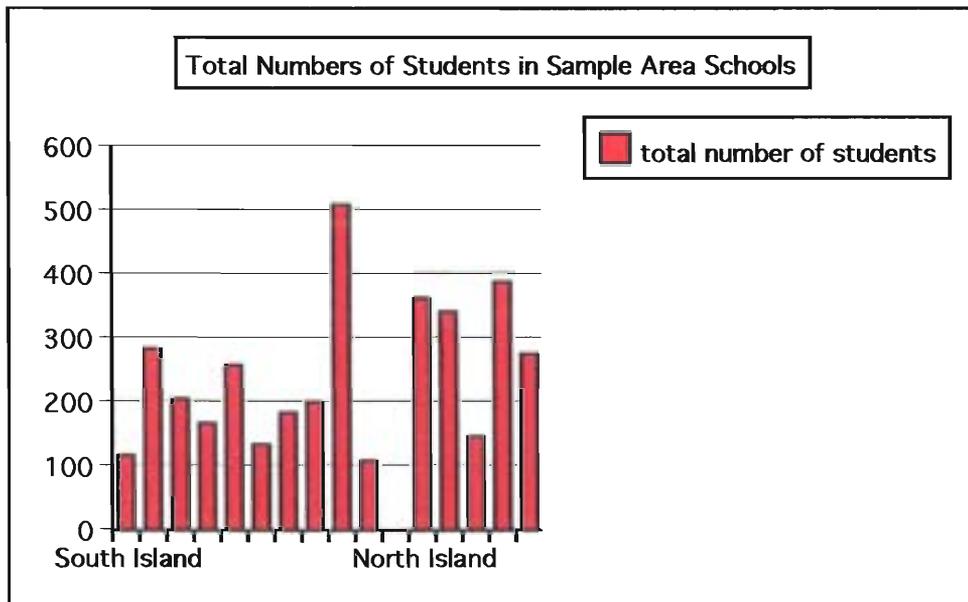


figure 1

Decile Ranking

The socioeconomic group that rural schools draw from is across the spectrum but there is a “slight tendency towards the higher range” (Rural Education Winter 2001, p.1 Education Review Office). Schools are given a ranking from the Ministry of Education, this is called a decile ranking and is issued according to the socioeconomic background of the schools’ students. The ranking ranges from 1 to 10, 1 being a low socioeconomic area and 10 a high socioeconomic area. “Just over half of New Zealand’s rural schools are in the decile range of 6 to 10.” (Rural Education Winter 2001,p.1 ERO).

This next graph shows the decile ranking of the schools that I heard from. I found it interesting to note the decile ranking and the total number of students (figure 1) were in reverse, with the South Island schools having lower student numbers and a higher decile ranking and the North Island schools, high numbers of students and low deciles.

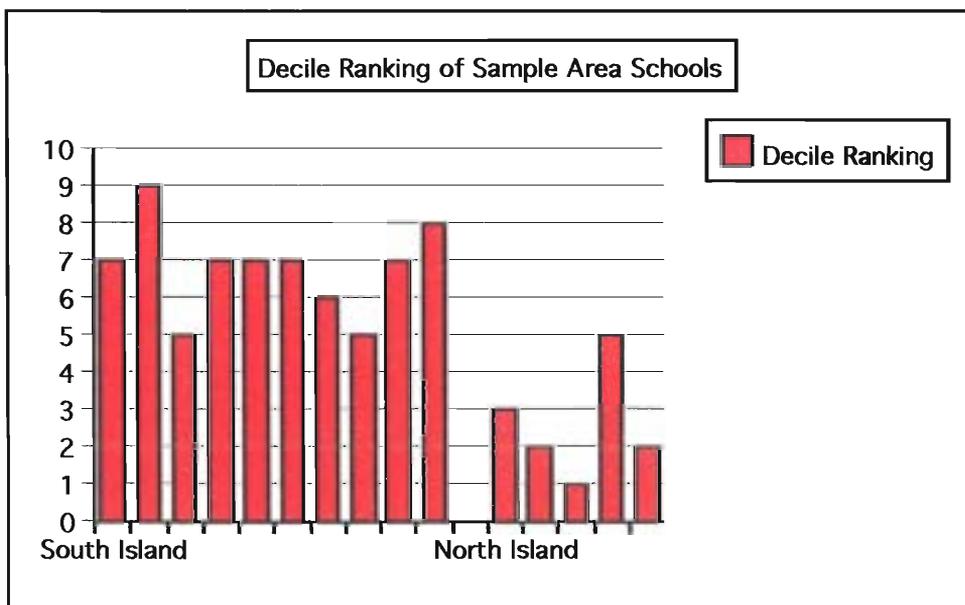


figure 2

AREA SCHOOLS SURVEY :-

METHOD

I thought of questions in relation to what a school offers its students. I decided to include school information, subjects offered, additional opportunities, pastoral care system, staffing, facilities and community/ business support. I wrote up the questions and asked a few people to read, comment and amend the questions, to :

- ensure they were easy to understand
- the questions asked what I wanted to find out
- I had the right information at the end of it.

The surveys were then amended, retyped, photocopied and posted out. As an incentive I offered a draw of two bottles of local wine to those that completed and returned the survey, and I enclosed a stamped addressed return envelope. I also asked whether the principals would be interested in receiving a copy of the completed report.

32 surveys were mailed out, I received 16 back. This gave me a 50% return. All respondents of the survey indicated that they would like to receive a copy of the finished article.

The survey was sent the week before a two week break and the return date given for two weeks after the commencement of the next term.

All the Area Schools in my local area responded, probably because I know the principals as the schools and Trustees have contact with each other through the local Area School Association.

NB: Not all the surveys questions were completed by all the respondents so there are some cases where the numbers do not correspond to the total number of surveys returned.

AREA SCHOOLS SURVEY :- RESULTS

SCHOOL INFORMATION

Student Numbers in Secondary Area

This graph (figure 3) shows the total number of students in the secondary school (ie. years 7-13) and also the number of boys and girls in those years in each individual school that answered the survey. In most cases the comparison of boys and girls is fairly even, there are 3 schools where the difference is more pronounced, 1 having more girls and the other 2, more boys.

I required this information to find out the difference between the total number of students (figure 1) and the senior school, whether the primary section of the school had a much larger trend than the secondary. Only one school appeared to have a slightly smaller number of secondary students than the others where they had a very similar trend to figure 1.

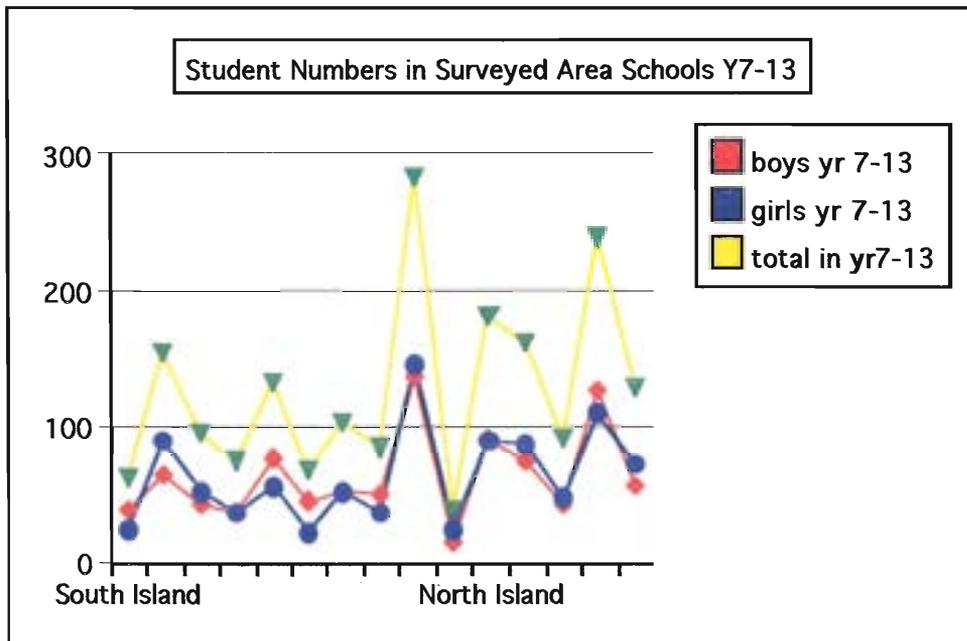


figure 3.

Composition of Classes

I asked the schools for information on the composition of their classes. The result (figure 4) shows the gradual fall off of students from the end of year 10. The range shows that in some schools there are no students in the Year 12 and 13 classes but in others the numbers are 28 and 15 for the same year groups. There were only two schools that had no class of students at all, this was in the Year 12 group for one school and Year 13 for the other, all other schools had classes but they were a group of either all boys or all girls. The schools with the class numbers in the 45-50 bracket had 2 classes of that year level.

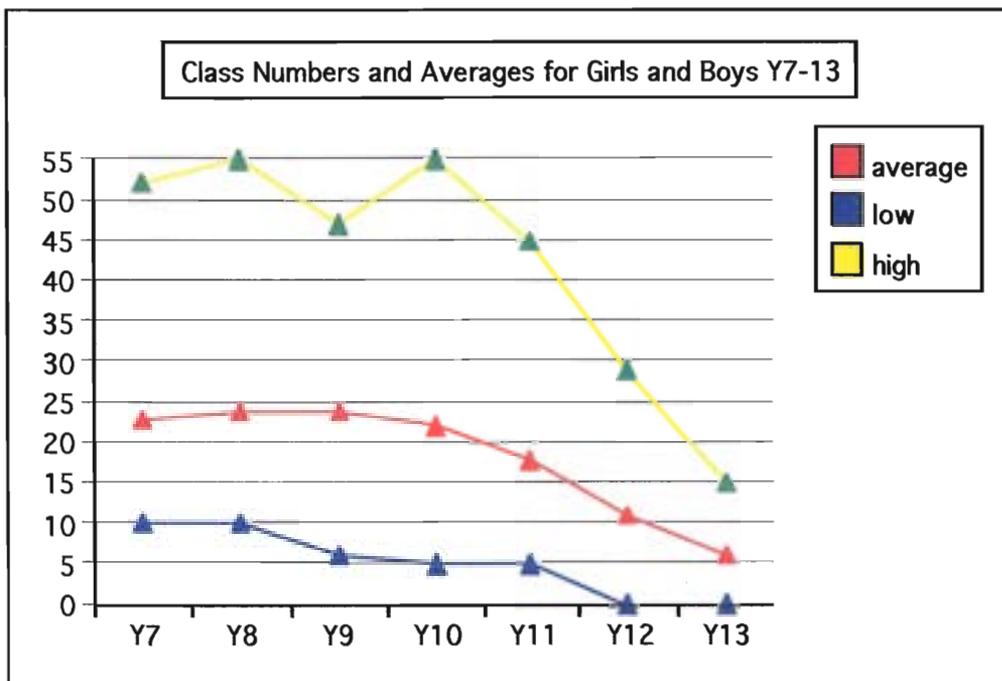


figure 4.

Levels students leave to attend another school and reasons why

Schools indicated they tend to lose students at the Year 9 level after completing their primary schooling, and then some at the Year 11/12 and 13 level. This is confirmed in figure 4. The most common reasons that were given by the principals for students leaving were :

- perception that other schools offer better education
- tradition
- subjects not available particularly in Year 11-13 or only available by correspondence
- meet sporting aspirations
- social reasons
- desire for private/ single sex/ church based education
- discipline problems at home, remove the child from local "trouble scene"

I then gave them the opportunity to offer further comments to this topic, one statement in particular stood out ; ***"It's self perpetuating, students leave because other students have left so reducing what we can offer."***

The retention of pupils is something that Area Schools need to work on. There are some students who will be sent to another school regardless, but the untrue or negative perceptions out in the community need to be corrected. Positive advertising, educating the local people of the many advantages to keeping students locally, the small family nature of Area Schools and the involvement that parents can have are some of the strategies that schools can use.

SUBJECTS OFFERED

All the schools offered the normal subjects of English, maths, science, social studies, art, physical education, workshop and food technology up to Year 10 fully taught. A number of schools also offered music, keyboarding and languages fully taught and there were numerous other courses that were taught at individual schools.

At the senior level (ie. Year 11-13) fully taught options were smaller and correspondence or alternative teaching methods came in. English, maths, physical education, science were fully taught by all the schools. Workshop/ food technology, graphics, art, geography transition, physics, biology, maths with statistics and calculus were offered by the majority of schools as taught subjects. Correspondence or alternative teaching methods were offered in subjects such as accounting, history, languages, agriculture and art history. (See appendix 1). There were many individual schools offering taught specialist courses that their pupils showed interests in eg. drama, child care, auto technology, photography, hospitality and tourism, equine studies etc.

CORRESPONDENCE AND ALTERNATIVE TEACHING METHODS

Due to the small number of students in senior classes (see figure 4) Area Schools often have classes of less than 4 students, in some cases this means students taking their subjects by correspondence or using an alternative method of teaching.

Correspondence School courses are offered by all the schools I surveyed. The majority of schools supervised their students when on correspondence lessons but there was a mixture of some supervised, some unsupervised lessons, depending on the student. In one of the schools, correspondence courses use video-conferencing.

Area Schools have been very innovative in their approach to offering students as wide a range of subjects as possible. In some regions, schools have joined up with other area schools to utilize specialist teaching staff, using computer technology to reach students requiring that subject.

The Canterbury Area Schools offer Cantatech, and the Otago Area Schools, Otagonet. The teachers use video-conferencing to deliver their lessons to students in other schools in the case of the Otago network, the Canterbury cluster use on-line computing.

Open Polytech courses and their on-line courses were another alternative method of teaching.

Community Views on Correspondence and Alternative Methods

These methods of teaching receive a mixed reception by the community. Some see the benefits of the student being able to work at their own pace, organise and take responsibility for their own learning. Others see the lack of direct teacher input as a disadvantage.

The success/ failure of correspondence depends very much on the individual student and the course they take. Some schools find that the alternative methods of teaching are more effective than correspondence as there is more accountability. On the other hand those students that do well on correspondence transfer to tertiary education successfully.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

-

1. Sport

This table shows the number of schools that offer sport to their students and to what level it is offered. This was not a complete list and there were other sports eg. polo, cross country, shooting, badminton, in-line hockey that were offered too. There would be more schools that offer rugby but I omitted to include it in my list and some people may not have thought to add it. At a local level students are offered a range of sporting choices, about half of these are available at inter school and regional level for those chosen to represent the school and some go on to national competitions.

Sport	provided	inter school	regional	national
athletics	15	7	8	2
basketball	14	7	5	4
golf	11	5	4	
hockey	13	6	5	2
netball	16	9	8	7
outdoor Ed	11			
soccer	13	6	8	3
squash	6	1	1	
swimming	15	9	8	2
tennis	11	3	2	
volleyball	8	7	6	2
rugby	7	4	4	5

table 1

2. Cultural/ Arts

Table 2 shows the options available in the surveyed schools of culture and arts. Visiting theatre/ arts, maori performing arts and dance were added by some schools so there may be more schools that offer them. There are fewer schools providing choices in cultural/ arts here than are offered in sport.

Cultural/Arts	provided within school	inter school	regional	national
band	7		2	
choir	10	4	6	1
drama	11		2	
orchestra	1		1	
visiting performers	15	1	1	
kapa haka	2		1	
itinerant music	3			
production	1			
visits to theatre/arts	2			
maori perf. arts	1	1	1	1
dance	1	1	1	1

table 2

3. Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC)/ Field Trips

All schools offered EOTC and field trips across the years 7-13. The number of days varied according to the year level. Years 7-10 averaged 5 days a year for all the schools that replied, years 11-13 averaged 6 days but this was dependent on the course the student chose.

4. Maori/ Cultural Club

Nine schools offered a Maori/Cultural Club to their students, of them, three groups went to a competition two more were intending to enter competitions in the near future.

5. Community Service

Most schools offer some form of community service to their pupils.

table 3

Community	yes
charity collecting	8
visiting elderly	3
work day	1
work experience	14

6. Leadership

All the schools had a student representative on their Board of Trustees. The majority of schools offered leadership courses, had house captains and student councils.

table 4

Leadership	yes
BOT student rep.	16
head students	7
house captains	12
leadership courses	13
peer support	9
sports council	4
student council	12
library leaders	1
whanau leaders	1

7. Duke of Edinburgh Award

Six of the sixteen schools that answered the survey offered the Duke of Edinburgh awards programme. One school had 15 pupils involved in the scheme. Another school's programme was in abeyance at the time of the survey.

8. Careers/ Transition

All schools offered at least 2 of the following: life skills, STAR courses and work experience courses as part of the careers/ transition part of the curriculum. One school had introduced teaching the Youth Awards Scheme this year (this promotes and records qualities and achievements of students which may not necessarily be catered for in conventional school subjects). Another school had careers days each term where they hosted visiting speakers.

9. Pastoral Care System

All the schools had a pastoral care system in place. This varied from school to school and many of them used their form teachers as first contact provider. There appeared to be a well structured plan to help any student in need to be referred on to an outside agency if required. Many of the schools had a whanau support network available to their students. The smaller nature of Area Schools means that all the students are known to staff, as are the family, and pastoral care is seen as a natural extension of the service staff offer to students.

Pastoral Care	yes
guidance teacher	6
guidance counsellor	5
deans/ form teachers	9
careers adviser	16
school chaplain	1
visiting psychologist	1

table 5

STAFFING

Staffing is an essential ingredient in education and a school can only offer a service to the community if there are teachers. Attracting staff to rural areas isn't always an easy exercise especially when teachers aren't available in large numbers. I asked schools to estimate the average number of applicants that applied for teaching positions over the past 2 years, this came up with a variety of answers ranging from 1- 60. The average was 8 applications.

The majority of the replies stated that the number of applicants was decreasing, this was most noticeable in the secondary area where quite a few respondents mentioned there was a marked shortfall of teachers. It was noted that there is a significant lack of English and Maths teachers specifically and other subject teachers are heading that way.

Ten identified that they have a problem attracting staff, three said it was dependent on subject teacher required and two schools didn't have a problem yet.

The reasons given for the problem of attracting staff were enlightening and listed below :

- rurality, professional isolation
- smaller school therefore teachers in secondary often sole teacher of subject - resulting in added responsibility
- smaller pool of good quality staff to choose from - smaller numbers apply
- Rural/ remote schools negative perception by educationalists and politicians
- number of applications incredibly variable- for one position we had 70 applicants and for another 0. Depends on a) age group to be taught b) subject specialism c) if job is long term relieving or permanent d) time of year
- the demanding requirements of Area School teaching - multi subject specialists
- general shortage of secondary specialists - difficult to retain in Area Schools unless here for life style/ family reasons
- we do have plenty of people applying for positions but they are usually quite unsuitable - no current N.Z teaching experience
- we get a lot of beginner teacher applications. We would like more experienced teachers or a mix of both
- area is unattractive ? isolated. high unemployment, total immersion, maori population

COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS SUPPORT

A school in a rural area needs its community support for all sorts of activities to add to the school environment and for the students' benefit. The results of the question about this are below. It is heartening to know that the majority of schools have a reasonable amount of support from their communities and local businesses. (Two schools received a some/ high score of support from their BOTs.)

Table 6

Community and Business Support		involvement	with	school
		low	some	high
PTA/Home and School		2	7	4
parent/whanau support at:				
	field trips	2	5	9
	sports days		7	9
	camps		8	8
	transport	1	8	7
	information evenings	4	9	3
	fund raising activities	1	10	5
Board of Trustees		1	6--	--11
Business sponsorship / support		3	7	5
Community Trusts				2

FACILITIES AVAILABLE

As staff and community are needed for schools to operate, so too are facilities. Following is a list of facilities available to the schools that responded, and whether they are on site or in the community. Some schools have access to the community facility and have one on site too. A few of the replies stated that they had the facilities but some of them were inadequate.

Facilities	yes	on site	in community
computer suite	16	16	
drama theatre	3	2	5
graphic design	11	10	
gymnasium	16	16	
marae	5	1	4
sports fields	16	15	7
swimming pool	16	12	5
technology:			
bio tech	12	12	
food tech	16	16	
hard materials-			
wood	16	15	1
metal	10	10	
plastics	11	12	
music suite	3	3	
sea harbour	1 across road		
multi-media suite	1	1	

table 7

PAST STUDENT SURVEY :-

METHOD

I tried to think of questions I was likely to require answers to and included them in my draft survey. I broke the survey up into parts: school years, influences on their lives and after school years . Once I had the questions compiled I had them printed and asked a few people to read through and comment. Changes were then made and once satisfied I printed off the surveys.

In deciding the group of students to survey, I chose classes rather than individual pupils to avoid the possibility of "hand picking" only the academic students.

To get a range of opinions I selected a variety of years, to ascertain whether the length of time since leaving school, experiences, having a family, made a difference in their feelings of an Area School education. I covered a 25 year span, which meant that if they had all stayed at school for 5 years they would have left school 2 , 5 ,10 ,15 and 20 years ago. Due to the small nature of Area Schools this also gave me a larger number of candidates.

To find names required to send the surveys to, I referred to past issues of school magazines that the school executive officer had in her personal collection and looked at photos of when the students were in 3rd form. I asked a retired teacher and the school executive officer for help with names and addresses or contact addresses if known. I then followed up those contacts myself, with phone calls, for correct addresses. A number of past students were overseas either on working holidays or living, I sent surveys to them by e-mail when it was available but I had some difficulties with this with wrong addresses and then if received people not being able to open the attachments. Some people's addresses I just couldn't find out or I had no reply to messages left on answer phones, I decided to leave those, after giving them a few attempts each. I addressed and posted the surveys out.

As incentives to complete and post back their replies, I included a return stamped, addressed envelope and to those who returned their surveys by the date I selected, I offered them the option to go into a draw for 2 bottles of wine. People were given 3 - 4 weeks to return the survey.

I sent out 67 surveys (7 by e-mail) and received 32 completed forms back.

NB: Not all respondents completed all the questions so there are some results where numbers do not respond to the number of surveys returned.

PAST STUDENT SURVEY :-

RESULTS

SCHOOL YEARS

How long did you attend this school and did you attend another primary school?

Of the 32 respondents, 8 students attended the same school for all of their education, the other 24 came from smaller rural primary schools that were contributing schools to the Area School they attended for their secondary education.

What year level did you leave?

The majority of them completed 6th and 7th form.

What qualifications did you achieve?

There was only one past student that left without a national qualification.

Were there any subjects you would liked to have taken but they were unavailable at your school?

22 answered no, they were happy with the subjects available, 4 of these mentioned that the subjects they wanted were available by correspondence if they weren't taught. The subjects listed by past students who said yes to this question were (with number of times mentioned in brackets) :

- music studies (1)
- classical studies (1)
- animal science (1)
- human biology (1)
- mechanical workshop (1)
- metal work (5).

Leadership roles you held while at school

22 of the students had taken on some form of leadership during their time at school, either as part of the school council, as a peer support leader, librarian, Board of Trustees representative, bus prefect or sports team/ house captain.

The opportunities for leadership at an Area School are much greater than a larger school due to the fact that :

- staff know the students extremely well
- they know their strengths and areas that could be fostered with some form of leadership
- there are fewer people to share the jobs around and every student is encouraged to take on an active contributing role in the senior school.

INFLUENCES ON THEIR LIVES

Do you think living at home and having your family involved in your schooling had an influence on you?

There was an overwhelmingly positive response to this question no matter whether they had been left school 2 years or 20 years ago.

Comments constantly mentioned :

- support
- assistance and encouragement with homework/ study by parents and siblings,
- the rural lifestyle
- values and grounding
- discipline
- parental involvement, support and interest in school activities, etc.

One person commented ***“ I did not want to move away from home, so we would travel up to 1 hour each way on the bus to go to school. I was able to have my parents debrief each days activities and encourage me,when I got home.”***

Do you think your rural schooling had a positive effect on your life?

The responses to this question were also extremely positive; the students own words tell the facts :

“It was such a positive/ fun environment where you were able to be yourself without pressures from peers/ society.”

“The smaller classes and coming from a small community were great”

“ The smaller classes allowed better one on one with teachers, closer to your peers because of class size. No influences of town eg. drugs, etc. Better leadership roles and sporting opportunities.”

“You learn a lot more about people and become a lot friendlier.”

“Not as many distractions, more mixing with age groups and other schools”

“After spending the first half of my 6th form year at a private school I returned to this Area School disgusted in the level of pressure that was put upon students to achieve both academically and in the sporting arena only as a method of advertising. I found rural schooling much more positive the way we were rewarded for achieving without the pressure.”

Was there any particular person/ people who had a positive influence on your life while at school?

25 responses answered positively to this question. 18 of these students mentioned that a teacher had made an impact on them, this was mainly naming a specific class teacher, or a group of teachers in general. The comments indicated with how much fondness the staff member/ s were remembered :

“.....we could ask her almost anything.”

“...the closeness because of the smaller classes,more individual attention-easier to get on with”

“....his mere presence made students sit up and take notice. We had so much respect for him and he had for students.He treated us like adults. Good humour but also got good grades because we wanted to prove to him that we wanted to succeed. Great man!!”

“... he even made Macbeth fun!!...”

“ I gained a lot of support from teachers through difficult events in my later years of schooling. I greatly appreciated their understanding.”

7 circled that no particular person influenced them.

The rest (and also several of the people who indicated teachers) mentioned family and friends as having a positive impact. There were many recurring words that frequently came up like

- support
- encouragement
- involvement
- their presence

AFTER SCHOOL YEARS

Do you think schooling should prepare one for life?

28 thought that it should, 2 gave a negative response.

2 answered yes and no, and clarified this with

“ It depends on the individual, some people thrive in the school environment but get lost in the real world, whereas some battle through school but excel once they leave”

Do you feel your schooling prepared you for life?

19 answered yes. Their answers to this speak for themselves :

“I was able to develop confidence and become who I wanted to be without feeling pressured to be/ do something else. Now I’m strong enough to do what I want to do.”

“By offering opportunities that were new, challenged and built confidence .”

“ Learning there is always a need to start at the bottom and do the hard work to work your way up, this happens many times and stages in life.”

6 circled no. They qualified this with :

“ Schooling can only prepare and give you the skills for a workplace. Life skills are much more important and these skills can only be learnt through experience not in the classroom.”

4 yes and no. Comments to this were :

“ moving from a small town to a city was a different way of life that I hadn’t prepared for ie. car being broken into, living so close to other people, flatting with strangers, noise levels. Doing subjects at school by correspondence helps me with my current studies and the relaxed atmosphere of the Area School prepared me for dealing with other people - adults and younger children.”

“ There are a lot of things that you learn as you go and I don’t think school can offer some of this.”

“ Yes in terms of self discipline and motivation and organisation of time and how to work with people. No in relation to confidence. Local school environment very sheltered, found it hard after leaving school to enter work force and university.”

“ I think once in the work force we learn and probably appreciate more about what life means and responsibilities that come with it!”

DISCUSSION :- AREA SCHOOLS SURVEY

Area Schools do offer many opportunities, particularly in leadership, sporting and cultural areas, to our children. There are many advantages to their size and rurality. Students need to be more self-disciplined and self-motivated, wonderful attributes for life after schooling.

An unexpected finding when I collated the information on subjects and something I thought should be brought to readers and rural industries attention was the extremely small number of schools that had agriculture/ horticulture as a subject choice. This obviously means that very few students are requesting it as a subject to study. Of the 14 schools that completed the subjects section of the survey, at year 11 agriculture and horticulture are only taught in 14% and 21% of schools (respectively) and offered by correspondence at 21% and 14%.

By Year 12 agriculture is not taught at all by any of the Area Schools but is available by correspondence in 21%. Horticulture is taught at 7% of schools and at 21% by correspondence.

A subject called rural skills is taught at 1 school at Year 11 and 12.

This raises a host of questions :

These schools are rural by nature, clientele and location, why is agriculture not a more dominant subject?

What does this say about the agricultural industry of the future?

Do most farming families send their children to urban schools that may or may not offer agriculture?

Do many urban schools offer agriculture/ horticulture subjects?

Is agriculture not being promoted by the industry and people in it, as a viable career choice?

Are the tertiary agricultural institutions getting many students to study agricultural related courses?

A common reason parents use for sending their children to another school is that the local school doesn't have enough subject choices. As can be seen by the Area School survey, schools are prepared to do as much as possible to assist pupils to receive the subjects they want. This may not be a subject that is taught by a teacher, but offered by alternative methods. One school actually said when asked whether alternative teaching methods were as effective as taught classes "yes, because we work incredibly hard to make them so!!"

Most of the schools acknowledged that the effectiveness of alternative teaching was very dependent on the student, their attitude, motivation and their self-discipline.

With technology increasingly becoming more sophisticated, long-distance education will become easier to access. Video-conferencing and other technical devices can and may in the future be just as good as taught classes.

DISCUSSION :- PAST STUDENT SURVEY

FAMILIES

The family's role in a person's life is obviously something not to be underestimated. All respondents regardless of age answered that their parents and siblings had a huge influence on their lives.

If there was going to be any particular group that may have had a slightly less positive view on this, it may have been the students that left school 2 years ago, still going through the age where admitting that family are important isn't "cool". The response from the pupils who had been left school longer was more predictable, as by that stage they generally have married, have children of their own and realize the importance of families.

The comments people offered that consistently repeated each other were :

- support
- assistance and encouragement with homework/ study by parents and siblings
- the rural lifestyle
- values and grounding
- discipline
- parental involvement, support and interest in school activities, etc.

Parents that send their children away from their families for the child's education, may be losing more than they realise when it comes down to

- family values
- family allegiances
- sibling bonds
- support
- encouragement
- teaching the importance of family.

At what unrealized cost does a so called better education and exposure to a wider circle of friends do to the family and family relationships?

RURAL SCHOOLING

Their rural schooling had a thoroughly positive effect on the lives of those students that responded to this survey. They were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the education they received for a variety of reasons that are quoted in the results.

PUPIL/ STAFF RELATIONSHIPS

The close relationship that student and staff of Area Schools experience would be a direct result of the smaller nature of Area Schools, enabling teachers to know their pupils and pupils to know their teachers;

- personalities
- situations
- abilities
- capabilities
- and often the pupil's and teacher's family, very well.

Staff frequently have known the student for a number of years, if not all their schooling, and if they don't teach them each year the pupil is at school, the staff have some interaction with them through sport, lunchtime activities or catching up within the school grounds.

As the students move up through the system and because they know the staff so well there is a more personal relationship (which still has the respect) that evolves between staff/ pupil, than would be possible in a larger school. This would explain the large number of past students who named a teacher, as having a positive influence on them. The careers and guidance advice that is given can be very specific due again to the staff knowing the individual students so well, academically and personally.

PREPARATION FOR LIFE

The answers to the two questions on whether schooling should prepare one for life and whether their schooling prepared them for life were more varied than most of the rest of the survey as so much of this part of life is dependent on influences other than school.

- The family, immediate and extended
- exposure of the person to external influences and experiences
- the individual themselves

are all factors that come into the answers to these questions.

It is not school alone that prepares students for life and the responses reflected this.

FINAL DISCUSSION

In my mind there is no doubt that a local rural Area School education is by far the best education you can give your children. Children get the education and the family, both very important aspects of their lives.

Children can receive all the extra “social stimulus and subject choices” they want but if their family life isn’t “there”, especially through the turbulent adolescent years, they are struggling on their own (perhaps using their peers to help them solve issues where they would otherwise ask parents). The support, encouragement and unconditional love they receive from their family is of far more value for life. Stability and reassurance are what give anyone the push to go on.

An Area School is an extension of the family; the staff are known to the pupils and their families, the smallness of the whole school means that students from all year levels and both sexes know each other well and mix together for sport and social interaction. All this reflects society, as no time in society are we ever put into such a false situation as in a larger school where you mix predominantly with only one level of ages, and also in some cases one group of sexes.

Education no matter where it is in New Zealand or at whatever school is of a similar standard (See appendix 2). This negates the perceived idea many people hold that a larger urban school can offer a better education than a local school. Therefore sending children away for their secondary education is not necessary in my opinion.

People who read this project will realize, according to past pupils of an Area School that a local, rural education is of tremendous benefit to students.

The positives of constant family life and the family atmosphere that is part of the small rural Area School system shone through each students survey time after time.

You can augment your education throughout
life

BUT you can NEVER replace family life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Area Schools positively and regularly advertise themselves, their students and their achievements to the general public, particularly to their own primary school families and their contributing schools. This can be done through school newsletters, contributing schools, local newspapers and regional newspapers, A&P shows etc.
- Appoint a publicity officer to write articles, take photos etc.
- Profile past students on a regular basis in newsletters, school magazine, or newspapers.
- Get a past student to speak at assemblies, school events, prize givings.
- Agricultural Industry organisations and tertiary institutions promote a career in agricultural and related industries as a stimulating career choice at rural secondary schools. Support rural schools by any means possible eg. sponsoring a prize for agriculture/ horticulture at end of year prize givings, offer scholarships to rural schools, promote agriculture to career advisors in schools, include agriculture in subject lists for entrance to university agriculture courses.

Appendix I

YEAR 11 -13 SUBJECTS TABLE

key: T = Taught class

C = Correspondence class

A = Alternative method of teaching

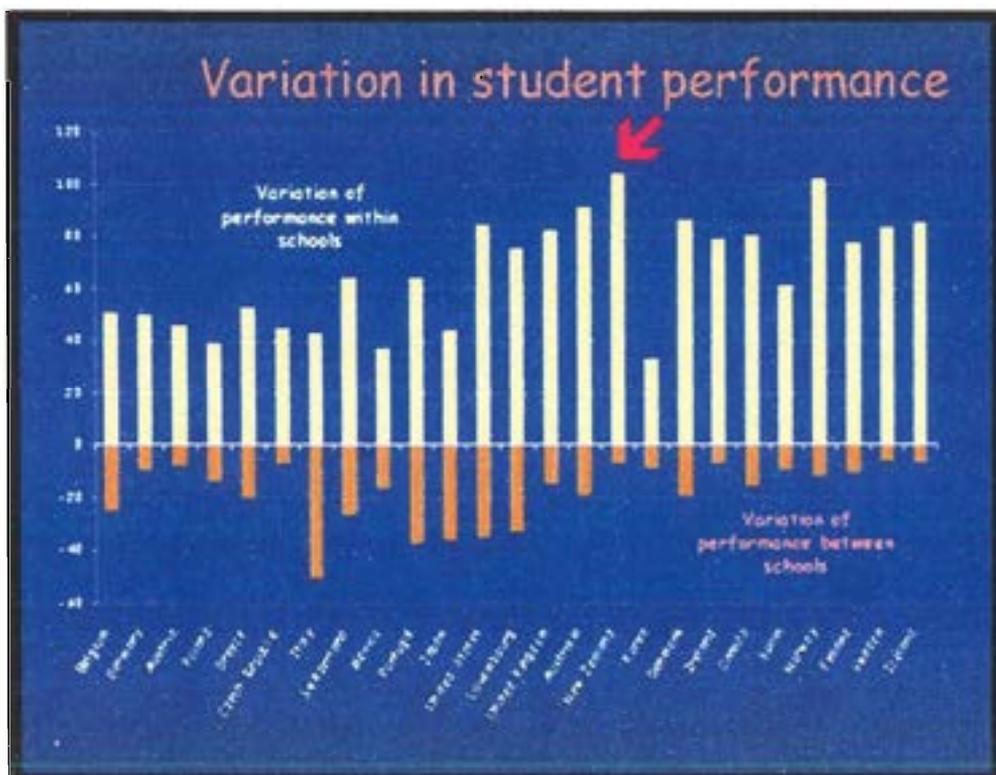
SUBJECT	Year 11			Year 12			Year 13		
	T	C	A	T	C	A	T	C	A
Accounting		5-	-1		4-	-2		4-	-2
Art History					5			3	
Languages German		2			1			1	
Languages Other		1			1			1	
Mathematics with Statistics							7	2	1
Mathematics with Calculus					1		5	2	2
Languages French		2			1		1	1	
Biology		1		11	2		7	2	1
Chemistry				6	5		2	4	
Physics		1		4	4	1	2	3	1
Mathematics	14			14	1		14	2	
English	14			12	2		9	2	
Physical Education	14			11			7		1
Science	14			4	2		1	2	
Workshop Technology	12			5	1		1	1	
Graphics	10	1		4	2		1	1	1
Art	9	4	1	6	3		4	1	
Geography	9	3		6-	2	-2	5	1	1
Transition	8			8			7		
Food Technology	8	1		5	1		1	1	
Computer Studies	5	1		10	2		6	1	
Economics	5	1		4	2	2	2	1	3
History	3	3	2		2	2		1	1
Hospitality	3			3			1		
Horticulture	3	2		1	3			1	
Agriculture	2	3-	-1		3			1	
E.O.T.C.	2			3			1		
Keyboarding	2	1		2	1			1	
Languages Maori	2	3	1	1	2			2	
Music	2	1		1	2		1	1	
Drama	2			1			1		
Languages Japanese	1	1			3			1	
Painting	1			1			2	2	

APPENDIX 2

An international body, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) was set up several years ago to investigate the achievement of students at age 15. The 2000 study included 28 OECD countries and 4 others.

The report confirms that New Zealand's schools do very well globally. However, we have very worrying numbers of students who are not achieving. PISA also tells us that the range of achievement *across* New Zealand schools is quite narrow. **There is relatively little difference between schools.** However, the range of student performance *within* New Zealand schools is the widest of any country in the OECD. Students who are under achieving, exist in every school - they are not concentrated in a few schools.

The conclusion is two-fold - all New Zealand schools have a part to play in identifying students who are at risk of under achievement and to help them. The second conclusion is that **there is no evidence to suggest that we can justify having different expectations of students because they are in different schools.** (www.leadspace.govt.nz/tools/board_man/index.php Planning and Reporting, Thinking Template, Planning for better student outcomes,click on expectations- highlighted in red. November 2002)



References

Education Review Office. (2001). *Rural education, winter 2001*.
Wellington : Education Review Office

www.leadspace.govt.nz - go to tools then to board/ management,
thinking template (November 2002)