



## It's Worth The Effort

A case study in supporting students to achieve New Zealand Scholarship

### The leadership of a boys' secondary school in central Auckland is supporting staff and students to achieve academic excellence in New Zealand Scholarship examinations.

Associate Headmaster Hayden Kingdon started rethinking the New Zealand Scholarship programme at St Peter's College in Auckland almost 10 years ago.

Since then, St Peter's students have achieved significant Scholarship success.

The school has a strong academic focus which includes Academic Deans at Years 11, 12 and 13, and a rigorous monitoring system including checkpointing.

Hayden leads the programme, with classics teacher Cameron Sitters<sup>1</sup> in charge of the Academic Leaders' Academy (ALA), co-ordinating across learning areas, monitoring all aspects of day-to-day student activities, and keeping an eye on general wellbeing.

1 Cameron specialises in teaching NZ Scholarship Classics to Year 12 and Year 13 students.

#### St Peter's College

##### Location:

Mountain Road, Grafton,  
Central Auckland – close to  
Newmarket and Epsom

##### Special character :

Catholic school for boys, Years  
7 to 13, in the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers  
tradition, focused on the values of Christian love  
and service.

A Touchstone value of the school is to provide a  
'Liberating Education.'

##### Roll:

1 July 2023 – 1,250

##### Dual academic pathway:

- National Certificate of Educational Achievement
- University of Cambridge International Examinations

##### Website

<https://www.st-peters.school.nz/>



Top image: *Training Critical Thinking* - Cameron Sitters works to stretch "academic muscle" and grow student confidence.

Back in 2014, when Hayden was given responsibility for the college Scholarship programme, he asked himself what the leadership team could be doing to increase achievement through Scholarship exam success; how could they be taking more responsibility for academic goals.

“Students were missing opportunities for the academic excitement and critical thinking involved in Scholarship exam participation,” he observed.

“There was clear need to allow our staff to increase their professional capability by acquiring the necessary skills to prepare students for success in Scholarship exams.” Teachers needed to feel confident that they had the knowledge and skills to help student success.

Hayden could see that staff would “flourish in the excitement of the academic challenge of Scholarship exam preparation” and that they would be motivated through love of their subject and the mana that Scholarship success brings to the school.

The Headmaster’s conversations with teachers won their trust and enthusiasm. Increasing Scholarship exam success was agreed and adopted as a key school goal back in 2014. A target of 50 scholarships per year was decided on as a number congruent with the school’s vision and values to seek academic excellence.

Leadership behaviours have been key to achieving the goal - building relational trust with staff and students (and their parents); encouraging on-going staff buy-in; supporting an increase in staff professional capability; establishing and maintaining scholarship success as a valued goal by students; acknowledging achievement and providing scholarship classes to help students prepare for the exams. Timetabled subject specific scholarship classes were introduced in 2019 (2 periods a week).

Student enthusiasm for their school subjects and readiness for scholarship exam success starts in the junior years at secondary school. Preparations for the senior years can begin as early as Year 9. As one student recalled, “... it would be the cumulative effort of all my years of effort of all my years of high school that built up the skill required to undertake the Scholarship exams successfully.” Horsley and Moeed (2016).

High IQ is not necessarily the key factor in high-level academic achievement. The St Peter’s culture promotes

a growth mindset in students by encouraging them to embrace learning challenges through praising their effort over their natural intelligence.

“Praise of effort promotes autonomy and sets continued achievement expectations,” says Hayden. “It is the effort required to prepare for Scholarship exams that should be emphasised and praised.”

That preparation involves “stretching academic muscle” and growing confidence says Cameron.

“Training critical thinking and learning how to construct an argument are a consistent focus.” What Cameron calls, “writing heavy” subjects tune up “top writers.”

Cameron works to create a “fun dynamic” learning environment, a “deliberate space” for his students. He revels in their search for knowledge and how they bring differing perspectives to their research. “Their enthusiasm is infectious,” he says. “It’s the highest calibre of teaching.”

## Academic pathways

Entry into the Scholarship programme is generally set at Merit or B level in the subject a student wishes to take. Teachers shoulder tap students they think should be considering it. Some students are driven by the financial award. A number enter multiple subjects. Others opt in for the intrinsic value. Competition is a driver for many.

The ALA was introduced in 2016. The strategic plan identified the need to invest in Year 12 and Year 13, so every six months the school selects 15 students in years 9 to 12 based on academic performance, including writing and critical thinking. The data is reviewed every half year with some students leaving the academy and others joining. About 75 percent of the group is stable.

All the ALA students look to do at least one Scholarship subject. When students choose their subjects for Year 12, they can then opt into the Scholarship programme to benefit from the extra teaching and learning.

As a faith-based school, all students participate in Religious Studies with up to two thirds of Year 13 and a large proportion of Year 12 entering Scholarship in the subject. “Students respect the quality of the teachers and value the quality of the learning material. It’s not indoctrination. It involves discussion and

dialogue about religious traditions and world religions. It's a strong pathway for Māori and Pasifika students," says Hayden. "They do particularly well at NCEA given their strong knowledge of scripture which comes from home and church and their culture."

While Year 13 students can opt into the Scholarship programme, the University Entrance (UE) pathway is the most important goal for the school with high levels of Māori and Pasifika students achieving UE.

## Validating students' and teachers' efforts

St Peter's leadership acknowledges scholarship teachers are masters of their craft. They are critical in fostering love of learning, forging student success and promoting wellbeing. The relationship between the teacher and student is critical, as validation of opinion is a key aspect of Scholarship learning.

Regular check-in meetings focus on building relationship, sharing expertise and subject knowledge while doing the important work of seeking a balance between pursuing students' personal goals and school goals without over-emphasising performance and results.

"The teachers appreciate the opportunity to have success validated and acknowledged, to voice concerns, and feel valued," says Hayden.

Scholars' assembly celebrates student and staff success. Participation in the programme is celebrated and supported through seminars. Teachers acknowledge students' efforts at Scholarship events such as a breakfast in Term 1 or a lunch in Term 3 when past scholars are brought in to share their stories.

Success at Scholarship level represents a signal to prospective employers of both intellect and work ethic.

## Scholarship success at St Peter's College – shifting the academic mindset

Success in Scholarship achievement has come through shifting leadership practices, taking responsibility for promoting academic growth mindset, and encouraging the internal motivations of students and staff.

### Responsibility

Explicitly articulate your responsibility as a leader for strategic goals and meeting achievement targets by providing the academic environment and tools teachers and students need to focus on their business.

Regularly articulate school vision and that the role of teachers and students within this is to teach and learn respectively.

Build relational trust and rapport through discussion with staff, students, and parents to foster an atmosphere of community.

Consistently model and embrace values that guide action and provide psychological fortification and fidelity for the long-term pursuit of data driven school improvement goals.

### Mindset

Look for opportunities and solutions rather than weaknesses when challenges arise.

Foster a growth mindset culture that encourages students to present their authentic internal motivations, not just their "academic smarts".

Use aspirational language that encourages students to take on the academic challenge of New Zealand Scholarship, and '*do the hard yards*' while acknowledging '*we're not afraid of failure.*' '*Your teachers are motivated to help you achieve at the highest possible level.*'

Praise student effort and persistence in achievement, rather than just their intelligence. Praise of effort promotes autonomy and sets academic achievement expectations.

## Motivation

Encourage excellence and inspire staff, students, and parents towards the goal of increased student achievement.

Generate a culture that empowers teachers to flourish professionally, holding up the core business of academic achievement by consistently appealing to their internal motivations, love of their subject and aspirations for their students.

Take every opportunity to acknowledge student and staff success and express gratitude for their hard work. Build environments conducive to excellence in teaching and learning.

Fuel and facilitate professional conversations and establish relationships where everyone is free to speak candidly and openly.

The leader's ability to lead the pursuit of increasing Scholarship success is augmented by the resilience and grit-enhancing values they possess.

## Readings

Harris, M., Johnston, MA. (2009). Values-Based Leadership: At the Heart of Sustaining School Reform and Improvement. S. G. Huber (Ed.). *School Leadership – International Perspectives*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Horsley, J. (2009). *Critical Connections: High-Ability Students Perceptions of Factors that Influence NZQA Scholarship– a Mixed Method Study* (Unpublished PhD thesis). Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand.

Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., and Lloyd, C. (2009). *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration [BES]*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

## Acknowledgement

NZQA thanks Hayden Kingdon and the Board, staff and students of St Peter's College for sharing their experiences.

## Predicting Scholarship participation and success

New Zealand Scholarship assessments extend top students.

Scholarship assesses students against challenging standards. They are expected to demonstrate high-level critical thinking, abstraction, and generalisation, and to integrate, synthesise and apply knowledge, skills, understanding, and ideas to complex situations.

Assessment is by either a written/spoken examination or by the submission of a portfolio or report of work produced throughout the year.

A Scholarship Award provides recipients with academic recognition and a monetary reward during their tertiary study at a New Zealand university.

## Pathways to Scholarship success

Whether a student is on a NCEA qualification pathway or not, they are eligible to enter for New Zealand Scholarship if they are enrolled in a school in the year of their assessment.

Being on a [qualifications pathway to university](#) is a useful starting point for Scholarship.

## Achieving excellence endorsement at NCEA Levels 2 and 3 for a subject increases Scholarship success rate

For students studying at NCEA Levels 2 and 3, the best indicator of the potential to achieve in a Scholarship subject is completing Level 2 in that subject and achieving 14 credits or more at excellence. If the student goes on to achieve similar levels of excellence at NCEA Level 3, then their chances of being successful in the Scholarship subject increase.

## New Zealand Scholarship: Monetary Awards

Read the details on eligibility for entry and the different monetary awards in the Assessment Rules for schools and TEOs 2024. [Go to Rule 5b & c and Schedule 1 section 8.2 of the Assessment Rules 2024](#)