

G.A.T.E. - Rutherford Review 2008.

(Mount Aspiring Annual Goal for 2008)

The Rutherford review took the form of a parent questionnaire with follow up interviews of negative returns, interviews and a questionnaire to a sample of students, meetings and input from staff, discussions with the first Rutherford student intake who are now 22 years old and discussion with the present coordinator Colleen Carr.

History

In 1999 after analysis of several years School Certificate results, it was decided by staff that "gifted" students in the College were not being formally identified and that curriculum did not necessarily challenge these students. At the time the culture of Wanaka and the College often focused on sporting achievement and while a lot of extra one off activities were available at the College it was not seen by the student body as something to be identified with. In a desire to raise the perceived value of academic achievement at M.A.C, the Rutherford Programme was developed in 1999 and began formally with four year groups in 2000. The first intake of students is now approximately 22 years old and five of these students were interviewed as part of this process; to address the difficult question of long term outcomes.

The goals of the Rutherford Programme:

- To allow students the opportunity to work in groups with others of similar ability.
- To develop a school culture that values high academic performance and students who are proud of their talents.
- To extend students skill bases in areas outside the curriculum.
- To encourage creative talent and promote thinking and problem solving skills.
- To help students learn the skills associated with effective team work.
- To develop an enthusiasm to face new challenges and to learn to use failure as a learning strategy.
- To encourage students to use school opportunities effectively so that they develop into well balanced people who can enjoy academic, cultural and social successes.

Defining and identifying students.

The school's definition is based on Gagne's differentiated model of giftedness and talent (1993) and includes demonstrated or potential performance in one or

more of: general intelligence, specific academic areas, creative arts, leadership, creative thinking, and interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

Students are identified through a range of range of formal and informal methods.

Objective Methods

standardised achievement testing in Reading, Maths and P.A.T. - Listening
teacher-devised tests
S.S.P. - Reasoning test.
Contributing school's information.

Subjective Methods

teacher observation of behaviour, questioning, quirkiness
anecdotal information
parent nomination
peer nomination
student self nomination based on student interests.

Changes occur from year to year depending on the student population but in 2008:

84 students took part in the Rutherford programme.	24% of the Year 7-10 roll.
Girls	41%
Boys	58%
Maori students	6%
Maths extension - 30 students	
Years 7-8	15 students
Years 9-10	16 students

Programmes and provision

In the Rutherford Programme, gifted and talented students have met (out of class) for two periods a week. They meet in year levels and the programme includes:

- "Future Problem Solving"
- Critical thinking skills
- "Tournament of Minds"

- Debating
- "A Model United Nations Assembly"
- Otago University problem solving
- Fair Go advertising competition
- Mathematics and literary competitions
- Creative design awards - senior students
- Speech competitions - senior students
- Leadership programme - senior students

Gifted and talented students have also participated in out-of-school activities and competitions, such as story writing, art competitions, CREST, fashion design, "Asia Wise", Duke of Edinburgh, chess, astronomy visit, speeches and some night classes. These activities change from year to year depending on the student group

A further group of students are provided with a period a week of Mathematics extension. These students are in two bands of Years 7-8 and Years 9-10.

Parent Questionnaire Responses:

To help gauge our parent communities views on the Rutherford programme forty nine parents returned questionnaires (see Appendix A). The sample included parents of both current students and past students who have taken part in the programme.

Findings:

84% of parents felt that all the goals of the programme had been met for their child.

10% felt some were achieved or they were not sure if other factors had an influence as well.

6% felt that the goals had not been met.

- The top six positives for the programme in order were: stretching abilities beyond what students were used to, being with like minded people, team skills and leadership, improved confidence, thinking and problem solving skills, interschool opportunities/competitions for unsporting students.
- Favorite activities mentioned were Tournament of Minds, competitions, debating and M.U.N.A. But also mentioned was Duke of Ed., and Future Problem Solving, also Young Enterprise (now a Year Ten timetabled class).

- Being withdrawn from class was not a problem for 60% of students but it was for 40%. The main issue was catching up on class work, one response each for teasing, and being allowed to go being used as a reward or threat to finish class work.
- 51% of parents felt that Rutherford should not be extended to the senior school, 27% said yes and 22% were unsure. Many parents felt that the demands of NCEA in terms of work load were enough and that the Excellence/Merit system was extending their children. Comments in favour talked about tutoring in terms of working towards Scholarships, providing mentors and career education. However there was strong demand for continuation of out of school "extras" such as M.U.N.A., speech competitions, debating and Duke of Edinburgh which parents of senior students saw as very valuable.
- Communication to the home was not adequate for 59% of parents. Many felt they would like an outline of the programme. Four parents wanted a meeting at the start of the year or a first report/interview and one parent was unsure why children were selected.

Two parents commented that it would have been reassuring to discuss the development of skills over time. (e.g. An activity that may be initially demanding such as debating, becomes less so with time.)

Many of the parents were very actively involved with their child's "total" education and as such would like the opportunity to help support activities in the home.

Of the parents who felt communication was good, most mentioned that they could easily talk to the present co-ordinator if they wanted to know anything.

Two parents mentioned the need for parent education in the form of ideas or articles on parenting issues, or perhaps a parent support group.

There was good feedback on improvements that could be made to G.A.T.E. at Mount Aspiring College.

Four parents mentioned the lack of a block of time and the secondary system of single periods which was seen as too inflexible. It was felt that this did not allow enough time to go deeply enough into topics or for students to have the time to pursue their own creativity.

Three parents commented students missed the opportunity for learning to be structured around concepts/topics that utilised students own interests and were set by the student. These parents also missed the chance to be involved themselves through activities and trips outside the classroom. They felt there was too much emphasis on competitions and the need for a product or outcome. That activities should be needs focused rather than programme based.

Two parents mentioned the need for IEP's as part of the College's approach to "gifted" students. That this group of students were different and their needs should be monitored more closely.

The need to use community members with talent/expertise that could be utilized by the College was mentioned by three parents.

One parent felt that academically the school needs to do better with its "gifted" students and school scholarship results do not reflect what should be achieved. As part of this the opportunities for mentoring and e mentoring needs to be pursued further.

Student Feedback:

Senior students and past pupils were asked "What if any were the lasting benefits from Rutherford for them." "Did they have any ideas that would help senior students at the College achieve their goals?" and for any other thoughts/ideas. Comments were very similar between both groups.

- Recognition that they were different was important, and that they could achieve at a high level. Several students mentioned that Rutherford was the first time that anyone had recognised them as being talented and that this had raised their own expectations of themselves.
- Through activities such as T.O.M. they were expected to take on roles that they might have been uncomfortable with, however this had taught them that they could put themselves forward in leadership roles.
- Learning to think outside the square and having processes to follow. Some of this had seemed hard at the time, but had been very helpful across all subjects at all levels.
- They liked looking at world issues that they would not otherwise have covered.
- Good to learn skills at an "early age". All commented they had learnt leadership and thinking skills that were not taught in other subjects or situations at school.
- MUNA had helped learn about the wider world, the necessity of making alliances and negotiating to achieve what you want in life.
- Learning to think on your feet and being able to structure your ideas logically and articulate clearly in a public forum, so that others understood them. Many said that was something they still focused on daily, as their brains seemed to work differently to others.
- Time management and coping with pressure had helped with the exam system and particularly tertiary studies.
- Having a person to support you and take an interest in you throughout your school career was important.

- Time out of class with like minded people, and not being held up by slower classmates was enjoyable.
- Three students who had initial difficulties with their tertiary studies also mentioned that they remembered discussions about facing challenges and that it was alright to fail so long as they used the experience. As a result they had either changed their direction in life (with success), entered university at a later date or persisted with their studies recognising that it would not be their job in life, but that it still had validity.

Staff Feedback:

Staff unilaterally saw Rutherford as having positive benefits for students and the school. However there is some friction concerning interruptions to class programmes, when students are out in alternate activities. While it is generally acknowledged missing class work does not negatively affect extension students, staff often felt pressured to catch students up. Staff also felt they wanted more say in who left class to attend extension programmes.

Ideas discussed have been:

- Rutherford organised into blocks with a different focus each time so different groups are targeted. Would include extension Mathematics so out of class time is limited to two periods a week.
- Timetable Rutherford as a two period block rather than single periods.
- Timetabling Rutherford on the option line and putting other specialist groups against it (not subject options), so that all students are receiving some extra help.
- Explore the new curriculum for opportunities in Y7/10 programme involving all classes using inquiry and thinking skills with a cross curricular focus that would involve working on common goals/topics. This would allow greater subject depth and room for different groups to operate.
- A group approach to Rutherford with several interested staff being responsible.
- That all extension should be under the umbrella of Rutherford including those students with a specific talent such as technology, sport etc.
- Mentoring of older G and T students.
- That all teachers have responsibilities in assisting the development of G&T students and that the school's programme should support all teachers to do this.
- One staff member felt that project-based extension or enrichment is preferable to alternative learning programmes.

Conclusion

Extension activities through the Rutherford Programme have been a valuable part of the College culture for nine years and as such the school already has in place many more strategies than other schools. Time invested in these students has had very positive outcomes for the College in terms of student leadership, appreciation of and a striving for high academic attainment by the student body and enabling a school culture that appreciates difference. It has also allowed individual students to participate in a range of activities not available in the regular curriculum. It was clear when interviewing past students that Rutherford had long term benefits for them, and many of the skills taught and practised were still valued and being utilised.

We have been fortunate in having the services of a staff member whose Masters degree focused on training in gifted and talented education. She brought many activities to the College that have only recently become available in New Zealand.

Recommendations:

That the College continue to target the top 15% of the student population and to use a broad identification strategy incorporating subjective and objective criteria, so that different aspects of talent are recognised. As part of this process all parents of new students should be given a questionnaire about their child to help with this process.

That identified students in Years 7-10 continue to be given the opportunity to participate in an enrichment programme out of normal classes that is targeted to their needs.

That the current programme provides some valuable extension programmes and the opportunity to mix with a range of talented students from MAC and other schools. That interschool activities continue, as they provide venues for social contact with other schools and ensure that rural students are not disadvantaged by programmes only being offered in urban areas.

That opportunities for thematic topics/centre of interest studies also be added to the Rutherford programme to allow students to follow special interests and foster their creativity.

That departments take more responsibility in monitoring their "gifted" students and that the focus on differentiating programmes needs to continue. Departments should report on the effectiveness of their strategies and programmes as part of the curriculum reporting cycle. Departments should begin a process of building a definition of what "giftedness" means for their subject to help cater for their students.

That some activities currently in the Rutherford programme be devolved to departments who will be responsible for administering them.

That timetabling issues be evaluated annually to find more creative ways of catering for programmes.

That a "team" be created to look at programmes and metacognitive foci; also to monitor the needs of individual students under the "Rutherford" umbrella. This should involve I.E.P.'s for particularly the "profoundly" gifted group.

That communication with parents is improved with an annual meeting for Year 7 participants. Also news should be posted on the school web site for parents to remain in contact with the programmes and information through the newsletter.

That ways of involving members of the wider community be investigated for school programmes.

That some form of student mentoring be investigated for senior students, this might be members of the community, staff members or part of the e learning community.

That funding from outside groups is investigated, to help students attend outreach programmes.

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