

STRENGTHENING THE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP OF NEW ZEALAND PRINCIPALS

Evaluation of the impact of Springboard Trust's Strategic Leadership for Principals programme

Executive summary

SpringboardTrust is a non-profit organisation whose aim is to improve student outcomes through improving the effectiveness of principals. Its work addresses a conspicuous absence in the support needed for principals in the New Zealand self-managing schools system.

NZCER was asked to evaluate the short-term impact of SpringboardTrust's flagship programme, the **Strategic Leadership for Principals Programme (SLPP)**. Since 2007 SLPP has provided customised leadership development for 120 principals whose schools serve in total close to 41,719 students. It is a year-long programme.

Principals are assigned to cohorts of six, meeting together with their workshop facilitator, a senior business leader, in six workshops through the year, following a core curriculum. Principals work on the development of a strategic plan for their school over the course of the year, with individual coaching between workshops from a capacity partner from the private or public sectors. Capacity partners receive training for their role. SLPP programme managers use feedback from principals, capacity partners and facilitators to support principals' learning, monitor the programme and keep developing it.

As well as the tangible outcome of a good-quality strategic plan for their own school, SLPP aims to develop the leadership understanding and 'soft' skills to ensure that these strategic plans can underpin improvements in school capacity and learning.

This evaluation focused on the alumni of 2012–14. It draws on interviews with 40 alumni principals, principal ratings of their strategic skills and plans pre- and post-SLPP and Education Review Office (ERO) reviews pre- and post-SLPP.

We find that SLPP is a well-constructed and highly effective programme. Its high-trust, collaborative approach encourages the openness and sense of efficacy needed to make real change. The quality of SLPP is due to its curriculum, the calibre of voluntary and SpringboardTrust programme staff and their commitment to working as a 'learning organisation', in a real cross-sector partnership, to improve education and outcomes for children.

SLPP experience had positive impacts for the leadership of all but a few of the principals participating, and in the aspects of leadership that the programme aims to improve. In turn, these were leading to the impacts for schools that are the ultimate goal of the programme: particularly, improved leadership capacity among teachers and improved learning opportunities, and gains in student knowledge and skills. This makes

sense: the aspects of leadership that SLPP aims to improve are important ones that are also stressed in the educational research on effective educational leadership.

We found:

- ✓ Principal and capacity partner (coach) ratings of principals' strategic planning skills and plans pre- and post-SLPP increased markedly.
- ✓ Twelve of the 26 schools that could improve their ERO level did so: nine schools improved from a 3-year to a 4–5-year level and three schools improved from the 1–2-year level to a 3-year level.

The proportion of SLPP alumni leading schools in the highest ERO review level—4–5 years—is 47 percent, much higher than the national proportion of around 15 percent.

- ✓ Overall, we judged that SLPP had had a high impact on the work of 24 principals, medium impact for 13 and low impact for three.
- ✓ SLPP was associated in principals' accounts with:
 - better strategic planning and use of strategic plans to prioritise and focus school resources of time and money, with more coherence
 - more effective work with stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education
 - strengthening teacher capacity and leadership
 - strengthening principals' decision-making, communication, and reflective and analytic skills
 - strengthening principals' 'soft' skills such as emotional intelligence, and skills in motivating others
- ✓ some gains for school board capability and confidence in their governance role, particularly in decile 1–3 schools
- ✓ some gains in parent and whānau engagement with their children's learning.
- ✓ SLPP learning was also linked to changes in teachers' practice and work together in many of the schools, and to improvements in students' learning opportunities and performance in 70 percent of the schools.

The full report can be downloaded from the SpringboardTrust website at <http://www.springboardtrust.org.nz/>

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