It's About Time

2023 - 2025

TOOLKIT

Section 5: Developing further appropriate timetable policy components

Schools have developed different frameworks to deliver student learning programmes. Most, because of limited school resourcing and facilities and community needs and expectations, are variations on a traditional timetable, but schools are also experimenting with new forms of programme delivery however in innovative timetables. Newly built 21st century schools with quite different learning spaces and buildings have opportunities to create timetables unlike those of the past – and some certainly have. Some Christchurch schools operated some radical changes through the worst of times. Many schools are also collaborating in virtual learning networks which have their own challenges and demands.

Timetable decisions are complex as one change may have unavoidable ramifications. Not only do clear agreed policies provide timetablers with clarity for their work but all staff, parents and students can understand the rationale behind decisions.

Some further questions

Policy discussions should seek to find agreement on answers to a range of questions, like the following:

On the nuts and bolts of timetabling:

- ❖ What will be the length and number of learning periods in a day?
- ❖ What should be the length of the timetable cycle – five days, six days or more?
- ❖ How will any non-curricular activities be organized – meetings, assemblies etc?
- ❖ Do we use modular systems?
- ❖ Do we block subjects at different levels?
- ❖ How will rooms be allocated and used?
- ❖ How will we incorporate initiatives like student academic mentoring?

Many schools have moved to longer learning periods, some schools vary their periods and a few have a whole day set aside for student self-directed learning. Many have expanded the old 5 minute form-time into longer instructional periods where individual students receive academic mentoring which is now part of curriculum delivery.

A significant factor in reducing teacher stress is having one room as a base and ideally rooms should have a particular subject focus. Where movement is unavoidable every effort should be made to minimize this. Beginning teachers certainly need to be allocated a permanent room if at all possible. Most timetables are constructed around the senior students because of the pressure of allocating specialist staffing. Who gets priority for rooms – juniors or seniors, less able learning groups or more able learning groups, difficult learning groups or easier learning groups?

On class size and curriculum:

- ❖ What are the learning group sizes to be – minimum, maximum?
- ❖ What factors will determine if a learning group is viable or not?
- ❖ What factors will determine when a large learning group will be split into two?
- ❖ Should there be multi-level learning groups?

The size of a learning group has received particular attention with the demands of internal assessment for NCEA and the emphasis on meeting learning needs of individual students so what does that mean for different learner groups. Smaller classes will usually be seen as educationally beneficial but usually uses more teaching resource and may lessen curriculum width. Parents, too, are always interested in class sizes!

Determining whether a new subject will be introduced or an established subject be removed from the options will be challenging but needs to be based on sound and understood principles. Very large schools tend to have problems with overly large classes in core learning areas whereas very small schools face the opposite particularly with options and the senior curriculum and therefore do consider multi-level classes. All impact on the work of teachers.

On non-contact and time for other assigned responsibilities:

- ❖ How is non-contact time allocated?
- ❖ How much teaching will be required of counsellors and guidance staff?
- ❖ How much time will be allocated for administration and management?
- ❖ How do we recognise the areas for special non-contact allocation?
- ❖ Is time for admin and management spread across staff or concentrated in a few?
- ❖ How much teaching will be required of senior managers?

Time needs to be allocated for a wide range of responsibilities (work) in secondary schools and the allocation of non-contact time, other than that which is mandated in the STCA, depends upon decisions that should stem from school policies. This time for administration, management and leadership in curriculum, student support and guidance, teaching and learning support – and probably much more – is all taken out of the school's total staffing entitlement and reduces impacts the use of staffing for the actual teaching. This is another balance that can be challenging.

A fair deal for teachers and students:

- ❖ How do we recognise the different number of classes teachers may have?
- ❖ When will we split a learning group between two teachers?
- ❖ How will the school manage the teacher-profile for each learning group?
- ❖ How will we manage the learning group-profile for each teacher?
- ❖ How will we manage the allocation of difficult learning groups?
- ❖ In what way will non-subject learning activities (such as student and academic mentoring) be incorporated into the timetable?
- ❖ How will teachers operating outside the normal timetable be compensated?

In answering these kinds of questions the underlying principles are about having a fair allocation of work and what is best for student learning. A longer timetabling cycle and greater number of periods can offer more flexibility for the school to deliver the curriculum but it can often mean extra classes for teachers.

For some time such things as pressure on specialist facilities, particularly at senior level, has led to some teachers teaching a learning group before school, during the lunch-hour or after school. There needs to be clarity about how such departures from the usual hours are negotiated with the teacher concerned and what adequate compensatory measures arranged.

More recent thinking on good practice in curriculum delivery and student programming have led schools to take closer looks at how they structure their timetables , and with more focus on vocational pathways and options such , for example, as Trades Academies there are a range of new challenges.