

RISING — to the — CHALLENGE

Stories from the Covid-19 crisis



Springboard Trust is continuing its Strategic Leadership for Principals Programme – virtually – to help school leaders navigate the Covid-19 crisis.

SPRINGBOARD TRUST: COVID 19 – WHAT SCHOOLS CAN LEARN FROM THE CANTERBURY EARTHQUAKES

By Nicholas Moody

The aftermath of the earthquakes that devastated Canterbury and its people a decade ago are providing valuable lessons for schools about how to lead out of the Covid-19 crisis.

“Canterbury school leaders had to cope with severe upheaval and the challenge of bringing a sense of normality back to their schools and community,” says Springboard Trust (SBT) chief executive Dale Bailey.

“There are parallels with coming out of the Covid-19 lockdown, and some valuable learnings about resilience. The pandemic has tipped the education system on its head and schools will require strong leadership and clear strategies to help teachers, children and their families navigate the unknown road ahead.”

SBT is an education initiative that offers a myriad of programmes, one of which is the Strategic Leadership for Principals Programme – where highly skilled volunteers are paired with senior executives from the business sector, including from ASB, KPMG, Spark, Fonterra, Air New Zealand and McKinsey & Company.

It is supported by NEXT Foundation, Aotearoa Foundation, Hugh Green Foundation, and other strategic partners.

Bailey says three rapid response teams from SBT are busy finalising new short courses tackling resilience, crisis leadership and distance learning, using the latest New Zealand and international research.

The modules are a series of easily digestible, 30-minute sessions of bite-sized topics, activities and reflections school leaders can do with their teams as they deal with the disruption caused by Covid-19.

“The issue is how do we manage our support for school leaders so that they have time to consider these ideas, yet not feel like a distraction when they are focused on immediate responses,” says Bailey.

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Bailey has been heartened by the dedication of its volunteers, known as capacity partners, during the lockdown.

“There is a real desire to play a part and help out in this time of crisis. Even people with some very challenging day jobs continue to contribute to the programmes,” he says.

“It helps principals develop the skills to transition from teachers into a CEO of a medium-sized company, which is essentially what a principal is now.”

SBT’s 19 school leader cohorts across New Zealand also have continued to be highly engaged, despite the day-to-day challenges many of them are facing.

“Initially we thought school leaders would be too busy for strategic conversations and planning,” says Bailey, who himself only started as CEO in February.

“But we have found the vast majority of people want to be involved, they see the importance of connectedness, reflecting on their current direction and what opportunities arise out of it.”

Preparing principals and other school leaders to think about the future of learning is another role SBT is gearing up for, when the time is right, says SBT chairman Ian Narev.

“There will be a time to realise the advances we are going to make in this period. Some of them have the potential to influence the way we do our jobs. That will be an exciting time, when we ask, ‘How can the Covid-19 crisis make schools better for the long term?’” says Narev, who has been with SBT since its inception and chairman for the past 14 years.

Narev says the crisis has also shown SBT it can use technology to scale its remote learning programmes nationally, such as the Strategic Leadership for Rural Teaching Principals Programme, which is being piloted this year.

“Effective strategic leadership transforms school communities and helps schools overcome challenges, like Covid-19, and thrive. We want to play our part in ensuring that all Kiwi kids, regardless of where they live, what their means are, have access to a great education.”

NEXT’s representative Frank Janssen says SBT provides a two-way benefit for both school leaders and their corporate volunteers. Principals gain strategic insight and their capacity partners learn what it means to run unique organisations like schools.

“The programmes enrich educational outcomes, but also enrich the corporate leaders who participate,” says Janssen.

“Training our school leaders to deliver educational excellence feeds into our mission to build New Zealand’s long-term knowledge capital. Great leaders develop great schools and SBT is ensuring we give school leaders the tools they need to help our kids have the best shot at succeeding in education.”

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