

Schools Don't Change Unless the Principal Does

Sabbatical Report

Mike Lander

Thames South School

FOCUS:

Through my fourteen year stint as an Adviser on Māori Education and now more recently as a principal of a predominantly Māori school for a further eighteen years I seriously question our system as to how well we prepare our principals and leadership teams, let alone our staff and all our students, to live, work and be effective bicultural citizens here in this Our Land, the one we call Aotearoa/ New Zealand.

OR

If You Don't Walk In Both Shoes in This, Our Land, You Continue To Limp Around In the Same Social Circles making the Same Mistakes and Judgements Our Predecessors Did!

With the support of my Board of Trustees and School Leadership Team, I applied and was awarded a principal's sabbatical for Term 2, 2011. In the following report, I will outline both the purpose for my sabbatical and the cultural sensitivity inquiry brief which formed the investigative framework for my sabbatical. This will be followed by my scribblings following discussions with my fellow principal colleagues, visits to their schools and other research spanning some 60 years in education. My report will conclude with the implications for all my fellow school leaders and especially those aspiring to be school leaders in our communities in this our land.

My Grateful Thanks

I wish to acknowledge and thoroughly recommend the Principal Sabbatical Scheme as a wonderful way to climb out from under the mountain of paperwork to view the trees. As Principals we live such hectic and energy sapping lives attending to the never ending demands of the curriculum, staff, Board, students, parents and especially the Ministry that we rarely make time for ourselves to reflect on the bigger picture and in my case it was to look at successful ways Principals go about improving staff competency so as to in turn improve Māori Achievement in their kura.

I particularly wish to thank my Thames South School Board of Trustees for their support. To my senior staff and especially my DP, Jeannie Apthorp for taking on the 'challenge' and doing such a fantastic job in the 'chair' during my absence. To all of our staff, teaching and non teaching, Māori and Pakeha, my grateful thanks for the way you all take on the necessary challenges, the risks and as a team, make the changes on a daily basis, continually looking for ways that really do work for all of our students.

My sincere thanks to all my Māori teaching colleagues and friends who freely offered their comments, concerns and returned my questionnaire, Nga mihi nui kia koutou katoa. You are a continual source of inspiration and have been all my teaching career.

My special thanks to my fellow principals for their honesty and openness in sharing their particular journeys and I appreciate the demands you all face as you continue to navigate the Cultural Continuum with your teams for the benefit of all in our charge.

Kia Ora, Mike Lander

School's Don't Change Unless the Principal Does

This paper is primarily for my fellow Principals, not their employers and I welcome comment from aspiring and current Principals and all other interested parties, especially Māori in education, as my message is a simple one to a very difficult problem that has been vexing educationists in Aotearoa, New Zealand for generations and is to do with the “bell curve symbol” used by academics to explain the spread of achievement in our classes, our schools and even nationally.

Māori and Pasifika largely made up the left-hand hemisphere and despite all our efforts and ministry focus, they still cast a brown shadow from the sunnier right hand side, when we gather our statistical data and sadly not just in education.

Is that the way it needs to always be? Do Māori and Pasifika deserve to occupy these bottom rungs of the ladder? Some say that someone has to but others would say that our system appears to do it deliberately otherwise our statistics would, by now, look a lot different. Where do you stand in this debate? Is it fair? Is it right? Should it always to be like this?

What can schools really do to have, especially Māori, feature properly on both sides of this infamous curve of academic distribution?

First you have to believe that there is a desperate need nationally and especially locally in our own schools to improve the achievement levels of Māori students and that something very different must happen. It's then a matter of getting your senior management on board and with advice; devise a strategic plan that becomes your main all consuming focus. A plan that is well resourced, well sold to the rest of the staff and BoT and committed to over a reasonable period of time. A plan that also looks hard at possible new appointments to support the above **because it will take much more than just good will and some PD to reverse this ingrained trend.**

Now you might begin to understand what I mean about the Principal of a school needing to change. If the CEO of a school does not take the risk and go on this personal journey, this mindset change then all we are doing is perpetuating the status quo and our token efforts will be just that, tokenism.

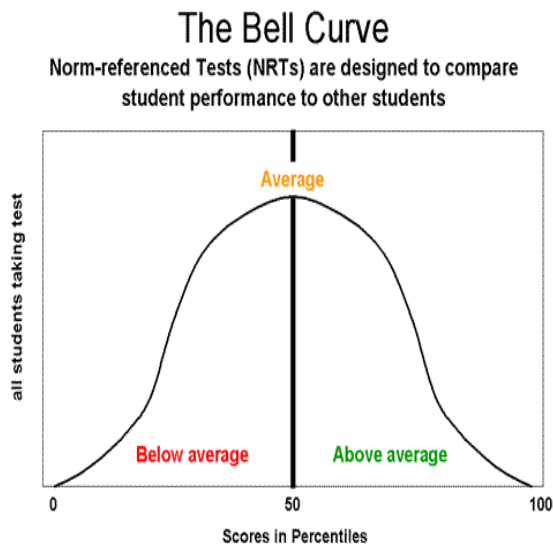
Perhaps its time to look at what other schools have been doing and to hear what Māori in the system believe is the answer. My sabbatical this year was about just doing that and I have appendaged a copy of the questionnaire where I specifically targeted Māori Educationalists i.e. Māori Teachers and Resource Teachers Māori, to gauge THEIR view on what THEY thought was the best scenario for Māori Achievement, something which I believe has been sadly lacking in all of this debate over all these years.

If you would like to contribute to the debate by filling in the questionnaire and forwarding it to me principal@thamesouth.school.nz please feel free, it will take just ten minutes.

Question - Why is the Bell Curve White on the Right?

For just over 60 years, I have been part of the New Zealand Education System and knew then as a young pupil, who in the class, besides me, were the non-achievers. We each had various and often devious ways to disguise our individual shortcomings and our lack of expertise in especially literacy and so we gained our mana through sport and being more street-wise than the rest. The difference for me then, was that I was one of the few white guys in the group, but I also had an overriding family expectation that I would suddenly “get” schooling and do well. It did happen, much later than my parents really expected, but their perseverance and faith did finally pay dividends. What I observed then and now throughout my forty-six year teaching career is that the pattern has not changed and schools with all the extra resources, extra decile funding, extra help, extra focus, still have not cracked it.

The left hand shadow of the curve of distribution or the bell curve is still mainly brown and unless we have a heart and a desperate will, inside and outside of education, to really make a difference, then that infamous shadow will still remain denying Māori to reach their individual and collective potential here in Aotearoa, New Zealand.



As a principal where would you place yourself on this curve in terms of cultural awareness and cultural competence? Where would you place your staff in terms of this and especially how they might rate in getting Māori/ Pasifika Achievement levels up to their potential?(not your expectation.) Where would you place your staff in helping all our students becoming biculturally competent?

If you are honest about yourself and your staff,- What are you now going to do about it?

Do you have some growth to do? Will you be setting some challenging goals for yourself and your team? Will those same goals find their way into your own Performance Agreement? What about your school's annual and strategic plans? What about everyone's appraisal goals?

Politicians and Academics - Who has the Answers?

Heaps of papers and research have been done especially over the last forty years, into what is going on and many of us have waded and contributed to this mountain of paperwork but what are the simple answers. What can we do, as Practical Principals, to finally get it right? The key wider spheres of operation as I see it are to do with:

1. Society as a Whole
2. Māoridom and especially local Iwi
3. The education and culture we offer in our particular schools.

This paper focuses on the later because that is the one area I have and continue to have an influence, especially in my own school and the schools I talk to. The other two areas are absolutely critical to solving this damning shadow in our nation's future growth but those other two areas are out of my and your immediate influence and need to be addressed in a different forum although many in education still use these excuses for their own inertia.

I am mainly concerned with what I can solve, even though the other spheres impact hugely on our efforts we cannot continue to blame them, nor indeed the past, the parenting, the lack of home reading and preschool education, the mother's or even the dad's gene pool and family history. It is time we addressed the immediate problem which is **OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM'S CONTINUED FAILURE TO PROVIDE AN ADEQUATE EDUCATION FOR TANGATA WHENUA.**

When I asked prominent Māori in the Ministry in Wellington more than two decades ago what the problem was with Māori Education, (and they still say it), the official answer was "a myriad of factors wider than just schools". This sort of cop-out leads to the inertia referred to above.

Many of us over the years have looked at and still do train up and bring in teachers and parents to help us with our literacy programmes (our own school sets aside more than \$80,000 each year in support staff essentially working with Tarp, Lexia, Reading Recovery, Speak To Me, Toe by Toe, Talk to Learn and other Literacy and Numeracy Enrichment and Skills Programmes), all designed to boost our juniors to where we expect them to be by Year four. Other schools spend much more but what else can we do? How else can we train up not just our whanau to help the younger siblings of our students to be better prepared for schooling and once there get the most out of what our school has to offer but also, and especially our professional staff because our system should be about **ADVANTAGING EVERYONE, NOT JUST SOME.**

Our senior managements and school staffs all need to have a heart for things Māori if they are to work with Māori students. That's the challenge I am putting to you, my fellow principals and that heart, that pulse also needs to be seen on the outside and not just assumed from within that it is there. Others and especially Māori need to be the ones who acknowledge and let you know about this Heartbeat in your school.

One Magic Formula

One Principal's Experience, My Story

I did not know it at the time, but when I moved my family from Te Kuiti in the mid 70s to a Northern Hawke's Bay four teacher school, **one Magic Formula** was there for all to see. I inherited a school that had high expectations of its 95% Māori roll in Kapa Haka, Sport and Academic Achievement. We had Kaumatua, mainly Kuia, moving freely in and out of our school, a school community who cherished, in the main, their children going off on Academic Scholarships to board and do well at other schools, as our local High School wasn't local at all but an arduous three hour's round trip away from our kura and many had travelled some distance already just to get to us.

The expectation of staff and parents was high, but so too was the work ethic of the students, not just when they were in our care, but away from us as well. Fortunately those same stately Kuia, who ensured there was no truancy, continued to take an active and very positive interest in those same students when they returned to the village on their term breaks. Those same boarding students still felt important and included and so they should.

Was that the Magic Formula? A team of teachers dedicated to achieve the best for their students in both the Pakeha and Māori worlds and having respected community members actively involved, treasured and proactive in the school and with its students, especially when they were also away from school. The children at home back in the 1970s, admittedly didn't have the distractions of today. Their lives were simple but hard, either back on the farm, in the fishing community or in the forestry, away from any street life. Most of us now have things quite different where respect and relationships with adults whether they be teachers, any form of authority at home and elsewhere or even with Māori Community Leaders, is not the same and the influences outside of the school grounds have a massive impact, often devaluing what we are trying to achieve in each of our kura.

What can we do? You can only change yourself, but that change can also influence all those around you. For nearly twenty years now I have been Principal of Thames South, a decile 3, 200 plus, 65% Māori, full primary school. We have tried paired teaching based on the Kaiako / Kaiawhina model in double classrooms, we have set up Total and Partial Immersion classes and we have tried Kaiawhina support in our mainstream single cell classrooms, all designed to gain that all so important respect and relationship with students and whanau so that our combined hard work and high expectations of our tamariki would rub off on the home life and pay huge student achievement dividends. In truth we know we still have some way to go, but boy and at last, we are motoring.

Over the years and still now, we have been privileged to have high quality teachers but with all the hiccups in individual children's and even our own school lives in terms of major changes, it has only been in very recent times that I have felt that we are nearly there, nearly cracked it, nearly putting together the Magic Formula for us and for perhaps other principals to look at and consider.

We got close to cracking it with our full immersion classes where we have full whanau support but at times this very determined and strong voice has proved to be intimidating for the teaching professionals almost undoing the good. It has to be **a mutually respectful working partnership**.

In recent years we have created two other Te Reo Whanau classes adopting the 80% model and the early signs are breathtaking. The professionals here have been hand picked and are two very accomplished kaiako who thankfully work in extremely well together as do the Kaiawhina I Te Reo in both classes but the foundations were well thought through and planned for after talking to key University people about the 80% model and visiting several inner city Auckland Kura years ago.

All tamariki coming into Nga Kahui Whetu are English First Language Students so we logically start with the Year 4s because those younger infants need to experience success in the basics in their **FIRST** language first. Whanau were carefully checked for their total support for this special unit where we promised they would be exceptionally well prepared for both worlds and especially High School and beyond. The bonus of other languages like French, German and Spanish is introduced to these 'Language Students' as time went on but to sign up whanau were committing themselves to being very supportive of our Kaiako and the unit and most importantly to have representation at all whanau hui, which now turns out to be eagerly awaited twice a term. Our aim from the start was to have 100% turnout and to date we have achieved that, even at our annual noho marae stay overs.

Our glorious problem now is accommodating and feeding the "hordes" including past pupils, who tag along with their parents whether it be on class trips or at our "Paa War" events.

Let me explain. Right from the start our two classes of 24 (and we have a waiting list for each) were placed into four waka, younger and older children, using Tuakana/Teina and with each waka competing with each other, right throughout and as a normal part of our every day learning but on Paa War Nights they have to include younger and older siblings, cousins, parents, wider whanau and especially grandparents. These nights involve games such as touch, tapuwai, softball, netball, whare whare, quizzes, cards, talent quests etc in fact anything fun that will involve a wide cross section of the whanau but better still these Paa War activities are now being organised by the whanau themselves and these activities are now being shared with the rest of our kura.

Our Kaiako are there to teach. They are the ones working with the tamariki getting to really know them, their strengths and needs, their whanau and planning for their schooling achievement so things like transport, marae organisation, fundraising, contacting kaumatua, organising kai, etc are being done by parents, yes, planned for and done by our very keen whanau sub committees.

It is clear that our kaiako are the ones in charge and when they ask for help with crafts or local history or something to be researched or even resourced to assist the classes, that's the homework for our whanau who desperately want to be involved and helping out even in the classrooms which is a blessing because when they come along they personally see the high expectations and feel the achievement culture of the classes and from there, out in the community, they are our best advocates and supporters.

These Paa War nights are followed by a shared tea and then a brief meeting which touches on what is coming up, what our expectations of the children are and ways parents can help. It would be fair to say that the other nine classes in the school are a little envious of the community support for these two classes simply because the parents are wholeheartedly there and because the kaiako communicate so well with them and their extended whanau, things just seem to flow.

WHAT ELSE IS OUT THERE? WHAT ELSE WORKS? WHAT COULD HAPPEN?

Paeroa, a town with a high proportion of Māori students, last decade benefitted from a Ministry sponsored scheme they called SOAR@PAEROA (Students On A Rise at Paeroa). Experts moved in to assist ten schools surrounding the town in literacy and maths. Paeroa College was the lead school and for nearly a decade teacher expertise was targeted. Of course the schools who put most into it got the most out of it like any scheme but it will be interesting to observe these ministry projects five or ten years later to assess their sustainability not just with new staff entering the school but the inevitable teacher reversal to what we know best when the chips are down.

Student achievement at the time of this full on project rose markedly and when, a few years later, I interviewed two of the schools still meeting to share expertise and results each used different methods to ensure necessary change happened. The first like most schools used senior staff to convince, model and then hound the others into the sound new practices being advocated and relied on the resulting improved student achievement and some good old fashioned classroom “stalking”, to continue the momentum. “All Hail to the Classroom Stalker.” This first school already had a strong bicultural strand running through it.

The other school came at the desired changes a little differently in that the facilitators took the time to sit in on each class for quite some time to observe current practice and to fully understand each class’s culture and makeup. Once the teachers knew that everything was not going to be thrown out with the bathwater, that their hard work ethic was recognised and that they were each already doing a great job only then was a bond of trust developed laying the foundation for everyone being very keen to try new ideas and to somehow work smarter rather than a lot harder.

Other Waikato Schools I have observed, have gone about things differently too when talking about improving classroom practice. Some have adopted a Whole School Inclusive Philosophy which needed total buy in from all staff and tested individual views on acceptance and going out of our own comfort zone to appreciate what it was like for tangata whenua and especially new immigrant children and their families to get the most out of our education system. Some schools have incorporated the Values Philosophy to gain total school buy in and facilitate change to gain better relationship building and smarter classroom practice. Many others have adopted Restorative Practices that have challenged staff to look at the ways we work with and not against students and this has resulted in a whole new way of working and relating to our learners whilst other schools have explored and adopted deeper Māori Values and Philosophies to base their everyday interactions with learners and their whanau on.

To get total staff buy in to anything is often not easy because our job is not easy. We are flat out working so hard now that anything and everything else looks like and feels like **an extra that we can well do without** but here is the key consideration. Essentially our traditional way of delivering to most Māori children has not worked so anything that challenges us to think again and come away with new practices that really work for these kids (and funnily enough also work well for the rest of our students too) is, believe you me, well worth pursuing.

It is imperative that we each continually examine our own views as to why we have this damning brown shadow on the wrong side of the Bell Curve in our own and in most neighbouring schools.

We need to start with ourselves by challenging first our own views as to why Māori are not being advantaged, like everyone else, in the systems we run and then to challenge those same views in our senior teams and wider staff. **Is the deficit theory in your school still alive and kicking?**

Is there any residue of blame for the victims, or hint of ‘we can’t do anymore than what we are doing now?’ How far below the surface is that debilitating negative, often “racist” view and excuse?

We need to be determined to make key changes for ourselves and for our professional and non professional staff and if there is fall out we need to keep reminding ourselves as to what our school is really about? And really this is not just about Māori it is about all who call themselves Kiwi!

Is it about teachers doing what they have always felt comfortable doing?

because they have believed that it works, well maybe not for all but at least for most?

or is it really about ALL our students, THEIR needs and THEIR achievements for ALL not most here in Aotearoa / New Zealand?

For me it is not just about Māori students, (even though it is imperative that we do a hell of a lot better, starting yesterday!) It is about all of us in Education!

Because sadly and regretfully WE ALL, collectively, have done a very poor job, (and have done it for Donkey’s Years, not just in John Key’s years) of biculturally educating ourselves and ALL those we influence.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE is all that we ask.

“Teacher cultural competence, with other cultures in our classrooms, involves understanding, respecting and valuing that culture, knowing how to use culture as an asset in the teaching and learning process, both inside and beyond the classroom”, (Tataiako, 2012) *then why haven’t we, as a nation, been successful all these years with regard to our own indigenous culture here in Aotearoa/ NZ?*

Let us all finally make it a matter of **National Importance**

Not one of **Continuing National Shame**

Kia Ora Koutou Katoa

Mike Lander

Thames

March 2012

SCHOOLS DON'T CHANGE UNLESS THE PRINCIPAL DOES

The sad fact of the matter is that in Māori Education, and I have been involved at the chalk face for nearly forty five years, overall nothing much has changed as the stats still show. Those of you who knew me whilst I was on the road recognised that my target was those in the school's hierarchy like BoTs, deputy principals, the senior school team and especially fellow principals. Nothing really has changed and they still need to be challenged. I'd greatly appreciate your brief comments on the following six questions by copying them into a word document and emailing them back to me, like ASAP.

Looking at the schools you have worked in and which are predominantly Māori

1. Have you ever thought that a school is doing well for its Māori students with a principal and hierarchy who are not sympathetic or committed to Māori achievement and Māori issues?
2. What are the characteristics that tell you that a school is successful with its Māori students?
3. What are the characteristics that immediately tell you the opposite?
4. In your opinion can we have a school doing well in Kapa Haka but poorly at achievement in literacy and numeracy being perceived as a successful school?
5. Conversely can a school that is doing well academically but poorly culturally be rated successful by you and its Māori community?
6. Over the last fifty years we have seen a number of dedicated people work tirelessly to turn those statistics around but have seen little gain. What do you think should happen?

List some of the initiatives you have been involved in over the last 50 years that you feel have helped support Māori achievement in education.

Please share this brief questionnaire with other Māori educators because it is high time for those in the system to have their say as to what should be happening.

Parent Partnership Reaps Rewards

Whilst the Government is talking up Charter Schools and Big Business having more say in certain schools, one low decile school in Thames is bucking the trend by maximising its parent partnership to reap the rewards. Two years ago it started its Dual Language Units and gained so much interest amongst its Parent Community that the classes continue to have a waiting list even though the expectation of parent commitment and involvement is way higher than any normal classroom around the country and of course guess who are the real winners? The formula is a simple one and this year they extended it to their senior mainstream class with even greater and more dramatic results.



Thames South School is a decile 3, inner rural town school of just over 200 pupils. This year's ERO report recognised its pupil and parent leadership focus and witnessed first hand its wider school community's enthusiasm and involvement. Principal Mike Lander talks about it's school wide Community Days where parents are encouraged and expected to be part of the day's activities sharing their interests, skills and passion with the children - not a new idea but a stepping stone into something much more exciting and special. Take the Dual Language Units called Nga Kahui Whetu, a gathering of the stars, where twice a term at their whanau meetings they expect and get 100% plus attendance - yes, 100% plus attendance, and more importantly these critical gatherings are run by the parents themselves and it is because of

“the quality of the whanau spirit”, something all new parents comment on and want to be part of. “The teachers are there to teach and not to do everything else, it's about partnership not teacher burn out”.

Whanau Hui

Yes our two dynamic and very competent Kaiako have a hand in everything but it is not all up to them. These parent run whanau gatherings start at 4.30pm with competitive activities where students are divided up into four waka but also includes on the night their older siblings, parents, whanau and especially their grandparents who usually are the most competitive. These activities, all run by parents, include such games as tapuwai, touch and rippa rugby, softball, ancient Māori games and if its wet where where, card or board games, quiz/talent



quests and of course kapa haka, all followed by shared kai and a packed whanau meeting. These meetings are important because then it's the teachers' turn to talk about the tasks in hand, the trips, the mahi in the classrooms and where they desperately need help. Out of these meetings comes the real 'juice' as one teacher puts it. Parents offering to hear children read, parents lining up to be trained in Pause, Prompt, Praise; teacher aiding, outdoor activities and even numeracy. So keen are they that parents have to be turned away or put on rotation when going away on class hikoi and marae stays. Recently the classes stayed on the Waikare Marae near Te Kauwhata, travelled to Hamilton and Ngaruawahia for an in-depth look at Kingitanga, taking part in Waka Kopapa, school visits, zipping up to participate in the Auckland Polynesian festival and even finding time to entertain the Prime Minister, all made possible with funds raised from parent organised activities. The teachers just needed to attend to the educational side of things and not the organisation of food, transport and accommodation - the parent committees willingly and expertly attend to all of that.

Leadership and Adventure Classes

At Thames South it doesn't stop just there as this year they have started up another special character class of Year 7/8 students whose focus is on Leadership and Adventure. Who wouldn't want to belong to something like this? and already in Term 1 they have been away on two challenging camps, the first in the bush to realise their co-operative leadership potential and the second at a coastal location to challenge them even further but this class is not just all about camps. Again their parent group met to hear and be excited about the Adventure Challenges ahead but more importantly to offer their full support to this new and exciting venture. Again fundraising, transport and accommodation were taken on by the parents but so too was their expertise. "The support and the input from our parents is an integral part of the recipe for success," says senior teacher Lynley Russek. In another project, parents assisted the students to make their trolley designs a reality. A proto-type was worked on and within weeks they had built, painted up and trialled their trolleys that would take out medals at this year's Thames Heritage Trolley Derby as well as being used at a Gala the same week to help cover material costs. Look out for next year as they are already working on how to make these stream-lined creations heavier and faster. The class prides itself in finding out: What works? What can we do better for next time? How can we work together to achieve this and the 'together' includes their parents?

So successful has this venture been that they are setting up another 'Learning Through Adventure Class' as a feeder into this senior room. "With the expectation of meaningful parent participation in and outside the classrooms, our students, like Lucy in this photo, really do get a great push start in their learning."



Lucy Kini-Conner gets a push start from Dad, Lance

100% TOTAL IMMERSION IN TE REO MĀORI

Thames South also has a Total Immersion class where they have been practicing all the above as a small unit for close to twenty years and it has only been recently that the time

has been right to build on this further with other classes and indeed sharing their successes with other schools.

Whakawhanaungatanga Days



These five classrooms are showing the way at what can be achieved when parents are valued, involved, empowered and excited about their children's achievements. Other classes are using this simple formula to bring about similar enthusiasm and commitment. "We have these school-wide Whakawhanaungatanga days each term," says DP Jeannie Apthorp, "Where parents spend

part of a day over a number of weeks sharing their talents, interests and passions with the children and these have been happening for years thus providing the foundation but being able to take this further requires careful planning and a drive by some very talented teachers to create these 'special character' classrooms that tap the full potential of our most potent educational force, our Parent/Teacher partnership". This combined and very unifying energy means zero behaviour problems and higher achievement all round because everyone is talking the same language, everyone is informed and everyone is working together - the teachers are doing what they are trained to do and the parents are feeling valued and having the freedom and confidence of the teachers to do what they can to help. It's a very simple but effective formula and currently Thames South has it in spades.

