Spotswood College

An interview with principal, Nicola Ngarewa

Why did you decide to end streaming at your school?

It went against our strengths-based approach to teaching and learning, reinforcing a system of haves and have nots, ultimately perpetuating systemic racism.

How did you manage the shift from streaming?

The Board appointed me with the full knowledge that this process would be put in place. In the first month we drafted the strategic plan and strategic direction that would lead on to all of this. A significant portion of our school, particularly senior school, was streamed. What sat around that streaming was prerequisites. We view prerequisites as being another mechanism that allows streaming to happen. We have undergone a significant transformation of how we do everything. We are now student–centric. That's the centre of everything we do and with the community at the heart. Everything is agile and responsive because it's got students at the centre. The first thing we did was establish 'the why'. That's easy to do but it's confronting, so if everyone is on board with the why that makes it so much easier. Then we did some parallel shifts. We made systemic and structural shifts. This had to happen in parallel with the philosophical shift- philosophical referring to the change in mindset from how we had always done things, and then we had to radically transform the system. We went from being a 100% traditional school, then with six months of planning and prepping with the team, to being absolutely agile and responsive at the other end. In doing that- the systemic and structural shifts in the things that we've done- got rid of streaming.

We developed four particular pou within a strategic direction: Student success – or I'd rather call it equity and excellence for students because that changes the narrative from being a credit driven education system. Leaders of learning – every staff member as a leader of learning in their context or space. They need to be champions of learning. Community connectedness – partnerships and co-constructing the curriculum. Future focus – everything we do is continually revised.

What challenges did you face?

Getting the staff to move toward the new model was a challenge in itself. Those who adopted it early were acknowledged and supported. Those who weren't on board were supported but continued to be challenged to change. The curriculum overhaul was hard for our Year 13s because the system changed completely for their last year at College.

We were very aware of the response by our community and their expectations. We regularly survey our community to gather their feedback. We make a conscious effort to take our community on the journey with us. There are parts of our curriculum that are best run by our community. The standard of our school property doesn't support our innovation programs. This and financial barriers have caused some constraints. Student voice sits in the centre of everything. This influences everything we do.

What significant actions helped manage the shift away from streaming?

We put Te Tiriti o Waitangi front and centre of everything we did so that every decision made, every structure developed had that layer on it. We got our pou right and focused on deep visible and inclusive culturally responsive learning. If you're a teacher in our school, you can't escape it. We landed 'the why' quickly with our staff. We then came up with different models and courses we would run and parameters or measures around co-construction. We kept finding things we couldn't plan for until we were in action.

What outcomes have you seen from de-streaming?

We've seen a culture shift in the students. I think there is a really strong relational focus. There's been some good shifts in our NCEA data – some really good individual and cohort outcomes. We've seen some incremental shifts in attendance, which I would rate as engagement. Stand-down and suspension data is much improved. There's lots of student driven projects happening around school and within the community. We have a much more whanau-friendly environment. All these things make us more human and less institutionalised.

What advice would you give a principal who is considering or planning to end streaming at their school?

Just do it – be courageous!

"The measure of success is around social transformation.
We play a key part in that, but as an education system we need to
make provision...we haven't made any provision for that to be such
a key part in our education system."