The Challenges in Moving From One School Structure to Another: Leading a School on Two Sites. A Case Study.

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Abstract

Recently New Zealand schools have faced an ongoing climate of Education Reviews with many schools being restructured or closed as a result. For schools faced with the reality of possible closure, it is imperative that they explore other alternatives to maintain choice for the local community which they serve. One such alternative has been to develop a merger between two or more schools where the schools involved merge onto one central site, often establishing a new school identity at the same time.

This research project explores a case study of a merger between a large urban primary school and a small two teacher rural primary school in New Zealand, who took the concept of a merger between two schools, but instead adapted the process where they operated under one name and one shared Board of Trustees, but continued to operate from the two original school sites with classes coming together for specific school wide events.

This study explores the leadership and management challenges that the school leaders faced as they established their merger, and addresses four key areas as a result – how to create a model and develop a vision for the merger, staffing considerations, issues surrounding communication systems, and the lack of support structures which is a dominant factor and one that is also explored in relation to the other key challenges. The findings are also related to current educational issues in regard to the
leadership of small schools in New Zealand and the education review process.

The issues and challenges raised in this research paper are intended to provide information which address how such a merger impacts on school management and leadership. As it appears that no similar studies have been undertaken in New Zealand in this particular setting, it will be of particular relevance for schools facing education reviews or for schools seeking an alternative option to the traditional merger process or intended closure of their school.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

New Zealand schools have in recent years been facing an ongoing climate of Ministry of Education led reviews (Kenny, 2004; Tarr, 2005) with many schools being restructured or closed as a result (Ministry of Education, 2005b). For schools faced with the reality of possible closure, it is imperative that they explore other alternatives to maintain choice for the local community which they serve. One such alternative has been to develop a merger between two or more schools where the schools involved merge onto one central site, often establishing a new school identity at the same time.

School Merger Initiative

This research project explores a case study of a merger between a large urban primary school (School A) and a small two teacher rural primary school (School B) in New Zealand, who amidst a district-wide review of education sought an innovative response to the prospect of school closures (Messervy, 1998; Scanlon, 2001). These schools took the initial concept of a merger, but instead adapted the process where they opted to continue operating on the two original school sites rather than close one site and establish themselves at one main school. As part of this merger process, the schools involved operated under one name and one shared Board of Trustees (Gerritsen, 2001), and the students continued to be taught at their original school sites but had opportunity to come together as a whole school for specific school wide events. After the merger occurred, members of the senior management team experienced a change of status as
a result, with the Principal from School B becoming the Assistant Principal and a new site manager later being appointed for the rural school site.

This idea is a new concept within New Zealand education (Scanlon, 2001) which up until this merger had not been implemented in New Zealand before, although the concept had been successfully established in Australia prior to this merger (Gerritsen, 2001) which adopted a model based on a particular school in Victoria, Australia.

**Application of Research**

The issues and challenges raised in this research paper are intended to provide information which address how such a merger impacts on school management and leadership. As it appears that no similar studies have been undertaken in New Zealand in this particular setting, it will be of particular relevance for schools facing education reviews or for schools seeking an alternative option to the traditional merger process or intended closure of their school.

This case study will focus on the challenges involved in moving from one school structure to another and what impact this has had for those leading and managing the school as the merger evolved over time, as well as addressing literature relating to contextual learning, small school management, school leadership, and managing the change process. Before exploring these areas in more detail, it is important to provide some
background information relating to the education reviews in New Zealand and the rationale underpinning them.

**Education Reviews in New Zealand**

The New Zealand government (Mallard, 2003) have predicted that primary school rolls will drop by approximately 70 000 children over the next fifteen years, and that many areas in New Zealand are already affected by declining school rolls. This has led to the Ministry of Education announcing a series of education reviews over the past decade that have been established to assess whether the present school structure provides the best education opportunities for students (Education Review Office, 1999) and what re-organisation may be needed to ensure that quality education can be provided in the future (Ministry of Education, 2005b).

Schools in particular areas have had education reviews imposed on them for a number of reasons which have included falling rolls, a suggestion for change from one or more schools in the area, a significant number of schools located in close proximity, under-utilised resources, or concerns over the quality of education being provided (“Many Factors Considered”, 2003). The Ministry of Education believe that education reviews have a number of benefits and these include ensuring students have access to quality education in the future, planning which addresses perceived demographic changes, full utilisation of school resources, consideration of new models for the delivery of education, and increased community involvement in educational debate and decision making (ibid).
Once a need has been identified for a school review, the Ministry of Education contact the schools involved and organise a community reference group to be set up, which must include representation from every school involved in the review process, along with school trustees and principals, education union members, government representatives, and members of the local community. This reference group is led by a facilitator who presents data and information, suggests future potential schooling models for discussion, consults with individual schools and communities, and sets out possible options, which are summarised in a report for the reference group. The Ministry of Education takes this report into consideration when making the proposal for school reorganisation in the district, and this is announced publicly to allow for further consultation with school communities and for any further recommendations to be made. Once the Minister of Education has considered the feedback, a final decision on restructuring is made and communicated to schools. During the review process a significant amount of community consultation is involved, and legal requirements ensure that at least two periods of consultation with the community is allowed for. This is particularly important as an education review will lead to change for the schools involved, and this may result in the closure or merger of schools, or even new schools being established.

A merger which arises as a result of an education review raises a number of issues for schools, and in attempting to make sense of the merger process it is useful to focus on aspects of leadership which impact on
school leaders, particularly in the initial stages of establishing a merger. The following section will explore how the unique nature and context of specific school organisations affect leadership within a school based setting.

**Leadership in Context**

One of the most robust findings from leadership research is that context matters and indeed leadership is contingent upon environmental and contextual factors.

(Southworth, 2004, p.1)

Southworth (2004) recognises the diverse character of primary schools which are closely integrated into their local communities, with rural schools in particular being markedly different to those sited within urban areas. As merging schools may often represent two completely different communities, the merger process is likely to raise specific issues and challenges during a period of enormous change for school communities and their management teams.

With schools responding to the Ministry of Education driven reviews in a variety of ways, school leadership has been impacted by the changes brought about by the education review process (Davis, 2005). School mergers present a range of challenges for the schools involved as they work through the process of addressing the management and leadership issues necessary for adapting to a new school structure and context. Davies, Ellison and Bowring-Carr (2005) maintain it is vital that school leaders have the ability to consider both the long term future of the school
as well as developing a sound understanding of the current contextual setting of their educational organisations, and this is certainly a necessity for Principals, senior management and Boards of Trustees as they seek to establish school mergers which accommodate their own unique settings.

Southworth (2004) refers to the contextual factors of environment, school culture and local community as being important influences in the development of school organisations, and it is vital these elements are taken into consideration during a restructuring process. When considering educational change, Fullan, Bertani and Quinn (2004) believe that leaders also need to take responsibility for changing the larger educational context for the better, therefore any restructuring of schools also needs to add benefit to the wider community which is inherent in the merger developed in this case study, as it offers other school communities an alternative option not just to closing, but to the traditional merger process as well. Fullan (2003) also makes reference to the importance of context in his eight lessons for change and in his third change lesson ‘Changing Context is the Focus’ he states “Don’t treat the context as a given. Change it, even in small ways, to get new results” (p.28). For a successful merger to develop, it is crucial that schools address the issues directly relating to their specific context and use this as the basis for future change and development.

Other contextual factors such as current educational policy can also be seen as shaping education, particularly with the Government led reviews
impacting on such a large number of educational districts within New Zealand in recent years (Ministry of Education, 2005b). Because of this, the review process is a dominating contextual factor which is seen as an impetus for planning and creating change within the school system, however other contextual considerations also need to be taken into account.

Seal and Harmon (1995) and Dunn (2001) share the view that rural school education is important in reflecting and shaping their communities, as rural schools are often the cultural and social centres of small towns. With many education reviews targeting the closure of small schools within New Zealand (Scanlon, 2001), a merger model as in this case study, is a viable alternative which enables the unique nature of rural school sites to be maintained. Gerritsen (2001) recognises that rural schools are valuable to their local communities and that being a small school has no relation to the excellence of education that it offers, even though the government appear to be striving for a ‘bigger is better’ model (Dunn, 2001; Tarr, 2005) where smaller schools are being closed in favour of developing larger schools within the district.

Dunn also acknowledges the dichotomy between maintaining the many effective practices of rural education, such as the sense of community and personalisation of learning, within a system-wide focus on consolidation, or in this case, the education review process. A merger where the schools continue to operate from two sites is one way of addressing such a
dilemma, as the expansion of a main school can also be enhanced by retaining the unique aspects of rural education and hence the rural context is a crucial component in determining how the two schools operate as one. Rural schools account for nearly a third of all schools in New Zealand, and as over ninety percent of these are also small schools (Education Review Office, 2001), the following section will explore the particular challenges that leaders of small schools face within New Zealand.

**Leading Small Schools in New Zealand**

According to Southworth (2004), “leadership does differ in the way it is enacted and transacted in schools of different sizes” (p.5) and this means that leaders of small New Zealand schools face a range of leadership challenges specific to their setting, which is usually of a rural nature (Franks, 2004). In a study undertaken by the Education Review Office in 1999, it was noted that effective small schools resulted from strong professional leadership and governance, particularly when school principals showed highly developed leadership ability, were able to successfully manage the demands on their time in relation to classroom teaching and school management requirements, and were skilled change managers. However, it was also acknowledged that leaders of small schools faced a number of challenges associated with their size.

The first of these challenges relate to the multiple roles that small school principals have – the responsibility for managing a school as well as a classroom teaching role with its associated workload (Education Review
Office, 2001). The demands on teaching principals is considerable and is made more challenging by the fact that small schools have a tendency to attract less-experienced principals, which may impact on the quality of educational leadership provided (Education Review Office, 1999). This is often due to the lack of financial incentive for small school principals (Franks, 2004), particularly for those in rural areas who often face additional costs due to their isolation which can affect their access to professional development and training programmes (Education Review Office, 1999).

The second challenge for small school principals is that due to the smaller parent community, there is a limited pool of parents from which to attract school trustees and as a result the skills and expertise of Board members may be limited, placing a greater burden on principals to carry out governance responsibilities (Education Review Office, 2001). This can often lead to principals feeling overloaded especially for schools that have very few senior staff members to rely on.

A further challenge for small school principals is the difficulty many face in recruiting experienced staff, which can impact on the ability of schools to provide a quality curriculum delivery (ibid). This is often more noticeable in rural areas because of their isolated location. This means school leaders often have to lend considerable support to less-experienced staff since they are less likely to have other experienced colleagues to take this role on. These issues are specific to leaders in a small school setting.
and are challenges that require strong leadership in order to address them and provide a quality education for the students who attend these schools. For some organisations, the education review process is an opportunity to explore other alternative solutions such as the merging of small primary schools. The study undertaken by the Education Review Office (1999) showed that in 1997 most of the completed school reviews were in rural communities which involved amalgamating the resources of schools, and were aimed at enhancing the education available to students while ensuring the continuation of viable rural schools.

A further area of interest is how leaders manage the change process, which includes their knowledge of change management theories and how these can be applied in a merger situation. The following section examines current research on managing change and explores strategies that leaders can use to ensure a smooth transition during periods of organisational change.

**Leadership and the Change Process**

To cope with a changing world, any entity must develop the capability of shifting and changing – of developing new skills and attitudes: in short, the capability of learning.

(De Gues, 1997, as cited in Fullan, 1999, p.43)

The Government led education reviews of recent years have affected a large number of educational districts throughout New Zealand, and Tarr (2005) states that the closure or merger of schools is the biggest change that teaching and learning communities can face. He also argues that
whilst school restructuring and rationalisation is being promoted by the Ministry of Education, it is left up to practitioners to cope with, and implement the changes brought about by such reviews. According to Fullan (1991) “there is no point in lamenting the fact that the system is unreasonable, and no percentage in waiting around for it to become more reasonable. It won’t” (p.10). Davis (2005) suggests that change is inevitable and that if communities adopt a proactive approach in dealing with change, they will maintain more power and control over the change process. Block summarises this viewpoint also:  

The key to positive politics, then, is to look at each encounter as an opportunity to support autonomy and to create an organisation of our own choosing. It requires viewing ourselves as the primary instrument for changing the culture. For us to have any hope that our own preferred future will come to pass, we provide the leadership. We hope that the world around us supports our vision, but even if it doesn’t, we will act on that vision. Leadership is the process of translating intentions into reality.  

(Block, as cited in Fullan, 1991, p.17)

As a result of the education reviews in New Zealand, many schools that have developed a merger, have taken on the challenge of being instrumental in creating change, in order to gain control of the review process and shape the future of their schools and communities. Ainley (1993, as cited in Hargreaves, 1997) states that “when schools involve communities with them in the uncertainties of change before the internal professional response has been decided, assistance, support and understanding are much more likely to be forthcoming” (p.25) and the partnership between schools and their communities is certainly a key feature throughout the development of school mergers.
As the change process is not always straightforward, Fullan (2001) suggests that school leaders must be able to operate under complex and uncertain circumstances. He also draws attention (2003) to the concepts of ‘non-linearity’ where reforms may not always go ahead as intended, and to the ‘unpredictability’ of the change process as a result of dynamically complex interactive forces. However, Fullan (1993) in his Change Forces series, labels this as a change lesson – “problems are our friends” (p.21) and acknowledges that problems are inevitable but that one cannot learn without them, and this is extended to “conflict and diversity are our friends” in his later work (1999, p.22). As schools work through a merger process, school leaders are likely to encounter a range of challenges but leaders should embrace these as an opportunity for learning new skills within a relevant context.

Fullan (2001) also states that understanding the change process is one of the main components of leadership and that in order to ensure the long term success of an organisation, leaders must act with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, children and parents, and society as a whole. Furthermore, he adds “effective leaders see the bigger picture; they don’t panic when things go wrong in the early stages of a major change initiative. They know it takes time for things to gel” (p.124). This is particularly important in a school merger process as this brings with it major organisational change as schools learn to come to terms with a new organisation culture and general upheaval of existing school structures (Kyriacou & Harriman, 1993).
Fullan (1993) believes that school leaders undergoing change in a merger process must recognise that “every person is a change agent” (p.22) and Bennis and Nanus in their work on leadership (1985, as cited in Fullan, 1991) also make reference to this, stating “the new leader is one who commits people to action, who converts followers into leaders, and who may convert leaders into agents of change” (p.19). For the Principals of schools looking to form a merger, it is vital that they involve others in this process and this includes the Board of Trustees, school staff and the wider parent community of all schools involved.

In order to implement school reform, it is necessary to build teams of leaders within the organisation who can create and drive the vision behind the merger, and this needs to be done through high level engagement and communication with others in the district (Fullan et al. 2004) so that a shared ownership and commitment to the merger is strengthened. According to Fullan et al. leaders also need to understand that the vision will continue to evolve as a merger is implemented, in response to a range of conditions that will invariably arise throughout the process - such as political pressures, policy changes, financial circumstances and school conditions. These changes bring with them huge potential for leaders to learn in a relevant context as the everyday conditions associated with the change process mean that leaders will need to develop leadership skills and improve the school organisation as they work through these issues (Fullan, 2001). Ellinger (2004) also makes reference to this informal learning and suggests that this comprises the majority of learning that
occurs in the workplace which can often be dictated by the needs of the
organisation and its members, or influenced by specific events and
encounters with others.

Heifetz comments that often when challenges arise, people look for the
wrong kind of leadership:

In a crisis... we call for someone with answers, decisions, strength
and a map of the future, someone who knows where we ought to be
going – in short someone who can make hard problems simple.
Instead of looking for saviours, we should be calling for leadership
that will challenge us to face problems for which there are no
simple, painless solutions – problems that require us to learn new
ways.

(Heifetz, as cited in Fullan, 2001, p.3)

Therefore it is important that leaders are flexible, adaptable and open
minded in considering alternatives, in order to work through issues whilst
striving to meet the needs of their schools and communities.

The following chapter will outline the research question underlying the
case study in this report and provide an overview of associated terms that
are referred to throughout the study.
Chapter 2: Research Questions

Research Question

This research paper aims to explore the following research question:

What are the main management or leadership challenges faced by school leaders as they move from one school structure to another during a merger process?

As part of this research question, the following sub-questions are also of interest:

- How does current literature describe strategies for managing change and how does this apply to a merger process?
- Does school size impact on the management and leadership of schools and does this have an effect on a merger situation?
- What support structures are available to support leaders as they move from one school setting to another?
- How do contextual factors impact on management and leadership decisions?

Definition of Terms

Within these questions are a number of key concepts and terminology which need to be clarified in the context of this case study.
Merger

The most pertinent concept is that of a school merger which is the process by which two or more schools join together to form one new school, which traditionally operates from one main school site. In this case study however, the term merger is used to represent the joining together of two schools which operate as one organisation and share the same name, but are physically based on two separate school sites.

Education Reviews

Education reviews (also known as network reviews or school reviews) are a process that the Ministry of Education define in ‘Network Reviews’ (2005b), as being undertaken by the Ministry of Education and directed by the Education Minister, which assess the way education is currently being provided in a particular area and what re-organisation is needed to ensure all students receive a quality education in the future. The merger in this case study was established in direct response to an education review of schooling in the local district and was viewed as a viable alternative to possible school closure.

Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education in New Zealand is a government agency responsible for developing educational policies which enable educators to operate effectively, within a system which is responsive to wider social and economic impacts as well as the needs of different communities (Ministry of Education, 2005a).
Leadership

Leadership is another key term and in this particular study the concept of leadership implies the responsibility of developing a school vision (Neuman, 2000) and establishing an environment of shared culture within the school community, where learning and growth is actively supported (Stewart & Prebble, 1993).

School Leaders

School leaders are the staff within a school, who are responsible for making decisions on behalf of the school and its community, which in this case study include the school Principal, and staff within the senior management team who are appointed by the Principal to help manage staff and deal with organisational aspects of the school. This case study does not focus on the Board of Trustees and their role as part of the leadership and management team, although two of the participants are members of the current and previous school Boards.

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is the governing school body (Ministry of Education, 2006) who have overall responsibility for the school. The Board of Trustees consists of the school Principal, staff representative and parent representatives who are elected on to the Board to represent the wider school community.
Management

The research question also makes the distinction between leadership and management and in this research project the term management is defined as the day to day responsibility for creating and maintaining the conditions and climate in which people are motivated and work with a sense of purpose (Finger, 1996). Hence, leadership sets the vision for what the school will look and feel like, and management aims at making that vision happen.

Contextual Setting

The contextual setting is another term often referred to and this is described by Southworth (2004) as the set of factors which influence the school as an organisation and which may include the environment, staffing, school culture, local community, current educational policy, and social and economic factors. These factors are important for determining the context in which this merger process occurred and in understanding how the merger process came about and what factors shaped its creation and ongoing development.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This case study is aimed at providing information about the challenges inherent in a particular type of merger, and as it seeks to understand the ways in which individuals create, modify and interpret the world in which they find themselves (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000) the research takes a qualitative approach through the use of discourse analysis. This chapter will outline the nature of qualitative research with reference to discourse analysis before outlining the research project and specific procedures in more detail.

A Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative researchers follow an interpretivist approach which Neuman (1997) summarises as “the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds” (p.68). By adopting such an approach, Neuman believes researchers can discover how people construct meaning through everyday experiences, allowing others to understand or enter the reality of those being studied.

The issue of ‘authenticity’ (Silverman, 2001) is seen as an integral part of qualitative research as the researcher must strive to produce an authentic description and understanding of others’ experiences, which can be difficult to do without first eliminating any researcher bias which could
impact on the way in which findings are portrayed. This is reinforced by Weber (as cited in Silverman, 2001) who states that “all research is contaminated to some extent by the values of the researcher” (p.270) and it is therefore necessary for qualitative researchers to acknowledge any prior assumptions or possible bias towards the research, especially since qualitative research approaches mean the researcher may be involved on a personal level with the research participants. In this case it must be acknowledged that the researcher works within the merged school and was involved with the merger process as a staff member at the town school from its initial stages, however the researcher has strived to remain as neutral as possible in not allowing her experiences or personal relationships with the participants to shape the outcome of the research.

Another way of ensuring that research data is valid is through a process of triangulation (Anderson, Herr & Nihlen, 1994; McKernan, 1996) where the researcher uses a combination of qualitative methods to provide different perspectives and corroborate findings. In this study, the completed interview transcripts were given to the participants following their individual interviews to ensure that they reflected their views accurately and so any amendments could be made if needed. This assists in ensuring that the research data holds greater validity by providing an accurate portrayal of events.

As qualitative research is by nature context bound and focuses on how individuals construct meaning within specific settings, data gathering
methods traditionally limit the number of research participants in order to allow the researcher to gather a greater amount of information and detail. Limited sample sizes however, lead to issues of external validity, which is seen as a criticism of qualitative research since findings cannot necessarily be generalised to other situations. However, as Anderson et al. (1994) state, “qualitative research does not seek to generalise one study to all other similar studies; instead it seeks to explain behaviour in one setting” (p.110). In this case study, this has the added benefit of allowing readers a more in-depth and personal insight into the specific challenges involved in this particular type of school merger.

Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Anderson et al. 1994) raise an alternative notion of ‘transferability’ in which others who seek to make an application to a different setting may do so, however it becomes their responsibility to ensure there is enough evidence and contextual similarity between the original research findings and their own investigations. Fullan (1999) also addresses issues of transferability and states that “the deeper reason that transferability is complex is that successful reforms in one place are partly a function of good ideas, and largely a function of the conditions under which the ideas flourished” (p.64). Healey and De Stefano (1997, as cited in Fullan, 1999) also acknowledge this commenting that “accordingly, what works in one location won’t necessarily work in another. Instead of replication of the reform itself, we contend that it is the conditions which give rise to the reform in the first place that should be replicated” (p.64).
In this study, those wishing to make an application of the research to their own educational context should be aware of the implications in doing so.

**Discourse Analysis**

Within the framework of qualitative research, this investigation explores the effects on leadership and management during a change in school structure through discourse analysis, based on the analysis of transcribed interviews where the focus is on language as the medium for interaction (Silverman, 2001). This approach enables the researcher to identify patterns and themes which arise within the discourse (Cohen et al. 2000).

Burr (1995) states that “discourses, through what is said, written or otherwise represented, serve to construct the phenomena of our world” (p.49) with each discourse claiming to be the truth. However, as Burr points out, “there is a two way relationship between discourses and the actual things that people say or write: discourses ‘show up’ in the things that people say and write, and the things we say and write, in their turn, are dependent for their meaning upon the discursive context in which they appear” (p.50). Researchers therefore need to acknowledge the effect their own assumptions have within the research process as this can affect the objectivity of the data gathered. Measor and Sikes (1992) also make reference to the dual role of the researcher, since qualitative research is contextual, the researcher is part of the action and therefore influences the context under analysis.
The aim of using a discourse analysis methodology within this research project is to generate key themes which relate to the impact that a change in school structure has on the leadership and management responsibilities of educational leaders within the contextual settings surrounding the merger between School A and B.

**Case Study**

This research project takes the form of a case study approach, focusing on the specific contexts of School A and B leading up to, and following their merger process. The case study method allows for an in-depth investigation based on the perspectives of selected participants, where we are able to understand the feelings and values of the subjects in their particular settings (McKernan, 1996).

**School Characteristics**

In understanding the leadership roles and responsibilities of the participants in this case study, it is also pertinent to explore the characteristics of the two schools involved, in order to understand their background nature prior to the merger.

School A is a full primary school, located on the edge of an industrial area within the town, with a school roll of over 350 students. The staff are of varying ages and experience, and a large number have been employed at the school for less than five years. The last ten years have seen a complete change in the management team and also to management roles which have
undergone several structural changes. The school in general is well supported by parents and takes pride in the extra learning opportunities it provides to students which include academic, sporting and cultural experiences. The school has also initiated several innovations over the last few years which have been well supported by staff and the local community.

School B is a two teacher school located ten minutes drive from the outskirts of town. The Assistant Principal (under the new structure) was employed there as the Principal in 1998 and the other teacher has been employed there for over ten years. The school and its staff are a central part of the school community and it enjoys a strong level of support from the parents. The school has a number of traditions which are characteristic of its rural nature and long standing partnership with the local community and these include family camps and specific fundraising schemes which reflect the integral role that parents play within the school.

Figure 1 provides an overview of how the merged school operates on two sites, with regards to management and staff roles and responsibilities, as well as learning opportunities for students following the merger.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board of Trustees</td>
<td>One shared school Board of Trustees which governs both sites. Includes the Principal who is based at School A and one elected staff representative who may come from either school site.</td>
<td>One shared school Board of Trustees which governs both sites. The Board must include at least one representative from School B either elected by the community or co-opted by the Board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>The Principal is based at the town site and has overall responsibility for school management and leadership at both sites which includes responsibility for finance and property.</td>
<td>No on-site Principal. The Principal liaises with the Area Leader of the rural site and visits on a regular basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant &amp; Deputy Principals</td>
<td>Both roles based at the town site. Both provide support for the Principal in managing the school, which includes staff appraisal, and whole school behaviour management.</td>
<td>Roles currently based at town site. Behaviour management issues dealt with by Area Leader of the rural site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area Leaders</td>
<td>Area Leaders are responsible for specific school syndicates (staff and children) and administration tasks associated with this. They attend regular senior management meetings in town. Report to the Board once a year and provide a monthly report for the school newsletter.</td>
<td>Area Leader is responsible for staff and students at the rural site as well as administration, parent and community issues, and behaviour management at School B. Also liaises with the Board representative from the School B community and prepares monthly Board reports raising any relevant issues. Deals with property and maintenance issues as they arise. Attends regular senior management meetings in town and provides a monthly report for the school newsletter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Staff</td>
<td>Staff members are responsible for own class planning and contribute to syndicate, curriculum and staff meetings as required.</td>
<td>Staff members responsible for own class planning and contribute to staff and curriculum meetings as required. Provides support for the Area Leader and assist in the day to day management of the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration Staff</td>
<td>All administration staff are based in town. They deal with all school mail and phone enquiries from parents of both sites. Information for the rural site is either faxed or sent out via parents or staff members.</td>
<td>No administration staff based on site. The Area Leader has responsibility for dealing with some administration matters relating to the rural site and communicating these to the other staff on site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Usually participate in school activities at the town site only. Extension programmes and special learning needs support available in town. Teacher aides based on site and available for students as needed.</td>
<td>Students come in to town for school assemblies, prizetvings, sports events, school performances and productions, and extra learning opportunities. Extension programme offered at the rural site. Teacher aide based on site and available for students as needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Roles and responsibilities in the merged school.
Participants

Three school leaders who were involved with the merger were approached to take part in this research project, through the use of individual interviews.

The first participant was the former Principal of School B who was employed as Principal of the two teacher rural school eight years ago during the beginning of the education review within the district. Following the merger, she remained at the rural site as the Area Leader (or site manager) for a year before moving into the town site to teach. She is currently the Assistant Principal of the merged school, with responsibilities for leading the middle and senior areas of the school, and is the staff representative on the Board of Trustees.

The second participant is the Principal of School A, who retained the Principal’s position following the merger. He has been employed as Principal of this school for over ten years and is based at the larger town site where he is currently responsible for 17 classes, two of which are based at the rural site 12 kilometres away, as well as a large number of teaching and support staff. He also represents the school as Principal on the Board of Trustees.

The third participant is the previous Area Leader of the small rural site, who became part of the senior management team when she moved from the town school to replace the former Principal of School B as site
manager, a year after the merger occurred. This was her first management position and after four years in that role, she has now returned to the town site as an Area Leader with responsibility for the senior classes.

It is important to note that in this particular study, the Board of Trustees are not included as participants due to the size and time constraints associated with this research project. However, as the Principal and Assistant Principal are both school representatives on the current Board of Trustees and were also members of the two original Boards of Trustees prior to the merger, their perspectives are enhanced by their Board role and knowledge, as well as their school leadership and management roles.

Consent Process
Initially, participants were approached to see if they agreed to be part of the study and were given an information sheet (refer Appendices 1 & 3) outlining the intended research project. Following this participants were asked to complete a consent form (refer Appendices 2 & 4) and a copy of the proposed interview questions were provided to participants prior to their interviews (refer Appendix 7). As a courtesy, a letter of introduction and a consent form (refer Appendices 5 & 6) were also provided to the school’s Board of Trustees outlining the nature and purpose of the project and the involvement required from each participant.
Data Collection

Information was gathered from participants through the use of semi-structured, audio taped interviews which enable the researcher to gain a deeper perspective of how the participants perceive the challenges arising from the merger process (McKernan, 1996). All participants were asked a number of specific questions (refer Appendix 7) which focused on positions of responsibility, personal involvement with the merger, the effects of working at a school based on two sites, the management and leadership challenges that arose, and the support that was available to assist in adjusting to changes in the school structure. By using a semi-structured interview approach, other questions and issues were also able to be explored as they arose in the course of the interviewing process.

Kvale (as cited in Cohen et al. 2000) identified a range of key characteristics relevant to qualitative research interviews. These included exploring the life world of the participants, where in this case the school merger is the lived world of the subjects and their relation to it. This allows the researcher to interpret the meaning of central themes within a specific context. Kvale also acknowledged the importance of change, since the research data may produce new insights and awareness of the topic, which has the advantage of allowing the interviewer to delve into areas of interest as they arise (McKernan, 1996).
Data Analysis

Following the interviews with the participants, the interviews were fully transcribed to provide an accurate account, as transcripts are ideal for exploring the narrative aspects of the topic being investigated (McKernan, 1996) although the disadvantage is that transcripts do not make reference to any visual factors or non-verbal behaviour exhibited during the interview process. However, McKernan states that the discourse analysis approach argues that the main sources for evaluation are the participants and their utterances in human discourse, and not aspects of their surroundings which are seen as external to the participants.

The data analysis stage aimed to identify emerging themes and patterns to allow for key areas to be identified as the main challenges in moving from one school structure to another during the merger process. This included coding the transcribed interviews using key words to locate specific themes, and then using the generated themes to highlight sections of the transcripts that related to each theme and to locate excerpts useful for illustrating relevant issues.

Ethical Considerations

In order to preserve the confidentiality of the three participants, their names and that of the schools are not to be identified, and any specific details which may lead to identification have been removed. Individual interview transcripts were coded according to management roles and permission was given by the participants for excerpts from their transcripts.
to be published. Participants were also given the right of withdrawal from
the study at any stage without penalty or explanation. All information
relating to the project has been stored at a private residence and is to be
destroyed twelve months following the completion of this paper, with the
exception of the final research report which will be made available to the
participants and to the University of Canterbury College of Education
library.

The following chapter identifies the main themes that arose out of the data
analysis stage and seeks to explore these in relation to current literature
and the participants’ perspectives.
Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

Emerging Themes

Having conducted interviews with each of the three participants (Principal, Assistant Principal & Area Leader), their interviews were transcribed, coded, and analysed in terms of emerging themes and patterns relating to the leadership and management challenges involved in moving from one school structure to another (refer Appendix 8). This analysis included identifying key words throughout the transcribed interviews and then categorising the key words into central themes.

Four main themes (or challenges) arose during this analysis:

- Creating the Model / Developing a Vision
- Staffing Roles and Opportunities
- Communication Systems
- Support Structures

The fourth challenge of ‘Support Structures’ also emerged as an underlying component of the first three themes, and this connection is illustrated in Figure 2 below.
The following sections in this chapter focus on these four themes and aim to explore the key elements of each in relation to current literature and points of interest arising from the participants’ interviews.

Creating the Model / Developing a Vision

In order to understand how this merger initiative came about, it is important to understand the context within the district at the time leading up to the initial proposal put to the Ministry of Education. The local district was subject to a review of education which had arisen out of School A’s desire to recapitulate to full primary school status.

Principal: …the region was subject to a review of education that came about as a consequence of – well it came from the fact that this school, had recapitated. In a meeting… the Minister of Education … intimated that recapitation was very clearly an option for School A and for our town but alluded to the fact that if that
was going to go ahead then ... the Ministry would impose a review on the district.

At the time of the review, the Assistant Principal had just been appointed Principal of School B. Small rural schools had been told by the Ministry that they needed to have a plan, and the Board of Trustees at School B decided to investigate a merger which School A had initiated with them (Transcript 1, Lines 20-27).

The Principal of School A saw the Ministry led review as a chance for the district to "look at what the future may hold" and "challenged the school teaching fraternity... to be professional about what the potential of education could be in this district" (Transcript 2, Lines 33-36). However, he was disappointed with what he saw as the lack of initiative shown by his fellow colleagues stating "I think personally we still lost an enormous opportunity to do something big and creative in education... there was no leadership at all and there was not a bright idea anywhere which frustrated me hugely" (Lines 36-45). So the merger concept came out of an idea forced by his disappointment with what was happening and with the lack of creativity from the teaching community (Lines 118-120) and this was coupled with his desire to show some leadership within the local district, and his passion for rural education (Lines 55-77). The idea to merge as one school but to continue operating from two school sites came out of the Principal’s background in educational history where the concept of side schools had been part of the history of local schools in the past (Gerritsen,
2001). The Assistant Principal explains the development of the merger process following the initial proposal put to School B.

Assistant Principal: So School B decided that the School A option was the best, and there were several community meetings – it was a community decision to explore that. Then we went through several, I’d like to say years, and it probably was years, of too-ing and fro-ing with the Ministry, meeting about terms of agreement and how much money we might get if we merged, and how the whole operation might happen and what it would look like because there was no model in New Zealand.

Transcript 1, Lines 43-51

This became the first challenge that the school leaders faced as they had no example in a New Zealand school based setting to follow, and a lack of available research meant the specific details of how it would work had to develop as the merger evolved. Fullan et al. (2004) acknowledge this evolving nature of school reform stating “effective districts do not just get the strategy right to begin with; they continually refine it using systematically collected information” (p.3). Patterson, Purkey and Parker (1986, as cited in Fullan, 1991) state also that “vision is the product of exercising many skills in a holistic way to create a mental picture of what the future could and should look like” (p.33) and a vision of ‘one school on two sites’ soon began to develop regarding how the merger would proceed.

Principal: I started thinking of what we had – a franchise running which was School A on a different site – and we worked for a while in that vein and… you know the adage or the analogy that there are Farmers’ shops all over the country, although the places they serve aren’t the same, they give the same service and the same product.

Transcript 2, Lines 137-142
However, it soon became apparent that this vision needed adapting, as the schools faced the challenge of how to provide consistent education at both sites while maintaining the close-knit relationships between the rural site and its community, which Dunn (2001) states as needing careful consideration in a situation of this nature. During this planning stage, the Assistant Principal also visited the school in Australia that had used a similar merger model, to talk with their management team and gain any relevant information that would enable the school to clarify and develop their vision for the ‘one school on two sites’ and help with the implementation of this process.

Interviewer: Were they helpful in providing you with a working model that you could take aspects from to apply to your own context back in New Zealand?
Assistant Principal: Yeah, they certainly said what was important...and just lots of regular contact but retaining the individuality of each site...so it was the same but different which I also thought was quite good.

Transcript 1, Lines 439-456

Self (2001) also emphasises the importance of combining educational needs with the needs of the community and the Principal of School A also acknowledges this:

Principal: Well it came to pass I think and it took a wee while to get our heads around the idea that the very things that made little schools important are the very things you want to value and they’re the things you want to keep. There was no point in transplanting or overlaying the value systems that were inherent here, that were part of this place (School A), on that community in that school (School B) because it had its own particular needs and view on it.

Transcript 2, Lines 144-150

Fullan (1997) states that “vision emerges from, more than it precedes, action” (p.42) and this view is certainly reflected in this merger process as
the leaders worked to create an identity for the ‘one school on two sites’
while at the same time striving to retain the uniqueness of the rural site.
Beare, Caldwell and Millikan (1989, as cited in Tarr, 2005) also recognise
the importance of taking into account the particular culture associated with
individual schools as each entity is shaped by their own values and
experiences. Over time it became apparent that both sites had different
cultures which needed to be integrated into one cohesive system while still
maintaining some of the unique factors at each site, which meant as the
merger progressed this became reflected in a ‘same but different’ vision
for the school. The Area Leader who replaced the Principal at the School B
also acknowledges the importance of culture with particular reference to
the rural site:

Area Leader: I never thought School B should be a mini School A,
but that it needed to take the opportunities that School A offered…
It is a unique place so keeping it as a country school is the essence
of what it is about there and you wouldn’t want to lose that.
Transcript 3, Lines 82-80

Initially the two schools agreed to a trial period of three years which was
to be followed by a review by the Board of Trustees (Transcript 3, Lines
30-33) and this was a strategy which allowed time for the new vision to be
triailed and adapted as needed, depending on the needs of the school and
its community. The school also employed a number of other key strategies
to address the challenges of creating a ‘same but different’ vision and this
included retaining existing staff to maintain the particular culture at each
site, and also having one shared Board of Trustees which was gleaned
from the Assistant Principal’s visit to Australia.

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Assistant Principal: Having one Board was a really important thing. They had trialled two Boards initially with the merger and that just didn’t work, so that was useful information...One managing Board and just lots of regular contact.

Transcript 1, Lines 442-448

This information was taken into consideration by the school communities and is reflected in the commitment made to ensuring that each site is always represented at the Board level.

Principal: As part of establishing a memorandum of agreement between the two Boards, part of that was there was always going to be representation – initially two, and then it went simply to a vote as a regular member/candidate... If there was no School B representative we would co-opt somebody – always have a representative – that community needs a voice.

Transcript 2, Lines 201-210

The following section explores further challenges faced by the school leaders, in terms of the staffing roles and responsibilities within the new school structure, and also how the vision of the merger was established by using existing staff members in key roles.

**Staffing Roles and Opportunities**

As mentioned, the retention of existing staff members was given priority in order to help maintain the individual culture of each site, and this was particularly important at School B where the rural nature of the site was closely linked with the identity of the local school community. Tarr (2005) states that the importance of a rural school as a community focal point cannot be overstated, and therefore staff employed at the rural site have an additional role to fulfil as members of that community. This is particularly important since part of the vision for the school is to have a staff rotation
system which provides teachers with a promotion opportunity to manage the site and to experience teaching in a multi level class within a small school environment (Transcript 2, Lines 59-61; Transcript 1, Lines 313-319).

Fullan et al. (2004) state that “the main mark of successful leaders is not their impact on student learning at the end of their tenure, but rather the number of good leaders they leave behind who can go even further” (p.3) and this view is shared by the Principal.

Principal: Part of my responsibility in my job is to promote good people out of here, not to hang on to them forever and a day. But the point is I do see that as part of the job. And I see opportunities for that job, for that role at School B – to give people an unusual experience of which to create opportunity for themselves.

Transcript 2, Lines 306-311

Fullan (2001) believes that “good leaders foster good leadership at other levels which produce a steady stream of future leaders for the system” (p.10), however promoting staff to the role of Area Leader of the rural site brought with it some suspicion from the teachers targeted to benefit from the opportunity. While the Principal saw it as a chance for staff to develop management and leadership skills in a unique context which they could take with them when they move on to future job promotions, his staff didn’t necessarily share his view.

Principal: It rather amuses me – when the Area Leader first went out there and when the next teacher went out there, the suspicion that the going created in each teacher. You know there was the sense that he wants to get rid of us. I think to be fair the Area Leader went screaming out there and she came back kicking and screaming... but I think the next teacher... by personality she’s more inclined to embrace the challenge. So she wasn’t, I don’t
think, quite so suspicious but nevertheless there’s still suspicion. 
Transcript 2, Lines 325-332

Kyriacou and Harriman (1993) make the link between school mergers and teacher stress and argue that appointments within a new school structure can pose problems for staff as they adjust to new responsibilities, new colleagues and new expectations of them. These challenges are often seen as threatening, especially for staff members who had no intention of moving to a new school site but perhaps have this imposed on them with little choice.

In this merger, the Assistant Principal (formerly the Principal of School B) stayed on at School B for the first year following the merger before moving to the town site, but her official title changed to Area Leader (Transcript 1, Lines 108-109). In an agreement made with the Board of Trustees, the Assistant Principal was guaranteed a degree of status within the school and her existing salary for three years (Transcript 2, Lines 126-135). However, with the Assistant Principal remaining at the country site after the school merger, she acknowledges that not much changed “which wasn’t true to the merger as we were just two separate schools that had the same name” (Transcript 1, Lines 126-127).

Assistant Principal: We weren’t actually merging at all so I decided that for the merger to really progress I needed to leave. If I didn’t leave it was never going to change so I initiated a discussion about that and the Principal agreed that I would come into town and another teacher was approached to go out to School B. 
Transcript 1, Lines 129-133
This move created an opportunity for promotion for another staff member as Area Leader of the rural site, and this was viewed by the Assistant Principal as being important in implementing the vision of ‘one school on two sites’.

Assistant Principal: Certainly if I had stayed I would have just carried on as the Principal and they (the community) would have still treated me as the Principal. The Principal of School A would never have been recognised as the Principal.

Transcript 1, Lines 137-140

It should also be noted that although the Assistant Principal thought it was beneficial staying at the rural site initially to help with the transition process, she views it as important that the leader coming out of that position goes to the other site with a new focus or direction, and that one year was an reasonable amount of time for this transition stage to occur (Transcript 1, Lines 548-561).

The Principal, through specific targeting of staff, has chosen leaders for the rural site who have all been chosen to influence the direction of School B in different ways.

Principal: We’re now onto our third cycle of staff. Each has done a little more to influence the direction of School B. In the Assistant Principal you had the status quo, in the Area Leader you had somebody who began to challenge some of the isolationist kind of mentality… and in the next staff member I suspect we will have more of a merging of the two sites. Probably the Area Leader – her role was to advocate for School B, to say we are here. The next teacher’s role is to merge School B… into the School A mould I think.

Transcript 2, Lines 172-184

The other existing staff member at School B was purposely retained by the Principal to help students and families cope with the transition, and to
maintain continuity for the community through the ensuing changes in management that were to follow.

Principal: And that’s been done quite intentionally because in the other teacher out there, I quite intentionally left her there and I refer to her as the keel because part of the rationale of taking on School B was to offer staff a promotion opportunity, and for that to happen one person’s there… but to maintain the culture that is School B, it seems to me you need someone who is aware of the seasons of the place and so she does that.

Transcript 2, Lines 152-159

As the rural site operates without an on-site Principal, it is important that the staff there work co-operatively together to provide support for the management of the site.

Area Leader: The other teacher has more than just a teaching role because you’re the only other person out there so they have to take a supporting role in helping to run the site even though they’re not paid for it. In town, people might say that’s not my job but out here you just do what needs to be done.

Transcript 3, Lines 256-261

The role of the Area Leader at the rural site is also a new challenge for staff, as the position carries with it more responsibility than that of the Area Leaders at the town site, and includes many duties that the previous Principal would have been responsible for.

Area Leader: Area Leaders in town would have a more administration based role, whereas at School B it is administration plus it has the practical side of running the property and parent issues because you’re the sole person there dealing with issues. There’s probably more support for Area Leaders in town – there’s a different level of support needed out here as you’re in a more ‘principal’ type role. So it’s been a great opportunity for developing management strategies and organisational skills.

Transcript 3, Lines 135-142

Principal: The site manager is site manager of two classrooms and… somewhere between 40-45 children. There’s nobody else in the school who has a management unit for numerically so few
children, however they certainly have a much more important role in liaising with the community than our Area Leaders or managers in town. The person that manages that site, for all intents and purposes continues to run the people component of that school... and they are the first port of call for concerns from the community, the children and so forth.

Transcript 2, Lines 217-229

This brings with it additional challenges for the Principal and Board of Trustees as they need to ensure that they have a “strong person leading the site because the reality is that the Principal is not going to be there everyday” (Transcript 3, Lines 99-101).

Assistant Principal: It certainly gives staff the opportunity to lead on a site away from town – you’re isolated so you have to make decisions about health and safety, about curriculum, about behaviour, all those things that you have to do in town but you’ve got support and ultimately the Principal makes those decisions, whereas at School B you have to make those decisions day to day.

Transcript 1, Lines 401-406

Patterson et al. (1986, as cited in Fullan, 1991) state that “people become empowered when they can count on the support of the boss and can make or influence decisions affecting them” (p.30) and therefore the Principal’s role is a vital link in ensuring the school operates as a cohesive organisation and as the Area Leader states, “the Principal would always support the decisions that were made in his absence” (Transcript 3, Lines 113-114). This means clear and frequent communication is required between the Principal and the rural site leader to support the day to day decisions that are often made on the spot. The Area Leader also reports that the School B community look upon her as a ‘substitute Principal’.

Area Leader: It’s taken a while for them (School B community) not to have a Principal to report to or talk to but then they knew I was their Area Leader and running the site so they’d go through me rather than through the Principal. The community here look on
their Area Leader as their substitute Principal. There is more of a rapport between the Area Leader and the parents here at School B because of the location and where they are.

Transcript 3, Lines 124-130

However, the Principal does not see School B as being adversely affected by having an off-site Principal as the students at the rural site understand he is the Principal when he visits (Transcript 2, Lines 237-239) and as he is in frequent contact with the Area Leader about any issues that arise, it means when he does go out there “it’s more of a meet and greet opportunity rather than coming to sort things out” (Transcript 3, Lines 103-105).

Principal: As for me I have to say I find it quite refreshing to go out there and leave behind some of the systems of this place...and some of that’s my make up and my reflection of what I think a school Principal should be, and part of that is to be seen and available to children and parents. Because children need to see, and I think families need to see, the Principal’s in residence, because that’s my view of what this job’s about.

Transcript 2, Lines 270-284

However, the Principal acknowledges that the role of an off-site Principal could be a challenge for future Principals of the school, as they need to buy into the philosophy behind the merger and have an understanding of the context and a commitment to it, otherwise the rural site will not survive (Transcript 2, Lines 239-244). It is also important that staff at all levels of the school and management team buy into the overall vision of the merger, as it is their ongoing commitment which is vital for maintaining a strong link between the sites as the school strives to become an integrated school organisation. Fullan (2001) recognises this as the ultimate leadership
contribution as the leaders that the Principal develops are the ones who will move the organisation on even further after the Principal leaves.

The following section explores some of the communication challenges that arose during the merger process, some of which still need to be addressed in order to ensure that staff commit fully to the vision of the merger.

**Communication Systems**

According to Kyriacou and Harriman (1993), poor communication is one of the major issues contributing to teachers' stress levels during school re-organisation, therefore it is crucial that school managers focus on establishing good systems of communication in order to alleviate any anxiety arising from the merger process. Kyriacou and Harriman also comment that one way of addressing this is to allow a lengthy lead in time prior to the merger to enable as much planning as possible to occur in regard to how the new school will operate. Unfortunately as there was no New Zealand model to base the merger on (Transcript 1, Lines 479-480), the management team could only predict what challenges lay ahead, and many of the communication issues only became apparent as the school worked through the merger process.

Through the interview process, it became apparent that many of the issues which caused the greatest concern for staff were in relation to communication between the two sites.
Assistant Principal: We probably didn’t get as much mail because eventually that went to town, but in that initial year there were fights over the fact that we (School B) still had a phone number – you know that people could contact us directly, that they didn’t have to go through School A…The phones caused so many issues. The parents and the teachers, me, couldn’t understand what the big issue was...why did they have to ring town to get hold of us? But then the Principal’s justification was that no one else at School A had a phone in their room and we were supposed to be just like everyone at School A which was the start then of...you’re part of us, so you actually have to be part of us.

Transcript 1, Lines 120-124 & 191-199

Area Leader: Communication has been a big thing to work on and that has been at every aspect of school life – between pupils within the site, amongst children, between staff, to the two sites, to the Board, to the parents. There has been a lot for people and parents to get their heads around – from not having a direct line to the school (School B), having newsletters which included School B, there has been a lot to work on.

Transcript 3, Lines 179-185

It is seen as the responsibility of the management team in particular to make communication a focus (Transcript 3, Lines 193-194), so that staff are kept well informed of what is happening at both sites and daily contact is made with the rural site. The participants listed a number of strategies that the school had implemented in response to communication issues and these included sending minutes of meetings to each site, having nominated staff members from each school area or committees to pass on relevant information, communicating through a staff pigeon hole which was delivered daily to School B by a parent, and having the Area Leader of School B prepare a monthly report to be presented to the Board of Trustees to update them about issues at the rural site. However, some of these strategies are hugely reliant on individual people and as the Area Leader
points out, this could sometimes lead to a breakdown in communication systems.

Area Leader: There were issues with the delay between work being left in town and information getting sent to us in time and on the same day as the rest of the school. Things like notices going out – they would be ready in town to go home on a Wednesday but we wouldn’t get them until the Friday and they would have Wednesday’s date on them. Also individual staff members organising things – it meant teachers would have to plan earlier and get the information to us earlier and not leave it to the actual day.

Transcript 3, Lines 211-219

In order to overcome these problems, the school was making a concerted effort for all staff members to be more inclusive of School B (Transcript 1, Lines 227-234) and to make sure that policies and procedures were consistent at both sites. This was an area that needed further development as some policies, for example the curriculum policies, didn’t take into account the contextual factors of the rural site such as the multi level classes, so some updating was necessary to ensure that policies reflected both sites (Transcript 1, Lines 251-261). As the merger progressed, it also became apparent that further effort was needed to ensure that the country site was included in all aspects of school life and this was also raised during the recent review of School B (XXX, 2005) where it was stated that “consideration of contact with the town site needs to be maintained and opportunity for social interaction taken” (p.3).

Assistant Principal: There has to be effort on both sides to make it an inclusive unit...and remembering that when we do notices we have to do them for School B as well, when we pick a team we’ve got to include School B kids, that if we want to make sure that they have the opportunity, we need to remember to include them, that when we plan a production, that they’re part of it.

Transcript 1, Lines 363-370
Block (1987, as cited in Fullan, 1991) asserts that “the organisation I am part of is in many ways my own creation” (p.15) and this is also emphasised by Bennis and Nanus (1985, as cited in Fullan, 1991) who state that “leadership through communication is the creation of understanding, participation and ownership of the vision” (p.19). In this case, it is necessary for school leaders to continue to encourage staff, students and parents to take ownership of the process and make an effort to participate in an integrated and cohesive way.

Assistant Principal: The School A kids since I’ve been in here, used to, not so much now, look at the kids from School B and think where have they come from? The parents didn’t come in very much but I’m noticing a change in that, you know that seems to be moving which is good, so maybe that communication thing is starting to move and I think there is a real commitment on the School B parents to make an effort but I don’t know that there’s the same commitment from town.

Transcript 1, Lines 293-300

Fullan (1997) believes increasing ownership can be done through creating a shared vision which evolves through the dynamic interactions between members of the organisation and leaders. However, this takes time and needs to be open ended so the vision can be adapted as the merger develops, and by doing this the school and its community will grow in their commitment as their own vision and ownership of the process emerges.

The research data have provided a valuable insight into the challenges of establishing a merger between two schools operating on two sites within the three themes of creating a model/developing a vision, staffing roles and opportunities, and communication systems. However, the fourth area
which underlies all of the previous themes relates to the support structures which are available to assist leaders with managing the change process brought about through this particular merger. This will be explored more fully in the following section.

Support Structures and Considerations

As the merger was the first of its kind in New Zealand and there was no existing model in a New Zealand context to follow, it has meant that the school leaders have had to create their own vision as to how the merger would operate and be open to considering ideas and adapting this vision throughout the process.

Assistant Principal: We really didn’t know what was going to happen and I guess we sort of went into it thinking it was a trial period...we weren’t sure how it was going to work...we had some clues as to what the challenges might be but really we were a bit in the dark.

Transcript 1, Lines 494-499

Heifetz and Linsky (2002, as cited in Fullan, 2003) acknowledge that “there is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise and standard operating procedures” (p.21) and this case study was certainly testament to this view. Although the Assistant Principal visited a school in Australia that had established a merger of this nature, and the Principal had been in contact with the leaders of that school, a lot of the information they gained related specifically to the context of that school and so the transferability of knowledge was limited due to the differences in conditions between the schools involved.
Assistant Principal: The distance was a lot less for them so they were backwards and forwards quite a lot and they had loads of money, money was not an issue so...
Interviewer: That made a difference?
Assistant Principal: It did make a difference.

Transcript 1, Lines 469-473

The Principal also makes reference to the contextual differences between the two mergers and the fact that he viewed their merger as not being well supported at government level.

Principal: (The Australian School) really didn’t give us a lot of direction in so much as they were very well funded. We were doing this almost in spite of the Ministry – the initiative wasn’t raised as a good idea – it was taken as sod them, they’re interfering with our view of the world...(the Australian merger) was a supported merger, whereas ours was contrary to a view and as a consequence the Ministry rather than say how can we help you, I think they were unduly pragmatic about how much support they would give in the resulting merger. I might say the same model extrapolated out to 2005 enjoys a hell of a lot more funding than we do, than we did.

Transcript 2, Lines 365-395

However, the Principal acknowledges that the government had “bought into the idea sufficiently” (Transcript 2, Lines 413-414) as they had provided the opportunity for the school to come up with the idea during the education review but that once consent for the process had been given, the Ministry did not maintain an interest in how it would actually operate.

Principal: In fact at times I think they have been less than spontaneous in the congratulatory cards on how well we’ve built the merger.

Transcript 2, Lines 424-426

The participants in this study all noted the lack of support available to help leaders with implementing such a merger, and the support structures they did access was mostly initiated by themselves. The Assistant Principal visited the school in Australia at her own expense and initiation
(Transcript 1, Lines 435-436), and the Area Leader had recently completed a human resource management paper through her personal study, of which aspects of the management role could be applied to education and her own teaching context (Transcript 3, Lines 305-309).

All participants had a strong view on what support structures would have been beneficial at the time the merger was implemented, and believe these are aspects that need to be addressed and shared with the teaching community in order to assist other school leaders contemplating such a merger in the future.

Interviewer: What would you have wanted when you were going through the merger?
Principal: More realistic support. I mean it is about the value that you place on what’s trying to be achieved. I mean if you value it highly...if the Ministry and the bureaucracy value the idea – encourage the initiative that some people are bringing to the work. Don’t create difficulties and set every step to be a challenge. 
Transcript 2, Lines 477-485

Assistant Principal: I think there needs to be some support for after the merger in terms of changing roles and change in responsibility because when you are leading you have to be, you know up front and confident in running with things and thinking on the hoof and everything happens at once and when that all goes away you need to find another focus... It’s quite hard to stay in the job but step down.
Transcript 1, Lines 529-541

The Area Leader also reflected on areas of support she thought would assist other school leaders in the same situation and particularly for the leader who takes over running the small site.

Area Leader: Having a strong link between the schools, having good support people to help you run the place, getting on well with the secretary at the main school, having more support for behaviourally challenged children as you don’t have the same level
of teacher support like you do in town... knowing you have back up from the Principal and your Board representative and I guess also a good transition between the person that has left and the person who goes out... It was good that the Assistant Principal went into the town site afterwards as she was a good link to raise awareness of School B to the people in town because she knew what it was like to work in an isolated environment and she was very helpful and supportive in the initial months.

Transcript 3, Lines 317-337

In order for a merger of this nature to be established and for it to operate successfully as ‘one school’, it is important that school leaders reflect on, and address the challenges raised in this study. This can be done by creating a greater range of support structures which can assist school leaders in managing a merger development and this will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Contextual Factors

The importance of addressing contextual factors (Southworth, 2004) has been identified as a vital element for leaders managing school reorganisation, and this is particularly important when a small rural school is involved since small schools have their own unique contexts which need to be considered (Franks, 2004). In merging a large urban school with a small rural school, the school leaders in this study have faced this challenge and have been flexible in adapting their vision for the merged school to account for the unique nature of the rural site and this is affirmed by the Area Leader.

Area Leader: It’s one school. We share the same name but we still have a country component which is quite unique and working well and they are happy with that. I think both parts of the school are happy with that. We’ve got a town culture and we’ve got a country culture but they’re both working together and accepting of each other now.

Transcript 3, Lines 357-362

This has also been addressed through the retention of existing staff at School B to ensure a smooth transition and to maintain a strong link with the local rural community which is an integral part of School B’s culture. The school management team have also recognised the importance of communication systems in providing support for the leader at School B, and although a number of communication issues have arisen during the merger process, the leaders appear committed to ensuring that these systems remain a priority for running a successful school organisation.
Small School Challenges

A number of challenges for small school leaders (Education Review Office, 1999) have also been addressed within this merger. The first of these challenges relate to the difficulty small schools face in attracting new staff members and this has been partially resolved due to the school’s vision for a staff rotation system at the rural site which means they can draw on the larger pool of teachers within the whole school, to provide an ongoing selection of experienced staff. However as noted by the Principal, (Transcript 2, Lines 325-332) the staff members targeted to teach at School B have not always been inclined to take up the opportunity to work at the rural site. More work may be needed in the future to develop a greater ownership of the merger by the staff, in order to create a stronger commitment to the school’s vision for a staff rotation system, which will ensure that students at the rural site are exposed to a greater range of teaching styles and experience. This would also enable new staff within the school an opportunity to develop a commitment and belief in the vision which Heifetz and Linsky (2002, as cited in Fullan, 2003) believe is the eventual solution for educational reform.

A further challenge for small school leaders was the ability to access regular professional development and support from teaching colleagues (Education Review Office, 1999). This is an area that has been addressed as a result of the merger situation, since staff at the small site are exposed to the same school based professional development programmes as the town staff, and they also have a wider network of school colleagues to
draw support from. However, the distance between the two sites will affect the ease in which School B staff access this support and development, and therefore it is vital that strong communication systems are maintained and that the school leaders remain open to considering alternative ways for staff members to access opportunities and additional support.

In the study of small schools carried out by the Education Review Office (1999), it was also noted that principals in small schools faced high demands due to the added workload of having a teaching role on top of their management duties. As the rural site no longer has an on-site principal, the workload associated with running School B has changed, but due to the unique nature of the site there are still additional responsibilities placed on the Area Leader there which Area Leaders at the town site are not subject to, and this issue was raised by the Area Leader in the previous section on support structures (Transcript 3, Lines 401-406). However, the Principal views this as a reasonable expectation (Transcript 2, Lines 215-232), since the Area Leader of School B is responsible for less staff and children than the Area Leaders in town and he sees this as offsetting the additional responsibilities of community liaison and the day to day management decisions needed by the rural site manager. It is also important that other staff members who actively assist the Area Leader of the rural site be acknowledged, as their support is unlikely to be financially rewarded but they may often go above and beyond the call of duty in helping with the running of the site which was a consideration noted by the Area Leader in relation to staffing roles (Transcript 3, Lines 256-261).
Transferability of Findings

As mentioned earlier by Tarr (2005), school mergers or closures are the biggest challenges that school leaders face, and this is made more challenging when there is no New Zealand model to provide leaders with a standard operating procedure. Due to the unique nature of this merger, other educational leaders wishing to use this as a model for future school mergers should also acknowledge the contextual factors which have shaped this development, and in applying knowledge gained from this merger, schools should understand Lincoln and Guba’s concept of transferability (as cited in Anderson et al. 1994) where every context is seen as unique, therefore differences in location, staffing and leadership will all impact on how the process evolves.

In this study, the Principal and Assistant Principal in conjunction with their Boards of Trustees, agreed to a trial period for the merger of three years, which addresses Fullan’s (2001) view that it takes time for a change process to be implemented. By allowing for a trial period, the school gained valuable time to work through issues as they arose and also to seek alternative support structures to assist them. Visiting the Australian school in action was seen as a helpful tool for providing a model of how a merger of this kind could be run successfully but as the Principal and Assistant Principal found out (Transcript 2, Lines 365-400; Transcript 1, Lines 468-471), issues of transferability meant they could only apply some aspects of this model to their own setting. Therefore in order for these research findings to be applied to other situations, it is necessary that the context
and conditions are of a similar nature as well. However, the opportunity of visiting another school model was a good learning experience for the school leaders, as it required them to analyse their own processes and school setting in order to determine which procedures would work and which would not be applicable to their own context. This is where Fullan’s (1993) change lesson - ‘problems are our friends’ (p.21) becomes apparent as the leaders had opportunity to enhance their professional learning and skill development by working through the process to create conditions specific to their own merger, thereby developing a greater ownership and commitment to their school merger (Fullan, 2003).

Research Limitations

This research was intended to portray an in-depth account of the three participants’ experiences through their merger process although it must also be acknowledged that as the Board of Trustees were not interviewed in this case study, the research findings are therefore limited to the perspectives of the selected participants which is not necessarily representative of the wider school community. However, the researcher believes that while many of the specific leadership and management challenges may only be applicable to this setting, the four main themes can be seen as universal themes which other educational leaders can use as a starting point for consideration in their own context.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

This research has aimed to explore the leadership and management challenges for leaders through a change in school structure within a merger, whereby the merged school is based on two separate sites. The findings have shown four main challenges that have arisen throughout the process – how to create a merger of this nature and develop a vision for how it will operate, staffing roles and opportunities, communication systems, and a lack of support structures, all of which impact on the school system and daily operation.

During the first challenge of developing the merger model, the study illustrated that creating a school vision needed to be flexible and open minded as there was no New Zealand model to base the merger on. The information that was gathered from a similar merger overseas was not always transferable to the New Zealand context because of contextual differences in the proximity of school sites and the difference in financial and government support that the other school received. A lack of available research also meant that the leaders involved had to create their own model as the merger progressed and take into account their own unique contextual factors and work out how they would accommodate these and meet the needs of the school community at the same time.

Staffing was clearly another key area of consideration in a merger of this nature and there were a number of challenges that need to be worked
through to ensure that the two sites worked together as one school. These included retaining existing staff to help with the transition process, developing new leaders to add to the future development of the two sites, and addressing the implications of having an off-site Principal and a shared Board of Trustees.

Communication issues was the third area that posed a challenge to school leaders’ and an area that needed ongoing development as school leaders and staff members adjusted to new systems and ways of communicating. With the school operating on two sites, it was crucial the school leaders encouraged the school as a whole to work through issues, adapt processes and procedures, and strengthen communication systems to ensure the school was functioning in a consistent manner.

Within the fourth area of support structures, this case study has explored how the lack of support structures during this merger has infiltrated all of the other three areas and has provided some future suggestions for leaders seeking to apply this study to their own context. It is therefore vital that all schools that have established, or are considering a merger of this nature, continue to share their knowledge. By doing so, other school leaders will have access to a greater range of support structures, such as an opportunity to visit a school merger of this nature within a New Zealand context to understand how it operates and the contextual features that are relevant to each unique setting, which can assist them with future merger developments as school leaders gain a better appreciation of the processes.
involved in a New Zealand based setting. It is hoped that the research findings from this case study will be beneficial for other educational leaders who are considering alternative options to school closure, or are in the process of establishing a school merger.
References


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Appendix 1

*Information for Participants*

Monique O’Sullivan  
(Address)  
(Phone)  
(Email)

Dear _______________________

I am a student in the Master of Teaching and Learning degree at the Christchurch College of Education. As part of my degree I am required to undertake a research project. I will be working under the supervision of Dr Susan Lovett, the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator at the Christchurch College of Education.

I am hoping to undertake a small scale research project which examines the leadership and management challenges of moving from one school structure to another, with the focus on leading a school on two sites following a merger process. With a number of educational areas in New Zealand undergoing or facing Network Reviews by the current Ministry of Education, the information gathered during this project would be valuable for other school leaders who are seeking alternatives to school closure. This would provide them with information on how such a merger can function and the challenges involved in operating one school on two separate sites.

As part of this project I would like to interview three staff members from your school who have been influential in the leadership and management of the merger between School A and School B. This would include the current Principal of School A, the former Principal of School B and the current Area Leader of School B. There would be one interview each, at a time which suits you, which would involve approximately an hour of your time and would be centred around your experiences as part of a school now operating on two sites and the contextual factors which impact on school leadership and management. A copy of the proposed questions will be available for you to read prior to the interview taking place. Completed copies of the interview transcripts would also be given to you for final approval following the interviews.
All responses are confidential and neither you nor the schools involved would be identified by name in the completed research report. All material relating to the project will be stored in a secure location and coded to ensure confidentiality and anonymity at all times. All data will be destroyed 12 months after the examination of the project.

The research report will be seen by the project participants, myself, my course supervisor and examiners, with a copy of the final report also being made available for the Christchurch College of Education library. Participation is voluntary and if for any reason you wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so without penalty or without providing an explanation. A copy of the final research report will be made available for you at your request.

The Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

Complaints Procedure
The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
PO Box 31-065
Christchurch
Phone: (03) 345 8390

My course supervisor is Susan Lovett (phone 03 348 2059) and she may also be contacted at any stage in regards to the project.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you are interested in being part of this research project, please read and sign the attached consent form and return it to me. Please do not hesitate to ask if you have any further queries regarding the nature of this research project. I can be contacted at the phone number or email address provided at the top of this letter.

Many Thanks,

Monique O’Sullivan.
Appendix 2

Declaration of Consent for Participants

I give consent to participate in the research project - The challenges of moving from one school structure to another: Leading a school on two sites.

I have read the information for participant’s sheet about the proposed research project and I understand the nature of the intended research project and what will be required of me if I participate in the project.

I understand that the information I provide to the researcher will be treated as confidential and that my name and the name of my school will not be identified in the final research report. I am aware that all information pertaining to the project will be coded for confidentiality and stored at a private residence.

I understand that the final research report will be made available to myself, the researcher, her course supervisor and examiners, and a copy will also be made available for the Christchurch College of Education library.

I understand that my participation in the project is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the project without incurring any penalty or without providing an explanation.

I understand that my participation would involve one interview of approximately one hour and that I would receive a copy of the proposed questions prior to the interview.

I give permission for my interview to be taped to allow for transcribing at a later stage and understand that I will have access to my transcript once completed.

I give permission for excerpts from my transcript to be quoted in the research report and I understand that these will be unattributable in order to maintain my anonymity and the confidentiality of the schools involved.

Name ____________________________________ Date ____________

Signature ____________________________________
Appendix 3

Information for School Principal

Monique O'Sullivan
(Address)
(Phone)
(Email)

Dear Principal

I am a student in the Master of Teaching and Learning degree at the Christchurch College of Education. As part of my degree I am required to undertake a research project. I will be working under the supervision of Dr Susan Lovett, the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator at the Christchurch College of Education.

I am hoping to undertake a small scale research project which examines the leadership and management challenges of moving from one school structure to another, with the focus on leading a school on two sites following a merger process. With a number of educational areas in New Zealand undergoing or facing Network Reviews by the current Ministry of Education, the information gathered during this project would be valuable for other school leaders who are seeking alternatives to school closure. This would provide them with information on how such a merger can function and the challenges involved in operating one school on two separate sites.

As part of this project I would like to interview three staff members from your school who have been influential in the leadership and management of the merger between School A and School B. There would be one interview each which would involve approximately an hour of their time conducted out of school time which would be centred around their experiences as part of a school now operating on two sites following a merger, and the contextual factors which impact on school leadership and management.

All responses are confidential and neither you nor the schools involved would be identified by name in the completed research report. All material relating to the project will be stored in a secure location and coded to ensure confidentiality and anonymity at all times. All data will be destroyed 12 months after the examination of the project. As this particular merger was the first of its kind in New Zealand, a main ethical consideration will be to maintain confidentiality of the participants and the schools involved. Every effort will be taken to
ensure that any identifiable factors, such as location within New Zealand, are not disclosed.

The research report will be seen by the project participants, myself, my course supervisor and examiners, with a copy of the final report also being made available for the Christchurch College of Education library. Participation is voluntary and if for any reason participants wish to withdraw from the study, they may do so without penalty or without providing an explanation.

The Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

Complaints Procedure
The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
PO Box 31-065
Christchurch
Phone: (03) 345 8390

My course supervisor is Susan Lovett (phone 03 348 2059) and she may also be contacted at any stage in regards to this project.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you are happy to allow the participation of your staff in this research project, please read and sign the attached consent form and return it to me. Please do not hesitate to ask if you have any further queries regarding the nature of this research project. I can be contacted at the phone number or email address provided at the top of this letter.

Many Thanks,

Monique O’Sullivan.
Appendix 4

Declaration of Consent for School Principal

I give permission for my staff to participate in the research project - *The challenges of moving from one school structure to another: Leading a school on two sites.*

I have read the information sheet about the proposed research project and I understand the nature of the intended research project and what will be required of my staff if they participate in the project.

I understand that the information provided to the researcher will be treated as confidential and that the name of my school and the participants will not be identified in the final research report. I am aware that all information pertaining to the project will be coded for confidentiality and stored at a private residence.

I understand that the final research report will be made available to the participants, the researcher, her course supervisor and examiners, and a copy will also be made available for the Christchurch College of Education library.

I understand that participation in the project is voluntary and that participants may withdraw from the project without incurring any penalty or without providing an explanation.

Name ___________________________ Date ____________

Signature _________________________
Appendix 5

Information for Board of Trustees

Monique O’Sullivan
(Address)
(Phone)
(Email)

Dear Board of Trustees Members,

I am a student in the Master of Teaching and Learning degree at the Christchurch College of Education. As part of my degree I am required to undertake a research project. I will be working under the supervision of Dr Susan Lovett, the Postgraduate Studies Coordinator at the Christchurch College of Education.

I am hoping to undertake a small scale research project which examines the leadership and management challenges of moving from one school structure to another, with the focus on leading a school on two sites following a merger process. With a number of educational areas in New Zealand undergoing or facing Network Reviews by the current Ministry of Education, the information gathered during this project would be valuable for other school leaders who are seeking alternatives to school closure. This would provide them with information on how such a merger can function and the challenges involved in operating one school on two separate sites.

As part of this project I would like to interview three staff members from your school who have been influential in the leadership and management of the merger between School A and School B. There would be one interview each which would involve approximately an hour of their time conducted out of school time which would be centred around their experiences as part of a school now operating on two sites following a merger, and the contextual factors which impact on school leadership and management.

All responses are confidential and neither the participants nor the schools involved would be identified by name in the completed research report. All material relating to the project will be stored in a secure location and coded to ensure confidentiality and anonymity at all times. All data will be destroyed 12 months after the examination of the project. As this particular merger was the first of its kind in New
Zealand, a main ethical consideration will be to maintain confidentiality of the participants and the schools involved. Every effort will be taken to ensure that any identifiable factors, such as location within New Zealand, are not disclosed.

The research report will be seen by the project participants, myself, my course supervisor and examiners, with a copy of the final report also being made available for the Christchurch College of Education library. Participation is voluntary and if for any reason participants wish to withdraw from the study, they may do so without penalty or without providing an explanation.

The Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

Complaints Procedure
The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

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Ethical Clearance Committee
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PO Box 31-065
Christchurch
Phone: (03) 345 8390

My course supervisor is Susan Lovett (phone 03 348 2059) and she may also be contacted at any stage in regards to this project.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you are happy to allow the participation of your staff in this research project, please read and sign the attached consent form and return it to me. Please do not hesitate to ask if you have any further queries regarding the nature of this research project. I can be contacted at the phone number or email address provided at the top of this letter.

Many Thanks,

Monique O’Sullivan.
Appendix 6

Declaration of Consent for Board of Trustees

We give permission for staff to participate in the research project - *The challenges of moving from one school structure to another: Leading a school on two sites.*

We have read the information sheet about the proposed research project and we understand the nature of the intended research project and what will be required of the staff if they participate in the project.

We understand that the information provided to the researcher will be treated as confidential and that the name of the school and the participants will not be identified in the final research report. We are aware that all information pertaining to the project will be coded for confidentiality and stored at a private residence.

We understand that the final research report will be made available to the participants, the researcher, her course supervisor and examiners, and a copy will also be made available for the Christchurch College of Education library.

We understand that participation in the project is voluntary and that participants may withdraw from the project without incurring any penalty or without providing an explanation.

Name ___________________________ Date __________

Signature _________________________
Appendix 7

*Proposed Interview Questions*

Describe your current position of responsibility within the school.

What is the background nature of the merger? How did it come about?

What has your specific involvement been with the merger between School A and B?

How does the school operate now that it has merged?

How is your position of responsibility affected by working at a school on separate sites?

What do you perceive as the main leadership and management challenges faced by a school which operates off two sites?

What aspects of leadership and management have been enhanced by the change in school structure?

What professional development or support structures, if any, have been made available for you, to support you with managing a school on two sites?

What support structures and assistance would be beneficial for school leaders moving from one school structure to another?

What factors do you think other schools contemplating merging should be made aware of?

What do you see as the next stage for developing the ‘one school on two sites’ further?