

Apple School

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Room One at Apple Primary School (Names changed to protect privacy) was an easy choice as I have worked in the school and have found it to be enjoyable and an enlightening experience. It is different from the Primary School I attended, and has an older group of children than I have previously worked with. Even though some individuals at the school, as is true with any school, and the school itself, may have special needs, the people are an inspiration. The teacher in Room One is the one I worked with last year. I noticed then that he had an extraordinary way of relating to the pupils, a way that empowered them. When I began talking about my research project he volunteered his class for study, and I felt that I would be able to gain a deep understanding of his class and community. As Rappaport (1987) says we should study those communities that display our 'phenomenon of interest,' especially empowerment.

A community is defined as "*- a group of people related through common values, a common location, communication patterns, and or a relationship*" (Gregory, 1999, p.242). Room One at Apple School is a community in each of these instances. It has its own social structures, values, processes, strengths and weaknesses. Like any community, Room One is part of a larger community, Apple School, which is part of a larger community that is part of the Palmerston North Community, administered by the Palmerston North City Council. Therefore, the students in Room One at Apple Primary School will be both directly and indirectly influenced by the Palmerston North City Council. This fits the ecological models proposed by Kelly and Bronfenbrenner. Kelly proposes that studying the community and its interaction with individuals is useful for the design of interventions (Levine and Perkins, 1997). Bronfenbrenner gives five levels of analysis, the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem, all of which have been helpful in understanding Room One (Muuss, 1996).

Room One

The classroom has no other regular class beside it. On one side is the Sewing room, on the opposite side the empty team room that can be used by any of the classes in the team during times when they might need to spread out, for example when practicing plays or group discussions (Site Visit, 19 March 2002). Outside, between the class and school boundary, are two netball courts, seats and grass. On the opposite side is the corridor, leading to the toilets and the school hall.

Social Structures

Room One consists of seventeen Year Eight boys and fourteen Year Eight girls, the majority of whom come from relatively settled homes (H.T. 2002). Many of the children interviewed live with both their mother and father and many mentioned spending time or doing activities with their families in the weekend (Room One Students, 2002). However, some students have serious issues at home to deal with, and this can sometimes show through at school as antisocial behaviour (H.T. 2002). This adds pressure on the teacher to try and accommodate and cope with all the children and all the behaviours they demonstrate in class. These antisocial behaviours are always time consuming to deal with and can sometimes include violence (Site Visit, 22 March 2002). Many other classes in the school have at least one student with similar behaviour patterns. The high number of antisocial behaviours overburdens the behaviour management strategy programme that the school has in place (Participant Observation).

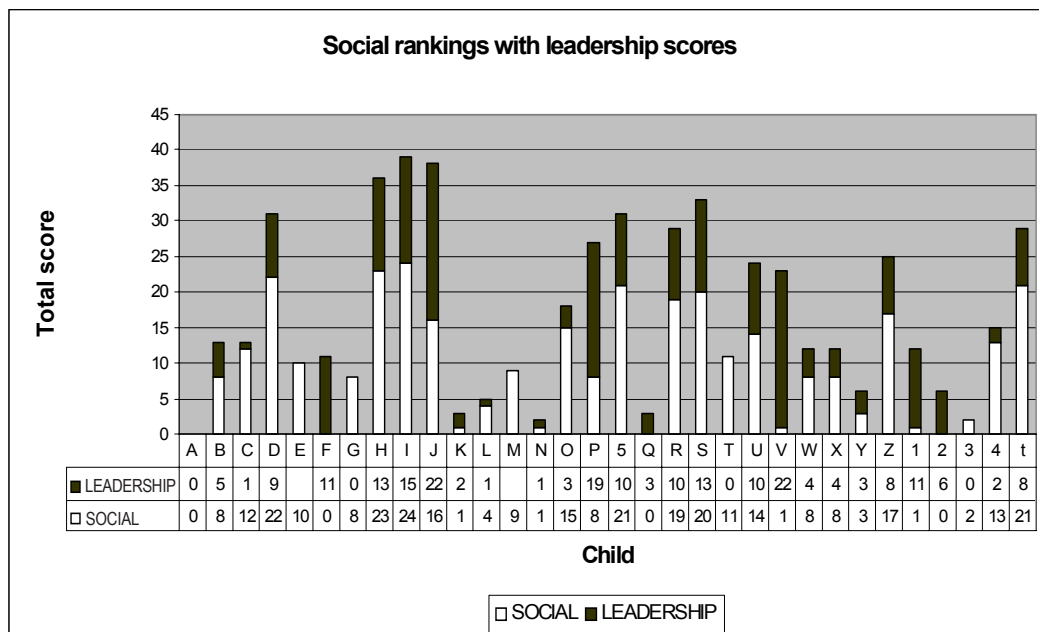
Room One's class teacher finds it difficult to balance the behaviour management of one child in particular with the needs of the rest of the students. The teacher estimates that at least 30 minutes a day is taken up by either dealing with this child or completing the paperwork recording what the child has done and making recommendations for consequences, even though these

recommendations are seldom followed through with by school management (H.T. 2002). The teacher seems to be getting more and more frustrated with the schools inability to cope with this child's behaviour and the inaction that leaves it as his responsibility. Also, this inability by the school to act was noted by the Education Review Office (E.R.O.) during their previous visit (Education Review Office, 2002). The time taken to deal with the problem behaviour influences all the children in Room One, both directly and indirectly. Direct influences include being the victim of the original behaviour, while indirectly the teacher is either unavailable while dealing with the incident, or is sometimes out of the class, or by taking up class time establishing what happened and then dealing with the consequences (Site Visit, 22 March 2002). This puts stress on the teacher and the students in Room One. In every room in the school, similar incidents happen daily. Even though similar stressors exist for each teacher and each child attending the school, there are very different outcomes, or observable reactions. Dohrenwend explains the different outcomes from similar stressors to be a function of situational and psychological mediators, for example, social support and personal attitudes (Levin and Perkins, 1997).

As could be seen in sociograms collected,

two distinct subgroups were noted at the beginning of the year, a boys and a girls group. These groups included most children. However, very clear and observable exceptions include several children outside any of the social groupings (Site Visit, 1 March 2002). These subgroups are much more obvious when observed during Morning Interval (Site Visit, 11 March 2002). Eight weeks later when a similar task was carried out these groups were starting to merge, and some of the isolates were beginning to form tenuous links with others in the class. Merging of gender groups is characteristic of stage 2 of Dunphy's Progression of Peer Group Relations typical in this age group (Santrock, 1998). The gender group leaders begin to form mutual relationships with each other. The change over time is an example of Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem. He surmises that internal and external life experiences and events affect the individuals that make up a community (Muuss, 1996).

Both the sociograms and in-school observations make it clear that several children still have no visible connections with anyone in Room One, or indeed, in Apple Primary School. An example can be noticed when watching students walk home from school. Student "K", while not popular or friendly with any one student in Room One, still walks home with groups of other



students, five students from school (Observation, 6 May 2002) and on a different occasion one student from class and another student from school (Observation, 20 March 2002). Student “2”, however, has no links with anyone in the class and also walks home by herself (Observation, 6 May 2002). Student “2” is an extreme isolate in this school community, and also lacks power in the class.

Power was determined by adding a social ranking score from sociograms to leadership scores obtained from a class exercise. Those who spoke initially, more frequently and became central to the discussion were identified as leaders. True leaders, according to Pines (1984), are those children that others are attracted to, but who also get their way frequently, they start new group activities and are sought out by other children. Castiglione (1994) adds that true power can not be given. In the first table you can clearly see who the students are in Room One who hold the power. ‘A’ through ‘5’ are boys, and ‘Q’ through ‘4’ are girls. ‘t’ is the class teacher, who we tried to exclude from the leadership exercise, however, you can see that the children depend on him for leadership. This is also reflected during behaviour observations, where the students’ behaviour meets expectations much better when the teacher is present. Of students getting a score of 30 or more on the power table, only one is a girl. All but one of the socialization votes that crossed the gender barrier, were made by people scoring in the top 29 percent of the power rankings, proving Dunphy’s theory that it is

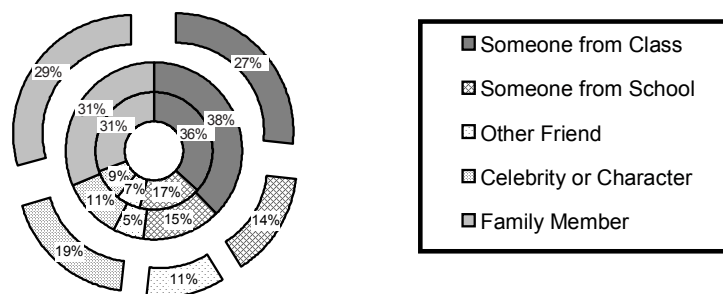
those that hold the power in each group who first begin to merge (Santrock, 1998). For those people in the top half of the power table the average number of reciprocal relationships was just more than 3. The average number of reciprocal relationships for those people in the bottom half was less than 1, showing a difference in social self-awareness.

Values

The teacher in Room One values empowering children both socially and academically. Rappaport (1987) sees empowerment as a process of enabling others to have control over their own lives. The teacher, H.T., does this by trying to foresee potential problems and working to lessen the effects (20 March 2002), encouraging the children to explore all of their options before making even the smallest of decisions (Site Visit, 1 March 2002), understanding mitigating factors in the children’s lives that impact on their behaviour at school (Site Visit, 12 March 2002), helping children to help themselves (Site Visit, 7 May 2002) and allowing children to ‘fix it’ themselves (Site Visit, 30 April 2002).

A class exercise about important values showed how children in Room One are beginning to think more abstractly, one of the major changes in cognition during adolescence (Steinberg, 1996). Students in Room One generally regarding which attributes make people popular. Good looks are rated high on every list, which demon-

Type of person chosen to accompany students to a tropical island for a year



strates how appearance is also becoming more important, typical of this stage of development (Petersen et al., 1996). Generally, children in Room One value people with positive personalities, and believe positive personal attributes make someone popular. Most groups placed negative attributes that are within one's own control in the category 'Aspects that make someone unpopular'. "The two self-admitted least popular children in the class, when identifying aspects that determine popularity, listed qualities that were quite different from the other groups and that they probably have little control over. This is important because these children see popularity as something beyond their influence and therefore, something that they will never be able to attain.

The values in the class can also be expressed when considering the types of people with whom they would choose to spend time. Close to one third of the people chosen are from their families and close to half are from the school, mostly people from Room One. The innermost circle is the combination of all of the students' top five choices, the next circle is their top ten choices and the outer circle is all of their thirty choices added together. The inner circles are representations of Room One's microsystems and the outer circle their mesosystems. We can also see the effect of the media, especially in the outer-most circle, where 19 percent of those people chosen have never met anyone in the Room. Bronfenbrenner's explanation of a microsystem is the most intimate level of interpersonal interaction, he adds that healthy microsystems are reciprocal (Muuss, 1987). According to the research conducted here, it would also seem that the higher the number of reciprocal relationships the higher one rates in the popularity scores. Bronfenbrenner explains a mesosystem as being networks of microsystems where people play different roles, he adds that when microsystem role expectations are complementary teens develop in a much healthier way (Muuss, 1987).

Processes

The open lines of communication in Room One seem to be beneficial for the children. Parents feel free to pop in and see the class teacher when they need to, and the class teacher will phone parents when he feels there is a need

to do so (H.T. 2002). This empowers the parents. Communication between the students and the teacher also appears open. Most of the children interviewed felt that their teacher listened to them and treated people fairly most of the time (Room One Students, 2002). This is another example of the teacher giving the students power over their own lives, Rappaport's definition of empowerment (1987).

Room One's teacher is developing independent thought skills in the children by encouraging decision making skills. Recently Room One was the class that had the responsibility of running assembly and providing some entertainment. The children decided amongst themselves that they would come up with and perform their own dance. This involved only minor guidance from the class teacher (Site Visit, 12 March 2002). Other times the class teacher will provide the children with choices or alternatives and the children decide for themselves when they might finish an activity or what activity they might do next (Site Visit, 6 March 2002). This helps to develop the children's self-responsibility, their decision making skills and independence, which all aid the development of the students self-efficacy, defined by Myers (1994) as feeling that they are effective and competent.

Strengths and Needs

When asked, many of the students in Room One identified the qualities of people at Apple School as both the best and worst facets of the school. Special mention went to fair, supportive and friendly pupils and staff as their favourite things about Apple School. Bullies and bad attitudes were highlighted by many groups as being their least favourite part about school, that and actually having to do work (Site Visit, 22 March 2002). According to Dohrenwend, how the children react to the stress of being harassed by a bully will determine how emotionally healthy the outcome. She says that there are three possible outcomes; emotional health, psychopathology and no change in their perception (Levine and Perkins, 1997). The school has the potential for a wide scope of influence in this area if they subscribe to Dohrenwend's process model.

The most influential factor in Room One is the staff member involved and his high level of

commitment and concern for his students. His influence is especially notable when considering the behaviour observation tallies made by the investigator. His presence, or the expectation of his presence, seems to be the greatest influence on the children's behaviour. Changing their physical location can influence their meeting expected behaviour, but this can be mediated by the proximity of the class teacher. This would follow Dohrenwend's model of the processes that can influence factors relating to stress. She supposes that by changing one aspect of the environment you can affect the outcomes (Levine & Perkins, 1997). When asked the best things about being in Room One most students mentioned personal qualities about students and the class teacher. They liked that the class was fun and friendly and that people stick together. The top of the list for their least favourite things was punishments and people with bad attitudes like bullies and teasing (Site Visit, 22 March 2002).

The greatest need in Room One appears to be that one third of the class does not have any close friends within their community, and especially the extreme isolates who have no social support from anyone in class or at the school at all. One boy (F) who openly admits he has no friends, is annoying and stated "even the teachers pick on me" (Room One Students, 2002). He has recently been diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome (H.T. 2002). If this had been diagnosed much earlier in his life he would have been able to receive social skills training to help him overcome his difficulty. Another boy (K) seems to find it hard to deal with the social situation in the class and strikes out with inappropriate behaviour that is stressful for the class and time consuming for the teacher. I believe this need can be reflected in other areas of the school community and the greater community as a whole.

Apple Primary School

Apple School is bounded by private homes and two other schools, one of which they contribute to (Site Visit, 28 February 2002). Apple School is a decile five school with between 300 and 400 children aged 10 - 13 years old (E.N. 2002). Deciles are measures of socio-economic status of the contributing families, and reflect

an aspect of Bronfenbrenner's exosystem. Each decile contains approximately 10 per cent of all of the schools in New Zealand. The low socio-economic areas have schools rated deciles 1-3, while the higher socio-economic areas will have decile 8 - 10 schools (Ministry of Education, 1999). This is an example of how the exosystem can affect students in Room One. Bronfenbrenner's explanation of an exosystem is a structure that does not directly influence the community under consideration (Muuss, 1996). The income level of the students family, while not directly influencing the day to day running of the school, would influence the amount of discretionary money the school might have, the special needs resources available to them, the zoning area that the students live in - that is their choice of available schools, and has the potential for making the home environment more stressful than that of other families.

As well as twelve class teachers the school has four design and technology teachers who specialise in woodwork, cooking, sewing and art. The school also features a literacy room for remedial studies, a music suite for small group lessons, office staff, three special needs teacher aides, a resource centre manned by Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (R.T.L.B.), a School Learning Resource Center which includes the library and librarian, a computer suite with technician and a teachers resource room (E.D., 2002).

Social Structures

Some of the teachers at Apple School, like the children, socialise with each other outside school hours (Site Visit, 20 March 2002). This has an important impact on the informal power structures of the school, in that the teachers who socialise together also seek out each other for support when conflict arises over an administrative issue (Participant Observation). Most of the few new members of staff this year seem to be finding friends and social supports within the staff (Site Visit, 5 March 2002). As a way to try and band the staff together as a complete functioning unit a social club has been established, however the first social club event got only a 22 percent turn-out rate.

Some teachers use the commonality of their situation to gain social support and source

coping strategies from one another. However, the prevalence of antisocial behaviour at this school overburdens the currently unsuccessful behaviour management strategies that the school has in place, and some teachers feel that the lack of support they receive from this system can inflame some situations (Participant Observation). Lewin would support this idea. He believed that behaviour is a function of the person in their environment, each aspect playing off the other (Muuss, 1996). Students who carry out problematic behaviour on a regular basis are more often than not eventually excluded from the school rather than reformed, leaving them to be another school's burden (Participant Observation).

The school's student council is a group of students elected from within their class to organise social events for the students. This year the group is also playing a slightly bigger role in making decisions that may affect students (H.T. 2002), but mainly seem to hold mufti (informal clothes) days to raise money for sporting equipment and charities (Site Visit, 30 May 2002).

Values

Apple School values offer children opportunities. There is a new electives programme this year where children can explore hobbies or other languages. There are about 40 sports teams throughout the year, managed and coached by the teachers. The school has a special education programme headed by a senior teacher in charge of special needs and supported by the literacy room.

The staff has developed a list of statements that will focus decisions made in the school on providing teachers with the skills to provide a safe learning environment for the children where success will be encouraged, supported and celebrated. This list is hung in every classroom throughout the school and in the staff room (Site Visit, 10 May). The process of developing culture statements and core beliefs has been an interesting and proactive exercise that is continuing this year. The school has periodic whole staff meetings, sometimes with invited guests to lead discussions, where the staff considers alternate ways of addressing some of the schools identified problems (Site Visit, 13 March 2002).

Processes

Internal communication is by way of daily notices delivered on the intranet. Also, the school principal, deputy principal and teachers deliver notices to the whole school at the weekly school assemblies. Staff notices are shared daily during Morning Tea. This is not foolproof, as monitors in those classes who forget to check their computers for messages miss out, as do support staff. There is no record of who has or has not been notified (Site Visit, 8 March 2002). Weekly assemblies are also chances for awards and rewards to be presented. For the teaching staff weekly staff and team meetings occur. Since the E.R.O. visit there has also been four "Full" staff meetings where support staff have been included and issues regarding school culture have been addressed. These meetings have begun positively, but interest and attendance is now beginning to wane (Site Visit, 13 March 2002, 12 April 2002, 22 May 2002).

Communication with parents usually takes the form of weekly school notices, however some parents do not read these (Site Visit, 20 May). Group or class notices or individual letters are sent home when needed. Parents can phone the school and leave a message for their child's class teacher to contact them if necessary and are expected to phone the school to inform if and why a child is not attending class (H.T. 2002). Most parents have little contact with the school, the main exceptions are the Board of Trustees (BOT) and the recently formed Friends of the School (PTA). The Board of Trustees, while supposedly running the school, as a general rule, seem to have very little understanding of what is actually happening within this school, or how schools operate (Site Visit, 20 May 2002). It appears that the decision making power rests mostly with the Principal (Participant Observation).

In all schools communication with outside agencies, for example Resource Teachers, or the New Zealand Children and Young Persons' Service, is sometimes necessary. This takes place via letters or forms (S. M. 2002). Communication with the wider community occurs through the media when the occasion warrants, although this seldom seems to be necessary (Site Visit, 13 March 2002).

As with any public school there are chains of

responsibility. At the top is the Prime Minister, then the Minister of Education, the Ministry of Education, the Board of Trustees, the Principal, Senior School Management and the class teachers. The type of decision that is required will determine where in the chain of responsibility to start. If, for example, one wanted to change the school uniform one would approach the Board of Trustees, which is mostly made up of elected school parents, and has the responsibility for individual school policy. A class trip would usually need the approval of the principal (H.T. 2002). In this school, the general feeling appears to be that this is not a particularly effective form of management (Participant Observation). The Ministry of Education has recently sent the Education Review Office on its regular review and effectively failed many aspects of the school, but the school community seems unsure of what they are supposed to do about it (Site Visit, 20 May 2002). The B.O.T. are also mainly unaware of the day-to-day problems faced by the staff, and this leaves the class teachers to fend for themselves when it comes to problems encountered (Site Visit, 13 March 2002). I also believe that the teachers, while aware that there is obviously a problem with lack of respect, are not addressing the real life causes and implications of this, and would rather stick to idealized notions of how they believe respect is manifested (Site Visit, 22 May 2002).

The Important Factors for Room One

There are many aspects of Apple School that affect Room One, however, the most influential characteristics would have to be high stress levels of the staff at the current time and the lack of support for the behaviour management system. Positively though, the school and management are attempting to remedy some of the features of these problems. The B.O.T. are wholeheartedly focused on making the necessary improvements to their systems before the E.R.O. re-visit shortly (Site Visit, 20 May 2002). The school and management are feeling pressure from the parents and fearing any more negative publicity about the school as the school roll is dropping possibly due to the unflattering view the local community has of the school. While the Palmerston North City Council has no direct influence over any of these issues, the school and students have some concerns that the

Council may need to address, especially when considering that 20 percent of Palmerston North's population is under the age of 13 (Hills, 2001).

Palmerston North

When asked, the students in Room One felt the most important ways that the City Council could improve their lives was to improve the roads, the hospital and provide more leisure options for them. The class was surveyed twice regarding their activities in the community, the first time was to establish a list of activities and the second time was to obtain a frequency count. The most popular activity by far was hanging out with friends either in town or at home. Popular activities that the City Council has an influencing factor in are; playing, swimming, visiting the beach or rivers, going to the public library, going to the park, playing sport, using the new skate park and going to events at the stadium. While funding some of the facilities for each of these activities the council has another role in the lives of Room One, that is, running the city (Boyle, 2002). Activities that the council is responsible for include providing the water supply, roading and parking, wastewater disposal, storm-water drains, refuse collection and disposal and recycling (Palmerston North City Council, 2002). Many of the students in Room One do not know what the city council does, how it affects them or the ways in which they can have their say on issues that affect them (Site Visit, 30 April). The school has recently tried to have their say on the 'Draft Annual Plan 2002/2003' because they were unsatisfied with the cancellation of the 'Bike Plan', a road safety venture aimed at making the streets safer for cyclists. The Principal attended a submissions meeting, but felt that it was a waste of time (E.N., 2002). Before cancelling the 'Bike Plan' the city council would have had to consider the implications that this would have had on children in Palmerston North, after their adoption of the 'Strategic Direction On Children's Issues' and the establishment of 'The Children's Issues Reference Group' last year. However, the decision to cancel the 'Bike Plan' has not been a very popular one and will likely be reinstated (Boyle, 2002).

The City Council would be another example of Bronfenbrenner's exosystem. It is a large,

political community structure that affects Room One with its decisions that they cannot directly participate in (Muuss, 1996). This is certainly the way that Apple School Principal feels after his submission hearing, even more so for the students in Room One who cannot even vote for representation on the City Council. Palmerston North is certainly a community by Kelly's definition - a set of groups of people, living in a particular area, that are competing for resources and have overlapping interests (Levine and Perkins, 1997).

Room One and Apple School, with their unique strengths and needs, are one aspect of the Palmerston North City Community. The Palmerston North City Council is responsible for ensuring the interests of all factions of the community, or microsystems, are considered when allocating resources. While the Palmerston North City Council heard submissions on its Draft Annual Plan, the Principal feels a lack of empowerment after his submission. The class teachers at Apple Primary often have a feeling of disempowerment, while they are simultaneously doing all that they can to empower their students. It is clear to see that empowerment, and the related stress experienced when it is not received, is a concern at every level of the community of Palmerston North.

KEY WORDS Primary School. Children. Behaviour. Power Structures

ABSTRACT Primary school is a common experience for nearly all New Zealanders, and the lessons learned at an early age provide a foundation for the remainder of the lifespan. The author observed individuals and their styles of organisation in a single classroom, then studied their struggle to fit in and take on leadership and followership roles. She discusses values, processes, structures, and the daily rounds, and then generalises what she learns to the larger contexts surrounding her classroom, including the entire school, the neighbourhood, and the still larger community of Palmerston North.

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S.M. *Personal Communication*: Interview with Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour, has held this position since it began four years ago: March 15, 2002.

SITE VISITS

28 February 2002 Preliminary school visit.
 1 March 2002 Preliminary class visit in Room One.
 5 March 2002 Morning Tea time in the Staff Room.
 6 March 2002 Class visit in Room One.
 8 March 2002 Morning Tea time in the Staff Room.
 11 March 2002 Morning Tea time in the Playground.
 12 March 2002 Class visit in Room One.
 13 March 2002 Full Staff Meeting in the Library.
 19 March 2002 Class visit in Room One.
 20 March 2002 Class visit in Room One.
 22 March 2002 Group exercise in Room One.
 12 April 2002 Full Staff Meeting at a local Motel.

26 April 2002 Listing community activities in Room One.
 30 April 2002 Class Visit in Room One.
 3 May 2002 Tropical Island exercise in Room One.
 7 May 2002 Class Visit in Room One.
 8 May 2002 Whole School singing and Class Visit.
 10 May 2002 Class Visit in Room One.
 20 May 2002 Board of Trustees Meeting, 6:30pm, Staff Room.
 22 May 2002 Full Staff Meeting in the Staff Room.
 30 May 2002 School Visit during Mufti Day.

OBSERVATIONS

Done Outside the School Grounds after school

6 May 2002
 20 May 2002

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