MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

Making a Difference

How ten New Zealand schools and early childhood centres are engaging students in positive learning and achievement

New Zealand Government

Contents

Small Steps that Measure Success

Four-year-old Kane makes sense of his world in a way very few adults can even begin to understand.

At frequent intervals during his four mornings a week at Whararangi Kindergarten he goes out to the garden and runs his fingers repeatedly around the spikey edges of the daisies.

He also regularly gets pencils then spreads them into a fan and strokes their spikey ridges.

These very specific sensory activities are important to Kane, who is non-verbal and autistic. The kindergarten staff understand how significant and calming this is for him, so they've planted a special plot of daisies.

When children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) become what we call 'dysregulated', the emotional pressure can escalate to a point where it explodes as challenging behaviour and becomes unsafe for the child and for those around them. The team around four-year-old Kane is trying to prevent this, and is working to support his own attempts to regulate himself. The kind of strategies they use can be highly effective with all children.

The kindergarten staff have found it easier to understand Kane thanks to his involvement in a pilot programme designed specifically for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders whose progress, though very variable, can often be extremely gradual and difficult to measure.

Kane is one of five children in Hawkes Bay who have been part of the ASD Early Intervention Development Project for the past two years. As part of the project, a framework known as SCERTS is being trialled to see how this successful American model can be adapted to use in New Zealand.

The pilot is being trialled by the Ministry of Education's Special Education early intervention teams who are working side by side with early childhood centre staff, parents and support workers, both at home and in the children's centres.

Routine and predictability are important to Kane. He can very easily be thrown out of kilter if he is a bit sick or if there is too much going on around him or even if he decides he doesn't want to be there on a particular day.

This can result in 'dysregulation', an emotional response that might see him repeatedly beating his chest or running up and down the fence line.

Early Intervention Team Psychologist Maria De Monchy says since Kane joined the pilot he has made social improvements. "He has definitely gone up a level in functioning and play. He's more interested in people coming and interacting with him. Before, he used to be more aloof and would do his own thing."

However, what's most exciting is, thanks to SCERTS, they can measure his progress.

"Previously we wouldn't have been able to measure this in such a reliable, consistent way. We can now say 'yes, we have the evidence' – or 'no, what we're doing isn't working and we need to take a different approach."

Adults supporting the child can measure progress because the SCERTS framework uses developmental steps (in the areas of social

"It has also highlighted for us as teachers the need to embrace programmes of this type and to be open to new ideas. The outcomes have been so positive."

– Susan Young, Head Teacher, Wharerangi Kindergarten

From left: Maria De Monchy, Pip Harrison, Karen Piercy with Kane, Louise Holdcroft, Susan Young and Maria Boolieris

communication and emotional regulation) that are tiny and very clearly defined. Similarly, Kane's goals are very clearly articulated.

"Other assessment frameworks focus on setting goals for the child," explains Occupational Therapist Maria Boolieris. "What's different about this is it also sets goals for everyone working with the child so their input can be reviewed as well.

"That means there's a really collaborative approach. It really brings people together and requires us to communicate extremely well."

In Kane's case there's been a close working relationship between his four kindergarten teachers, his support worker, three members of the Hawke's Bay Early Intervention Team: Maria Boolieris, Maria De Monchy and Speech-Language Therapist Louise Holdcroft and – most importantly – his parents.

"His mum, Karen, is an active team member. We've had her buy-in right from the start," says Maria Boolieris. "She ensures things are really followed up."

The strong collaborative focus makes a real difference for the parents, adds Maria De Monchy. "They are able to see that we are all working together. They have a strong sense of direction and hope. They can see the steps their child has taken."

Collaborative support that is very consistent between the home and kindergarten help Kane achieve a better quality of life, she says. "It is satisfying for adults working with such children when they can find a way to help a child make sense of the world. SCERTS is a tool for doing this."

Taking on the SCERTS work wasn't easy at first. In early 2006 the three Early Intervention Team members together with their Hawke's Bay colleagues joined eleven other teams from around New Zealand to undergo two-day assessment training in Wellington; parents were invited to a one-day overview.

"Initially it felt like the blind leading the blind!," says Maria Boolieris. "It was very unfamiliar. It is from overseas and uses quite specific language and lots of jargon."

A lot of reading was involved, she adds. "We had to learn this and implement it at the same time so it was quite stressful at first."

But the more the team worked on this the more they saw its value.

"Previously we wouldn't have been able to measure this in such a reliable, consistent way. We can now say 'yes, we have the evidence' – or 'no, what we're doing isn't working and we need to take a different approach."
– Maria De Monchy, Psychologist HB Early Intervention Team (above)

They started to identify the parts that would work best in their local setting and adapted it.

Another local adaption that had occurred earlier in the process was the sewing into the framework those strands of Te Whāriki, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum policy statement, that aligned with SCERTS.

Maria Boolieris says some forms of assessment sometimes result in staff just collecting data. "But this enabled us to really measure the work that everybody was doing. It's really meaningful because we can use it to modify our behaviour as well."

Kane's SCERTS assessment makes no reference to his developmental age or what he is unable to do. The starting point is to describe in detail what Kane can do and align this with the steps defined in the SCERTS framework. That meant those working with Kane had to collect a significant amount of information via observation at home and at the kindergarten.

All members of Kane's support team were then required to negotiate and agree on what was being recorded. The first assessment for a new child is estimated to take up to 10 hours in total. In Kane's case it wasn't so time-consuming as all the team members already knew him.

What followed were detailed discussions with the family about what they wanted Kane to be learning and what his goals might be. This led to a planning meeting where the whole team worked on a written plan that documented everyone's goals – not just Kane's.

"Goal-setting for children is a normal part of our work in early intervention. In this case we very clearly articulated the steps every person was going to undertake in order to support Kane to achieve his goals. Everyone works in the same way, as defined in the framework, and there are very specific steps in the SCERTS framework against which their progress is measured," says Louise Holdcroft.

For example, one of Kane's goals is to respond to verbal instructions. One of the strategies for the adults, as identified in the framework, is to use less complex language when talking to Kane.

As part of the goal-setting in the social communication area of the SCERTS framework, the family has been supported by the Early Intervention Team members to implement the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), which teaches a child to use pictures or symbols to communicate their needs.

"We were able to incorporate PECS within the framework because SCERTS provides an umbrella which enables a range of intervention approaches. It actually helps form a common language and common goal-setting," says Louise Holdcroft.

Susan Young, Head Kindergarten Teacher, says kindergarten staff see themselves as playing a very supportive role. An example of one of the goals for the adults was to offer consistent and predictable routines and activities at home and kindergarten. This enables Kane to make choices for himself, to feel empowered and to work towards independence.

Kane's progress is carefully documented and measured.

GSE team members regularly visit him at home to observe, discuss and document what has happened that week. Kane's support worker also records his progress on a weekly basis. The Early Intervention Team members and kindergarten teachers hold fortnightly discussions about what has been happening for Kane at kindergarten. They then document Kane's learning in his Learning Profile in the form of Learning Stories and other observations. They reassess Kane's progress regularly, measuring changes that have occurred since the initial assessment. This progress is summarised and presented in a clear and visual way.

"What is so important is that we are not just measuring Kane's progress all the time but also whether the transactional support – the adults around Kane – are all making progress toward their own goals," says Maria De Monchy.

Having that double set of goals makes everyone more accountable.

"It is quite critical. It tells us if we are doing things the right way for the child and alerts us if we need to change. And if one person has had more success we can then make sure everyone learns from them."

Says Susan Young: "It [being involved in the pilot] didn't mean extra work for us because we set goals for other children as well. It's definitely a good tool and it's been well worth doing.

"It has also highlighted for us as teachers the need to embrace programmes of this type and to be open to new ideas. The outcomes have been so positive."

Phase one of the ASD Early Intervention Development Project ended in December 2008. Phase two is now underway.

SCERTS stands for: **S**ocial **C**ommunication – how children communicate, **E**motional **R**egulation – how they modify their sensory input and emotional information to then make themselves available for learning, and **T**ransactional **S**upport – how adults can work together to get the best response.

A big strength of SCERTS is that it puts a lot of emphasis on prevention. Adults supporting the child take great care to observe and understand the child's behaviour. By working with the child and appreciating their efforts – and at the same time teaching them more sophisticated and socially appropriate strategies – they can help children such as Kane to learn to be more independent in managing their emotions and their environment.

In many ways SCERTS offers a similar approach to most other effective 'behaviour' programmes. Understanding what the child's behaviour is achieving for them and then teaching them other skills to substitute for the less desirable ones, is at the basis of most effective programmes.

SCERTS is unique in that it also provides adults supporting the child with a tool to understand the child's developmental path in learning to regulate their emotions, and suggests the most effective strategies to support them.

A Better Way

A wholehearted commitment to restorative practices at Opotiki College in the Bay of Plenty has established a more positive climate in the college and made suspensions and expulsions a thing of the past.

Opotiki College is a decile 1 school serving the needs of a fairly isolated rural community with more than its share of social problems. Eighty percent of its students are Māori.

Principal Maurie Abraham has been at the school for 10 years, the last three as principal. He was deputy principal with responsibility for discipline for seven of those years so he had first-hand experience of the challenging behaviours of disaffected students.

"We used to have the full range of punitive systems in place. We would be suspending 50 students a year, the vast majority for marijuana use or repeated antisocial behaviour. We might have up to 10 expulsions each year and a further 40 or so stand-downs. Beneath that came the layers of detentions and so on."

There was no end to it, says Maurie. He became convinced there had to be a better way.

"We felt strongly that suspensions and continual stand-downs alienated the kids. It made them angry about the process, rather than leading them to reflect on their behaviour. Sometime they'd go off to detention, unable to relate it to the things that had been building up in the classroom over the previous two or three days. And once you've given the detention, what do you do next? It just keeps escalating."

Maurie explored other options and came across the restorative practice approach at a Ministry of Education workshop. It was an idea that appealed because it put the focus on enhancing relationships between teachers and students, and repairing relationships that had

Pictured left: (From left) Lea Vellenoweth, deputy principal; Robyn Abraham-Harris, deputy principal; Maurie Abraham, principal; and Teryl Edwardson, Year 10 dean

"We felt strongly that suspensions and continual stand-downs alienated the kids. It made them angry about the process, rather than led them to reflect on their behaviour." – *Maurie Abraham, principal*

been damaged by bad behaviour. This made a lot of sense when research was showing that the key driver for student achievement – especially Māori – was the calibre of the relationship between teacher and student.

"Overnight we virtually tossed out our punitive systems and attempted to replace them with restorative systems, and the boldness of that may have been a bit of a mistake. It was challenging the way teachers normally dealt with students, and in the behaviour area that often meant passing it on for someone else to deal with.

"We built the aeroplane while we flew it which caused some angst. But on reflection maybe it was the way to go because when eight or nine months later we all sat down as a staff to design school-wide systems and processes for implementing restorative practices, everyone had some experience to draw on. It was no longer an abstract concept."

The challenge they faced, says Maurie, was to implement restorative practices right across the school at all levels – for serious and more regular behaviour issues. It was not just a tool for the deputy principals and principal but an approach for all teachers and deans throughout the school to use in their classrooms.

"For this to work I needed 45 people who were not only committed to the philosophy but were able to run restorative sessions at the appropriate level."

Maurie and his two deputy principals were trained in restorative practices and workshops were held with staff to get them familiar with restorative practice. A full-day session with an outside facilitator was particularly beneficial in addressing concerns about how the system could be applied to all levels in the school.

"As a staff we collectively developed a set of responses to common behaviour management issues in the classroom, such as no equipment, late to class, continual disruption. We applied the

restorative practice formula to these issues and came up with agreed responses that were put into a handbook. This was a practical guide for teachers to follow in having a restorative conversation."

Restorative practice hinges around a meeting between the student or students involved and the appropriate teacher or school representatives. Family members are invited to attend if the issue warrants it.

Restorative meetings are held at various levels within the school. Ordinary misdemeanours in the classroom are dealt with between teacher and student in a 'mini-chat' situation. More serious issues may involve the dean or deputy principal, and the most serious offences will involve the principal or deputy principal. These latter meetings deal with issues that previously would have been addressed at board level.

All meetings share a common desire to achieve a positive resolution so that the student can move forward.

Says Maurie: "At these meetings we explore what happened, why it happened and the impact it had on others. We get the student to talk about how they feel about what happened now that they have had a chance to reflect on it. And we move on to what they are going to do about it.

"If there is a 'victim' involved, that person can say how they feel too, and so can their family and the offender's family."

It's a very powerful mechanism for dealing with issues that need resolution at many levels, says deputy principal Robyn Abraham-Harris.

"In the restorative hui that we have run – and there have been some pretty high-end ones – there's never been an unsatisfactory result. When you are sitting there with young people and their families, everyone becomes quite open to saying things as they are. Some sessions become incredibly emotional when you have families there who are distressed by what has happened.

"If a student knows that they can tell you they smoke dope and they aren't going to get kicked out for it, nine times out of 10 they'll tell you the truth. In the old system they'd never tell you.

"Mostly I find young people to be pretty truthful, because they know it's not going to be the end. Our motto is 'the only way forward is to tell the truth.'"

A restorative approach means a fundamental change in how an issue is dealt with, and this requires a mind-shift on the part of the classroom teacher, says Robyn.

"When you back kids into a corner, they come out fighting. This approach is about changing perceptions and having the processes in place so that teachers don't back kids into corners anymore. It's a new way of thinking.

"I've been in a number of restorative hui where staff apologise too. Conflict doesn't just come out of students."

Fellow deputy principal, Lea Vellenoweth is also a big fan of restorative action.

"I think it's one of the most brilliant things that has come to Opotiki College. When you see it in action you can't deny it's the only way to go. We still have a few staff who are struggling with it but it takes time.

"The best strategy is to model a restorative approach in your own dealings with students and teachers, and make sure you have clear processes and guidelines that all staff understand."

Restorative meetings are not the sole strategy in use at Opotiki College. 'Catch-up' sessions are held at lunchtimes, after school on Thursdays and on Saturday mornings for students who have missed work because of bad behaviour. But the accent is on catching up with work, not on doing meaningless detention tasks, says Lea. Whereas once the detention rooms were over-flowing, now there would be no more than five to ten students in a catch-up session.

"Everything we do has a restorative tone to it, even a 'punitive' measure. Students know that if they don't do their work in class, there will be consequences but they will be relevant consequences. They can see the point of it and they tend to respond very well."

The different levels of restorative conversations mean there is still a type of referral system in place for teachers. There are clear steps in the process, the first ones to be taken by the teacher but if they fail, the issue can then be referred onto the dean or deputy principal for assistance in resolving it.

"The real success of restorative practice is in the classroom," says Robyn. "Our philosophy is that the better that teachers manage behaviour difficulties in the classroom the less of it they'll have. The ideal is teachers becoming restorative, sorting it out themselves with those who need to be involved."

"I've been in a number of restorative hui where staff apologise too. Conflict doesn't just come out of students."
– *Robyn Abraham-Harris (above right)*

Student Voices

"I LIKE 'RESOLUTION' BECAUSE I GET TO HAVE A SAY AND THEN I CAN GET BACK TO CLASS AND GET ON WITH THINGS."

"I FELT LIKE APOLOGISING."

"IT'S A GOOD WAY TO RESOLVE THINGS. YOU FEEL BETTER AFTERWARDS AND IT HELPS YOU KEEP OUT OF TROUBLE."

In addition to these measures, the school also has a range of positive initiatives in place to recognise student improvement and achievement. A 'pupil of the month,' nominated by teachers or pupils, is recognised at every form level once a month and positive behaviour and achievement are rewarded with vouchers and a letter home.

The views of students are also canvassed from time to time to provide feedback on teacher performance.

Teryl Edwardson is Year 10 dean at Opotiki College. She stresses the need for teachers and deans to be very professional in how they conduct restorative hui, which she says translates into a need for ongoing professional development.

"We must be professional in how we handle difficult situations – we need to come to them mellow and ready to sort things out. The process must work for everyone which can be difficult at times because you have to strike a balance between the pastoral care of students and respecting the sensitivities of colleagues. That's why you need professional development."

Follow-up on the restorative hui is also essential, says Teryl.

"You have to check how students are settling back into class and what other issues might need addressing."

At a more strategic level, data on misbehaviour is analysed at regular intervals to identify issues impacting on behaviour, adds Teryl.

"We look for the relevant factors. It may be the classes after break or it may relate to the food that they are eating, or it may be a teaching and learning issue. It has to be seen holistically, not just as a series of isolated incidents."

Experience has shown that restorative practice has transformed the school's relationship with parents of offending students. Traditionally this has been a fraught area, with parents often becoming defensive.

"Families respect the process and they see we are doing everything we can," says Robyn. "They used to be angry and defensive. Once they know the door won't be closed on their child, they are much more willing to want to sort it out. We're now on the same side."

It's important that behaviour management is seen in the context of the wider vision for the school, says Maurie.

"I use the image of a jigsaw with four pieces – the curriculum, pedagogy, values and behaviour management. Staff can see how it all fits together, how all the pieces are indispensable. We're not throwing four separate things at them.

"Behaviour management is a crucial part of the overall vision for our school. We're decile 1, we're remote enough for isolation to be an issue for our kids. We could be a bit of a ghetto school but we're not.

"We have 575 students, with roll growth of 100 over the last five years. Our NCEA results are at or above the national average, which is great for a decile 1 school."

And what about those suspensions and expulsions?

"Last year there were none. And only one or two stand-downs where once there were 40 or 50." ■

An adventure in learning

Above, from left: Gemma Periam, board member; Prakash Naidoo, deputy principal; and Nigel Ord, physical education teacher

Four years ago Te Kauwhata College had 35 suspensions a year. This year there has only been one. The secret? A new outdoor education initiative that's as successful at shaping attitudes and behaviours as it is at providing adventure-based activities.

Te Kauwhata College, a decile 5 school, sits in semi-rural, dairy country halfway between Hamilton and Auckland. The school's 485 students span Year 7 to Year 13.

Gemma Periam, a board of trustee member and parent at the school, has helped to introduce the new outdoor education programme in her role as coordinator for the Perry Outdoor Education Trust. The Trust is a not-for-profit organisation that works with low decile schools who would not otherwise be able to afford such activities.

Gemma is currently working with six schools in the area. She says: "This programme is about personal and social development using physical challenges and working in groups so that students form positive relationships and positive attitudes to themselves, their peers and the teachers.

"When the students come back to school we've created a much more positive environment for learning, based on mutual respect among students and staff. That's why we no longer have as many incidences of behaviour interfering with learning."

Previously, the school's only outdoor activities were trips away to places like the museum or local areas of interest. This year 70 Year 7s, 70 Year 10s and 24 Year 13s will spend up to a week away from the school. The students get to know each other, their form teachers and senior student leaders in an informal setting.

They complete a wide range of games and the older ones do

"Camp was awesome. I didn't know half the people before camp and we just got a lot closer afterwards. I get on way better with them all now. It helped me get into my studies too. It's cooler back in the classroom because everyone's friendly. It's a better learning environment, it's more fun." – *Sam Irvine, Year 11*

outdoor adventure activities such as caving, tramping and working with high ropes. By the end of the camp, the groups are ready to compete in an Amazing Race-style challenge that tests their physical, mental and creative aptitudes. That's the litmus test for the progress they've made during the week.

To the kids it's all good fun. To the school it's a chance to break down barriers to learning – engage students, win their trust, build their confidence and educate them in the thinking that creates positive attitudes towards school.

Gemma Periam explains that the programme is a triumph of pedagogy as well as activity. It has been carefully designed and encompasses the key competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum – thinking, managing self, participating and contributing, language/communication and relating to others. From a folder, she pulls out a diagram of a learning spiral that illustrates how students' developmental needs are aligned with their educational needs and how each year of camp activity builds on the next.

The programme has been heavily tailored to suit the school. The starting point for the staff was to identify exactly what behaviours needed to be addressed. The aim is to combine physical activity with personal reflection that builds awareness and self-knowledge. The programme ensures students learn responsibility and respect through problem-solving and cooperative activity.

"There is lots of reflection on students' contribution to group cohesion. People are challenged to think about their behaviour and how they approach it. What they're good at and not so good at. The programme is getting them to think about what should be happening and what contributes to a group dynamic falling apart," says Gemma.

It's a journey for all involved and Gemma is quick to point out that there are no miracle transformations.

"If someone's a follower, you are not going to change them into a leader. It's not about that. It is about people accepting themselves and accepting others. Those who are being disruptive within a group must deal with the comments and expectations of the rest of the group."

Over the course of a few days those expectations can have a powerful effect.

"We don't change all of them, but in general, we see a significant change in behaviour and attitude in most by the middle of the second morning. All of a sudden there is a shift in how effectively those groups function. Achieving that takes hard work and a sound educational approach," says Gemma. "Part of it is students suddenly recognising that they have a common goal. They learn the personal and interpersonal skills they need to function in a group and when they go back to school. The programme is designed to allow that to happen. The point is that these are skills that you can learn in the right social situation.

"The programme holds the individual accountable to the group for the goals they've all agreed on and in that way it's a microcosm of school – suddenly your behaviour is your responsibility, not someone else's. Students realise they don't need to act in negative ways to cultivate approval or take risks to get noticed. They're accepted, so those behaviours disappear."

In an ideal world students would arrive at the school with these personal and interpersonal skills already at their disposal. But the school has noticed a growing trend of 'learned helplessness' among students. Parents are doing more and more for their children and robbing them of the chance to develop initiative and other important attributes.

The impact of the new programme has been profound, says deputy principal Prakash Naidoo. He believes it has had positive spin-offs for the community as a whole. Parents too are singing its praises and some Year 10 students have come back to school after spells of absenteeism.

"After that Year 10 camp, some students have rediscovered the value of learning and felt more secure about turning up at school. It has re-engaged them," says Prakash.

"What this shows is that it is only through participation that you learn the values of socialisation, cooperation and coping with different situations. By going to a totally different environment they are learning to be independent of home, but dependent on other members of the group to make things happen. That's what three to five days' worth of these activities can achieve.

"I think the greatest spin-off is the boost in their level of confidence and self-esteem. They are no longer afraid to participate. This has got to be a big contributing factor to the drop in stand-downs this year."

The school has been surveying staff and students to build an evidence base about the camp's effectiveness. The approval rating from the students was 90 percent. The comments from the teachers were also revealing – "it's like these kids are from a different planet," wrote one teacher. "They're different kids now," said another.

The survey results have confirmed that the programme "is making a significant difference to the behaviour of these students in terms of their learning in the classroom," says Gemma.

Physical education teacher Nigel Ord certainly appreciates the difference in his day-to-day teaching.

"I have no doubt that because of these experiences the students are a lot more engaged in class. It's hard to measure, but you can just tell if someone has a more positive attitude towards school. And there are fewer behaviour issues for the deans to deal with. It's showing up in those numbers."

Perhaps the biggest vote of confidence is that the school is now running the camps as early as possible in the first term – a sign of how valuable their contribution is to the learning ahead.

"We know we have got to get these kids early so we address these behaviours. Even though it is a busy and difficult time of the year, people felt very strongly about that. It is a school priority," says Prakash.

The biggest challenge for the school is to maintain the positive momentum gained at the camps. A follow-up health programme that runs at the school through the year provides a weekly opportunity to do so. It is offered by the teachers who the students have got to know at the camps.

"A lot of that programme is about building relationships and coping with challenges. I think it really complements well what happens on camp. The challenge is to keep them on this path once they've started," says Nigel Ord.

With this in mind, the camp teachers are selected a year in advance

"I liked the hike we went on. I made a lot more friends. I think it's made school a more enjoyable place to be. You get to know people and see what they're good at. You learn how to work well with other people." – *Carlie Dyer, Year 11*

From left: Carlie Dyer and Paul Dallas.

so that there is a continuity from the camp to classroom once the positive relationships have been formed.

Nigel has been heavily involved in the camps, a challenge he's enjoyed. He says the benefits work both ways, dramatically improving the quality of the relationship between teacher and student.

"Once you take students out of the school environment, you tend to lose a lot of the negative baggage. It's the same for the teachers as well. It's not about authority. It's about building a bond that is going to have long-lasting effects on behaviour back in school. Students can see they are not being treated as a person in a uniform, but as an individual who has a lot of capabilities. It's been an amazing thing for staff to be involved in. It changes the whole atmosphere at school – there's like a hush, suddenly eveything's cool. You talk to them and they talk to you in a whole different light. The quality of your interactions has jumped up to a whole other level. That's very satisfying."

At the moment, the school has focused on Year 7, 10 and 13. The plan is to expand the programme to include Year 9s in the near future.

Deputy principal Prakash Naidoo says the whole approach has changed his job for the better.

"Last year we met with teachers at some of our contributing primary schools and they raised their concerns about the behaviour of quite a number of students coming to our school. But after our camp, very few have come to my attention. The vast majority have settled down beautifully. We were warned about the measures we would have to put in place, but we haven't needed to do any of that."

Gemma Periam paints a similar picture. "We used to impose conditions on those who were disruptive, but they'd still be a problem because we weren't able to address the real issues behind their behaviour. We needed to put in place experiences that demonstrated what were the positive behaviours we were looking for. That's where it all started. The key is to ensure it's not just outdoor activity for its own sake, but activity connected to learning. It's about communicating to our kids what our expectations are. That's its potential."

Potential Prakash Naidoo has seen come to fruition.

"My work at the school has become easier. I would much rather affirm students than discipline them. I like that role better. In the three years I've been here I've noticed a real difference. It's getting better every year. Our expectations are higher. The students' expectations are higher. Now it's about tapping into their potential and maximising their learning." ■

Going the Extra Mile

"I do see it as our job. We could have written him off but there was nowhere else for him to go. We had to do everything we possibly could."
– *Gina Benade, principal*

From left: Gina Benade, principal; Georgia Jensen-Procter, RTLB; and Sarah Gleeson, teacher.

When Phillip arrived at St Pius X School in Glen Innes, Auckland last year, the school knew it had a major problem on its hands. Just 11 years of age, he was already on to school number four, having been 'stood down' from two previous schools.

St Pius X School is a decile 1 school with a roll of 161 children, 98 percent of whom are Pasifika students. This small primary school, bordering Auckland's affluent Eastern suburbs, provides a values-based Catholic education tailored to the needs of the local Pasifika community.

Phillip arrived with a hostile attitude and an intimidating way of being with students and teachers, recalls principal Gina Benade. He would fly into explosive rages, unleashing obscenities and racist remarks at other students that would often result in nasty altercations. In the classroom he indulged in cruel put-downs of other students. When he wasn't angry, he was withdrawn and moody.

"From the outset we knew that Phillip needed special attention," says Gina. "He was a big boy for his age and he would walk about in the yard with a real swagger. I would see him at morning break sitting on the bench outside the classroom and not mixing with the other children at all. He wanted to have friends but he had no idea how to go about it.

"I knew we had to act quickly before the situation got out of hand so we applied for an RTLB (Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour) to help us develop strategies to deal with Phillip."

"I applaud the school for summing up the situation quickly and seeking help," says RTLB Georgia Jensen-Procter. "It takes some courage to see that a problem is beyond your resources to deal with."

When she arrived, Georgia spent some time observing Phillip's behaviour, before beginning one-on-one sessions with him.

"He continually teased other students and was unable to pick up the social signals to stop. He didn't know how to join in with his peers but was very dependent on them for feedback. Most of his relationships were provocative. There was little or no engagement with school work."

Georgia made contact with his family so they were in the picture right from the beginning. She was the regular contact person for the family throughout the behaviour management process that was implemented by the school.

"Everyone had a part to play; no single person could deal with all this. Phillip's parents recognised there was a problem and they were prepared to do what they could. We had their support."

Georgia quickly assessed that there would be no 'quick-fix' solution to Phillip's problems. The school was in for a long journey, she recalls.

"Phillip had had 11 years to perfect these seriously antisocial behaviours. We were teaching him to undo what he was very successful at doing and that was not going to be easy."

Turning round Phillip's behaviour did in fact require a sustained commitment and team work from the school and interventions from a range of people over the course of a year. Those directly involved included Georgia, Gina, associate principal and class teacher Sarah Gleeson, associate principal Debbie Williams and Phillip's parents.

A team approach was absolutely essential, says Gina.

"Those of us affected by his behaviour came together often to find solutions and we kept each other informed of what was happening.

"I realised early on that I had to be prepared to drop everything and get involved. The seriousness of his offences meant that he was often ending up in front of me. I had to build a relationship with him and give him a lot of my attention.

"I do see it as our job. We could have written him off but there was nowhere else for him to go. We had to do everything we possibly could."

Pivotal to this whole process was forming a trusting, caring relationship with Phillip by each team member when working with him. This helped calm Phillip. After each incident team members were consistent with the messages they were giving him.

This often involved the following restorative conversation:

1. Tell me what happened.
2. What went through your head?
3. Who has this affected?
4. How will you fix this?

This sequence helped Phillip reflect on his behaviour and take responsibility for it in a non-blaming manner.

"It was very challenging for the school but they were so good. We had to do it over and over and over with Phillip. He didn't get it in one." – *Georgia Jensen-Proctor, RTLB*

While Phillip was regularly ending up in Gina's office, he was also having regular one-on-one sessions with Georgia. This involved either working through a restorative thinking sequence or anger management activities from the Whitehouse/Pudney handbook, *A Volcano in My Tummy*. In addition, Georgia, not only an RTLB but also a registered psychologist, administered a general intelligence test with Phillip which confirmed that he was in the high/average range, verbally and non-verbally. Clearly there was plenty of potential to work with, potential that is now being realised through his enrolment in the one-day-a-week 'Gifted Kids Programme' (GKP) at Tamaki Intermediate.

Georgia also suspected that his attention problems in class might be related to an underlying auditory processing disorder so she arranged for Phillip to visit the audiology clinic at Auckland University's Tamaki Campus. This confirmed that he had auditory attention difficulties.

"This meant that the school had to be very clear in giving Phillip instructions and checking back with him that he had got the message correctly."

The person who had the most to do with Phillip on a day-to-day basis was his teacher, Sarah Gleeson. Following a restorative meeting with Phillip, his family, school (Gina and Sarah) and Georgia it was decided to put in an individual contract in the classroom. The daily contract focused on reducing Phillip's negative behaviours, such as swearing and put-downs of other children. Sarah administered the contract on a daily basis, signing each morning and afternoon if his behaviour was positive. An incentive (time alone on the computer) was built in as a reward for consistently good behaviour over a week.

The contract did not prove to be a magic bullet but it offered a practical strategy for dealing with his wildly erratic behaviour within the classroom. A calm but firm and fair approach was essential, says Sarah, who became very adept at seeing the triggers that might lead to angry outbursts.

When Phillip did fly into a rage, he would go to the cloakroom and then the office until he calmed down, says Sarah. He would also spend time in the school's 'peace room,' where key messages from the school's 'virtues' programme were reinforced.

Says Sarah: "I talked with the other children in the class about Phillip and what we had to do to try and help. We had to be a team – they were in on the process and that made a big difference."

In addition to the classroom contract, the school's other major strategy was the use of restorative practices to deal with conflict situations. Phillip's parents were involved in these meetings as well as Gina, Sarah and Georgia. The aim was to get Philip to reflect on his behaviour and to begin to see its impact on others and to be accountable for his actions.

"This was a new thing for Phillip," says Georgia. "It was not in his behavioural repertoire up to that point to think about these things or to think about what he could do to make things better.

"It was so important to get across to Phillip that we were not devaluing him as a person but that his behaviour was unacceptable.

Pictured above: Phillip with his parents, Mina (far left) and Nga; principal Gina Benade (rear left); and Georgia Jensen-Procter (rear right).

Like the sky tower I am big and tall.
Like a lion I can sometimes be ferocious.
Like a coconut I am brown and hard on the outside
and soft on the inside.
Like the colours yellow and black, at times
I can be mean and angry.
And at other times I can be happy and humorous.
Like a play-station, I play games.
Like a boulder, I am large and I am fast.
Like a Mustang, I am fast on-road and off-road.
Like a clown, I like to laugh.

– Phillip's Poem

It took a long time and involved many restorative meetings. It was very challenging for the school but they were so good. We had to do it over and over and over with Phillip. He didn't get it in one."

All those involved with managing Phillip's behaviour agree that it was a long, slow process with one step forward, one step back.

"It was a gradual change, says Georgia. "Over a long period some positive things started to happen. I noticed he walked taller, he didn't slouch. He was calmer and you would see a smile on his face.

"There were also some spontaneous things like coming to school and clearing up some broken glass that was lying around and was a danger to students. Perhaps most significantly he began to come and talk about the things that were upsetting him.

"At the centre of the transformation was a slow but steady building of trust. He could see that all these adults cared about him and were working together to help him be happier."

Today, just over a year later, Phillip is a different boy. He has won a place at Sacred Heart College for next year and has also been selected for the under-14s Auckland rugby trials. He hopes he might go places with his rugby talents or as a coach.

"I would like to go to university. I might even be a teacher one day," says Phillip. "I'm the best in the school at maths and I'm good at reading. I could teach kids who are like I was. They could learn from what happened to me."

Phillip's parents, Mina and Nga, are full of praise for the school's persistence in working with Phillip. It has been a long struggle but so worth it, says Mina.

"It was pretty stressful at first, I'd get phonecalls from the school week-in and week-out. It's tough having to come to the school all the time and see the principal. I told Phillip I'd been in the principal's office more often than when I was at school. I didn't like that but it was essential. The school had to have our support.

"Mrs Benade and the teachers at this school go the extra mile. Mrs Benade could have kicked him out anytime but she didn't want to give up. She is a lady who would do anything to help my son.

"His behaviour didn't improve to begin with. It went from bad to worse but it's been a great turn-around. I think the big thing is he now knows that people care about him."

For Gina Benade it's amazing to reflect on the change in Phillip.

"Today he was sitting in front of me in church and he was perfectly behaved, even going so far as to tell other children to keep quiet.

"It's been a huge learning experience for us. We were taking one step at a time and learning as we went. There was a little glimpse of hope every now and again. It's been so gratifying to know that it has worked. I almost can't believe it. It builds your confidence in dealing with this kind of situation."

Phillip is not a unique case, says Georgia.

"It's not uncommon. This is a socially distressed area. It's taken a concerted effort on the part of the school and a determination not to give up. And that's what it does take. There are no shortcuts." ■

A matter of PRIDE

A positive school-wide culture that teaches responsibility and respect is the key to behaviour management at Beckenham School.

Beckenham School sits in a leafy, park-like setting in the garden city of Christchurch. For the school's 440 pupils those trees have come to symbolise more than just play time. The school has chosen one to illustrate its values and vision for learning at the school.

Beside each limb of the illustrated tree is a letter of the acronym PRIDE, which stands for:

- **P**ositive habits of mind
- **R**ights and responsibilities
- **I**nformation skills
- **D**eep thinkers
- **E**nthusiastic learners.

The PRIDE symbol takes centre place in the school's signage, entranceway and literature. The thinking behind it ensures that the school keeps on top of any behaviour issues in a way that is planned, positive and proactive.

Four years ago the board and senior staff brainstormed the PRIDE vision. How could they ensure that the children would flourish as well as the trees in the nearby park? Literacy and numeracy skills were an obvious foundation but other qualities were seen as vital too. In particular, the school decided it needed to ensure children were able to recognise the attributes and attitudes they needed to develop if they were going to be successful.

Deputy principal Jacqui Pascoe is quick to point out that the school's main focus has been on developing the whole child and improving engagement and achievement. Any gains in behaviour have been a welcome corollary of this approach.

"We have put in place a lot of strength-based approaches to ensure the thinking skills and attitudes of our children align with their academic development. It's about looking at the whole child and the social and emotional aspect of that child's growth as being just as important as their academic side."

The school spends a lot of time teaching children positive habits of mind such as being organised, getting along with others and being confident, persistent and resilient. Once again, visual symbols are used to reinforce the message – in this case a series of colour-coded keys associated with each attribute.

"Every term we focus on a particular key," explains Jacqui. "This term it is being organised. It's a matter of including it in absolutely everything we do. So we promote the concept of being organised at assembly, in our newsletters and we get teachers to give children specific feedback to children in class about organisation and we get the students to set their own goals around organisation. Then we hand out awards to reinforce behaviour that captures good organisation or one of the other qualities."

Principal Nick Major holds up one of his 'Citizen of the Week' certificates and goes on to explain. "You can say 'Oh, our children are disorganised,' but children don't know how to be organised unless you teach them. It's the deliberate, specific teaching of those skills that's required. You can't assume they arrive with those skills."

"Schools have to have a very clear idea of what behaviours they want to change and shift." – *Nick Major, principal*

Above Deputy principal Jacqui Pascoe and principal Nick Major.

Below: Year 8s Peter Scriven and Alice Purves.

"The PRIDE programme is about keeping us motivated." – *Peter Scriven*

Jacqui adds, "A lot of children have a learned helplessness now. For example, it's quicker for parents to pack their bags so the children don't learn to be organised. So what we're trying to do is create independent thinkers and learners."

The same approach has been applied to the next letter of PRIDE, R, which stands for rights and responsibilities. Here the link to behaviour is more defined. The school's behaviour management plan is based on the concept of restorative practice and achieving a balance between rights and responsibilities. The aim is ensure that children are taught to be more thoughtful about their actions and made aware that every action has a consequence and affects others.

Jacqui says all staff members have been trained to respond to classroom or playground incidences using the language of restorative chat. Each teacher has a card with a series of prompts tailored to a variety of situations. The essence of the approach is one-to-one dialogue; there is no bawling people out in front of the whole class.

"For learning to happen the P and the R have got to be in place. It is those positive habits of mind and an awareness of their rights and responsibilities that enable our students to learn," observes Nick.

The concepts might seem abstract, but the school has kept things simple. There are just three rights – the right to learn, the right to feel and be safe and the right to be respected for being who you are.

The school has done whatever it takes to inculcate these values. One teacher has even put these messages into song form, which the children sing in assembly and in their classrooms. The result is a shared understanding among staff and students about how students should act and behave at the school.

Nick compares this leap in thinking with years gone by.

"In the past, all those children who never hooked into learning were forever the ones who were never organised or who weren't resilient or confident. They were the same children who engaged in behaviours that were destructive for learning. That's why teaching positive habits of mind and respect and responsibility are so important."

Jacqui says the whole approach matches the New Zealand Curriculum. "All of this is really about developing a thinking curriculum where we infuse deeper thinking throughout the school.

"We use any opportunity to mention it and promote the PRIDE ideas. When something happens that's the language we use," says Jacqui.

One of the most important aspects of behaviour management is ensuring consistency of approach. Beckenham staff spent time discussing and agreeing what would be the boundaries of acceptable behaviour at the school to ensure there was common understanding.

Nick supports this. "Schools have to have a very clear idea of what behaviours they want to change and shift."

Both Nick and Jacqui agree that the school's values and vision were essential touchstones during this exercise.

"We've done a lot of work on bullying. That's an ongoing challenge that you need to work on every day. Not just physical bullying but the put-downs because that's the language older children may be using. We find we only keep on top of that by talking about it all the time and following up every instance. It's an ongoing challenge," says Jacqui.

The school surveys students once a year and holds class meetings once a week to pick up instances of bullying. It also teaches each child what to do if they are being bullied – all part of the resiliency the school is looking to develop.

"They know they should tell someone if they are being bullied or if they see someone else being bullied. That's the culture here. Our latest surveys have shown that our children will say if they're being bullied. Then we follow up and work one-to-one with the children involved. We're very proactive and we recognised quite a while ago the power of frequent class meetings and giving students a voice."

The school's behaviour plan is reviewed annually and included in teacher-only day training so that new staff are brought up to speed. The response from staff has been positive.

"Everybody is on board. What we've been working hard to achieve is consistency in the way every teacher manages an incident. It's about revisiting your approach, talking about it. We've got to teach the teachers these skills to achieve consistency so the children aren't playing teachers off against each other. Our children aren't getting different messages from class to class," says Jacqui.

The school's systems and staff development ensure that when incidences do occur and parents are called in, there's a process to follow that is transparent, fair and equitable.

"No teacher would walk into a classroom without a plan of what they're doing. It's same with behaviour management – you need a contingency plan with specific steps for when something goes wrong."

"If we stop thinking and talking about these issues, so will the children. It's like a language everyone needs to learn and use."
– Jacqui Pascoe, deputy principal

The school has adopted one of the key principles of restorative practice – that the consequences link logically to a person's actions. For example, if a child is acting in an unsafe way in the playground, they will be restricted about where they can play in the playground. If they litter, they are made to pick up rubbish.

"The children can understand that. What we don't do is just give them 100 lines to write out."

The school also keeps a log of playground incidents and regularly checks to see if any worrying patterns or trends are emerging. This data is also useful for any follow-up discussions with children or parents.

"By documenting things, it means that when there are issues and we have to get parents in we are able to present evidence. It's not just hearsay. I think if parents can see that you're following these procedures and that everybody has rights, they accept it. These records become the basis for arbitration rather than people's personalities," notes Jacqui.

Nick stresses that the school's planning and procedures alone aren't a panacea.

"Designing these things doesn't remove the fact that incidents do occur from time to time. What I would say is that this approach is enabling us to keep on top of things."

Jacqui has noticed a culture change in the school.

"I can confidently say that if you look at the students who started with this programme a few years ago, they have been transformed. They are all turning into really thoughtful, caring children.

"Out of 440 students maybe only two haven't been part of this regime and they're the two who came from elsewhere and need individual management plans. They haven't had the benefit of being inculcated into this approach. Here we deliberately and specifically teach our children how to behave and we follow that up and we use the right language in doing so."

Nick adds, "This programme is not something being done to the children. It's something that they understand exists for their benefit. We've been working with the student council very effectively. They help us by doing roleplays in assembly and they talk to their classes about organisation, confidence and responsibilities. It's not just us, they're spreading the word too.

"Behaviour management at this school is not about firefighting, it's about imbuing the attributes and qualities that we want people to have anyway. What's at stake? A lot – potentially, disrupted learning, unsafe behaviours, an unhappy school and teachers who have to run around 'putting out fires.'"

It has been three years since Programme Achieve was introduced at Beckenham and progress has been encouraging.

"Shaping attitudes takes time and it's an evolving thing, but if you talk to our children you'll find that they are able to articulate the PRIDE vision. They understand what it means and that's always been our goal. These aren't just pieces of paper, they're a living breathing thing and our job is to sustain momentum. If we stop thinking and talking about these issues, so will the children. It's like a language everyone needs to learn and use," says Jacqui.

Year 8 students Peter Scriven and Alice Purves are great advertisements for the power of the PRIDE approach.

"We know we're role models and everyone is watching what we do. I think it does affect how the younger children behave. It's a good idea," says Alice.

Peter neatly summarises the change in culture. "The PRIDE programme is about keeping us motivated," says Peter. "It's about being rewarded for being good, rather than punishing being bad. It's a better way." ■

Great Expectations

A strong focus on setting and reinforcing expectations is a key feature of the behaviour management strategy that is delivering promising results at Dannevirke High School.

Dannevirke High School is situated on the eastward side of the Ruahine Range in the largest town in southern Hawkes Bay. It's the only secondary school in the rural servicing town and serves the needs of families from a broad socio-economic spectrum. Nearly a third of its 500 or so students are Māori.

Principal Mike Tribe has been principal at the school for 11 years and is enthusiastic about Effective Behavioural Support (EBS), a strategy introduced into the school in 2004. The school did not have a particular problem with discipline beyond the usual challenges, he recalls, but the pastoral care and discipline systems were mixed up and so much effort was going into trying to maintain the status quo rather than improving behaviour.

"We were looking for a way forward when Joe Smith, our assistant principal at the time, attended a conference in New Plymouth on student behaviour systems. At the conference he heard about EBS and it fitted in very well with what we were trying to do.

"We invited EBS facilitator Juliette Lewis to come and speak with the board and staff, and help us implement EBS throughout the school. At the heart of the system lay the setting and clarifying of behavioural expectations for everyone in the school – students and teachers.

"EBS marks a shift from traditional behaviour management with a clear focus on the 95 percent of students who are quite happy to behave well. The aim is to establish in very specific terms what we expect in terms of behaviour, and to get consistency across the whole school community. This means teaching behaviours instead of expecting that students just know what to do."

The introduction of EBS received strong support from staff, says Mike. To get things started, a group was set up comprising teachers, students, board members and local RTLBs to examine all the systems and relationships relating to behaviour in the school. Juliette observed the school in action and carried out a behavioural stock-take.

"This was quite a daunting thing to do; we had no idea what was going to come out of it. Juliette concluded that the situation overall was pretty sound so that was a good platform to work from.

"Her findings, however, did include a challenge for teachers. For example, some had to accept that they probably didn't speak to students as well as they could or weren't as punctual as they expected students to be.

"We then worked out exactly what we did expect in terms of behaviours around the school. This was done very comprehensively, spelling out the desired behaviours in different areas of the school and in different situations – for example, the classroom, corridors, the library, assemblies, common room, staffroom, admin, canteen and out in the community."

The effective communication of messages around these expectations has been critical to the success of EBS. Dannevirke High School has made big efforts to communicate these expectations creatively and thoroughly, and to keep reinforcing them over time.

"We teach children how to use a knife and fork but we don't necessarily teach them how to talk nicely to their mates." – *Mike Tribe, principal*

The school adopted the mantra of 'UNITED' to encapsulate the core ideas underpinning positive behaviour at the school:

Uniqueness
Never give up
Inner respect
Truthfulness
Encouragement
Dedication

These six concepts were then grouped into three pathways – respect your school and community, respect yourself and respect others. Once again these ideals were translated into practical, positive behaviours that are expected of all people in the school.

Many strategies are now in place to communicate EBS ideas with freshness and vigour in the school. Every second week at assembly, a drama group presents a short drama around an EBS idea or theme – for example, what it means to 'speak respectfully' or to 'listen to instructions first time.' Every Wednesday in period two, the classroom teacher focuses on a particular behavioural expectation for 10 minutes.

Posters setting out these expectations are prominently displayed around the school. Daily notices carry an 'expectation for the week.' A student EBS committee meets regularly to feed in a student perspective on positive behaviour. And a carnival day, with plenty of sports, music and fun activities, was held to launch and celebrate EBS. This event was very successful and the school plans to make it an annual affair.

"We came to realise that students didn't necessarily know what the desired behaviours were," says Mike Tribe. "We teach children how to use a knife and fork but we don't necessarily teach them how to talk nicely to their mates.

"We are not making the assumption they know, so we are teaching everyone – teachers and students – the same thing. Everybody has the same idea.

"The other key thing with EBS is staff involvement. We have the same expectations of staff as students. If we expect students to speak quietly in class, we expect the same of teachers. Be there on time is a rule for teachers as well as students. It's a great self-discipline for us all.

"And, of course, if students see teachers modelling positive behaviour, they model it themselves. That's what we have found. A great example is the use of cellphones. We have a rule that if you use it or it rings in class, you lose it. Well, we had a teacher's phone ring in class the other day. She was mortified but had the good sense to have her own phone confiscated and taken to the office."

Another key element of EBS is the data management system which goes with it. A system of 'greenies,' 'blueys' and 'pinkies' (feedback forms filled in by teachers) is in place to collect information on positive and negative student behaviour. This information is held in a centralised place and passed on to others as appropriate. Positive behaviour is publicly recognised in the school with a rewards system and a letter home to parents.

The data system allows us to chart student behaviour in all classes and see any patterns emerging, says Bruce Hanton, assistant principal with responsibility for pastoral care.

"This flow of information is the underpinning of the system," says Bruce. "Having accurate data gives us an overview of what's happening in the classrooms and enables us to act on it. It may simply mean a chat to find out what's going on or it may require more substantial action."

The original data management system (SWIS) that came with EBS has since been replaced with a student manager system which can capture positive behaviours and is better tailored to the school's needs, says Mike Tribe.

He agrees with Bruce that comprehensive data-gathering enables sharper, more focused interventions with students.

"We've always gathered data on students but now we have a more detailed, centralised database which we are continually updating. It's this information which triggers a response. When Bruce meets with the deans every week, at-risk students or those regularly misbehaving are discussed to find out what has been happening in the classroom. We monitor it pretty well."

Bruce is a firm advocate of the split between pastoral care and discipline at the school. Deans are responsible for pastoral care and discipline is handled by heads of department and at senior leadership level if required, says Bruce.

"This approach means a lot of students will go to their deans with their concerns. They know they'll get support, not discipline.

"It also means that students get to choose how they wish to be managed. They can be part of the pastoral care system or if they are not making it work at dean level, it goes to SLT and they have to take responsibility for their actions. Students will work very hard to keep away from the discipline system and get back into the support system.

"I have students coming to me, even when something has seriously gone wrong and what they want is help, not punishment. At the same time there are lines in the sand they can't cross and they know that. Seriously disruptive behaviour is dealt with immediately."

Joel Perry is a Year 13 student and chairman of the EBS committee. He considers his involvement with EBS a highlight of his time at school.

"I've loved being involved with EBS. I've put a lot of time into it and got a lot out of it."

According to Joel, EBS works because it is more about positive behaviour than discipline.

"It thrives on positive behaviour and it gives students a voice. We are constantly surveying students to get their ideas and those ideas are put into action. We work closely with staff and that's why it's successful."

And judging by the raw statistics, it certainly is successful.

Says Mike Tribe: "We haven't had a drug incident in the school resulting in a suspension since 2006. And make no mistake, Dannevirke is a town with endemic drug use.

"We have reduced our truancy rate by 50 percent in the last two years. We now have about eight chronic truants. Three years ago we probably had around 40. And our suspension numbers have been steadily decreasing.

"Overall EBS has made the school a nicer place. Our students weren't particularly bad but there's always room for improvement. And the interesting thing is we are not dealing with the difficult cases – the five percent – anywhere near as much as we once did. By making sure that students know what is expected of them, the high-level stuff is ceasing to exist." ■

Effective Behaviour Support (EBS)

EBS creates a positive school environment, in which the staff recognises and consistently abides by the same set of behavioural expectations as students. It is designed to improve the learning environment by teaching critical skills that help students to become competent, responsible and caring. It educates all staff to respond to problem behaviours in logical, proactive and consistent ways. The data system ensures that 'at-risk' students are identified early so that families, students and teachers can work together to problem-solve and develop appropriate support plans.

EBS – six major components

- An agreed and common approach to discipline, and a positive statement of purpose.
- A small number of positively stated behavioural expectations for all students and staff.
- Procedures for teaching these expectations to students.
- A continuum of procedures for encouraging and maintaining these expectations.
- A continuum for discouraging rule-violating behaviour.
- Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the discipline system on a regular and frequent basis.

"[EBS] thrives on positive behaviour and it gives students a voice." – *Joel Perry, Year 13 student and chairman of the EBS committee*

Left: Year 13 Joel Perry: EBS has been a highlight of his time at school.

Below: Dannevirke High students try their hand at some Shakespeare.

A Focus on Achievement

Drug and alcohol abuse is something all New Zealand communities have to confront. But how should schools deal with this issue? Wanganui High School has developed guidance and pastoral care systems that focus on learning and strike a balance between accountability and support.

Principal Warwick Maguire says the way his school approaches alcohol and drug incidents has changed markedly during the 14 years he has been in charge. In the mid 1990s the board's standard response to the few drug-related incidents that arose used to be expulsion. But over time there has been a growing realisation that these issues are complex and the causes often go beyond the individual student.

"It's not just about the child experimenting with these things," notes Warwick. "The big difficulty is where we have kids from families where drug use is totally normalised. It's what their parents and grandparents do. What we have to do is point out to parents and students the impact it's going to have on the young person's life – for example, they won't be able to be a builder or flight attendant or travel to America. If you can make it real and show these people the difference it will make to their lives, they're more likely to want to make more positive choices."

Warwick says the board now takes these wider family issues into consideration so that one bad choice doesn't ruin the rest of a young person's life.

"The board has become much cleverer at identifying the issues the child is facing and the potential for change, while balancing the message they are sending to the rest of the school. They can still act in a way that has a huge impact on the family and brings it home to them, but if we see they value their place at the school,

From left: Principal Warwick Maguire; guidance counsellor Diane Calman; and deputy principal Kevin Shore.

"Our task is to keep every student on a positive pathway so that they have some real choices when they leave school."
– Warwick Maguire, principal

the board will let them put in place steps that enable them to successfully return to school."

It is important to note that Wanganui High School does not have major drug and alcohol issues. In the last two years there have only been a handful of such incidents. However, the school realises there is no room for complacency.

"Drugs and alcohol are issues all schools have to consider," says Warwick. "Is it more of an issue at this school? No. We are confident there is not a particular drug problem at this school. However, we think it may be more of an issue in Wanganui than other areas of the country.

"Outside of school, these issues do exist and therefore they can have a major impact on the students' success at the school – whether these kids are going to reach their potential or not. That's what we respond to. Our task is to keep every student on a positive pathway so that they have some real choices when they leave school."

With this goal in mind, the school has gone to great lengths in recent years to really strengthen its counselling and pastoral care systems.

The starting point, says Warwick, is establishing the right school culture and communicating the school's expectations to students and parents. "For example, we sent a letter out to all parents about alcohol at our school ball. This year we had 350 there and there wasn't one alcoholic breath coming through that door. They just know that at this school, we don't.

"It's all about the school culture you create. Whatever their external influences or circumstances are, we send a strong message to our students that at our school everyone is valued and that achievement is the goal for everyone. We constantly reinforce that message in assemblies, form time, teaching and lots of other mechanisms."

This leads on to Warwick's main insight – that discipline is no longer just a guidance issue, it's a learning and achievement issue.

"We see no distinction between guidance, discipline and teaching. The change in this school over the last 10 years, in my opinion, has been a shift from a pure guidance focus – we'll look after you and take good care of you with no particular goal in mind – to an achievement focus. The reason we are providing this care and guidance is because we know you have to get the qualifications that will enable you to take your next step. That's why we now have pathways in this school for whatever a child might want to be. If academia is not your way, we have other pathways here."

This approach is working well and the school's qualifications and retention rates are higher than the national average, notes Warwick.

"We're here to enable the kids to achieve. That's given all our guidance activities more focus and more meaning for the students and parents who take part in them," he says.

This focus on achievement has huge implications for how a school handles drug and alcohol incidents. Diane Calman, who has overseen the school's guidance programme since 2000, explains the difference it has made to her work.

"I was dealing with this boy who had some significant issues around drugs. He was brought before the board, and the board said, 'We're happy to have you back, but drugs cannot be part of your life.' He was required to come and see me and came in with this mother so we could pursue those changes in his life. We worked together and looked at his lifestyle. He was heading towards failure but we got him back on track and he scraped through and got a qualification. That's the success. If he'd been left to his own devices at the time he would have left school – he thought everyone was against him. But by working with him, he realised that we weren't against him, we were just against the things that were preventing him from achieving his goals. He saw that and he grew with that. That's just one example and there have been more."

A host of other measures are also in place to support students who may have alcohol or drug issues. The school has the services of a drug and alcohol counsellor, who works at the school one day a week. This move acknowledges that drug and alcohol abuse is a serious health issue requiring appropriate professional training and intervention.

A mentoring system has also been established to help at-risk students. Teacher mentors already work with at-risk students and senior students are now being trained and supported to take on similar roles. This year, Year 12 student Kehuoterangi (Kehu) Mathews has been working with at-risk Year 9 students.

"I look at where they are struggling, help work out some goals and then help them achieve those goals. It's about helping them realise that school is a good place and it wants to help them achieve their goals. Most of the students I've worked with are pretty pleased with the programme. I've had some good feedback – they're getting better grades and comments from teachers. I think it helps them to have someone they can relate to.

"This school works hard to get pathways for everyone," says Kehu. "I had one young guy who didn't like school, thought his teachers were picking on him, but after working with him for a couple of months his attitude improved. This programme is making a difference."

All this means students who may have once have left the school are now getting support they need to stay and achieve.

Comments Diane Calman: "It is about recognising that a normal part of student development is pushing the boundaries. So we factor it in and we're not surprised, for example, that Year 10 creates more issues than others. It always did. That's the way of the world and it simply means you need to put in place more support systems for Year 10. That commitment to whole-school guidance is essential.

"Any school is a system and guidance counselling needs to be firmly embedded within that system. It can't just be there on paper or a little bit here and there. The students need to see that help is always available. It's about developing a collective responsibility, rather than just wanting to get rid of a problem. One of the keys is that the kids are always treated with respect and dignity. We tell them, 'What you've done is not ok, but that doesn't mean you're not an ok person.' That message is hugely powerful in allowing for change in people's lives."

Deputy principal Kevin Shore oversees the pastoral care system. He says Wanganui High's efforts will always be a work in progress, where new ideas are explored and existing systems reviewed. A new values programme has been put in place in the junior school to impart eight key values over two years. The school is also boosting extracurricular activities in sport, performing arts, Māori and Pacific culture so that more students are busy and engaged in their spare time. And now the school is considering starting a chaplaincy and holding more regular parents meetings around

"We're here to enable the kids to achieve. That's given all our guidance activities more focus and more meaning for the students and parents who take part in them."
– Warwick Maguire, principal

pastoral care issues. He says issues affecting learning are not left to develop into serious problems – a system of demerit points triggers pastoral care and mentoring well before trouble sets in.

"I'd like to be able to tell you that our success in this area is all down to this or that, but I can't do that. However, what all our initiatives do have in common is that we want our students to succeed. We send a strong message to all our students that it does matter what they do out there, that they will be held accountable for their actions, that if you do something wrong, it will have implications for your future life and everyone in your life. Part of putting things right is achieving an understanding of that.

"To a large degree, we've been able to keep the drug and alcohol issues we have in our community out of our school. The fact that we're looking at these issues from an education point of view is important. It's also vital to celebrate the fact that it is ok to be a good student. That being good doesn't mean you can't have fun. Our society is pushing kids to grow up so quickly. This environment is about trying to hold out for a period of time so they can just enjoy being kids."

Diane sums up the school's approach. "We've made a concerted effort to create a whole-of-school guidance system that everyone is part of. There's a real commitment throughout the school to look at the whole development of the young person and address any issues that get in the way of achieving academic excellence." ■

Back on Track
One Student's Story

"First, I got into trouble drinking. I came to school drunk and was stood down for three days. Then me and a few friends got caught smoking weed in the toilets. I was suspended for a month. I've had to see the drug and alcohol counsellor since then and the Police came round and talked to me. One of the conditions of me coming back was seeing the counsellor and having a drug test every month to show the school I was 'clean.'

"The counsellor has helped me a lot. I see him every week. He's helping me get off the drugs and fix my life. I'm trying to get a building apprenticeship, but the drugs would ruin my chances of that. Now I'm going to do a Gateway programme, have you heard about that? I get to do work experience with a builder while I'm still at school and at the end it'll help me get an apprenticeship. That's the goal now. Going there has helped me a lot. It's got me off the drugs, simple as that.

"Me and my Mum were also fighting heaps and we also went to see the normal counsellor here. That's helped me and Mum sort out stuff too.

"Schools have to be realistic. There are always people out there in the community into drugs. There's nothing the school could've done to stop it happening. It's about how you handle it. What was the best thing the school did? They let me come back. They got me counselling. They helped me sort out my anger problems. I've wanted to be a builder since I was little, now I'm working towards it."

Wanganui High School Year 10 student

No-one Succeeds Alone

Deputy principal Pat Tetley chats with students at Tangaroa College

"There's a clear ethos in this school that we deal with people decently. So the interactions teachers have with students who have transgressed are still very reasonable. We use restorative practices when appropriate. The point is they are conversations about learning. The focus comes back to learning." – *Pat Tetley, deputy principal*

Tangaroa College has worked hard to create a genuine community environment with a strong support network for learners so that teachers are free to focus on student learning and achievement.

Situated in the heart of Otara, South Auckland, Tangaroa College has around 1,100 students, 85 percent of whom are Pasifika and most of the rest are Māori. It is a community which experiences a lot of adversity, says principal Ngaire Ashmore.

"This local community has had a battering. It's a place where things don't always go well and kids can come to school a bit jaded. They need to know that we want them to be here and we are going to do all we can to help them be successful."

Our parents have high expectations of what their children can achieve and look to the school to help make it happen, says Ngaire.

"Lots of them are migrants and they have come here specifically to give their children a better education and a chance at a better way of life. It's our job to respond to the high aspirations they have for their children.

"Tangaroa College is all about creating confident learners who are capable and motivated to go on to tertiary education and training. We are really challenged to achieve that for our community and for our students.

"This positive focus on learning has a decisive impact on behavioural issues," says Ngaire. "Behaviour is a symptom of other things that are happening. If students are learning successfully, if they are feeling connected, if they know that people care, they are less likely to behave in ways that jeopardise their opportunities to be part of that."

Tangaroa College has a number of measures in place to promote effective learning and establish strong relationships with students. A key one is a tutor programme designed to support students in their personal growth and development. A tutor is assigned to each class and meets with students for 30 minutes a day. The focus is on areas such as goal-setting, behaviour, personal wellbeing and time management.

"The role of the tutor is very different to that of a form teacher," says Ngaire. "It's not about reading notices, it's about relationship-building. The emphasis is on helping students to connect to why they are here at the school and where they are heading in the future.

"It's so important to get students to feel part of the school, to feel that they have a place here that is valued, and every day somebody is going to talk to them about how much they are valued.

"We want the tutor to be a significant adult in the life of the students and a point of contact for the parents. We came to realise that students are expert at separating out parts of their life and their education can suffer from that. The tutor is well placed to break down the barriers and take a real ongoing interest in how students are going with their learning. Tutors also make contact with parents as and when required."

The school has made a big effort to build links with parents and the local community. Encouraging parental contact with the school has been a major factor in encouraging learning and dealing with behavioural issues.

Parents are invited to special assemblies for recognising achievement and in Years 11, 12 and 13 a three-way meeting is held between students, parents and teachers to discuss subject options and possible future career directions.

Says Ngaire: "I think one of the most significant developments has been the conversations that we have with parents, and the focus of these is on learning, not bad behaviour. We encourage contact with parents about things that are going well. It's not just a case of making contact when there are problems."

"Even when deans and DPs meet with parents because things are not going well, we still look at achievement. We look at the positives. So the conversation is around achieving and supporting, rather than about bad behaviour and 'what are you going to do about it?'"

Deputy principal Pat Tetley believes that the calibre of relationships which the school has with students is the circuit-breaker when it comes to dealing with bad behaviour. No one strategy or initiative is the magic bullet.

"There's a clear ethos in this school that we deal with people decently," says Pat. "So the interactions teachers have with students who have transgressed are still very reasonable. We use restorative practices when appropriate. The point is they are conversations about learning. The focus comes back to learning."

Pat acknowledges that this is a shift from a more traditional punitive approach, which relies less on conversations and more on imposing penalties.

"That's not how it works here," says Pat. "Teachers are a part of the solution. Behaviour management is not about power, it's about relationships. It's a simple thing – if students know you care about them, they are going to be fine. You can be strict, you might even be grumpy but if students know that underneath it all you care about them, that makes all the difference.

"We're more interested in finding a solution together. I suspect that's why we are getting much better buy-in from family and whānau. When parents come to the school – and we involve them a lot – they are not experiencing that huge power differential. It's much more about how we are going to move forward together.

"If you treat people decently, you have a 95 percent chance you'll be treated decently back. If you treat people poorly, you probably have a 50 percent chance you'll be treated well back."

The school has done away with the old detention system, which was self-defeating, says Ngaire.

"When I started here 10 years ago we had a detention system in place and the DPs ran it. When it was your turn, you cringed because you had the great list of those on detention and you went to the room and only 10 turned up. You spent a lot of your time the next day rounding up those who didn't turn up and then what? More detentions! So we decided no more detentions."

"We've replaced it with learning conversations," continues Pat. "Students are still accountable, in fact they are more accountable. They have learning conversations with their teachers and deans. If they misbehave, they will be sent to the DP."

Pat is quick to refute any idea that it's a soft approach at Tangaroa. It's not soft but it is a personal, individualised approach and it does require patience.

"When students transgress here, it will be dealt with seriously. We do have stand-downs and we do have the odd suspension and we will keep doing that. When you get to the end of your rope, you have to do that."

It's very important to support teachers, says Ngaire, who admits that a more personal, student-focused approach can be a challenge for some teachers, at least initially.

Tangaroa College principal, Ngaire Ashmore, talks with a senior student.

"If students are learning successfully, if they are feeling connected, if they know that people care, they are less likely to behave in ways that jeopardise their opportunities to be part of that." – *Ngaire Ashmore, principal*

"It can be threatening for teachers but the benefits far outweigh the drawbacks. It's our job to work closely with teachers and support them."

Tangaroa College has found restorative conferencing a very useful tool for dealing with major behavioural issues. Restorative conferences involve the dean, student, parents and other affected parties as required. Problems are dealt with openly and honestly with the focus on repairing relationships.

"We have had very positive outcomes from these sessions," says Pat. "The power of it lies in the honesty that it demands and in the engagement of parents. Parents can see that their son or daughter's transgression is being dealt with seriously and fairly, and there's an outcome that's acceptable.

"Restorative conferencing provides a positive context for dealing with issues. It really does work. It reflects a more general philosophy at the school that says that anything that happens is an opportunity for learning. So when a student makes a mistake, that's an opportunity for learning."

There are other initiatives at Tangaroa College that have a very positive influence on the school climate and strengthen links with the local community.

"We have two people employed full time in a student support/youth worker role," says Ngaire. "They play a huge role in supporting teachers and students. They are from the local community and the community has a lot of confidence in them.

"Our student support staff build up trust with the students, they visit homes and they make parents very welcome here. They are also often the first to know if there are any problems or potential problems. These people have a very special role and contribute hugely to the sense of belonging in the school."

Tangaroa College is also part of the 'cops in schools' pilot and there is a health centre in place at the school providing students with free health services. The college also runs its own alternative education programme and teen parent unit.

Says Ngaire: "A number of our students come to school with issues that are not about their learning, but have an effect on their learning. If we want tutors and teachers to focus on the learning, we must have people and mechanisms in place to deal with the other issues. We've made a pretty comprehensive attempt at Tangaroa College to do that. "

A wide range of academic courses, work skill programmes, learning experiences and activities are available at Tangaroa College. A comprehensive career education programme is in place to ensure that all students have clear employment and career pathways when they leave school. The timetable is arranged to allow students maximum choice in their subject selection.

"We are a school with high expectations," says Ngaire. "Our approach to behaviour management is not soft or woolly. It's purposeful. We don't have a parent community that is banging the door down with their demands and expectations. They have high expectations but they trust us to deliver on them. That's the difference."

And while there is always room for improvement, it's an approach that is definitely working, say Pat and Ngaire. In 2007, Tangaroa College's Level 3 NCEA results were above the national average. The numbers of students achieving National Certificates at all three levels is increasing each year. And on the behaviour front, the school has seen a marked reduction in the number of suspensions, from 14 in 2006 to five in 2007.

"We know what we are doing is effective because of the rising achievement in the school and the decline in suspensions and stand-downs," says Pat. "But there's also just the feel of the place and the sense of purposefulness as you walk around the school. I would also see the increasing number of parents who are engaged with the school as very significant. When the parents are confident and involved, you know the school is working for their children."

Tangaroa College's school prospectus sums up the partnership approach which the school sees as critical to managing behaviour and achieving a positive learning environment.

"No one succeeds alone. We learn and grow thanks to the skills, knowledge, support and aroha of others – teachers, friends, parents and community. We believe that by working together and helping each other, we all have the chance to grow and be the best we can." ■

THE TURNING POINT

What do a dog, a horse and a recycling shed all have in common? They have each played in role in the amazing transformation of a troubled Invercargill youngster.

Last year was a turning point in Year 6, Newfield Park School's Shane King's life. It began in familiar enough fashion – Shane was struggling academically, disruptive in class and given to angry outbursts two or three times a week. These mood swings were so volatile that staff found him a handful.

Principal Paul Ellis remembers, "Shane had major learning deficits and behavioural problems, and previous interventions had had limited success. If he felt something wasn't right, he'd react very quickly with extreme behaviour. It was terrible. In a couple of cases when he really got angry he'd throw things round the room. And he's a large boy. I've had to restrain him with the help of others on several occasions."

Those memories are still vivid for Shane's classroom teacher, Sonya Carey. "Shane had had challenging behaviours all the way through school. As a Year 5 and 6 he would pick up desks and throw them, and target and assault other children who he felt had wronged him in some way. In the classroom he had low levels of literacy and maths achievement because he wasn't engaged and he couldn't control his emotions. He'd go from neutral to full-on aggression in five minutes. Sometimes it took days for him to cool down."

Shane's days at Newfield Park looked numbered, and sure enough, midway through last year, even after making some progress in his behaviour, he still faced exclusion by the board. His fate look sealed. After all, the board had the safety of the other students, not to mention staff, to consider.

But that's not how this story played out. Instead of excluding him, the school came to his aid, calling in whatever outside help was needed to address Shane's needs. This sent Shane a surprising and powerful message – the school was on his side and would do whatever it took to keep him.

The first person to speak in his favour at that meeting was his teacher, Sonya. "I still saw this child as part of our classroom. We had to find a solution that would allow him to participate. To me he was just a kid who had special needs and they happened to be behavioural. That's the challenge in all this. You have to believe kids like this are part of your team. It's a matter of valuing someone and seeking the right support. Everyone has the right to be here and everyone deserves to be valued and respected no matter how they behave. Once you've got that mindset then you're open to whatever professional support is offered."

A condition of the board's decision to keep Shane at school was that a safety plan be drawn up and implemented immediately. That job fell to Rose Brown, a psychologist with the local Special Education service. She'd already spent time talking to Shane and analysing his behaviour.

"The basis of our work is that all behaviour has meaning. People do something because it serves a purpose – they get something from it or communicate something by their actions. If you can't change what they get out of it then they'll keep doing it," she explains.

While she completed that analysis a support person was put into the classroom for a couple of hours, intermittently during the day, to support Shane at the times of greatest risk of behaviour outbursts. This bought time and enabled the school to put in place a plan of action that was proactive and innovative.

"Shane's lack of engagement in learning was largely about anxiety," says Rose. "So the teachers and I agreed to modify the classroom programme and add in some other things for him to do that would provide a high level of success with a high level of support. Shane was vulnerable to failure. We wanted to reduce those triggers that sent him into orbit. Our plan was about building his strength and resilience. You had to change his belief in himself so that when he was in class he would be confident enough to get engaged in learning."

Shane was enrolled in a Riding for the Disabled Programme, a challenge he relished. It was an inspired move. Shane loved animals – his dog Skye was his favourite companion.

Meanwhile, an occupational therapist assessed Shane's coordination difficulties and developed a programme to enhance his fine motor skills and strength in his upper limbs. His handwriting and posture dramatically improved as a result.

Shane was also given the skills to identify and manage his own behaviour. Over time, he was taught to evaluate his anger on a five-point scale drawn in the shape of a thermometer. When he reached his threshold he would remove himself from the class, leaving a special card on his desk to signify he'd done so.

Where did he head? The recycling shed. That's where Shane worked with the school's caretaker, breaking up cardboard boxes as part of the school's recycling efforts. It was another smart strategy, for recycling was the one school activity where Shane showed leadership qualities. The caretaker's unassuming manner and the physical exertion of demolishing boxes worked a treat. Shane calmed down and the number of exits from class gradually began to reduce as the year wore on.

"We knew that if he reached a certain point, the chances of him not having an incident were low. He, the staff and I worked out what the scale was for him. Over time, he and the teachers got better at recognising the warning signs. We worked really hard

"I still saw this child as part of our classroom. We had to find a solution that would allow him to participate."
– Sonya Carey, teacher

"People came to realise that all the kids were our responsibility, not just some." – *Keith Pyne, board, pictured with principal Paul Ellis (far left)*

to get him to exit himself. He found it difficult at first, but he would go if a teacher asked him to. There was a very structured approach to crisis management that Shane was part of developing and monitoring," says Rose.

A host of other measures were rolled out too. Shane's writing and reading programmes were redesigned. He was assessed by a speech-language therapist from Special Education and provided with a programme to help to improve his communication difficulties. His mum provided a cellphone, held in the school office, so Shane could text or ring his mother whenever he felt anxious. Activities were timed to coincide with what had been key crisis points in the past – for example, morning interval.

"We took it step by step. The result was increasing engagement and application in the classroom and hugely increased confidence. By the end of the year he was willing to take risks and have a go at a lot of different things," says Rose.

The key to success was that the school implemented a comprehensive plan that focused on improving learning and increasing skill levels, and thereby reducing inappropriate behaviour.

"You can't separate learning from behaviour. We used the teacher aide time we had to work on learning and we used learning as a vehicle to change his behaviour. We also worked on the premise that we don't stop a behaviour from happening, we replace the behaviour with something more appropriate. For example, if you stop someone hitting, they're likely do something else, because you haven't addressed the problem. If you give someone something appropriate to do with their hands then the hitting stops by default," says Rose.

Shane's journey was no overnight success. It took a year and there were plenty of 'potholes' along the road. But despite those reversals, the team around him never gave up. And, crucially, Shane felt part of that team. He and Rose met weekly and Shane's feedback and ideas informed the next step. Rose and her team also regularly reviewed progress and adapted their actions accordingly. Flexibility of approach was essential.

"For me, it's really important that you do things *with* kids, not *to* them," says Rose. "We made sure Shane had a voice in all this. Our role was to help him put his behaviour into perspective. One of the things about these kids is that they often define themselves by one bad event rather than the many positive things that have happened that week. Shane needed to realise how far he was progressing. One negative event does not make you a bad person. In the debrief after an incident we'd ask, 'What did you learn from this, did you manage it the way you needed to, did you follow the plan?' We tried to put the incidents in context, to focus on the good choices he made and discussed what he might do differently next time something went wrong."

None of this would have worked without the involvement of Shane's mum, Eve. She welcomed the school's support.

"The teachers, the principal and the board of trustees here were all willing to help. It made my whole life easier, because Shane was having problems at home too, but thanks to their help he's learnt to manage himself. Before, he wouldn't come home and tell me what had gone wrong. Now he could tell me what had happened. He could understand what was happening. That put him much more in control and made him feel better about himself. It's been

a big learning curve for Shane. He's had to come out of himself."

Eve pulls out a folder of materials to show the progress Shane has made and the tools he has used to get there. There are management charts, debrief forms, weekly timetables and evidence of a host of other activity sheets. Shane talks us through the details.

"This shows you how cross you are so I know when I get angry, I need to stop and go somewhere else," he says pointing to the thermometer. "The arrow is 'go'. That's when I went to recycling," he says.

His mother beams – together they've made it through. "My message to other parents is don't be afraid to ask for help. That help makes a major difference. There's no quick remedy. You've got to keep at it and at it," she says.

That patience was rewarded when one of the defining moments in Shane's life became a symbol of just how far he'd come. His beloved German short-haired pointer Skye went missing only to turn up at the school a few days later badly hurt after being hit by a car. Skye died. Shane was heartbroken but, tellingly, his classmates rallied around him and helped him overcome his grief. He was no longer an outsider. The class wrote stories about Skye and their own pets, and Shane openly shared his emotions in his writing which had come on in leaps and bounds by then.

"The school had given him that sense of belonging," remembers his teacher Sonya. "The whole class was there for him, and this kid who had such difficulty identifying his emotions learned to manage his way through the whole grief process and deal with his feelings. What we saw was this guy's learning turn around, not just his behaviour. Shane went up three or four years in reading age. He turned out to be a very capable mathematician. Skye's death was a catalyst for his re-engagement in learning because at the heart of his non-achievement was a sense of not belonging. As soon as he belonged, his learning took off."

Rose sums up Shane's journey. "Prior to this Shane was completely disengaged from school. Now he's at high school and he's confident enough to look you in the eye. He had capabilities and that's the thing we nurtured – we worked on his strengths and his resilience with a programme matched to his needs. It's not about rewarding bad behaviour, it's about saying, 'hey, this isn't working, we need leeway here to look at some alternatives,'" she concludes.

"We worked on his strengths and his resilience with a programme matched to his needs." – *Rose Brown, psychologist, Special Education service*

It could so easily have been different.

"At any stage in a two-year period there were opportunities when this school could have suspended and excluded Shane," says principal Paul Ellis. "I take my hat off to the board. It would've been so easy to kick him out."

Keith Pyne was the board chair at the time. He saw a real shift in attitude among some of his fellow board members.

"The board's initial view was that we had 300 other kids to look after. We had to look after the majority. But people came to realise that all the kids were our responsibility, not just some. Special Education, Shane's teacher and his parent also provided a commitment to do something to solve the problem, so we let him stay on the condition he received the help and expertise to make a difference. That plan gave us confidence and the result has been very positive. My advice to other boards is that you've got to be very calm and open-minded, and make sure you're doing something new because by the time it reaches you, a lot of things have probably already been tried. You need to get other agencies involved and remember that whatever you do to help is going to advantage the school." ■

SUCCESS GOES CLUSTER-WIDE

When Garry de Thierry became principal of Rotorua Intermediate five years ago, he'd sometimes look out his window and see as many as 20 or 30 students picking up paper.

"There was a real focus on the punitive aftermath of an incident, but nothing was really happening to try to resolve the actual problem. And anything that was happening was lumped on the counsellor or the DP (deputy principal)."

Garry was concerned the school was not teaching students enough of the skills that would enable them to take responsibility for their behaviour or to resolve situations themselves.

Garry believes teaching such skills not only helps create a better learning environment in a school, but provides essential social skills that students will need throughout their lives to help them function well at home and in the workplace.

Conflict and disagreement are a normal part of relationships, he says. "The hardest part is always finding the words that enable a person to repair any damage and restore a relationship."

Rotorua Intermediate is an inner-city decile 5 school with a roll of 720. It has a mix of children from different backgrounds. An increasing number are streetwise, they know about gangs and P and violent video games, says Garry. The school has its share of challenges in the way most New Zealand schools do.

When the local RTLB (Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour) team organised a three-day restorative practice workshop in May 2007 for the 15 schools that comprise the Rotorua Central Cluster – one intermediate, one Year 7 to 13 school, two secondaries and 11 primaries – Garry was quick to sign up. The workshop was run by the highly regarded Australian restorative practice expert Margaret Thorsborne.

Garry also sent the school's two counsellors. The school has since sent three more staff to the three-day workshop, which trains staff to become fully fledged facilitators.

Eight schools sent staff to that initial workshop, however it is Rotorua Intermediate that now leads the cluster with its example of how comprehensively it has embraced restorative practice. Not only is it reaping good dividends with fewer exclusions and a more positive school culture, it's also providing a good working model for other cluster schools.

Erika Locke, the RTLB based at the school, attributes Rotorua Intermediate's progress to the fact the principal himself attended the workshop and became a trained facilitator. Garry gained a very practical understanding. He saw that this approach had the capacity to transform the way his school community could respond to wrongdoing and, at the same time, teach concepts of accountability, responsibility and empathy.

Rotorua Intermediate is now benefiting as other cluster schools start adopting the restorative approach. Students arriving from contributing cluster schools know what it's about and what to expect.

The growing interest cluster-wide is thanks to the high level of support provided by the RTLB team, whose members, Erika, Erna Cullen, Te Amokura Gaffey, Angela Quaiffe, Roslyn Hamlyn, Debbie Roberts and Christina Phillips, are strong advocates.

"For teachers, this involves changing mindsets and the language we use. The focus has to move away from the punishment to restoring relationships."
– Garry de Thierry, principal

While six of the seven-member RTLB team have undertaken the three-day training to become facilitators (the seventh will train this year), Erika has also completed papers toward the Diploma in Restorative Practices in Education through Waikato University.

"In terms of working with challenging behaviour and troubled classrooms, the restorative pathway offers more hope than anything else I've worked with," says Erika.

Erna adds: "I really believe this has the potential to reduce negativity and create a culture of care in a school. It has the power to work regardless of a school's decile or social culture."

The RTLB Māori team member, Te Amokura, in consultation with Tangata Whenua, has translated 'restorative chat cards' for use in local kura kaupapa, immersion and bilingual units.

Two Rotorua Girls' High School staff, who went through facilitator training, believe restorative concepts also marry very well with the values and principles of the Kotahitanga programme offered at their school. It's also a perfect fit with some of the key competencies identified in the new curriculum.

Erika and Erna caution that some of the cluster schools are still tentative about such a significant shift in thinking. However, the RTLB team is on hand to offer advice and support: RTLBs have now led sessions on restorative thinking in 10 of the 15 cluster schools and followed up with training on practical steps those schools can take. Eight schools have trained facilitators, while RTLBs are also available to facilitate conferences.

The team provides more tailored support to staff who've attended the three-day facilitator training. The RTLBs developed an ongoing network of support through email and, as Margaret Thorsborne was also part of the network, feedback was immediate and of a professional quality. RTLBs also hosted a back-up training day with Margaret for facilitators in August 2008.

Garry says the biggest issue in introducing restorative practice is that it requires people to believe in it. "For teachers, this involves changing mindsets and the language we use. The focus has to move away from the punishment to restoring relationships."

When the school began to look at introducing the changes it ensured all stakeholders were kept informed of what was happening and why.

Some teachers were initially sceptical, says Garry. "It represented a major shift in thinking and they had to believe it would work for it to work. Some of them had started their careers when strapping was seen as the way to fix problems."

Teachers became more receptive with information, training and ongoing RTLB support – and as they saw for themselves how powerful the restorative approach could be. They could also see how restorative processes underpinned the school's values: having respect for oneself, respect for others and taking responsibility for one's actions.

The hallmarks of a restorative school are the use of non-judgemental language and a greater respect in the way all people within the school treat each other.

In terms of addressing behaviour, restorative practice ranges from 'restorative chats', that aim to repair relationships when minor incidents have occurred between individuals or even within classroom groups, to a more formal restorative conference, referred to as a 'full monty', which is run by a trained facilitator.

"I really believe this has the potential to reduce negativity and create a culture of care in a school. It has the power to work, regardless of a school's decile or social culture."

– Erna Cullen (right), Rotorua Central Cluster RTLB, pictured with Erika Locke, RTLB

At Rotorua Intermediate, restorative chats occur daily while full-on conferences take place, on average, once a fortnight and last about an hour.

Chats follow a set question line and chat cards are usually used to guide the conversation. Erika says some classroom teachers find this tricky at first. "It feels artificial because it seems like a script but once they get more familiar with it, it becomes more natural."

The 'why' question is never asked. When there's an incident, the restorative language questions are likely to be: "What has happened here…? What were you thinking when you did this…? Did you do the right thing or the wrong thing…? Who has been affected…? What do you think you can do to put things right…? What can I do to help you…?

Formal conferences usually involve the wrongdoer, the person harmed, if there is one, parents, a board member and the facilitator. The classroom teacher attends so they know first-hand what has taken place.

Each participant is briefed separately on what will take place: the language that will be used, the seating, the order of speaking – everything is carefully planned to ensure everyone is treated with the utmost respect. Conferences – like chats – are as structurally consistent as possible.

The conference has three phases: a 'reflective' phase, where each of the parties speaks and wrongdoing is admitted; a 'repairing' phase, where an action is decided – there may be apologies and agreements made on ways to repair the harm, such as performing a community service. Follow up takes place to ensure certainty of consequence.

Thirdly, there's a 'reconnecting' phase, where participants are encouraged to stay and talk informally over shared 'kai and coffee' in order to rebuild their relationship.

"Under this system you get a chance to hear the whole story, with the victim getting input into what needs to happen to set things right," says school counsellor Debbie Hamblyn.

Under a more punitive system you often just got part of the story, with the focus being on apportioning blame and dishing out a punishment, she says. Having to face up to and reflect on what you've done in front of the person you have harmed, parents and teacher, is almost always harder and less 'comfortable' than being meted out a punishment.

Conferences can be an emotional experience. Those who support the restorative approach say you've got to take part in one to fully appreciate how powerful acknowledgement and apology can be for both the wrongdoer and the person who has been harmed.

Erika says she went home after one conference and spent the night believing it had failed because the wrongdoer had refused to admit his guilt despite earlier owning up to both the counsellor and his parents.

But the next day the girl who had been hurt by his actions told her how much better she felt having gone through the process. "She didn't even need to hear the boy admit he'd done wrong or even apologise. Just being allowed to tell her story and having people listening respectfully to her was enough to help her and she was able to return to school."

RTLBs say parent support has been unanimous. Parents are often very grateful that so much care is being taken with their children.

They can see the school is taking time to listen to what's happening with their child. Not only does this build relationships between home and school, it also supports a consistent approach.

Garry says introducing restorative practice, alongside a strong set of school values, has been an important tool in transforming his school. He credits it with helping build a school-wide sense of safety because students have been given certainty that there will be consequences for wrongdoing. The procedures are very structured, clear and consistent.

Students are adhering more to the school's values and there are fewer behaviour problems.

However, there have been a few incidents where conferences haven't been successful. "Unfortunately, we have been put in a position of having to suspend students when their behaviour has been so serious that our current resources haven't been enough to address their issues. For example, when there have been repeated assaults on other students."

That said, the figures for suspensions, stand-downs and exclusions since the school introduced the initiative speak for themselves: in Term 1, 2007 there were 26, for the same period in 2008 there was just one.

Garry says it's easy to see when kids do wrong. It's much harder to measure how often a student thinks of doing something wrong but doesn't proceed because they have been taught skills that enable them to reflect about what effect their action might have on others.

Debbie says her job has become a lot easier – "students have become more willing to own their behaviour when they've done something wrong. We're also seeing parents gaining a sense of pride out of seeing their child admit responsibility when they've done wrong."

Debbie says no one has ever walked out of a conference at the school. And in all but very few cases, students who have been through a conference and had a chance to reflect on their action, have not repeated that behaviour.

This year the RTLBs will review the progress of Rotorua Intermediate. Twice a term each team of teachers will attend an hour-long professional development session facilitated by RTLBs.

Garry says significant operational funding is invested in training and employing counsellors to support the initiative.

The RTLBs have run several sessions for parents at cluster schools, providing an overview of restorative thinking and giving chat cards

From left: RTLB Erika Locke, principal Garry de Thierry, counsellor Debbie Hamblyn and RTLB Erna Cullen

for use at home. Similarly there have been presentations to boards of trustees.

Erna says the majority of teachers they work with support restorative practice and understand this is not a quick fix but rather, as Margaret Thorsborne would say, "a gently relentless process". There's learning involved so it's about changing behaviours over time, rather than immediately. The first step is to build a relationship.

"A lot of teachers are saying they don't want to be the police. The restorative approach allows them to educate rather than punish," says Erika.

In April there will be further three-day facilitator training for the cluster schools, led by Margaret Thorsborne.

Following an RTLB presentation on restorative thinking practices at a Rotorua Principals' Association meeting late last year, principals agreed to grant a day's release to receive back-up training to staff who attend the three-day facilitator course.

This year restorative practice training will also be available one day each term for teachers across Rotorua and surrounding areas.

Several schools have recently asked to have extra staff put on the waiting list for Margaret Thorsborne's upcoming workshop. Some teachers who've been through the workshop have described it as "the most valuable PD (professional development) I've ever experienced".

Others have said they wished they'd known about restorative practice when they began teaching – Garry de Thierry suggests colleges of education might like to consider that. ■

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