

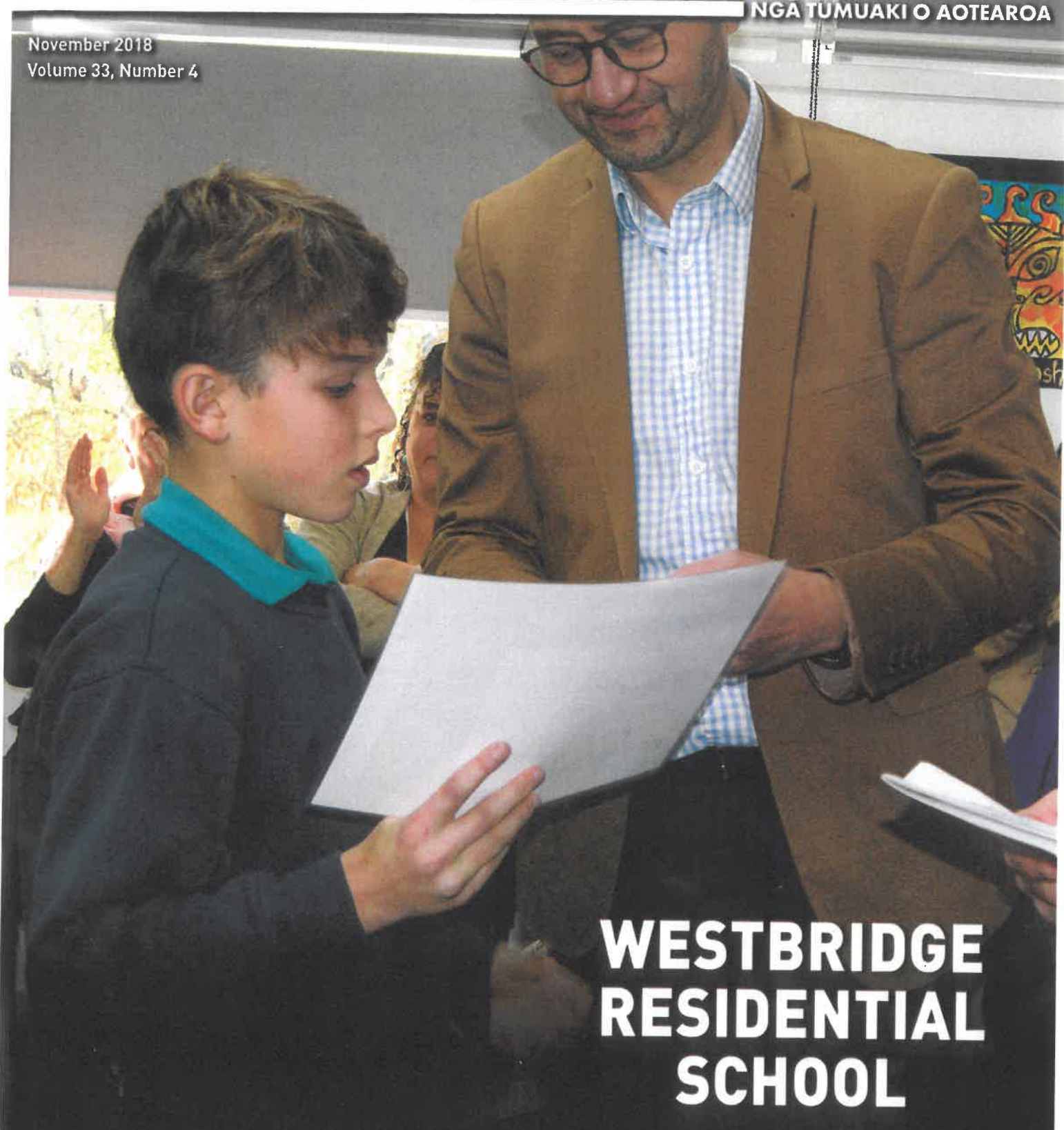


New Zealand

PRINCIPAL

NGĀ TUMUAKI O AOTEAROA

November 2018
Volume 33, Number 4



WESTBRIDGE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

ALSO
featuring

- Breath of Fresh Aire
- Curriculum Progress and Assessment
- Launch of the Leadership Strategy
- NZPF Conference 2018 in Photos
- Anxious children

WESTBRIDGE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

LIZ HAWES EDITOR

EARLIER THIS YEAR, I joined President, Whetu Cormick, on a trip to the South Island. This trip had one specific purpose – to visit two Residential Schools, Halswell in Christchurch and Salisbury in Nelson. Whetu wanted to experience first hand the programmes in action at these schools. He wanted to meet the residents, their teachers and principals and their Boards of Trustees. It was important to get a clear picture of the contribution that these schools make to the overall network of schooling provision in New Zealand.

It was not long before we realised the enormity of the challenges facing some of the young residents both socially and emotionally, as well as educationally. We also quickly recognised the exceptional levels of expertise that the teachers and support staff in these schools call on every hour of every day as they go about the work of educating these exceedingly vulnerable young New Zealanders.

The third residential school, which shares a Governance Board with Halswell, is Westbridge in West Auckland. There are just ten

boys enrolled at the school which could easily take thirty-two, according to Principal, David Bagwell. And it's not that there isn't demand for those places. Westbridge has inquiries every day from parents wanting to place their young children at the school.

As Salisbury and Halswell school principals had earlier reported, qualifying for the Intensive Wrap Around Service (IWS) is the greatest barrier. For a start only so many students can qualify for IWS funding, so very few new students can be considered each year. Further barriers can come from the opinions of experts like psychologists, some of whom are ambivalent about residential schools or take a philosophical position that all young people should be included in mainstream schooling. Parents would welcome an alternative pathway into these residential schools, so that more very challenged youngsters could benefit from the outstanding education on offer.

Associate Minister Tracey Martin, who has long championed the work of residential schools and alternative education, gives parents hope that access to residential education will be made



Achieving their Gold certificates is a milestone for the boys to celebrate



Principal David Bagwell

easier in the future. Minister Martin’s mantra is that every child should have access to whatever learning support they need to succeed. That includes the specialist support that residential schools provide.

Principal, David Bagwell, is clear about the severity of his students’ behavioural challenges. Westbridge is the only school in the country dedicated to working with year three – ten students who have severe behaviour, social, emotional and learning needs. They provide 24/7 care. The needs stem from a variety of causes including severe trauma and family violence. It is difficult to imagine how any of these young people could be integrated into mainstream schooling, without first experiencing the high-level intense training that the Westbridge teachers and support staff provide.

‘It can take at least twelve to eighteen months for some of

our students to build trust and form healthy relationships, to understand their feelings and recognise what triggers negative and violent reactions,’ he said.

The work of the highly specialised teachers at Westbridge does not stop with the students. It extends also to their families and their eventual mainstream school.

‘Our liaison teacher works with the families while the children are with us, so that when these children do return home, the routines and practices that have proven successful here can continue at home,’ he said. ‘She also undertakes assessment and planning of family goals and provides resources to help support new learning in the home,’ he said.

We meet the Liaison Teacher, Barbara Nelson, who emphasises the importance of the family’s commitment to the Westbridge programme, so that there is continuity for the student. ‘The



Principal David Bagwell keeps his students’ hands colourfully displayed in his office



Pictorial image of the work at Westbridge to take the students on a journey of change



Barbara Nelson, Liaison Teacher, Westbridge

changes we introduce at school, require practise at home to be maintained,' she said. 'We want our students to have positive relationships with their families and the wider community, so that they can have successful future lives,' she said.

Parents may also request training in positive parenting and in these cases, a special training programme for the parents will be included in the residential plan for the student.

'Our positive parenting programme is a helpful addition for those who have not had great role models of parenting themselves,' says Barbara, 'and this can be an important ingredient for the success of our students,' she said.

As students gets closer to transitioning to their mainstream school, Barbara takes them on a school visit. Visits may be repeated over time, gradually integrating the student into the new school's life and work.

'It has to be a gradual process,' says Barbara, 'We can't rush it or re-integration will fail. We have to be sure that our students have the right supports in place at their new school, including peer support, or we risk integration failing,' she said.

The school's three key competencies of responsibility, respect and safety are central to the students' learning at Westbridge

and these are expressed in a range of social, emotional and educational learning activities involving themselves, their peers, staff, property, the environment and their academic work.

The school runs a band levels programme, based on the Positive Behaviour for Learning framework. There are six levels, from Green to Gold, each with its own goals. Goals include, for example, 'Doing what the teacher tells me straight away'; 'Communicating pleasantly and politely'; 'Doing

my best and asking for help'; 'Keeping my hands and feet to myself'; 'Joining in with others'; 'Having pleasant and polite conversations with my peers'; 'Avoiding trouble and using self-control'; 'Maintaining behaviours for an ever-increasing length of time'. At the lowest Green level, students will have achieved the goal after ten days of 80 per cent in a row; at the highest Gold level, students will have achieved the goal after 30 days of 97 per cent in a row.

The day we visit, it is prize-giving, a very special celebration of the children's band levels achievements. Parents and family members join the staff as certificates are awarded to those who have satisfied the various levels of achievement in these key competencies. Some are also awarded vouchers for extra special achievements.



Fun activities at Westbridge



Another proud moment to smile about

David tells us that the band levels have proven a successful system for behaviour change at the school. The number of youngsters collecting certificates and vouchers was a clear demonstration that the students take this system very seriously. The intention is that the children will eventually be re-integrated into the mainstream and 85 per cent do transition successfully back into their local schools.

'It would be so much better if we were not seen as the last resort after all else has failed,' says David. 'Students have often endured years of going nowhere before they can even be considered for residential care,' he said. 'By the time we get them they are completely disengaged and failure is well ingrained.'

David was also critical of the policy to remove 'safe' rooms. 'We are dealing with such high needs,' he said, 'and a safe room is an essential tool for us.'

All of David's staff are trained in how to restrain students safely but the 'safe' room would be so much more effective for both students and staff. Staff members are also trained in de-escalation techniques and well experienced in using them. However, to keep everyone safe they need the full compliment of tools at their disposal. It is unhelpful when these are taken away.

Despite the barriers, David is optimistic about the future, especially now that Minister Martin is in Government. He is optimistic that there will be alternative pathways to access his school in the future and they will be able to enrol their full quota of students. The needs are there and Westbridge, along with Halswell and Salisbury are more than capable of meeting these needs.

'Investing early in the kind of specialist training we can offer, will save millions of dollars for the country in the long run,' he says.



Students use motivating stories to learn resilience



Each residential cottage has eight students