



## Taking on the world from Southland

**Partnerships with local businesses, a link with a UK school and a maritime studies course are all part of a think big approach from a small Southland school.**

Aparima College in Riverton is a Year 7-13 composite school with just 22 teachers and 210 students.

It is a busy place where teachers, the community and students are involved in developing courses and where links in Southland and as far a-field as England are being fostered in order to give students the best possible educational opportunities.

Principal Kaye Day says the NCEA has brought many opportunities for the school and its students.

"Standards-based assessment has allowed the college to explore areas we could really only dream about, such as our development of marine-based studies and boat building."

The school has developed a strong partnership with Invercargill boat builder Stabicraft. This year Stabicraft will train a group of Aparima students in the art and science of building an aluminium boat. Students achieve credits towards NCEA and towards a specialist National Certificate in Boat Building. It also gives them workplace experience in a local industry that needs skilled staff.

Maurice O'Rourke, production manager at Stabicraft, says the relationship with Aparima College is a win-win situation for them. "We can take our apprentices from the pool of students who do this course with us. By the time they come to us as full-time apprentices they have completed the safety aspects of a National Certificate in Boat Building and have partially completed other components as well."

"There is a real shortage of skilled workers in the industry and we are very happy to be part of a solution to that," Mr O'Rourke said.

The college has also introduced a marine studies course this year.

Mrs Day says the course is partly a result of interest in the fishing, diving and tourism industries from students, partly due to the need for staff in those local industries and therefore as a response to the community, and partly due to growing links with Stabicraft.

Marine Studies students will gain credits for NCEA but will also complete or partially complete qualifications such as PADI diver certification, coastal tickets and day skipper tickets.

"We have also begun to develop tentative links with the West Coast Fishing Academy based in Westport, as their course is a logical step for our students keen on a job in the fishing industry," Mrs Day said.

### International links

In a more global initiative, Aparima's Head of Technology has fostered a relationship with Heles School in Plymouth, England. Students from both Heles and Aparima have embarked on a similar technical project designing camp stoves and freeze-dried food products aimed at the tourism market.

Year 7 and 8 students at Aparima have developed a camp stove for purchase with freeze-dried food manufactured by local company, Back Country Foods.

"Back Country Foods have acknowledged this as a bona fide opportunity for them. Now we plan to further our partnership with them by making this innovative project part of the senior secondary school," said Mrs Day.



Venture Southland, a local government initiative set up to promote the positives of Southland, is supporting the innovations at the school. Aparima is looking at using the camp stove project to tie in with the *Innovations for Interaction* scheme it is involved with along with 10 other Southland schools.

Meanwhile, students at the Plymouth school in the UK are working on a similar project – developing a product, finding markets and learning about business and innovation.

"The students at both schools communicate by e-mail and talk about the problems and processes and how the business is working for them," said Mrs Day.

"It is a great experience for them to see what the possibilities for innovation are out there in the world and here in Southland."

### **Being small. Thinking big.**

Mrs Day says the school tries to manage limited resources in different ways to meet the needs of as many students as possible.

"As a small school we don't always have opportunities to offer the traditional range of subjects. NCEA has meant our students are not disadvantaged by our size, and has allowed us to develop courses of study that more readily reflect staff, student and community interests and needs."

An example is a humanities course where students study a combination of standards in both geography and history. This has solved the problem of not having enough staff or students to justify full-time courses in both geography and history. The subjects become full-time at Year 12 when students decide which to focus on.

A performing arts programme runs along similar lines allowing students to achieve credits in both music and drama by combining the two.

"The key to students learning and staying at school is providing them with programmes that they want to study," Mrs Day said.

"No longer are our students restricted to academic or vocational course structures. They are now beginning to see the value in tailoring their courses of study to meet their own needs."

She said the past year had seen a noticeable increase in the number of students coming to discuss individualised programmes with staff.

"Students are also becoming much more discerning about what they need and want. This is probably most obvious with our Year 12 students who worked with the Head of the Mathematics Department to write a course that they felt was more suited to their interests and requirements."

Staff are also being encouraged to teach to their passions, and this is now reaping rewards as they are starting to develop programmes that suit their individual interests, teaching styles and the needs and interests of the students.

There is plenty for students to choose from at Aparima College, including a two-year Outdoor Pursuits course covering both level 2 and 3 standards. This course allows students to focus on outdoor recreation and tramping in one year, with the second year having more of a sports-coaching base.

An agriculture programme is run outside of normal subject lines and students who enrol for it do so as a part-time option instead of attending normal classes.

"This was a big success for us last year with students doing exceptionally well in both the practical and theory aspects of this course," Mrs Day said.

The school makes extensive use of past NCEA, Bursary and sixth form certificate results. This analysis has been used to develop a four-strand maths programme that allows multi-level teaching for students in Years 11, 12 and 13.



"One of the strands involves more computer programming which makes maths much more relevant for some students."

"Naturally the student who is going to go on to university and undertake courses of study in mathematics may do all four strands," she says.

Mrs Day says Aparima College was one of the first schools to embrace standards-based assessment pre-NCEA and was quick to see the obvious advantages of unit standards.

"NCEA has added another dimension and broadened rather than diminished our curriculum."

"Although as a school we are still a long way from the ideal, the outlook for us is bright," Mrs Day said.