

Opihi High School, Temuka

Interview with Bob Cumming, DP

Bob was a most affable gentleman who gave willingly of his time to talk to me about what was an obvious passion for him because of the results he had seen with the introduction of academy learning.

Opihi has two main specialist groups: Horticulture and Services.

Both operate semi-independently from the school although the school has management over-sight of them.

The horticulture academy works from a classroom on a 4 acre block down the road from the school . It is TEC funded (students who would leave school with fewer than 40 credits). Intake is from WINZ referrals as well as school students.

Their course covers not one horticultural skills and knowledge but also small motor maintenance, upholstery, using farm machinery correctly eg chainsaws, catering, engineering, and retail. Certificates on the FOL are achieved.

The hort patch supplies and operates a shop on the site where they market and sell their home-grown produce. Trainees can gain NCEA credits in retailing.

Seedling plants are supplied by a local nursery at cost. Trainees from the local Tech come over to assist as tutors to the group from time to time as part of their training. School students have the hort option timetabled against science in their programme and have to walk 22 metres down the road to the hort patch. Some of them work after-hours voluntarily in order to get ahead.

The hort academy is also used to provide an alternative schooling option for youngsters who find it difficult to cope in the main stream.

One teacher in the school is responsible for the programme.

Literacy and numeracy tutors are brought in to raise the students performance and also assist students to focus on life skills and setting goals for their future. The major part of the course is of necessity, practical/ hands on work in various locations around the district. Good cooperation was given by local work places.

Opihi also have a services academy which started out as a sports academy set up off site by Rob Burrows now principal at Linwood college in Christchurch. It was found that the expectations of excellence in sport and the professional commitment required were just not there for this group of students so the model changed to a services academy and it has never looked back.

Again, situated off site (in fact now in Timaru)... Funded by TEC and STAR run by Shane Kiriana in a military style.

Literacy and numeracy are again a focus for the students but activities also include military components such as drill, parades, and fitness. Discipline is of a military style and the students wear a uniform appropriate to this. Emphasis is on developing self discipline, leadership, and personal motivation with a goal for many of them to seek a career in the services... army, navy, airforce, police and more recently fire dept. They assist in community work from time to time and provide help to primary

schools with sports coaching, kapahaka training etc. Their uniform is provided by the school and by the army; also equipment such as packs. Army personnel also come in to take lectures on survival skills, personal pride and striving for success.

Because TEC funds are only available for low achievers some STAR funding is used to cover costs of more able students who enrol. These more able students become role models for the rest. An application pack is given to intending enrolees and interviews are held with students and their parents to ensure they know what they are enrolling for and what is expected of them.

Their initiation into the programme is a 2-week camp at Burnham Army Base where they are subjected to both physical and mental challenges but they are set up with the goals, motivation programme and rewards for success. They participate along with all other service academies in a coast to coast competitive event towards the end of the year.

Asides: Bob was interested in our experience with MUSAC software and told me they are changing to KAMAR in the third term. The whole school is wirelessly networked and all staff bring their laptops to staff meetings. They belong to the Aoraki ICT cluster through which they got ministry funding for video conferencing and smartboards in every room. They employ a computer technician on site for 40 hours per week and consider that it has saved them heaps in maintenance costs etc. The admin staff have been issued with cellphones under a deal with Vodafone in which a cell module is set up on the PABX system and all calls from those fones go through there at no cost. The system cost is \$40 per month for 3 years. 'Talk?zero plan.