

Principals Column

Brent Gray

Wet weather and schools – an interesting combination. It is about this time every year that I think gymnasiums would be a great idea in primary schools. A place to be able to continue physical education programmes as well as an area to let off steam during the breaks. But I am sure that this is the least of our worries, especially when the Christchurch City Council are busy putting pumps into the Flockton Basin area to try and keep the flood waters at bay during this week.



Water will always be topical in our area. It is a source of much pleasure or dismay depending on how much or how little we have at any given time. You can always guarantee that when we need it we don't have it and vice versa. Water creates a lot of discussion within schools especially when it comes to swimming instruction. As a small community that has access to a local pool, we are grateful that we can run a swimming programme for our pupils (of course this is weather dependent, and occurs more during some years than it does others!). Swimming New Zealand sets a guideline that they would like to see everyone achieve – being able to competently swim 200 metres by the time they leave Year 8 (Form 2).

While I believe that in a country and community such as ours it is extremely important to be able to swim, I would much rather see every child be involved in a water safety programme whereby each child knows how to act in recreational swimming situations such as being safe in the irrigation pond, river, lake or ocean. As I have always said, great if you can swim 200 metres, but what if the boat goes down 400 metres from the shore?

I was very fortunate when I attended Methven Primary School. The long hot summers allowed for plenty of pool time and there was an expectation from the government that swimming be part of the curriculum programme, so the teachers taught us. I also had a family that supported me in my pursuit of swimming, as well as dedicated coaches who taught me. As parents, my wife and I have made a commitment to pay for lessons for our children to fill the gaps in the school programme and build our children's confidence in the water.

It is evident when attending school swimming sports that the demise of school pools has contributed to less children being able to take part competitively and it is clear which pupils are club swimmers. Many schools use the community pool in Ashburton for lessons, but this is restricted by availability issues, and transport costs. I don't have an easy solution to this, but I hope that these issues are being considered by the administrators of the new stadium and pool complex in Ashburton.

Water will always be a part of our lives, and recreationally, we all want our children to be able to enjoy using it for physical activity and enjoyment, reassured that they have had grounding in safe water practices that keep them from becoming a statistic.