

Principals Column



Brent Gray



At the end of the last school term our school took on a reasonably big challenge – taking the whole school away for three days to Lake Ruataniwha and Mt Cook. Some of you might be thinking we are crazy taking our five year olds away with the rest of the school, and maybe we are, but it certainly was an interesting experience for all involved. It is a big commitment for parents to take time away from home and work to join us, and even more of a challenge to

work with children other than their own. Maybe some have come away thinking that their own children aren't that bad to have around after all! Apart from the obvious headaches of managing 90 pupils while they are away, some of the benefits outweighed a lot of disadvantages.

Our theme for our inquiry work this year is 'Sustainability' and the main reason for heading to Mt Cook National Park was to look at the way the Mt Cook Village is run in a sustainable manner, to provide recreation and tourism opportunities while looking out for the special environment within the National Park. The Department of Conservation Staff that worked with our pupils while we were there were amazing. Very dedicated, extremely knowledgeable, and they catered well for the variety of age groups we had with us. The senior pupils walked up to the Hooker Glacier, looking closely at the flora and fauna along the way, and the school also made use of The Hermitage and their documentary screenings. A highlight for our junior pupils was the visit to Mt Cook School where there are 12 children and 7 different nationalities. Visits to the Benmore Power Station, as well as the High Country Salmon Farm were also undertaken, each with a different focus on sustainability.

Apart from the obvious academic learning that we undertook while away, the social learning was equally important. Learning to live with others and share a space for a few days was something completely different for a number of children. (How any of them found what belonged to them from the piles of clothing on the floor was a mystery to me!). Relying on an adult other than their own parent, adults working with other adults to achieve a common goal – the learning did not stop at the children. There is no National Standard for that!

But the other thing we can't forget – just what an amazing place New Zealand is and the fact that after a couple of hours on the road, we were in one of the most iconic parts of New Zealand's landscape. It shows how fortunate we are to live where we do. Something I'm sure was not lost on the children and adults who were part of this outdoor experience.