

Sherenden &

Making a positive difference 2129 Taihape Road,

Sherenden and Districts School, like all rural schools, is the hub of its community and for quite some time has been dogged by rumours of closure, but that couldn't be further from the truth.

Falling roll numbers led to the general perception that closure was imminent; however, Principal Leonie Egan says that's just not true.

Prior to Leonie's arrival in January this year, the school was facing some huge issues. There was not a quality learning environment and the kids were missing out.

With Leonie's arrival, the feeling in the school changed, resulting in happy kids who want to come to school.

"We are getting there, but it takes a while to change the community's perception. A lot of people further afield had the notion that the school was going to close. We are far from closing. The biggest

battle is letting everyone know that the school is no longer what it was."

Leonie says she finds it difficult getting prospective families in the door.

"If you can't get them in the door, you've lost

the battle before you even begin. We've had some big community events, like the tapas evening. We ended up with 130 people attending, the hall was bulging, but it was a great opportunity for the children to share their learning."

Leonie says there have been a lot of "whiz bang things" going on and that helps to change the perception.

"You need to get out there and promote what you are doing."

Prior to her arrival at Sherenden and Districts School, Leonie taught at Peterhead School in

Flaxmere for almost nine years. During that time, she attended many professional development courses that equipped her with all the skills needed to take the country school into the future.

"Armed with all the right tools, you can make a really big difference."

She says moving to a small country school provided her with the opportunity to get involved in management and make changes.

"This school was the ideal place because it had hit rock bottom, and that left it open for me to pick it up and run with fresh new ideas."

Leonie says it's been a big team drive for the kids to get to where they are now, and it's not something



Children out fishing on the Senator Cat as part of their EOTC week. Students enjoy their time at school, they strive to achieve through opportunities they experience both in and outside the classroom. ERO October 2008.



Katrina Nelson, Hunter van der Jagt, Kimberley Weir, Paula-Kayte Shannon, and Jack McGhie in front, proudly tend to the school's vegetable garden. They are eagerly awaiting the end of the year when they have a feast planned.

Districts School

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you can do alone. It is essential to have support of the board.

She says the board and the school's community have been hugely supportive, and as a result the quality of education at Sherenden and Districts School is "just streets ahead".

"We have high quality teaching programmes, with really low student ratios and that's thanks to the board. We have 23 children and at times we have up to three teachers in the classroom."

Leonie says she teaches to the children's needs, as country kids don't necessarily need what town children need.

"We offer all sorts of programmes for the kids and those we don't offer are catered for by Flaxmere College. The programme is flexible, to support individual progress and achievement. The year seven and eight children go to the college for technology, where they learn Spanish, carving, cooking and sewing."

Leonie says, in consultation with the community, she is realigning everything for the new curriculum.

"We have looked at what we as a school and as a community value. These values include honesty, excellence, respect, pride and enthusiasm. We are



The school's 23 pupils thoroughly enjoy their day at school.

trying to create a child that has these values and is a lifelong learner."

She says the children have been part of the consultation and as a result they "own it".

"If they don't own it, it means nothing. It's a new way of learning and is in its third year now. It used



to be that the children were learning without knowing why they were learning it, and they didn't know what their next step was. You give them feedback and feed forwards, so it makes them responsible for their own learning rather than being teacher driven."

Leonie says the vast improvements in the school have not gone unnoticed, high expectations for success and ongoing improvement are evident.

A visit by the Education Review Office (ERO) in May last year identified many areas of concern. In September, ERO revisited the school to confirm its directives had been acted upon. The full ERO report can be viewed on their website: www.ero.gvt.nz

Leonie says she was thrilled with the report issued by ERO, which cites progress in a variety of areas, and she feels the hard work put in by the board, the community, the students and herself have paid off.

"It's a neat little place to be, the kids are fantastic."