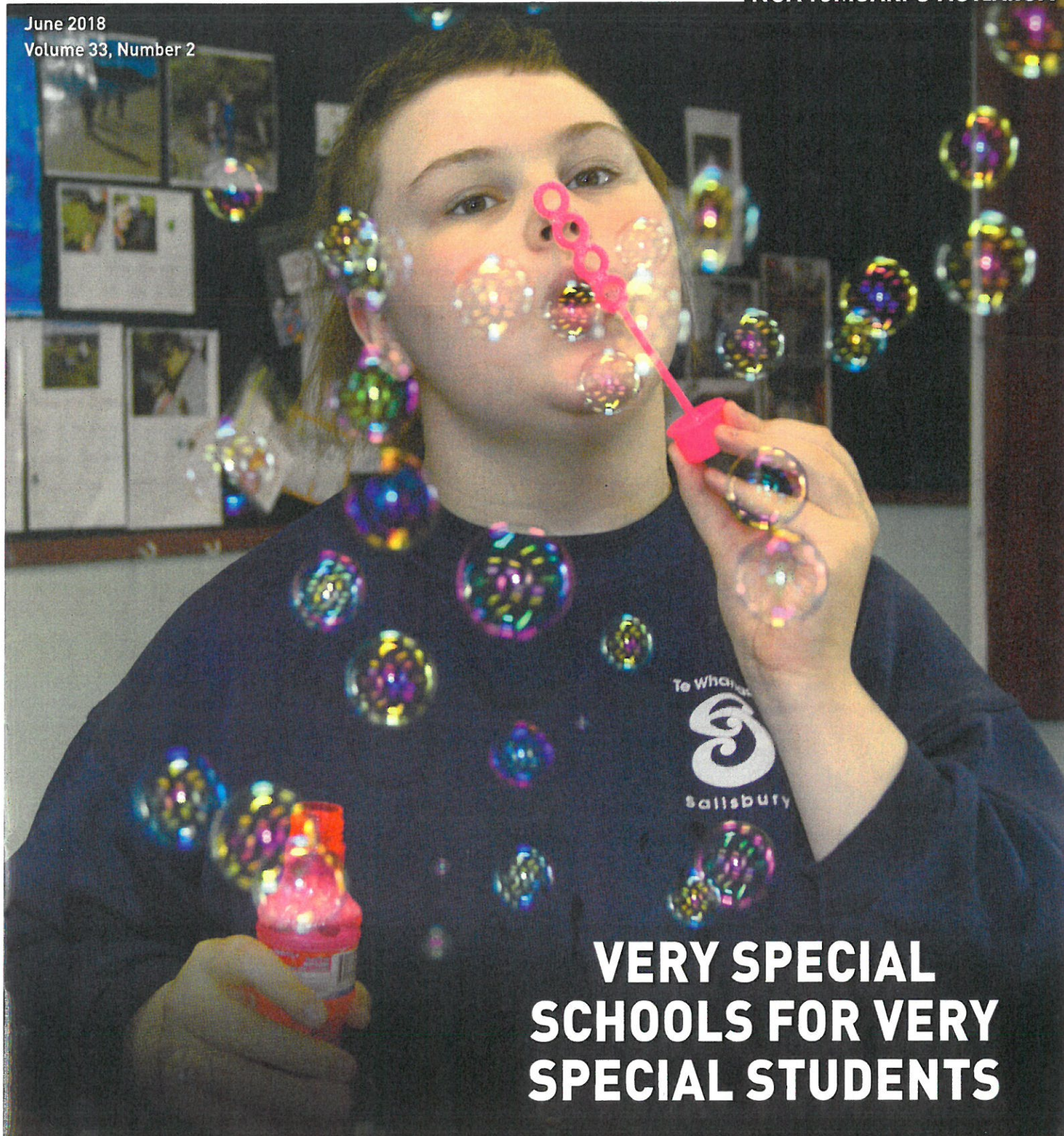


June 2018
Volume 33, Number 2



VERY SPECIAL SCHOOLS FOR VERY SPECIAL STUDENTS

ALSO
featuring

- NZPF Moot 2018
- Assessment Design and Reporting
- Education Council On-line Services
- NZPF Conference 2018 in Wellington
- Sir Ken Robinson in NZ

SPECIAL SCHOOLS FOR SPECIAL HALSWELL WESTBRIDGE AND SALISBU SCHOOLS TELL THEIR STORIES

LIZ HAWES EDITOR

LIVING IS LEARNING in the residential school environment. These are 24/7 schools where teaching and learning never stops. The social and emotional sit right alongside the educational when it comes to teaching the very special residents of these very special schools.

When you visit residential schools, it is hard to understand how the young people could possibly have a comparable learning and living experience anywhere else. Yet despite the obvious



Working in the classroom is engaging

progress these young students are making academically and in developing life skills, the schools have been under threat of closure many times.

In 2012 there was a proposal to close them all. Fortunately, that didn't happen, with only a fourth school, McKenzie Residential School, being forced to close its doors. There were changes however, with Halswell becoming co-educational for intellectually impaired youngsters operating at level one. Back in 2016 Salisbury Residential School for Girls in Nelson, was [almost] closed by then Minister of Education Hekia Parata. Fortunately for the young residents and their families, there were oversights made in the process which gave Salisbury a second chance.

Not so long ago, Salisbury School operated on a roll of 80 girls, with a waiting list. Even as late as 2010 there were 77 in residence at the school. The 2017 roll is nine. Halswell Residential College in Christchurch and Westbridge School in West Auckland tell a similar story of roll decline.

It's not as if there are now fewer young people who could benefit from the outstanding learning programmes offered at these schools. The teachers and support staff are doing an exceptional job of developing the potential of the youngsters in

their care and preparing them to take their place in their own communities, as contributing young adults.

Politicians have argued that parents don't choose residential options any more because of the *Intensive Wrap-around Services* available to their children in mainstream schools. Parents of these young people beg to differ.

Take the case of Ellen Treweek, whose parents fought for two years to enroll their intellectually disabled daughter at



Pride in one's work is important at Halswell

Salisbury. They wanted to give Ellen access to the expert academic programme, the specialist attention available and the Living and Life-skills programme to help Ellen manage her behavior, socialize and become an independent adult. They had heard of the outstanding results the school had achieved for other youngsters who were now functioning, independent young adults living outside of the school and working in their communities.

The Treweek's struggle was mirrored by other families. What it really came down to was the Ministry's new philosophy of 'inclusion' for children with special education needs. It was expected that all young people, irrespective of the complexities and severity of their behavior and learning challenges, would be accommodated in mainstream schools. Those at the extreme end who qualified, would be allocated *Intensive Wrap Around (IWA)* services to meet their needs.

Some would argue this shift in philosophy has been a disaster because the expertise necessary to support these severely challenged youngsters in the mainstream, simply doesn't exist for all schools. Cynics view the shift as purely economically driven. IWA is a considerably cheaper option. The problem is, so few qualify for IWA – which is also a prerequisite for enrolment at a residential school. The IWS is capped at 335, allowing very

UNG PEOPLE RESIDENTIAL



The staff and support staff gather for morning tea at Salisbury

few new students to qualify each year. Further, the funding is available for just two years.

Those parents battling to have their children educated in residential schools say that the IWS creates an impossible barrier because the criteria are skewed towards conduct disorders rather than intellectual disabilities, autism and other learning disorders. It's therefore not surprising that the number of young people attending residential options has dramatically reduced.



The library is a great place to chill with friends, read a book, play a board game or make a puzzle

I joined NZPF president, Whetu Cormick, on his trip south to experience the culture and values that drive these Residential Schools, to witness the programmes in action and observe how the young residents respond.

We had the great privilege of meeting with the schools' Board members, the principals, the teaching and support staff and most importantly, the young people in residence.

Halswell Residential College

An extended family atmosphere was quickly apparent at Halswell College. We joined staff and students in a shared lunch and were treated to engaging, warm conversations as students entertained us with their stories of sporting competitions, and other fun activities, interlaced with elements of good-humoured teasing. We were deeply impressed by the level of respect the students afforded each other, the staff and ourselves. As visitors, we could not have felt more welcome.

It's all about being the best you can be at Halswell and the residents each have an individually designed learning and life skills programme to follow. As we made our way through the classrooms, we observed students in very small groups or

individually working with a teacher. There was the usual suite of subjects you might see in any school.

What was different at Halswell was the way teachers approached these subjects, providing authentic individualized contexts that were of the appropriate level of challenge for each student. The focus and engagement of the students in their learning and the pride they showed in their achievements was a sure sign they were well connected with their learning content and achieving



Principal Janine Harrington and Board Chair David Turnbull check out the Kitchen of the Halswell Dining Room

success every day.

These classroom achievements come down to the strength of relational trust the students have developed with their teachers and support staff, who have been trained not just as general teachers but as experts in behavioral management and in developing learning strategies for highly challenged students.

'Because our students are here 24/7, we can reinforce the self-management and social skills programmes continuously,' said principal, Janine Harrington. 'That way we are able to maintain consistency and get results more quickly.'

Links between living and learning are very strong and teachers are intimately involved in both. The students live in villas which are part of a new multi-million-dollar development for the school. They are allocated responsibilities for keeping their rooms and bathrooms clean and tidy and share lounge and dining room spaces.

'There will be crisis moments for some,' said Janine, and we have contingencies for those occasions too. Our sensory room is hugely helpful for many students needing some time out,' she said.

The sensory room is a bright, colourful space with many

comforting activities from running your hands through sand to flopping on a great big bouncy bed and if its quiet solitude that soothes you, there is a TeePee you can hide in.

'All of our staff are trained in dealing with all contingencies,' said Janine, 'so our young people can feel safe.'

Students do not necessarily stay at Halswell Residential College for their entire schooling. Some may stay for as little as a school term, and then return to their mainstream school, others may take much longer.

'Some students will just need support to learn how to manage their own behavior and programmes we can apply here may not take long to achieve that,' said Janine.

community are also rated highly. 'The girls love being involved in sports and tend to join in enthusiastically,' said Carolyn, 'which is great for teaching them how to fit in with others outside of their everyday environment.'

We visited the food technology kitchen and watched as the girls prepared their lunch of chicken noodles. They were doing a great job, under the watchful eye of their cooking teacher, and proudly showed off their culinary delights.

One of our most memorable moments was taking afternoon tea in the 'flat' that Ellen and Nicola share. The two girls are preparing for life after Salisbury and are doing some supported 'flatting' to develop a higher level of independence. We were honoured to be their visitors at the conclusion of a most affirming day.



Our welcoming party at Salisbury School



Ellen proudly introduces us to the Bradshaw Hut, which is completely built out of eco materials

Salisbury Residential School

Girls at Salisbury, aim to become confident, connected, actively involved lifelong learners, and to achieve these goals they all have individualized learning programmes. Teacher Aide Carolyn Shirtcliffe explained that in one case a student's entire academic and social skills learning programme was based on horses, since horses are a 'touch-stone' for the student.

Identifying feelings and what triggers them is an important part of the girls' development at Salisbury. It is a pre-cursor to learning how to take responsibility for their own actions and becoming self-reliant adults who can monitor and control their own behavior.

'Teaching the girls about feelings and how to control them is a critical life skill so we place a lot of emphasis on exploring feelings,' said Carolyn.

Salisbury is a Gold level Enviro School, and the involvement with the Enviro-schools programme brings many additional learning activities and interests for the girls to enjoy. We are led by a group of senior girls and teachers on a tour of the school's enviro projects, including a visit to the Bradshaw Hut which is completely built from eco materials. We also visit the ghekkos and the weta sanctuary amongst other gems of nature.

Sport and other activities that connect the girls with the

There is no doubt that the outstanding facilities at both schools are under-utilised and Minister Hipkins has made it quite clear that Residential options are to remain a choice for parents.

Associate Minister Tracey Martin has also been very clear about the importance of retaining residential schools. Both Ministers will be wanting to see the facilities better used. There are many possibilities including using the residential schools as training grounds for future specialist teachers in special education. There is also the possibility of using the residential accommodation for more young people transitioning to independent living, just as Ellen and Nicola are doing now.

But perhaps before any of these ideas are explored, the Minister will need to examine the IWS system and the ways in which it has created so much anguish for parents desperately wanting to enroll their children at these outstanding schools. Board members from both schools were confident that by removing the IWS barriers, they would quickly grow their rolls to the highs of a decade ago and with

greater numbers be able to enjoy economies of scale, making the residential option a much less expensive one.

These very special young people deserve the education they need to fully participate in society, as independent, confident adults. The exceptional education on offer at both Halswell and Salisbury Schools will help them get there.



Ellen is so proud of the noodle lunch she has prepared in her food technology class