

Otara parents proud of their schools



Pukunui author James Waerea working with pupils at Clydemore School.

Despite reports of parents busing their children to other schools and raising the spectre of racial discrimination, Otara parents are proud of their schools.

The race relations conciliator has been investigating reports that European children are being taken by bus to schools in Howick, rather than schools in Otara which have predominantly Maori and Pacific Island pupils.

Mrs Angeline Hamiora lives and teaches in Otara. Her children go to school in the South Auckland suburb where she and her family moved only recently after living in the Bay of Plenty for some 10 years.

She still feels like a "foreign Maori" in an area where she had no connections and found hard to get to know people at first, describing it as a "bit of cultural shock."

Though people like to rubbish Otara, Mrs Hamiora and other parents defend the hard work being put into education in the area by teachers and parents alike.

A junior school teacher at Clydemore School, she says there has been a real effort to lift the standard of attainment over the last 5 years.

Mrs Hamiora: "These kids may not achieve as high as other kids but there

has been a real effort to lift their achievement."

She says local parents now get so involved with the school that, "you can't tell who are the parents and who are the teachers."

"At the moment we are doing really well. The pupils are getting extra help and parents are helping."

Class numbers are low enough to allow teachers to spend more time with pupils. Special programmes right through the school are designed to boost reading skills.

And there is the highly successful neighbourhood scheme where volunteers help parents and pupils in their home.

Cultural and Maori language groups feature strongly in the school which has a mix of cultures on its staff. Of the 400 pupils, over 90% are Maori and Pacific Island.

Mrs Hamiora's husband, Chubby, is chairman of the school's school committee. He says there is a real concern, "right from the top down," among the staff to do the best for the kids.

And there is a developing pride in the school among the pupils. Vandalism, says Mrs Hamiora, is not as rife as it used to be.

There are still major areas of concern to both parents and teachers. The standard of attainment is still markedly below other school areas.

School principal Mr Stewart Rundle agrees. He says a low standard will restrict pupil's future job prospects and opportunities.

But, he says, the situation is improving markedly. As success has led to success the pupils self image has improved.

Mr Rundle attributes this partly to the strong emphasis on cultural groups which has provided a positive incentive.

The disproportionate low standard of attainment among Maori and Pacific Island children has often been attributed to their lower socio-economic position.

The school rejects this theory. "We see increasing evidence against this," says Mr Rundle. "Schools can make a big difference."

He says if more money was spent on extra staff and facilities then Polynesian students achievement levels would be no different from other students.

The quality and stability of staff has been a factor in improving the situation says Mr Rundle. When he first arrived 7 years ago there was only one Maori on the staff and most of the teachers lived out of the area. Today a high proportion live in the area and have a good local knowledge.

Continued from page 15

Both Maoris and Pakehas share this problem of how best to educate girls. What does New Zealand society expect of its women? They are crucial in the establishment of attitudes. Does it want them to maintain and perpetuate cultural differences? Does it believe that a nation comprises only one culture or does it see different peoples existing as one nation? Can the Maori effectively cope with living in a bicultural, or a multicultural context? Can the Pakeha?

If the answer to the last question is yes, then Maori society will survive intact, despite making many modifications to suit a now urban society. If the majority society, which is Pakeha, accepts that it can live with different cultural concepts and yet still be one nation, then it will allow a minority people to solve their problems in their own way. And if this becomes a part of the law of our country, schools will have to

offer diversified courses suited to the growing needs of the many-faceted sections of society.

I think the way to provide this sort of education is by setting up alternative secondary schools. Expensive they may be, but for the future security of New Zealand, the cost would be infinitesimal.

And if Maori girls and women are expected to contribute to a cohesive exciting society, but one which is also tolerant and humane, they must be given equal status with their men. They should not be destined to the drudgery and obscurity of house-keeping only, but should be made to feel confident in their ability to cope with the demands of an increasingly varied world.

Arapera Blank teaches at Glenfield College, Auckland.