

# Whanganui EDUCATION HUB

## What are restorative practices?



From left: Hayley McConachy (Head Girl), Ms Nita Pond (Deputy Principal), Selena Cao (Head of Academia) and Shannon Te Kira (Head of Sport). Ms Pond collaborates on features of Restorative Practices enabling senior students to strengthen their knowledge.

In 2014 Whanganui, became the first city in New Zealand to work towards being a restorative practices city. Four years earlier, Whanganui Girls' College became one of the pilot schools to trial restorative practices through the work of Deputy Principal, Ms Nita Pond. Her work is now recognised across New Zealand given she sits on the Whanganui Restorative City Advisory Group as the secondary school representative.

So what are restorative practices? In the context of education, it can be summarised as helping children relate to each other with dignity and respect whilst being accountable for actions and understanding the impact of their actions upon others.

Teenage brains are perfectly calibrated for spotting unfairness when it relates to themselves, however the developing brain has a hard time knowing when it may be treating others unfairly.

The traditional path for school misdemeanours is a detention. The idea being that writing lines or enforced solitude will enable quiet reflection allowing the student to emerge from a cocoon of seclusion as a reformed character. In reality, any changes in the offender are often due to fear of further punishment; not due to an understanding of the impact of their wrongdoing.

A restorative approach includes four vital aspects. The offender understanding what they did wrong, the offender understanding why they did it, this gives a voice to the 'victim', and gives the offender the chance

In that sense, the offender learns positive behaviours. And why not? If a student cannot read, we teach reading. If a student cannot write, we teach writing. But if a student cannot behave, we punish? This may feed our inner need for vengeance, but it does not foster the forging of effective relationships and emotional intelligence. Both are vital ingredients for success at school and beyond. The result of embedding such practices saw Whanganui Girls' College's NCEA results improve to such an extent that the school were asked to share their formula with schools across New Zealand, something Ms Pond may never have envisaged when her work started all those years ago.

- Prabh Mokha,  
Assistant Principal.