

Merit programme at GHS: positive reinforcements delight all

"A barrow-full of positives" is how Geraldine High School (GHS) principal Juliette Hayes describes a wheelbarrow stuffed full to overflowing with thousands of merit vouchers.

Throughout the year, students receive merit vouchers to reward positive behaviour.

At last week's school assembly Mrs Hayes congratulated all students who had earned vouchers saying, "This barrow represents a whole year of doing the right thing; thousands of moments in time when students have received positive recognition from teachers."

Once a term the vouchers go into a draw with prizes like Subway coupons, but at the end of the year there is a major draw with a big prize. This year the prize was an iPod Nano and the winner was Casey Daniell, a year 11 student. Casey had 20 vouchers in the draw – most of which she said were for "being diligent". Casey was recently talking to her mother about buying an iPod, and so was delighted to win one. "I was really surprised; all the kids have been excited by it [the big draw]."

Mrs Hayes explains the school is part of a nationwide programme called Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) funded by the Ministry of Education. School values are clearly stated and students learn how to instil the values into their everyday lives at school so they can become effective learners. She emphasizes that although the consequences of negative behaviour are clear to all students, she prefers to focus on rewarding students when they do things right. "We call it: caught being good."

There are four school values: respect, responsibility, relationships and achievement; and posters around the school emphasise these.

Teachers issue merit vouchers for all kinds of activities and sometimes just for students doing what is expected of them,



Geraldine High School principal Juliette Hayes is delighted with, "A barrow-full of positives" - a wheelbarrow stuffed full to overflowing with thousands of merit vouchers gained by students. Casey Daniell is the lucky winner of the draw and the prize an iPod Nano. Photo: Jo Bates.

eg their homework. However, students are particularly given merits when they do better than expected, like picking up litter without being asked, getting an Excellence for work or doing something kind for someone.

When a student receives ten merits, or multiples of ten, they receive a postcard to take home to share their success with their family. "My aim is for every GHS home to have a postcard on their fridge this year," says Mrs Hayes.

She explains that before joining the programme the school already had a merit system in place.

"With PB4L we amped it up, so lots more merits are now given."

Involvement in the programme has been a great success and after three years, Mrs Hayes is delighted to see serious disciplinary issues have reduced. "Everyone wants to be part of it."

Jo Bates