



New richness pervades Rag

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“Rag” — it’s the unflattering nickname that Rangitikei College pupils reckon has followed them around for too long.

The Marton school, anxious to shake its poor image, is making strides with a crackdown on bad behaviour that has brought a lift in achievement.

The school has toughened its stance on uniform and attendance rates and this year has rolled out a government behavioural programme worth \$10,000 a year. NCEA pass rates are up for the first time in years and pupils say they are pulling their socks up to match.

Student leaders Materina Te Tue and Ngatu Bates, both 17, say the school has cleaned up its act since they were juniors.

“It was really rough. There wasn’t a lot of control . . . there wasn’t a lot of focus and no one really cared,” Materina said.

“Even if you ask past students it was, ‘We’re just Rag,’ that little Marton school,” Ngatu recalled. “Now it’s ‘Rangitikei College.’ We’re proud to wear that crest and the community are starting to see that now.”

It is not only the school spirit that

has lifted – the change in academic achievement is measurable.

The low decile school has a roll of fewer than 300 and its size has dropped by about 50 pupils since 2009. At that time, its pupils’ poor attendance rates and behavioural issues were noted in an ERO report. Only a third of Rangitikei College pupils passed NCEA level one in 2011. There were no scholarships that year. Seventy per cent of Rangitikei College pupils passed level two, and fewer than 60 per cent passed level three.

Last year, something changed. Pass rates almost doubled with two-thirds of the school’s NCEA level one pupils making the grade. Levels two and three also lifted slightly and three pupils finished school with scholarships.

New principal Karene Biggs began at the school last year and soon confronted a challenge. A group of 15 boys were caught on camera

smoking cannabis on the school grounds. She immediately suspended the entire group, vowing to change the culture of the school.

“In a sense it gave me a good opportunity to say ‘it’s not okay’ and we don’t put up with that behaviour, and that we were prepared to take a

stand on it,” she said.

So the school set a target of 90 per cent attendance rates at all times. A Maori leadership system was introduced and all pupils were placed in mentoring groups with teachers.

A survey of parents and pupils found bullying was more prevalent at the school than teachers thought so a restorative justice concept was also implemented.

At the end of last year an opportunity arose for the school to take part in the Positive Behaviour For Learning (PB4L) programme that has just taken a chunk of government funding worth more than \$63.6 million over the next three years. Term one figures for 2013 indicate the school’s stand down rates have already halved compared to the same time last year.

Mrs Biggs attributes the lift in educational achievement to a focus on a culture of positive behaviour.

“We teach kids to write, we teach kids to read and we teach them maths but someone also has to teach them how to behave. Because if they are not learning that at home they don’t know what that looks like. So we teach them what being kind looks like,” she said.



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Lifting school spirit: Rangitikei College student leaders Ngatu Bates and Materina Te Tue, both 17.

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