

# Happy birthday, Waterlea School!

*"5 September - the school opened this morning. By the end of the day we had four rooms opened to occupy. Painters, carpenters, flooring specialists were still working around the building which is the first of its type in New Zealand. The building has six classrooms, a dental clinic, a furnace room and attached to the smaller unit the office, library, storeroom and staffroom".*

(Opening paragraph in Waterlea School's diary, written 50 years ago)

Birthdays are memorable but as we get older they may become less important. Not so for Waterlea School which celebrates its 50th with a big Jubilee in the weekend of 28 October 2005.

The school's web site ([www.waterlea.school.nz](http://www.waterlea.school.nz)) shows a programme which includes a range of things from opportunities to meet and chat with old school friends, to a look at old photos, and a spit roast BBQ on Saturday afternoon. And let's not forget the entertainment by current Waterlea students.



Principal Mrs Cavell & Waterlea School pupils.

Without students, schools would not exist. Starting off small 50 years ago with a role of only 84, Waterlea School now has close to 400 pupils. I met with Litiana, Laura, Sean, Keziah, Joshua, Joe and Connor in mid August, and pride about their school is obvious. They love their friendly teachers, enjoy the trips (especially to Rainbow's End), and feel it is easy to make new friends since they are "...all kids you can relate to, interested in the same thing". Add to that the fact that the school is "...out of the city", and near the sea and you end up with a great location.

Most of the pupils I met were on the Student Council, and involved in peer mediation, school patrol, the library, or wet-day-monitor. And they mentioned that the students would play a great part in the celebrations, with performances of the choir and kapa haka group, and a role play

by the peer mediation group. They are clearly excited about the party and are amazed that their school looks so well for something which is 50 years old. The link with the initial days is there since many of the kids have either parents, or aunts or uncles, who went to Waterlea in its early days.

The school (yet without a name) started in September 1955 with 9 classes, ranging from what was then called Form one, up to Primer 1. No overcrowding in those days, with numbers per class ranging from 5 to 14 at enrolment time. Head Teacher Mr Frank Thomas was supported by Mrs C Hanna and Mrs A Bilkey (Assist. Relieving), and two students from Auckland Teachers College (Mr John Gale and Miss Ann Montgomerie).

The school received a visit from Mr J Shortland (Secretary – Manager of the Auckland Education Board) and Mr Willis, Staffing officer, and there may have been some concern about making a good impression since one of the entries in the diary reads that "The school grounds have not received any attention. The outfields have many hundreds of cabbages, silver-beet etc. as it has been a market garden."

At the 3 October School Committee meeting the school was given the name Waterlea after one of the original farms in the area within the school boundary. And the roll increased to 96. On 7 November a telephone was installed, and 4 days later the roll reached 110.

A month in the life of Waterlea School, with many more memorable events to follow over the years. To find out more, you will have to attend the Jubilee to catch up with pupils (and maybe staff) of its early days, or talk to current principal Mrs Mary Cavell. Mrs Cavell has been principal at Waterlea School since 1986, and as such has played a considerable part in the school's growth and development. When I point out that she has been associated with a large part of the school's history (20 years in 2006) she looks surprised.

Teaching has played a very important role in Mary's life. Her career spans more than 35 years, both in Auckland as well as Hamilton and Nelson. While her current role as principal may not allow much time in the class room, she is still hands-on. "I provide literacy support to 8 children," says Mary, "which allows me to stay in touch".

As principal Mary feels strongly about supporting her teachers, and creating strong teams. Together with the Board, there are further plans to develop what Mary calls 'reflective practice time' for teachers; to support gifted children's needs; and to improve numeracy. When asked where she would like to see Waterlea 5-10 years from now, Mary mentions Information Communication Technology.

During the interview Mary provided me with a lot of information about the Board of Trustees goals for the near future, and her role in managing this change. But her real passion for Waterlea School became evident when I asked her what legacy she would like to leave behind when she retires. Mary comments that she would like to see "...kids who embody the rules of the school while Waterlea provides a

nurturing environment for kids to achieve whatever they are capable of".

It is important for Mary that the school provides a trigger for ongoing learning, and that the kids feel safe and valued, and are able to "...look after themselves and their environment, both physically and socially. And that they are proud of their achievements".

Mangere Bridge, and Waterlea School in particular, have become a big part of Mary's life, and Mary has played a role in many people's lives, in some instances teaching both parents and their children. When I ask her why she chose to become a teacher she simply mentions that her principal at high school suggested it to her.

Mary recently caught up with that principal and says "I expressed my gratitude for the choice. I feel it is a privileged life, being part of so many lives". And going 50 years strong, Waterlea School has been privileged to have had Mary at the helm for almost 20 years. Happy Birthday Waterlea!

(Mrs Mary Cavell provided some information on the early days of Waterlea which is gratefully acknowledged).

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