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BUILDING CULTURAL AWARENESS A STRATEGIC PRIORITY FOR MAC

Te Kura o Tititea Mount Aspiring College has begun rolling out a leadership programme for rangatahi Māori students in Years 7 to 13, and implementing a raft of new initiatives to develop a greater understanding of te ao Māori and te reo at the school.

Principal Nicola Jacobsen said that developing a deeper understanding of te ao Māori within the school's learning community was a strategic priority for the school.

"We want MAC to be a safe and inclusive environment for all our students, including our rangatahi Māori and their whānau," said Ms Jacobsen.

"Developing rangatahi Māori leadership within the college is one way we can enable our rangatahi to achieve success at school and in their future lives."

Ms Jacobsen said the school's new culturally focussed initiatives offered valuable learning opportunities for both students and staff.

"We've introduced a Māori performing arts enrichment programme for junior students which can lead to an NCEA-endorsed Te Ao Haka subject.

"We've created a new 'Te Ao Māori' section on our website, we offer our students a range of cultural experiences such as our house haka competition, and we are using te reo in our school publications and signage, in the classroom, and at meetings.

"We're also designing courses which incorporate mātauranga Māori and promote a greater understanding of our local area so students can apply what they learn at school in the place where they live.

"We recognise the importance of building our staff's understanding, knowledge and skills of te ao Māori through professional development that focuses on Aotearoa New Zealand's history, practices and language."

As part of the school's efforts to promote authentic learning experiences in te ao Māori, a group of students, staff and parents recently went on a haerenga to Taranaki, travelling to South Taranaki and visiting Ratana Pā, Parihaka and Mt Taranaki, paddling on the Whanganui River, and connecting with hau kāinga (local Māori) and rangatahi from local schools.

Held every two years, the haerenga is open to all students in Years 8 to 13.

Year 11 student Lucy Maibach said the Taranaki haerenga provided her with many valuable experiences.

“Before I went on the trip, I knew about Māori feeling a very strong connection to their whenua and where they come from but I didn’t understand how someone could feel so strongly connected to a piece of land.

“Now I have a much greater understanding and respect for this connection in others and also in myself. I felt like I was a part of the whenua, not just living on it. It was amazing.”

Year 11 student Ryan Enoka also found the experience deeply enriching.

“One of the highlights was all the kōrero between myself and the many matua and whaea we met on our journey. In te reo Māori we call this ‘taonga tuku iho’ which means the treasure of knowledge passed down from generation to generation,” said Ryan.

“As rangatahi, we are exactly the generation that needs to have this treasure passed down to us.”

Both students said they enjoyed learning more about tikanga, the Māori system of values and practices.

“Our time spent sitting through powhiri and staying on marae taught us all valuable lessons of tikanga and how some live their lives so very differently to us here in Wānaka,” said Ryan.

“It starts with karanga (call) and then whaikōrero (speeches), waiata (song), koha (gift), harirū (shaking hands and hongi), and then eating kai,” explained Lucy.

“I was quite nervous attending my first pōwhiri but after I’d been to a few, I realised how lovely it is to be welcomed on to a marae in this way.”

Lucy and Ryan encourage all MAC students to learn more about te ao Māori.

“I now realise I am allowed to be interested in my history and feel a part of it,” said Lucy. “I don’t believe you have to be Māori to be interested in our history, because if you are from Aotearoa, you are a part of it and that’s all that matters.”

Ryan said the values of te ao Māori are something everyone can connect with.

“Living in a way that aligns with te ao Māori puts a focus on a person’s relationship with themselves, the environment, and the people around them. It’s about whānau (family), guardianship of natural places and resources (kaitiakitanga), and living in a way that is mutually beneficial for both people and the environment.”

More information

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