

# **Ring the Bells! Sound the Conch! Shout from the Hilltops!**

It is not an exaggeration to say that every day, throughout our country, in every one of our schools, something good is happening. But do we hear about it? Do we know it? Do we value, appreciate and celebrate it? Do we talk about it? Or are we so conditioned to hearing only bad news and deficit views that we've forgotten the power of the positive perspective.

The constant bombardment of slogans like those that tell us we need to aim for improved schools, better teaching and higher achievement is a drip, drip, drip into the public psyche which skews and distorts the picture of our schools, our teachers and our children as they really are. I am not an apologist for that very small minority who need special support because they are failing to perform to reasonable expectation, but an advocate for recognising, talking about and appreciating the large majority who are!

We each have our stories to tell. Today one of my 7<sup>th</sup> Form sons, in preparation for bursary examinations, attended an optional tutorial held over the lunch break. His teacher took the tutorial while eating his lunch! My son remarked, "He really cares about us – and his lunch looked really nice!" We are so appreciative.

Earlier in the week our family received the school's newsletter. It was thematic: the principal concentrating on telling the school community of so many good things that are happening in and around the school – things that are a credit to the quality of school leadership, the professionalism of the staff and the responsiveness of the students.

The picture is one of a school that works hard to do its best, sometimes against the odds, and its successes are put to the forefront. The principal, the teachers and the students make all of these things happen. They are not done because someone is watching over them, checking them and regulating them. They are self-regulating!

Earlier this year the Ministry of Education gave us the results of an important international comparative study which examined the performance of 3<sup>rd</sup> year secondary school students. (Programme for International Student Assessment.) On average, New Zealand students were among the best of the 32 participating countries, in reading literacy.

On average, New Zealand students were in the top group of countries for both mathematical and scientific literacy. These high rankings reflect the cumulative effect of numerous good schools, good teaching, responsive pupils and supportive parents.

But was this splashed all over the media – and day after day, as the media is apt to do when there is a big story? I didn't see it. Instead, we get a tireless dictum about our schools needing to raise the literacy and numeracy achievement of our children. Some: yes. The majority: really?

Clearly it is time for a paradigm shift. It is time to shift more of our attention, our talk, our recognition to the many accomplishments, whether big or small, of our schools, our teachers and our children. It has credibility, and it won't cost a thing – so let's try to be more generous!