



# Can we teach values and attitude? Look no further than Christchurch

By Robyn Pearce



*Riccarton Way badge winners*

It's amazing where a story comes from. I was sitting in Wellington Airport with a corporate client, when he happened to mention he'd recently stepped down as chair of the Riccarton High School Board of Trustees, in Christchurch.

'They've got a great programme running at our school – the Riccarton Way,' Bill added. A few weeks later I was sitting in their principal's office, having a chat with Gary Coburn and deputy principal Phil Holstein.

Let's add another element to the background. At the same time I was proofing my fifth book, *Getting a Grip on Leadership - How to learn leadership without making all the mistakes yourself!* I had just proofed the following extract about work climate:

You also want to learn how to help your team grow their self-leadership skills, for you know that a leader's challenge is to spread responsibilities and rewards across all divisions of the organization - to develop people. How, you may ask, and where can you learn?

Not often enough in school, that's for sure! Most colleges don't run 'How to create and sustain a climate of cooperation and effectiveness in the workplace: 101' (although the occasional rare teacher or community-sponsored peer support programme integrates such concepts into

their teaching). And so most of our young people hit the streets with no formal understanding of how to get the best out of themselves, their colleagues and their work environment. Result? Huge loss of productivity, disenchanted staff, and companies who waste incredible amounts of potential earnings.

Well, I can now tell you that Riccarton High does run a programme to promote exactly that, and they're seeing great results. It began in 2001, after they'd noticed themselves telling some particularly challenging Year 9 students, 'That's not the Riccarton Way.'

Some questions then filtered to the front: What is 'the Riccarton Way? What does the school stand for? What are our values? What attitudes do we want to encourage, amongst staff as well as students?

The realisation hit that it was easy to focus on the bottom end, the problems. But what would happen if instead they focused on what they wanted, encouraged desirable behaviour, rewarded examples of positive attitude and practical application of great values?

And so they came up with a very practical programme to do just that. The aim is to build a school based on values. The programme 'unpacks' care, courtesy and respect.

How do they do it? Here are some of

the practical elements:

They identified their core values, and each year emphasise just one. It will take a few years to cover them all, but choosing one a year sharpens the focus, instead of spreading energy and attention too thin.

- A smart and simple logo was created by a professional design company – branding the image they wanted to promote. (Every marketer knows the power of an image.)
- The logo is on everything – the school flag, business cards, Year 9 students' information, the school diary every child gets, prefects' badges, and heaps of other places.
- The Riccarton Way is constantly referred to at assemblies. The assistant principal, Chris Kokay, and junior deans run assemblies for Year 9 and 10 that focus on the Riccarton Way in a positive reinforcement sense.
- Each Year 9 student gets a fridge magnet with a picture and contact details of their dean; the logo is on it.
- Attractive professionally designed action-style posters are displayed around the school, one for each year, promoting the value for the year. Last year, for instance, was