

HOKIO BEACH SCHOOL —

FEW KNOW IT EXISTS

HIDDEN away among sandhills at Hokio Beach near Levin is a social welfare home which for 60 years few people in the district have been aware of.

And of those who do know Hokio Beach School exists, most do not even know what the institution looks like, or even where at the beach it can be found.

But with the recent publicity the school has gained following two escapes in one week by a pair of 13-year-old boys much interest is being shown in its activities, with particular attention to the security system.

A rifle was involved in the first escape, with the Armed Offenders Squad in Wanganui assisting in the recapture of the boys. Because of this the school gained a notoriety the principal, Mr Keith North,

and other staff feel it does not deserve.

The school is an open institution for up to 60 State wards and while the boys are difficult they are not dangerous. Security measures are taken, but these are not stringent, bearing in mind the age of the boys — at present 10½ to 14.

Though many do not know of the school, it is through no wish of its own to remain anonymous. Visitors are always welcome and are given a tour of the institution and the school by one of the boys. Nothing is hidden—not even H block's two cells which are used for overnight security when necessary.

The school looks like any other to be found in New Zealand . . . a neat row of classrooms, head teacher's office, gymnasium, tennis courts, swimming pool and large playing field accommodating rugby goals and soccer nets.

The only real difference is the buildings on the other side of the drive — the administration block, kitchen, dining room and the four dormitories with its recreation area, known, because of its shape, as H block.

These are the buildings which remind the visitor that Hokio Beach school is a social welfare institution.

by LINDA SUMNER

By day the school is the boys' domain and by night their work and recreation revolves around the institution.

Though two separate entities, the boys' performances are collated by the staff of each to award the boys points which help them to measure their own progress and also to determine privileges they qualify for.

The school has four classroom teachers which gives a 15 to one ratio, a head teacher in a supervisory capacity, and a manual teacher who takes eight pupils at a time and relieves the pressure on the classrooms.

Since 1972, 22 teachers have been through the school and it has been without teachers for long intervals during that time.

The school has been without a head teacher now for a year though the position has been advertised by the Education Department.

The reading levels of the boys are very low and the school has a desperate need for a remedial-reading teacher, or at least, the reduction of class sizes to give the teachers the time to do it themselves.

The teachers are doing their very best for the boys in their care, but only the acting head teacher, Mr Bernie Crutchley, has any previous experience of teaching 13 to 14-year-old secondary age pupils.

The school day is organised on a somewhat unique basis, and it works remarkably well.

While most of the boys are not thrilled with the thought of school lessons, they prefer Hokio's way to the educational system they have previously been part of.

The system, introduced by Mr Crutchley, was devised with the boy's low concentration level in mind, to enable each boy to make a few decisions on his own, and to help give him a responsibility to himself.

The boys spend the first part of the day with their "home" teacher and after that are free to move between the class rooms to study the subjects of their choice, and with the teacher of their choice.

Subjects range over the usual reading, writing and arithmetic and include Maori studies and such innovations as chess, Monopoly and Scrabble which serve to relax the students while learning at the same time.

Each boy fills in a timetable as he goes, noting what activities he took part in during the day. From the timetable the teacher can advise the pupil if he is spending too much time on one subject or not enough on another.

While the pupils are working on their own, the teacher moves among them, helping with their work and giving special attention to those who need it.

Such a system can benefit both teacher and pupil alike.

The pupil can have a break from a teacher he may not be getting on with, and the teacher may come to realise his own shortcomings through attendance of his class.

While they may not be the best of students academically, the boys' art and woodwork is of a very high standard, with some of it being exceptionally beautiful.

Sport is another area in which they can excel. As well as playing rugby and soccer the boys take part in athletics, indoor basketball and harriers against other school pupils in the district. They can also indulge in canoeing on the Hokio Stream which flows through the school.

Except for two days after school which are devoted to sport, the boys spend the interval between the end of lessons and tea time organising their own activities.

Before school in the morning there are beds to make, cubicles to tidy and cleaning and sweeping to be done.

Morning break and lunch are the same as in any

school, with the boys taking part in a variety of activities.

The staff circulate freely among them, talking with them and perhaps joining in some of the games while keeping an unobtrusive eye on who is where and doing what.

The same happens in the evening with all activity revolving around H block where the duty master keeps an eye on things from a central office.

Mr North feels much of the school's success results from the active participation of staff in recreational and sporting activities.

"...and it is in these areas that the foundations for good relationships with the children are established and because of staff interest the children are encouraged to do better with resultant improved behaviour and sportsmanship.

"This influences the atmosphere tremendously and helps counteract boredom which is the basis of a good deal of trouble and misconduct," he said.

Mr North said they don't expect to perform miracles as the children have been problem children for a long time before they came into their care.

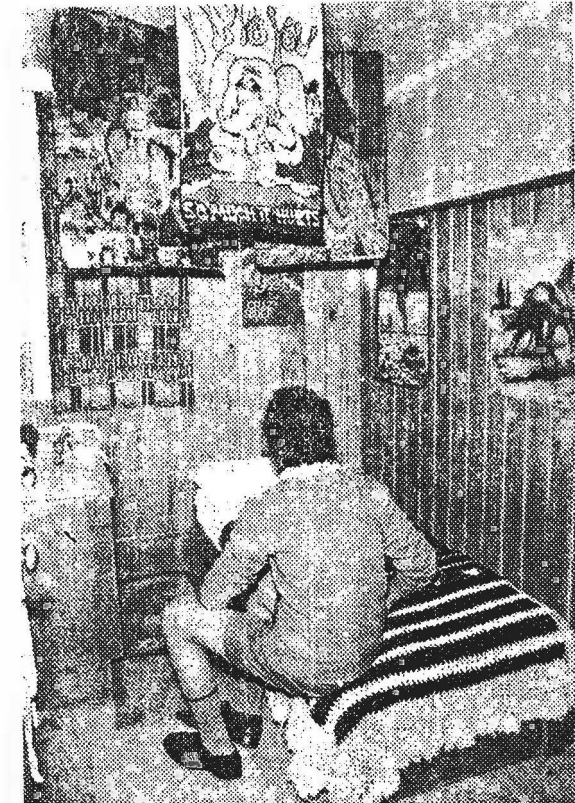
"But we can send them out better adjusted individuals and hopefully they will develop into better citizens and perhaps lead happier lives in the community.

"We can help them gain some self respect by experiencing some success and it is very important that they develop faith in themselves. One thing we should do is help them relate better with adults, specially authority

figures, and help them dispel the feeling many have when they arrive that they are all enemies."

Perhaps the greatest testimony for the school comes from a young lad almost 14, who, knowing there will be nothing for him at home when it is time for him to return there, wants to stay at the school until he is 15 and ready to start work.

This his teachers are hoping to arrange but pressure of numbers waiting to be admitted to the school may mean it will not be possible.



Each boy has his own cubicle which he must keep clean and tidy. Many of the boys give them a homely touch with colourful rugs and ornaments and posters covering the wall.



The Hokio Stream flows through the school on its way to the sea and some of the boys recreation time is spent canoeing on it. Here two youngsters return to the school over the stream after flying their gliders on the large playing field.