

School-owned cooperative looks to a good future

by Tony Deavoll

Chairman, Canterbury Education Services Society Ltd

A recent member of the NZ Cooperatives Association, Canterbury Education Services Society Ltd (CES) was established as a cooperative in 1989 by 33 state secondary schools from the



Christchurch and Canterbury area to take over the staff, operations and business of the former Christchurch Secondary Schools' Council (CSSC). Like the education boards, CSSC was a statutory body which was abolished by the Education Act 1989, heralding the birth of "Tomorrow's Schools".

For many years, CSSC had handled administrative matters for all state secondary schools in Canterbury, on the West Coast and in North Otago.

Apart from a similar but much smaller council in Wellington, CSSC was a unique organisation as all other state schools in New Zealand were administered either directly by the Department of Education or by regional education boards.

As a result, secondary schools in these areas had long enjoyed a tradition of self-managed administration and unity of purpose.

CES continues to offer a broad range of services. More recent services added to the CES portfolio have included developing and maintaining schools' asset registers, conducting triennial school board membership elections, conferencing and seminars, together with some property maintenance and planning. At the last elections held early in 2007, for example, CES managed the process for some 120 schools around the country.

SCHOOL-OWNED

As an education service centre, CES was originally one of 15 in New Zealand, albeit the only school-owned one. In 1989, as the education reforms were implemented, all education service centres except CES received cash grants, interest-free non-repayable loans and generous contracts from the Ministry of Education. This initial inequity strengthened the cooperative's purpose and, together with its long tradition of service and expertise, has taken it to where it is today: a leading education service provider to over 180 schools.

In setting up the co-op, the 33 founding

members achieved two objectives:

- the avoidance of an administrative vacuum that could have arisen from the disestablishment of CSSC;

- the continuation of a centralised resource to provide professional administrative support to member schools on a fee for service basis, utilising its staff who have a level of expertise not easily duplicated within individual schools, and at a cost that is more than competitive.

CES provides a continuing service on which school boards can rely.

With a high percentage of schools located in the upper North Island, particularly the greater Auckland area, CES established an Auckland office in 2007. This proved a positive step for the co-op.

With a staff of 26, day-to-day management is in the hands of Anna Thomson who assumed the General Manager role early in 2008. She has an



effective management team reporting to her, and the CES staff are experienced, competent, and well able to provide effective and efficient services to client schools.

GOVERNANCE

The governance of the co-op is undertaken by a small board of directors, with each director elected for a two-year term by the current 34 shareholding member schools. Half of the board retire each year, and are eligible for re-election.

From initially only servicing its original 33 member schools, CES has expanded so that it now provides financial, secretarial, and school supply services to over 700 schools throughout New Zealand.

The rebates paid to shareholding member schools is a matter that the directors are seeking to extend to all schools through the examples and advice offered through our membership of the New Zealand Cooperatives Association.

Our challenge is to continue to provide for schools those services that CES has the skill and specialist knowledge to make available.●

Tony Deavoll, Chairman,
Canterbury Education
Services Society Ltd
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Canterbury Education
Services Society premises
in Christchurch
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www.cessl.org.nz

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