

NEWS

Having sick days gets you in school

Special classes for the seriously ill

By SAM McKNIGHT

TAKING a sick day off school might seem a luxury but for pupils of the Southern Regional Health School it is a prerequisite to attend.

The board of the South Island-wide school met in Invercargill on Friday for an outpost visit but its principal Chris Parsons said not nearly enough people knew it existed.

"It's our job to teach these kids and to try and give some normality back to their lives."

Invercargill was one five centres with a campus but the school's net was spread much wider than that, Mr Parsons said.

Pupils were taught at the offices, in the home or at the health-care provider or through the magic of the internet, he said.

The Education Ministry-funded school teaches from year 1 to 13 and to be eligible pupils have to be off

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school for more than 10 days and supply a medical certificate.

"Our students have a range of ailments from glandular fever, chronic fatigue and cancer."

The two Invercargill learning centers at the Menzies Building and at PACT Youth South had about 12 students but that could change at any time, he said.

"Our job is to get the kids back into a regular school as soon as possible."

But Board of Trustees chairman Chris Bridges said more awareness of the school was needed.

"Last year we had 38 Southland students from 20 schools."

With more than 80 schools in

Southland, school referrals were only 13 per cent, with the rest coming from health and social organisations, he said.

Referring the pupils was easy and it ensured they kept up an education and did not become isolated from society, he said.

And Mr Parsons said while his pupils clearly faced battles of their own, the teachers were often subject to similar emotions.

"Last year one of our teachers lost five children, it can be very difficult."

However, there was also a huge amount of job satisfaction - it was a necessary and fulfilling role, he said.

One of Invercargill's two teachers Ruth Soper, who has been in the job since the beginning of the year, after 20 years teaching, said it was a job with extensive travel but she could see the worth of her work on the faces of the pupils.