

A School Comes Home

- by Renata Hopkins -



These students are talking about their new school, Te Raekura Redcliffs. Their new school is also a very old school! There has been a Redcliffs School in Christchurch for more than one hundred years, but in 2011, earthquakes made the school buildings unsafe. The students had to move out, and it was nine years before the school was rebuilt and students were able to return. For a long time, the school community thought that this might never happen ...



The earthquake

The story begins on 22 February 2011. At 12.51 p.m., a powerful earthquake struck. Parts of the cliffs behind the school fell down.

Rosie Jerram, who was in year 7 in 2011, remembers that day. "I was eating lunch when the shaking started. You could hear the cliffs starting to collapse. Then a dust cloud came towards us really fast. We ran towards the field, but the cliffs behind the field started falling too, so we ran towards the road to get away."

When the shaking stopped, everyone came together. "The kids were pretty upset, but the teachers were so kind." Rosie remembers that parents started to arrive soon after. Some were wearing wet clothes. The only way they could get to the school was to wade through the water of the nearby estuary because the road bridge was damaged.



2011
Rosie Jerram
2020



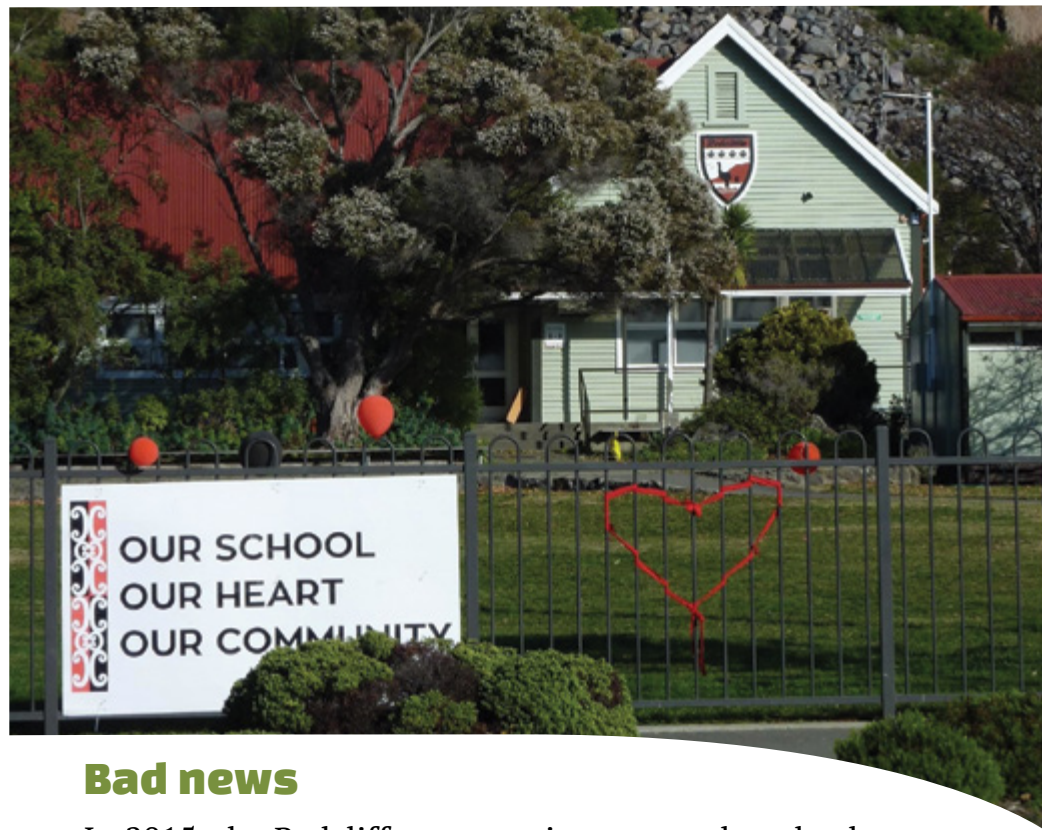
Moving around

The students had to stay home for the next few weeks while some areas of the school were fenced off and some classrooms were moved further away from the cliffs. But then, in June, soon after they had returned to school, there were more strong earthquakes. It was too risky to use the school any more.

For the next few months, classes were held in all sorts of places, including parents' homes and a church hall. For a while, the school was able to use some rooms at Sumner School.

Rosie says she learnt a lot from that time. "You never knew what might happen tomorrow. It showed us that things can change but still be OK."

Finally, in September 2011, Redcliffs School was invited to share the van Asch Deaf Education Centre in Sumner. That meant the students could all be together again, but lots of them missed going to their own local school. They looked forward to the day they could move back to Redcliffs.



Bad news

In 2015, the Redcliffs community got another shock. They found out that the government had decided to close the school for good because the earthquake had caused so much damage. Amelia, who was in year 3 then, remembers when her mum told her the news. "My sister and I just burst into tears."

There had been a school in the Redcliffs area for so long that many people felt it was the heart of their community. One of the parents, Andrea Wylie, explains why: "It came down to what it means to be a Kiwi kid – growing up with your neighbours and walking or scootering to school with them."



Taking action

A lot of people in the community wanted to save the school. They held meetings to decide what to do. They wanted everyone to know what was happening and how they felt about it.

One part of their plan was to make signs and have a big march. Three thousand people turned up! They carried signs saying “No Closure” and “Save Redcliffs School” and wore T-shirts that said “Reddy to Return”. They knew that short messages are a good way to get an idea across because they are easy to understand, and they show up well in photographs and on television. People also put “Reddy to Return” signs on their fences.

Next, the school sent hundreds of postcards to the government. The students wrote messages on the postcards, explaining why they wanted to keep their school.

A petition (a list of names of people who agree with an idea) was also started. The Redcliffs petition was signed by around 7,500 people.



Good news

In 2016, the government was due to make another decision about the school. Liam, who was in year 4 then, remembers waiting to hear the news. “We didn’t do much work that day because everyone was nervous. The teachers got us together in the gym to tell us what was going to happen.”

“Some of the teachers were crying when they came in,” adds Amelia. “We didn’t know if they were happy tears or sad tears!” Luckily, they were happy ones. The government had decided that the school would be reopened.

More decisions

However, there were still more decisions to make. Many people thought the old school grounds would be unsafe and that a new school should be built somewhere else. Someone suggested the idea of a “land swap”. The new school could be built at one of the parks in Redcliffs, and the old school grounds could be turned into a park.

Some people liked this idea, but others weren’t sure. The Ministry of Education and the Christchurch City Council listened to everyone. A few students went to council meetings to share their feelings about their school, too. At last, in September 2017, it was decided that the land swap could go ahead.

A new school – Te Raekura Redcliffs

It took three years to build the new school. While it was being built, local iwi worked with the school community on ways to remember and celebrate the important history of the Redcliffs area. Two local hapū, Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke and Ngāi Tūāhuriri gifted the school a new name – Te Raekura Redcliffs. (Te Raekura means “red, glowing headlands”.) They also gifted names for the school buildings and learning spaces.



Worth the wait

At the opening of the new school, lots of people came to celebrate – even Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. There were hugs, songs, and more happy tears. The school was home again, after nine long years.

The students agree it was worth the wait.

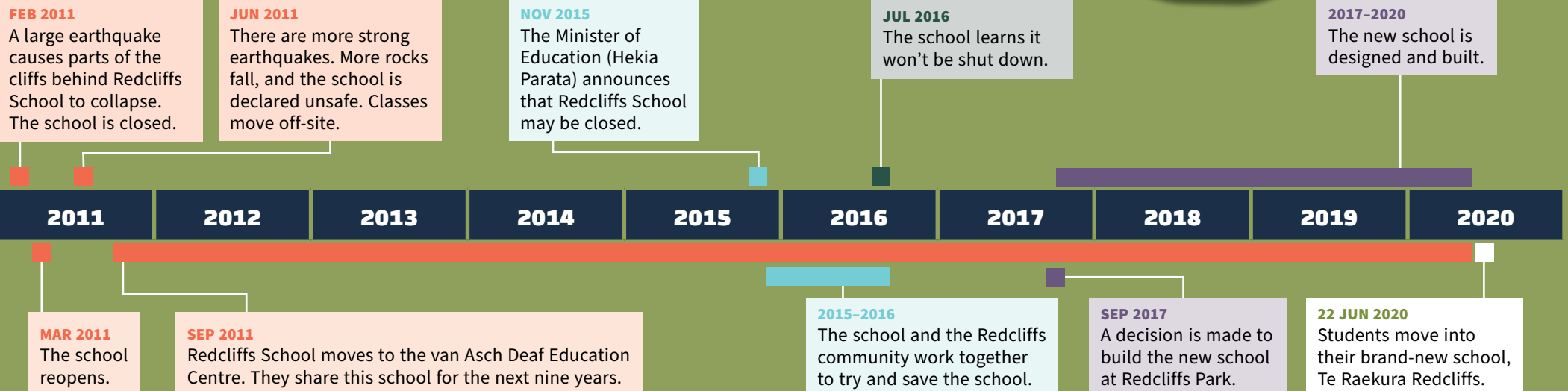


*It's amazing.
I love it!*

*I feel really
proud that we
got here.*

And lucky!

TIMELINE



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The Ministry of Education and Lift Education would like to thank Rose McInerney and the staff and students of Te Raekura Redcliffs School for their help with this article.

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Published 2021 by the Ministry of Education,
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www.education.govt.nz

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Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

ISBN 978 1 77663 865 9 (online)
ISSN 2463 4174 (online)

Publishing Services: Lift Education E Tū
Editor: David Chadwick
Designer: Liz Tui Morris
Literacy Consultant: Dr Kay Hancock
Consulting Editors: Hōne Apanui, Te Mako Orzecki, and Emeli Sione



JUNIOR JOURNAL 62

Curriculum learning areas

English
Social Sciences
Health and Physical Education

Reading year level

Year 3

Keywords

belonging, Christchurch, communication, community, demonstration, earthquake, history, land swap, message, petition, protest, rebuilding, resilience, safety, school, social action, students, Te Raekura Redcliffs, timeline