

Nexus puts Taranaki students on course

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By HUGH CHALMERS

Ryan Hill was a high achiever at school, who blitzed School Certificate subjects with three A passes.

But Ryan was bored. The New Plymouth student hated the sixth form subjects that were compulsory and he wanted to specialise in science, especially genetics. The system just didn't allow him to do it.

So he left, but hasn't dropped out. At 16, Ryan is now studying his first university papers at Western Institute of Technology (Witt). What allowed him to change his learning direction is a newly developed approach to secondary education in Taranaki.

Inglewood teacher Michael Fenton has created a programme called Nexus Research Group Charitable Trust, which is a way of helping students connect with careers they want to follow. Under the Nexus system, students are guided to the right contacts so they can prepare themselves for their chosen career paths.

Mr Fenton, the head of physics at Inglewood High School, voluntarily helps children of all ages find ways to excel in their chosen career path. He has contacts around New Zealand who can assist students in their chosen paths.

Mr Fenton said Nexus used to be science-based when it was first established in 1997, but now students could pursue any academic or career area.

"There are plenty of opportunities. We will help wherever we can."

Mr Fenton said Nexus students from 1999 and 2001 had the record for being the youngest presenters at international science conferences. Nexus, which now had dozens of students, was a non-profit, charitable organisation looking for funding or local support from community, he said.

"We've had interest from Auckland. Apparently, it is the only one in the Southern Hemisphere."

Three other teachers involved with Nexus are Heather Moore, head of nursing at WITT, Marie Barret, principal of St John Bosco Primary School, and Christine Fenton, a course co-ordinator at WITT's science department.

Ms Moore said WITT had given Nexus students access to science labs to help them with projects. Now that Nexus was broadening from just science, Witt planned to broaden its assistance to any area students wanted.

New Plymouth Mayor Peter Tennent said he endorsed and applauded what they were doing as a group: "It's one of the benefits of living in Taranaki that people give a hoot about children."

Meanwhile, Ryan said he was happy studying at WITT. He was now meeting interesting people and wanted to pursue a career in genetics. "Now I know where I want to go in life."



NEW DIRECTION: Ryan Hill conducts a chemistry experiment watched by Inglewood teacher Michael Fenton, creator of the Nexus programme.

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