

# 2025 Whītau School Staff Profiles

## Principal: Mrs Sandra Dentice

Kia ora tātou, ko Sandra Dentice tōku ingoa. He tumuaki ahau.

When I came to Linwood North School as Deputy Principal in August 1999, I had no idea just what a wonderful community of learning I would be working in or that I would have the privilege of leading the learning and becoming Principal in 2003. Through the years since my appointment, I have had the ongoing support of great School Boards, Teaching and Support Staff together with the joy of the company of many wonderful children and their whanau, some of whom are now returning to Whītau School with their children. I just love being able to make a difference in the lives of children and their families in the Linwood community. Every day at school brings both its rewards and its challenges!



I live in Burwood with my husband Garry, together with Dougal, our Scottish Terrier and Moragh, our West Highland Terrier. I have three adult children. Matthew lives in Sydney, Sarah Jane and Daniel here in Christchurch and Garry's two children live in Wellington. We have three grandchildren between us and we are especially proud that our grandson, Samuel attended Whītau School. In my spare time, I love chilling out with Garry and Samuel, catching up with my family and friends, being in my garden, singing, playing competitive bridge, learning to play better golf, fitness, reading, music and travel. We used to love spending time relaxing on our launch in the Marlborough Sounds, but now we are the proud owners of a fully self-contained caravan.

I enjoy the privilege of serving the community as a Justice of the Peace and my role as a registered marriage celebrant and a funeral celebrant, which I hope to pursue further when I retire from Principalship on Friday 19th September, at the end of Term 3, 2025.

## Deputy Principal: Miss Amy Collins

Kia ora koutou, Ko Amy Collins tōku ingoa. He tumuaki tuarua ahau.

This is my twelfth year at Whītau/Linwood North School as an Associate and then as the Deputy Principal. I love working at Whītau School! I lead the Junior area of the school. I grew up in our community and owned a house in this area until 2013, which was red-zoned, which led us to move to Halswell. I love working back in this community that supported me as a child and ensuring all students can shine at Whītau School and thrive in our wonderful community.

I have taught for twenty-four years throughout New Zealand. I live with my fiancé Phil, my deaf Cavalier King Charles Spaniel called Poppy and two cats called Dotty and Jimmy. I have two grown-up stepchildren, Alex and Grace. Alex lives in Australia and Grace lives in Oamaru. In my spare time, I enjoy reading a good book, walking the dog, crafting, shopping, gardening, cooking and baking, camping in my caravan and spending time with family and friends.



## **Associate Principal: Miss Hannah Thomas**

Kia ora, ko Hannahi tōku ingoa.

My first year at Whītau School has been a great experience. I've loved getting to know our wonderful tamariki and their whānau and being part of such a supportive community.

I grew up in Southbridge and pursued my studies at Lincoln University before completing my teaching qualifications at Canterbury University. With 13 years of teaching experience, I began my career at Spreydon School, where I taught for two years, and then spent the next 10 years at Prebbleton School.

I love teaching all subjects, especially Maths and Literacy. I have a huge passion for sports, health and fitness. I love netball, touch, the gym, rogaining and athletics. While at high school, I was a pole vaulter and competed for NZ on a few occasions. I also love taking my dog Stan (Jack Russell) for walks, especially in the hills, reading a good book and hanging out with family and friends.



## **Learning Coordinator: Mrs Kim Kennedy**

Kia ora.

My name is Kimberly Kennedy and I am privileged to work at Whītau for the next two terms as the LSC- Learning Support Coordinator, SENCO and ORS Specialist teacher.

I have moved here from Oamaru, where I have worked in the same role and also various other roles advocating for Tamariki and Whanau. I am a proud Mum of my son Cooper and daughter Bennette, along with my fur babies, Dave the Dog, Daisy and Minnie the cats. I am a big reader and spend most of the summer camping, where we enjoy the lakes, the sun and good company. I am really enjoying my time here at Whītau and look forward to building relationships with the local community.

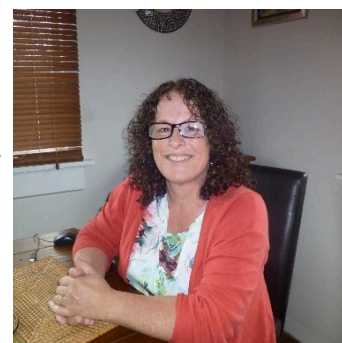


## **Year 1 Class Teacher in Room 2 - Kōrari Hāpori Leader: Mrs Rosalie Sprosen**

Kia ora. My name is Rosalie Sprosen. After three years working with Mana Ake, I returned to teaching at Whītau School in 2022. My husband Ian and I have two adult children, Daniel and Charlotte and one grandson, Luca, who will start school in February 2025. We spend a lot of time together as a whānau. I enjoy doing walks around Canterbury with whānau and friends. My favourite tracks are those near the ocean. Scarborough Cliffs through to Taylors Mistake is one of my favourite walks.

I also enjoy spending time in the garden and visiting different markets.

I look forward to working alongside you and your child next year.



## **Year 1 Class Teacher in Room 3: Ms Peta Berry**

Kia ora. I'm Peta Berry and I joined Whītau School in Term 3 of 2024. I have four children with my husband, Simon. We spend a lot of time together outdoors, in the mountains and on the sea. At home, I love my garden, walking the local hills with my dog and reading. I have taught new entrants, students in Years 7 and 8, and high school students in a specialist school. I am so excited to teach new entrants again. Their curiosity about the world around them and the exponential growth they make in their learning always amazes me. I am particularly excited about teaching Literacy.



### **Year 1 Class Teacher in Room 4: Miss Leah Harvey**

Kia ora koutou!

My name is Leah Harvey. I began my teaching journey at the beginning of 2024 at Whītau School. Originally from sunny Hawkes Bay, I moved to Ōtautahi in 2020 to study at the University of Canterbury and quickly fell in love with it. I enjoy yoga, pilates, shopping, painting, embroidery and exploring Ōtautahi on walks in my free time. Being social and outgoing, I love spending time with friends, whānau and my cat Tui. My Mum and Dad have just recently moved to Wellington and my older sister is currently living in London. I am so excited to meet my new Whītau whānau next year!



### **Year 1/2 Class Teacher in Room 5 - Acting Kehakai Hāpori Leader: Ms Sherry Gold**

Kia ora koutou.

My name is Sherry Gold. I joined Whītau School in Term 3 of 2022 and really enjoy teaching here. I returned to New Zealand six years ago after 25 years away, living and teaching in London. I grew up at Waikuku Beach and still visit there often. I enjoy travelling, gardening, sewing and listening to live music. I love using storytelling to create exciting writers. I look forward to meeting with you all next year.



### **Year 2 Class Teacher in Room 6: Mrs Fi Laird**

Kia ora whānau!

My name is Fi Laird and I joined the team at Whītau School in Term 4 of 2022. I live with my husband, our 4-year-old daughter, Kaia and my 15-year-old stepson, Liam. I also have two grown-up stepchildren, Finn and Mia who are working and planning to travel the world. I like to stay fit after work with kickboxing at the gym, and I enjoy outdoor family time. I am passionate about digital literacy and love to show tamariki ways to showcase their digital learning. I look forward to returning to Whītau School in 2025 and getting to know you and your tamariki.



### **Year 2 Class Teacher in Room 7: Mrs Prabh Bhambra**

Kia ora!

My name is Prabhjeet; You can call me Prabh.

For ten years, I have lived in Hamilton, New Zealand, with my husband and our two wonderful kids. We have made many great memories here.

I have worked in several respected schools in both New Delhi and Hamilton. Each job has helped me grow my passion for teaching and commitment to creating a positive learning environment for my students. I am excited to join the Whītau School community and look forward to contributing to its lively atmosphere. In my spare time, I enjoy walking, travelling to new places and exploring different cultures. I am also getting ready for a new adventure, as I will soon move to Christchurch. I can't wait to continue my teaching journey at Whītau School!





### **Year 3 Class Teacher in Room 8: Mr Harrison Jolly**

Kia ora.

My name is Harrison Jolly. I am from Ōtepoti/Dunedin and studied at the Otago College of Education. I have been teaching at Whītau for one year in Room 5/Rūma Rima and am ecstatic to learn with the Whītau tamariki in Room 8/Rūma Waru. I am positive, caring and enthusiastic in all realms of my life.

My classroom is a warm, inclusive environment where tamariki will feel at home. Relationships and demonstrating Manaakitanga are at the core of my values. I strive to form them by genuinely expressing empathy, respect and care. I enjoy making learning fun, engaging and accessible while prioritising the hauora/well-being of tamariki.

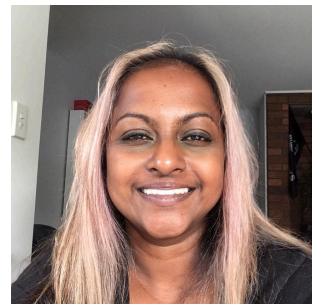
I am passionate about several sports, including basketball, American Football, and rugby, to list a few. I play quarterback for the New Zealand Mako Development team, as well as the Canterbury Panthers in Flag, and contact American Football. I also enjoy superhero content, which reminds me of a strong childhood passion. I love spending time with my friends and whānau, keeping active on the field or the court and watching new releases at the movies.



### **Year 3/4 Class Teacher in Room 9 - Karawhā Hāpori Leader: Mrs Joyce Maria Soosai**

Kia Ora whānau. Ko Joyce Maria Soosai tōku ingoa.

I am from Singapore but I have studied, lived and worked in New Zealand for 29 years. I am married and have two teenage children, Joanna and James. I enjoy walking on the beach and through Bottle Lake Forest. I like to spend my time working around the house and garden during the holidays. I spent a lot of time at Tairoa QE II gym. On the weekends, I hang with my family and church. I have been teaching in NZ for ten years and in Singapore. It has been great being at Whītau School and I have taught in Karawhā block and Kākano block since 2016. I look forward to meeting you all and working alongside your child next year.



### **Year 4 Class Teacher in Room 10: Miss Lina Ioane**

Talofa lava, mālo e lelei, bula vinaka - my name is Lina Ioane.

I feel so blessed and grateful to be teaching here at Whītau School. I'm the eldest in my family, with three sisters, two brothers and a gorgeous nephew, Eli, who lives in Oamaru. My little Fijian-Samoan son, Ratu Aseri, has just turned one, and he brings so much joy to my life. I'm passionate about Pasefika Arts, Te Reo Māori, and especially working with our Māori and Pasefika students to help them connect with their learning through language, art, and dance. I love hanging out with my son and partner in my spare time, shopping, sleeping, watching rugby, and playing social netball. I'm looking forward to working with our learners in 2025 and creating some memorable learning experiences together!





### **Year 4/5 Class Teacher in Room 11: Ms Abby Bills**

Tēnā koutou e hoa ma

Ko Alan tāku tāne

Ko Joey, rātou ko Jack, ko Jimmy ā māua tama

Ko Bills-Strange tōku ingoa whānau

Ko Abby tōku ingoa

He kaiako taku mahi ki te kura o Whītau

My name is Abby Bills-Strange (Ms Bills) and 2025 is my second year teaching at Whītau School. I have been teaching at various schools in Christchurch for 16 years. I am married to Alan and we have three sons. Our boys play many sports and when I'm not taking them to their games, managing their teams, or at school, I like to read and write. I love digital technology and creating videos to present our classwork.

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini - my strength is not that of an individual but that of the collective.



### **Year 4/5 Class Teacher in Room 12: Miss Sarah Diedrichs**

Kia ora.

My name is Sarah Diedrichs. I have been working at Whītau School since 2019 and teaching since 2005. Much of that time has been spent teaching on the east side of Christchurch. My passions are Literacy, Digital Technologies and Art. In my spare time, I am learning Te Reo Māori and I love to walk my dog!



### **Year 4/5 Class Teacher in Room 13: Mrs Aleisha Blackler**

Kia ora My name is Aleisha Blackler.

I am incredibly fortunate to have joined the Whītau community in 2024. Since joining this vibrant school, I've loved engaging with students, staff and whanau to create a supportive and dynamic learning environment. I live with my 11-year-old twin daughters Mina and Crystal-Ann and my husband Cannon. In my spare time, I enjoy being by the water, camping, fishing, playing and listening to music.



### **Year 5/6 Class Teacher in Room 14: Miss Belinda Walsh**

As a teacher I enjoy working in my local community and have spent the past 16 years at Pareawa Banks Avenue and with my move last year to Whītau I am still close to home. Before retraining as a teacher, I was a Residential Social Worker which taught me a lot about what children need to be the best that they can be.

I have one daughter who also went to school locally. I have strong links to the Irish community in Christchurch and have taught dance for many years giving me a lot of experience in putting on performances both in dance and singing. Some of my favourite times as a teacher have been watching the joy that children get being on stage.



## **Year 5/6 Class and Release Teacher in Room 15 - Kōrari Hāpori Leader: Mr Darrin Mitchell**

Kia ora, Ko Darrin Mitchell tōku ingoa. I am born and bred Cantabrian and I have lived and worked here all my life. I have been a kaiako for 21 years and I love my job. I am an avid sports follower and still manage to play football during the winter season. I also love to travel both overseas and within New Zealand. I love gardening and feel passionate about protecting our environment. Music is another passion. I have an extensive record collection and love attending concerts. I have two grown-up kids - my daughter is a nurse here in Christchurch and my son works in London.



## **Year 5/6 Class Teacher in Room 15: Mrs Kelly Heads**

Kia ora!

My name is Kelly Heads and I love teaching at Whītau School! I have worked here from 2010 to 2014, and I returned in 2020. My husband and I have two children, Ashton (10) and Lexi (9) and our wee dog, Oreo. We love travelling whenever we can! In my free time I love camping, kayaking and the outdoors. This year, I have started playing bridge again. Otherwise, you can find me at home baking, creating with arts and crafts or spending time with my whānau. I can't wait to work with everyone in the New Year. Have a safe summer break!



## **Literacy Intervention Teacher: Mrs Karen An**

Kia ora koutou. Ko Karen An tōku ingoa.

2025 marks my fifth year of teaching Literacy at Whītau School. I feel privileged to support our Whītau tamariki as they develop their reading and writing skills, celebrating their progress and growing confidence along the way. I live in Rolleston with my husband, Joseph, and our two children, Sienna and Marcus. After school, I'm a busy mum, driving back and forth to take them to their sports activities. I am passionate about fostering a love of learning and literacy, and I look forward to another year of working with our amazing Whītau tamariki.



## **Classroom Release Teacher: Mr Tim Betts**

Ko Timothy Scott Betts toku ingoa,  
I tipu ake au ki ngā whenua o te ao,  
Nō Ōtautahi ahau

Kaua e mate wheke mate ururoa,  
No reira, Tēna koutou, Tēnā koutou, Tēnā tātou katoa.

When I was travelling in Thailand once, off the tourist track I asked a man for directions. We went our separate ways and then he was back with his scooter five minutes later. He took me where I wanted to go and let me sleep on his lounge floor. The next day, he took me to his children's school and they put me in front of the class, as I was English speaking, where I taught my first lesson. Many years after more adventures and Teachers College, I ended up at Whītau School. I have always enjoyed teaching and sharing with people, whether children or adults. I enjoy being creative with hands, body and soul; whether it be a poem, a story, a painting, a picture, a cardboard weapon or a fancy dress costume. These days, my life has settled into the more mundane, but no more life-affirming or joyful; being a father, a husband, a friend, a computer gamer, a Kindle reader, a pickleball player, a dinner maker, a Netflix binger, a photographer and a teacher.



## **Classroom Release Teacher: Mrs Janine Gemmell**

Kia ora.

My name is Janine Gemmell. I grew up in this community, attending Linwood North throughout my primary school years. After many years teaching, I am still passionate about helping children learn and flourish in a positive, caring environment.

I live with my husband, Roger and our two sons; Nicholas who is almost 20 and Zach who is 14. We have a Labrador, Jett and a cat called Victor. I have always been into sports and competed in gymnastics and trampolining. I follow world gymnastics closely as it's still a passion of mine. These days I'm a regular at the gym where I enjoy training with weights and doing a few classes. Reading and watching the odd Netflix show are great for relaxation.



## **Classroom Release Teacher: Mrs Alison Cox**

Kia ora.

I'm Alison Cox. I'm originally from Auckland, and most of my family still live there. I have three adult children spread across New Zealand and Australia. I've taught at schools in both the North and South Islands. I spent two years teaching in the Solomon Islands through Volunteer Service Abroad. It's great to be teaching at Whītau School. In my spare time, I love walking our amazing NZ tracks, gardening, and reading.

