

17 May 2011

Dear Parents

## **TAWA COLLEGE SENIOR FORMAL DANCE**

As in most Secondary Schools across New Zealand, our Senior Formal is one of the school highlights, standing alongside Prizegiving, the Leavers' Dinner and the Major Production. It is a school event on which it is well worth spending time and effort and one which we want to preserve as an extra curricular activity.

In my experience the Senior Formals that have been most successful and enjoyable are those in which clear boundaries and high expectations have been set and have been adhered to by all who attend. The cooperation and support of parents in ensuring these boundaries are observed is a key ingredient in the success of any Formal. Hence I am writing to all parents of Year 12 and 13 students who are eligible and welcome to attend the Tawa College Senior Formal which will be held at Wellington Town Hall on Saturday 11 June 2011 from 8pm to 1am. I should note that the Formal is an event exclusively for Tawa College students in Year 12 and Year 13. These Year 12 and 13 students need to be currently enrolled at Tawa College. We do not give and have not given in the past, permission for any other students to attend. At present we have the largest number of students on the Tawa College roll at Year 12 and 13 in the college's history. We will not be able to accommodate everyone if all students decided to attend.

Therefore students who do not meet the expected standards of behaviour as laid out in the Tawa College "Code of Conduct" will not be able to attend. Students have been repeatedly informed that anyone who does not attend subject classes, both regularly and punctually, or who wear incorrect uniform may not be able to attend. In recent years a small number of senior students breached either the attendance or behaviour requirements and were not allowed to attend the Formal. This year we are also requiring ALL students who attend the Formal to return by bus to Tawa College at the end of the evening.

The Tawa College Formal is not an end in itself. It is part of our programme because we think it contributes to the "total education package" we offer our students. The activities associated with the Formal - planning and organisation by the students, ballroom dancing lessons, social graces explained and inculcated – all have worthy and desirable aims.

I have two other reasons for writing, first to brief you on some of our concerns and secondly to ask for your support. Our concerns are that some of our students may want to become involved with activities which push either the educational or the social benefits of the Formal into the background. We are worried about the costs associated with attending the Formal. It is not necessary to spend large sums of money on dresses or evening suits, hair styling, or mode of transport to the Formal. Peer pressure may result in students trying to persuade parents of the "need" to spend large sums of money, but the attendance at the Formal has never been envisaged by the school as a reason to have parents or students spend more money than they wish to.

You should know that I will be speaking to our students about what is appropriate to wear to the Formal. I will remind students that this event is not a fancy dress party, but the Senior Formal Dance, and that the dress worn by students should be appropriate to the occasion. If students chose to wear fancy dress rather than formal attire the character of the Formal will change probably irreversibly.

I have no wish to bar students on the basis of their clothing, so I trust all students will cooperate on this matter.

Every year we are always concerned about pre and post Formal parties at which parental supervision is minimal or absent, and where alcohol is served. The media are always more than ready to publish details of student activity and behavioural excesses related to school Formals, and any adverse publicity puts our Formal at risk.

The school's standards regarding alcohol are very clear, and they have not altered over the years. The young men and women who are attending the Formal must not attend school functions having consumed alcohol. To that end, a breathalyser will be present and students may be randomly tested to check that the specified boundaries with regard to alcohol have been respected. Furthermore, if post Formal parties develop where alcohol is supplied, supervision is not adequate and matters get out of hand, then the school will clearly have to rethink its commitment to the Formal. We have to remember that many of the young men and women who attend the Formal are 16 or 17 years old - ages at which the law of the land places considerable restriction on the use of both alcohol and cars. What applies to alcohol of course also applies to student use of drugs including tobacco.

The Formal must never be seen by our students as the "curtain raiser" to other events. If it does, it will have out-lived its purpose. Please remember that there are those in our district who would willingly gatecrash such events, so parents should ensure that any post Formal gatherings are small, are by invitation only, are well supervised by adults, and are not 'advertised' beforehand. It needs to be pointed out that after the students arrive back by bus, Tawa College's responsibility finishes. **There is no such thing as a Tawa College endorsed post-Formal function.**

In summary:

1. It is our hope that everyone will be able to attend the Formal in 2011. I am confident that all students who attend class regularly will be able to go. However, it may be that some are unable to attend due to poor school attendance records.
2. All students who attend the Formal must return by bus to Tawa College at the end of the evening. The cost of this will be included in the ticket. The ticket cost is \$110 for 2011.
3. It is not necessary to spend large sums of money on clothes, hairdressing, etc.
4. Students must not come to the Formal having consumed alcohol.
5. Please ensure parental supervision of any events associated with the Formal.
6. The Formal is the main event of the evening. We do not want to hear of large parties occurring either before the Formal, or after the Formal is over. Such parties, in our experience, bring trouble of one sort or another, reflect very badly on the school, and can cause considerable grief to parents if they get out of hand.
7. Please assist us by reinforcing the school rules that must be associated with any such evening.

The last nine College Formals that I have attended have been thoroughly pleasant occasions which have been enjoyed by all who attended, whether they be students, staff or the Board. I understand that this has been the case for many years. With your support and your sound guidance of your son or daughter, I am sure we can continue to organise and run a Tawa College Formal of which the whole school community can be justly proud.

Yours sincerely

Murray Lucas  
Principal