Roma learning from Waikirikiri reo strategies

by Christine McCafferty

STRATEGIES for preserving minority languages were discussed when Waikirikiri School staff met with teachers from Europe who are working to develop the teaching of Romani language in schools.

Romani is the dialect of Roma — the largest ethnic minority group in Europe. Erika Adamova, a secondary school teacher from Slovakia, and Florin Nasture, who works for the Roma Education Fund in Budapest, were in Gisborne to attend the Democracy in the Pacific Conference held in Ruatoria.

The pair also took the opportunity while they were here to learn more about teaching Te Reo Maori and heard from Waikirikiri School staff about their development as a bilingual and total immersion school.

“We are sharing strategies on the retention of native languages and particularly drawing on the Maori experience,” Ms Adamova said.

“We have met with people who work in the Maori education field to find strategies that may be applicable with teaching the Romani language.”

She said New Zealand was far more developed in terms of preserving the Maori language compared with how European countries were with Romani.

“A lot has been achieved here. It seems Maori people have a lot of focus on retaining and teaching their language whereas Roma people are just starting to deal with this type of thing.”

— Erika Adamova

AN American woman visiting Palmerston North with her husband detoured to Gisborne for a few days in search of a local teacher she met with a group of Gisborne students in Hoturoa in 2004.

But the search of Ann-Lousie Potockhini of Oklahoma proved fruitless as she remembers only the surname of her teaching acquaintance, a Mrs Ruru.

She had offered to help set up a penpal association for the Gisborne students with students from her own hometown school. But in packing her things Mrs Potockhini lost Mrs Ruru’s details and she very much regretted letting her down. When the opportunity came to revisit Gisborne she went out of her way to find Mrs Ruru.

She may have retired from teaching and I can’t even remember the name of the school where she taught,” Ms Potockhini said.

She hopes Mrs Ruru will read this and contact her by email at: cleanwaterkarl@arkansas.net

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