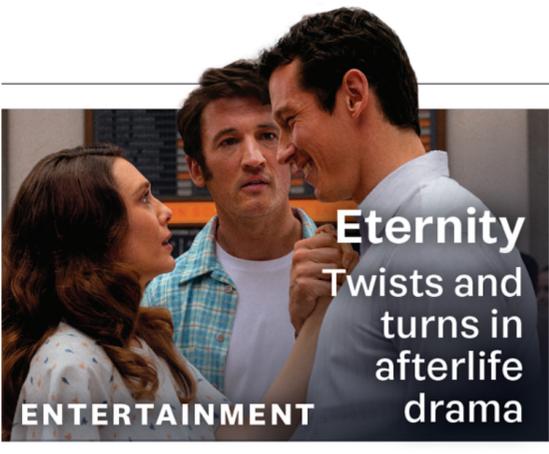


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Eternity
Twists and turns in afterlife drama

ENTERTAINMENT

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INSIGHT



The 'angry centrist' election?
Middle NZ dissatisfied but unsure about solutions
OPINION

An online vendetta no-one can stop

Naenae College fighting back against 'malicious' social media campaign

SOCIAL MEDIA
Hanna McCallum



Naenae College principal Chris Taylor has been hit with an onslaught of complaints and OIA requests not long after taking up the position of principal.

In one video, Naenae College principal Chris Taylor is seen sitting at his desk, smiling. Then he pulls out a gun, held in two hands, and starts shooting. Bang, bang, bang. In another, he says cheerfully to the camera: "Here at Naenae College, we help the bullies and punish the affected." The fake AI-generated videos, only about six seconds long and rarely with a caption, were posted to an Instagram page, which Taylor noticed about three months ago. Other content, AI-generated from photos taken from the website and Facebook page of the Lower Hutt secondary school, show staff and students breaking into dances, marching, chanting or throwing rocks in the air. Three websites containing allegations of misconduct, poor facilities, mismanagement, and highlighting the college's lower than national average NCEA pass rates have been taken down through online safety advisers Netsafe over the past couple of years. A fourth remains online. The websites attempted to be factual, Taylor says, but the newer social media campaign has become "a lot more malicious". He suspects it is the most recent iteration of expressing ongoing "gripes" against the college by a former student who was excluded - expelled for those more familiar with that term - more than two years ago. "This was the first time that it became so harmful." But it was only the tip of the iceberg. It first started with an Official Information Act (OIA) request from the former student - recognisable by their name - for data on vandalism in the bathrooms and how much it cost to restore, back in August 2023. Taylor had just been newly appointed principal, due to take on the role in October. The former student, who *The Post* has decided not to name for legal reasons, had been excluded from the school not long before. Then, an onslaught of complaints and OIA requests - summarised by Taylor in a document spanning eight pages - began. The former student complained to the school board about his treatment related to his exclusion, then the Ministry of Education, the Ombudsman and eventually the Human Rights Tribunal, claiming his autism had not been taken into consideration and, therefore, the exclusion

impinged on his human rights. "In all those cases, everyone has landed on our side and firmly said, 'no, you were not wrong'," Taylor says. But the OIA requests continued, Taylor counting 46 - 13 alone of which came in following a board meeting, which the student had also begun to attend. The first 15 to 20 had his name attached before they began coming through under different names - assumed to be the former student due to the similar nature. The information released would then also appear on websites - the different versions almost all identical in content - leading Taylor to believe it is the former student behind them. He estimates he and his personal assistant have spent thousands of hours over the past two years responding to them, leading to "plenty of sleepless nights [and] loads of frustration". When Taylor eventually stopped responding, the Ombudsman agreed they were vexatious and frivolous in nature and he no longer had to reply - that was some time this year. But despite the time spent, taking resources from tending to the needs of his current students - and the emotional toll it has had - no avenue has been successful in holding the former student accountable. There is no "outward threat" for the police to respond to or technically any law broken. Taylor has gone through Netsafe, police, academic experts and even paid a lawyer to understand whether it breaches the Harmful Digital Communications Act - "none of them have been successful". The Harmful Digital Communications Act applies to harm caused to individuals, not an institution, which means "he can attack the school as an entity as much as he wants", Taylor says. "It certainly takes me away from my core business, which is the students here and the staff here. It's very hard because there's a real lack of power to do anything about it."

TURN TO PAGE 3



Director James Cameron and actor Oona Chaplin on the set of 20th Century Studios' Avatar: Fire and Ash.

20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

Call for better rebates amid Avatar frenzy

FILM
Chief Arts Chumko
Chris Andrews Correspondent

Live blog
Avatar premiere coverage live at thepost.co.nz from 4pm

Distinguished Canadian-born director James Cameron, who is marking the release of his *Avatar: Fire and Ash* with the biggest film premiere Wellington has seen since 2012, says he would love to talk to the Government about improving the rebate scheme for film-makers, to entice more productions to choose Aotearoa as a screen destination. "It could be better," the film-maker told *The Post* in a wide-ranging interview yesterday, one of several interviews the star gave to media ahead of the showing of the visual spectacle *Fire and Ash*, which an audience today will get to see at Courtenay Place's Embassy, after a red carpet event that's closing roads and is expected to draw crowds in the thousands. It is the third film to be released in the epic science fiction franchise, following the release of *Avatar* in 2009 and *Avatar: The Way of Water* in 2022, but the only one so far to have its Australasian premiere in the city that helped to make it, as well as the city that Cameron now calls home with his wife, Suzy. Cameron, who was an illustrator and

artist before becoming a film-maker and who was made a New Zealand citizen this year, begins our interview by saying that he approaches cinema as a sort of illustrative art. "I just feel like I'm painting with pixels and photons, as opposed to paints," he said. *Fire and Ash*, which runs for nearly three and a half hours but flies by due to its engrossing and immersive nature, is more emotionally intense than its predecessors. Dealing with themes of family, colonisation and humanity's impact on and relationship with the natural environment, Cameron says the film's heightened sense of jeopardy was deliberate. "Action is a cathartic thing, but only if you've built the suspense on the jeopardy beforehand, and [have] the emotional commitment of the audience. If the audience doesn't care about the people that are being plunged into these action situations, then it just sort of plays out as a kind of spectacle for its own sake," he says. *Fire and Ash* begins slowly before building its momentum, opening with the aftermath of a tragedy in the previous film.

Then come the invaders from space to the fantastical world of Pandora: fittingly, humans from Earth, intent on taking it over and determined to extract it - by industrial means - of its resources in name of corporate greed. New is the presence of the violent Mangkwan Clan, also known as the Ash People, led by actor Oona Chaplin's unapologetically militant leader Varang. Without giving too much away, the new tribe of Na'vi humanoid the audience is introduced to are hell-bent on domination. But at the heart of the film is the grief, blaming and guilt that unfolds between the family comprised of Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), his partner Neytiri (Zoe Saldana) and their children: Kiri (Sigourney Weaver), Lo'ak (Britain Dalton), Spider (Jack Champion), and Tuktirey (Trinity Bliss). As a writer, Cameron sees a bit of his own 14-year-old self in Lo'ak's story. "And Jake's a little bit [like] my dad. But Jake's also a little bit me as a father ... of five kids. So, you know, I love that about screen writing; you can kind of pop your mind around into all these different characters." *Fire and Ash* was filmed with *The Way of Water* concurrently, with the actors engaging in performance capture, an advanced technique that records an actor's complete

performance, for about a year and a half before Wellington's Weta FX took over the bulk of the mind-blowing VFX work. "As a writer-director, I just want to get the truth of every scene," Cameron says. "It's not necessarily even my truth as the writer. It's the sort of collaborative truth that we find, right? The actors are bringing their own life experience [and] their preparation for their character. They're bringing a lot of creative energy into that. I think of it as a creative sandbox, just a play space or safe space ... We can do anything in there. We're completely unbridled, and it's pure imagination. So it's a wonderful experience." Some of the most engaging scenes for Cameron, and the ones he's most proud of, are the "two-handers" in which two characters are talking and there's not much else going on: no action, no spectacle, no creatures. "The spectacle, in a way, is the easier part, because I have some of the world's best artists and VFX artists ... working with me on that." With more than 1500 New Zealand crew members being involved in *Fire and Ash*'s production, and all three films contributing \$1.1 billion to the local economy, the

TURN TO PAGE 2

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