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Nelson Mandela is a former president of the international college. Picture / Reuters.

Global college eyes remote Otago site

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By Karen Tay

Paradise Valley in Glenorchy may soon be home to a United World College, the international boarding school whose graduates include, among others, Cabinet minister David Cunliffe and the sons of Nelson Mandela.

Glenorchy in Otago was chosen because it was a "sleepy little town", said Lucy Barnard, national selection co-ordinator for the college.

The international college has approved plans for a New Zealand branch, and the committee has an agreement with Paradise Trust for land to build the school.

The aim of United World schools, of which there are 10 around the world, was to "isolate" young people to give them "a sense of community", Ms Barnard said. United World students would be given an education which would bring them into contact with other cultures so they could "unite" for a "sustainable future".

Most United World colleges were in remote areas with the exception of Hong Kong and Singapore.

United World's former presidents would make any Who's Who list. Nelson Mandela is a former president and still acts in an honorary capacity; Queen Noor of Jordan is the current president.

"It's exclusive in the sense that you have to be selected to attend," said Ms Barnard.

The selection process was based on merit, but it would not necessarily be the "dux of the school" who would be selected.

"We look for all-round merit. They need to be involved in their school and community, and also need to be physically active."

The estimated cost to attend the school would be around \$30,000 and students would only be accepted for two pre-university years. United World students will gain an International Baccalaureate diploma at the end of the two years.

The cost for a full year's board at King's College in Auckland is \$10,792.

Rebecca Lewis, a 2003 graduate of the United World College of South East Asia, said she had "the best time" of her life at the school.

Students were encouraged to be all-rounders, and had to take at least one each of maths, science, arts and a language subject.

"It's difficult if you're not so good in certain areas but the school was really good at helping me bring up my weak subjects like maths," Ms Lewis said.

Students also had to be involved in C.A.S (Creation, Action, Service), which were categories of achievements at the school.

"You do about 50 hours worth of each of those categories in the two years you do the International Baccalaureate."

Despite the high fees, Ms Barnard hopes to be able to offer full scholarships for most students.

New Zealand sent selected students to United World colleges overseas every year.

This year's students include Elroy Finn, the son of Neil Finn. Elroy will attend the United World College of the Atlantic in Wales.

Ms Barnard said she hoped to have the New Zealand college set up by 2012.