

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF AUCKLAND

Catholic Schools Office

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Proverbs 4:13

7 APR 2011

CATHOLIC SPECIAL CHARACTER EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT

ST. MARK'S CATHOLIC SCHOOL PAKURANGA

27-28 October 2010

School Details

Name : **St. Mark's Catholic School**

Address : **334 Pakuranga Highway
Pakuranga**

School Type : **Primary**

Principal : **Mrs Catherine Rivers**

Directors of Religious Studies : **Mrs Arminda Wood
Mrs Rosemary Grant**

Board of Trustees Chairperson : **Mr Richard de Haast**

Parish Priest : **Fr Raphael Lobo**

Reviewers : **Mr Neil Laurenson
Sr Lucille Taylor**

Report Confirmed : **4 April 2011**

The National Administration Guidelines (NAG 2) requires all schools to develop a Strategic Plan, maintain a programme of self-review and report to the community. In Catholic Schools this process must include provision for the maintenance and development of Catholic Special Character. The review and development cycle includes annual internal self-review of a key dimension of Catholic Special Character as well as an external review every four years.

The purpose of the external review is to provide assurance to the Proprietor that the school has appropriate systems in place to deliver education with a Catholic Special Character in terms of the following three Key Dimensions:

Catholic Community:
Te Iwi Whanui Katorika

The extent to which the school is a Christian community where Gospel values are central, where faith is nourished, and where Christian celebration in the Catholic tradition is highly valued.

Pastoral Care:
Manaakitanga

The extent to which the school community nurtures, supports and cares for individuals.

Religious Education:
Te Whakaakoranga Whakapono

The extent to which the school helps to fulfil the teaching Mission of the Church.

As well as the key dimensions, the Reviewers look at the school's process for self-review and how areas for development are incorporated into the school's Development Plan. In carrying out this review, the Reviewers had access to relevant documentation, interviewed staff, Board of Trustee members, parents and students and visited all classrooms.

SELF REVIEW

The school has a process for annual Catholic Special Character self review to identify strengths and areas for development

Ongoing review of a key dimension of Catholic Special Character is included in the Strategic Direction for 2009 – 2011. Documentation for previous years shows that the school has engaged in a review process which included staff meetings, discussions and surveys. However there was no clear outline and summary of how the process was carried out. The Self Review folders included materials unrelated to the review process and it was difficult to decipher an orderly process or any targets and action plan resulting from areas identified for development. While the Proprietors Representatives' Report each year notes areas for development, these have not followed through into the Annual Development Plan.

One of the main purposes for review is development. A committee comprising several members of the Board of Trustees could work with the Directors of Religious Studies on the Annual Review Process so that the review be more closely aligned to the school's annual development plan, and progress on targets be monitored.

At the conclusion of the review, a report should summarise the process, results from surveys, meetings and discussions and make recommendations. This is important for future reference and to be able to evaluate and review progress in areas for development. The report should be included with the Proprietor Representatives' Annual Report.

It is recommended that significant areas for development arising from the Catholic Special Character Self Review be added to the Annual Plan with specific actions, outcomes and persons responsible. These should then be reviewed and followed through if required.

Self Review Recommendations:

- 1) That significant areas for development arising from the Catholic Special Character Self Review be added to the Annual Plan with specific actions, outcomes and persons responsible.

CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
Te Iwi Whānui Katorika

The school is a community where gospel values are central, where faith is valued and where Christian celebration in the Catholic tradition is highly valued

St. Mark's Catholic School provides a Christ-centred, challenging, safe, happy learning environment where self-confident children achieve success in all areas of the curriculum. This is the vision of the school which is being earnestly lived out by the staff, students and school community. Catholic Special Character is paramount to the daily life of the school.

School Culture

Catholic Special Character is visible in the relationships, and the artistic expressions, seen throughout the school

The school has continued to stress the acronym 'A.B.C.' for the concepts of Attitude, Behaviour, Consistency and Commitment. These are the umbrella under which the school's Mission, Charism and core values are continually articulated and nurtured. This is visualised in the three rings that wrap around the school crest. Children demonstrated a positive attitude, self control, commitment and a desire to do their best in all areas of school life. They are given the opportunity to set goals and to take on responsibilities from a young age.

The school motto, 'Seek and You Shall Find, Rapua Kia Kitea,' reminds everyone to do their best and success is celebrated.

The school has worked hard to reclaim the charism of the Mission Sisters who founded the school in 1979. This has been named and woven into the core values and spirit which is continually being articulated, instilled and very successfully lived out earnestly and sincerely by staff and students. The Mission Sisters are involved in school events, especially Masses, Liturgies and Mission Day celebrations.

The school crest includes the symbols of the Mission Crest, the lion for St. Mark representing courage and a can do attitude, an unfolding koru which depicts developing faith and knowledge. A large cross forms the background representing the centrality of Christ. The children understood the significance of the Crest.

Leadership

Leadership effectively shapes the faith-based vision, direction, values and outcomes of the school programme

The school is fortunate to have a Principal who provides professional and spiritual leadership for the school community. She brings many years of experience to her role. She is committed to Catholic education in her own school, the Diocese and the wider mission of the Church in New Zealand. She has been an active member of the Auckland Catholic Primary Principals' Association representing them on various committees. She has strong personal faith and has been instrumental in refounding the school's charism and its integration into the core values so that it is meaningful for the children and staff. The Board of Trustees acknowledges the strong leadership the Principal provides and together they are committed to wanting the best opportunities and education for the children. The Principal and Board of Trustees chairperson have developed a strong working

relationship built on mutual respect and a love for the school and students who attend it. They have the confidence and respect of staff, students and their families.

Parents appreciate that they can always approach the Principal and teachers and that there is "never a fear that you can't talk to them." This was endorsed by the students. "We are not afraid to talk to the teachers. They talk to us politely." The pastoral needs of the children are always uppermost in their decision making and mode of operating. The staff love the children and see their work as a vocation and are prepared to go the extra mile. "My children feel valued at this school. They are encouraged and their self esteem is nurtured." (Parent)

The Board of Trustees is united in its purpose to provide an excellent Catholic education for the students. The trustees work as a team and Catholic Special Character guides their decision making.

Partnership

Education is a collaborative responsibility

The school recognises that in order to enhance children's learning the Board of Trustees and staff must respond to the educational needs and wishes of the school community. "The school will actively demonstrate an open and welcoming atmosphere that acknowledges the importance of parents/caregivers' support and partnership." (Philosophy) Parents shared examples of the efforts that the school has taken to ensure that this happens. One parent expressed her deep gratitude for the time that the Principal and teacher had given prior to entry to ensure that her child who had severe needs, would settle comfortably into the routines of school. A result of going the extra mile has meant that school has been a very positive and happy experience for the mother and the child.

Parents are surveyed and consulted each year in matters relating to curriculum and Catholic Special Character. They receive written communication from the Board of Trustees, open days are held and curriculum meetings are scheduled.

The school has an active P.T.F.A. which meets regularly and provides a valuable link between the school and the home by planning social events and fundraising. These include a school gala and a family picnic following Mass every second term. The P.T.F.A. also provides regular communication to the school community and organises a speaker for the Annual General Meeting on a parenting topic.

The Principal's newsletters always include a reflection and prayer to highlight Catholic Special Character. They often include parenting advice and encourage participation. Parents acknowledged that belonging to this Catholic school community has promoted responsible and loving parenting.

Prayer and Worship

Catholic culture of prayer, liturgy and faith-based celebration is promoted in the school

Buddy classes are rostered to attend a Parish Mass once a term. The children prepare the prayers, the readings and a hymn for the beginning and end of these Masses. Mass for the whole school is celebrated at the beginning and the end of the year, the Feast of the Assumption and Ash Wednesday for the senior classes. Special liturgies are held during Holy Week and on other special occasions. The school celebrated Catholic Schools' Day with two neighbouring Catholic schools. "It is a great joy to see the school children regularly attending the weekday morning Masses. Their behaviour and participation in the responses and singing shows evidence of their meticulous preparation beforehand. The Prayers of the Faithful and Offertory processions are performed, with great reverence and their answers to Father's questions show they have followed the readings with great attention." (Parent)

Classes take turns to lead prayer at assemblies. During the visit, Reviewers joined four classes for morning prayers. In each class children were recollected and participated with sincerity. Children prayed spontaneously and the prayers were articulate and varied, including prayers of praise and thanks, and showed an awareness for others in need. Senior students attend the Ecumenical World Day of Prayer liturgy most years. "My children are spontaneous in their prayer life every day." (Parent)

The 2nd Rite of Reconciliation is not provided through the school. It has been considered that this is the responsibility of the parents. The school should consider making this sacrament available for senior classes during Lent and Advent with an appropriate liturgy.

Collaboration with the Parish

The school collaborates with the parish of which it is part

The school collaborates with the Parish for the First Communion programme with the Principal playing a leading role in teaching the children's programme. The school premises are used for these sessions. Under the Principal's direction and by the end of the programme, the children have a full and deep understanding of the Sacrament." (Parishioner)

The Directors of Religious Studies assist with the Confirmation rehearsal liturgy and meetings as requested by the Parish. Children from the school are encouraged to become altar servers. The Reviewers joined the Friendship Club from the Parish who were being entertained with items the children had recently performed at local festivals.

The Parish Centre and the Lyon's Den continue to be available for school use. School and parish notices are published in respective newsletters. The school supports the Parish foodbank and the Priests and Parish Team are invited regularly to morning tea. Parishioners support school events such as the gala and a pianist from the Parish assists with the school choir. "I have watched children, both my own and other Parish children who go to St. Mark's school, and I am proud of their reverence during Mass and the way that they contribute. St. Mark's school pupils are confident in their faith, they understand their place in the Parish community and contribute through the choir and altar service." (Parishioner)

Stewardship

The school accepts responsibility for delivering education with a Catholic Special Character

The Catholic Special Character policy reviewed in 2010 continues to ensure that every element of Catholic Special Character is rigorously preserved and upheld. The rationale expresses in simple language the very essence of the purpose of Catholic education. It reminds everyone that Jesus is the reason for the school's existence and the model and inspiration for staff, children and the community.

The recommendation made in the 2006 Review report has been implemented under the guidelines, stating that the Mission charism will be promoted in all aspects of school life. The Board is aware that all policies should reflect the Catholic Special Character of the school. Most policies contain a Catholic Special Character statement. When reviewing policies it is recommended that the Board of Trustees and staff discuss how the policy will reflect this commitment to the Catholic Special Character and if necessary clarify it in the Rationale or Guidelines.

St. Mark's School Scheme Policy 1.12 states that the school scheme will be written, 'In accordance with the school Charter and our Catholic Special Character.' The purpose and the broad guidelines should state how this is to be carried out. Procedures for Curriculum Leaders 1.5 should state in the purposes and broad guidelines that curriculum leaders will ensure that the Catholic Special Character will have prominence in their particular curriculum responsibility, namely, in the curriculum plan, in teachers' planning and in classroom displays.

As stated in the 2006 Review, Catholic Special Character is incorporated into the Charter and Strategic Direction. In the Action Plan for 2010, Catholic Special Character is slotted in as a planned priority under National Administration Guidelines 2, 5 and 7. Under 2.3.1 and 7.1.3 the planned priorities are stated as Catholic Character and Catholic Character Review. The expected outcomes are in fact the planned priorities. The format should include specific expected outcomes to show how the planned priorities will be achieved.

The school's Prospectus continues to highlight the Catholic Special Character and the Mission charism.

The school has an Appointments Committee which includes a Proprietor's Representative for all positions. The Principal's reports to the Board of Trustees always contain a full report on the school's Catholic Special Character.

The Professional Standards for teachers contain a Catholic Special Character dimension. The Professional Standards for the Senior staff should also include appropriate standards and indicators pertaining to their leadership responsibilities. The Catholic Special Character dimension and the Professional Standards should be included in every staff member's appraisal and not left just to the formal lesson appraisal by the Director of Religious Studies.

Catholic Community Recommendations:

- 1) That the Board of Trustees and staff discuss how the policy will reflect this commitment to Catholic Special Character and if necessary clarify this in the Rationale and Guidelines.

**PASTORAL CARE
Manaakitanga**

The school community nurtures, supports and cares for individuals

Relationships

The school is a friendly, welcoming, co-operative learning environment where the dignity of each person is respected

Parents both in their surveys and interview spoke of the sense of pride they have when they attend school functions and field days, and see the respect and caring attitude that children show to each other and to adults. "The children are taught impeccable manners, about caring for others and about being inclusive." (Parent)

The Board of Trustees described the warm supportive environment. "It oozes calmness, care, respect and welcome." Parents, staff and students described the school as a big family where everyone is known, loved and respected. "Whenever we are upset, someone tries to make us happy." (Child)

In visiting classrooms, the Reviewers observed that the children needing additional support were participating and fully included. The school is to be commended for honouring their values of compassion and respect for others. Staff and children have an empathy with these students and their families and appreciate the blessings that they bring. In successfully providing inclusive education, the school is living out the spirit of their Mission charism.

Behaviour Management

Discipline processes are just, compassionate, respectful and consistent

The A.B.C. concepts, Attitude, Behaviour, Commitment and Consistency are continually articulated and nurtured and shape children's behaviour. Children are encouraged to have a positive attitude, and to continually do their best in all areas of school life. Self discipline and personal responsibility are developed in the children, who are given opportunities to make positive decisions and choices and to accept the consequences of their actions. The school values have been aligned with the key

competencies and are integrated into the teaching and learning. "My children have a developing conscience and ability to say sorry when they have done wrong and to know the good choices or decisions that they need to make." (Parent)

Children who are Peer Mediators, are trained in conflict resolution and encouraged to develop the spirit of compassion by asking other students, 'How would you feel?' and 'What would Jesus do?' Senior students are role models for the younger children, and children from Year 1 upwards are given opportunities for leadership and service in their classrooms and in the school. Special Character badges are awarded at assemblies to those who have displayed school values and their names are published in the school newsletter.

Teachers take time to listen to students and to help children to solve problems. Children are given opportunities for quiet thinking times to aid problem solving and reconciliation. This nurtures the contemplative spirit of the Mission charism.

Service and Social Justice

The school promotes social justice and students assist people in need through service and outreach opportunities provided by the school

A purpose in the Catholic Special Character policy is to carry forward the charism of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions through their zeal for Mission and Outreach. The school celebrates Mission Day each year with the funds raised by the children going to help women and children overseas and at home. The school supports Caritas, St. Vincent de Paul collections once a term and the Catholic Primary Principals' Mufti Mania appeal. The children are encouraged to provide gifts for the underprivileged at Christmas time and they recently supported with cards and money St. Paul's School, Dallington which was destroyed by the recent Christchurch earthquake. Children have knitted blankets for orphans, written letters to prisoners and in conjunction with the Parish, the children visit a neighbouring Retirement Village to sing and take gifts to the residents.

Parents acknowledged that children are sensitive to those in need of moral and spiritual support. "They are aware of less fortunate people and the importance of being kind." (Parent)

Bicultural Commitment and Cultural Awareness

The school is committed to the Treaty of Waitangi and recognises and honours cultural diversity

The school's Treaty of Waitangi policy acknowledges the commitment of the Auckland Catholic Diocese to honouring the Treaty of Waitangi as a covenant. The school has continued to encourage the Kapa Haka Group who performed at the assembly to welcome the Reviewers and for the Parish Friendship Group. With this group being well established, it would be timely to consider introducing the protocol of powhiri for formal school welcomes and at the same time to teach the whole school waiata so that everyone can participate. This will help children, staff and whanau develop an appreciation and acceptance that it is a normal part of being a New Zealand citizen. In recognising Maori as Tangata Whenua, it will emphasise for the children the importance of culture and the need to honour and reverence the culture of every student and their family.

All staff have completed the Catholic Institute of Theology Maori Spirituality and Theology module. The school has a Te Reo Māori plan which is based on an Introductory Te Reo Maori Programme for a main stream school. This programme should ensure progression and competency in conversational Maori throughout the levels. The school is aware of the new curriculum guidelines for teaching and learning Te Reo in English medium schools and is planning to review the current programme in light of these guidelines. The school intends to focus on developing the confidence and ability of staff to deliver this curriculum. A teacher has been designated to teach Te Reo next year in classrooms where teachers don't feel confident. The school is to be encouraged to evolve the role of this specialist teacher to one of support for classroom teachers to that they will all be able

to teach Te Reo to their own class and so increase the level of attainment at each class level. Teachers should be encouraged to bring the Maori Spirituality concepts in the Religious Education curriculum into everyday conversation in the classroom and apply them as appropriate.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
Te Whakaakoranga Whakapono

The school helps to fulfil the teaching mission of the Church

Leadership

The Principal and the Director of Religious Studies provide leadership and sound management in Religious Education

The Director of Religious Studies position is a shared role. Both of these women are long standing members of the staff. They have the institutional memory and as members of the Parish have a knowledge of families and the workings of the Parish, and the Parish community. They are actively involved in various ministries in the Parish. They provide advice and guidance and are role models for other teachers, the children and their families. With their enthusiasm for Religious Education and their generous spirit of service for the good of the Parish community, they provide pastoral care for staff, children and their families. They are well respected by the staff and live out the school's charism and values working hard in a sensitive, kind and thoughtful manner.

They observe one prayer session and one Religious Education lesson in every classroom each year. Full notes are written for teachers which are affirming and constructive and areas of concern are followed through. Lessons are modelled when required.

Religious Education Curriculum

The Religious Education programme is professionally delivered

The school has updated the Religious Education scheme which contains much valuable information about good teaching practice in Religious Education. As a scheme it should contain an overview of the year's programme, an outline of the Strands and Modules and the required time allocation for Religious Education. There is a statement about the school's partnership with parents as first educators of the faith. This should include the student's activity book which should be an important link between home and school. Some material, such as the Catholic Special Character Review and Development document does not belong in a Religious Education scheme.

Teachers plan in detail for each strand, with some teachers planning for two levels. The Reviewers did not see this same level of planning in all classrooms for the Liturgical year and Prayer modules. In some classrooms evaluations were constructive and showed areas for future development and planning. In other rooms, these were incomplete. There was evidence of summative assessments in children's activity books and portfolios and in teachers' workbooks. At present the Director of Religious Studies is responsible for checking this planning which is done at the time of a lesson observation. It is recommended that the Syndicate leaders also take responsibility for checking Religious Education planning, assessment and evaluations along with all the other essential learning areas.

Class environments reflected the current strand being taught and the children interviewed at the time of the visit spoke with enthusiasm and knowledge about their learning in Religious Education and how this has an influence on their daily lives. "I see my children's spiritual development demonstrated by their ability to discuss their faith and act it out in daily life." (Parent)

Professional Development

The school provides opportunities for regular Religious Education professional development and spiritual formation for staff

The Proprietor Representatives' Annual Reports for the last three years record that the minimum 12 hours of professional development in Catholic Special Character required by the New Zealand Bishops Conference has not been completed by all staff. The response to the 2009 Proprietor's Annual Report (letter dated 19 February 2010) stated that, 'Each teacher should have a personal Religious Education/Catholic Character goal as part of their annual appraisal to complete the required 12 hours professional development. Teachers who do not have Classroom Level Certification should be working towards this qualification by completing the NZQA Accredited Diploma in Religious Studies Stream Religious Education. This should also be linked to their personal development goals in their annual appraisal.' It is recommended that each teacher be required to complete the 12 hours professional development in Religious Education as part of their annual appraisal. Some staff have enough hours to apply for Classroom Level Certification and they should be encouraged to do so.

The staff are currently undertaking the Understanding Sexuality Module. The first day was completed at the beginning of the year. The second day was held on a school day in Term 4. The staff are fortunate to have a Board of Trustees who were prepared to enable staff to complete this on a teaching day as most schools are required to complete such in-service on call back days, weekends, or after school. The Directors of Religious Studies lead a Religious Education staff meeting when required, and the majority of staff attend Cluster meetings.

Communication

The school communicates with parents/caregivers about Religious Education

At the beginning of the year, meet the teacher evenings and new entrant meetings always include a Religious Education slot. New families are required to buy the Whanau Book. The school could consider making Religious Education a topic for a series of home/school partnership meetings to help parents better understand how to support children's faith development in the home.

The school uses a project book to replace the old activity book. The original purpose for students' Religious Education workbooks was to provide an important link between home and school to give parents a tool for discussion and reflection when activities are completed at home. In some classes, these books are being sent home regularly and teachers, parents and students are writing pertinent comments. In the classes where this is not as evident, a target could be set to increase the number of parents who write comments in these activity books. The teachers can provide a role model for parents by their own constructive and encouraging comments.

While school newsletters provide a reflection on the Liturgical Season and other Spiritual reflections, it would be helpful if the current Religious Education strand theme could be further highlighted in each school newsletter with ideas for follow up discussion at home.

Integrated Curriculum

Catholic teaching is integrated with other curriculum areas.

The school has developed a planning template that includes the key competencies, school values and the A.B.C's. When planning, teachers highlight when these will be incorporated and emphasized. When teachers plan a unit, they need to ensure that a Catholic perspective is always highlighted, regardless of the subject. This should be evident in all classroom displays through captions and explanations.

The school is to be commended for their efforts to make all children aware of the need to care for God's Creation. Environmental education includes the worm farm and recycling. The school is currently developing an area near the entrance of the school as a prayer garden and children are

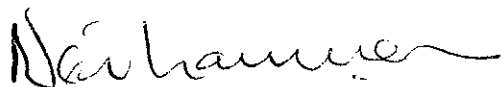
responsible for planting and nurturing a vegetable garden. When students greet staff and visitors they add the words, "God Bless You," helping them to be conscious that God is always present in every situation.

Religious Education Recommendations:

- 1) That the syndicate leaders also take responsibility for checking Religious Education, planning, assessment and evaluations along with all the other essential learning areas.
- 2) That each teacher be required to complete 12 hours Professional Development in Religious Education as part of their annual appraisal.

Conclusion

The education provided for the children at St. Mark's Catholic School is grounded in the Catholic faith. The Reviewers observed, and the parents confirmed, that the children's faith is natural and spontaneous. The school is fulfilling its vision to provide a Christ centred, challenging, safe learning environment where the children are confidently achieving success in all areas of the curriculum. "Our children are learning and experiencing their faith in a personal and sincere way." "We like that the Catholic faith is not just a curriculum subject but is talked about, practised, explained and expected from everybody." (*Parents*)



Neil Laursen
Manager
Catholic Education Services

4 April 2011