

# **CATHOLIC CHARACTER**

## **EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

These examples of current practice in a range of Catholic schools and colleges are made available as a stimulus to thinking about best practice. Each item is a separate example, unconnected (except by general subject matter) with the items above or below. Another compendium of good practice will be offered next year, and examples are sought.

### **1. Pastoral care**

- Pastoral care is part of the everyday life of the school. The school has a Pastoral Care Team that includes both priests, the two Directors of Religious Studies, the principal, and four parents representing the different community language groups.
- The Pastoral Care Team – covering guidance counselor, career adviser, deans, international student support, and learning support, discipline, attendance and health – adopts a 360 degree approach to student welfare, networking with other groups and drawing on their support and advice.
- The Pastoral Care Team includes fluent speakers of the community languages to help with consultation and sharing information about important issues.
- There is a strong team approach to pastoral care and children are the responsibility of the whole staff, not just their classroom teacher.
- It has become a tradition for each child to be designated a soul friend or mentor from another class and during the school's Feast Day Mass children agree to care for that special friend throughout the year.

### **2. Teaching RE**

- Teachers plan cooperatively for Religious Education and use modern teaching practices such as Multiple Intelligences. The Arts are integrated into the curriculum and complement the teaching and learning of Religious Education. A Catholic perspective is documented in the Health Curriculum Plan, and 'Myself and Others' is integrated into Health Strands where appropriate.
- Emphasis is given to the practical application of Religious Education to the students' everyday lives.
- Religious Education workbooks are sent home each week and the school gives parents guidance on suitable responses they might make to support their children's work.
- Teachers encourage children to write meaningful comments in their activity books at the completion of each strand. The teachers provide a good role model for the children with the positive and encouraging comments they make throughout the children's activity books. The school encourages parents to become involved in the children's work at home.

- The student's report form contains a section on RE and the teachers have modified the Key Competencies to include a Catholic dimension: 'Respect the mana and wairua tapua (God's spirit) in our behaviour towards others.'
- Senior RE classes are team-taught, with energy and enthusiasm.
- Pupils were given digital cameras and instructed to go into the local township and take photos of what God looked like there. The resulting images showed intermediate pupils who could articulate personal images of God with conviction and assurance.
- At years 12 and 13 guest speakers are introduced in an attempt to stimulate the students' interest in Religious Education.
- The work done in the year 13 Advanced Religious Education class has an intellectual focus, encouraging work of the highest academic quality.
- In years 11-13 particular emphasis is placed on ensuring RE is relevant to students' lives.
- A sample of the work that children do in Religious Education is included in the children's portfolios when these are sent home three times per year. This is another means of effective communication and cooperation between the school and the home.
- The school has developed a comprehensive 'Catholic Directory' which sets out clear guidelines and expectations for teaching Religious Education. In the school's Curriculum Delivery statement the Catholic Character dimension is highlighted with a special section entitled 'Being Catholic'.
- Traditionally, teachers have planned using the standard format from the programme, but recently they have begun developing their own thinking and planning to better meet the specific needs of their school – for instance, links to language and integration of values. On another form they identify how a Catholic element is being integrated into other curriculum areas.
- Teachers forward their strand and module evaluations to the DRS, identifying successes as well as concepts students have found difficult to understand. Detailed records of student assessment of the learning outcomes are kept. Assessment records include criteria for attributing the exceeded, met and below standard grades, along with an analysis of results of the assessments. Teachers use affective domain questions and comment on the students' own comments.
- As the teachers implement a more integrated approach to curriculum, they are including a Catholic perspective into their whole-school units of work. For example, when they identified a gap in students' knowledge of traditional church, a Cathedral unit was planned and implemented. Whenever a topic lends itself to, or a social justice situation arises out of, a unit, a practical 'social action' is put into practice.
- Teaching and learning experiences are adapted to meet student need and interest, whilst matching the prescribed programme's learning outcomes. Concepts are introduced in English and Maori as outlined in the programme. Teachers revise prior learning at the beginning of lessons and recap learning outcomes at the end.

- The school includes a Catholic Special Character dimension in the Classroom Observation Sheet. This correlates with the Catholic Special Character Professional Standards and performance indicators.
- The school's Strategic Goal is to model gospel values across the curriculum; the school's Annual Target is to improve Catholic Character through classroom teaching programmes with a focus on scriptural knowledge and stories.

### **3. Values and virtues in the school community**

- Along with the development of a values programme, the school has ensured that values language is deliberately incorporated into the language of behaviour management.
- The school community has embraced a virtues project and adapted it to incorporate and reflect gospel values and teachings. Through this project the staff assist students to develop both a vocabulary and a meaningful understanding of the virtues/values. Parents have commented on the effect the project has had on their children and the way in which they are able to apply their school learning into life at home.
- Staff have indicated they would like to do professional development around the language of intervention and companioning to assist them with the spiritual companioning dimension of the virtues project.
- The principal and staff ensure the school's values are clearly articulated and documented as gospel values, eg respect for each other because we identify the Christ in each other.

### **4. Parish / School relationships**

- The parish priest has a high level of involvement and provides significant support to staff in the delivery of the RE programme. Parishioners are involved in reading to children and assisting with the school's annual All Souls Day visit to the local cemetery. The school provides altar servers and supports the sacramental programme. The school and parish are currently working on a project to move the parish hall onto the school site and have it refurbished.
- The school is working with the parish on a plan to get year 7 & 8 students to visit and help housebound parishioners.
- The parish priest speaks to prospective parents about their role and the role of the school within the wider parish.
- With the clarification of criteria for preference enrolment, many families now entering the school come with limited background knowledge of the Catholic faith. The priest works with parents (or in some cases with the child's grandparent or sponsor) who come to him seeking preference enrolment for their children. He meets them to discuss his expectations for them and to attain a commitment from them, in an encouraging way, to support the faith development of their children, including attendance at Sunday Eucharist.
- The principal sits on the Parish Council, and the Board of Trustees and the Parish Pastoral Council meet once a term. The school holds a joint parish/school gala day

and has a joint parish/school newsletter etc. Each year 8 student is adopted by a parishioner, then kept track of at secondary school. Classes rostered to weekday Mass are seated among parishioners, who vie to have them.

- At the beginning of each term a blessing ceremony takes place to welcome new students and staff to the school. This is followed by a school and parish morning tea.
- New students are welcomed and presented with a candle at their first school Mass.
- The priest chaplain and the proprietor appointees on the board of trustees have initiated a 'Parents New to the School' evening. This introduces parents into the Catholic education system and encourages them to assume responsibility for bringing their children to Mass.
- The school allows the parish to use classrooms and the staffroom outside school hours for parish meetings. The parish hall is used by the school on a regular basis and the church is also made available. The principal and Director of Religious Studies attend parish meetings and the school helps with the annual parish picnic.
- The school supports and leads four Sunday parish Masses each year and the teachers try to make the Liturgy relevant and meaningful for the children. The staff support, and are involved with, the parish sacramental programme by preparing those children who attend the school.
- The school encourages families to become more involved in the parish by joining the Passionist family groups. These groups help new families to form relationships with other families in the school and parish community. The Passionist family groups organise the function following the celebration of Confirmation and they work together with the school to plan the Christmas Nativity Liturgy each year.
- The parish priest knows most of the children by name, and he is timetabled to visit and talk to all classrooms each fortnight.
- All new entrants are welcomed at Assembly and receive a Bible story book provided by the parish.

## **5. School / Home relationships**

- The parish has employed a School/Parish/Home liaison person to help create effective links between the school, the home and the parish and to facilitate pastoral care. When required, they are available to assist families in the school.
- Under the Family Whanau programme – Our Home, Our School, Our Church – all new families are contacted and expected to attend a series of three weekly sessions. The programme run by a small group of committed parents is designed to give new parents a basic overview of Catholic education and Catholic Special Character in a friendly non-threatening forum.
- As each year level begins at the school, parents are invited to form a social group, meeting together for breakfast or coffee or a chat. This inclusive approach has created a sense of pride and ownership in the school by the parents. Those interviewed said they felt very comfortable speaking with teachers about their children.

- The school will implement the Parent Programme again as a number of parents spoken to indicated an interest in some form of education relating to the Religious Education programme.
- Individual support plans, with parental involvement, are prepared and implemented for many students.
- Meetings take place once a term to explain curriculum and school procedures.

## **6. Treaty of Waitangi / cultural awareness / ethnicities**

- The school recognises its responsibility to acknowledge and honour the Treaty of Waitangi and the bicultural commitment of the Church. The Charter includes a Treaty of Waitangi goal and objectives and it is a priority in the Strategic and Annual Plans.
- The school has a Maori Curriculum Plan that aims to encourage a positive attitude and a deeper understanding of Maori tikanga, te reo and spirituality. The Treaty of Waitangi policy is a comprehensive statement that is steeped in the Church's teaching of inculturation. Where appropriate, Maori spiritual values are integrated with essential learning areas of the curriculum. Maori responses and waiata are naturally integrated into school Masses and liturgies. Each year the school schedules a Maori-intensive programme to assist teachers, students and parents in their understanding and appreciation of tikanga Maori. The Board of Trustees attended a twilight session on Maori spirituality.
- The teachers try to expose the students to the changing face and increasing multiculturalism of New Zealand society. A very successful unit on Refugees involved online discussion with immigrant children from various cultures in schools throughout New Zealand. The principal is conscious that the focus on understanding racial diversity and developing tolerance is important for all students and needs to be fostered.
- The school has a culturally diverse community and this is acknowledged and celebrated. For example, a Social Justice and Cultural Diversity Assembly last year gave families the opportunity to speak about their unique cultural backgrounds and encouraged children to take pride in their own heritage.
- First languages of the students are celebrated and nurtured.

## **7. Student leadership**

- In their final year at the college, senior students are expected to complete a minimum of 40 hours service, usually in the form of leadership roles or as duty servants. They have opportunities to serve others as peer tutors, peer mediators, 'big brothers', sports coaches and mentors.
- The school student leaders joined senior staff members for a two-day leadership retreat, an experience highly valued by both teachers and students.
- The student leaders are consulted and kept informed of many day-to-day management decisions. Parents recalled how the college captains ran an extremely successful orientation evening for new students and parents.

- The college captain drives the college Student Leadership Team Action Plan, designed to provide a clear direction for student leaders to ‘maintain and strengthen pride within the college; to enhance better relationships between senior and junior students; and to provide leadership opportunities at all levels’.
- Senior students, acting as role models, provide peer tutoring to younger students who are struggling academically; peer mediation and duty in the grounds; and 1:1 mentoring for some students with challenging behaviours. A ‘study zone’ with peer tutors is available for younger students after school in the library.
- College captains for Maori, Pasifika and international students are representatives on the senior student leadership team.
- One of the criteria for the school’s premier award at the end of year prizegiving is the student’s involvement in the life of the parish. The parish priest is consulted in this process.
- The year 10 students are encouraged to take over leadership roles, once the senior classes disband towards the end of the year.

## **8. Documentation**

- All key documentation is explicitly Catholic. The Charter and Strategic Plan have a Catholic Special Character dimension with specific goals and objectives, and under each N.A.G. in the Charter, the school states what this means for the community, the students and the staff, thus ensuring that everyone takes responsibility for the Catholic Special Character.
- The enrolment pack provides new families with an outline of the Catholic Character of the school, and application forms are bilingual.

## **9. Social Justice**

- Student awareness of social justice and the need to reach out to others is encouraged through a strong focus on Caritas, both in terms of fundraising support and utilising and integrating Caritas units into the school programme.

NZCEO  
February 2008