

# **CATHOLIC CHARACTER IN NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC SCHOOLS - FURTHER GOOD IDEAS**

The examples below of current practice in a range of Catholic schools and colleges add to the examples provided in early 2008. They 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 it. Examples of good practice for circulation continue to be sought

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### **1.0 Pastoral Care and School / Home Relationships**

- The school has a Pastoral Care group who organise various opportunities for the school to get together and offer support to individual families as needed. Parents are invited to be part of this group and its existence is advertised in the school newsletter so parents will know where to request help if it is needed.
- A 'Core Care Committee', consisting of one teacher from each syndicate meets regularly and looks after the welfare of staff and students. Pastoral Care issues are also discussed and addressed at the Friday Forum meeting.
- A significant emphasis is placed on the welcoming of new students. A first week phone call to the home is made by the Principal for every new student.
- All new families are contacted and expected to attend a set of three sessions, run by a small group of parents, to give new parents a basic overview of Catholic education and Catholic Special Character in a friendly, non-threatening way. Also, 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.

- A very active ‘Parent School Link Group’ (PSL) fundraises money and arranges activities that gather the community together. This group holds monthly afternoon teas at the school. New families are welcomed and every month the theme of the afternoon tea depicts one of the cultures of the school. The PSL also works with the principal to provide assistance to any family in need.
- The welcome and friendship team is an initiative where existing families welcome new families into the school community and also provide practical support for families in need eg baking etc.
- The programme of parent education comprises workshops run by the principal based around the building blocks of the school charter – security, selfhood, affiliation, mission, competence and spirituality.
- The enrolment pack provides new families with an outline of the Catholic Character of the school. New students are welcomed at the first school Mass. Home/School relationships are fostered with a PTA group who help the school financially and socially.
- Every fortnight, one child per classroom receives an ‘I am Special’ award. The affirming citations for these are written by the children’s parents and the class and read out by the principal. These are published and sent home at the end of each term. A similar format is followed at the end of the year for each year 6 child as they leave the school.

## **2.0 Teaching Religious Education**

- All new entrants are welcomed at assembly and receive a bible story book.
- A specific English and Religion programme has been developed and implemented for international students in their first year at the college where they spend six months exploring basic concepts of Christianity and six months on understanding key elements of Catholicism.
- The DRS is supported in her strong and effective management of Religious Education by the RE curriculum team. This group is responsible for the dissemination of information throughout the school through the syndicate structure. The collegial support provided by the syndicate planning and evaluation meetings assists teachers in their understanding of the key theological concepts of the RE programme and ensures reflective practice regarding future planning. Records of student assessment are kept throughout the school and strand evaluations are given to the DRS. Understanding and refining practices for planning and assessment in both the summative and affective domains is an ongoing feature of the school’s professional development.
- Following classroom observations, the DRS provides written feedback using a set format based on the criteria being observed.

- The DRS is released to work with teachers on planning prior to the start of a new strand. This helps to ensure very good consistency of planning throughout the school.
- Varied and interesting learning experiences are provided, including cooperative learning and strategic thinking skills. The Smart boards are effectively used for RE. Scrapbooks are well used for the displaying and sharing of Learning Intentions and for building up word banks to which students can return for understanding and reinforcement.
- The DRS provides sound Religious Education and Special Character leadership. She willingly assists staff with requests for help in the teaching of the RE programme. She ensures teachers have attractive resources for prayer and for the classroom lessons. She communicates effectively with the home via the school newsletter, regarding what the students are learning in RE and about Catholic Character events within the school.
- RE strand lessons are systematically planned within syndicates. Teachers share and display the learning intentions and success criteria in order to assist students to assess how well they have achieved the outcomes of the RE lessons. Teachers recap prior learning at the beginning of lessons. They ensure a balance between new learning input and activities that enable students to process their learning. Clear teacher expectations mean students are observed actively engaged in their learning. Some teachers use RE wall dictionaries with concepts displayed alongside their definitions for student reference.
- Staff have drawn up a wish list for religious books for the library and as resources for teachers. The Parent Teachers' Association have invited people to purchase one of these books or give a donation. This is an innovative idea and there has been a generous response from the school community.
- The children's activity books are sent home regularly and at the beginning of the year, a letter from the Director of Religious Studies is sent home with these to encourage parental participation in the children's activities. Parents acknowledged that they enjoy reading these books and discussing the activities with their children.
- Instructions on the use of the activity book have been translated into Samoan and Māori.

### **3.0 Values and Virtues**

- 'We must love one another as God loves us – it is as simple and as hard as that' underpins the school's spirituality.

- The College is a faith community where trustees and teachers promote the Good News through word and witness. The Forming Faith Together programme is a prerequisite for enrolment and provides a clear message to parents that the home, college and parish partnership is a critical one for the faith development of the young people.
- Staff new to the school are inducted into its Catholic Special Character on a professional development day at the start of the school year. Each is given a copy of the comprehensive Special Character folder prepared by the DRS. The booklet on Special Character which has been developed by the DRS is an outstanding example of a resource about Catholic belief and practice relating to the school's work.
- Each Sunday, students are invited to attend the “[School] Mass” held in the college auditorium. All of those from the school who were asked about this regarded it very positively. It was noted that the Mass draws families and many young people who might not otherwise be at Sunday Mass. Students commented that they appreciated the chance to come together with liturgy, prayer and music that draw them into a stronger sense of community than they find in some parish Masses. They are grateful that, although there are many demands on their Chaplain's time, he is prepared to lead them in this celebration.
- The practice of Christian meditation has been introduced throughout the school. Junior children participated in meditative prayer at the end of their morning prayer session. The children's composure and concentration and their ability to collect themselves were apparent. Children are using this practice of prayer in the home. The practice of meditation in daily life and the ability to feel comfortable with silence is a gift for these children.
- A Catholic perspective is included in whole-of-school units of work, including aspects of students' knowledge of the traditional Church, and opportunities to put social justice into action.
- The school has a list of five rights and responsibilities which are based on respect for self, others, property and care of the environment. These are prefaced by a quote from the first letter of St John 5:1, “Think of the love that God has lavished on us by letting us be called God's children and that is what we are.”
- Many teachers conclude their lessons with a time of quiet meditation for students to reflect on their learning and how it relates to their own lives.
- The “Lunch Club” helps students to develop positive social interaction skills and is a very positive way of helping those children who need to moderate their behaviour.

- The “Keep Happy Plan” directs behaviour management at the school. It focuses on cooperation, accountability and responsibility and treating others as you want to be treated. Peer mediators are used in the playground to very good effect.
- Students showing unacceptable behaviour complete a ‘think sheet’ which enables them to reflect on their behaviour and make reparation. Students are acknowledged for using school values in the playground and receive house points, and weekly awards at assembly highlight students displaying excellent attitudes to learning in the classrooms.
- The school has a specially designed prayer garden with the school prayer featured.
- Past pupils visit the school regularly and help in classrooms.

#### **4.0 Parish / School Relationships**

- Students help fold the weekly parish newsletter, they contribute to the food bank and support community appeals. The Director of Religious Studies and staff assist with the sacramental programme and provide art work to decorate the church for particular liturgical seasons. Parishioners support the school’s Jesse Tree initiative and school Masses.
- The parish priest is a visible presence in the school. He relates very well to the children and knows them by name.
- The school works very closely with the parish for the sacramental programmes. The deputy principal has worked with the parish priest to successfully plan and deliver the Confirmation programme.
- At the time of First Communion the parish priest visits all the families and provides them with a useful leaflet on praying as a family. He also gives this out when parents come for preference cards.
- Items of interest are published in both the school and parish newsletters.
- Copies of the College newsletter are sent to each parish within the area for distribution and each year parish priests are invited to participate in the College prize givings. They are informed about parishioners enrolled at the College and receive a copy of the College Year Book.
- Each class is linked with a parishioner who will join them for Masses and assemblies, share prayer intentions and visit at special times of the year.
- A parishioner takes the ‘Seasons of Growth’ programme for students who have had a major change or loss in their lives.

- The parish priest and assistant priests often join the staff for morning tea and visit classes for special lessons. From time to time they join a class for morning prayer.
- The year 8 students have one session a week with the Parish Youth Worker who encourages them to continue their relationship with the parish by joining the Parish Youth Group.
- At Christmas time the parish and school have a Jesse Tree project to provide gifts for children who might otherwise not have them.

## **5.0 Treaty of Waitangi / Support for Ethnic Groups**

- In 2006 a Pacific Island consultation evening was initiated by a year 13 student, to enable Pacific Island parents to discuss their daughter's education and prospects, what they envisage for her education and how teachers and parents can help her achieve her goals.
- The school and parish community have learnt about Tikanga Māori, and its importance to Māori and other New Zealanders.
- In the development of Te Wharenui and Te Waharoa the school has also honoured the community's Pasifika culture. Designs are a harmonious blending of the Māori and Pasifika cultures.
- The school held a very successful cultural festival. A highlight of the evening was the performance by the principal of a nifo'oti, a prestigious dance which was done with great dignity and finesse. Parents were impressed that he had taken the time to learn the dance properly, and as a result he earned a great deal of respect and mana from the community.
- Integrating Samoan culture and language more effectively into the life of the school, particularly in the liturgical prayer dimension, is being achieved with the help of the Samoan parent community.
- Te Reo is included in planning and in word banks for key theological concepts. Teachers attempt to use Māori as a natural part of the RE lesson.
- Teachers choose one word, concept or phrase in Māori per strand to gradually increase their use of Māori in RE.
- First languages of the students are acknowledged and displays in the school foyer reinforce this. Maori greetings and songs are part of class prayer, school liturgies and Masses. The school has a kapa haka group which performs at school events and has entertained at a rest home.

- The school has enrolled some Muslim families in their non preference quota in the belief that an understanding between Christian and Islamic traditions is an important element in achieving greater tolerance and peaceful relations.

## **6.0 Student Leadership**

- Senior students are trained as “Fussbusters” that mediate in the playground.
- Year 6 students volunteer to be playground angels to support a child who is a New Entrant. They are informed of their responsibilities and presented with a badge at a school assembly.
- The Leadership Certificate for Year 8 incorporates a Service and Liturgy Group that organizes liturgies.
- The Year 8 students act as buddies for the new Year 7 students, and the dean works hard to make sure they are well supported during these early college years. Through the structured Peer Support programme Year 12 students also provide informal support for a small group of Year 9 students.
- Special Character Prefects have a particular leadership role and vertical tutor groups enable senior students to provide positive role modelling for younger ones.
- School assemblies are run by the students and classes take turns to lead the prayer at assembly, which is based on the strand or module currently being taught in RE, and takes a variety of forms.

## **7.0 Professional Development**

- Current professional development in Religious Studies relates to developing strategies for formative assessment. Teachers share success criteria along with learning intentions to assist students in their understanding of how well they have achieved the outcomes of the RE lessons. The DRS is released to do appraisals of teachers’ RE lessons. The school is developing strategies for the assessment in the affective domain. This will help students clarify their attitudes and values in relation to the Gospel and enable teachers to evaluate the effect of their RE teaching on their class as a group of learners.
- The Director of Religious Studies has drawn up a Professional Development and Spiritual Formation plan, which includes the requirement for all teachers of Religious Education to gain Level 1 Accreditation or to be actively working towards this.

## **8.0 Documentation**

- The Board of Trustees Code of Conduct spells out quite clearly that the members must be loyal to and uphold the values of the Catholic faith. They have to “ensure that the Catholic Special Character of the school, together with knowledge, unity

and wisdom is fostered and upheld and permeates all policies, procedures, practices and programmes with the school”.

- The Staff Handbook includes the Philosophy of Catholic Schools in New Zealand, the Code of Ethics for staff and Boards of Trustees of New Zealand Catholic Schools, the Mission Statement, Values and details about the Catholic Special Character Self Review.
- The enrolment pack provides families with a comprehensive outline of the history and Catholic Character of the school.
- The induction booklet for new staff, prospectus for enrolment and employment application packs all include a strong Catholic perspective.
- The school’s RE parental guidelines booklet is included in the school’s enrolment pack.
- All job descriptions include a summary which outlines Catholic Special Character requirements and every teacher’s appraisal has a substantial Special Character element with criteria appropriate to the teacher’s level of experience.

## **9.0 Service and Social Justice**

- All students are expected to undertake a half day of service annually. Each student entering Year 12 is required to identify, design, carry out and reflect upon one example of personal service of each student’s choice. Service is to be of at least 20 hours duration excluding planning evaluation and reporting.
- Caritas educational units are integrated into the school programme and fundraising support.
- The DRS works with the Young Vinnies co-ordinator to plan a programme for senior students. This includes time for prayer and planning and one term activity eg can drives, visits to rest homes, books, Christmas gifts and food. At the time of the review the students were busy making ‘Hug Rugs’ for elderly residents.
- At a staff meeting the DRS gave a PowerPoint presentation to stimulate teachers to reflect on and discuss Catholic teachings on Social Justice, and this has proved beneficial for teachers as they have worked on the Virtues programme and the integrated unit on Refugees.

## **10.0 Environmental Awareness**

- The school has embraced an EnviroSchool philosophy promoting ‘reduce, reuse and recycle’. The project encourages a greater awareness and responsibility for protecting and enhancing the environment and creating a sustainable school community. Already a walkway project, vegetable garden, worm farm and composting are successful examples of this initiative. A whole school enquiry

unit, “The way in which I live has an impact on God’s world”, links this philosophy to formal teaching and learning.

- The school has initiated a comprehensive environmental awareness programme. Senior students have volunteered to be responsible for recycled cardboard and paper throughout the school. One syndicate has set up two worm farms and recycles food scraps. The teacher leading this programme recently won a grant from the regional council to build two compost bins for the school. The school won an Enviro Schools award for its project on “Education for Sustainability”. A group of senior students also researched the cause of the death of eels in the school stream, as a community problem-solving project. The initiative for all these projects develops in the children a reverence for God’s Creation and their responsibility to care for the earth.

### **11.0 Other:**

#### **Collaboration with Other Catholic Schools**

- There are direct links to two Catholic secondary schools on the school’s website.

#### **Staff**

- The Board of Trustees discusses how to prevent stress occurring for staff and putting strategies in place to support staff so that they can give their best.

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