

CATHOLIC CHARACTER IN NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC SCHOOLS 2008-2009

The initiatives below are examples of current excellent practice in our Catholic schools and colleges. We offer them as prompts for developing further excellent practice in schools.

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1.0 Catholic Character

- At the time of a child's enrolment, the parish priest visits the family home to discuss the enrolment.
- All new entrants are welcomed at assembly and receive a bible story book.
- New staff are welcomed at their first assembly and presented with a lighted candle.
- 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 is run by a small group of committed parents and gives new parents a basic overview of Catholic education and Catholic Special Character in a friendly non-threatening forum.
- The DRS writes a Catholic Special Character column in the fortnightly school newsletter. Parents are given ideas to build on the concepts that the children are learning at school in Religious Education. The Family-Whanau parent booklet is promoted in the newsletter.
- The entry area and the office foyer have presentations relating to Special Character. The DRS uses an alcove as a focus area for the liturgical season, and there is a 'working wall' where the principal has set up a public display about the

school's strategic plan and how it is implemented as the year progresses. In the entry foyer, a DVD player runs throughout the day, with programmes about the school and its work, along with prayerful music.

- A large blackboard at the entrance of the school keeps parents informed about school happenings, including feast days and other Catholic Special Character events.
- Catholic Special Character is integrated into curriculum statements in a range of subjects – English: reading (proclamation of scripture), writing (prayers); Social Sciences: Caritas lessons on advocating for justice; and Science: conservation and our responsibility to be stewards of our world.
- The Catholic Special Character of the College is integrated into all teaching subjects – for instance, objects made in a Hard Materials Technology class, religious themes as the subject in Art classes, student prayers being used in an Information Management Technology class, and a well-known parable being used as an illustration of a novel's theme in an English class. The booklet 'Christianity and Science' is used in the Science Department.
- Staff have drawn up a wish list of religious books for the library and as resources for teachers; the Parent Teachers' Association has invited people to purchase one of these books or give a donation.
- Technology is used to nurture children's spirituality. As well as staff-prepared material, senior children have made individual DVDs for school prayer times, with sacred music and art enhancing the prayer and liturgy.
- Students are offered a wide variety of prayer experience, including meditation, faith-sharing, offering prayers of petition and thanksgiving, centring prayer, silent reflection and prayer through movement, as well as a number of traditional prayers of the Church.
- 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 school has a specially designed prayer garden with the school prayer featured.
- The priest chaplain and the Board of Trustees have initiated a 'Parents New to the School' evening.
- The principal ends her message in each school newsletter with a note about Sunday Mass.
- 'Keep in your Prayers' is a regular feature of the newsletter where students and the community are encouraged to include their special intentions.
- Parents and caregivers are encouraged to join their children in the weekly celebration of the class or whole school Mass, assemblies and liturgies.

2.0 Pastoral care and school/home relationships

- The principal makes a first week phone call to the home of every new student.

- Each child is assigned a soul friend or mentor from another class and during the school's Feast Day Mass the children agree to care for that special friend throughout the year.
- The Lunch Club helps students to develop positive social interaction skills and is a positive way of helping those children who need to moderate their behaviour.
- Year 6 students volunteer to be "playground angels" to support a child who is a New Entrant. They are trained for their responsibilities and presented with a badge at a school assembly.
- To assist children with poor social skills, the school has introduced lunchtime events ranging from a fun choir to board games. Another strategy is teachers other than the class teacher deliberately targeting students in need of a little extra TLC (tender loving care).
- The (co-ed) College provides a male Guidance Counsellor one day a week to work especially with Year 10 boys at risk. He follows a programme 'Gems of the Water' with a group of ten boys for ten weeks and may take three groups in the course of a year.
- Every fortnight, one child per classroom receives an 'I am Special' award. The citations are written by the children's parents and the class and are read out by the principal. They are published and sent home at the end of each term. The same thing is done at the end of the year for each Year 6 child as they leave the school.
- Every child at the school is placed in a family group (of about nine students) named after a saint and led by Year 7 and 8 leaders. Family groups sit together during school Masses, have lunch together, and enjoy sports, social justice and EOTC activities as a group.
- 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.
- Meetings take place once a term to explain curriculum and school procedures.
- A collection of appropriate books and reading materials for parents to borrow is displayed in the foyer.
- The Board of Trustees puts strategies in place to prevent stress occurring for staff.
- The Parent School Link Group (PSL) 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 pastoral care group is advertised in the school newsletter so parents will know where to request help if it is needed.
- The parish employs a school/parish/home liaison person to facilitate pastoral care.
- School newsletters keep parents informed about children's learning and activities, and provide ideas to actively support children's learning in the home, as well as

parenting tips. Each term parents are also provided with a newsletter from the class teacher which covers the learning completed that term.

- The Pastoral Care Team includes fluent speakers of the community languages to help with consultation and sharing information about important issues.

3.0 Parish/school relationships

- 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 parish priest is timetabled to visit and talk to all classrooms each fortnight.
- The parish priest has a programmed 'shared lunch' with each class at least once a year.
- Once a term, the parish priest presents two certificates to each class in recognition of their Religious Education books being completed to a high standard.
- One of the criteria for the school's premier award at the end of year prize-giving is the student's involvement in the life of the parish. The parish priest is consulted in this process.
- The parish leadership team phones parents twice a year enquiring if they can help in any way. All aspects of parish activity are planned and considered in terms of how they will affect the school.
- Parishioners read to children and assist with the school's annual All Souls Day visit to the local cemetery. The school and parish are currently working on a project to move the parish hall onto the school site and have it refurbished.
- 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.
- The school holds a joint parish/school gala day and has a joint parish/school newsletter. Each Year 8 student is adopted by a parishioner, then kept track of them at secondary school. Classes rostered to weekday Mass are seated among parishioners, who vie to have them close by
- The school is working with the parish on a plan to get Year 7 & 8 students to visit and help housebound parishioners.
- The school allows the parish to use classrooms and the staffroom outside school hours for parish meetings. The school helps with the annual parish picnic.
- Students help fold the weekly parish newsletter, they contribute to the food bank and support community appeals. Parishioners support the school's Jesse Tree initiative and school Masses.
- 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 for Growth Programme for students who have had a major change or loss in their lives.
- 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.
- Each month, the families of a designated class are invited to provide baking or family meals for the parish welfare freezer.
- Prayer groups and programmes such as ‘Becoming Church, Becoming Catholic’ support the spiritual growth of families within the school.
- When senior students have been trained and commissioned as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, the college writes to the students’ home parishes suggesting they might be considered for the parish rosters.
- Twice a term there is a parish family Mass on a Sunday, with students taking responsibility for liturgy preparation, readings and prayers.
- Each year the school leavers receive a Bible from the Board of Trustees, so that each household has their own Bible. The parish team gives silver chains to every school leaver to symbolise their link with the parish even after they have left the school, and to indicate that they will always be welcome in the parish.

4.0 Teaching Religious Education

- 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.
- A sample of the work that children do in Religious Education is included in the portfolios that are sent home three times per year.
- 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.
- The Catholic Special Character subcommittee publishes a newsletter to keep parents up to date with the Religious Education Curriculum, parish life and articles for spiritual formation.
- An annual *Religious Education Journey* mural is on display in a main thoroughfare of the school. This is built up through the year to show Religious Education strands and Special Character events and celebrations.

- The ‘Thinking Skills’ are integrated into the Religious Education programme.
- All Religious Education teachers plan their strand lessons on eTap.
- Knowledge NET has been used to set up homework for each class. There is a Religious Education section, and as with the other curriculum subjects, most of the tasks are practical.
- 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.

5.0 Values and Virtues

- The theme of ‘Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus’ is a major school-wide focus and is intended to underpin the whole school culture.
- Staff members have worked together to develop a Staff Values Statement.
- 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.
- Students are acknowledged for using school values in the playground and receive house points; weekly awards at assembly highlight students displaying excellent attitudes to learning in the classrooms.
- Teachers have developed an evaluation form for students to reflect on how they have understood and practised each value.
- Senior students are encouraged to have a voice in the school through their meetings with the principal and they recognise fellow students’ good efforts in relation to the virtues through the presentation of a koru award.
- Students showing unacceptable behaviour complete a ‘think sheet’ which enables them to reflect on their behaviour and make reparation.

6.0 Evangelisation

- At enrolment interviews the principal states his expectations of students’ and parents’ Mass attendance. This expectation is reinforced throughout the year.
- Some 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 discusses his expectations of them, including a commitment to support the faith development of their children through attendance at Sunday Eucharist.
- At the time of First Communion the parish priest visits all the families and provides them with a leaflet on praying as a family. He also gives this out when parents come for preference cards.

- The staff see themselves as a ‘mission school’ and accept responsibility for evangelisation of the whole school community. They have introduced the pre-school programme ‘The Fledglings’ as part of the school’s enrolment process. These meetings occur weekly in the term before the child’s fifth birthday, and provide opportunities for building relationships with the new student and their family.
- The principal uses the school newsletters to promote the Catholic and spiritual dimension of the school – throughout the year the newsletters provide explanations of Catholic customs and practices.
- Parents have the opportunity to share in two prayer groups led by parents. One is for parents and families who are in searching mode and want to learn more about their faith, and the other is for sharing meditation and reflection.

7.0 Treaty of Waitangi responsibilities

- Where appropriate, Māori spiritual values are integrated with essential learning areas of the curriculum. Each year the school schedules a Māori-intensive programme to assist teachers, students and parents in their understanding and appreciation of tikanga Māori. The Board of Trustees attends a session on Māori spirituality.
- Māori greetings, responses and waiata are part of class prayer, school liturgies and Masses.
- Te reo is included in word banks for key theological concepts, and teachers choose one word, concept or phrase in Māori per strand to gradually increase their use of Māori in Religious Education.
- Girls in the New Entrant class have been taught karanga, and this ritual is carried out each day as the girls take it in turns to call the class to prayer.
- The school has established connections with the local Catholic marae. Tikanga, karakia and te reo have been integrated into the ritual life of the school.

8.0 Support for ethnic groups

- Application forms in the enrolment pack are bilingual.
- First languages of the students are acknowledged and displays in the school foyer reinforce this.
- Instructions on the use of the activity book have been translated into Māori and Samoan.
- A successful unit on Refugees involved online discussion with immigrant children from various cultures in schools throughout New Zealand.
- A Social Justice and Cultural Diversity Assembly gave families the opportunity to speak about their unique cultural backgrounds and encouraged children to take pride in their own heritage.

- A Year 13 student initiated a Pacific Island consultation evening to enable Pacific Island parents to discuss their daughters' educational goals.
- The Samoan parent community is helping integrate Samoan culture and language into the life of the school, particularly in liturgical prayer.
- 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.
- The school includes a question in its parent consultation to ensure the wishes and expectations of community cultures are being met.
- Staff have developed RESOL resources.
- Special classes are provided for international and other ESOL students: at Years 9 and 10 they are taught Social Studies and Religious Studies in an integrated programme through the ESOL Department; there is also a Year 12 and 13 Religious Education class for ESOL students and students with learning difficulties.

9.0 Student leadership

- Before the new school year begins, Year 12 students ring and welcome every Year 9 student; they act as buddies and teach them the college anthem and haka as part of their orientation into the college.
- 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 join senior staff members for a two-day leadership retreat.
- Student leaders are consulted and kept informed of many day-to-day management decisions. The college captains run an orientation evening for new students and parents.
- Senior students are trained as 'Fussbusters' who mediate in the playground.
- All students across the school are vertically grouped and every Year 8 student is responsible for planning and leading family group prayer and follow-up activities for their group. The senior students are specifically taught how to work with younger students and given time and support to prepare for these sessions. The leaders reflect together with their teacher on how well their groups went and how they might improve or strengthen them.
- Year 13 students have done Peace Foundation training as peer mediators. They are monitored by the Guidance Counsellor, meet weekly, and write up any incidents in which they are involved.

10.0 Professional development

- The Director of Religious Studies has drawn up a Professional Development and Spiritual Formation plan for teachers.
- The Professional Standards for Teachers include a Catholic Special Character dimension with school expectations which are evaluated against actual performance. These include the requirement to work towards the next level of certification, and a Catholic Special Character development objective. Senior leadership staff members also have a Catholic Special Character dimension relating to their particular leadership responsibilities.

11.0 Documentation

- 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.
- All key documentation is explicitly Catholic. The Charter and Strategic Plan have a Catholic Special Character dimension with specific goals and objectives.
- 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 school's Religious Education parental guidelines booklet is included in the school's enrolment pack.

12.0 Service and 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 educational units into the school programme.
- All students are expected to undertake half a 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 their choice. Service is to be of (at least) 20 hours duration (excluding planning, evaluation and reporting).
- The DRS works with the Young Vinnies Coordinator to plan a programme for senior students. This includes time for prayer and planning and activities such as can drives, visits to rest homes, books, Christmas gifts and food.
- Whenever a social justice situation arises out of a unit, a practical 'social action' is put into practice.
- At a staff meeting the DRS gave a PowerPoint presentation to stimulate teachers to reflect on and discuss Catholic teachings on Social Justice.

- The prefects' Social Justice Committee attended a Caritas training day and returned to college with a goal of raising awareness about national and international social justice issues.
- Classes learn about applying Catholic social justice teachings to world affairs through the use of Caritas lessons.
- An extensive outreach is organised by the Parent Teachers' Association which keeps a store of homemade frozen meals for families who experience hardship, illness and bereavement.
- The principal works confidentially with families in need, accessing support from external agencies when necessary. From time to time, she provides discretionary assistance from the budgeted 'hardship fund'. The parish finance committee assists some families struggling with attendance dues.

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