

CATHOLIC CHARACTER IN NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Some Suggestions to Stimulate Best Practice

November 2013

The following suggestions are drawn from best practice in our Catholic schools. You may find them worth replicating.

- Encourage young mothers who were ex-pupils of the school to bring their children to Baptism through their association with the school and parish.
- Fostering School/Parish relationships and evangelisation can be achieved by the Principal and staff playing a major role in supporting parents and students through to Baptism and then celebrating and supporting them beyond that commitment.
- Ask a parishioner to run courses for children who are not baptised.
- Use the Buddy system for new teachers when inducting them into the Special Character of the school.
- Use the 'teacher only' day to give special attention to the Charism, Special Character and way of teaching and learning. Then six months later use a checklist to ensure that all teachers are aware of the Special Catholic Character and other policies of the school.
- Identify each culture with a flag in the school hall. For significant cultural groups (eg Māori and Pasifika) provide a display map with photos of the child(ren) placed beside the appropriate group of islands or turangawaewae (area of tribal origin). Ensure teachers pronounce children's names correctly and honour the cultural diversity within their classrooms. Encourage children to share prayers in their own and others' native language in the classroom and at Masses.
- Encourage all Year 8 children to take a leadership role within the school by creating a wide range of leadership roles. Children apply for these roles with a CV and are chosen by staff.
- Institute PALs (Physical Activity Leaders) to organise and supervise sports and games for the junior children.
- Integrate Catholic Character into curriculum mapping (including relevant Biblical quotations). The DRS can interview a focus group of children from a class about their learning in RE. Video this interview and upload it to the teacher site for teachers to view and reflect upon. It might also go on the school website for parents to see.
- Get senior students to create a weekly video clip on Catholic Character, and place it on the school website. (Don't forget to mention it in the school newsletter.)

- Choose a Religious Education theme for each term, incorporating one of the school values into it.
- Welcome new children at the school-wide prayer session or Mass. A student leader can place a korowai around each child to signify their importance to the school and to show that the community wraps them in care and protection. Assign them a buddy and place a photo of them in the staffroom and corridor so they can be identified.
- Encourage students to design challenges reflective of their ethnic backgrounds and work towards gaining a badge in a Home Learning Programme that has a Catholic Character/Service in School and Community category... It also encourages them to develop their faith in the practice of religion.
- Teach values through the daily prayer sessions and integrate them through all areas of the curriculum. Awards at assembly can relate to how students have demonstrated these values.
- Use Māori language in all classroom displays and teacher planning. Encourage Māori parents to work with the staff to update the kaupapa for Māori students in the school charter. The curriculum can incorporate Kotahitanga, Taonga, Turangawaewae, Taiawhio term by term. Teachers who have completed a Māori spirituality workshop could lead others in introducing these concepts.
- Identify a peace zone in each classroom for children who need to think about their actions. At lunchtime use a Peace Room as a time out zone. Ensure it is a quiet place where children can go if they cannot manage themselves in class or in the playground. A teacher would need to provide supervision in the Peace Room.
- Have a badge system where all senior students can apply for an Honours Badge for exceptional leadership. Those who meet the specific criteria are presented with their award at a presentation ceremony, and parents are invited to attend.
- Each time the new Caritas Kit arrives share it with all the staff so that they may integrate the social justice issues in their classrooms. Students will develop awareness of social justice issues through celebrating Social Justice Week using some of the activities from the Caritas Kit.
- Provide opportunities to strengthen the parish/school relationship by inviting parishioners to the school to sit in on an RE lesson to find out how students learn about God today, then invite them to share their skills with the school eg gardening, art, music, knitting, reading.
- Set up a liturgy group to organise liturgies, select readers at Mass, look after the school's reflection area or Catholic Character displays in the foyer and corridors, prepare liturgical dances and art.
- As well as the usual activities run by the parents, why not suggest that they run a Faithathon, with questions based on faith concepts and Catholic Character.

- Make Special Character a standing item in the monthly Board meeting agenda – this ensures that the Principal reports monthly on aspects of Catholic Character. It also allows the BOT representative on the Parish Council and the Parish Priest on the BOT to report back on relevant parish and school activity.
- Encourage teachers to set personal goals for each term to develop their delivery of the Religious Education Curriculum and Special Character. This will lead to more specific and helpful appraisal.
- When writing and working with staff appraisals consider constructing measurable steps to help staff achieve Special Character goals they have set. Specifying steps such as professional reading to be completed, resources (including people) required, date of completion and expected outcomes or success criteria, will enable staff to identify which steps to take next.
- Make evangelisation a school goal. Encourage families to join Special Character events such as morning classroom prayer, school Masses and Sunday school Masses. Attendance will enable families to be more fully involved in the prayer and liturgical life of the school. This can lead to increased evangelisation within the community. Invite parents to take a more active part in Masses and liturgies by being involved in the Prayers of Intercession, Proclaiming the Word and the Offertory Procession.
- Invite parents to join the junior children in the prayer circle, and ask parents to offer their own prayers.
- Create a database of students by preference criteria. This will enable the school to identify preference students who are not baptised so the school can plan an evangelisation programme with the parish. The significant adults could be personally invited to attend Special Character events and/or be advised of ways that they can help in the formation in faith of the children they have agreed to support.
- Include in your enrolment packs leaflets on the parish community, especially organisations such as the Passionist Family Groups.
- Use the school newsletter as a major tool for evangelisation.
- When visits to the school are occurring these could also include a visit to the Church for the parents. This would assist the parents in understanding that they are becoming members of the parish as well as the school community.
- Have HODs report to the Board of Trustees on how they respect and enhance Catholic Character through their programme of teaching. Allow time for Trustees to ask for specific details as required.
- Use an “I believe” journaling structure to begin RE classes: present a short stimulus to students at the beginning of class (e.g. a video), then encourage students to respond to this in their journals. The questions for journaling should integrate the stimulus to

the topic being explored in the later part of the lesson. These “I believe” sessions enable students to develop the skills to talk about their faith and help them to integrate the knowledge gained in the classroom with daily life.

- Some senior students may benefit from an RE programme that is very structured and scaffolded, with scope to incorporate life skills.
- Consider having a specific spiritual goal in the personal section of the Catholic Character staff self-appraisals. This would reflect and support each teacher’s faith journey and ensure growth in their knowledge and understanding of Catholic Character.
- An occasional activity to make RE more current for today’s students: using TV One On Demand ‘Good Sorts’ programme as a starting point – the teacher poses the question “Why do we as a society consider these people to be Good Sorts?”. Bibles are then used to find “Good Sorts” in Jesus-time.
- Embed Māori spirituality into the school with the use of Māori hymns such as Aue te Aroha – O my great love.
- For parents from NESB groups, after interviewing prospective parents, follow up with visits by a formally appointed parish assistant and perhaps a volunteer from the community and encourage parents to communicate in their own language.
- Encourage the parents group to work with the wider parish to establish a Parish Freezer – a supply of frozen meals and baking that is distributed to people as situations arise, as a way of supporting and showing care.
- Encourage staff to form learning groups and to keep reflective diaries. These diaries engage staff in reflection across all subjects including Religious Education and they have a profound effect on aligning practice and raising standards.
- To cover Special Character in the Principal Appraisal develop a partnership with another Catholic Principal to observe and make appraisal comments against the standards prepared by the New Zealand Catholic Primary Principals’ Association.
- Ensure that the school values are central to the Gospels – they need to be recognisably different from values that might be found in a state school.
- Ensure that the school Charter, Strategic and Annual Plans all have strong Catholic Character content. Goals should be challenging and central to the development of faith.
- Write a Board of Trustees plan to focus on staff development over 3-5 years. It is especially important to encourage younger staff to undertake courses offered by The Catholic Institute, including degrees and diplomas.