

CATHOLIC SPECIAL CHARACTER  
EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT

ST. MARK'S CATHOLIC SCHOOL,  
PAKURANGA

4-5 JUNE, 2014

## SCHOOL DETAILS

<b>Name:</b>	<b>St. Mark's Catholic School, Pakuranga</b>
<b>Address:</b>	<b>334 Pakuranga Rd, Highland Park P.O. Box 82106, Highland Park, Auckland 2143</b>
<b>School Type:</b>	<b>Contributing school, Y1-6 boys and girls.</b>
<b>Principal:</b>	<b>Mrs Catherine Rivers</b>
<b>Director of Religious Studies:</b>	<b>Mrs Arminda Wood and Mrs Rosemary Grant</b>
<b>Board of Trustees Chairperson:</b>	<b>Mr Sheyan Samarasinha</b>
<b>Parish Priest:</b>	<b>Fr. Raphael Lobo</b>
<b>Reviewers:</b>	<b>Mr Neil Laurenson Mrs Colleen Gleeson</b>
<b>Accompanying Principal</b>	<b>Mrs Mary Zellman</b>
<b>Current Roll:</b>	<b>243</b>
<b>Report Confirmed:</b>	<b>10 July, 2014</b>

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.

## CATHOLIC COMMUNITY: Te Iwi Whanau 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.*

St. Mark's Catholic School, Pakuranga warmly welcomed and embraced the opportunity for review and development. The Board of Trustees, Principal, staff, students, parent and parish community welcomed the reviewers and all shared openly their thoughts and opinions.

Established in 1979 and situated in the East Auckland suburb of Highland Park, the school serves the Parish of St Mark's, Pakuranga and shares the site with the Presbytery, Church and Parish Centre. It is bordered by the Pakuranga Retirement Village and a proposed BP service station which the school and village communities are in the process of objecting to.

### SPIRITUALITY

*The individual and communal spirituality of the whole school community is promoted and nurtured.*

The spirituality of St Mark's Catholic School is seen in the way the staff and students relate to each other, welcome visitors and support each other and the wider community. This was evident, in action, on the recent death of a student at the school. The staff, students, parents, friends of the school and the wider community supported each other and the family and school through their loss, grieving and sadness.

Through its charism and values it provides encouragement and resources for individuals within the school community to develop their own faith journey. Parents commented to the reviewers that the children were very 'spiritual' and that the teachers were great role models as the children see them at Mass outside of school hours.

*"It is a privilege to be at a school with the Catholic Special Character which feeds ones spiritual needs, beliefs and sharing within the community."*

(Staff survey comment)

*"Be it known to all who enter here that Jesus is the reason for this school. He is the unseen yet ever present teachers in our classes. He is the model of our community and the inspiration of our children and teachers".*

(Religious Education Handbook – Essence and Key Beliefs)

*"When one of our children suddenly died, our community were very aware of the goodness of God in that we believe that we have a special Angel in heaven resting peacefully in God's arms."*

(Special Catholic Character internal review – staff brainstorm)

## EVANGELISATION

*The school is a faith community which endeavours to spread the Good News by word and witness*

The school proclaims the mission and Gospel of Jesus Christ. Parents spoke of how welcome they feel at the school and the strong sense of family, warmth and caring which provides a nurturing environment for the personal spiritual growth of each individual. All members of the school community are encouraged to be examples of Catholics living in faith and service.

## PARTNERSHIP

*Education is a collaborative responsibility.*

The Principal, staff and Board of Trustees work to build strong relationships with families, the Parish and wider community.

The partnership with parents is continually being developed through effective communication and learning conversations. A core group of parents meet monthly as the PTFA of St Mark's Catholic School. They initiate events and fundraising and get huge support from the school and parish community at all events. They organise and run a Gala every 1 to 2 years, sausage sizzles, a twilight family fun night, family picnic and discos. They raise money for the school and many events are organised just to build community. They commented that they did not like any children missing out and often supported families with uniforms and payment for trips and sports.

The school has fostered close relationships with other local schools in the Pakuranga area. An Extending High Standards Across Schools (EHSAS) Pakuranga cluster, supported by the Ministry of Education for Assessment Best Practice, was completed in 2011, however the schools including St Mark's have continued to work together. They attend Principal, AP/DP and Lead Teacher meetings together.

St Mark's Catholic School also maintains close relationships with the Catholic Colleges the students choose to attend, Sancta Maria, Baradene and Sacred Heart

## VALUES

*The school identifies and actively promotes Gospel values.*

*"Our Gospel values at St Mark's Catholic School are those values which tell us how to spend our time right here and right now."*

(St Mark's Catholic School Charter)

St Mark's Catholic School, Pakuranga has identified their core values as:

*Love of God*

*Respect*

*Integrity/Honesty*

*Tolerance  
Commitment  
Self Control*

The children, staff and parents were very familiar with these values and were able to articulate, to the reviewers, what they looked like in action.

The values are displayed around the school and in every classroom. It was noted at the Special Catholic Character – Catholic Community Review meeting that it was a strength of the school that *“values were taught, using teachable moments, throughout the day and were integrated into the planning and teaching of all curriculum areas.”*

When children are seen using the values in their everyday life their name is put into the “Good News Book”. At Assembly these names are read out and the children get a sticker, their names get mentioned in the school newsletter the following week.

The St Mark’s Catholic School Charter also sets out core values for teachers. *“Our Guiding Values for Teachers”* shows how the core values also underpin the teachers’ work in their Professional Learning Community. The values of Passion, Integrity, Diversity, Respect/Responsibility and Compassion/Empathy are clearly outlined in the Charter and related to the work of teachers.

*“The values of the school that are taught carry through to the home which creates a respectful environment at home.”*

(Parent survey comment)

## **SCHOOL CULTURE**

*Catholic Special Character is visible in the relationships and the artistic expression seen throughout the school.*

*“Our Catholic Character is the heart and essence of all we do and say at St Mark’s Catholic School”.*

(St Mark’s Catholic School – Essence and Key Beliefs)

St Mark’s Catholic School reflects the charism of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions (RNDM), the founding order. The children were very aware of the foundress of the order, Euphrasie Barbier, and the relationship the school still has with the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions.

The patron saint of the school is St Mark, named with the Church, for the Gospel writer and evangelist. The school brochure *‘Welcome to St Mark’s Catholic School’* explains clearly about St Mark and the Mission charism.

The school emblem is a shield containing a large cross of Jesus with a seven frond koru representing the seven core values. In the corners are the Mission Sisters cross, the initials SMS for St Mark’s School and a lion depicting the symbol of Mark’s gospels. Around the shield are three rings representing the school principles of ‘Attitude, Behaviour and Consistency’. Above the shield is the school name and across the base of the shield is the school motto “Seek and you shall find”. The senior students were able to articulate the charism and the emblem and what it meant to them.

The school has a strong sense of family and community. The Principal and teachers know every child by name and work to maintain strong relationships with the parent and parish communities. There is

an open door policy and parents commented that they felt comfortable coming into the school. A family atmosphere, warmth and generous hospitality were school strengths mentioned by many groups spoken to by the reviewers. The small size of the school and the safe, caring, inclusive and understanding environment were factors in parents choosing St Mark's Catholic School for their children.

The four school houses; Maungarei (Mt Wellington), Rangitoto (Mt Rangitoto), Pakuranga (Pigeon Mountain) and Waimokoia (Tamaki Estuary) were named for the landmarks surrounding the school.

The St Mark's Catholic School entrance foyer, corridors, staffroom and classrooms depict the Special Catholic Character through colourful and attractive displays and Catholic symbols. The displays were relevant to the current work being done in classrooms, the school's history and vision. Outside, the front entrance has recently been enhanced with a rock garden with a large succulent garden raised from the ground in the shape of a cross. Also a large white cross, with the seven fronded koru around it, stands at the front of the garden and is the first thing people see as they enter the school grounds. Tiles and murals are set around the school, memorial seats and a garden by the Principal's office provide places for reflection and a focus on the Special Catholic Character.

There is an expectation at St Mark's that "We do our best in everything". The Mission statement:

*"Our school will provide the best education in a Catholic environment".*

*"Ka whakaratoa e te kura nga tino matau teitei i waenganui i nga katorkia".*

is lived out in the daily life of the school. There is clearly a St Mark's Catholic School way of doing things which encompasses the principles and values. The school Charter explains that:

*"The St Mark's learner will live the Gospel values, be literate, numerate, well rounded, strive for success, have a spirit of inquiry and develop a passion for life-long learning".*

## LEADERSHIP

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

The Principal of St Mark's Catholic School, Pakuranga, has successfully led the school for 11 ½ years. Her commitment and passion for providing a quality Catholic education that is relevant to the students of St Mark's is evident in her words and actions and was acknowledged by the Board of Trustees, staff and parents. She has an excellent rapport with parents, is approachable and always available. The school and parish community have trust in the Principal and see her as an excellent role model and a motivating leader.

The Principal reports to the Board of Trustees through a monthly report which includes a Special Catholic Character section. She has set strong management and communication systems in place to support the staff to maintain her vision for the school and her high standards.

She is a member of the executive committee of the Auckland Catholic Principals' Association and the East Auckland Principals' Group.

The long-standing Chairman of the Board of Trustees had very recently resigned and a new Chairman had just been elected at the time of review. The previous Chairman was also a member of the Parish Council and most of the Board members were active in the Parish of St Mark's. All members of the Board of Trustees had the Catholic Special Character at heart. As part of the review, the reviewers interviewed the Board members and they were able to express how the school's Catholic Special

Character impacted on their role of governance. They commented that it was at the centre of every decision that they made and underpinned everything they did as a Board.

The Special Catholic Character Committee, includes all Proprietor Appointees, including the Parish Priest, Chairperson and the Principal. They work in conjunction with the Directors of Religious Studies. They meet annually to discuss the Internal Special Catholic Character self review report. A Proprietor Appointee is a member of all appointments committees.

The Board of Trustees is representative of the school community and all members have participated in regular training through the Ministry of Education webinars and Catholic Education Services workshops. New Board of Trustee members, after the recent elections, had induction training. The Board has a page on the school website with the Chairperson's annual report and dates for Board meetings. It is suggested that the Board of Trustees post information on their page about themselves so that parents can identify Board members.

The school communicates to parents through the fortnightly newsletter. The Principal includes information and quotes relevant to the Special Catholic Character of the school, prayers and reflections from Pope Francis. The newsletter is posted on the school website. The Board of Trustees send out a newsletter three or four times per year with information for parents.

## STEWARDSHIP

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

The Board of Trustees recognise their responsibility to ensure that Catholic Special Character permeates the whole curriculum and the school environment. They understand that partnership with the Parish is an important aspect in developing an effective school environment. Many Board of Trustee members and staff are parishioners at St Mark's who contribute to the Parish and school working as one.

The Charter and Strategic plan has a very strong Catholic Special Character content throughout. Emphasis is placed on the core beliefs and values of the school community. In response to the 2011 External Special Character Review recommendations the Annual Plan now includes specific actions, outcomes and responsibilities for significant areas for development.

New teachers are inducted into the Special Catholic Character and particular ethos of the school by the Principal and the Directors of Religious Studies. At the time of appointment the expectations for a staff member and teacher are made clear. The Director of Religious Studies works with each teacher to ensure they are confident teaching the Religious Education programme. Each teacher is paired with a buddy teacher at the same level for support.

The Principal meets with every new family and provides information about the school and its expectations. The Special Catholic Character of the school is explained and emphasised particularly well on a brochure which is given to each new family.

The process for the annual Internal Special Character Self Review is clearly outlined and the recommendations are written into the Strategic and/or annual plan each year. The review report forms part of the annual report to the Proprietor.



The Performance Management documents include the Special Catholic Character. Each teacher's job description has a Special Catholic Character section. Classroom observations for Religious Education are conducted by one of the Directors of Religious Studies. The Director of Religious Studies provides a report of the observation to the Principal and the Associate Principal appraiser. The Principal observes and appraises the Directors of Religious Studies and the Associate Principals.

In response to the 2011 External Special Character Review recommendations all policies contain reference to the Special Catholic Character of the school.

The school complies with the Integration Act in that all tagged positions required are filled. In regards to Preference students, the Principal keeps an up-to-date register of preference status and an up-to-date non preference waiting list. The number of non preference students complies with the 5% total set in the Integration Act.

## PRAYER AND WORSHIP

*A Catholic culture of prayer. Liturgy and faith-based celebration is promoted in the school.*

The reviewers joined six classes for prayers during their visit. These prayers were student led at all levels of the school and the students were reverent and respectful of this sacred time. The children were focused using candles, crucifix, statues, photos, items of relevance to the Religious Education focus, and Bibles placed on a liturgical cloth appropriate to the season. A variety of methods to pray was used, including spontaneous prayer and reflections, singing, traditional prayer and meditation.

The staff pray before each staff meeting and at other times in the staffroom for special intentions or special occasions.

Each Monday morning the school gathers together for a Prayer Assembly. Each class takes a turn to lead the prayer. A Director of Religious Studies discusses the previous Sunday's gospel and the Principal relates this to the school values and its relevance to everyday life.

School Masses are held at the beginning and end of each year, also on special feast days throughout the year. The Directors of Religious Studies plan and organise all School Masses and other significant liturgies. Each week two buddy classes attend the Tuesday morning Parish Mass. Parents are invited and strongly encouraged to attend all Masses and liturgies. The school joins with the Parish for Masses on Holy Days of Obligation. Liturgies are also held for Ash Wednesday, Grandparents Day and other special events. Mass is always part of every school Camp.

The school has its own St Mark's Catholic School Prayer.

All Sacramental programmes are organised and implemented by the Parish. The Principal and Directors of Religious Studies liaise with the Parish and teachers to support the programme in their classrooms. First Reconciliation is held during Lent. It is being discussed to have a school Reconciliation in line with the Sacramental programme.

The Board of Trustees is considering having a combined staff and Board Retreat each year and possibly a Year 5 and 6 Retreat every second year. The Directors of Religious Education have also discussed having a staff retreat. It is suggested that these ideas continue to be developed.

*"The pupils of St Mark's are taught reverence and respect for sacred things and behave accordingly. The children participate at Mass with singing and praying the Prayers of the Faithful. I believe this school has a strong Catholic Spirituality". (Parish survey comment)*

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

*The school promotes social justice.*

St Mark's Catholic School provides many opportunities for the students to develop an awareness of others, of issues in and beyond their immediate community and an empathy for those who are hurt and suffering. It contributes to raising awareness and action for justice within the school and the wider community.

In line with their Mission Charism the school works to support the Mission Sisters' Mission of Nirmalalaya School in India. They also support the Solomon Outreach Society and victims of disasters across the world, (eg. the hurricane in the Philippines), Canteen, We Can, the New Zealand Catholic Primary Principals' Mufti Mania and the St Vincent De Paul Society. They also sell ANZAC Day poppies and provide food for the Parish foodbank.

The senior students organise and run a Mission Day each year where they have craft and food stalls and games for all to enjoy. Every Tuesday is '10c Tuesday' when children bring 10c to put in their class Mission Box.

Caritas resources are used in classrooms when social justice can be integrated into the curriculum topics.

*"Through outreach to others in need, students grow into adults that are aware and concerned for the situation of others. They become outward thinking and citizens who support outreach".*

(Staff questionnaire comment)

Where there is a bereavement in the family or a family in need, meals are made and prayers are offered.

## COLLABORATION WITH THE PARISH

*The school collaborates with the Parish of which it is part.*

The Board of Trustees sees having the Priests in the Parish interested and supportive, as very relevant to the school/parish relationship. The Parish Priest is a member of the Board of Trustees as a Proprietor Appointee. The Assistant Priest has become very active in the school and with the Parish Priest visits classrooms regularly. They support the families of the school.

The school newsletter includes any special Parish news. The school and parish share the carpark and some music resources. The school has some use of the Church and Parish Centre when available. Some St Mark's Catholic School children are trained by a Parish member as altar servers for parish and school Masses.

The Parish runs the Sacramental programme and the school supports the programme throughout. Parents are personally approached by the school and are encouraged to participate. All Sacramental programmes are advertised in the school and Parish newsletters.

The Directors of Religious Studies, being active parishioners, have a strong working relationship with the Parish Office.

*"The school contributes to the life of the Parish by entertaining our Senior Social Group with their singing, Maori group and speaking. They took part in the World Day of Prayer when it was hosted by the Parish. The parishioners also enjoy attending the yearly fair."*

(Parish survey comment)

## AREAS FOR CATHOLIC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- That the Board of Trustees post information on their webpage about themselves so that parents can identify Board members.
- That the idea of a retreats for Board of Trustees and staff and a Year 5 and 6 Retreat every second year be further developed.

## 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*

As visitors to the school, the reviewers experienced warm and generous hospitality from all members of the school community. Parents acknowledged that teachers were passionate, approachable and respectful to them and their children. All school staff had a warm, gentle and caring relationship with the children. The Board of Trustees, staff, parents and Parish happily work together with respect and co-operation to provide a nurturing environment. This teamwork and collaboration makes for a happy and cohesive learning environment.

*"I think the special character shows through in the warmth and spirit shown by the staff. This helps me as a staff member to feel included, welcomed and respected in a caring environment."*

(Staff survey comments)

Parents and parishioners are warmly welcomed into the school at all times. The school endeavours to involve parents as much as possible in all school events and parents provide partnership and support for the school programmes and special events. There is an excellent relationship between parents and staff. Parents are appreciative of the high level of commitment of staff to their children and the staff value the trust that parents have in them.

Teachers modelled the core values in all their dealings with students and this was reflected in the way students related to each other. All teachers had a happy, warm and relaxed relationship with the children and it was obvious to the reviewers that they really cared about each other.

In response to the 2013 Internal Self Review on Pastoral Care, teacher well-being initiatives have been introduced to ensure that staff felt valued and cared for. For example, the Principal and Board of Trustees provide morning tea to the staff at the beginning and end of each term. Support staff felt valued and supported as full members of staff, even if they worked part time.

The school has an inclusive environment where all children are acknowledged for their special talents. A number of programmes are in place to support learners, the Principal and the Senior Teacher in charge of Year 1 classes are the Special Education Network Co-ordinators (SENCOs). Reading Recovery and Reading Support programmes, Handwriting support, and special Maths programmes are run by Teachers and Teacher Aides. Children with disabilities are welcomed to the school, well resourced and supported. The school employs a large number of Teacher Aides which shows their commitment to inclusive education. These Teacher Aides commented that they felt well supported and are given opportunities for professional development when it is relevant to their role. The school works closely with a variety of outside agencies including Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs), Social Workers and the Health Nurse.

A Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) register monitors the children above the National Standards and competitions and extra programmes such as Mathex and Otago Problem Solving are available when needed.

The Principal and both Directors of Religious Studies are trained in the "Seasons for Growth" programme and could deliver this when required.

## ORGANISATION

*The way pastoral care is organised is evident to all members of the school community.*

During the review visit, the reviewers heard of the many times care and support was given to families and individuals. The Principal and staff ensure that all families know of the support they could receive and organise help and support in times of need, hardship, grief or illness. The school also informs the Parish Priest when necessary. The Principal asks for prayers for certain families, through the newsletter.

*"When I was sick I could feel the love".*

(Parent interview comment)

The Pastoral Care Group look after migrants in the community, support them with language difficulties and understanding the customs of the school. The Principal identifies the needs of families and places support where it is needed.

## BI-CULTURAL COMMITMENT

*The school is committed to the Treaty of Waitangi.*

St Mark's Catholic School recognises the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi / The Treaty of Waitangi and the status of Maori as Tangata Whenua.

*"St Mark's Catholic School will acknowledge the unique position of the Maori culture in New Zealand society. We acknowledge Maori as the elder treaty partner. We seek to develop and promote awareness of te Mana o Aotearoa and foster improved cultural understanding consistent with te Tiriti o Waitangi"*

(St Mark's Catholic School Charter)

The school's Mission Statement (Our school will provide the best education in a Catholic environment - *"Ka whakaratoa e te kura nga tino matau teitei i waenganui i nga katorkia"*) and Motto ( Seek and You Shall Find – *"Rapua Kia Kitea"*) have both been translated into Maori, however the staff and children did not use the Maori translation as easily as the English.

The school has a specialist Te Reo teacher teaching all senior classes for half of each year and supporting teachers to use Te Reo in everyday classroom work. Four teachers attended the "Introduction to Te Reo" course earlier in 2014 and all staff except four have completed a Maori Spirituality course. Integrated topics are planned with Maori content for the junior and senior school. Teachers are encouraged to have a Maori Glossary displayed in their classrooms and to pray, sing and make the Sign of the Cross in Maori.

The Kapa Haka group welcomed the reviewers with rousing haka and waiata. They are well trained by a teacher at the school and perform a capella. Classroom programmes are specifically designed to integrate Maoritanga. The junior school visit a marae and the senior school visited Cascade Kauri to look at the Maori use of the forest and the Botanical Gardens to do flax weaving.

## CULTURAL AWARENESS

*The school recognises and honours cultural diversity.*

At St Mark's Catholic School, teachers were very careful to honour the cultural diversity within their classrooms.

*"The cultural diversity of the school is acknowledged and celebrated".*

(St Mark's Catholic School Charter)

The school is very multicultural and has a large Filipino community. Many migrants come to the school and are supported by a strong Pastoral Care Group to integrate into the school. Parents work with teachers to share their cultures with the school. All school consultation meetings are held with Maori, Pasifika and Filipino groups.

The school uses teacher strengths when possible and the children in the senior classes learn Spanish for half of the year from a staff member who is a native Spanish speaker.

A recent internal self review on Pastoral Care found that:

*"The diversity and variety of backgrounds and cultures, lends itself to showing tolerance, understanding and compassion which is a strong way of living spiritually and we acknowledge that we are spiritual"*

## BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

*Discipline processes are just, compassionate, respectful and consistent.*

The happy, positive relationships and calm learning-focused environment of the school community removes most causes of disruptive behaviour and creates in children a willingness to co-operate and self manage. The school expects a high level of respect and dignity for all.

At St Mark's Catholic School behaviour management is based on the schools core Values and the ABCs (Attitude, Behaviour and Consistency). Issues are often resolved using the questions, "What would Jesus say or do?" or "Does this behaviour show St Mark's School Values?"

*"Children are encouraged to see the Holy Spirit in each of us"*

(Staff questionnaire comment)

In times of conflict, restorative justice the Five Point Plan is used and the 'Cool Schools Peer Mediators' work with the children in the playground.

## SERVICE

*The students assist people in need through service and outreach opportunities provided by the school.*

Leadership opportunities are provided throughout the school. All children are given the opportunity to lead prayer and act as monitors in their own classrooms. All senior children are given the chance to lead through being school and house captains, monitors for first aid, PE shed, bell ringers, milk distribution, collecting empty cartons, sports, wet days, library, sound system and ICT suite. They can also do road patrol and be peer mediators and Kapa Haka leaders. Children sign up for these roles and the teachers decide who is appointed.

The gardening club is voluntary and the children tend the vegetable gardens and flower beds and pots around the school by watering and weeding.

The children entertain the "Friendship Group" at the Parish with a dance group, music group and the choir. A Christmas Nativity is held at the Pakuranga Village hall each year and the elderly residents enjoy the show.

Children participate in liturgical dance, prayers of the faithful and the presentation of the gifts at Masses, some are trained and serve as Altar servers.

# 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.*

For the past 10 years the Director of Religious Studies position has been shared between a part time teacher and a full time teacher. The part time teacher has been in the Director of Religious Studies role for 14 ½ years, the full time teacher has been in the Director of Religious Studies role for 10 years. This agreement works well for these two people and for the school. They work collaboratively with the Principal, staff and Parish personnel to ensure that a strong partnership exists between the school and parish. Their enthusiastic yet gentle approach to the job ensures that professional development, liturgies and other important religious occasions are carried out efficiently and calmly. Both ladies are active members of St Mark's Parish.

The Directors of Religious Studies plan and prepare all full school Masses and celebrations together. They support new teachers to the school and teachers new to Catholic schools and model lessons when required. One of them observes a Religious Education lesson and a prayer session in each classroom at least once per year. She provides formative feedback, affirming good practice and providing a next step for development to each teacher. Written appraisal is given to the teachers, the Principal and starting this year to the Associate Principal of the syndicate as well.

Two staff meetings are facilitated by the Directors of Religious Studies each term, one at the start of a strand which focuses on the theological focus, the other is to provide input for the Special Catholic Character Internal Review. They seek guidance from the Religious Education Advisors and meet regularly with the Principal.

Release is provided to both Directors of Religious Studies to attend the Director of Religious Studies days, annual Conference and professional development days. They are invited to attend the Senior Management Meetings and planning days where relevant to their role and they attend the annual Senior Management Day run by the Auckland Catholic Primary Principals Association. They acknowledge

The Directors of Religious Studies distribute a newsletter each term explaining the Strands and Modules to be covered and any other news concerning the Religious Education and Special Catholic Character of the school.

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM** *The Religious Education programme is professionally delivered.*

*"Through its Religious Education class programme the school provides opportunities for children to learn what it is to be Catholic – that is, what Catholics believe and how they celebrate, live and pray."*

(St Mark's Religious Education Procedures)

The classrooms, foyers and corridor displays throughout the school were evidence that Religious Education and the Special Catholic Character have a high status at St Mark's Catholic School, Pakuranga. The Religious Education Curriculum is very full. The school is trialling a two year cycle to ensure that all Strands and modules are being covered well. This trial is due to be reviewed at the end of the 2014 year. The strands and modules are well covered and the Special Catholic Character is being integrated into all topic planning.

Teachers plan Religious Education in their syndicates and specifically for their own classroom, using the Religious Education Advisors sheets, which provide a consistency across the school. Assessment of Learning Objectives is recorded to inform children's individual faith development and pre tests are used to inform the teacher of prior knowledge and to revisit the Strand topic. Further consideration could be put into how these assessments could be used to form a faith journey for each child from Y1 to Y6. Most teacher evaluations were thoughtful and reflected the strong emphasis on faith development and student achievement. In response to the 2011 External Special Catholic Character review the syndicate leaders now check the Religious Education planning in line with all other subject areas.

Teachers are encouraged to align the formative teaching, pedagogy and best practice used in other curriculum areas with the Religious Education programme. Teachers have begun to be more creative in the expected children's responses to learning. It is suggested that the school continue to develop creative ideas for teaching Religious Education and creating a variety of children's response to learning.

The children record their learning in a Religious Education book. Most of these books were well presented and the children were proud of their work and willing to discuss and reflect on what they had done and what they had learned. In most classrooms, at the start of each Strand the Achievement Objectives outline was pasted into the book. At the end of each Strand of work an evaluation comment was made by the child and teacher and in most classes the books were taken home for the parents to share and make a comment. It is suggested that all classes send the Religious Education books home after each Strand.

A Mission Charism programme has been written with junior, middle and senior syndicate learning objectives to ensure the children progress through the school, building on their knowledge of the charism. This programme is taught every second year.

The learning environments were vibrant and the displays were relevant to the Religious Education Strand being covered, the review visit occurred just as the Holy Spirit Strand was being completed and the Church Strand was beginning. Pentecost was also being discussed.



## INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

*Catholic teaching is integrated with other curriculum areas.*

At St Mark's Catholic School a Catholic perspective is very evident in classroom environments across the curriculum. At planning meetings there is a deliberate discussion on how to integrate the Special Character into themes and subject areas. Teachers were successfully weaving a Catholic point of view into the total curriculum so that children were naturally making links and seeing that God was present in everything. The St Mark's Catholic School Inquiry model is a graphic demonstration of how the curriculum is linked to the special character with the Mission cross as the centre. Formative teaching was used in all classrooms across all curriculum areas, including Religious Education.

The "Myself and Others" module was integrated through the St Mark's Catholic School Health programme to ensure a Catholic perspective was provided. Puberty talks called 'Coping with Change' are delivered by the Senior Syndicate teachers to senior students. Talks are also given to the senior girls before they go to camp. The Health programme is supplemented with Life Education and Keeping Ourselves Safe programmes and one of the Directors of Religious Studies is on the Health Team. Health consultation with parents is implemented every two years.

A Music specialist is employed part time, by the school and has formed marimba group. The school choir is trained by two teachers. Private lessons are also available at lunchtimes and after school in guitar, singing and keyboard. Many teachers and parents readily give their time and expertise to provide opportunities for children in music, performance and sports.

The school is a WasteCare school. Teachers and children keep the school rubbish free and recycle plastics, paper and food scraps. Banana skins and apple cores are fed into the Worm Farm and other suitable waste is composted. The Worm Tea and compost is used on the vegetable gardens and fruit trees that are planted in the school grounds. Discussions about 'Caring for God's Creation' are regular at school assemblies and in classrooms. The Gardening Club tend the gardens with weeding and watering. The fruit and vegetables are sold to the families. The Year 5 and 6 children go to a school-run camp at Carey Park every two years as part of the Education Outside the Classroom programme.

## RESOURCES

*The school makes financial provision for Religious Education and Catholic Special Character resources.*

The school is well resourced and the Directors of Religious Studies ensure that all classrooms have the necessary resources to deliver the Religious Education programme and provide an environment that reflects the Special Catholic Character. All class teachers use the digital resource and all classrooms use Interactive whiteboards and are beginning to use technology effectively. Boxes, with books to support the digital resource, are in each classroom as well as prayer support materials, cloths in liturgical season colours and candles. Teacher resources are added and updated on the school server as appropriate. The server also holds music that the school owns and photos and images to do with the Parish.

The Religious Education Advisors are used by the school to support beginning teachers and teachers new to Catholic schools and to run staff meetings when requested.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

The Directors of Religious Studies ensure that Religious Education professional development is delivered through staff meetings at the beginning of each Strand on the theological focus. Professional development for the Charism and Special Character of the school is covered on Teacher Only Days each year and guest speakers are invited to present at many of these sessions, including the Sisters of the Mission. Staff are encouraged to complete 12 hours of professional development each year and this expectation is part of the appraisal process. It is recommended that the school inform the Catholic Schools Office of these meetings when they occur so that credits can be awarded to teachers towards Certification. It is also recommended that the Religious Education Procedures (C1.2) states that there is an expectation that all teachers complete 12 hours of Professional Development in Religious Education and Special Character each year.

The staff takes advantage of all courses, workshops and cluster meetings provided by the Catholic Schools Office. The Directors of Religious Studies attend all DRS days and the annual DRS conference. Five teachers have completed the Understanding Sexuality Course and/or CFLE.

The senior management team and Directors of Religious Studies attend the ACPA Senior Management Day in Auckland and all staff attended the Megan McKenna workshop in 2012.

Teachers are all encouraged to work towards Certification. The Principal and both Directors of Religious Studies have achieved Endorsed Leadership level, two teachers have Classroom level and another five teachers will achieve Classroom level in 2014 and all teachers are working towards classroom level.

*Additional information was collected during the review in an area of special national interest, namely professional development in Catholic Character and Religious Education.*

## COMMUNICATION

*The school communicates with parents/caregivers about Religious Education.*

The Principal shares her faith through the school newsletters where she includes prayers, reflections and quotes from Pope Francis. The Directors of Religious Education inform parents of the current Strand topic and provide information on the liturgical season and feast days through a DRS newsletter each term.

Most children's Religious Education books are sent home at the end of each Strand for parents to discuss with their children. Teachers, children and parents all write comments at the end of each Strand which affirm the learning. Parents commented that it was an excellent way of discussing the Religious Education programme with their children. The school website includes information parents may need to support their children at school.

Parents and families are invited to classroom prayers, school liturgies, assemblies and Masses. The open door and welcoming attitude at the school invites families and the parish to participate and contribute. Teachers make themselves available to support parents and to discuss the Religious Education programme with them.

Each year, at the 'Meet the Teachers' meeting, parents are informed about the whanau book and Religious Education as an essential learning area. Parents of new entrant children attend an orientation meeting where the Principal talks about the Religious Education programme and the Special Character of the school.

### AREAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

- Continue to develop creative ideas for teaching Religious Education and creating a variety of children's response to learning.
- That all classes send the Religious Education books home after each Strand.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

- That the school inform the Catholic Schools Office of all staff meetings and Teacher Only Days with Special Catholic Character content when they occur so that credits can be awarded to teachers towards Certification.
- That the Religious Education Procedures document (C1.2) states that there is an expectation that all teachers complete 12 hours of Professional Development in Religious Education and Special Character each year.

## CONCLUSION

St Mark's Catholic School, Pakuranga provides a child-centred, nurturing learning environment that focuses on the achievement of excellence. The leadership of the Principal and the Board of Trustees, a dedicated staff, enthusiastic and positive parents and the close links with the St Mark's Parish, together combine to form a successful Catholic community. The Mission charism, the patron saint St Mark and the school's core values provide the school with an ethos that permeates throughout the school.

The senior children interviewed by the reviewers are living testament that the school is achieving what the community aspires to in their Vision:

*"To provide a Christ-centered, challenging, safe, happy learning environment where self-confident children achieve success in all areas of the curriculum."*

(St Mark's Catholic School Charter)


The children are confident, happy and engaged in their learning. Along with their families they are proud to be members of St Mark's Catholic School.

*"May the links, involvement and blessings between St Mark's Parish and the school grow ever stronger. May the children always feel that the Church is theirs."*

(Parish survey comment)

*"The school is a great influence in our children's understanding of the Catholic faith and a great partner to us parents in our children's spiritual development."*

(Parent survey comment)



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