



**CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF AUCKLAND**

**Catholic Schools Office**

*Kia mau ki te ako ko tou oranga hoki ia*  
Proverbs 4:13

# **CATHOLIC SPECIAL CHARACTER EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT**

*Te Purongo Kaupapa Arotake Mo Nga Ahuatanga  
Katorika*

**ST MARY'S SCHOOL,  
NORTHCOTE**

**14-16 NOVEMBER, 2017**

## SCHOOL DETAILS

<b>Name:</b>	<b>St. Mary's School, Northcote</b>
<b>Address:</b>	<b>45 Gladstone Road Northcote Auckland 0627</b>
<b>School Type:</b>	<b>Contributing: Boys and Girls Years 1-6.</b>
<b>Principal:</b>	<b>Mrs Michelle Holly</b>
<b>Director of Religious Studies:</b>	<b>Mrs Maria Matthews</b>
<b>Board of Trustees Chairperson:</b>	<b>Mrs Lisa Smith</b>
<b>Parish Priest:</b>	<b>Father Lio Rotor</b>
<b>Reviewers:</b>	<b>Linda McQuade Philip Mahoney</b>
<b>Accompanying Principal:</b>	<b>Ms. Catherine Ryan</b>
<b>Current Roll:</b>	<b>412</b>
<b>Report Confirmed:</b>	<b>March 5, 2018</b>



## *Introduction*

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

Situated on Auckland's North Shore, the school shares the site with the Parish of St. Mary Northcote, the Presbytery and parish hall. The school also provides for students from the parishes of Maria Assumpta Beach Haven and St Thomas More Glenfield. Around half of the classroom buildings were replaced in late 2016 with a new double story building which includes four innovative learning hubs equivalent to ten teaching spaces.

Over the past two years the school has seen several changes: a new building; a new Principal, a new Parish Priest and a new Board of Trustees Chairperson. Changes in approaches to teaching and learning, governance and management have proved challenging and support for the Board and Senior Leadership Team has been provided through the appointment of a Limited Statutory Manager and oversight from the Education Review Office. That support has now been withdrawn with the return of the school to a normal three year review cycle.

## *Response to Recommendations from the 2013 External Review*

**That an observation of a prayer session and a Religious Education lesson, in each learning area be undertaken each year, as required, to ensure consistency across the school.**

- The DRS observes prayer and religious education lessons in each learning space.

**That a formal meeting be arranged between the liaison representative of the Religious Education Team and the Parish Priest at least once per fortnight to ensure that everyone is kept informed.**

- There is no longer a Religious Education team, as a DRS has since been appointed and meets with the Parish Priest as required to discuss all liturgical celebrations.

**Continue the work already begun to strengthen working relationships between the Parish Priest and Principal**

- Both the Parish Priest and Principal have changed since the last review, and regular meetings now occur between them and a positive relationship is being established.

**That the Religious Education Team continue to review its practice and procedures to ensure that consistency of Religious Education teaching and learning across the school is coordinated and monitored and that communication with all teachers is effective.**

- The Religious Education Team has been replaced by a DRS and assistant DRS who coordinate and monitor planning and delivery of Religious Education across the school, and communicate with all teachers.



## ***Encounter with Christ – Te Tutaki ki a Te Karaiti***

*The school encourages and facilitates the development of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ who reveals the transforming love and truth of the living God.*

### ***Areas of Success***

St Mary's School has a shared understanding of a Catholic spirituality based on their Mercy Charism and Dominican heritage which are reflected in the school's values. The reverence and respect shown when the school gathers for prayer, liturgies and Masses and the presence of the symbols of the Catholic faith throughout the school, witness to a lived spirituality. This spirituality is also evident in the way the staff and students relate to each other, welcome visitors and support each other and the wider community. Parents commented on the respectful relationships between the children and how God is central to their thinking.

Opportunities are available for spiritual development of staff through an annual retreat day in the holidays and teachers participating in further study. Prayer is an integral part of the daily routine of school life, and this includes individual and community prayer using traditional and contemporary forms including meditation. Children are encouraged to lead prayer in their home groups. The prayer usually follows a set routine with home groups in the hubs joining together at times. Staff prayer is held weekly and the staff also use the 'Going Deeper' programme for discussion and reflection.

The school's values of Unity - Kotahitanga, Respect - Manaakitanga, Compassion - Atawhaitanga and Truth - Pono are well documented and are linked to scriptural references. A branding group was formed to develop a new school logo and to include Truth – Pono along with the other values. This group has representation across the community, including students, and has developed designs for consideration by the Board.

*I have been impressed with how well the students and school community understand and value the importance of the school charism and its unique Catholic Character. This is strongly reflected in St Mary's new visual identity.* (Parent comment).

St Mary's School is evangelising to the staff, students and their families, forming a link between the school and the Parish. The school encourages all eligible children to join the Sacramental programmes delivered by the parish. The school actively supports the parish Sacramental programme.

The Principal, Staff and Board work to build strong relationships with families, the Parish, the Parent Support Group (PSG) and the wider community. The Principal meets with the Parish Priest weekly for prayer and planning. The DRS attends the monthly Parish Council meetings. The Parish priests are invited to all school celebrations and events. The Parish Priest is a member of the Board. Promotion of parish life is provided through the school through the weekly bulletin, at parent meetings and invitations to Masses and liturgies. The school and parish share facilities like the hall. The school supports de Paul House in the parish through care packages and fundraising.

The Board and Senior Leadership team ensure the Catholic Character is central to all that they do. The Principal has a key role in maintaining this focus through the promotion of prayer and respectful relationships that reflect the Catholic Character. She is a strong role



model who can confidently articulate her own faith and is seen living her faith at school and in the Parish.

St Marys School is an authentic Catholic community where the community strives to live the Parish Vision – “Together we grow to reflect the face of Christ”. This is evident in:

- The reverence and participation shown by classes attending weekly Mass in the parish.
- Student input into organisation of school-wide liturgies and involvement through the student choir.
- A positive environment where all are included and encouraged.
- Staff becoming positive role models who support, uphold and witness to the Catholic Character of the school through their relationships with students and each other.
- Parents feeling welcome and supported at the school.
- A prayer intentions board in the staff room.

### ***Opportunities for Development***

It is suggested that retreat opportunities are provided for senior students focussing on encountering Christ and deepening their personal relationship with him.

We support and applaud the school’s initiative to develop a ‘reflection garden’ on the hill outside the Catherine Block for students to use to pray and reflect on the natural beauty that God provides around them.

### ***Growth in Knowledge – Te Whakatupu ma te Matauranga***

*The school assists its community to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ, his teachings and the Catholic Church.*

### ***Areas of Success***

The Director of Religious Studies has taught at St Mary’s for ten years and was appointed Director of Religious Education two years ago. Her status as a leader is acknowledged through appropriate management units and release time. She works closely with the Principal and middle leaders. An Assistant Director of Religious Studies has been recently appointed to support her in the role.

The school is well resourced and the use of digital programmes and devices to support teaching and learning of Religious Education was evident. All planning is done on-line using a common template and monitored by the Director of Religious Studies. Expectations of the timing of Religious Education lessons in the day and the number of lessons per week are clearly communicated by the Principal and Director of Religious Studies who coordinates and monitors planning and delivery of Religious Education across the school, and communicates with all teachers. Extensive support is provided particularly for those new to teaching in a Catholic school.



Teachers are beginning to integrate a Catholic world-view into all learning programmes using their inquiry planning template. This is assisted by the choice of themes for each term that have a strong Catholic perspective such as cultural diversity and social justice.

The Director of Religious Studies leads professional development meetings for the beginning of each strand. The expectation is that all teachers will complete at least 12 hours of professional development in Religious Education. Teachers take part in cluster meetings and Diocese organised seminars and workshops when available. New teachers attend the 'Teachers new to Catholic School' course. The Religious Education Advisors support the Director of Religious Studies with resources, support and guidance.

Parents are kept informed about the Religious Education programme by a variety of means, including the newsletter, a display in the foyer and children's books being sent home. The school is investigating giving parents access to programme information and student's work on-line through the school's Student Management System.

### ***Opportunities for Development***

With innovative changes in Religious Education teaching and learning, the school needs to look at new ways to:

- assess the Religious Education programme
- share with parents changes in teaching and learning.
- use the RE Curriculum Bridging Document from 2018

Consistent Religious Education planning was evident across the school hubs and the next step is for teachers to differentiate that planning to meet the specific individual needs of students.

Support staff be invited to attend a professional development day in Catholic Character at the Pompallier Diocesan Centre.

Teachers other than the DRS be encouraged to complete the course "Having Life to the Full" (formerly called Understanding Sexuality) and also other courses offered by The Catholic Institute.

### ***Christian Witness – Te Whakaatu Karaitiana***

*The school provides a hope-filled Catholic Christian witness which empowers its community members to integrate their faith and their life.*

### ***Areas of Success***

The Principal, Director of Religious Studies and other teachers in S464 positions are active witnesses of faith in the school and their parishes and reflect the face of Christ to others. The school is a welcoming environment where all are treated with hospitality, aroha and courtesy.



St Mary's School and Parish have an increasingly positive relationship. This is demonstrated by:

- Junior and Senior classes are rostered to attend the weekly Parish Mass each Wednesday, and growing numbers of parishioners are now attending also.
- Celebrations are planned with the Parish priest for feast days and events throughout the Liturgical calendar.
- A school Mass held once per term as a Sunday Parish Mass.
- Parish and school celebrate an annual cultural day which is a joint celebration of unity and diversity.
- Many teachers at the school are members of the local Parish and some also participate as Ministers of the Word and Eucharist.
- Students are Altar servers and readers at Mass
- Parish and school personnel work closely together and share resources and facilities.
- The Parish priest visits the school regularly and meets with the Principal to pray and plan.

The parish sacramental programme is actively promoted by the school, and children who are yet to be baptised join the RCIC, and some parents have been baptised after joining the RCIA programme.

The school works to build strong relationships with its families. A parent support group (PSG) exists and is open to all who wish to join. Pastoral care is provided for families suffering from grief, loss or hard times in the form of visits, flowers, meals and transport. The PSG also organize other community events.

St Mary's School endeavours to provide opportunities for students to contribute actively to the life of the local community. Money and goods are collected throughout each year for various charities and causes including de Paul House, Cans for Christmas, a sister school in Tonga and Caritas. The student leadership group identify through consultation with their classmates the charities that will be a focus for fundraising. As part of the Social Justice theme each class and student performed acts of service. This service was linked to Christ's identification with the hungry and suffering (Matthew 25:35), to the parable of the Good Samaritan and to role models such as Suzanne Aubert, Vincent de Paul and Mother Teresa to help students understand the Christian motivation for service and outreach.

The school welcomes students with special needs and provides appropriate assistance and programmes to enable them to fulfil their potential. Support staff spoken to by the reviewers felt valued and supported in their roles.

St Mary's School recognises Maori as tangata whenua and has an understanding of the principles of partnership and participation. The Board has been using the Hautu board self-review tool over the last year and as a result of consultation with the Maori community have included elements of tikanga into school events in the form of karakia, waiata and with the formation of a kapahaka group. Specific achievement targets have been set for Maori students following consultation with whanau. There is a growing diversity of cultures at St Mary's with Filipino (15%), Pasifica (8%) and Indian (5%) becoming significant. Cultural identity was a focus for Term One to help students clarify and understand their own and each other's cultures.



Behaviour Management in the school is based on the school's values. At mini-assemblies examples are provided for students of expected behaviour in line with the values.

*My children can articulate what these look like, both in the classroom and in the playground at their school. They actively participate in these values, taking ownership of situations where they feel these values are being compromised.* (Parent comment)

Several staff are trained in a restorative approach to behaviour management, and the aim is make this approach more explicit. The PB4L programme is a future possibility.

The school provides opportunities for students to contribute actively in school life. A Student Leadership Group has been formed to gather student voice and to share that with the Senior Leadership Team. Their focus is on care for others. They have developed a job description around the charism and are involved in the appointment of leaders for the following year. A tuakana teina system is developing, and the Special Character Leaders are involved in the planning of school Masses and liturgies. Some students were part of a branding group formed to come up with designs for a new school logo incorporating the school's core values and charism.

### **Opportunities for Development**

St Mary's School is becoming more culturally diverse. Meetings could be scheduled with the different ethnic groups to ensure that all cultures are acknowledged and given opportunities to contribute to enhance the cultural richness of the school.

With recent staff changes it is timely to revisit the NZ Catholic Bishops document "The Catholic Education of School Age Children" so that staff fully understand the role of the Catholic School as part of the Mission of the Church and also in facilitating the disciple's journey of Encounter, Growth in Knowledge and Witness.

### **Safeguarding and Strengthening Catholic Character – Te Kaitiakitanga me te Whakapakari I te Tuakiri Katorika**

*The school in its stewardship and compliance with statutory obligations, safeguards and strengthens its Catholic identity.*

### **Areas of Success**

The Catholic Character of the school is central to the Board's considerations and decision making. Throughout the challenges the Board has faced over the last two years, Board members believe that maintaining a clear focus on the Catholic Character has enabled them to both encounter Christ and to be the face of Christ in the way they have worked with the staff and the community to address issues that arose.

The Board has been developing clear processes to govern the school and support management. They are looking forward to next steps including continuing to strengthen the Religious Education programme, reaching out to all groups in the community, and continuing to improve links with the parish to ensure more families and children are involved in the parish. These steps are reflected in the goals in the Strategic Plan for the



next three years which aim to have students reach their full God given potential, growing as disciples of Jesus, communicating Christ through their actions, and to witness to and live by Gospel values.

As part of the Special Character Review process a preference audit was conducted on during the review. The breakdown of students into preference categories follows:

	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4	5.5	Non-Preference	Total
Number	347	2	34	6	0	23	412
Percentage of Total Roll	84	0.5	8	2	0	5.0	100

The school is compliant with its maximum roll of 475 and the allowed number of non-preference students (23).

The school collects preference forms for each qualifying enrolment. 89% of preference students are in the 5.1 criterion.

### *Opportunities for Development*

Board members need to continue becoming familiar with “The Handbook for BOTs of Catholic Schools” and “The Catholic Education of School-aged Children.” They need to consider these documents when they are reviewing all policies, procedures and strategic goals.

### *Key Recommendations*

The Curriculum and Student Achievement Policy needs to include a statement to ensure that the Special Catholic Character, a Catholic world view and Catholic Social Teaching are integrated throughout all curriculum areas.

The Religious Education Policy and the Special Character Policy need to be updated in line with the new Catholic Character Review model.

The Behaviour Management Policy needs to acknowledge that respect for others is based on the belief that we are all made in the image and likeness of God.

Gospel quotes rather than quotes from Paul’s letters should be sourced to support the values of Unity, Respect and Compassion.

### *Conclusion*

St Mary’s School has successfully worked through many challenges in the past two years. The Board and Senior Leadership team with external support have ensured that the school



is now well placed to continue to provide a high standard Catholic Education for its community as part of the mission of the local Parish.

In the new Catherine block, the teaching and learning spaces have been built as innovative learning environments which has meant the staff has had to accept working more collaboratively and learn to adapt their pedagogy. The Senior Leadership team comprising of a new Principal and two new Deputy Principals have chosen to work out of a shared space which has required a high degree of collaboration and allowed for mutual support. A change of Parish Priest has required the building of new relationships between school and parish. Regardless of all of these changes the school was found to provide a happy, cohesive Catholic learning environment.

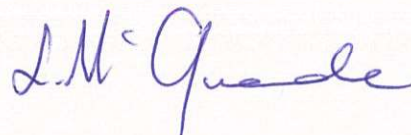
The school's leadership, committed staff, connection with the Parish and supportive families provide a nurturing environment for children who love coming to school. They focus on the whole child, spiritually, emotionally, physically, culturally and academically.

The school provides many opportunities for each child to have a genuine and ongoing encounter with Christ, to grow in knowledge and understanding of Christ's teaching and to live a life of Christian witness within the Catholic Church. The senior children interviewed by the reviewers were living testament that St Marys School is achieving its purpose and mission.

*In the school we live the parish motto, 'together we grow to reflect the face of Christ'.*  
(Student comment)



**Philip Mahoney**  
**Manager**  
**Catholic Education Services**



**Linda McQuade**  
**Vicar for Education**

Date: March 5 2018