

**DIOCESE OF DUNEDIN
CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE**

**External Review of
Catholic Special Character and Development**

**REPORT ON
St Mary's School, Milton**

School Type	Contributing Years 1 - 6
Visit	26 th September – 28 September 2011
Principal	Mrs Diane Hayes
Reviewer	Mr Paul Ferris
Assistant Reviewers	Fr Wayne Healey, Mrs Sharon Harvey

Summary Page:

St Mary's School is a school of choice for the Milton district. It has a student roll near capacity in an area where other schools have struggled to maintain support. Those who enrol in the school are strong in their praise for its synthesis of faith and life. The quality of education in all aspects of school is a key part of its success supported by its pastoral care of children and their families.

The school has a strong Board with a commitment to Special Character. Proprietor appointees are long serving and loyal to the Parish and community. The Principal has provided quality leadership to the school for many years and plays a pivotal role in supporting and developing younger staff for the school.

Young staff are willing to accept responsibility not normally available at such an early period of their career but with good mentoring they are well placed to develop excellent leadership skills at a critical time in their career and for the wider Catholic system.

The school has embraced the new digital resources for religious education and is well resourced. The school has accessed a range of sponsorship supported by the Home and School to create a tidy, well cared for school environment.

Staff have used all the opportunities available for professional development. It was clear to the reviewers that staff work in a collegial education community.

Students are polite, spontaneous and proud of their school. As a group they appear to be well versed in their understanding of faith.

St Mary's School has a Dominican charism and has made extra efforts to record and share the history and influence of this charism. Throughout the school there are frequent reminders of the history of the school.

The Board resources and supports Special Character with adequate resources and a commitment to budgets associated with Special Character items.

St Mary's Milton is an excellent Catholic School proudly living and proclaiming Gospel values in the community. Their work has resulted in strong enrolments in the school and excellent evangelisation.

Aims of the Review:

1. To enable the school to demonstrate that it effectively maintains, develops and promotes its Catholic Special Character and that it achieves acceptable standards in terms of the three Catholic Special Character dimensions:
 - Catholic Community
 - Pastoral Care
 - Religious Education
2. To provide an assurance to the Proprietor that the school is authentically Catholic
3. To ensure that the school, which is essentially the parish community assisting parents to provide for the faith formation of their children, is doing this in a collaborative relationship

School Information

Name: St Mary's School

Address: 7 Chaucer Street, Milton

School Type: Contributing Yr 1- 6

Decile: 4

Staffing Roll for 2011: 87

Actual Roll at Time of Review: 87

Maximum Roll: 90

Non-preference Maximum: 5

Actual Non-preference at Review: 5

Teaching Staff:

Roll generated 5.3

Ethnic Composition:	NZ European/Pakeha	68%
	Maori	28%
	African	1%
	Dutch	1%
	Korean	2%

Board of Trustees Chairperson: Mrs Julie Scott

Principal: Mrs Diane Hayes

Director of Religious Studies: Ms Niamh O'Mahoney

Parish Priest/Chaplain: Fr Michael Hishon

Strengths of the school:

- 1. The quality of the Religious Education programme**
- 2. The pastoral care of the students and parents**
- 3. The leadership of the Principal**
- 4. The emerging leadership of the Director of Religious Studies**
- 5. The leadership and commitment of the Board.**
- 6. The overall standard of commitment to literacy and numeracy.**
- 7. The focus on inclusion.**
- 8. The atmosphere for learning.**
- 9. The school and environs.**
- 10. The religious education knowledge of students throughout the school.**

Attestation Report (Last sent to the Proprietor in 2011)

The review selected four aspects of the Attestation where the school had attested that it had complied.

1. Principal Appraisal

The Principal appraisal is done by the Board Chair in a collegial way and does have focus points on Special Character. The Board Chair and Principal are quite clear that Special Character is an important part of the leadership and appraisal of the school.

2. Staff Appraisal

Staff appraisal is done by the Principal and DRS. The Principal appraises the DRS and the DRS appraises the other staff for their delivery of Special Character. This is a big expectation for someone still developing a depth of experience in school leadership. Her willingness to accept the challenge is to be commended and encouraged, but it will need to be supported with professional advice and support.

3. Budget

The Board resources Special Character and Religious Education realistically. It earmarks funds for the support of Special Character. These funds are generally operated through the Principal. The DRS is not aware of the fund but has no issues accessing new resources to support the programme.

Progress in Catholic Character since the last review:

Since the last review in 2008 the school has continued to work to meet the expectations of the Proprietor by developing a three year review plan, by communicating with the Proprietor and continuing to be an instrument of evangelisation in the community. Students and their families are drawn to the school because of its reputation for excellence and are then encouraged and supported into a sacramental relationship with the Church.

The school has had several changes of staff as it struggles to attract both tagged and untagged teachers from the wider Dunedin area to the district. It has reported recent changes in the interest of applicants and the strength of candidates in its most recent appointments. Staff appointed are generally not resident in the community and this makes connection with the community more challenging because of the travel required. The Principal has been strong in her leadership around staff support for weekend parish liturgies which gives the school a presence in the parish.

The school has developed one of the most sophisticated systems of triennial self review in Special Character. It completes the attestation form and submits it to the Proprietor each year. It consults the Proprietor in setting annual goals and it extensively surveys and considers the three aspects of Catholic Special Character. It begins by conducting a full survey of parents and staff and then summarises this data in a booklet with recommendations for next steps. Each booklet is well presented and edited and gives narrative responses to the information gathered in the surveys. St Mary's School self review process is the most extensive witnessed in the Diocese and should be considered as Best Practice and shared at teacher meetings.

The school has made extensive use of the Diocesan Religious Education Advisor. It values her work and contribution to the programme. Her influence in the implementation and presentation of lessons and resources is evident in the school. The Review team were very impressed with religious knowledge at three levels in the school as they witnessed lessons taken.

The school has made every effort to embrace the new digital resource. It was assisted by the Diocese to gain a mimeograph but also made effort to get local charitable sponsorship for four more fully integrated promethean white boards. Staff have begun to use these as an important resource in the teaching of Religious Education and other subjects. The Principal and Board are to be congratulated for taking the initiative to get the boards at a price that was cost neutral to the Diocese and school.

The high turnover of staff which results from the need to recruit teachers out of the Dunedin area has meant that the Principal is frequently having to go back over work that has already been developed and covered off before. The Board is encouraged to consider ways that it can retain staff for longer so that their developing expertise in Religious Education is retained.

The Principal has developed a capacity for mentoring and supporting new staff. She continues to refine and develop appraisal processes that include Special Character. Her processes are well documented and her approach with staff is pastoral and supportive without compromising on the focus on Special Character.

In all the documents of the school there is clear evidence of the school's commitment to Special Character as an integrated approach to school life. Other documents and processes relating to Curriculum in general and responses to Negs and Nags also show that Special Character is considered across the school. The Principal has excellent documentation recording her progress in policy and curriculum development. Her work is worthy of sharing with new Principals. The Review Team would like to see her participate in the new Principal Programme run through the Auckland University. She has much to give in supporting new people to take leadership in an integrated school.

Catholic Special Character Dimensions

Catholic Community - Te Iwi Whanau Katorika

The school is a community where Gospel values are centre , where faith is nourished and where Christian celebration in the Catholic tradition is highly valued.

Spirituality

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

Prayer and worship are important and integral in the daily life of the school. Each day begins with prayer in classes that are taken using age appropriate liturgy and includes all members of the class. Staff have developed comfortable but meaningful routines around prayer that children have responded to.

There is a schedule of prayer and liturgy planned at the beginning of each year with dates and detail well considered in the whole school calendar. This is published as the Special Character Calendar. It is very comprehensive showing dates for key religious events, school masses and Religious Education themes.

The school is developing a relationship with the Parish so that increased levels of participation can take place in Sunday masses which are considered school masses. The Parish Priest is encouraged to work and support the new DRS in developing this side of her ministry.

Evangelisation

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

Evangelisation is one of the key strengths of this school. It uses a range of communication in the community to invite and encourage people to be part of the Catholic Community and it has been highly successful in receiving people into the Church through their involvement with the school.

The development of a website will extend the ability of the school to share many of its successes with a wider audience in the community.

Partnership

Education is a collaborative responsibility

There are positive working relationships throughout the school community. Staff are welcomed and supported in the school which is fortunate to have two key people with strong connections to the Community and Parish. The Principal has been in the school for twenty years and the school secretary has a lifetime association with the district and church. Their engagement in the school plays a key role in leading the success of the school and ensuring that people feel welcome .

The Board has strong leadership. All members of the Board participate in decisions at all levels. Their governance is comprehensive and always includes Special Character. Board members represent a cross section of the community.

The Proprietor Appointees are loyal, long serving and focused on the interests of the Proprietor. They seek a closer working relationship with the Parish. Their interest in the school continues long after their children have graduated from the school.

The Principal plays a key role in the success of this school. Her administration is detailed and comprehensive. She has excellent relationships with the staff, parents and students. She has a high profile in classrooms supporting teaching and learning. Parents report that she is approachable and supportive. She is often the first contact people have with the Parish and she has worked hard to involve the Parish Priest in using this contact for the growth of the Parish in general.

Staff work well as a team and give generously of their time by attending Sunday masses each term as a way of supporting Parish partnership. Most staff need to travel from Dunedin for these occasions which they do with commitment.

Values

The school identifies and actively promotes gospel values.

The school has a set of Gospel values which were developed following the last visit. They are comprehensive and defining. They are displayed in the foyer and some documentation but they do not have the profile that other schools give their values nor are they well known to the children. Values are focused on in assembly and children rewarded for displaying a particular value. This is a good start which can be built on again with staff and students. Assigning the values in their Gospel context and using them to define behaviour, proclaiming across the newsletters and embedding them in the website would help promotion and understanding.

School Culture

Catholic Special Character is visible in the relationships, and the artistic expressions seen throughout the school.

The culture of the school is obvious to all visitors. It is relaxed, supportive, inclusive and welcoming. Children greet visitors genuinely and staff react naturally to self review. Staff and students are proud of their work and are keen to share what they do.

Inside the school there are a range of religious symbols. The foyer has strong historical links to people, journey and symbols of faith. The classrooms have many expressions of work from the children which show their engagement in Special Character.

The grounds and courtyard have no symbols of faith, or anything other than the sign at the gate, which show this is a school of Special Character. This could be a consideration for the School Community.

There is a significant number of Maori enrolled in the school but there are few examples of Maori symbols or expressions of culture. As part of their regular consultation the Board might work with the Iwi and develop some work which supports their cultural aspirations.

Special needs students are included in every aspect of school life.

The focus on a full development of each child is obvious. The Board, Principal and staff have an obvious focus on student achievement in literacy and numeracy. Data shows this is a focus and a very successful one. Students leaving the school are welcomed in the local high school as being well prepared for their next step. Sport, culture and engagement in life are spread across the year, giving balance and engagement to the students in many aspects of the curriculum.

Leadership

Leadership effectively shapes the faith-base vision, direction, values and outcomes of the school programme.

The Principal is an experienced leader. Her commitment to work and her detailed recording of the journey of the school demonstrate her fine leadership and her witness to the values and charisms found within the school. She is open to developing a stronger link with the Parish and this will enhance the overall success of the school in Special Character.

The Director of Religious Studies is a young teacher with a genuine commitment to Special Character and an emerging strength in giving leadership across the school. She is being mentored and encouraged by the Principal to accept responsibility and prepare for even more leadership in a Catholic School. The Board is encouraged to support her development with formation experiences that will broaden her strengths. Her participation in a parish ministry will help support her leadership. Opportunities for study in Catechetics and engagement with the school Dominican Charism would help support this growth.

Stewardship

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

All the documentation of the school is well presented and of high quality. It is produced at low cost but with an eye for showing the school at its best. Pictures and presentation make all the information in the enrolment booklet and other reports engaging and good representations of gospel values.

All job descriptions and appraisal documents have clear references to Special Character. These documents have evolved over time and capture the Special Character in an appropriate way.

Worship

A Catholic culture of prayer, liturgy, and faith based celebration is promoted in the school.

There is a comprehensive calendar of religious events planned at the beginning of each year. They include regular masses and sacramental moments as well as programmes and events that involve other members of the community. School assembly is an important part of this programme and would benefit from a regular presence of the parish priest as a way of linking parish and school.

Service

Students assist people in need through service and outreach opportunities.

The school community supports many activities that have an impact on the wider community and represent the Special Character of the school. The school wants to explore opportunities for engaging with parish links. One of the first steps would be for those resident in the Parish to accept some parish ministries.

Collaboration with the Parish

The school collaborates with the parish of which it is part.

In the last few years there have been several changes of parish priest which challenges the community to re-establish lines of communication and capitalise on the proximity of parish and school. The self review process identified the promotion of this relationship as a goal.

Previous parish priests have played a significant part in the evangelisation of the community and the enrolment of students in the school. The present Parish Priest sees this as important work and wants to continue with it.

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.

The review interviewed a group of year 6 students and informally met many others in the course of the visit. They confirmed their pride in the school and the way it manages and supports their learning and their peers. Reviewers observed warm and happy relationships among students and between teachers and students.

Parents and visitors are welcomed and encouraged to visit the school and be part of its life.

Safety

The school provides for students and staff an environment that is safe – physically, emotionally, spiritually, socially and culturally.

The school is a safe learning environment. Teachers enjoy working with the students and their relationships with students makes that obvious.

Students are very clear about the safety of the school and the processes in place to ensure that issues of safety are well known and dealt with expediently.

Behaviour Management

Discipline processes are just, compassionate, respectful and consistent.

There is good behaviour management in place in all the classes, consistent with a Catholic School. Controls are not dominant but students understand boundaries and accept that if correction takes place it is for a reason. Students believe that correction in the school is transparent and just. Staff form healthy relationships with the students which avoids the need for any regular discipline issues. Behaviour in class is on task and easily managed.

Cultural Awareness

The school is open to the enrichment of diverse cultures.

The school has a significant percentage of Maori and is committed to honouring this in the programme. It has a genuine commitment to literacy and numeracy for all students and especially Maori where it tracks their progress.

The school consults its Maori community each year and includes aspects of culture and tradition in many of its units of enquiry learning. The school reports that Maori language is used by teachers.

The opportunity exists for the school to extend this engagement with their Maori Community by investigating the possible inclusion of Catholic Maori leaders to form a Runanga where the Spirituality of the people could be interwoven with school liturgy. A worthwhile task would be finding art and symbolism relating to Maori spirituality that could be placed around the school.

Other cultures are welcomed and supported. Events like the Rugby World Cup give the opportunity for students to explore aspects of a range of cultures.

Organisation

Pastoral care is organised in a way which is evident to all members of the school community.

Families are supported in a range of ways. There are mechanisms that support those in need. Finance is not a barrier to enrolment. Sensitivity to need is a genuine feature of this school.

Religious Education - Te Whakaakoranga Whakapono

The school helps fulfil the teaching mission of the Church by living and teaching the values of Jesus Christ

Leadership

The Principal and the Director of Religious Studies provide leadership and sound management in Religious Education.

The Principal has been very focused on building capacity in Religious Education and has used a range of resources to help support that growth. She has been resourceful in gathering people to assist. Staff changes due to the travel commitment of staff has meant that much of the work has to be repeated more often than some schools in settled urban areas experience. The change has also allowed for new and fresh approaches to continually join and refresh the community. The challenge for the school is to have sufficient resources to keep staff open to formation and development with the new technology in Religious Education and with the understanding necessary for the content to be taught well. The Principal has continued to ensure all staff attend twilight meetings and other professional gatherings. It is hoped that some of the newer opportunities for Religious formation about to be provided by the Church will help her in her efforts.

The Director of Religious Studies is open to more formation . With her short work experience she has stepped in to a complex role and achieved a great deal. She should be proud of her emerging leadership and encouraged by the Board to keep exploring opportunities for more. The review team were impressed with her energy and commitment to her department. The Parish should see this an important opportunity to engage her in some ministries that will help build the relationship so important to a school /parish partnership.

Religious Education Curriculum

The Religious Education programme is soundly managed and professionally delivered.

The religious education programme is well planned and managed. The Principal and DRS plan with the staff a full programme. Each class is timetabled for the appropriate time allocation according to the direction of the New Zealand Bishops.

All lessons followed the guidelines of the programme. What impressed the Review Team was the extent of the religious knowledge that children displayed when responding to the programme.

Integrated Curriculum

The teaching of Religious Education is integrated with other curriculum areas especially those which include ethical issues, personal relationships and sexuality education.

Special Character is integrated across the school in curriculum and activities. The foyer is welcoming and closely aligned with a range of religious symbols and messages. This integration of faith and life continues in the classrooms and other areas of the school. Class programmes in other subjects often use Special Character themes or ideas as a conduit for another teaching subject.

Appraisal documents show that Special Character is considered as integrated in all school activities. Appraisal has been used appropriately to address issues.

Resources

The Board of Trustees makes financial provision for Religious Education and Catholic Special Character resources.

The Board has made a deliberate provision for resources in Religious Education and the DRS is being helped to assume responsibility for that delegation.

Provision is also made for Professional Development in Special Character. Although the budget shows one sum for Professional Development a detailed plan with money specifically allocated for Special Character is planned and presented.

The Principal has been very proactive in gaining outside sponsorship for equipment that will support special character.

Professional Development

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

St Mary's has been very strong in its commitment to every opportunity for professional development. This is to be celebrated. It has been an excellent response by a school which has had to welcome staff with limited experience in Catholic Schools and who want to engage in the Special Character.

The school is encouraged to look at other ways that might encourage and support staff to engage with the Charism. Finding new and innovative ways of celebrating staff effort and supporting them because of their contribution to Special Character will help encourage staff to be reluctant to leave.

Communication

The school communicates with parents about Religious Education programmes.

The school newsletters are weekly and packed with a range of information and photos informing and celebrating school life. Special Character features in all newsletters. Staff responsible for these newsletters should feel proud of their efforts to include such a diverse range of information.

The next challenge is to create an effective web site that represents the school and allows it to be even more responsive to its community. Some Catholic Schools have developed blog sites for children and opportunities for parents and teachers to maintain appropriate and timely communications with families. There are so many positive aspects of this school that it is timely for it to seek ways to use technology to engage parents even more. This would also support evangelisation with appropriate resources being made available for parents.

PROPOSALS FOR ACTION FROM THIS REVIEW

Compliance Requirements

There were no compliance issues for the school to attend to.

Key Recommendations for further development

1. To continue to prioritise the relationship with the parish as a way of building the Catholic community of Milton.
2. The development of a highly interactive web site that could support a range of engagements with parents and promote parish participation.
3. To continue to invest in the catechesis of staff so that they will share this gift with the children through their programmes.
4. To continue to explore ways of reporting progress in a meaningful way to parents in Religious Education.
5. Manage the appraisal responsibilities of the DRS so that she is encouraged and supported to be even more engaged in leadership in the school.
6. Find ways to share the annual themes of the Diocesan Office so that staff and students receive every opportunity to understand how faith supports our understanding of life.
7. To continue to challenge the school and community by setting more aspirational goals around Special Character to replace the task related ones that characterise the current plan.
8. To continue with the excellent self review process and to try and show clearer links between the review process recommendations and the plans made to develop Special Character and Religious Education.

**Catholic Special Character Review Team
September 2011**