

**CATHOLIC SPECIAL CHARACTER
EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT**

*Te Purongo Kaupapa Arotake Mo Nga Ahuatanga
Katorika*

**ST. FRANCIS SCHOOL,
THAMES**

28-29 JUNE, 2017

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name:	St. Francis School, Thames
Address:	202 Mackay St, Thames 3540
School Type:	Contributing Primary – boys and girls Y1-6.
Principal:	Mrs Geraldine Sumner
Director of Religious Studies:	Ms Debbie Trenwith
Board of Trustees Chairperson:	Mr Eric Hamilton
Parish Priest:	Fr Oliver Aro
Reviewers:	Colleen Gleeson Philip Mahoney
Accompanying Principal:	Mr Andy Thompson
Current Roll:	77
Report Confirmed:	September 8, 2017

Introduction

St Francis School, Thames 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 the Coromandel Peninsula, St Francis School serves the parishes of St Francis of Assisi, Thames, St Colman's, Coromandel, St Paschal's Ngatea, St Mary's Tairua, and St Patrick's Whitianga. It shares a corner site with the St Francis of Assisi Church, parish centre and presbytery. The school and Parish are preparing for the 150th Anniversary of their establishment in November this year.

Response to Areas for Development from the 2013 External Review

That the Board of Trustees post information on the school website to inform parents of their work.

- The Board of Trustees page on the school website includes the member's names and their responsibilities on the Board.

The Board of Trustees still needs to inform parents of the work they are doing. They should post the Chairperson's end-of-year report in December and an update of projects they are working on each term.

The Teacher Aide job descriptions include:

"Maintain Gospel values in relationships and attitudes"

"Observe school policies and activities regarding prayer and liturgy"

- Both the Teacher Aide and the School Secretary now have this wording in their job descriptions.

That the school continues to develop creative ideas for teaching Religious Education and for creating children's responses to learning.

- The Director of Religious Studies attends conferences and Director of Religious Studies workshops and professional develop and shares new ideas with teachers.
- Teachers are sharing ideas when collaboratively planning and are using the digital resource to support the programme.
- Children's responses in their Religious Education books are a mixture of worksheets, writing, drawing, photos of work produced and personal reflections.

That all teachers complete the 'Understanding Sexuality' course and that a Pubertal Change programme be developed in consultation with parents.

- The 'Understanding Sexuality' course has not been undertaken by any teachers due to lack of availability and the cost of travelling to Auckland for four days.

- A Pubertal Change programme has not been developed or delivered and no consultation with parents has occurred.

It is recommended that the school look into the options available with Hamilton Diocese to join with other schools to do the 'Understanding Sexuality' course and to begin consultation with parents and development of a Pubertal Change programme.

Other Areas Developed since the 2013 External Review

In response to the 2013 External Special Catholic Character Review the school consulted the community to decrease the number of core values listed in the Charter. They now have four overall values – Love, Respect, Honesty and Responsibility – each referenced with a Gospel story or quote and an explanation of what it looks like in action. The values are visually depicted on an 'umbrella' with the heading "Building the Kingdom of God", showing everything sits under the umbrella of these values.

The students earn 'Value rewards' when they show one of the four values in action. Three students are drawn each week to receive a small reward. All names are put into a larger draw at the end of each term.

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.

Areas of Success

St Francis School has a very strong Catholic, Franciscan and Josephite spirituality. Faith underpins all that occurs at the school and core values are very evident in the way the staff, students, parents and parishioners pray together, relate to each other, welcome visitors and support each other and the wider community. There is a strong sense of community and belonging within the school community. The school's environmental and sustainability programmes reflect the work of St Francis and the teaching of Pope Francis through the encyclical "Laudato Si".

The close proximity to the St Francis of Assisi Church and presbytery makes it very much a parish school. All stakeholders are very proud of the long history of the Church and school and their place in the history of Thames. The school nurtures a family atmosphere that pervades the school community and which encompasses Catholic, Franciscan and Josephite traditions. The Parish Priest, Board of Trustees and Principal are working together to enhance the parish/school relationship. The school and Parish share newsletters and advertise events for each other. They each have links on their websites to show the strong partnership. The Parish Priest attends school events as often as possible. The school and parish share their resources and facilities when needed. The parish sacramental programme is run by the parish and supported by the school.

The Principal and Parish Priest are working together to encourage families to attend Sunday Mass and to join Sacramental programmes. The Principal and Parish Priest both speak to

new families about their commitment to the Catholic faith and the school's expectation to participate in the Parish. The school provides the "What Catholics Believe" booklets to parents who ask and the staff are always available to speak to parents about the Religious Education programme. Information evenings are held for parents to understand more fully the Religious Education and the Sacramental programmes. Invitations are given to those students who are in the 5.2 to 5.4 criteria for Preference to join the Sacramental Programmes. The parish have set up Children's Liturgy during Sunday Mass, a children's choir has been established to sing at Masses and altar servers are trained once they complete the Sacramental programme.

The Principal is a first time Principal who has been at the school for just over two and a half years. It has been a difficult start to her leadership with the passing of a teacher in her first week, the Director of Religious Studies having extended time off for health reasons and a number of changes in Parish Priest. She has a strong vision for the school and is forward thinking in her approach. The Board of Trustees, Parish Priest, parents and teachers spoke highly of the Principal's leadership and her commitment to the faith which is a model for them all. She is an active member of the Parish Leadership team, a Minister of the Eucharist and a member of a family group in the Parish.

She meets weekly with the Parish Priest and the Parish Board Chairperson who is a Proprietor Representative on the Board of Trustees. The Principal is a member of the Auckland Catholic Primary Principal's group and the Thames Principal's Group. The school is joining with other Thames schools to establish a Collaboration of Learning (COL).

St Francis School is an authentic Catholic community where the Gospel values are central, faith is nourished and Catholic celebration is highly valued. This is evident in:

- The warm, welcoming atmosphere where children and their families feel valued and part of the learning team.
- The strong visible signs of Catholicity throughout the interior and exterior environment.
- The Tuakana/Teina relationships where the older children care for the younger students naturally, without being told.
- The deliberate display of the school values throughout the school
- Student knowledge of the school's Franciscan and Josephite charism.
- Participation annually in the Thames World Day of Prayer.
- Prayers throughout the school which are varied and always reverent, spiritual times.
- The St Francis School Prayer books given to each new family with the words to traditional and specific school prayers.
- One class attending a parish weekday Mass twice per term and the Parish Priest attending a liturgy in the new entrant room twice per term.
- Full school Masses held twice per term including special celebrations and Feast days.
- All Souls Day Mass which has become a large community Mass remembering those who have passed.
- The students finding comfort in the Friendship Seat and Peace Garden at times during the day.

Opportunities for Development

An opportunity for eligible students to go to Reconciliation during Lent and Advent each year should be arranged with the Parish Priest.

Pastoral Care – Manaakitanga

The extent to which the school community nurtures, supports and cares for individuals.

Areas of Success

St Francis School nurtures, supports and cares for all individuals within its community. As visitors to the school, the review team experienced warm and generous hospitality from all members of the school community. Being a small school was seen as a strength by the parents. Parents were very appreciative of the high level of commitment shown by staff and staff value the trust parents place in them. The Tuakana/Teina (older children caring for younger ones) has become part of the culture of the school rather than something that is expected.

St Francis School is very responsive with pastoral care. The school community is small and people know if help is needed and tend to support those in need quickly and effectively. The Parent and Teachers Association (PTA) and staff co-ordinate the support provided to families. They work closely with the Parish Pastoral Worker. The PTA has a small, hard-working committee who organise support of food, transport, prayers, finance, uniforms, fees etc which is provided for those in need or grief. The reviewers were told of many situations where this care and support was provided. The PTA also organise events to build community and support the school financially such as Quiz nights, pot luck dinners, Irish Fling, Christmas Wonderland and family fun nights. The Board of Trustees, staff and PTA shares a dinner once per year.

The school has an inclusive environment where all children are acknowledged for their special God-given talents. The school provides Reading Recovery, ALIM, STEPS, ESOL, robotics and extension writing programmes. The school liaises with outside agencies to provide support for students and teachers. The Teacher Aide has had training in the programmes she works with. The support staff are affirmed and valued in their roles.

St Francis School community recognises the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the status of Maori as Tangata Whenua. There is an awareness of the diversity of cultures in the school and children are proud of their identity. Maori is used through the Religious Education programme and all children can make the Sign of the Cross in Maori. The school acknowledges its growing cultural diversity and students show respect and accept differences. A Cultural day is held each year. A Chinese teacher visits the school each week teaching the Mandarin language and culture.

St Francis 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. They raise money for Caritas charities and use Caritas resources, collect food items for the local Foodbank, grow vegetables which the parish use for feeding the poor and vulnerable at “Tasty Tuesday”, a Thames community initiative shared by a group of churches in the area. They also participate in ‘World Hunger Day’ and 24 hour Famine. They support the Red Cross and the Cancer Society.

St Francis School provides service and leadership opportunities throughout the school. All children are given the opportunity to lead prayer, liturgies, act as monitors in their own classrooms and apply to be on the Student Council. There are high expectations on Year 8 students to fulfil roles of service. They apply to become House Captains, Enviro Leaders, Sport’s Captains and to lead the School Council. They can be Librarians, Office Monitors, Fitness leaders, Team Green and ICT for Masses. They do Road Patrol and the boys do the rubbish bins each day.

The students at St Francis can be trained as Altar Servers, they clean the creeks and do tree planting for the wider community. Senior students serve and share morning tea with the elderly in the parish once per year. They present Christmas concerts to the local retirement home and an annual Nativity concert for the school community, including parishioners. The students are encouraged to lead in a way that inspires other students to follow their Christ-like behaviour.

“The students’ active involvement school, parish and community events reinforces the Special Catholic Character, the Gospel values and keeps them close to the Church, reinforcing the importance of serving others just as Jesus did”.

(Director of Religious Studies questionnaire response)

The happy, positive relationships and calm learning-focussed environment of the school community removes most causes of disruptive behaviour. Each class writes its own Treaty each year. Any behaviour management is based on restorative principles and the school’s core values.

Opportunities for Development

There needs to be a progressive Te Reo and Tikanga Maori curriculum to ensure continuity across the school. Teachers need to use Te Reo for instructions and provide scaffolding to develop vocabulary.

The Behaviour Management Policy refers to a Behaviour Code and Bullying Prevention procedures, neither of which could be found. This Policy needs to be reviewed and the procedures used by the school need to be well documented.

Religious Education – Te Whakaakoranga Whakapono

The extent to which the school helps to fulfil the teaching Mission of the Church.

Areas of Success

The Director of Religious Studies has taught at the school for 10 years and has been Director of Religious Studies for 9 years. She is on the Senior Management Team and teaches the Year 6 to 8 class. She has adequate release time and support for both leadership roles. Observations of the teaching and learning of Religious Education and prayer sessions are carried out in each classroom and verbal and written feedback is provided to teachers. The Director of Religious Studies provides support and guidance for teachers in planning and resources and she plans and organises full school Masses. She facilitates a staff meeting on the theological focus for each strand. She attends all professional development available through the Religious Education Advisors and encourages teachers to seek out professional development in Religious Education where possible. The Director of Religious Studies attends all DRS days and conferences in Auckland to network with other Directors of Religious Studies.

Teacher planning is consistent across the school. The Religious Education digital resource is included in the planning and all teachers made use of the technology available to them. The senior classes have 8 to 10 Chromebooks in each room and some 'Bring your own' devices (BYOD) which are used as learning tools. The junior classes use ipads. The school is now using the Google platform. Some teachers are using creative ways to respond to learning, for example through blogs, classroom dojo, Seesaw, PowerPoints, art work and drama and class sites. E portfolios have recently been introduced. Religious Education books are used throughout the school to record student responses to learning. These books are set out consistently across the school with Achievement objectives at the start of each Strand, teacher, student and parent comments and Summative assessments at the end of each Strand.

St Francis School received a 'Green-Gold Award' as an Enviro School this year. Environmental education and sustainability is a large part of the identity of the school based on its charism and Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato Si" and the students are very proud of their efforts. The programmes initiated over the past 6 years have been sustained and enhanced. The school is well known in Thames for their environmental work and many of the programmes are supported by the local Council and businesses. They grow saplings for planting on banks and roadsides, vegetable gardens for the local 'Tasty Tuesday' meal for the community homeless and needy. They have an orchard, worm farm and compost. They clean streams and are the only school to present at the Enviro Schools Expo. The school was invited to design the local Porritt Playground and to choose murals for the park's toilet walls.

St Francis School is preparing for the production of "Olivia" at the end of Term 3. Music lessons are available through the school for piano, guitar, ukelele and brass instruments.

Professional development is provided for teachers through:

- Religious Education staff meetings lead by DRS and Principal
- All new teachers are required to complete the paper in RE501 for new teachers or attend “Teachers New to Catholic Schools”.
- Religious Education meetings lead by Auckland Primary School Advisors, once per year.

One teacher has Leadership level Certification, one has Classroom level and all other teachers are working towards Classroom level.

Communication from St Francis School to the school community is through:

- The weekly school newsletter which includes columns from the Principal (Principal’s Pen), Board of Trustees, PTFA and the Director of Religious Studies when appropriate. It is colourful and ‘newsy’.
- Blogs, Facebook, Emails, txts, class dojo and the school website.
- Classroom newsletter each term

Opportunities for Development

With up to three year groups in one room it is suggested that teachers’ plan using prior knowledge assessment to differentiate teaching across the year levels rather than teaching one year level per year to the class.

It is suggested that the next steps for teachers is to step back and review their pedagogy, by facilitating the students to manage their own learning and to begin to differentiate the teaching of the Achievement Objectives to more specifically meet each individual student’s need, as they do in other curriculum areas. Assessment for Religious Education needs to be consistent across the school to show student progression.

Students record their learning responses in a Religious Education book. With the introduction of digital learning it is suggested that a review be undertaken as to the best way to present the Religious Education books, digital and integrated student work.

The school is using an inquiry approach to planning and integration of all curriculum areas. It is suggested that when planning for each term a gospel quote or Special Catholic Character focus is the key idea for the term. It is through this Catholic lens that all teaching and learning should happen. The integration of the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching and the Special Catholic Character of the school should filter through everything. The “Myself and Others” module is used with some units however there needs to be a more formal approach to its use across the curriculum.

Because of the remoteness of the school it is difficult for teachers to attend all Auckland Diocese professional development. It is suggested that the school ask to be involved in some professional development in the Hamilton Diocese if this is easier to attend.

Stewardship and Compliance – Tuaritanga me te Hanganga Ture

The extent to which the Board of Trustees provides systems and processes to govern and comply with the school's Integration Agreement.

Areas of Success

All Trustees understand their role as governors and that it is a Christ centred school. They see the Special Catholic Character as being fundamental to all decision making. The Special Catholic Character sub-committee of Proprietor Representatives, including the Parish Priest, work with the Principal and Director of Religious Studies. This committee operates the annual Special Character self-review programme and any special character events. The Board of Trustees communicate to the school community through the school newsletter. The Board of Trustees attend all Diocesan training and other workshops and online training relevant to their needs.

The Principal reports to the Board of Trustees on the Special Character goals each month. The teacher performance management process uses the Catholic as well as the Education Council indicators for Attestation. The school has the required number of S65 positions to meet compliance.

A preference audit was carried out as part of this review on March 23, 2017.

	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4	Total	Non Preference
Y8	8		2	1	11	
Y7	2		1	2	5	2
Y6	3	1	4		8	1
Y5	4	1		2	7	2
Y4	4		1	4	9	1
Y3	1	2	3	1	7	2
Y2	3	1	2	1	7	1
Y1	5	1	4	2	12	2
Total	30	6	17	13	66	11

St Francis School are within the 10% (12) non preference allowance with 11 non preference students.

45% of preference students are 5.1 criteria. The 55% of students in criteria 5.2-5.4 should be further encouraged to enter the parish Sacramental programme.

The documentation for enrolment was in order however the school should ensure that, on school entry, each child has a preference form which is filled out correctly.

Opportunities for Development

The Board of Trustee members were all acquainted with the Bishop's Conference publication, "The Catholic Education of School-Aged children in New Zealand" (2014). It is suggested that they begin to 'break open' the Bishops' message and use the messages to support their documentation writing and decision making.

The Board of Trustees have planned to begin consultation with the community to review and update the Charter and Strategic Plan. It is suggested that this document be simplified and made more strategic for future development.

The annual internal Special Catholic Character Review must be completed each year and added as Part C to the Proprietor Representatives annual report to the Bishop. A plan of action should be designed each year to undertake the review and to collect relevant data on the chosen area. Recommendations from the annual Special Catholic Character Internal Review should appear in the Strategic or Annual Plan to ensure they are implemented.

The Board of Trustees has recently adopted the policies on 'SchoolDocs'. It is necessary to review these policies to ensure they reflect the Special Catholic Character of the school throughout.

Being a small community, communication is mainly informal. It is suggested that the Board of Trustees Chairperson writes and publishes a Christmas message to highlight the successes for the year. This could be posted on the school website.

It is suggested that the Board of Trustees develop a plan at the start of each year, listing the actions planned for each month to ensure that everything is completed by the end of the year. The plan should be monitored and reviewed at each monthly meeting.

Recommendations

To develop in consultation with the school community, and implement a Pubertal Change programme from a Catholic perspective for Year 7 and 8 students.

That all teachers, particularly those involved in the Pubertal Change Programme, attend and complete the "Understanding Sexuality" course.

Conclusion

St Francis School provides a happy, cohesive Catholic learning environment. The school has committed staff, a growing connection with the Parish, supportive families and children who love coming to school.

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

“Inspired by St. Francis’ love of creation, we will provide a nurturing environment for each child, focussing on their spiritual, moral, academic, emotional, social and physical needs.”

The children were able to clearly articulate where and when they meet Jesus at school.

St Francis School has a long and proud identity in the Thames community. Its strong environmental programme and love and care of God’s creation reflects its charism. It is a small school ‘punching way above its weight’ in the community, very family oriented and community minded.

The school provides an environment and 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.

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Date: September 8, 2017