

CATHOLIC CHARACTER IN NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Some Suggestions to Stimulate Best Practice

2015

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

CATHOLIC CHARACTER

- The school proclaims the mission and Gospel of Jesus Christ. All members of the school community are encouraged to be examples of Catholics living in faith.
- The school's values programme has each value linked to Scripture stories and quotes. It teaches students and their families how to be living witnesses to the Gospel message. The programme is extensive and woven into the life of the school. To assist families with reinforcing these values the school newsletter gives a definition of the value, breaks its meaning open in the context of Jesus' life and lists the success criteria. This seamless values education assists students to live the Gospel message in all aspects of their lives.
- The school has a real focus on evangelisation. The principal and board of trustees actively market the school to people who might not have made a choice for Catholic education but who will embrace it and show a desire to be part of the Church, with the support of the parish priest. A Board member hosts evenings for parents who want to explore aspects of Catholicism.
- A school prayer calls the students to *"live lives that change the world for the better and to give eyes that see the needs of others"*. This aspect of school life strengthens their understanding that there are injustices in the world that need correcting and as Catholics that is what they are called to do.
- Spirituality is based on social justice - students fully understand that they are not just raising money but also raising awareness of the needs of others.
- The school has a Vinnies group who collect foodstuffs and has groups that fundraise for local causes. Students enjoy being part of these groups.
- The school has displays in the foyer on Catholic Culture and encourages students to comment on them and say what is happening in the pictures etc.
- The principal speaks to each new family about the Catholic Character of the school and the expectation of regular attendance at Sunday Mass and living the Gospel values.
- The school's enrolment pack contains material on Catholic Character eg. Information on Education in Faith, the school's Gospel values and their meaning and the school characteristics including that the students will 'develop an awareness of God'.
- The school publishes graduate profiles to communicate a shared understanding of what a future-oriented learner looks like. Graduate profiles describe skills, knowledge, and attitudes that students will need to participate in a range of life contexts beyond school. Catholic Character is incorporated in this profile.
- Staff focus on the Fruits of the Holy Spirit and families apply these values at home as well. These are used as goals and guidelines for students' personal responsibility for, and to self-manage, their behaviour.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

- The Board of Trustees creates a strong Catholic Character policy which outlines in depth guidelines for the school on prayer, liturgies, pastoral care, curriculum, health, enrolment of students and appointment of staff.
- The Board of Trustees develops a sound Catholic Character strategic plan. It adds actions, indicators, resources required, completion dates and success to the plan – to ensure it is a working document. Goals are then transferred to the annual plan.
- The Board of Trustees embeds into the School Charter items that indicate an emphasis on Catholic Character eg. “We aim to develop children who have an awareness of God.”
- The Board of Trustees sees the Board’s responsibility for the Catholic character of the school as its first and highest priority.
- The budget for Catholic Character is split to show support of Professional Development on one line and resources on the other. This provides a higher level of transparency for the Proprietor.
- The Board of Trustees tracks the integration of Catholic Character through the annual Faculty Reports which include a reflection on Catholic Character. The BOT sets a formation time on the agenda of each BOT meeting. This strengthens their Board members’ understanding of their important role as stewards of the Catholic Character of the school.
- The Proprietor’s Appointees meet regularly with the DRS to discuss events and issues, this information is then provided to the BOT. The principal also provides information to the Board of Trustees and this ensures the whole Board is maintaining and developing the Catholic Character of the school.

TEACHERS

- Job descriptions contain Catholic Character expectations:
 - Principal – personal specifications around practice, knowledge, upholding of and commitment to the faith
 - DRS – Standards and indicators based on professional leadership of Catholic Character
 - Teachers – upholding the Catholic Character of the school
 - Teaching staff performance appraisal documents contain a Catholic Character quality assurance checklist
- The DRS job description includes: standards and indicators for professional leadership of Catholic Character, Catholic Character programme management, staff management, relationship management and financial and asset management. The opportunity for self-review and appraiser review of her performance in these areas is also important.
- The DRS is given time to effectively lead learning, facilitate liturgy and prayer and contribute to teacher appraisal, with particular reference to the Catholic Character/ RE goal in each teacher’s professional development plan.
- Staff are committed to undertaking formation through the Catholic Institute and this has had a profound effect on the confidence and delivery of Religious Education in the school.

- The role of tagged teachers as witnesses of faith is developed and provision of on-going professional development and formation time is made to assist these people. The diocesan office provide assistance in this regard.
- Staff are open about their own faith journeys and are willing to discuss their faith.
- When writing and working with staff appraisals, measurable steps are outlined to help staff achieve the Catholic Character goals they have set. With the inclusion of steps such as professional reading to be completed, resources required, date of completion and expected outcomes or success criteria. Staff will can then easily identify what steps to take next.
- Staff are trained to notice and adjust their teaching so that each child's learning needs and style are addressed.

PARISH

- Collaboration with the Parish – forming a strong partnership
 - Parishioners are invited to Grandparent's day, whether or not they have grandchildren at the school
 - The Principal and DRS work with the parish priest to provide appropriate Masses and liturgies for the children.
 - Parishioners are invited to help students in preparation of the Scripture readings and Prayers of the Faithful for weekly Masses
- Parishioners volunteer and are trained for the school's Reader-Tutor programme. The child and parishioner form a special bond as they read and chat to each other. The parishioner is encouraged to share their knowledge and of parish church history and also to attend all school events, Masses and liturgies.
- Parents are educated on the Catholic Character of the school. The church environment is de-mystified so that parents can enjoy the experience.
- The concept of being one community is built by actively working to connect families to the parish for church and social events. The school and parish have a shared plan with goals set for the year. These are centred round students being more involved in Sunday Mass and creating stewardship opportunities for them in the parish community.
- A prayer box is provided where students can put their own personal prayers. These all go to the parish church weekly and the parishioners pray for the students' petitions.

SACRAMENTAL PROGRAMME

- A sacramental programme is provided to encourage those students who have a Catholic connection but are not baptised and those who are baptised but have not completed the sacraments of initiation. This assists each student to identify their next steps as a person of faith.
- A Forming Faith programme is provided for new entrants from state schools, and reviewed after each session to determine what improvement is needed for next time.
- Rite Of Christian Initiation For Children (**RCIC**) is offered to encourage non-preference children (and their families) to join the faith community.

- Through the internal self-review process the school has highlighted a place for staff to accompany parents and their children through the sacramental programme journey.
- The school synchronises with the parish for the teaching of the strands and modules which complement the sacramental programme. Teachers attend the celebrations to support the families.

CULTURAL

- The school recognises the principles of the Te Tiriti Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi and organises a regular hui to which all Māori parents are invited.
- The BOT shows its commitment to the Te Tiriti Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi and tangata whenua with the secondment of a Māori representative on the Board. This person works as a liaison for Māori families and a regular report is submitted to the Board.
- Bi-cultural commitment – at Monday morning prayer assembly a Māori phrase is introduced and is practised throughout the school during that week. The sign of the cross in Māori is used throughout the school and hymns are often sung in Māori.
- Matariki is celebrated by the whole school community and includes a prayer vigil and procession round the school ending in the prayer garden where prayers are said for those who have gone before.
- In the classroom the teacher responds to children in English, Te Reo or Samoan, whichever is appropriate.
- The school regularly consults with ethnic groups as part of the review process.
- Cultural days are held when students can share their own stories and culture backgrounds. During these days, students and parents are involved in craft, music, dancing and cooking.

PASTORAL

- The school aims to provide an emotionally and physically safe and positive environment.
- The school establishes a Peer Support programme which will enable younger students to integrate into the life of the community.
- A special room, purpose fitted, provides a safe and convivial space for ORS funded students. Senior students are timetabled to be in this room to socialise with the students on a regular basis which helps towards the integration of these students into the mainstream life of the school.
- New entrant students are transitioned into school via a preparatory programme which allows them and their families to learn about and become familiar with the characteristics of Catholic education.
- Each class has a designated parent who is the 'go-to' person who will coordinate any assistance needed such as transport, meals etc, if a family needs extra support in times of crisis.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- Emphasis is placed on learning the responses to the Mass so that students can participate fully in all parish and school Masses.
- The school integrates Religious Education into learning across all curriculum areas - the literacy programme uses Bible stories in reading and writing and Caritas resources are linked with financial literacy
- The school works with other schools in supporting each other in the delivery and review of RE.
- The integration of the 'Myself and Others' module into the Health Curriculum ensures a Catholic perspective.

NEWSLETTER

- The school newsletter lists links between the curriculum's key competencies and how we lead our Christian lives, eg managing self is linked to how Jesus lived to bringing about the Kingdom of God.
- The school evangelises through the weekly newsletter. The DRS includes information on the RE strands being taught and offers parents simple and meaningful ways to develop these concepts in the home.
- Syndicate newsletters report the strand title and information about the key theological concepts, which provides an avenue for parent formation.
- The Principal creates a thought-provoking and challenging Catholic Character message for the school newsletter
- Wikispace (Wiki pages) and Facebook are used to help communicate with parents about activities and learning in the class.
- The DRS writes a RE News section in each school newsletter.

WEBSITE

- Prayer resources for parents are on the school website
- The Board has developed the school website as another tool to help support evangelisation beyond the student cohort by ensuring that good links to Church resources are hosted.