

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF CHRISTCHURCH

**CATHOLIC SPECIAL CHARACTER
REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT**

Our Lady of the Snows School

August 2017

Diocesan External Review of Catholic Special Character Our Lady of the Snows School, Methven August 2017

The aims and scope of this review are in accordance with the Aotearoa New Zealand Catholic Integrated Schools "Catholic Special Character Review and Development Document".

Aims of Review:

- ♣ To identify, affirm and celebrate all the positive expressions of Catholic Special Character at Our Lady of the Snows School.
- ♣ To enable Our Lady of the Snows School to demonstrate acceptable standards of the Catholic Special Character dimensions:
 - Catholic Community
 - Pastoral Care
 - Religious Education
- ♣ To provide an assurance to the proprietor Our Lady of the Snows School is authentically Catholic
- ♣ To acknowledge the parish/school partnership in assisting parents as first educators of their children.

About the School:

School Type:	Primary 0-8
Teaching Staff:	
Staffing entitlement	2.5
Actual Number of teachers (FTTE)	2.5
S65 Tagged positions	2 (Including Principal)
Filled	1 to fill
Students:	
Allowable Maximum Roll	75
Domestic students	34
Non-Preference Entitlement	4
Non-Preference Actual	3
Dates of Review:	8-9 August 2017
Review Leader:	Mark Gregory

Diocesan External Review Process

Consultation for this review involved an initial phone call to agree upon the days of the review followed by a set-up meeting with the principal.

During the two days, the reviewer met with the principal, teachers, support staff, parish priest, the board chair, a group of parents and a group of students. Both classrooms were visited to observe Religious Education lessons and to view the Religious Education curriculum and assessment documentation.

The school provided all the requested documentation in advance and organised the schedule of visits and interviews for the two days. The documentation was thoroughly prepared and appreciated by the reviewer.

The reviewer was made to feel very welcome throughout the duration of the review by all members of the school and parish community.

Recommendations for Next Steps from 2012 Review

Since the 2012 review, there have been changes in staffing personnel. Most of the 2012 recommendations have been incorporated into the school's annual charters from 2013-2017.

Catholic Community

As a part of its goal, *Living and Celebrating our Catholic Faith and Gospel Values*, the school proposes to build a stronger relationship with the parish community and share with them the reviewed Gospel Values programme introduced at the school during 2017.

Recently, copies of the school's latest Education Review Office Report were available for parishioners in the church foyer. There is a real determination to collaborate more closely with the parish community and to encourage parents to be more involved in the life of the parish.

Pastoral Care

The school has made a real effort to provide greater opportunities for te reo and tikanga Māori. This can be seen on wall displays in the classrooms. A recent community grant was used to employ a specialist tutor to give all students the experience of participating in a kapa haka group.

Religious Education

Current staff are working through suggestions from the last Catholic Special Character Review in the delivery of Religious Education within its multilevel classes, the collation of school-wide student achievement information and how successfully they are using this data to improve learning outcomes and monitor progress.

CATHOLIC COMMUNITY - TE IWI WHĀNUI KATORIKA

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

Our Lady of the Snows School belongs to the parish of St Augustine Canterbury, comprising former parishes of Ashburton, Methven, Tinwald and Rakaia. In recent times, the church changed its name to Our Lady of the Snows.

The Board of Trustees appointed a new principal at the beginning of Term 2, 2017.

The Vision for Our Lady of the Snows School is *Building Faith and Achieving Excellence*. The strategic goals for 2017 - 2019 have been developed directly from this vision statement. The implementation

of a new values programme strongly aligns with the school's vision and the charism of the school's founding order, the Sisters of Mercy.

Two board members indicated there is a renewed focus on the Catholic Character and is now firmly cemented as being 'first and foremost' in matters relating to governance and management. Evidence of this strong emphasis is highlighted admirably in the school's Charter.

The school teaches, promotes and models its 'SNOW STAR' values of Manaakitanga (Hospitality), Aroha (Compassion), Te Tapu o te Tangata (Respect), Tika (Social Justice), Rato/Awhina (Service) and Panekiritanga (Excellence). Incorporating the Snow Star Values, the Mercy Cross and the aligned Tikanga Māori Values acknowledge the school's past, its bicultural commitment and its sense of hope for the future. These values will now be encouraged, modelled and explored so that they become an integral component of the life within the community of Our Lady of the Snows School.

Each value is broken down in plain language to exemplify how it can be demonstrated. For example, I show *Hospitality...* when I welcome new students at my school, when I say hello to someone at school that I don't know. There are several examples for each value that are openly displayed in all rooms within the school. Each value contains its own related prayer that is read as part of school and class prayers on a daily basis.

Every two weeks the school introduces a new Snow Star Gospel Value during whole school prayer on a Monday. Staff talk about the value, what it means, how the children could display it by their actions and together, recite a related prayer to help them foster the value. Once all values have been introduced, the plan is to focus on one of them for the whole term and then revisit each on a term-by-term basis. The class certificates have been chosen each week based on the *Snow Star Gospel Value of the Week*. Included in the weekly newsletter explains the Snow Star Gospel Value with appropriate actions to nurture the value at home and at school.

Both teaching and support staff understand the importance of positive role modelling based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Snow Star Gospel Values and the school's vision, *Building Faith and Achieving Excellence*.

The Principal/DRS and staff all support and promote the Sacramental programmes. A list was compiled of non-baptised preference students eligible to participate in the Baptism Programme about to commence shortly. Hopefully these families will welcome the opportunity for their child to become a formal member of the Church and together, as a family, with the support of the parish and school, take a greater role in the faith journey of their child. Once this has been delivered and completed, a First Reconciliation and Eucharist programme will be presented before the end of the year. It is hoped that this programme could be organized and led by the parish.

The vision and values that underpin Our Lady of the Snows School are succinctly documented in the school's Charter and are well communicated to the students, staff and parents. The school intends to share these, and other successes with the parish community to build a stronger parish-school relationship.

Our Lady of the Snows School is one of nine schools in the Opuke Community of Learning. It consists of nine schools based around the foothills of Opuke (Mt Hutt) and along the plains bordered by the Rakaia River. There is one secondary school (Mt Hutt College), five full primary schools (Mayfield, Mt Somers-Springburn, Our Lady of the Snows, Rakaia and Dorie), and three contributing primary schools (Methven, Lauriston and Chertsey). Our Lady of the Snows School is excited about the opportunity this poses to learn and work together to raise student achievement across their local community.

The principal, a proprietor's representative and a parishioner who taught at Our Lady of the Snows over many years, make up the Catholic Special Character Committee which convenes on a regular basis. As all three are active parishioners, this working group will be instrumental in building and enhancing a stronger relationship between the school and parish and vice versa. As principal and Director of Religious Studies, she has a leading contribution in the development and enhancement of the Catholic Special Character of the school and its inter-relationships with the parish and local community. Already, one can see the level of determination by the principal and board to ensure this partnership flourishes.

The principal is to be commended for a recent detailed Religious Education Report to the Board of Trustees. Included in the report is a synopsis of the teaching of Religious Education, the delivery of the programme in each classroom, its time allocation and the integration and implementation of the school's Snow Star Gospel Values. Also featured is how the school promotes and supports the Sacramental Programme, a summary of School Masses and liturgies and other matters pertaining to the Catholic Special Character.

Two ladies from Catholic Women's League very generously offer to assist students with their reading once a week. This kind gesture is appreciated by the school, the students concerned and their families.

Throughout the school there are Catholic images and wall displays featuring the work of the children in Religious Education. The heart of each classroom is undoubtedly the prayer table creatively arranged with a variety of supporting Catholic symbols and resources.

Tamariki display a genuine respect for karakia which is a priority each morning, before lunch and at the end of the day. Students and staff are familiar with the routines and are often lead by the children themselves. During the review I observed and participated in morning prayers as a whole school and in an individual class. Prayers are often led by the students themselves. The staff plan to reinstate the Prayer Pack which will go home with a different child in each classroom each week, commencing Term 3. The principal plans to begin the school year in 2018 with the Prayer Module.

Teaching staff meet to pray and take turns in preparing and leading the prayer sessions. Likewise, all Board of Trustee meetings commence with a prayer which is also led by members on a rotational basis.

School Masses are celebrated once a term at the Parish Mass on Sunday morning. Students are involved in the readings and singing. Parents are strongly encouraged to support their children by attending themselves as a family. It is hoped that through these Masses, more families might make the commitment to attend the Sunday Eucharist on a more regular basis. Twice a term, the whole school attends the Wednesday parish Mass. It is through these regular encounters of the Mass that the children grow in their knowledge of the expectations of displaying reverence and prayerfulness. Parishioners have voiced how they really enjoy the presence of the children at Mass. Parents are invited to all Masses and Thursday assemblies via the newsletter, text messages, email, Facebook and the app, 'Seesaw.' Assemblies are held every fortnight in Our Lady of the Snows Church.

The school newsletter and Facebook page regularly support the Catholic Special Character by alerting parents to matters pertaining to Religious Education, Catholic Character events and appropriate prayers and reflections, including 'Faith Facts.'

In summary, Our Lady of the Snows School is a faith-based learning community where holistic Catholic education is promoted and upheld.

PASTORAL CARE – MANAAKITANGA

The school community nurtures, supports and cares for individuals.

As visitors to the school, there was a warm, genuine feeling of welcome. I was treated with the utmost courtesy by all with whom I made contact. A natural welcoming impression came from the children themselves. The Catholic community, by all concerned, was proud to celebrate and articulate what was so special about Our Lady of the Snows School.

School relationships, as one staff member wrote, 'are healthy, open and positive.' Staff look out for each other on a daily basis. Not only do they talk about professional issues but they regularly ask about each other on a personal level. The staff works as a unified team, both teaching and support staff. Members of staff are affirmed by the principal and feel their well-being is being nurtured. There is a real sense of 'family' within the school.

The strong pastoral care evident in the school was highlighted during the parent group discussion. Both parents claimed that the teachers have a wonderful rapport with the children and there is a great sense of mutual respect between staff and children. They also mentioned the great pastoral care within the school community and how everyone looks out for one another as the families know each other so well. The board allocates a Pastoral Care budget to be used at the principal's discretion supporting children and families in need.

The school enjoys tremendous support from the Board of Trustees and the Friends of the School. Members of these two groups have undertaken a large amount of work within the last 12 – 18 months. Parents have rallied together to organise working bees to completely refurbish the school library and to purchase and install a playground suitable for all children to enjoy. Parents are incredibly supportive and proactive in strengthening the school community and providing the necessary resources for the benefit of the children. Parents feel welcome at the school and enjoy the hospitality shown towards them by staff.

The children are involved in Young Vinnies and raising funds for Caritas appeals through 'Mufti Days' and 'Crazy Hair Days.'

The parish priest emphasised that the parents were very proud of their school. Under Catholic Special Character growth and development, he re-iterated the need to *'keep the concept alive that we are a faith school, a Catholic school.'*

The parish has been very generous in financially supporting the school in a variety of projects where priorities were high. Members of the board and staff are very appreciative of these kind gestures from the parish priest and community. Although the priests reside in Ashburton, one of the priests generally visits the school once a week, and the assistant priest now attends Board of Trustees meetings.

Within the Behaviour Management Plan is a focus to promote, teach and live Catholic virtues through the school values programme. The school expects all children to be respectful of themselves and others physically, spiritually and emotionally. It is encouraging to read scripture references that exemplify the way all should respond to each other. At Our Lady of the Snows School there is a programme of positive reinforcement and rewards for good behaviour. Ka Pai awards are tickets that are handed out by teachers during break and lunch times. The tickets are named and signed by the issuing staff member and placed in the collection box for the next draw. Ka Pai draws are held with balloted students being able to select an item from the prize draw box.

Students interviewed were able to articulate what made their school different from the neighbouring state school. They were knowledgeable about the saint their school was named after and the foundress of the founding religious order, the Sisters of Mercy. They weren't so familiar with the

school's vision statement despite this being very visible in every room in the school. Students knew each other by name and appreciated the many opportunities offered due to the small 'family-like' size of the school. What they particularly enjoyed was helping, and being able to play with, the younger students. New students to the school are assisted by others in the classroom and are introduced at whole school prayers, or the assembly and welcomed in the school newsletter.

In the classroom, a teacher aide offers extra learning support for children with learning difficulties. Support staff are to be congratulated on the work they do to support students and teaching staff and promote the Catholic Special Character of the school. Both mentioned the focus on the new school values as a positive outcome for the school community as a whole. The board and parish have supported the funding of additional teacher aide hours as they realise the importance of this role within the school.

The school recognises the importance of te Tiriti o Waitangi and the status of Māori as Tangata Whenua. Bi-cultural elements are noticeable in the classrooms and in planning documentation. It was observed during class visits that very little te reo Māori was used within the Religious Education lessons. As the Religious Education programme strongly features key words in both English and te reo Māori, it is important that all teaching staff are confident in regularly using the Māori names to build the knowledge and confidence of themselves and their students.

The school employs a Māori tutor for kapa haka and assisting tamariki with te reo Māori from a community grant that the board managed to successfully secure. All agree this is a very positive experience for the children and well worth the expenditure.

A consultation meeting with whānau occurred in 2016. In future, the school may like to consider a meeting with the whole family to gather ideas from the adults and the very important aspect of gathering student voice. Recommendations from the meeting can then be incorporated into the following year's charter and reviewed at the next consultation meeting to communicate progress to date.

In summary, the school's pastoral care procedures reflect Gospel values and Church teachings.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – TE WHAKAAKORANGA WHAKAPONO

The school helps to fulfil the teaching missions of the Church.

The school implements the national Religious Education curriculum and is experimenting with planning and assessment strategies. All teaching staff are new to the current Religious Education Programme and are doing their very best to make the curriculum 'alive' and relevant for the age and stage of the students' multi-level abilities and experiences. The current priority for teaching staff is to increase their own knowledge to effectively deliver the Religious Education Curriculum to their students. A commitment to participate in professional learning opportunities is assisting teachers in this area.

Currently, the role of Director of Religious Studies is the responsibility of the principal. The board intends advertising a tagged position that, if filled, could see the new teacher and principal sharing this vital role in the interim.

I observed the two classes in action during a Religious Education lesson. Both displayed a high level of student engagement and interest in the planned lessons. A mutual respect between students and teachers were noted during the classroom observations and outside of class. Learning intentions were shared and discussed with the students at the beginning of the lessons together with clear links to their prior learning. The junior class used art and drama to portray their learning about Mary

and the birth of Jesus. Religious art was a feature in both classrooms with the proud displays of very effective student work. The *Faith Alive* resource was used to effect during the senior class lesson.

School Masses are very well attended and it is recognised that the teaching staff focus on developing the students' knowledge and understanding of the Mass. Reinforcing the expectations and the level of reverence required to participate well in the Mass requires ongoing regular attendance.

Reports to the Board of Trustees on Religious Education and the Catholic Special Character by the principal are detailed and informative and are aligned very closely to the school's Charter and Annual Plan. Board members appreciate these reports and highlight the strong commitment by board and staff to keep the school's Catholic Special Character to the forefront.

Teachers have begun gathering assessment information for their own classes. The principal has identified the need, as a next step, to develop a Religious Education curriculum statement and delivery plan that would include clear guidelines on the overall structure and delivery within the multilevel classes. It would include an assessment plan indicating the strands to be assessed over time. This same assessment data could be used to report to parents and students, and when collated school-wide, could double as a report to the Board of Trustees on student achievement in Religious Education.

Collating school-wide data in selected strands from the 2017 Year 4 RE Online Assessment for Our Lady of the Snows School could be a useful starting point for teachers to make judgements about the effectiveness of their teaching. It may be of interest looking at previous year's results to determine any emerging trends. Strands chosen for further development in 2018 could be based on the weakest strands identified in these results. Likewise, assessing students on the Year 1-4 Benchmarks and collating and presenting these results to the Board of Trustees and parent community would be another option, as already indicated within the school's Charter.

Parents / caregivers receive regular feedback on students' progress in Religious Education. End of year reports for senior students indicate how well a student has achieved the chosen learning outcomes by a numerical grade. Junior reports, after one, two and three years at school, contain a written comment about the child's knowledge and attitudes. At this stage, interim or mid-year reports do not include any assessment or comment in Religious Education. Once a curriculum and assessment plan in Religious Education is completed, guidelines for reporting to parents will follow.

A learning celebration is planned for Term 4 that includes an RE Expo. This is an excellent idea that could foster a growing relationship between the parish and school. Consideration could be given to the RE Expo following a Sunday School Mass. Students could host the RE Expo and provide hospitality allowing school families and parishioners to view the Religious Education Curriculum and its related work of the children. This event would show parishioners and school families that the school was celebrating its Religious Education Programme and displaying its Catholic Special Character in action. The new Snow Star Gospel Values could all be incorporated in the display.

Staff are engaged in professional development opportunities in Religious Education. The teacher of the junior class enrolled in RE501 Religious Education Today which began in Term 2 and will involve an assignment in Term 3. The principal who has already attained Catechetical Studies, has chosen to participate in TH101 What Catholics Believe in Term 1 and is enrolled in RE502 Spirituality for Teachers in Term 3. She is proactive in joining a range of principal support groups, not only for her own benefit but to share her wisdom with others. Teaching staff are to be commended for their willingness to attend ongoing professional development in Religious Education.

Religious Education and Catholic Special Character information is featured on a regular basis in the school's weekly newsletter which is posted online. 'Faith Facts' provide parents with frequent information and knowledge about the Catholic faith. Other opportunities for informing parents on

matters pertaining to the Catholic Special Character include the school's website, Facebook page and Twitter account.

Sexuality education is presented in the context of the education of the whole person and is appropriate for the young person's stage of development. By the end of 2017, all full-time teaching staff will have participated in the Understanding Sexuality course offered by the Catholic Education Office. The last time parents were consulted on the health curriculum was 2014. The principal acknowledges that priority will be given to fulfil this requirement by the start of Term 4, 2017.

In summary, Our Lady of the Snows School helps to fulfil the teaching mission of the Church by giving the Religious Education programme high status and a focus on upskilling the knowledge and qualifications of its teaching staff.

GOVERNANCE AND COMPLIANCE – NGA WHAKAAETANGA ME NGA WHAKARITENGA

Board members acknowledged that the Catholic Special Character is first on their agenda to ensure it is given appropriate importance. As one board member stated, "It is the heart of what we do." Reports on the Catholic Special Character and Religious Education by the principal and Catholic Character Committee are appreciated by the board.

The board has compiled a detailed charter where the Catholic Special Character features prominently. The annual plan contains effective action plans titled: Collaborating with the Parish, Implementing the Snow Star Values, and Promoting a Catholic Culture of Prayer, Liturgy and Faith-based Celebrations. They outline the steps to achieve the actions with the provision to easily self-review against. Promoting the Sacramental programmes, particularly those eligible for Baptism aligns well with the New Zealand Bishops Document, *The Catholic Education of School-age Children*.

The collated Board of Trustees Questionnaire indicated that board members were reasonably familiar with the New Zealand Bishops' Document, *The Catholic Education of School-Age Children*. The board is currently re-visiting this document as it reviews and prepares for its 2018 Charter.

The Board of Trustees has reviewed the three dimensions Religious Education, Pastoral Care and Catholic Community during the last three years. From these internal reviews have emerged recommendations for further development. The school has a Special Character Policy linked to separate policies on Catholic Community, Pastoral Care and Religious Education using the *SchoolDocs* generic-based policies and procedures like many other schools.

All documentation relating to employment includes clear and concise information relating to the Catholic Special Character of Our Lady of the Snows School. The school has a written Appointments Policy in keeping with the Catholic Special Character and tagged positions are correctly advertised with specific requirements included.

School promotion material clearly articulates the Catholic nature of the school.

It is important for the board to allocate separate funding within its annual budget to support the purchasing of teaching resources for Religious Education and for Catholic Special Character including professional development opportunities for staff.

All teaching staff are included in a formative appraisal system that is linked to the goals of the annual plan and the Practising Teacher Criteria. Catholic Special Character goals are well covered and specified within the appraisal process. Currently, the appraisal of the principal is conducted by an educational consultant who is very familiar with the role of Catholic principal. Catholic Special

Character requirements are well specified in the appraisal document and aligned with the school's Charter and Annual Plan.

The preference/non-preference details, as at the time of the Catholic Special Character review (August 2017), were as follows:

Our Lady of the Snows School (Methven)	Maximum Roll (as per Integration Agreement) = 75 students	Non-Preference Maximum (as per Integration Agreement) = 4 students
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Preference Criterion	Number of Students	% of Current Total Number Students
5.1	19	55.9%
5.2	1	2.9%
5.3	8	23.5%
5.4	2	5.9%
5.5	0	0.0%
Non-Preference	4	11.8%
Total	34	100%

Please note that the 11.8% non-preference level is not a breach of the Integration Agreement for Our Lady of the Snows School – the school has not exceeded its agreed maximum number of 4 non-preference students; the 11.8% is as a result of the school having, at August 2017, a roll of 34 students (41 students less than the school's maximum roll).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS FROM THIS 2017 REVIEW

Catholic Community

1. To reduce the workload for the principal who is also acting as the Director of Religious Studies, it is hoped that the planned First Reconciliation and Eucharist programme could be organized and led by the parish.

Pastoral Care

2. When consulting with whānau, the school may like to consider providing kai at a meeting for all whānau to gather ideas from the adults and tamariki. Recommendations from the meeting could then be incorporated into the following year's charter and reviewed at the next consultation meeting to communicate progress to date.
3. The school has made great inroads in promoting tikanga Māori and an ongoing commitment and focus is clearly outlined in the Charter. As the Religious Education programme strongly features key words in both English and te reo Māori, it is important that all teaching staff are confident in regularly using the Māori names to build the knowledge and confidence of themselves and their students.

Religious Education

4. The principal and staff need to consider ways to effectively assess Religious Education in a more meaningful way and to evaluate their teaching to identify student needs and adapt learning programmes accordingly.
5. Collating school-wide data in selected strands from the 2017 Year 4 RE Online Assessment for Our Lady of the Snows School could be a useful starting point for teachers to make judgements about the effectiveness of their teaching. It may be of interest looking at previous year's results to determine any emerging trends. Strands chosen for further development in 2018 could be based on the weakest strands identified in these results. Likewise, assessing students on the Year 1-4 Benchmarks and collating and presenting these results to the Board of Trustees and parent community would be another option, as already indicated within the school's Charter.
6. The last time parents were consulted on the health curriculum was 2014. A commitment has been made to fulfil this requirement by Term 4, 2017.

Governance

7. It is important that the board allocates separate funding within its annual budget to support the purchasing of teaching resources for Religious Education and for Catholic Special Character including professional development opportunities for staff.

I thank the community of Our Lady of the Snows School for the warm welcome extended to me and for the opportunity to observe and experience the way they nurture their Catholic Special Character.

Mark Gregory
Catholic Special Character Reviewer