

**CATHOLIC SPECIAL CHARACTER
EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT**

**SANCTA MARIA CATHOLIC
PRIMARY SCHOOL
FLATBUSH**

9-10 November 2011

School Details

Name	:	Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School
Address	:	317 Te Irirangi Drive, Flatbush
School Type	:	Contributing
Principal	:	Mrs Gina Benade
Director of Religious Studies	:	Mrs Saira Boyle
Board of Trustees Chairperson	:	Mr Bradley Hamilton
Parish Priest	:	Fr Ezio Blasoni
Reviewers	:	Mr Neil Laurenson Sr Lucille Taylor
Accompanying Principal	:	Mrs Michele Mill
Report Confirmed	:	28 February 2012

The National Administration Guidelines (NAG 2) requires all schools to develop a Strategic Plan, maintain a programme of self-review and report to the community. In Catholic Schools this process must include provision for the maintenance and development of Catholic Special Character. The review and development cycle includes annual internal self-review of a key dimension of Catholic Special Character as well as an external review every four years.

The purpose of the external review is to provide assurance to the Proprietor that the school has appropriate systems in place to deliver education with a Catholic Special Character in terms of the following three Key Dimensions:

Catholic Community:
Te Iwi Whānui 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.

Pastoral Care:
Manaakitanga

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

Religious Education:
Te Whakaakoranga Whakapono

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

As well as the key dimensions, the Reviewers look at the school's process for self-review and how areas for development are incorporated into the school's Development Plan. In carrying out this review, the Reviewers had access to relevant documentation, interviewed staff, Board of Trustee members, parents and students and visited all classrooms.

CATHOLIC COMMUNITY **Te Iwi Whānui Katorika**

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

It was the desire in the hearts of the Establishment Committee to establish a Catholic school for the children of St. Luke's community with a gentle and nurturing spirit which would form them in their Catholic faith with Mary as their guide. This desire has blossomed into the very strong charism of Mary which permeates every aspect of the daily life of Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School.

Leadership

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

Founding a new school is a daunting task. The Establishment Committee never waived in their determination and commitment to see the project through to its completion. Their strong Catholic faith and their desire for a Catholic education for their children ensured that the school has been built on a very solid Catholic foundation. Coupled with this, is the love and devotion to Mary that has shaped the spirituality of the school. The Establishment Committee was ably led by their Chairperson. Her vision and positive enthusiasm inspired the committee who worked tirelessly to achieve their goal. The passion of these founders has been handed on to the staff and current Board of Trustees, some of whom were members of the Establishment Committee.

The Establishment Committee recognised in the Principal they appointed, that she embodied the qualities of Mary, which they desired in the charism for their new school. She has modelled and developed this gentle spirit in the staff and the children. The Establishment Committee, the Principal

and Deputy Principal successfully appointed staff who supported this gentle nurturing climate. The Principal has formed a strong Senior Leadership Team who are united and recognise each other's strengths. The tight bond and the way each person plays their role, their professional expertise, their enthusiasm and love for the school was apparent to the Reviewers. The staff and Board of Trustees are dedicated to the school. They know and love the community and tirelessly work together for the Pastoral and educational needs of the children and their families. Their strong faith and their passion for the school impacts on their individual and collective leadership. They all see their role as a Ministry in the local St. Luke's Parish community and are recognised and respected by the parents, children, Parish Priest and community.

On this solid Catholic foundation, the Principal, leadership team, and staff have developed and implemented a sound curriculum to achieve the school's vision of children, 'who are educated, successful, and active citizens with Catholic faith in their hearts.'

The Parish Priest has been a key figure in the establishment of this school. He has a wealth of experience and understanding of Catholic Education and the role a Catholic school plays in the life and mission of the Church. He saw the school as playing a central evangelising role in the St. Luke's Parish community. His wisdom, astute diplomacy and his love of Mary was highly valued and respected by the Establishment Committee. He became the Chairperson of the Establishment Board and mentored the current Chairperson into his role.

The school newsletters are very professionally presented. They portray that the education in the school is collaborative and involves the whole community with regular contributions from the P.T.F.A., the Board of Trustees and the Parish. Newsletters convey the breadth of the learning opportunities provided for the students and that learning is interesting and fun. This is well illustrated in the children's and teachers' writing and photographs which are a feature of the newsletters. The Principal's writing reflects her spiritual leadership of the school and her aspirations for children, parents and staff. Each newsletter continually promotes the school values which are reinforced through the virtues programme. This provides ideas for parents to reinforce these values at home.

"The style of leadership in our school is gospel leadership. It is the leadership of the servants of the Lord, who lead with Mary's virtues. Leadership in our school is respectful, participative and co-operative leadership that acknowledges and treasures the contributions of students, staff and parents/caregivers." (*Parishioners*)

Partnership

Education is a collaborative responsibility

The school is unique in that it shares a Campus with St. Luke's Community and Sancta Maria College. The College supported the Primary School in its development phase and the will of the Establishment Committee was always to foster a collaborative relationship with these other groups on the Campus. The College has actively supported major events in the life of the Primary school. College students assist the Primary School with Kapa Haka and netball coaching and the two schools combined with Our Lady Star of the Sea School for Catholic Schools' Day 2010.

The opening of the school brought together staff, children and families from many disparate school communities. Every child and adult member had to cope with change and adjust to an unfamiliar school culture and environment, each one bringing different experiences, expectations and customs and at the same time facing the prospect of making new friends and being part of a new community.

With generosity of spirit and many willing hands, the school community, which began as a collection of people from diverse communities, quickly came together and has melded and united to form a happy, focussed Catholic school community, growing in faith together with Mary as their guide. After one term, the school was ready for the official opening on 7 May 2010.

The building of a staff community requires continual nurturing. The challenge for the staff at this school was to build a completely new team. This has always been a top priority for the Principal and Senior Leadership Team. They have embraced the charism and the school values of Mary, bringing alive thoughtfulness, compassion, hope, determination and contentment in their own hearts and

engendering these in the lives of the children. Staff have worked extremely hard in a spirit of self giving to build a very successful learning environment. This is greatly enhanced by their own relationships which overflow into their relationships with children and their parents.

The school has used every opportunity to deliberately foster a supportive relationship between the home, school and Parish. This has included involvement and consultation of the community in the Strategic Planning process; the introduction of a class parent representative to act as a liaison person; coffee meetings with the Principal once a term; the promotion of the Virtues programme through the newsletters and the Parent Curriculum workshops held once a term. In 2010 the whole student body was consulted on what qualities they wanted to see in students leaving Sancta Maria and what was needed to achieve this. Two representatives from each class then formed a focus group to develop a Student Vision and Learning Charter.

The school has an active P.T.F.A. which was established when the school opened. They have organised family functions and numerous fundraising activities. They have also organised activities for the children that are primarily fun activities which have helped build community. The fundraising for the school adventure playground was a major project.

The unwavering support, understanding and dedication of our families has helped the school to flourish to what it has accomplished this far. The school has had lots of needs in terms of help in securing school equipment, facilities and organising events. Our families have pulled together through our P.T.F.A. to assist in every way they can. Their participation in the various workshops that our Leadership team has tirelessly prepared, also reflects their determination to team up with the school to ensure that our children grow into the individuals that we desire.” (*Proprietor Representative*)

School Culture

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

One of the first projects of the Establishment Committee and Board of Trustees was to create a garden at the front entrance of the school with a large statue of Mary as the focal point. This statue welcomes everyone who enters and defines the character of the school - a nurturing, gentle and caring presence, like Mother Mary. Mary’s image is also a prominent feature in the reception area and throughout the school. “These images symbolise the school’s mission and promise to provide a Catholic education of excellence with Mary as our role model.” (*Proprietor Representative*)

The school’s crest was thoughtfully and lovingly designed to reflect the nurturing qualities of Mary. It is rich in significant symbolism which reflects the school’s Catholicity and the role of Mary in the life of Jesus and the life of the Church. This symbolism was understood by the children. “The school values are those virtues which we believe Sancta Maria displayed throughout her life in her relationship with her beloved Son, Jesus. These values are relevant and essential to the lives of our young children and wider school community as they gain knowledge of, and become committed to, their faith.” (*Our Story – Our Charism*).

It has been a priority to unpack and communicate the school values and charism while also building a community which knows and lives these. “We foster the Catholicity of our school through the charism of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. The values of Mary are deeply embedded in our daily practices as we strive to live full of grace, obedient, faithful, compassionate, thoughtful, hopeful, contented and determined. (*Principal*)

The school has focussed on the values and deepened their understanding of them and discerned what they look like in practice. These have been succinctly outlined with an appropriate scripture quotation under each value and a statement expressing why the value is important and what it looks like when it is practised. The clarity with which the values are articulated, both in writing and spoken, ensures that it is purposeful and beholden on everybody – staff, students and parents to learn what these values mean in deed as well as in word, “To walk with Mary as our Guide to God.” (*Charter*)

The school's motto, "Growing in faith together," encompasses the mission of a Catholic school, which is the Parish community assisting parents to provide for the faith formation of their children in a collaborative partnership. "There are three distinct aspects that make up growing in faith together: growing faith in self, growing in faith in others and growing faith in God." (*Principal*)

The school houses are named after places that were significant to Mary in the Gospels. One of the buildings is named after St. Luke, the Patron Saint of the Parish and the other building is named after St. Joseph, an important figure in the life of Mary and Jesus. The school prayer which is recited each day at assembly, was written to pray that the values and school motto may be present in the daily life of the school.

Prayer and Worship

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

Staff celebrate Mass in the staffroom at the beginning of each year. Teachers meet to pray every Monday morning and they are rostered to prepare and lead these sessions. The Senior Leadership Team attended an overnight Retreat together in 2010 and a day retreat this year. A full staff overnight retreat is planned for the start of 2012.

All meetings begin and end with prayer, including staff interviews with the prospective candidates and meetings with visitors such as ERO and professional development facilitators. All school events such as the cross country, the school fair and the disco are opened with prayer. Grace is always prayed whenever staff eat together for a formal occasion.

The school assembles each morning in the courtyard facing the Statue of Mary to pray the school prayer together. Parents share in this prayer time. Teachers are rostered to lead this short assembly where the school values and virtues are reinforced and encouraged.

Children are responsible for leading classroom prayer with teachers' support and the Reviewers joined with six classes for this. The Director of Religious Studies provides a scripture reading for the school to use at prayer time which relates to the term value and fortnightly virtue. Questions are provided for teachers to help the children unpack the reading and increase their understanding of it.

All classrooms, the staffroom, meeting room and reception area have a prayer focus. Children have been encouraged to create a prayer focus at home. Evidence of this was shared by parents with the Reviewers. "Praying plays a big part in our lives now." (*Parent*) The school is planning to introduce prayer bags which children will have the opportunity to take home for one week. The Year 6 Catholic Special Character Committee leads the Rosary at lunch times during the months of May and October.

Every Friday morning a class is rostered to prepare and lead the Mass which is celebrated in the chapel with members of the St. Luke's Community. Sometimes these weekly Masses are prepared by Soul Friend classes. Other classes have the option of attending these Masses.

Full school Masses are celebrated at least twice a term. These include the school's Feast day on Mary's Birthday, Mothers' Day Mass, the Annual Commissioning Mass and the Year 6 Leavers Mass. Liturgies are celebrated on Ash Wednesday, Easter and Advent. The Staff Handbook provides staff with comprehensive guidelines to support the planning of every aspect of school and class Masses and paraliturgies.

The school is intending to provide the opportunity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Lent and Advent. This is to be encouraged. "I have attended some of the class Masses on a Friday morning. Our chapel is beautifully decorated with the children's colourful artwork specific to the strand of learning in religious education. Children have been very well behaved. Through the year they have begun to respectfully use the holy water in the font to make the Sign of the Cross as they enter and leave Mass. Their ownership of the Mass has been tremendous to see, as well as their participation in Mass. The readers have really done a good job with some of them actually memorising their readings. During some Masses for the junior classes, the younger students who have had a prayer or reading to

do, have been accompanied by their soul friends for support and encouragement. The singing has been beautiful.” *(Proprietor Representative)*

Collaboration with the Parish

The school collaborates with the parish of which it is part

“The link between our Parish and school has been strong from the onset. It is wonderful to see our children at Mass on a Sunday at their different levels of spiritual development, starting off with children’s liturgy for our budding Catholics and classes for the sacraments for our developing Catholics. The feedback received from the community is heart warming. So many are impressed by the readers, the singing, and how well behaved the children are.” *(Proprietor’s Representative)* The fact that many St. Luke’s Community members have children at the Primary School helps to strengthen the all important bond between Church and school. *(Parishioner)*

The Parish choirs at St. Luke’s combine with the school choir to celebrate Father’s Day Mass. Staff are well known in the St. Luke’s community as many are parishioners. “They know us and understand the values we uphold. The Primary School has done a superb job in getting the students to acknowledge God in their lives. We feel we are one with the Primary School.” *(Parishioner)* Teachers, students and parents carry out ministries such as Altar Servers, Liturgy of the Word and Ministers of the Eucharist. The school supports St. Luke’s Community events such as fundraising for the Church building fund. At a family social event the children performed a musical item.

The Director of Religious Studies is provided with the Sacraments of Initiation Programme and timetable and she ensures that all children concerned receive regular updates and reminders about enrolment, classes and the Liturgical celebration. The Parish and school newsletters feature notices about upcoming events.

The Director of Religious Studies and staff have a relationship with Parish Administrators and there is close communication between Parish and school with reference to Masses and prayer life. The Parish Priest is much loved and respected by the school community. He regularly visits classrooms which the children and staff appreciate. “Our Parish Priest is simply wonderful. He is supportive by affirming me, giving me advice and always leading our Masses with such faith and love.” *(Director of Religious Studies)* The Board of Trustees, staff and parents acknowledged that the Parish Priest is an integral part of the Catholic Special Character of the school with his love for each child and their families and, “The beautiful example he sets as a humble Priest servant.”

Stewardship

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

When a school opens, the Establishment Committee, Board of Trustees, Principal and staff are faced with the daunting task of having to put in place all the statutory documentation for the Ministry of Education and for the Proprietor. All documentation has been developed specifically for Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School with the charism of Sancta Maria and her values at the heart. “The name of our school is crucial for us to consider in everything we think, believe, carry out and accomplish in the journey of our school. Mary’s beautiful and immaculate spirit fills and permeates our school, guiding and nourishing us on our journey, as she walks with us to God.” *(Our Story – Our Charism)*

Because everyone responsible passionately believes this, they are able to articulate it when speaking and writing about the school. This was very apparent to the Reviewers during interviews, assemblies and conversations with the Board, staff, children and their families.

As a result of the strong Catholic faith and deep love for Mary, the School’s Patron, the Charter, the Annual Plan, Policies, the Curriculum, and all other required documentation is steeped in the school’s Catholicity, Marian charism and values.

SELF REVIEW

The school has a process for annual Catholic Special Character self review to identify strengths and areas for development

The school completed a thorough and rigorous review of Catholic Community in 2010, the school's foundation year. The process involved consultation with the community, Board of Trustees and staff. The areas of focus for the review were carefully selected and an appropriate process designed to involve all stakeholders, to elicit constructive feedback to assist with growth and development in particular areas of Catholic Special Character. The process is well documented showing thorough planning, the scope of consultation, the well thought out surveys, the honest analysis of data and the purposeful effort made by staff and Board of Trustees to ensure the Catholic Special Character is built on a solid foundation.

Highlighting specific aspects of Catholic Special Character such as spirituality; home, school, Parish collaboration; Gospel values; leadership and prayer life, would have raised the community's consciousness of the breadth of Catholic Special Character and the way it impinges on the total curriculum in a Catholic School. Involving the community so soon would have helped them to take ownership and responsibility for Catholic Special Character and the good response from parents shows the co-operative relationship that already exists between home and school.

Surveys invited comments under each focus area and the opportunity to make suggestions for future areas of growth and development. Surveys resulted in full responses which were collated, analysed and shared with staff, Board of Trustees and community. The summary report records responses, commenting on items already achieved or details regarding progress. Two goals were prioritized and incorporated into the 2011 Annual Plan – working with the parent community on restorative justice practice and a student leadership programme. Both goals were challenging and specific actions have already been implemented.

The school is to be commended for the professionally presented report and for the inclusive and proactive approach taken to ensure purposeful and on-going development of Catholic Special Character.

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 values of Mary that the Establishment Committee desired, all express the motherly tender love of Mary. Everything has been formed by that, including all relationships in the school. Mary is the model and the school considers that they are privileged to be able to nurture the children through her values in order to be able to accomplish the school's Vision and Mission. The founders wanted a nurturing, gentle and caring environment that loves, cherishes and grows the children, accepting them as sacred and made in the image of God. "The Principal and the Senior leadership team, together with all teachers and staff, are warm and friendly to everyone. Both children and parents strongly feel a true sense of belonging. Teachers demonstrate the virtues of patience and kindness in communicating with the children; moreover, their great enthusiasm is evident when teaching." (*Proprietor Representative*)

Board of Trustees, staff and parents happily work together with respect and co-operation, to provide a nurturing environment which is reflected in the way the children relate with each other. Optimism, good humour and a climate of affirmation are a hallmark of the relationship between adults and children in this school.

Behaviour Management

Discipline processes are just, compassionate, respectful and consistent

“To create a climate where everyone feels encouraged, supported, excited and willing to give what it takes to learn and grow. Each child is made in the image of God, and all our students are encouraged to live the virtues – the goodness within them.” (*Rationale Procedure 5.1*)

The school implements the Virtues Project which is linked seamlessly with the school's Mission, Vision, Values and Goals. It is integrated into the total curriculum. Each term the school focuses on one of the school's core Mary values and has carefully selected virtues that highlight this value. The well established Virtues Project and its consistent implementation, develops a culture where children are encouraged to develop the virtues of respect, patience, self discipline, tolerance and joy for learning. All teachers are trained to use the five strategies of the Virtues Project. That is, to speak the language of the virtues, recognise teachable moments, set clear boundaries, honour the spirit and offer the art of spiritual companioning. There is an emphasis on restorative justice, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Each classroom has a designated peace zone where children have time to reflect on their behaviour. A Peace Room offers a quiet space and a caring presence for each child who is referred there. Children needing support are provided with mentoring by a member of the Senior Leadership Team through the seven steps of Spiritual Companioning.

If teachers notice children practising virtues in the classroom or playground, they can issue a Virtues Voucher which is placed in the Virtues Box on the Mary focus in the foyer. Each fortnight a voucher is drawn at assembly and a gift awarded to the named child. Teachers can award two Virtues Certificates to children from their class to be given out at this Virtues Assembly. Classes are rostered to lead this Assembly which focuses on the fortnightly virtue being promoted. This virtue is highlighted in the weekly notices and school newsletters so that the same message is continually being reinforced and encouraged at home and at school.

Year 6 students receive training as Peace Mediators and are present in the playground to assist students to resolve issues through a series of reflective questions. Children are encouraged to take ownership of their actions and helped to restore friendships and harmony. They are helped to come up with their own ways to make the situation right.

The school has facilitated a Restorative Practice workshop for parents to enable them to use similar practices at home. “I believe the focus on love and virtues helps our family life tremendously by supporting and encouraging us. We have created a foundation of unconditional love for each other through this support.” (*Parent*)

Bi Cultural Commitment

The school is committed to the Treaty of Waitangi

The central shape in the school's emblem is based on a Koru which represents the school's commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi. The Koru also depicts new beginnings. As part of the appointments process, teachers are asked how they would incorporate the Treaty of Waitangi into their classroom. At the beginning of the year, teachers developed a class Treaty for their classroom.

Official events opened with a Powhiri. The school has an active Kapa Haka group which is led by a staff member who has been assisted by students from Sancta Maria College. Maori parents have been consulted on strategic planning. The Curriculum Essence Statement for Te Reo Māori is under construction. “Te Reo is offered as the only language in addition to English.” (*Curriculum Plan*)

All schools have recently been issued with Curriculum Guidelines for Teaching and Learning Māori in English Medium Schools, Te Aho Arataki Marau mo te Ako i Te Reo Māori – Kura Auraki. In order to increase levels of attainment in Te Reo at every class level, the school should now develop a school-wide Curriculum Plan with Achievement Objectives and Learning Outcomes for each year level based

on these guidelines. The Curriculum Guidelines will provide a valuable resource to develop the confidence and ability of all staff to deliver this curriculum and to bring Te Reo and the Māori Spirituality concepts in the Religious Education curriculum into everyday conversation in the classroom and to apply these concepts as appropriate.

“Cultural diversity is celebrated and demonstrated by the encouragement of the various cultural groups that exist in the school.” (*Curriculum Statement*) The Establishment Committee in choosing to place the school under the Patronage of Mary, the Mother of God, were hopeful that the new school would be welcoming and secure, a place where each member of the community would feel safe, especially new migrants to Aotearoa. The Strategic Plan should identify some planned priorities and specific actions to show how the school will acknowledge and honour cultural diversity.

Service and Social Justice

The school promotes social justice and students assist people in need through service and outreach opportunities provided by the school

Some specific Mary values encourage the children to be compassionate, thoughtful and contented. Opportunities are provided for the children to develop an awareness of others, of issues beyond their community and an empathy for those who are hurt and suffering. Through mufti fundraising, the school donated to the Christchurch Earthquake Appeal. Children wrote letters of support to children in Christchurch schools and to the families of Pike River miners. The school has also contributed to Jump Rope for Heart and Daffodil Day. At the time of the Review, the school were collecting gifts and money for the Christmas Shoebox Appeal.

The Service and Community Committee has introduced ten cent Tuesdays to collect money for Missionz. Each year, students take part in the Kids for Kids Choir as a fundraiser for World Vision.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION Te Whakaakoranga Whakapono

The school helps to fulfil the teaching mission of the Church

Leadership

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

The Director of Religious Studies was the Chairperson of the Establishment Committee as a mother of children who would be attending Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School. It was this Establishment Committee who desired to place the school under the Patronage of Holy Mary, the Mother of God and who discerned the qualities that would create a loving, nurturing, gentle school. The Director of Religious Studies has provided a strong link between the founding committee and the current Board of Trustees and staff. She has very effectively nurtured the charism and brought it to birth, articulating it in words, symbols and through her actions.

The Church's understanding of charism is that it is a gift of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the founders living on in the community today. It is the founders of this school, the Establishment Committee, Board of Trustees and staff who have successfully nurtured the rich spirituality that has become the charism of Sancta Maria.

The Director of Religious Studies has played a significant role in ensuring that there is a valuable resource detailing the story of the school's beginnings and the charism. Along with other staff, she uses every opportunity to integrate the charism into key documentation, planning, memos for staff, newsletters and school assemblies.

As the staff representative on the Board of Trustees, she chairs the Catholic Special Character Committee and prepares a report for the full Board each month.

The Director of Religious Studies is a member of the Senior Leadership Team and is respected by the staff, Board of Trustees and parents. She is approachable and provides encouragement and guidance for individual teachers as well as school-wide.

The Director of Religious Studies has a good overview of the delivery of Religious Education through formal and informal classroom visits, seeing teachers' planning, assessments and the children's activity books. She provides in-class support for all teachers and carries out a formal observation of a Religious Education lesson in each classroom. The Religious Education lesson observation notes are written up for the individual teacher to provide constructive feedback on good practice and areas for development that will assist the teacher in the teaching of Religious Education. This can be monitored at later visits. After the observation she meets with each teacher to discuss aspects of the lesson and to help them set a Religious Education goal as part of the appraisal process.

Religious Education Curriculum

The Religious Education programme is professionally delivered

The Religious Education Policy states that Religious Education will have prime importance in the school programme. The staff have been given a comprehensive Religious Education Curriculum Implementation Plan which gives teachers a clear overview of the requirements for planning, delivery, assessment and evaluation of the programme and expectations for the children's learning journal. There is a Religious Education and Catholic Special Character folder on the staff drive which is regularly updated with relevant support materials for teaching Religious Education and school and class Masses.

The high standards of teaching and learning which are evident throughout the school in all Curriculum areas are reflected in the high quality Religious Education programme being implemented in every classroom. There is congruence between the teachers' planning and evaluations, classroom displays, children's activity books, the love the students have for the subject and the practical application Religious Education has to their daily lives. The careful planning shows the level of commitment of the teachers who are proud and confident in the knowledge that their students are learning from and enjoying this programme. Learning objectives or the big idea are clearly visible in the classrooms. Teachers write comprehensive evaluations of teaching and learning which are honest and constructive and identify successes and barriers. "The effort that my daughter puts into her Religious Education programme, and the wonderful information that she passes on to her father and I, give evidence of her increased knowledge of God." (*Parent*)

Integrated Curriculum

Catholic teaching is integrated with other curriculum areas.

"The curriculum at Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School is based on our values and seeks to achieve our Vision."

The Senior Leadership Team determined that the process of curriculum implementation would integrate and develop a plan shaped by the Mission and Vision that the Establishment Committee had established for the students of Sancta Maria. The process has taken time and involved the staff, students and the community, to build on and develop a shared understanding of this founding Vision and Values.

The involvement of students in the writing of the student Learning Charter has helped them to take ownership of the school's Mission and Values and to embrace the charism which is shaping their lives as proud students of Sancta Maria.

Staff, students and families are aware that they are 'Growing in faith together,' and that Mary is their model and her values 'are deeply embedded in our daily practices,' and in the teaching and learning. The deliberate and thorough planning and consultation undertaken to develop the curriculum has ensured that the charism and values of Mary and a Catholic world view is integrated into the

Curriculum principles, and Key Competencies. The next step will be to ensure that all Curriculum Essence Statements, some of which are still under construction, contain a Catholic world view in the Description and Rationale, and Vision Alignment, as already demonstrated in Mathematics and Statistics, Science and Social Studies.

Communication

The school communicates with parents/caregivers about Religious Education

The school stresses the importance of parental involvement and encouragement for children's learning in Religious Education. The Reviewers observed the quality of teachers', children's and parents' thoughtful comments. Children's learning journals are sent home regularly and parents are reminded to follow up with discussion and support at home. The value that is placed on these books shows that they provide an important link between home and school, giving parents a tool for discussion and reflection as these activities are completed at home.

The Director of Religious Studies includes a section in the school newsletter which provides an update on Catholic Special Character activities in the school and Parish. This includes explanations about Liturgical Seasons, Feasts and informs parents of the current Strand topic. It would be helpful to highlight an aspect of the current Strand in each newsletter to provide parents with background understanding to help them follow up with discussion at home. The Newsletter Issue 12, Term 3, 2010 is a good example of such an explanation for parents about the Church Strand.

Each term the school has held a workshop for parents, including one on Catholic Special Character and one on Restorative Justice practices. This is to be commended and the school could consider devoting a session to Religious Education each term to help parents understand and effectively carry out their important role as the first teachers of faith. Such a session could cover the simple ways in which they can encourage and nurture children's spiritual development in the home, and to capture the teachable moments to provide a Catholic perspective to daily events and encounters. This could be held at a time that suits the community.

The many opportunities that the parents have to be involved in school and class Masses and other prayerful liturgies, provide parents with ongoing formation in the Religious Education programme and the Catholic Special Character of the school and in their own personal faith journey.

Professional Development

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

The Director of Religious Studies leads a Religious Education staff meeting once a term and with the Parish Priest has facilitated a staff day at the beginning of each year on the charism. All teachers are expected to attend Religious Education Cluster meetings and teachers' Religious Education appraisal goals result in appropriate professional development.

The Senior staff are working together to complete the Certificate of Leadership in a Catholic School. A number of staff members have sufficient credits to gain Classroom Level Certification or higher. These people should complete the process to have this confirmed. Teachers who do not currently have Classroom Level Certification should be required to work towards this by completing the NZQA Accredited Diploma in Religious Studies Stream Religious Education. This requirement should be included as a personal development goal in their annual appraisal with a plan as to how this will be achieved.

Conclusion

It was the dream of the Diocese and the St. Luke's Community to build a Catholic Primary school on the Catholic Campus for the children of Flatbush. The Establishment Committee, the Board of Trustees, staff, students and their families, with the support of the St. Luke's community have made this dream a reality.

"Every staff member, relationship, practice and teaching programme in Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School is inspired by, and infused with, faith in Christ Jesus and the virtues of Mary. Our school is a truly Catholic school that lives and teaches our faith in Christ Jesus. Our school lives in the way that Mary lived the Good News, as the first and most faithful disciple of her Son Jesus." (*Parish Priest*)

Neil Laurenson
Manager
Catholic Education Services

28 February 2012