

**CATHOLIC SPECIAL CHARACTER  
EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT**

**SANCTA MARIA CATHOLIC PRIMARY  
SCHOOL, FLAT BUSH**

**29-30 APRIL, 2015**

## SCHOOL DETAILS

**Name:** Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School, Flatbush

**Address:** 317 Te Irirangi Dr, Flat Bush

**School Type:** Contributing School, Boys and Girls Y1-6

**Principal:** Mrs Gina Benade

**Director of Religious Studies:** Mrs Annette Woodnutt

**Board of Trustees Chairperson:** Mr Michael Stride

**Parish Priest:** Fr. Ezio Blasoni

**Reviewers:** Mr Neil Laurenson  
Mrs Colleen Gleeson

**Accompanying Principal** Ms Carmel Bullöt

**Current Roll:** 335

**Report Confirmed:** 25 May, 2015

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 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.

***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 Whanau 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.*

Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School, Flatbush warmly welcomed and embraced the opportunity for review and development. The Board of Trustees, Principal, staff, students, parents and parish community welcomed the reviewers and all shared openly their thoughts and opinions.

Situated in the Eastern suburbs of Auckland, the school serves the Catholic Community of St Luke's, Flat Bush. The school shares a site with Sancta Maria College and the Presbytery. A Church (St Luke's) is soon to be built on the site. The primary school was first opened in February 2010 and the roll continues to grow as the area has become more populated.

### SPIRITUALITY

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

*"Growing in Faith Together".*

(Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School Motto)

The spirituality of Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School is seen in the way staff and students relate to each other, welcome visitors and support each other and the wider community. Through its charism and values it provides encouragement and resources for individuals within the school community to develop their own faith journey.

The reviewers spoke to many groups within the school and parish community, all of whom referred to the "grace and nurturing of Mary" as a model for their own spirituality.

*"The school provides information, tools and activities that enhance the children's spiritual development."*

*"The school helps the child to grow in faith and follow Mary's values".*  
(Parent survey comments)

### EVANGELISATION

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

Parents spoke of how welcome they feel at the school and the strong sense of family, warmth and caring which provides a nurturing environment for the personal, spiritual growth of children.

The Sacramental programme is run by the Parish and the school supports the many children who are involved each year.

*"Our children are shaping our family with Religious Education and are bringing us back to the church"*

(Parent survey response)

## PARTNERSHIP

*Education is a collaborative responsibility.*

The Principal, staff and Board of Trustees work to build strong relationships with families, the Parish community and the wider community. The partnership with parents is continually being developed through effective communication and learning conversations. The parent workshops held each term are well attended and parents commented that they were very informative and helpful.

The Parent, Teacher and Friends Association (PTFA) is a group of parents who meet monthly to organise fundraising and social events for the school community. They organise the annual Summer Fair, discos, Father's day breakfast, Art night and a Monster Raffle. The emphasis is team building and getting all of the cultural groups working together as well as fundraising.

An onsite SKIDS facility provides before and after school care for children and holiday programmes. Two of the SKIDS staff members work at the school as Teacher Assistants in the mornings which provides an effective link and communication between the school and the programme.

Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School joins with Our Lady Star of the Sea, Howick and Sancta Maria College for Catholic Schools Day. An Eastern Catholic cluster has been formed which includes St Mark's, Pakuranga, Our Lady Star of the Sea, Howick and Sancta Maria College and Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School. Principals, Leadership Teams and Lead Teachers meet regularly for discussion and moderation. The school also belongs to the Howick-Pakuranga cluster of schools for sports and cultural events.

The school continues to build a partnership with the College which includes sharing facilities. They are further developing a transition programme for the Year 6 students to familiarise themselves with the College. Year 7 and 8 college students have shared science lessons with the senior classes. The teachers from the primary school and college are attending a maths course together. The Director of Religious Studies at the College trains the senior student ICT Team in the setting up and use of the IT equipment in the College auditorium used for full school Masses and celebrations. Senior college students coach some sports at the primary school and the college hosts the Trinity Cup, a Basketball tournament for Year 5 and 6 students involving the three feeder Catholic schools. The junior school teachers at the college have also observed the modern learning environment model at the school and have now established a modern learning environment in Year 7 and 8.

## VALUES

*The school identifies and actively promotes Gospel values.*

At Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School the values of Mary are embedded in the everyday life of the school. The Mary values are identified as:

Full of grace, Obedient, Faithful, Compassionate, Thoughtful, Hopeful, Contented, Determined.

Each of these values has been linked to a gospel passage and each value has six related virtues.

Eg. We are Full of Grace when we show:

Patience, Humility, Gentleness, Peacefulness, Integrity, Honesty

These values can be found in the school's Charter and displayed around the interior of the school. The children were very familiar with these values and were able to articulate to the reviewers what they looked like in action.

Each term one value is focused on and discussed in classrooms and at assemblies.

*"The values are a reflection of what we like to practise at home".*  
(Parent Survey response)

## SCHOOL CULTURE

*Catholic Special Character is visible in the relationships and the artistic expression seen throughout the school.*

*"We foster the Catholicity of our school through the charism of Mary, the mother of Jesus."*  
(Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School Enrolment Pack)

The charism of Sancta Maria is focused on the nurturing Mary. This charism developed, by the establishment Board of Trustees before the school opened, has been deeply embedded into the life of the school. The Board of Trustees, Principal and staff are to be commended for the way the charism is owned and acknowledged by the whole school community.

*"The school is blessed with teachers and staff who have a genuine commitment to the Special Catholic Character of Sancta Maria".*  
(Parent survey comment)

The crest, also designed by the establishment Board, is bordered within the shape of a Church stained glass window with three points which reflect the school, home and parish working together. The white border depicts the purity of Mary. The cross, at the base stands for Christianity and Calvary, where Mary saw Jesus give His life for us. The shape in the centre is of a nurturing mother and child formed in the likeness of a Maori Koru. The crest is found on school stationery, signage and uniforms.

*"The overall image and gentle curves is uncluttered and one of simplicity and humility to reflect the nature of Mary".*

(Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School website)

Classroom, corridors and foyer displays depict the Special Catholic Character of the school and their devotion to Mary through colourful and attractive artwork, displays and symbols. The displays are relevant to the school's ethos, vision and the current work being done in classrooms.

The three main buildings have been named St Luke, St Joseph and St Elizabeth. The four Houses are places linked to Mary's life – Nazareth, Cana, Bethlehem and Calvary. The children were able to articulate the reason behind these names being chosen.

Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School was the first Auckland Catholic school to open a block built as a 'flexible space'. The original two blocks were built as 'single cell classrooms'. The Principal and staff are to be commended for the way they accepted this challenge to change in philosophy and successfully implement a modern learning environment. The school has become a model for this change in pedagogical practice and many schools, both state and integrated, have visited, and continue to request visits to observe these rooms in action.

They have established a junior (Y1 and 2) and a senior (Y5 and 6) shared learning space, the Y3 and 4 classes are all in the original single cell rooms. Now that the shared spaces are working so well and the children and teachers love the modern learning environment it has caused an issue with a mixture of traditional and flexible spaces. The school would like to convert all classes to flexible spaces. This would be the ideal situation and it is suggested that consideration be made to open the traditional rooms as far as possible to give consistent pedagogy across the school.

The school has a strong sense of family. The Principal and teachers know every child by name and ensure they form strong relationships with each of the families. Parents commented that they liked the school because it felt like a family, it was spiritual and had a sense of community. The partnership between church and school as one Catholic community is an important aspect for the school community. It was evident to the reviewers that Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School was very child-centered. The children are at the centre of everything and they and their parents have ownership and are actively involved.

*"I heard that this was a great school and that Catholicity was their way of life"*  
(Parent interview comment)

Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School has put careful planning into the school environment. The art work and gardens all enhance the environment and provide spaces that reflect the culture of the school.

## LEADERSHIP

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

The Principal of Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School is the establishment Principal and has very successfully led the school for 5 years. She is an experienced Principal and her commitment and passion for providing a quality Catholic education that is relevant to the students of Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School is evident in her words and actions and was acknowledged by the Board of Trustees. It was mentioned by most people spoken to by the reviewers that she was a "model of the Mary values".

*"The Principal is always approachable and sympathetic in times of need."*  
(Staff questionnaire comment)

She reports monthly to the Board of Trustees against the Annual plan, which includes the Catholic Character. She has an excellent rapport with parents and is approachable and always available. She is seen at the school gate most afternoons chatting with parents and children.

The Chairperson ably leads a Board of Trustees who has the Special Catholic Character at heart. They were able to express how the school's Catholic Special Character impacted on their role of governance. The Board is stable and committed to the development of the school. They consult with the community both formally and informally. A Board member attends all PTFA meetings, New Entrant parent meetings and any other parent/school meetings.

The Board of Trustees is representative of the school community and has participated in regular training with the School Trustees Association and Catholic Education Services workshops. They have a page on the school's website which introduces each member. The Board of Trustee manual is comprehensive and on the school's website.

A Special Character Committee includes Proprietor Representatives, including Chairperson and the Parish Priest, who liaise with the Principal and the Director of Religious Studies regularly. They ensure that Catholic Special Character Compliances and self review reports are completed in a timely manner.

The Principal is supported by a strong Senior Leadership Team. The senior leadership team are all skilled practitioners and share the Principal's vision for the school and her high standards. The Senior Leadership Team all attend each Board of Trustees meeting.

*"The Leadership Team lead by example".*

(Board of Trustees interview comment)

The school communicates to parents through the fortnightly newsletter which includes the Principal's reflection on relevant events in the liturgical season and the school's Religious Education programme. The Board of Trustees and the PTFA contribute to the newsletter in their designated boxes. The newsletter is posted on the school website.

## **STEWARDSHIP**

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

*"We are committed to celebrating an innovative and inspiring Catholic education of excellence, with Mary as our model."*

(Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School Mission Statement)

The Board of Trustees recognise their responsibility to ensure that the Catholic Special Character permeates the whole curriculum and the school environment. They understand that partnership with the parents and parish is an important aspect in developing an effective school environment. Many Board of Trustee members and staff are parishioners at St Luke's who contribute to the parish and school working as one.

The Charter and Strategic plan has a very strong Catholic Special Character content throughout. The Charter sets out clearly the Vision, Mission, Principles, Goals, Values and what it means to be a devoted student, nurturing teacher and caring parent at Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School. The Strategic and Annual plans are set out under the headings of Special Character, Student Learning, Students Engagement, Personnel, School Finance and Property and Community Engagement.

New teachers are inducted into the Special Catholic Character and particular ethos of the school through a specially prepared Google document. The Director of Religious Studies supports each teacher with Religious Education and Special Character and the Principal outlines with each teacher the 'big picture' of Sancta Maria. The senior team leaders support teachers with curriculum. The Staff Handbook is detailed and on the school website. New teachers are also given a buddy teacher.

The annual self review process is led by the Director of Religious Studies and Principal. They liaise with the Special Catholic Character committee and ensure that staff, parent and student voice is included. The review report is presented to the Board of Trustees and it forms part of the Proprietor Representative's Annual Report to the Bishop.

Each teacher has a Special Catholic Character goal in their performance agreement set in conjunction with the Director of Religious Studies. Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School is attending



a Teachers Council project to review the appraisal system. They have developed a system which encourages teachers to be self reflective. The teachers all have e-portfolios which include evidence of best practice. The Principal and Senior Leadership Team are appraised by a consultant.

When a teacher appointment is made, the appointment committee consider the question “Does this person reflect Mary?” All permanent appointments have a Proprietor representative on the committee.

The Special Catholic Character Compliances are all fulfilled. The school is well within the 5% of non preference students and has the correct number of tagged positions.

The school Information for Parents is presented in an Enrolment Pack and a Welcome pack which outline the Special Catholic Character of Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School.

## **PRAYER AND WORSHIP**

*A Catholic culture of prayer. Liturgy and faith-based celebration is promoted in the school.*

The reviewers joined six classes for prayers during their visit. These prayers were student led at most levels of the school and the students were reverent and respectful of this sacred time. The children were focused using candles and Bibles placed on a liturgical cloth of gold appropriate to the current season of Easter. A variety of methods to pray were used, including scripture reading, liturgical dance, personal reflection, traditional prayers and music. Staff prayers are held each Monday morning before school. The ‘Going Deeper’ programme is used as part of the staff prayer for terms 1 and 2 as a trial. Teachers are rostered to prepare these prayers and all staff are welcome. Prayers are also said at the beginning of all meetings.

The school prayer is said each morning at the 8:50 full school line-up assembly. Other special whole school prayer times have been organised such as praying the rosary as a whole school, a set meditation time across the school for one term and saying the ‘Angelus’ together as a school at 12pm daily for one term. Classes take turns to lead the school in prayer at assemblies.

Every Friday morning one or two classes have a Mass, planned by the teacher and children. These Masses are held in the college chapel. Whole school Masses are held at least twice per term. The school joins together with Sancta Maria College for the campus feast day on the Feast of the Assumption. A parish and school Mass is held on a Sunday in Term 2 annually. In response to the 2012 school self review on Pastoral Care a Grandparents Mass is held annually. All teachers, support staff and Board of Trustees members attend the Diocesan Dedication Mass each year.

Retreats are held for Year 6 students at the Friary and for teachers at the Tyburn Monastery.

The reviewers have been privileged to attend many Masses at the school prior to the review. The Masses are always child-centred and the children participate fully with readings, prayers, responses and beautiful singing and playing of instruments. The reviewers are always impressed with the reverence of all of the children during Masses and it is obvious that they understand and feel comfortable at this sacred ritual. Parents and parishioners are invited to all Masses and parents often are Special Ministers at school and class Masses.

In the 2013 school self review on Catholic Community it was suggested that the school initiate a 'Prayer Bag' system. In 2014 each class was presented with a prayer bag to share prayers at home. This initiative has been well received by parents and children.

All Sacramental programmes are organised and implemented by the Parish. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is organised for the school in either Lent or Advent depending on availability of priests.

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE**

*The school promotes social justice.*

Sancta Maria Catholic Primary 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. It contributes to raising awareness and action for justice within the school and the wider community.

The school supports several charities including Caritas appeals and the Catholic Caring Foundation. They supported and joined with Sancta Maria College and had a Caritas Lenten Coin Trail for the College's Caritas Challenge and went to watch the College students making rosary beads for the Caritas 'Sweat it' appeal. They raise funds for areas where disaster has struck and for special emergencies, particularly areas relevant to their community such as the Philippines. In 2014 a food collection was held for the St Vincent de Paul Society and Christmas shoeboxes were assembled. The school also supports Daffodil Day, Anzac Day, Loud Shirt Day, Jump Rope for Heart and the ACPPA Mufti Mania. Teachers use Caritas resources and have Caritas speakers visiting to speak to the school.

## **COLLABORATION WITH THE PARISH**

*The school collaborates with the Parish of which it is part.*

The Parish of St Luke's welcomes the school's presence. The Board of Trustees sees having the Parish Priest interested and supportive, as very relevant to the school/parish relationship. The Parish Priest is an establishment member of the Board of Trustees and is on the Special Character committee. Both the parish and school have a Marist special character.

The Parish website includes a 'School Contacts' page with contact details for both primary and the college. There is also a Primary School page with nothing on it. It is suggested that the school provide the Parish office with the link to your website to be placed onto the page. The school website does provide parish contact details and a link to their website. The school newsletter includes any special parish news.

The school newsletter includes any special parish news in the "St Luke's Community" box. The Parish newsletter does not contain school news. It is suggested that the Principal contribute a small news item each week for the Parish newsletter.

The Parish Priest is on the Board of Trustees and attends most school events. He joins the school for celebrations and events and visits each classroom once per year. He regularly meets with the Principal to discuss enrolments and pastoral work.

*"The Parish Priest often visits the school for morning tea and always shows an interest in the teachers' wellbeing."*

(Staff questionnaire comment)

Many of the teachers and the Director of Religious Studies are parishioners of St Luke's Parish. They are seen at Sunday Masses and contribute in various ministries within the church as a model for children.

The parish organise and implement all Sacramental programmes. The Director of Religious Studies liaises with the Parish co-ordinator and gives out enrolment forms to children in the school. The Principal, Director of Religious Studies and the Leadership team all attend the conferral of the three sacraments and the children are acknowledged at the next school line up.

## AREAS FOR CATHOLIC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- That consideration be made to open the traditional classrooms as far as possible to give consistent pedagogy across the school.

## 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*

As visitors to the school, the reviewers experienced warm and generous hospitality from all members of the school community. Parents acknowledged that teachers were dedicated, hard working, approachable and respectful to them and their children. All teachers had a warm, gentle and caring relationship with the children. They modelled the Mary values in all their dealings with children and this was reflected in the way children related to each other.

The Board of Trustees, staff, parents and Parishioners happily work together with respect and co-operation to provide a nurturing environment. This teamwork and collaboration makes for a happy and cohesive Catholic learning environment. The PTFA Chairperson attends Board of Trustee meetings and presents a report. A Board of Trustees representative attends all PTFA meetings and Parish Council meetings.

Staff are affirmed and work happily as a team. The support staff spoken to by the reviewers felt valued and saw that they were an important part of the staff. Communication between all members of the school community was open and transparent. Staff felt supported by the school community in times of need.

Parents are welcomed into the school and opportunities to get to know each other are provided by the PTFA events. A Meet the Teacher Picnic at the beginning of the year and a Family Christmas Celebration Picnic at the end of each year are held for parents and staff to get to know each other.

The relationships across the Sancta Maria school community are open and collaborative, they consider the team as a family, sharing the same vision.

*“Outside visitors regularly comment on the ‘special feeling’ they get on entering our school”.*  
(Staff questionnaire comment)

Staff and children show empathy and care for each other. Older classes are buddied with a younger class as ‘Soul Friends’. Older children naturally look after younger children in the playground.

The school has an inclusive environment where all children are acknowledged for their special talents. They work closely with a variety of outside agencies including Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLb) and the Health Nurse. Reading Recovery, “Quick 60” reading and a maths support programme are implemented. The teachers in the flexible space block use an audio device to make instructions clearer.

## ORGANISATION

*The way pastoral care is organised is evident to all members of the school community.*

During the review visit, the reviewers heard of the many times care and support was given to families and individuals. At Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School, the Principal and staff ensure that all families know of the support they can receive. The school liaises with the Parish Priest and the PTFA when they know of a need in the school community. Support is offered to staff and families in a variety of ways – planting of trees and dedicating trophies for children who have lost a parent, Seasons for Growth programme, the Leadership team visits homes, linking Prayers of the Faithful to a particular family, providing meals and transport, cards and flowers and material support for uniforms and lunches.

## BI-CULTURAL COMMITMENT

*The school is committed to the Treaty of Waitangi.*

Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School recognises the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi / The Treaty of Waitangi and the status of Maori as Tangata Whenua.

A Kapa Haka group, trained by the Maori Curriculum leader, performed for the reviewers at the Welcome assembly. The haka they performed has been written by the Maori Curriculum Leader and is based on the Mary values of Sancta Maria. The group perform at school celebrations and local events. They practice once per week after school.

The children use Maori in karakia/prayers and waiata/ songs. The Maori Curriculum Leader supports staff with protocols, Te Reo and pronunciation. She has developed a box of resources for each classroom.

## CULTURAL AWARENESS

*The school recognises and honours cultural diversity.*

Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School is aware of the multi cultural population in the school. They actively seek ways to involve and include all ethnic groups.

*“All cultures within the school will be valued and treated with dignity. Quality teaching will respect and affirm cultural identity and optimise educational opportunities for each group”.*

(Sancta Maria Catholic School Charter)

The reviewers were welcomed in three languages, Maori, Samoan and Tagalog (Filipino) at the assembly. Many teachers used different languages to call the roll. Parents are sometimes consulted in meetings held in their own language. Information on the school’s website about “Supporting your child’s learning” is provided in Maori, Samoan, Tongan, Tagalog and Chinese. The Board of Trustees and the staff are very representative of the school community and in particular the larger cultural groups.

For the past three years Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School has hosted the local Howick/Pakuranga Cultural Festival each year. Eight local schools participate and all cultures are represented.

## BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

*Discipline processes are just, compassionate, respectful and consistent.*

*“Our school charism of a caring, nurturing environment drives our behaviour management”.*

(Staff questionnaire comment)

The happy, positive relationships and calm learning-focussed environment of the school community removes most causes of disruptive behaviour and creates in children a willingness to co-operate and self manage. The school encourages a high level of respect and dignity for all.

At Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School, behaviour management is based on the Mary values and virtues and a restorative approach. Six virtues are connected to the Mary values and are used to reinforce positive behaviour throughout the school. Children are often asked “What virtue should you use?” and are encouraged to “pray and invite God’s wisdom into the situation”.

A ‘Peace’ room is set up for children to reflect on their behaviour and a “Peace Garden” has been developed as a quiet place to go, in the playground, to think, pray or reflect.

Peace mediators are trained and support teachers in the playground to mediate conflicts. Virtues vouchers are given to children when they are seen to be using a particular virtue either in the classroom or in the playground. They take their voucher and place it in their house box in the entry foyer. At assembly the house with the highest number of vouchers is awarded a trophy and one voucher from each house is pulled out and that child receives a prize.

## SERVICE

*The students assist people in need through service and outreach opportunities provided by the school.*

Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School provides leadership opportunities throughout the school. All children are given the opportunity to lead prayer and act as monitors in their own classrooms.

Year 6 children serve the school through many leadership opportunities such as: House captains and co-captains, members of the ICT Team, Peace Mediation Team, Student Herald, Environmental and Special Character Teams; Milk, PE, bell, flag and wet day monitors. A group of Year 6 children are chosen each year to attend the National Leaders Day. Workshops for explicit teaching of leadership skills and how to apply these to real life contexts are also part of the Year 6 programme.

The school provides outreach to the community with the marimba, recorder and ukulele groups, the Kapa Haka, Samoan and Filipino groups and the junior and senior choirs. They entertain at Retirement Villages and Festivals. The choirs have entered the Kids 4 Kids events and, this year, have joined the Botany Music Festival.

Many children serve the parish community as altar servers and participate in music groups in the parish community.

Sancta Maria College students do some service work at the Primary school and they helped with the Summer Fair.

As the first Catholic school to have an operating modern learning environment, Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School have hosted many Catholic and State schools to visit and observe their classes in action. The staff are to be commended for the time they give to talking to visiting teachers and guests.

## 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 has taught at Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School, Flat Bush for 2 years. She works collaboratively with the Principal, staff and Parish personnel to ensure that a strong partnership exists between the school and parish. Her quiet and professional approach to the job ensures that professional development, liturgies and other important religious occasions are carried out efficiently and calmly. She is a valued member of the Senior Management Team and ensures the Special Catholic Character is maintained in all work and decisions.

The Director of Religious Studies plans and prepares full school Masses and celebrations and oversees the planning of class Masses. She supports new teachers to the school and teachers new to Catholic schools. She is a member of the Special Character Committee and presents a report at Board of Trustees meetings. These reports include the internal self review process and findings which are collated as Part C in the Bishop Appointee's annual report to the Bishop.

The Director of Religious Studies facilitates staff meetings once per term which focus on the theological focus of a Strand or a module. Observations of Religious Education lessons and prayers in each classroom are completed by the Director of Religious Studies each year which form part of the teacher's appraisal process. She monitors teacher planning, evaluations online and views samples of children's Religious Education Journals.

She meets regularly with the Principal to keep her informed and to discuss issues when necessary. The Director of Religious Studies is a full time classroom teacher in the senior modern learning environment and receives release time to attend all Director of Religious Studies days and conferences and to observe and support teachers.

<b>RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM</b> <i>The Religious Education programme is professionally delivered.</i>
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*"The Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation for our school"*

*"To Jesus through Mary"*

(Statements from Special Character section of School website)

*"Our school will be a place where students have the opportunities to encounter Jesus.*

*'First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth'." Pope Benedict XVI (2008)*

(Special Character Policy Rationale)

These statements emphasise the high priority of the Special Catholic Character at Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School.

The classroom and foyer displays throughout the school were evidence that Religious Education and the Special Catholic Character are at the forefront of all learning. The Religious Education Curriculum is very full, the strands and modules are well covered and the Special Catholic Character is being integrated into all curriculum concept planning.

Teachers plan their Religious Education programmes collaboratively and effectively for their class year levels. Teachers endeavour to differentiate tasks according to age and ability. The planning and pedagogy for Religious Education aligns well with that of all other curriculum areas using teacher-inquiry and formative practice. The Director of Religious Studies views teacher planning regularly online and leaves relevant comments.

Teachers in the flexible spaces have been challenged to develop a pedagogy that works in this environment. It calls for a new approach to teaching and learning with more emphasis on students leading their own learning and teachers facilitating that learning. It takes much collaboration and planning to make it work successfully. The teachers in both shared learning spaces are to be congratulated for their innovative and flexible approach. As there are few models of good pedagogy for this situation these teachers are at the 'cutting edge' of 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning. It is a specific

pedagogy for a flexible space and although the teachers in the traditional rooms are part of the professional development and planning, it is not possible to practice this pedagogy completely in a single classroom. For consistency of pedagogy across the school it is suggested that the traditional rooms be opened as far as possible.

An emphasis is placed on the Religious Education journals the students use in response to the teaching and learning. The students were proud of their work and very willing to discuss and reflect on what they had done and what they had learned with the reviewers. With the move to more digital responses to learning it is important that teachers consider how and where children's work can be viewed.

The children spoken to by reviewers, at all levels of the school, were able to talk about their learning, how they were learning and why. The teacher's use of learning intentions and the learning talk they used throughout the day was reflected by the children. Self management of their own learning was an important aspect of each child's approach , particularly in the senior school.

The learning environments were all vibrant and the displays were relevant to the Religious Education Strand being covered.

## **INTEGRATED CURRICULUM**

*Catholic teaching is integrated with other curriculum areas.*

At Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School the teachers plan a curriculum concept map each term. Each topic is linked to a virtue, the Religious Education programme and the Special Character of the school is integrated where possible. It was evident in classrooms that a Catholic perspective was integrated whenever possible through all curriculum areas. The Director of Religious Studies ensures there is an overarching Scripture quote across all plans.

The school ensures that a Catholic perspective is provided throughout the Health Curriculum. The community is consulted every two years on the Health curriculum. Keeping Ourselves Safe and Life Education are delivered to enhance the Health Curriculum. The 'Myself and Others' module is integrated through all Health programmes to ensure a Catholic perspective.

A strong Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) is evident including a successful senior school camp at the Lakewood Lodge in Hamilton.

Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School is aware of the environment and have an Environmental Team which recycles and grows plants. They recycle paper, milk cartons and they have a worm farm. The gardens around the school are well tended and flourishing. They are looked after by the gardening club supervised by a teacher.

A specialist Music teacher takes Music lessons across the school and does instrumental group teaching. A junior and senior school choir is established and trained by teachers.



## RESOURCES

*The school makes financial provision for Religious Education and Catholic Special Character resources.*

The school is well resourced and the Director of Religious Studies ensures that all classrooms have the necessary resources to deliver the Religious Education programme and provide an environment that reflects the Special Catholic Character. Each term additional, relevant resources are provided based on the Mary value of the term. The library has a section of Special Character books and an additional box of Religious Education resources are held in the resource room.

The Religious Education Advisors are used by the school to support beginning teachers and teachers new to Catholic schools and to run staff meetings when requested and their resources are well used.

The Digital Resource has been made available through the school server and teachers use the “Faith Alive” website as it is developed.

An ample budget is set aside each year to provide for all resources and professional development. The school makes excellent use of the Information Technology they have. There are desktop computers in each room, laptops, i-pads and tablets and a ‘bring your own device’ policy is being trialled this year. Data projectors were in use in most rooms.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

The Director of Religious Studies ensures that Religious Education professional development is given time in all staff meetings, when appropriate and facilitates a Religious Education Strand meeting once per term. She supports teachers by observing prayer and Religious Education lessons in each classroom and provides verbal feedback and a written report as part of their appraisal. All teachers attend the Cluster meetings provided by the Religious Education Advisors and discuss the ideas in relation to their school as a team.

The year always begins with a Staff retreat which focuses on the charism and Special Catholic Character of the school. This is led by an independent facilitator.

All teachers complete at least 12 hours of Religious Education professional development each year. The Principal reports to the Board of Trustees on all Religious Education Professional Development each month. The beginning teachers and teachers new to Catholic schools attend the professional development provided by the Diocese. In response to the 2014 annual self review recommendation all staff are attending the “Understanding Sexuality” course this year. The staff are using the “Going Deeper” programme as part of their staff prayer each week.

The Director of Religious Studies attends all DRS days and the DRS Conference. The Principal attends Principal Development days and the ACPPA conference. The Senior Management Team attend the

ACPPA Middle Management day. It is intended that the Senior Leadership Team and Team Leaders attend the New Zealand Catholic Convention in Wellington in June this year.

Teachers are all encouraged to work towards Certification. Two teachers including the Principal have achieved Endorsed Leadership Level. Three teachers have Leadership Level. One teacher has Classroom Level and all other teachers are working towards Classroom Level.

## COMMUNICATION

*The school communicates with parents/caregivers about Religious Education.*

The Principal shares her faith through the fortnightly school newsletters. The Director of Religious Studies includes explanations about Liturgical seasons, feasts and informs parents of the current Strand topic. The Board of Trustees and the PTFA also contribute to each newsletter. Newsletters and notices are shared with the parish and college. The school's website is attractive, informative and updated regularly. All newsletters and extra information is posted on the school website.

The children's Religious Education books are sent home at the end of each Strand for parents to discuss with their children. Parents commented that these books are an excellent way of knowing what their children are learning in Religious Education.

Parent workshops are held each term. A different curriculum area is covered each term and recently the Religious Education workshop was very successful. Parents commented to the reviewers how valuable these workshops are. The school website has much information for parents about their children's learning. The Director of Religious Studies speaks to parents at the New Entrant Parent meetings about the Religious Education programme.

Parents are encouraged to stay for morning line-up each day, where the school prayer is said, and are invited to all class and school liturgies and Masses. The Principal and teachers chat to parents informally each afternoon as they pick up their children. The open door and welcoming atmosphere at the school invites parents and the parish to participate and contribute.

## AREAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

- With the move to more digital responses to learning it is important that teachers consider how and where children's work can be viewed.

## CONCLUSION

Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School provides a child-centred, Catholic, happy, nurturing learning environment. The school has enthusiastic staff, supportive families, a good connection with the Parish and children who have a love of learning and who love coming to school. The strong spiritual and academic leadership of the Principal has brought all of these components together to form a happy and successful Catholic School community.

The Board of Trustees, parents, teachers and children have a clear understanding of the school's goals and all members of the school community live by the Mary Values.

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

*"Students who are educated, successful and connected learners growing Catholic faith in their hearts and minds".*

The children are confident, happy and engaged in their learning. Along with their families they are proud to be members of Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School.

*"The nurturing, caring environment enables students to take risks and persevere in their learning resulting in excellent achievement results."*

*"Close links with the St Luke's Parish and Sancta Maria College, the high standards of work and the teaching of the Catholic faith and values are strengths of the school."*

(Parent survey comments)

**Neil Laurenson**  
**Manager**  
**Catholic Education Services**

**Colleen Gleeson**  
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**Catholic Schools Office**

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