

**CATHOLIC SPECIAL CHARACTER  
EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT**

**MONTE CECILIA CATHOLIC SCHOOL  
HILLSBOROUGH**

**25-26 February, 2015**

## **SCHOOL DETAILS**

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Monte Cecilia Catholic School, Hillsborough</b>
<b>Address:</b>	<b>72 Hillsborough Rd, Hillsborough, Auckland 1042</b>
<b>School Type:</b>	<b>Contributing school, Y1-6 boys and girls.</b>
<b>Principal:</b>	<b>Mrs Michele Mill</b>
<b>Director of Religious Studies:</b>	<b>Mrs Vickie Boffey</b>
<b>Board of Trustees Chairperson:</b>	<b>Mr Nick Batterton</b>
<b>Parish Priest:</b>	<b>Fr. Francis Poon</b>
<b>Reviewers:</b>	<b>Mr Neil Laurenson Mrs Colleen Gleeson</b>
<b>Accompanying Principal</b>	<b>Mrs Carolynn Philips</b>
<b>Current Roll:</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>Report Confirmed:</b>	<b>May 4, 2015</b>

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.*

Monte Cecilia Catholic School, Hillsborough warmly welcomed and embraced the opportunity for review and development. The Board of Trustees, Principal, staff, students, parent and parish community welcomed the reviewers and all shared openly their thoughts and opinions.

The school celebrated the Centenary of the Mercy presence, at the current site, in 2013. The school now shares the site with the Monte Cecilia Park and the Pa Homestead (previously known as Monte Cecilia House). In 2016 the school will move to new purpose-built buildings located beside the St John Vianney Church, further along Hillsborough Rd.

### **SPIRITUALITY**

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

*“There is a general atmosphere of the spirit of charity lived by the teachers and students at school. This is a very prayerful community”*

(Board of Trustees questionnaire comment)

The spirituality of Monte Cecilia Catholic School is seen in the way the staff and students relate to each other, welcome visitors and support each other and the wider community.

The school, through its charism and values, provides encouragement and resources for individuals within the school community to develop their own faith journey. Parents commented to the reviewers that the Principal was very ‘spiritual’ and was a great role model, as the children see her at Mass on Sunday.

*“We look at things through Catholic eyes”.*

(Senior Management Team interview comment)

### **EVANGELISATION**

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

The school proclaims the mission and Gospel of Jesus Christ. Parents spoke of how welcome they felt at the school and the strong sense of family, warmth and caring which provides a nurturing environment for the personal spiritual growth of each individual. All members of the school community are encouraged to be examples of Catholics living in faith and service.

Personalised candles and Bibles are presented each year to the Year 6 leavers, as a reminder of their Catholic education at Monte Cecilia and to use in the future as life-long Catholics.

Parishioners commented that many new families had started coming to Sunday Mass since the new Principal had joined the parish

## **PARTNERSHIP**

*Education is a collaborative responsibility.*

The Principal, staff and Board of Trustees have worked tirelessly over the past 18 months to build strong relationships with families, the Parish and wider community. The partnership with parents is continually being developed through effective communication and learning conversations. A core group of parents meet monthly as the PTA of Monte Cecilia Catholic School. They initiate events and fundraising and get good support from the school and parish community at all events. They organise and run a Twilight Market every 2 years, sausage sizzles, discos, movie nights and other fundraising ventures. They raise money for the school and many events are organised just to build community.

An independent music teacher works from the school to provide individual lessons for children on many instruments.

Monte Cecilia Catholic School also maintains close relationships with the Catholic Colleges the students choose to attend, St Peters, Marcellin, St Mary's and Baradene Colleges.

## **VALUES**

*The school identifies and actively promotes Gospel values.*

*"I see my children being loving, caring, friendly, respectful and happy kids because of our family values being reinforced in their daily school lives and their teachers are good role models."*

(Parent survey response)

Monte Cecilia Catholic School has identified their core values as:

*Truth  
Respect  
Integrity  
Courage*

The children, staff and parents were very familiar with these values and were able to articulate, to the reviewers, what they looked like in action. The values are printed on documentation and displayed around the school and in every classroom.

When children are seen using the values in their everyday life they receive a "Being Marvellous at Monte Card". At Assembly two children's names are drawn out and they receive a book prize. They are also acknowledged on the "Monte wall of Fame" in the office foyer.

The school Charter also states the three Mercy Pillars of Compassion and Care and Concern for the Poor and Vulnerable, Justice and Respect for Human Dignity and Service and the Core Mercy Values of Respect for Human Dignity, Compassion, Service, Justice and Care & Concern for the Poor & Vulnerable. It is suggested that the Charter is specific about how all of these values link together so that the school community can articulate the history of the school's core values and the Mercy charism.

“The children are immersed in the Gospel values”.  
(Parent Survey comment)

*“To ensure that the Gospel values of Jesus Christ, through the Mercy charism and spirituality permeate all aspects of school life”.*  
(Special Catholic Character Policy statement)

## **SCHOOL CULTURE**

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

Monte Cecilia Catholic School reflects the charism of the Sisters of Mercy (RSM) the founding order. The children were very aware that Monte Cecilia was a Mercy school and could name the foundress of the order - Catherine McAuley and Mother Cecilia Maher who established the Mercy Sisters in Auckland. The children spoken to by the reviewers were able to state they were in a Mercy school however there was some confusion over Monte, Mother and St Cecilia. The children also had a vague idea about the school emblem of the Mercy shield with the school's initials in it (MCS). The school has a progressive plan for teaching the charism (Years 1-6). It is recommended that the Board of Trustees, the Principal and staff work with a representative from the Sisters of Mercy to clarify the symbolism and significance of the Mercy charism.

The school motto was displayed in the staffroom and was a long statement not found in any other documentation. This motto will be reviewed and shortened to a catchphrase in the near future by the Board of Trustees, staff and students.

To prepare for the move into the new 'flexible space' designed school, three hubs have been created as a starting point for collaboration and modern learning requirements. These hubs each have two teachers and two year levels of children. A foundation class has been set up for very new entrant children to prepare them for the school environment. They are gradually transitioned into the hub as they are ready.

The school has a strong sense of family and community. The Principal and teachers know every child by name and work to maintain strong relationships with the parent and the parish community. There is an open door policy and parents commented that they felt comfortable coming into the school. The small size of the school, the "Catholic atmosphere", family connections and the nurturing nature of teachers were all reasons given by parents for choosing Monte Cecilia for their children.

*“It is like a country school in the city”.*  
(Parent interview comment)

The four whanau houses; Cecilia, MacKillop, McAuley and Vianney are named after saints who are significant to the school. Each year on the saint's feast days the Year 5 and 6 children lead a special liturgy and do activities in the whanau groups across the school. For example they had a 'talent share' on St Cecilia's day as she is the patron saint of music. The children interviewed by the reviewers did not know much about these saints. It is suggested that teaching continue to be reinforced about these Saints prior to the feast days.

The Monte Cecilia Catholic School entrance foyer, hall, staffroom and hubs depict the Special Catholic Character through colourful and attractive displays and Catholic symbols. The displays were

relevant to the current work being done in hubs, the school's history and vision. The exterior of the school is looking well groomed and tended. There are many beautiful artworks around the grounds which will be transported to the new site to integrate the old with the new school.

*"Monte Cecilia Catholic School will empower our people to strive for excellence through collaboration and service: to be life-long learners and contributors to the world, inspired by our Mercy tradition".*

(Monte Cecilia Catholic School Mission Statement)

The Mission statement is lived out in the daily life of the school. A 'Monte Cecilia Catholic School way' of doing things which encompasses the values and Mercy tradition, is being developed. The staff are beginning to work collaboratively together in hubs to prepare for the new school's flexible space environment. The model of a collaborative staff inspires the students to work collaboratively.

## LEADERSHIP

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

The Principal of Monte Cecilia Catholic School, Hillsborough, is an experienced principal who has led the school for 18 months. Her commitment and passion for providing a quality Catholic education that is relevant to the students of Monte Cecilia is evident in her words and actions and was acknowledged by the Board of Trustees, staff and parents. She has worked to build collaboration and partnership between teachers, parents and the parishioners of St John Vianney. Her quiet efficiency and devout faith have endeared her to the school and parish community. The school and parish community have trust in the Principal and see her as an excellent role model and a motivating leader. Over the past 18 months many changes have been made and systems and programmes begun which will benefit the school at this transition time. The Principal is to be commended for the leadership she has provided and the changes made in such a short time.

*"The Catholic Special Character permeates through everything the Principal says and does".*  
(Board of Trustees interview comment)

*"Our Principal is proud to be Catholic and loves her faith which is shared often"*  
(Board of Trustee questionnaire comment)

*"School leadership is so very important in shaping my children's learning experience and I am thankful that our Principal ensures that our school is standing firmly on God's word and God's values"*

(Parent survey response)

The Principal reports to the Board of Trustees through a monthly report which includes a Special Catholic Character section. She is setting strong management and communication systems in place to support the staff to maintain her vision for the school and her high standards.

A new Chairperson had just been elected at the time of review. All members of the Board of Trustees had the Catholic Special Character at heart. As part of the review, a reviewer interviewed the Board members and they were able to express how the school's Catholic Special Character impacted on their role of governance. They commented that it was at the centre of every decision that they made and underpinned everything they did as a Board.

The Special Catholic Character Committee includes all Proprietor Appointees, including the Parish Priest, the Principal and Director of Religious Studies. They meet to discuss the Internal Special Catholic Character self review report and present this to the Board. A Proprietor Representative works with the school Management Team on appointments for tagged positions.

The Board of Trustees is representative of the school community and all members have participated in regular training through the School Trustees Association and Catholic Education Services workshops. They have used a consultant, as a special advisor, when necessary. The Board has a page on the school website which names the board members and includes minutes to their meetings.

The school communicates to parents through the fortnightly newsletter. The Principal includes information and quotes relevant to the Special Catholic Character of the school, prayers and reflections relevant to the liturgical year. The newsletter is posted on the school website. The Board of Trustees posts items in the school newsletter. Board members attend school social events to mingle and chat with parents, here they are able to gain feedback from parents and to give them a chance to ask questions. It is suggested that the Board of Trustees put out a newsletter each term informing parents of their governance operations.

## **STEWARDSHIP**

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

The Board of Trustees recognise their responsibility to ensure that Catholic Special Character permeates the whole curriculum and the school environment. They understand that partnership with the Parish is an important aspect in developing an effective school environment. The Principal and a Board of Trustee member attend the Parish Council meetings. A Parish report is tabled at each Board meeting.

The Charter and Strategic plan has a Catholic Special Character section and has the Catholic perspective throughout. Emphasis is placed on the core beliefs and values of the school community. With the change in leadership and direction of the school the Board of Trustees is looking to review the School Charter, this process is timely. The Strategic Plan has a Special Catholic Character section and clearly states the way forward for the school. The school's Policy Framework is being reviewed and refined. It is the Board's intention to ensure that the Special Catholic Character permeates all policies and procedures.

The process for the annual Internal Special Character Self Review is clearly outlined and the recommendations are written into the Strategic and/or annual plan each year. The review report forms part of the annual report to the Proprietor. In 2014 Monte Cecilia reviewed the Religious Education dimension and identified relevant areas for future development.

New teachers to Monte Cecilia Catholic School are provided with an Introduction Book explaining the school's operations and its Catholic character. In 2015 teachers attended a Teacher Only Day on Catholic Culture. They worked at the Corban's Art Centre to create a tile which represented the school values or charism. All new teachers attend the Teachers New to Catholic Schools Course.

The Performance Management process and documentation is under review. It is based on the Formative Teaching and Learning professional development being provided schoolwide and teachers having learning conversations. Four-minute walkthroughs were part of the process up until recently.

As recommended in the 2012 External Special Character review, a new format will be developed in 2015 to include a Special Catholic Character goal for each teacher.

Monte Cecilia Catholic School requires 5 tagged positions, including the Principal and Director of Religious Studies, and has 4 of these positions filled. It is the intention of the school to advertise a tagged position for the start of 2016. The number of non preference students complies with the total of 7 children set in the Integration Act.

## **PRAYER AND WORSHIP**

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

The reviewers joined three hubs for prayers during their visit. These prayers were student led at all levels of the school and the students were reverent and respectful of this sacred time. The children were focused using candles, crucifix, statues, photos, items of relevance to the Religious Education focus, and Bibles placed on a liturgical cloth appropriate to the season. The Parish Priest blessed each hub's liturgical cloths at the beginning of the year. A variety of methods to pray were used, including Scripture reading, spontaneous prayer, reflections, singing and traditional prayer.

The staff have a shared Prayer time on Monday morning before school. All staff are welcome, including support staff and they take turns to prepare the prayer or reflection. They also pray before each staff meeting and at other times in the staffroom for special intentions or special occasions.

Each Monday morning the school gathers together for a Prayer Assembly. The Director of Religious Studies and the Special Character Student Team lead this assembly. The previous Sunday's gospel is discussed and the Principal and Director of Religious Studies relates this to the school values and its relevance to everyday life.

Each hub's day begins and ends with prayer and Grace is said at lunchtime. During the month of October the school gathers each day to say the Rosary.

Celebration Assemblies, community evenings and sports and cultural events also begin with prayer.

Members of the parent community gather on Tuesday mornings in the hall for prayer, led and organised by parents, to pray for the needs of the children and the wider community.

School Masses are held at the beginning and end of each year, also on special feast days throughout the year. The Director of Religious Studies plans and organises all School Masses and other significant liturgies. Ash Wednesday Mass, the Feast of the Assumption Mass and the end of year Leavers Mass are held at the St John Vianney Parish Church. Each Friday hubs take turns to attend a Mass or Liturgy at the Friary, this is dependent on the availability of the Friary or the Parish Priest. Mass is always part of every school Camp.

All Sacramental programmes are organised and implemented by the Parish. The Principal and Director of Religious Studies liaise with the Parish and teachers to support the programme in their classrooms. Rite 2 Reconciliation services are held in Lent and Advent, either in the Friary chapel or at school.

Once the school has moved it will make the organisation and practice of attending the church for all liturgies and Masses much easier for all.

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE**

*The school promotes social justice.*

Monte Cecilia Catholic 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.

Support is given to families in need in the parish and school communities through prayer, meals, shopping, ironing, transport etc when needed. The school community also provides funding for families to go on school trips and camps when needed – “no child is excluded”.

Caritas resources are used by all teachers and a curriculum focus is based around the work of Caritas. A Caritas speaker is invited to speak to staff and children to coincide with Social Justice Week. At Christmas the school collects food and gifts for Monte Cecilia House and the City Mission. Money is also collected for people in disaster zones such as the Phillipines and Tonga. 10 cent Tuesdays and Thursdays during Lent is a fundraiser for the Lenten appeal.

Participation in national days such as Daffodil Day and Make a Wish Foundation are decided on each year.

## **COLLABORATION WITH THE PARISH**

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

The Board of Trustees sees having the Priest in the Parish interested and supportive, as very relevant to the school/parish relationship. The Parish Priest is a member of the Board of Trustees as a Proprietor Appointee and he visits classrooms weekly and attends school functions. He supports the families of the school.

The new school will open in the Parish grounds in 2016. This will make collaboration easier for all concerned. Being quite a distance from the Church has made communication and collaboration difficult in the past. The school and parish are working together to build school/parish relationships and a way forward in the future. The school has begun to use the Parish Centre for the annual prizegiving. The Parish is invited to all school events.

The parish newsletter includes school news and contact details for the school. The school newsletter includes special Parish news. Newsletters are shared between parish and school. It is suggested that the school website includes a link to the Parish website.

The Parish runs the Sacramental programme and the school supports the programme throughout. The school provides the music, data display, and a choir to sing at the Confirmation/First Communion Masses. All Sacramental programmes are advertised in the school and Parish newsletters. The school recognises children who have made a sacramental milestone by presenting them with a gift of a cross at assembly.

Family Masses are planned each term and held in the Church with the parish. The PTFA provide a sausage sizzle after Mass for families and parishioners to enjoy.

The Principal is a member of the Parish. She and a Board member attend the Parish Council meetings.

## AREAS FOR CATHOLIC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- To ensure that the Charter is specific about how the school's Core Values link together with the Mercy Pillars and Core Values, so that the school community can articulate the history of the school's core values and the Mercy charism.
- That teaching continues to be reinforced about the House Saints prior to their feast days.
- That the Board of Trustees put out a newsletter each term informing parents of their governance operations.
- That the school website includes a link to the Parish website.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CATHOLIC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- The Board of Trustees, the Principal and staff work with a representative from the Sisters of Mercy to clarify the symbolism and significance of the Mercy charism.
- A new format for Performance Management will be developed to include a Special Catholic Character goal for each teacher.

## 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 approachable and respectful to them and their children. The Board of Trustees, staff, parents and Parish are working together with respect and co-operation to provide a nurturing environment. This collaboration makes for a happy and cohesive learning environment.

Parents and parishioners are warmly welcomed into the school at all times. The school endeavours to involve parents as much as possible in all school events. There is an excellent relationship between parents and staff.

Parents contribute to the school through the Board of Trustees, PTA, having learning conversations with their children and their teachers and participating in working bees around the school.

*"I feel we have the support of other school families in raising our children and feel part of a wider community with a special common bond".*

(Parent survey comment)

Teachers model the core values in all their dealings with students and this was reflected in the way students related to each other. All teachers had a happy, warm and relaxed relationship with the children and it was obvious to the reviewers that they really cared about each other.

Support staff felt valued and supported as full members of staff, even if they worked part time. They were kept informed of school events. Training has been provided for teacher aides in Special Needs and curriculum support. They join the staff for prayer and take a turn to prepare and present it.

Staff are supported by the community and celebrated on Support Staff Day and World Teachers Day. Birthdays and special occasions are acknowledged with cards and flowers.

The school has an inclusive environment where all children are acknowledged for their special talents. A number of programmes are in place to support learners, the Special Education Network Co-ordinator (SENCO) support team identifies student need and organises supporting programmes for them. Reading Recovery, Rainbow Reading, STEPS a computer based literacy programme and Literacy and Numeracy support groups are in place. Roots of Empathy, Seasons for Growth and English as a Second Language (ESOL) programmes are provided when necessary. Children with disabilities are welcomed to the school and are well resourced and supported. The school works closely with a variety of outside agencies including Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs), Resource teachers of Literacy, the Kari Centre, counselling services, Child Youth and Families, Assessment Services, Special Education Services and the Public Health Nurse.

The school belongs to the local schools sports group and encourages Catholic school sports events. Monte Cecilia has successfully organised and run the Catholic Schools Cross Country for many years.

## **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. The Principal and staff ensure that all families know of the support they could receive and organise help and support in times of need, hardship, grief or illness. The school also informs the Parish Priest when necessary. The 'Friends of Monte' is a group of parents who support the school to help parents in need and provide assistance when it is required.

## **BI-CULTURAL COMMITMENT**

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

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

*"Monte Cecilia Catholic School will endeavour to provide the means of fostering better cultural understanding consistent with the Treaty of Waitangi."*

(Monte Cecilia Catholic School Charter)

The school has a Maori programme which runs throughout the school and it was acknowledged by the Senior Management Team that this programme needed more structure and progression. Teachers are encouraged to have a Maori Glossary displayed in their classrooms and to pray, sing and make the Sign of the Cross in Maori. The staff have a word or phrase to incorporate into their days to practice schoolwide regularly.

The school has employed a Maori specialist who has trained the Kapa Haka group for the past 3 terms. They welcomed the reviewers with rousing haka and waiata. Classroom programmes are specifically designed to integrate Maoritanga eg. “Ko tatou te huringa – Be the Change”. Each hub has written a Treaty which was related to the Treaty of Waitangi and God’s covenant with his people.

## **CULTURAL AWARENESS**

*The school recognises and honours cultural diversity.*

At Monte Cecilia Catholic School, teachers were very careful to honour the cultural diversity within their classrooms.

*“All cultures within the school will be valued and accepted. Staff will ensure that students are treated with respect and dignity and will actively work towards high standards of achievement for all”.*

(Monte Cecilia Catholic School Charter)

## **BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT**

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

*“We believe that all people are made and loved by God who has gifted us with dignity and ability”*

(Monte Cecilia Behaviour Management Policy statement)

The children at Monte Cecilia Catholic School are encouraged to behave like Jesus and are often asked – “What would Jesus do?”

The school values of Respect, Integrity, Courage and Truth underpin all interventions in behaviour management. The values are taught, encouraged and displayed around the school and are often referred to when dealing with behaviour or conflict. Teachers and children are encouraged to use “Put-ups”. A Restorative Justice approach is used in all situations involving conflict.

The Monte Mentors support teachers on duty and work with children in the playground. They have peer mediation training and are supported by the Deputy Principal.

## SERVICE

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

Leadership opportunities are provided throughout the school. All children are given the opportunity to lead prayer and act as monitors in their own classrooms. Senior children are given the chance to lead through being Monte Mentors, Special Character Team, Monte Media Team and House Captains. Children apply for these roles and the teachers decide who is appointed and they receive a badge for each appointment. They also provide service to the school as wet day monitors and librarians. As some children are on more than one team they seemed unsure of the specific roles of each position. It is suggested that children have training for each role, early in the year, according to their job descriptions .

The children entertain the residents at Liston Village and serve cups of tea when invited.

*"It gives you a good feeling when you help others".*

(Monte Mentor interview comment)

Children participate at Masses and some are trained and serve as Altar servers.

## AREAS FOR PASTORAL CARE DEVELOPMENT

- That children receive training for each leadership role they accept, early in the year, according to their job descriptions..

## 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 been at Monte Cecilia Catholic School for 7 years full time teaching and now works part time as Director of Religious Studies and the Reading Recovery teacher. She works collaboratively with the Principal, staff and the personnel of the parish to ensure that a strong relationship between the parish and school exists. Her quiet and gentle approach to the job ensures that relationships, professional development, liturgies and other important religious

occasions are carried out efficiently and calmly. She ensures that the Special Catholic Character is maintained in all work and decisions.

The Director of Religious Studies plans and prepares all full school Masses and celebrations. She supports new teachers to the school and teachers new to Catholic schools with guidance and resources and models lessons when required. Teachers find her approachable and helpful. She creates Special Catholic Character displays throughout the school.

Prior to 2014 the Director of Religious Studies visited classrooms for 4 minute walkthroughs and provided feedback, being part time makes this difficult. A formal process for observations of Religious Education lessons and prayer sessions needs to be implemented and it is recommended that this begins as soon as possible.

In response to the 2012 External Special Catholic Character Review Recommendations one staff meeting is facilitated by the Director of Religious Studies each term which focuses on the theological focus of a strand. She seeks guidance from the Religious Education Advisors and meets regularly with the Principal.

The Director of Religious Studies attends the Director of Religious Studies days, annual Conference and professional development days. She is invited to attend the Senior Management Meetings and planning days when they are relevant to her role and she attends the annual Senior Management Day run by the Auckland Catholic Primary Principals Association.

The Director of Religious Studies contributes to the school newsletter explaining the Strands and Modules to be covered and any other news concerning the Religious Education and Special Catholic Character of the school. She also provides information for parents about the Liturgical year and Special Character events.

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM** *The Religious Education programme is professionally delivered.*

*“The Religious Education curriculum is an important component of the school’s overall curriculum and its content should be tailored to effectively provide an opportunity for children to learn:*

- *what it is to be Catholic;*
- *what Catholics believe – the Church’s teachings; and*
- *how Catholics celebrate, live and pray.”*

(Monte Cecilia Religious Education Guidelines)

The displays in the foyer, hubs and the hall throughout the school were evidence that Religious Education and the Special Catholic Character have a high status at Monte Cecilia Catholic School, Hillsborough. The Religious Education Curriculum overview is prepared by the Director of Religious Studies to ensure that all aspects are covered annually. The strands and modules are well covered and the Special Catholic Character is being integrated well into all topic planning.

Teachers plan Religious Education individually for their year level. The digital resource is incorporated into planning and the Faith Alive website is beginning to be used. A new online programme has been introduced and most teachers’ planning was well prepared. It is recommended

that the Religious Education planning be monitored regularly to ensure consistency across the school.

Assessment of Learning Objectives is carried out through Summative testing in some classes. Further consideration could be put into ensuring a formative approach to Religious Education teaching and learning by teaching to identified student needs. Student reflection and affective domain assessment is encouraged.

Professional development for formative teaching, pedagogy and best practice is ongoing throughout the school. As teacher skill is developed, the pedagogy used in other curriculum areas could also be used in the Religious Education programme. Teachers have begun to be more creative in the expected children's responses to learning. It is suggested that the school continue to develop creative ideas for teaching Religious Education and creating a wider variety of children's response to learning.

The children record their learning in a Faith Journal. Some of these books were well presented. In most classrooms, at the start of each Strand the Achievement Objectives outline was pasted into the book. In response to the 2012 External Catholic Character Review recommendation, at the end of each Strand of work an evaluation comment was made by the child, and in some hubs a peer, and the journals are taken home for the parents to share and make a comment. It is recommended that teachers also comment on the child's work and ensure that work is completed and presented with pride. Because these journals are sent home regularly it is recommended that they are monitored regularly to ensure consistency across the school.

The school teaches about the Mercy Charism at the beginning of each year and during Mercy Week. A strong Lenten focus was very evident throughout the school. The learning environments were vibrant and the displays were relevant to the Religious Education Strand being covered, the review visit occurred just as the Jesus Strand was being introduced.

## **INTEGRATED CURRICULUM**

*Catholic teaching is integrated with other curriculum areas.*

At Monte Cecilia Catholic School a Catholic perspective is very evident in classroom environments across the curriculum. At planning meetings there is a deliberate discussion on how to integrate the Special Character into themes and subject areas. Teachers were successfully weaving a Catholic point of view into the total curriculum so that children were naturally making links and seeing that God was present in everything.

The 2015 inquiry topic was "Ko tatou te huringa – Be the change". The special Catholic Character focus was - Our body is God's temple, God provides and Jesus is the Bread of Life. Each term has a different focus – I am the change..... thinking like a scientist, in our place, by sharing a message and by honouring the past.

The "Myself and Others" module was integrated through the Monte Cecilia Catholic School Health programme to ensure a Catholic perspective was provided. Puberty talks are given by the Public Health Nurse based on a Catholic perspective.

The school had an environmental programme with gardening and recycling programmes. Year 4 children organised a beautification project of the school grounds in 2014. It is suggested that the environmental programmes start again on the new site and could be written into an inquiry topic to

reignite interest. Some recycling is still being done and a garden is still producing vegetables planted last year.

## **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 hubs have the necessary resources to deliver the Religious Education programme and provide an environment that reflects the Special Catholic Character. All class teachers use the digital resource/ Faith Alive website and are beginning to use technology effectively. Teacher resources are added and updated on the school server as appropriate. The server also holds music, that the school owns, and liturgical music is stored on the school iPod.

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.

## **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 delivered through staff meetings at the beginning of each Strand on the theological focus. Professional development for the Charism and Special Character of the school is covered on Teacher Only Days each year and guest speakers are invited to present at many of these sessions, including the Sisters of Mercy.

Staff are encouraged to complete 12 hours of professional development each year. In response to the 2012 Special Catholic Character Review recommendations they take advantage of all courses, workshops and cluster meetings provided by the Catholic Schools Office. The Director of Religious Studies attends all DRS days and the annual DRS conference. The Understanding Sexuality Course has been planned for all staff this year.

In 2012 the staff participated in The Catholic Institute's "Introduction to Catholicism" paper however most of these staff members are no longer at the school.

The Principal attends all Auckland Catholic Primary Principal Association professional development. The senior management team and Director of Religious Studies attend the ACPA Senior Management Day in Auckland.

Teachers are all encouraged to work towards Certification. The Principal and the Director of Religious Studies have both achieved Leadership level, all other teachers are working towards Classroom level. One teacher is well overdue for Classroom certification.

## COMMUNICATION

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

The Principal shares her faith through the school newsletters where she includes prayers and reflections. The Director of Religious Education informs parents of the current Strand topic and provides information on the liturgical season and feast days through the school newsletter and a Religious Education newsletter.

All children's Faith journals are sent home at the end of each Strand for parents to discuss with their children. Children and parents write comments at the end of each Strand which affirm the learning. Parents commented that it was an excellent way of discussing the Religious Education programme with their children. The school website includes information parents may need to support their children at school.

Parents are also asked to write about their child at the beginning of the year and this is placed in the Religious Education journal. The reviewers were impressed with these reflections, they give a wonderful insight to the child.

Parents and families are invited to classroom prayers, school liturgies, assemblies and Masses. The open door and welcoming attitude at the school encourages families and the parish to participate and contribute. Teachers make themselves available to support parents and to discuss the Religious Education programme with them.

The Director of Religious Education is planning to post videos of Religious Education lessons on the website so parents can see how Religious Education is taught at Monte Cecilia. It is suggested that until this occurs the school plans to hold a parent workshop about Religious Education and the Special Character of the school. It is recommended that the school holds regular New Entrant Parent Orientation Meetings where the Special Catholic Character of the school and Religious Education Programme are discussed.

For parents as 'first educators in faith' for their children, each family is encouraged to purchase a Whanau book. They are also asked to sign a "Parents Role in RE" contract which is placed at the front of the Faith Journal each year.

Each year a "Brag night" is held where parents children and teachers meet and have learning conversations about the work done in hubs.

## AREAS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

- Further consideration could be put into ensuring a formative approach to Religious Education teaching and learning by teaching to identifies student needs.
- As teacher skill in formative teaching and learning is developed, the pedagogy used in other curriculum areas could also be used in the Religious Education programme.
- That the school continue to develop creative ideas for teaching Religious Education and creating a wider variety of children's response to learning.

- That the environmental programmes continue on the new site and could be written into an inquiry topic to reignite interest.
- The school plans to hold a parent workshop about Religious Education and the Special Character of the school.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

- A formal process for observations of Religious Education lessons and prayer sessions needs to be implemented and it is recommended that this begins as soon as possible.
- That the teachers' Religious Education planning be monitored regularly to ensure consistency across the school.
- That teachers comment on the child's work in the Religious Education Journals, as well as the child and parent, and ensure that work is completed and presented with pride.
- Because the Religious Education Journals are sent home regularly it is important that they are monitored regularly to ensure consistency across the school.
- That the school holds regular New Entrant Parent Orientation Meetings where the Special Catholic Character of the school and Religious Education Programme is discussed.

## CONCLUSION

Monte Cecilia Catholic School, Hillsborough provides a collaborative learning environment that focuses on the needs of individual children and the achievement of excellence. The leadership of the Principal and the Board of Trustees, a dedicated staff, enthusiastic and positive parents and the strengthening links with the St John Vianney Parish, together combine to form a successful Catholic community. The Mercy charism, the patron saint St Cecilia and the school's core values provide the school with an ethos that is being refined and developed to permeate throughout the school.

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

*"We will be people who love to learn; people who show respect and are resilient so as to become contributing Disciples of Christ who make a difference in our world."*

(Monte Cecilia Catholic School Charter)

The children are confident, happy in their learning. Along with their families they are proud to be members of Monte Cecilia Catholic School.

With the new school being built, this new beginning for the school provides an opportunity for change. The school community has begun this process and understands it has much work to do to ensure that the history and culture of Monte Cecilia is honoured and respected. The Principal and Board of Trustees need to cut through the layers of history, culture and systems and find what is important for the school moving ahead.

*“We are a family – with common values and beliefs. A caring community where everyone is included and valued.”*

(Teachers questionnaire response)

*“Our children love going to school and are always excited when there is a school Mass. This stimulates their thirst to learn.”*

(Board of Trustees questionnaire response)

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