

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF HAMILTON



*He Pūrongo Arotake Mātauranga
Ahurea Katorika ā Waho.*

Catholic Special Character External Evaluation Report

**St Michael's Catholic Primary School
Rotorua**

Evaluation conducted on 26 & 27 June 2024

Confirmed Report 26 August 2024

School Details 2024

Name of School: St Michael's Rotorua Catholic Primary School

Address: 76 Lisa Cres, Mangakakahi, Rotorua

School type: Primary Years 1-6

Actual roll: 98

Maximum roll: 250

Non-preference maximum: 25

Actual non-preference number: 22

5.1: 47

5.2: 4

5.3: 18

5.4: 7

5.5: 0

Roll based staffing entitlement: 6.8

Required number of Special Character CI 47 positions: 2

Filled number of Special Character CI 47 positions: 1

Principal: Rachael McLanachan

Director of Religious Studies: Shayla O'Neill (Acting shared role with the principal)

Presiding Member, Board: Joseph Assen

Elected Members (C or NC)

Proprietor's Reps:

1. Angela Bigwood - Smith

1. Joseph Assen

2. Amiria Savea

2. Chris Hepi

3. Nick Horton

3. Vacancy

4. Vacancy

Staff Rep: Shayla O'Neill

Parish Priest: Father Thomas Thanniyanickal

Ethnicity Percentages:

NZ European: 37% NZ Māori: 37% Asian: 21% Pacific:1% Other: 4%

Review Team

Lead Reviewer: Terry Consedine

Accompanying Reviewer/s: Dianne Porter and Wendy Consedine

The Aims of Catholic Special Character External Evaluation for Development

The Catholic Special Character Evaluation process produces a focused picture of the impact of Catholic schooling and the effectiveness of its goals on the lives of all tamariki and rangatahi¹.

The process seeks to determine whether they have encountered the living God revealed in Jesus Christ, grown in knowledge of Him and His Church, and as a result are forming a deep and lasting relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church².

The process also evaluates how the whole school community engages in authentic Catholic Christian witness and evangelisation.

The evaluation also investigates how the school is acting as kaitiaki of Catholic special character including meeting its statutory compliances.

A collaborative external evaluation process between school and the evaluators helps the school see what it is doing well and identify next steps.

¹ New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference. *The Catholic Education of School Age Children*. Wellington:2014.

² Ibid.

Introduction

St Michael's Catholic Primary School is located in the suburb of Western Heights, at the foot of Maunga Ngongotaha, Rotorua. The school has a rich history, providing Catholic education for tamariki from Years 1-6.

The opening of St Michael's Catholic School in 1958 was made possible by the Sisters of Mercy, a religious order who had arrived from Ireland. These women were inspired by their founder, Catherine McAuley, who became involved in various institutions, such as schools and hospitals around the world. Despite limited resources and funding, the Sisters were committed to their vision of '*service to the poor, sick and uneducated, to reveal the mercy of God in our world.*'

Today, St Michael's Catholic School is a vibrant community-minded school offering a safe and effective learning environment where every learner is celebrated for their unique passions, talents, and skills. It prides itself on its strong family values of love and belonging. All learners work collaboratively as part of a Christ-like community, and the school promotes perseverance, strength, and adaptability in its students.

Many of its students are second or third-generation pupils, and some staff members, including the tumuaki, are ex-students. St Michael's Catholic School extends a warm welcome to those who wish to become a part of their extended school whānau.

Although there are no longer any Sisters of Mercy at the school, St Michael's Catholic School continues to uphold the Mercy Values of compassion, excellence, hospitality, respect, social justice, and service. The school honours the first Sisters of Mercy to Rotorua as part of their annual St Patrick's Day celebrations.

The school's vision, principles, and values are integrated into all aspects of the learning environment and culture. The aim is to develop confident active learners who strive for excellence "*doing ordinary things, extraordinarily well*".

Progress with Recommendations from 10-11 March 2021 Catholic Special Character Review for Development Report

Key Recommendations:

- 1. With the work on the localised integrated curriculum underway, it is important that an authentic Religious Education Curriculum including assessment is well embedded and that this is thoroughly reviewed and evaluated on an annual basis.**

The new curriculum *Tō Tātou Whakapono Our Faith* is integrated into the localised curriculum, aligning it with cultural and community values. Thematic units incorporate religious education concepts alongside other subjects. Kaiako reflect on religious education teaching practices and shares best practice in staff meetings, part of the Professional Growth Cycle.

Professional development / Staff meetings for kaiako on effective religious education teaching strategies and assessment methods. Planning for the religious education curriculum implementation is checked regularly and discussed during staff meetings.

- 2. The school has a new opportunity with the appointment of a permanent Principal to work with the whole community to review the Vision, Mission and Values in line with its Mercy charism so that it is understood by students, kaiako and parents.**

Through community consultation, a new vision and set of values has been crafted that align with the Mercy Charism. This process has involved all stakeholders. The revised Vision, Mission, and Values are well-understood and embraced by students, kaiako, and parents.

- 3. There is a need for a greater connection between St Michael's parish and the school. There has been a strong history of opportunities for student Baptism and sacramental programmes in the past and both the school and the parish are keen to re-establish.**

The school tries to keep communication open with the parish by contacting the parish priest, Father Thomas, to discuss ongoing initiatives, upcoming events, and opportunities for collaboration. The school contributes to the parish newsletter and keeps in contact with the parish office assistant.

- **Revitalise Sacramental Programs:** In 2023 The Sacrament of Baptism was promoted by having classes here at school. A school Mass was celebrated on a Sunday afternoon. Baptism and sacramental preparation programs are only available through the parish this year. We try to engage families and provide clear information about the importance and process of these sacraments. It would be great if the school could offer the sacramental programmes. The tumuaki has offered to teach the Sacrament of Initiation in August to try to encourage whanau to participate.
- **Shared Events and Celebrations:** Parishioners and the community are invited to events such as Masses, liturgy and school events, fostering a sense of unity and shared faith.
- **Parish Presence at School:** We invite our parish priests to visit the school regularly, to

participate in school events, and engage with students and staff, strengthening their presence and relationship with the school community. We have a parishioner on our Board as Prop Rep who regularly comes to school to speak with the children about their faith journey.

- **Student Involvement:** We try to create opportunities for students to be involved in parish ministries, such as the St Vinnies garden.

We have embedded our annual Mary MacKillop hikoi, where our staff and tamariki retrace the steps of St Mary MacKillop. This year we included our parish and visited the ladies who are repairing the Church tukutuku panels. The ladies loved sharing the stories with our children. Our kaumatua is from our parish and is also a Proprietor Appointee on our Board. He often comes into school to speak to the children about his faith and the connection to Mātauranga Māori.

- 4. That the Board and Leadership Team continue to work together to ensure that the Director of Religious Studies has release time timetabled to include in-class support and preparation of Strand Staff meetings. This will ensure kaiako have more in-depth experience of the theology of the Strands, and the School community can be confident that RE is being very well taught in the school.**

Last year, the school's DRS took up a position at John Paul College Rotorua. This year, principal and DP are sharing the role with support from the rest of the staff. In Term 3, the school will re-advertise for a new DRS and a tagged teacher. Currently, there are two fixed-term positions that will be made permanent in 2025.

This year a fixed term part time Catholic teacher is supporting our two new kaiako in the teaching of religious education.

- 5. That the non-preference roll conform with the agreed as per the Schools' Integration Agreement**

Currently the non-preference roll is 22 students. While there are 4 non-preference spaces available, the school has decided to save these spaces for students enrolled later in the term.

Dimension 1: Encounter with Christ

How effectively does the school encourage and facilitate the development of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ who reveals the transforming love and truth of the living God?

FOCUS AREAS

1. Spiritual Formation

There is a respectful culture in the school where varied and rich prayer styles are an integral part of the daily routine of school life and fostered by the kaiako. Classes begin the day with combined prayer and tamariki take turns with a buddy, writing and reading their own prayers with the guidance of the kaiako. They share their intentions which include the needs of whānau, the church, the priests, the school and for the less fortunate.

Tamariki enjoy creating a central prayer focus display on the classroom floor before their peers gather around the display. In most of the classrooms, the daily morning routine during the prayer circle includes personal and traditional prayers, a scripture reading followed by a reflection, and finishing with songs. Prayers are also shared before food breaks and at the end of the day. One of the impacts of these experiences is that tamariki can articulate the importance of prayer in their own lives.

Tamariki expressed that they enjoy sharing their prayer time at home especially with the aid of a prayer bag. The prayer bag contains a small prayer cloth, a crucifix, Bible and prayer cards. There is also a prayer journal, and whānau are encouraged to write their prayers.

“My children love it when they get a turn to bring home the prayer bag. We also get to read what other families have written in the prayer book”. (Parent)

The school has begun to incorporate te reo Māori, such as karakia, waiata, and mihi. The Sign of the Cross, the Lord’s Prayer, and other prayers are regularly recited in te reo Māori. Māori prayers and hymns are also integrated into school Masses and liturgies. Miha Māori is regularly offered to the school community at St Michael’s Parish Church. The school celebrates significant Māori cultural events, such as Matariki (Māori New Year), incorporating them into the religious education programme and school activities.

Kaiako take time to pray together once a week. The tumuaki and DRS lead prayer in various formats alongside other kaiako who also take a turn to lead, including staff meetings. There have been some rich retreat opportunities for tamariki and kaiako which provide further opportunities to encounter Christ on the journey of discipleship. In recent years the staff have participated in staff retreat and there is a plan for a retreat to be held later in the year at the Ngākuru Monastery, located a short distance from Rotorua.

The school community has the opportunity to encounter Christ through the Mass liturgy and prayer. There is a regular and scheduled programme of liturgies and Masses appropriate for the age and culture of participants. During the weekly assembly, the whole school is invited to reflect on the upcoming Sunday Gospel. Tamariki have the opportunity to take on a leadership

role by organising these liturgies. The previous DRS instilled in the tamariki, the sacredness and stillness in prayer and the impact of this is clearly demonstrated by their reverent and respectful behaviour during prayer, Mass and special liturgies.

Despite a considerable financial expense, the school transports the tamariki by bus at least twice a term to St Michael's Parish Church located 3.6kms from the school's location. The board and tumuaki consider this matter of great importance and work hard to budget the necessary funds to ensure that each class has the opportunity to attend a Thursday parish Mass.

As an alternative solution, the school has refurbished a classroom in a central part of the school as a designated sacred space. Inside the room is a beautiful consecrated wooden altar, lectern, tabernacle, crucifix, celebrant chair, sanctuary lamp, religious pictures and candles. These religious items were originally from the Chapel in the Mercy Sisters' Convent which was situated next door to the school and were gifted to the school by the Mercy Sisters before their departure from the area. They are now considered as a significant reminder of the history of the religious order and that staff and tamariki will utilise this sacred space for personal and quiet reflection as well as a space to hold small group Masses and liturgies.

All staff including support staff, are positive role models who uphold and witness the school's Catholic special character. Tamariki have the opportunity to encounter Christ through the Charism of Catherine McAuley. They understand the vision of *'service to the poor, sick and uneducated, to reveal the mercy of God in our world'*. The school's values STAR: Service, Tika, Aroha and Respect, are clearly sourced from the Gospels and have been the focus of self-review over the last few years. These values are taught, modelled and promoted in displays throughout the school.

A number of displays and symbols, including those significant for Māori, provide witness to the Catholic special character of the school. This has also included tamariki and kaiako taking the opportunity to understand wairuatanga Māori. All these opportunities to encounter Christ are readily evident in the school and are well embraced by tamariki, kaiako and whānau.

2. Evangelisation

The school actively shares the mission and Gospel of Jesus Christ with its community in a variety of ways. Transition and orientation programs help new members understand what it means to be part of a Catholic community. Pre-school tamariki are invited to visit the school on Thursday afternoons as needed. Seniors warmly welcome junior tamariki and new members. New kaiako quickly adapt to the school's Catholic culture and expressed that they feel like part of the family, and are supported by a foundation course for teachers new to Catholic schools.

"The supportiveness here is amazing. I was ready to leave teaching at the end of last year but I came here. It's so supportive here. We share great ideas. It has renewed my Faith journey. I feel I have come home, I have found my place." (New kaiako this year)

St Michael's school and parish collaborate to encourage tamariki and their whānau to engage in parish life, such as Sacraments of Initiation and ongoing faith programmes and some parents

willingly join the programmes alongside their tamariki. The school invites them to begin and continue their sacramental faith journey, often inspired by their school experiences and events. The tumuaki and a former DRS have taught the Sacrament of Initiation Programme, while two staff members taught the Baptism program last year. This year, the tumuaki will be teaching the programme in August.

The parish's commitment to evangelisation is evident in the active involvement of its members with the school. The parish priest is keen to say Mass twice a term in the school hall, and the parish Deacon is eager to support class liturgies in the school's Chapel. Additionally a parishioner has offered to share their spiritual journey with the children. A parish couple lead tamariki in joyful singing sessions and help prepare them to perform at a local retirement village.

There is a strong desire to help reduce barriers which prevent tamariki from participating in the Sacrament of Initiation programme to be held at St Michael's. The goal is to address community challenges to make Baptism more accessible for tamariki and to enhance whānau engagement in their children's faith journey. There is also a wishful hope to celebrate this faith journey with, and in their parish church of St Michael's where the parish connection would feel more meaningful to the whānau and tamariki and less of a challenge and burden for many of the families to travel to join the larger combined group at St Mary's parish.

The school has some wonderful initiatives to engage both tamariki and their whānau in their faith journey. Liturgical and significant feast day events are celebrated with enthusiasm and community spirit. The school's annual school production is extremely impressive and involves the whole school with the support from a number of volunteers from the community. The production not only provides a platform to showcase the talents and efforts of all tamariki, but also provides a unique and meaningful way to demonstrate the core values of the Gospels and charism. The combination of daily faith practices and special community events, create a rich and supportive environment for them to encounter and experience Christ.

The school newsletter facilitates encounters with Christ and provides opportunity to spread the Good News. It offers sections for whānau and tamariki to reflect on the Gospel, enhancing their understanding of Catholic teachings. Additionally, the school's website, Facebook page, and other communication platforms, promote evangelization, integrating faith, culture and life.

3. Faith-based Leadership

Faith-based leadership shapes the school's vision and direction. There is a new feeling of trust and respect in the school since the present tumuaki has taken up the leadership over the last few years. The Parish priest commented...

"She is a very good Catholic and to me that is a very important thing." (Parish priest)

There is a genuine and supportive closeness amongst all the staff, including the support staff, which results directly from the examples and core Gospel values demonstrated by the leadership team. The tumuaki and tumuaki tuarua are passionate and committed to their roles as leaders of faith and are currently sharing the DRS role until a new DRS is appointed later in the year. Together they provide authentic examples of Jesus' servant leadership which are witnessed by the school community. They both confidently and competently lead the Catholic

special character as well as articulating their own faith. Each is committed to their own ongoing faith formation and are currently on their way to advance their certification and qualification levels.

Both the tumuaki and tumuaki tuarua work collaboratively to inspire, empower and nurture faith in others and encourage faith-based leadership from all. They understand the need to provide opportunities for kaiako in special character positions (*Schedule 6, Clause 47 Education and Training Act, 2020*) to deepen knowledge and understanding of their Catholic faith-based leadership role and capabilities.

Next Steps for Development

- Collaborate with the new parish priest, Father Prakash, to reduce barriers hindering tamariki from participating in the Sacrament of Initiation program at St Michael's. By addressing unique community challenges, aim to increase the accessibility and participation of tamariki who wish to be baptised.
- Integrate tikanga Māori, te reo Māori and Māori expressions of Katorikatanga into all aspects of Catholic special character at St Michael's. This includes incorporating these elements into Masses, liturgies, retreats, and prayer to enrich cultural understanding and spiritual connection among tamariki and the wider school community.

Dimension 2: Growth through Education: Growth in Knowledge

How effectively does the school assist its community to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ, his teachings, and the Catholic Church?

1. Leadership

The tumuaki and tumuaki tuarua (shared acting DRS) provide exemplary leadership in the studying of the papers for the Certificate in Religious Studies. At present, they are exhibiting effective leadership in the religious education curriculum and observances. As mentioned, there is a plan to appoint a DRS later in the year. The leadership team collaborates to ensure that there is regular teacher development in religious education and Catholic special character. Together, they lead the basis of the planning and facilitate the structure for the following term.

The tumuaki, DRS and Board are working to implement the principles of *Ka Hikitia*. These principles have been pivotal in setting a framework for the school's commitment to Māori education success, emphasising Māori identity, language, and culture. *Teaching and Leading to the North-East* pedagogy has been a focus to empower school leaders to advocate for and implement bicultural practices across the school. To assist with this they have worked alongside the Māori Achievement Collaborative.

This initiative has provided valuable insights and strategies to improve Māori student achievement and integrate Māori perspectives into teaching practices. While the school has an increased multicultural essence, kaiako have used *Tātaiako* to help develop cultural competencies necessary for effective teaching and learning relationships with Māori tamariki in particular.

Tamariki are given the opportunity to develop faith, leadership knowledge, skills and experience. They do this by leading prayer at assemblies and readings at Mass. In the senior school there is an opportunity to be a House Leader of one of the four Houses named after significant people associated with the school. There is also a Special Character Leader who organises and facilitates special character initiatives, and shows leadership when involved with Young Vinnies.

2. Religious Education

Kaiako express that they have effective systems in place that support teaching and learning in Religious Education including the access to an abundance of resources. The leadership team is guiding the introduction and implementation of the new nationally mandated Religious Education Curriculum, '*Tō Tātou Whakapono Our Faith*' and are very aware that time is needed to become familiar with the complexities associated with navigating the programme through its website and various links. A number of resources from *Faith Alive* are used to support the transition. This learning forms a foundation for their integrated cross-curricular planning and systems are in place to ensure religious education achievement objectives are effectively addressed.

The leadership team is well aware of the need to ensure that adequate time is provided to ensure the integrity of the curriculum. Whānau are informed regularly of the content and emphasis of the religious education programme through the newsletter and Seesaw App which also provides direct communication between kaiako and parents regarding tamariki's progress.

Tamariki value religious education and see the connection between their faith and life, and faith and culture. Te ao, tikanga and te reo, mātauranga, and wairuatanga Māori are valued and are beginning to be incorporated as an integral part of the religious education classroom. Kaiako have begun a professional development journey in tikanga Māori and te reo Māori to strengthen culturally responsive teaching practices in Religious Education. The approaches followed have come from *Niho Taniwha* and *Teaching to the North East*. Kaiako incorporate wairuatanga Māori into their teaching of religious education and spirituality.

Religious education kaiako participate in regular Catholic special character professional learning and formation which is recorded for certification purposes. These take the form of staff meetings led by the tumuaki and tumuaki tuarua. Kaiako of religious education are encouraged to become qualified in religious education and are working towards certification levels appropriate to their length of service in Catholic education. This information is shared with diocesan offices annually for certification purposes. The school makes use of Catholic education advisory services to assist with this professional learning.

Planning, assessment, evaluation, and reporting procedures are a work in progress that will be guided by the direction of the new curriculum. At present, tamariki progress reports inform whānau of involvement in Catholic special character and achievement in religious education.

3. Catholic Curriculum

The school, as an authentic Catholic community, demonstrates a strong commitment to educate a deeper understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its principles of protection, partnership, and

participation. This is especially shown through the localised curriculum which includes comprehensive lessons on the history of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, detailing the events leading up to its signing, its contents, and its implications for New Zealand society.

Alongside this, tamariki are learning about the local iwi and hapū associated with the school's region, understanding their unique histories and connections to the Treaty. This commitment is further exemplified through the school offering regular te reo Māori classes for all tamariki, promoting language proficiency and appreciation of Māori culture.

Kaiako new to Catholic schools receive ongoing support to enable them to understand the Catholic special character of the school and to effectively integrate a Catholic perspective across the curriculum. Experienced kaiako work closely alongside new kaiako as they build confidence in the programme. New kaiako also have the opportunity to do the introductory religious education papers.

The school develops tamariki awareness of their responsibilities as global citizens as well as citizens of Aotearoa, New Zealand. The school encompasses Caritas involvement and educational materials to deepen tamariki' understanding of social justice through a Gospel lens. This holistic approach not only enriches their academic experience but also cultivates compassion and a sense of responsibility towards the community. The tangible impact seen in their service programmes outside the school is a testament to the effectiveness of this integration. One parent put it this way:

"I chose this school to get my fella on the right path - there's a lot of meanness out there in the world. I want to teach him to be as humble as possible." (Parent)

The integrated curriculum includes the teachings of Christ and the Catholic faith across all subjects, with the aim of showing tamariki the relevance and interconnectedness of faith with various areas of knowledge and life experiences. Aspects of the new religious education curriculum, Tō Tātou Whakaponu - Our Faith, are integrated into the term inquiry, along with the school's values. Kaiako are developing an understanding of mātauranga Māori and are using this knowledge as they integrate it into the curriculum.

Next Steps for Development

- Foster and strengthen partnerships with whānau, iwi, parish community, and the founding order, the Mercy Sisters. Collaborate on initiatives that promote social justice, community outreach, and the Catholic ethos within the broader community.

Dimension 3: Te Whakaatu Karaitiana-Christian Witness

How effectively does the school provide a hope-filled Christian witness which empowers its community members to integrate their faith and their life?

1. Catholic School Community

Many whānau spoken to by the evaluators expressed their experience of the deep aroha present in the school. They felt that the kaiako really knew their tamariki well and related to them on a personal and caring level.

“The principal is the heartbeat of the school. She loves our kids and they love her. She knows what’s going on in our world and really cares about us. The whole staff cares, they are amazing and that’s why we love this school.” (Parent)

The school, as an authentic Catholic community, demonstrates a strong understanding of commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its principles of protection, partnership, and participation. Opportunities are taken to authentically consult with its Māori community including mana whenua Ngati Whakaue.

The school is characterised by warm relationships at all levels, friendly communications, active listening, and a strong sense of community. There appears to be an impressive respect among all the different ethnic groups represented. Great attention is paid to developing an understanding of the cultural background of every tamariki including Māori, honouring the identity, language, knowledge, and values of each of the cultures present. Whānau feel greatly valued, irrespective of their culture. A number of whānau stated that they felt included and appreciated that their culture was acknowledged and in numerous ways.

“..we pride ourselves on following the example of Jesus Christ. This is seen most clearly through the way our students treat one another and the respect they show others. Our students are known throughout Rotorua for their caring dispositions.” (Prospectus)

The school and parish work collaboratively to promote the involvement of tamariki and their whānau in parish life, fostering relationships that exemplify Christian witness. As mentioned earlier, many parishioners volunteer their skills at the school to share their faith and commitment and the school participates in parish celebrations of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist.

The Mercy Charism of Catherine McAuley is actively promoted as one of the key lenses through which the school's Catholic identity and commitment to Jesus Christ is made visible. Although the distance to the main parish church can be a barrier for some whānau in their preparation programmes, the parish priests are invited to play an integral role in school life and take opportunities to be involved in school activities when possible.

“We are a proud Mercy school and although we struggle to keep connections with our founding order, the children know all about our Mercy charism and founder Catherine McAuley” (Tumuaki)

2. Partnership and Collaboration

St Michael's has very effectively connected with several significant groups in the local community. Prime among these is the developing relationship with St Michael's parish. The tumuaki participates in Parish Council meetings when invited. There is a great relationship with Māori parishioners at St Michael's parish, who are included and welcomed at school events. The parish priests are invited to school events and special occasions. The current parish priest, Father Thomas, is very supportive of the school and warmly welcomes opportunities to be involved. There is anticipation that this relationship will be further built upon with the newly appointed parish priest.

A positive interactive relationship has been developed with St Mary's Catholic Primary School, located in the centre of the city. Tamariki interviewed spoke enthusiastically of the opportunity to interact with the 'St Mary's kids' in sporting activities, chess competitions, significant liturgy celebrations, and Masses.

"...this interaction with St Mary's is great and it has created a welcomed assurance that their children will be familiar with some of the St Mary's students when they move on to John Paul College in the future". (Parent)

The collaboration with the Faith-based Kahui Ako has fostered a strong relationship with Catholic schools in both Tauranga and Rotorua, particularly with John Paul College. This connection facilitates smooth transitions for tamariki, ensuring a seamless experience.

The shared Learning Support Coordinator (LSC) plays a crucial role in maintaining open communication between the schools. Additionally, the senior leadership team regularly visits local Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres, focusing on two Christian-based centres. These centres are invited to fun days with the junior school, the end-of-year production, and junior students visit to read to the preschoolers.

The tumuaki is a highly respected member of the Hamilton Catholic Principal's Executive and attends all meetings, retreats and professional learning when offered. She is also an active member in the Rotorua Principals Association which helps strengthen local relationships.

The tumuaki and tumuaki tuarua regularly attend and contribute to the discussions at the diocesan DRS days scheduled at least once a term. They value the opportunity to network and share their ideas and experiences alongside the other Directors of Religious Studies from other Catholic schools across the diocese, regarding leading religious education and special character.

3. Pastoral Care

St Michael's Catholic School goes to great lengths to ensure that education occurs in a safe, nurturing environment. Pastoral care is a deeply ingrained aspect of the school's culture.

Regular check-ins, flexible work options, and recognition of achievements are playing a crucial role in maintaining a positive and healthy work culture. One kaiako summed up the impact

“Through recognition, mentorship support and a healthy work-life balance, a collaborative school culture has been created.” (Kaiako)

The school welcomes tamariki with a diversity of ability and learning needs and provides appropriate assistance and programmes to enable them to fulfill their potential. All teaching assistants work exceptionally well together to support struggling students. The teacher assistants spoken to by the evaluation team valued the way they each worked strongly together and they felt respected and valued by the tumuaki and kaiako.

The school's dedication is especially evident in their efforts to support tamariki transferring from other schools who may be facing life challenges. Kaiako demonstrates a personal knowledge of tamariki, fostering a genuine sense of respect and aroha where students feel cared for and supported. Intensive work is undertaken to help these students integrate and adapt to the “St Michael's way”. The mana and tapu of each individual tamariki are acknowledged and upheld as they learn to take responsibility for their own behaviour. This strong connection is frequently highlighted by parents.

“I am all in praise of this school. I love it when I drop my kid off and the other kids know his name.” (Parent)

There are clear and consistent behavioral expectations for students, alongside positive reinforcement strategies to reward good behavior. Restorative justice practices are used to resolve any conflicts and promote understanding, providing opportunities for students to reflect on their behavior and its impact on others. Structured disciplinary actions ensure that consequences for any negative behavior are fair, consistent, and known to all tamariki. Whānau are included in behaviour management processes where appropriate to support positive changes at home and school.

The school's Office manager knows the families well, and provides a welcoming face to all those entering the school with a positive and cheerful energy. The school has a system for working with its parish and whānau to identify those in need and are given necessary support whenever possible. Provision of food items is one of the many practical ways the school responds to families who may need extra support. For a number of years, a volunteer associated with the school, collects leftover food items from a local bakery each Tuesday afternoon, repackages the items into assorted lots, ready to redistribute them from the school the following morning. Members of the community are encouraged to help themselves to take whatever amount they may need.

4. Service and Outreach

The school truly embraces the Christian call to take care of others and to work for justice and equality. It has sometimes been described as ‘a small school with a big heart’ to summarise their involvement in the area of outreach, school and community events. ‘Community’ and ‘fun’

are two key elements of St Michael's and each term a variety of community events are organised to bring everyone together to make the school a fun place for all learners.

The school has a very dedicated group of tamariki, led by the student leader of special character, who enjoy working with the school's gardener in the school's community vegetable garden. Produce from the garden is donated to the St Vincent de Paul Society or the St John's Foodbank. The school's outreach also includes a singing group led by a volunteer parishioner and his wife. They plan to attend a variety of Rotorua community events this year and the group is a significant part of outreach to the elderly.

"We help the elderly and we have different groups that go out and sing to them" (Tamariki)

There is a wide variety of fun, community events to ensure the entire school community can celebrate together, such as St Patrick's day cake stall and parade, Grandparents' day, mini marathons, pancake breakfasts, rice day, Bible reading and speech competitions, leavers' luncheons, St Michael's and feast days, Māori Language week and Matariki celebrations.

This holistic approach helps tamariki at the school internalise the values of compassion, justice, and service, rooted in the teachings of the Gospel. It fosters a community where each child is assisted in understanding and learning in promoting justice and equality, guided by strong Catholic principles and real-life role models.

Dimension 4: Te Kaitiakitanga me te Whakapakari I te Tuakiri Katorika - Safeguarding and Strengthening Catholic Special Character

The Board of Trustees and Senior Leadership Team ensure that the vision and strategic direction for the school clearly and openly reflects the Catholic Character and strives for excellence in educational delivery. This is evident in the school's strategic plan.

There is a very good and respectful working relationship between the Board Presiding Member and the tumuaki, with regular meetings held between the Board meetings. Both are clearly committed to excellence and the special character of the School.

“...the Board members are highly engaged, skilled and are strongly supportive of the Catholic special character of the school. (Presiding Member)

The Board and staff have undergone significant professional development to refine the values of the school. The Board recognises that the school is parish based and while physically distanced from the parish church, full school Masses are held at St Michael's Church.

Legal Obligations

The school meets all its legal obligations with respect to safeguarding, staffing, working within the maximum roll and preference and non-preference limits.

The school has submitted to the Proprietor the annual attestation document covering off the compliance requirements. The 2023 Proprietor's Appointee Report has been received by and responded to by Bishop Richard Laurenson.

Staffing

Based on the current curriculum and leadership staffing level of 6.8 the school is required to have four special character positions. These positions are that of the tumuaki, Director of Religious Studies (still to be appointed) and two classroom kaiako. The school will later advertise for another special character teacher to start in term one 2025.

In reviewing the letters of appointment for permanent teaching staff, it was noted that the letters explicitly state if the position was tagged Special Character or not, under *Schedule 6, Clause 47 of the Education and Training Act 2022*. A record of special character staff is readily available and the Diocese is notified each year of the number of special character positions filled or vacant by way of the Annual Compliance Report.

The tumuaki has a welcoming induction programme for all new staff. It covers the expectations and responsibilities around special character. New kaiako are buddied with more experienced kaiako

All permanent teaching vacancies are advertised within the guidelines as stated in the Education and Training Act 2020. The Proprietor, through his appointees, is represented in all permanent teacher appointments.

The school has a strength in giving support to continue building the knowledge in and faith capacity of all kaiako who teach the Religious Education Curriculum. Kaiako are given time to complete assessments when required.

Enrolment

The school meets its compliance requirements with regards to preference and non-preference pupils. A record is kept of the enrolment status of tamariki as to what preference criteria they are enrolled under or whether they are non-preference. All records are easily accessible through the tumuaki's executive assistant. If students are baptised or received into the Church while attending the school, the records on the student management system are updated.

Catholic Character

The Board of Trustees is truly clear about its obligations around Catholic Character and view responsibilities through a Catholic lens. (Soon to be applied to policies see opportunity below)

The annual budget reflects the commitment to special character with money allocated for curriculum resourcing and development and an allocation for staff professional development opportunities. This year a number of staff were given the opportunity to attend the New Zealand Catholic Education Conference in Wellington.

Special Character is a standing item on the Board meeting Agenda and is at present reported on by the tumuaki in their Board report. The DRS will have a role in this reporting when they are appointed later in the year. Board members are rostered to open and close Board meetings with a prayer. A formal self-review process of the special character is not yet in place but a willingness to do so was shared between representatives of the Board and Leadership.

All school promotional material reflects the Catholic identity of the school. The school has an excellent and informative Prospectus which clearly outlines the expectations of learning, teaching and being involved in a Catholic school. The Prospectus also expresses the strengths and aspirations the school has worked hard to develop and is proud of.

Policies

All Board of Trustees policies are reviewed as part of the Board's 3-year review cycle. While the school uses School Docs as the basis of its policies, there is a plan to look at and use the Catholic versions to help guide the review of Policies. The intention is to adapt them to reflect the Catholic ethos and Special Character of the school.

Health & Sexuality Education

The school has a clear Health Education implementation plan that aligns with the teachings of the Catholic Church. There are plans to develop a framework as part of the localised curriculum

design to integrate sexuality education into the learning program as guided by the Framing Document for Human Sexuality. The school has conducted effective and culturally appropriate consultation with whānau on this Curriculum in 2023. There has been a comprehensive analysis of the results of the consultation. The importance of the parent evening was highlighted as well as giving parents the opportunity to withdraw was well received.

Next Steps for Development

- Develop a comprehensive induction program for new Board members and staff that emphasises safeguarding practices and aligns with the school's mission and values.
- As the Board reviews policies there is an opportunity to ensure that each policy in School Docs is viewed through a Catholic lens.

Recommendations

- Appoint a Director of Religious Studies (DRS) for 2025 who will provide strategic leadership in enhancing the RE curriculum and fostering spiritual growth among students and staff.
- As knowledge of the new religious education curriculum *Tō Tātou Whakapono Our Faith* is built, the intention is to align planning, assessment, evaluation, and reporting in RE with other learning areas. Ensure the use of high-quality, valid data to monitor and improve student learning and achievement in religious studies.
- Ensure the Board's budget prioritises professional learning and formation opportunities for staff and Board members, including the spiritual development of the DRS and principal, to enhance leadership and governance in promoting the school's Catholic identity and mission.
- Although there is already self-evaluation happening among the staff on one Dimension per year, it is recommended that this be expanded to include tamariki, Board, whānau and parish personnel. [Link to NZCEO Ex 1 Ex 2 Ex 3 Blank](#)

The evaluation team is confident that the tumuaki has the willingness and ability to address these recommendations fully before the next external evaluation. The Catholic Education Office staff are available to assist the tumuaki, Board and kaiako in compiling an action plan to address these recommendations.

The evaluation team warmly thanks the community of St Michael's Catholic School for the welcome, hospitality and cooperation extended to them and for the opportunity to experience first hand the way that they safeguard and strengthen their Catholic special character. The organisation and preparation for the external evaluation by the school is greatly appreciated.

Terry Consedine
Lead reviewer

Dianne Porter
Assistant Reviewer

Wendy Consedine
Assistant Reviewer

N.B. This report will be shared with NZCEO and the Hamilton Diocesan Schools Council.