

REPORT ON THE REVIEW VISIT TO ST BERNARD'S COLLEGE, LOWER HUTT.

All schools are required to develop a strategic plan, maintain a programme of self-review and report to the community. In Catholic Schools this plan must include provision for the maintenance and development of the Catholic Special Character. The self-review of Catholic Special Character is carried out over three years considering the following three key dimensions and there is a visit by an external reviewer during this cycle.

Dimension

Focus

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.

Spirituality
Evangelisation
Partnership
Values
School Culture
Leadership
Stewardship
Worship
Service
Collaboration with Parish

PASTORAL CARE

Manaakitanga

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

Relationships
Safety
Behaviour Management
Cultural Awareness
Organisation

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Te Whakaakoranga Whakapono

The extent to which the school helps to fulfil the teaching of the mission of the Church, by living the teaching the values of Jesus Christ

Leadership
Religious Education Curriculum
Integrated Curriculum
Resources
Professional Development
Communication

St Bernard's College, Lower Hutt is a Catholic secondary school for boys – Y7-13 and is under the proprietorship of the Archbishop of Wellington. The college was begun by the Marist Brothers and continues its founding charism today.

CATHOLIC COMMUNITY – Te Iwi Whanui Katorika

St Bernard's College presents a strong sense of Catholicity and being Marist through the practice and physical amenities of the school. The values and traditions are sincerely and explicitly led and nurtured by the Principal who leads a committed team which works to ensure that every opportunity is taken to enhance the Catholic Special Character.

Spirituality

The college has a chapel which is sighted on the way to the gymnasium and Y7 & 8 classrooms and therefore is very visible and accessible to all. It provides a focus for some of the prayer life and is used for class Masses and available for students to use for visits and prayer during lunchtimes.

The school celebrates full school Masses every term. Special occasions are also noted with a full school Mass e.g. Dedication Mass, Feast of Marcellin Champagnat and St Bernard. Special liturgies are also very much part of the life of the college and it is notable that each Daily Notice sheet has a prayer and/or reflection as the first entry. Form classes meet together to begin the day and that meeting is characterised with prayer.

A new Chaplain has been appointed this year and is working to familiarise himself with his role. He is committed to enhancing the opportunities for the students and is being supported by the Principal and DRS (Director of Religious Studies).

Evangelisation

Students and staff of St Bernard's are encouraged to live out their faith by example. This is very evident in daily activities – one being the respect that staff and students have for each other. The noticeable and commendable intervention of the slightest hint of disruptive behaviour in the quietest and yet most effective way is a clear example of this.

New staff and students at the college have relevant and substantial inductions into the Catholic character and Marist charism. There is also commitment to the special character shown in the bi-annual special character day for staff and Board of Trustees members together.

Retreats are arranged for all and it is noteworthy that old boys who have left the college recently take time out of studies etc. to assist in the running of retreats for current students.

Partnership

Both the Board and Trustees and the Parents and Friends Support group display a really strong partnership with the college. The college is clearly Catholic and Marist and the parents really appreciate this. Parents and visitors are welcomed to the college and spoke warmly of this aspect of life at St Bernard's.

The college prospectus and information pack for prospective employees are clear in the special character goals and expectations. The principal's newsletter is also focused with major input related specifically to special character.

Professional development is strong and a number of special initiatives have and are being implemented to continue to raise standards.

Values

Gospel values are clearly articulated and lived out in the way relationships are fostered. Loyalty and respect are clear. Excellence in learning is a clear goal and results are impressive. The College was the second highest performing school in the Hutt Valley in the national scholarship examinations in 2006 which is a clear indicator of the work being done towards academic achievement. Another strategy that would assist with the excellence in the school would be striving for consistency in approach in all classrooms e.g. information for students in all classes and subjects about the goal for the class for the period along with the tasks to be covered and the way in which students can assess whether they have achieved the lesson objective.

The quality and variety of student work displayed in classrooms is impressive and there are a number of procedures that are observed across the school such as the use of 'praise' comments and classroom entry and exit procedures.

School Culture

The culture of the school is clear – Catholic and Marist. There is a strong respect for the environment which is kept in good repair. Students are encouraged, and are predominantly successful, to keep the environment clean and welcoming.

There is a strong pride in being 'Bernard's Men'. The values tie into this aspect of school culture.

Leadership

Research indicates that the quality of the leadership influences an institution more than anything else. It is crucial that the principal of a school is clearly the leader. Leadership styles will vary and St Bernard's Principal works with his strong Senior Management Team in an impressive manner which shows that there is great trust and professionalism in the group. He works with staff to ensure that the school is Catholic and Marist and, in this, is most successful. He is working at building a supportive and productive relationship with the newly appointed Chaplain.

Student leadership opportunities are many and varied, providing most worthwhile opportunities for students. These are from the traditional leadership roles of head and deputy head boy through the range of areas including special character, sport, music and culture.

The college is strong in sport and it is noteworthy that the moral issues about suitable team membership and correct grades are supported and carried through.

Stewardship

There are clear statements relating to special character in promotional material. Prospective employees also are involved in discussion and, at interview, specific issues related to special character are addressed.

Old boys of the college are committed and strongly support the school in a number of ways, including the delivery of retreat days to current students. Many sons of past students are enrolled at the school.

There are clear and specific threads drawn across the curricula areas and all subject management documents have specific ways noted in which special character is to be implemented into teaching. This is expected to be reported upon in annual department reports.

Prayer and Worship

As mentioned earlier, Masses, liturgies and assemblies are clear indications of prayer and worship being important in the life of the college. Bi-cultural and multi-cultural elements of the college are brought into these most successfully. The newly appointed Chaplain's role is developing and the staff are generous in their involvement in planning and taking part.

Service

Service is carried out in many ways. A strong example of this is the Young Vinnies group which is strong and takes every opportunity to promote service and social justice activities. An Amnesty International group is being formed and the school is always well represented in street collections for many charities.

Collaboration with Parish

Work is carried out with parishes which, in secondary schools, create more of a challenge as there are always a number of parishes to be included. Parish priests are invited to major celebrations and functions. The Chaplain intends taking youth to contributing parishes.

Contributing Primary School relationships are well developed.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

1. That the self review as set out in the Catholic Special Character Review and Development be formalised to concentrate, as a school, on the dimensions over three years. A process which involves staff, board and parents should provide goals which then become part of the annual plan.
2. That teachers who are newly employed and have not taught in a Catholic school previously are encouraged to attend the 'Teachers New to Catholic Schools' course which is provided by the Archdiocese.

Opportunities for DEVELOPMENT

1. That more visible signs of the Marist charism and values are made visible in classrooms, corridors etc.
2. That while many teachers do this, all teachers work to ensure that there is consistency in having expectations for each period of teaching clearly identified in front of students. The outcome, the tasks and the way assessment as to whether the outcome has been achieved should be available for all to see.
3. That prayer focus is accentuated in form rooms. This could be achieved by having a focus. Perhaps a candle to be lit during form class prayer could be set up on a side table together with some other indicator of Catholic or Marist tradition. It would be good to introduce the colour which represents the liturgical season of the year as part of the focus.
4. That a specific induction for International students is developed.

PASTORAL CARE – Manaakitanga

Pastoral Care is a real strength at St Bernard's College. Students are supported by a highly effective, sensitive and organised Pastoral Care Network which constantly reviews its practices in the interests of all.

Relationships

Relationships are the key for the students and staff. Respect is clearly the key for all relationships between those at the school – students and staff. There is also great recognition of people and a sense of celebration prevails. Parents with whom we spoke were impressed that staff give contact details and are prepared to be emailed and rung to discuss parent concerns.

The Director of Pastoral Care, the counsellor, the learning support co-ordinator, the careers advisor and deans work well together. The form teachers also take a key role in the welfare of the students.

Safety

The work done toward ensuring that St Bernard's is a safe place is impressive. Promotion of the 'It's OK to tell' programme has been most successful.

There is a very quick turn-around of issues reported to anyone in the team and parents report that they are very satisfied with the responses and follow up.

Behaviour Management

This is impressive and, as mentioned previously, early and sensitive intervention is well handled. The introduction of 'Restorative Justice' is being considered.

Cultural Awareness

There is great sensitivity shown to cultural awareness and inclusive behaviour is evident.

Organisation

The organisation of Pastoral Care at the college is thorough. The members of the team meet regularly and constantly review their processes.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – Te Whakaakoranga Whakapono

The Religious Education department is impressive. The DRS (Director of Religious Studies) is committed and has developed a management document, lesson plans and recourses which are 'user friendly'.

Leadership

The effective DRS is supported by her Principal who is committed and clear is the responsibility that he has as leader of a Catholic school.

Most of the teachers of Religious Studies teach other subjects and appraisal of these teachers is done on rotational basis. The HOD of the other department in which the teacher is involved carries out the full appraisal and the DRS makes some lesson observations. On the alternate year the DRS carries out the full appraisal and the HOD of the other subject doing some observations. On each occasion the HOD/DRS carrying out the observations wrote notes which were discussed with the teacher and filed with the other appraisal material.

The department has fewer teachers this year and more of a 'specialisation' focus. They meet regularly to discuss professional issues and update resources.

The Y7&8 Religious Education programme is led by a Y7&8 teacher who communicates regularly with the DRS.

Religious Education Curriculum

The curriculum is well covered. Unit Standards are available – Y10 cover two units, Y11-13 cover four units. Teachers' resources are very good with plans and resources available on the computer along with a good supply of text books.

Y13 has two full classes studying Religious Studies. Two further groups join Y12 – this has been done to accommodate the other curriculum options that Y13 students wished to study.

From time to time visiting speakers are invited into RE classes. While visiting speakers can bring both variety and the opportunity for informed discussion it is important that they are introduced with the full knowledge of the DRS and Senior Management.

Integrated Curriculum

All subject curriculum documents incorporate Catholic teaching and these are reported on in department annual reports. There are systems in place to support and monitor the Catholic perspective in the curriculum through regular reporting and appraisal

School policy ensures that the sexuality education component of the health curriculum is appropriate for the development of students and is taught in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Resources

The department is well resourced and staffing is allocated in discussion and agreement with the Principal. The school makes good use of the Catholic Advisory Services.

Professional Development

Local courses are well attended and teachers are in the process of achieving accreditation. Religious Studies teachers undertake regular PD.

The DRS is working to support the newly appointed Chaplain in his role and in his teaching in the department.

Communication

There is very good communication between department members and other staff..

Opportunities for DEVELOPMENT

1. That to improve parent knowledge of the curriculum and related issues, the DRS communicate with parents through an RE Newsletter. If this is not a separate communication then consideration could be given to this becoming part of the Principal's Newsletter.
2. That prayer at the beginning of Religious Education classes be reviewed to ensure that it is happening in all classes.

COMPLIANCE

Tagged Positions

There is an up-to-date record of tagged positions and those who hold them - the college has the correct number. It is interesting to note that 50% of the staff is Catholic.

There is care taken to ensure that the wording is correct when tagged positions are advertised and the board ensures that there is correct emphasis of acceptability at appointment of persons for tagged positions.

Preference and Non-Preference Students

An up-to date list is kept

Religious Education

Religious Education is well monitored through the Religious Education Sub-Committee.

General Board Policy and Practice

Committee structures and policies clearly involve Catholic and Marist Special Character.

There are practices in place to monitor Special Character – this is done through the Principal's report and the activities of the Special Character sub-committee which includes two Proprietor's representatives.

The Principal's appraisal includes a Special Character component.

Health Curriculum

The Health Curriculum is delivered in accordance with the Special Character. Parents are offered the opportunity to withdraw their sons from the Sexuality section of the health curriculum.

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

CATHOLIC COMMUNITY - Te Whakaakoranga Whakapono

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FINAL COMMENTS

St Bernard's College is overtly Catholic and Marist. The staff, led by its Principal, is working hard to enhance their Special Character. The three yearly cycle of self review of the three dimensions needs to be formalised so that there is clarity in how this will be carried out.

Parents should feel confident that the school is committed to having their sons succeed in their education and provides an environment which is conducive to good learning.

The remarks above commend many of the good things which are part of the practice and tradition of the school. It should be remembered that the examples mentioned are only a sample of what was observed.

It was a pleasure to be part of the St Bernard's community for the three days of the review visit, the welcome, hospitality and openness was much appreciated.

Collene Roche
20th June 2007