

**External Review of  
Catholic Special Character**

**REPORT ON  
ST PETER'S COLLEGE  
GORE**

**May 2007**

## **School Information**

**Name:** St Peter's College, Gore

**Address:** 121 Kakapo Street, Gore

**School Type:** Co-educational, secondary (Year 7 – 13)

**Decile:** 8

**Staffing Entitlement for 2007:** 30.8

**Required Tagged Positions:** 8 (plus Principal and Deputy Principal)

**Current Tagged Positions Vacant:** 0

**1 March 2007 Roll:** 368

**Maximum Roll:** 510

**Non-preference Maximum:** 5%

**Actual Non-preference on 1 March 2007:** 26

**Foreign Fee Paying Students:** 6

**Ethnic Composition:**

NZ European/Pakeha	88.5%
Maori	9%
Pacific	2%
Other	0.5%

**Board of Trustees Chairperson:** Andy Hunter

**Principal:** Martin Chamberlain

**Director of Religious Studies:** Rosalie Connors

**Chaplain:** Father Brian O'Neill

St Peter's College has an attached boarding hostel. The hostel is governed separately from the school by its own board, so it was not part of this review of Catholic Special Character.

## **Summary of Findings**

St Peter's College, Gore, proudly proclaims its Catholic Special Character in its documentation, environment and practice. The College is a faith community in which staff and senior students are expected to be exemplars of Christianity in action. Students of the school are provided with a wide range of opportunities for faith development and spiritual nourishment.

The College is actively developing understanding of the charisms of the founding religious orders.

The board of trustees is a dedicated group which recognises its critical role in maintaining the College's Catholic Special Character. Its members value the school's ethos and take justifiable pride in its achievements and reputation. The Principal provides a powerful model of faith and dedication to ensuring that St Peter's is an authentically Catholic school delivering quality education. In this mission, he is ably supported by a very competent Director of Religious Studies who is equally committed to the ongoing strengthening of the school's Catholic Special Character.

Throughout the school year there are many celebrations of liturgies, Masses and the sacrament of Reconciliation for the school. Students contribute to preparation and presentation of prayers and liturgies. A student Captain of Christian Service has a leadership role and is a member of the Liturgy Committee which puts much thought and careful planning into arranging liturgical events.

St Peter's is a welcoming and inclusive place. It has established strong, effective practice in pastoral care and student support structures. There is a desire to further biculturalism in St Peter's. A number of actions are being taken to move towards this. Students are made aware of social justice issues and St Peter's has a fine record of social justice involvement.

Religious Education is effectively delivered according to the national curriculum. This subject is integrated with other teaching areas and its principles underlie all activity within the school. Teachers of Religious Education have been active in pursuing opportunities for professional development and in this they are well supported by the board.

St Peter's College is authentically Catholic and is providing very competently for the faith formation of its students in collaboration with their families and the parishes served by the school.

Proposals for action from this review relate to reporting to the Proprietor, school documentation and professional development.

## **Aims of the Review:**

1. To enable St Peter's College to demonstrate that it effectively maintains, develops and promotes its Catholic Special Character and that it achieves acceptable standards in terms of the three Catholic Special Character dimensions:
  - Catholic Community
  - Pastoral Care
  - Religious Education
2. To provide an assurance to the Proprietor that the College is authentically Catholic
3. To ensure that the College, which is essentially the parish communities assisting parents to provide for the faith formation of their children, is doing this in a collaborative relationship

## **Review Personnel:**

Father Dan Cummings, Sharon Harvey, Brother Denis Turner, Pam Robertson

**Dates on Site:** 21 - 23 May 2007

**Review Process:** The review started with two of the reviewers meeting a member of the board of trustees, the Principal and the Director of Religious Studies (DRS) on 11 May 2007. The purpose of this meeting was to explain the review process, provide information and answer any questions. The Principal and DRS agreed to schedule the programme for the review.

The formal process began on Monday 21 May with the reviewers joining the staff for a time of prayer. Interviews and informal discussions with key College personnel followed during the week. These included the Chairperson, board of trustees members including the Proprietor's appointees, the Principal, the DRS, staff and students of the College. As the Chaplain was away from Gore during the review, he could not meet the review team. Instead he provided written comments about the work of the College. Parish Priests of local parishes served by the College and all staff members were given the opportunity to respond to a questionnaire about the Catholic Special Character review. Documentation provided by the College was examined and the reviewers visited classrooms, observed Religious Education lessons and attended a school assembly, a meeting of the College Liturgy Committee and a Senior Student Leaders' meeting.

The reviewers were warmly welcomed into the College and they appreciated the generous hospitality demonstrated by members of the College community. They would like to thank those who gave of their time, meeting the team and providing information relating to the aims of the review.

## **Catholic Special Character Dimensions**

### **Catholic Community**

*Spirituality* St Peter's College proudly proclaims its Catholic Special Character in its documentation, environment and practice. The College provides students with a wide range of opportunities for faith development and spiritual nourishment. There is a purpose-built chapel on the school site which is used for class Masses and liturgies and as a peaceful place where students may go for a quiet time.

Prayer begins the day in every classroom, with a prayer or reflection circulated by means of the Daily Notice. In addition, Religious Education classes include prayer and students are taught a variety of praying styles including formal prayers, meditation, contemplative prayer and prayer journaling. Liturgies and prayer times are included as part of school camp experiences and on other school trips.

Staff meetings and briefings always begin with a prayer or spiritual reflection. Each staff member takes a turn at preparing and leading this.

*Evangelisation* The College is a faith community in which staff and senior students are expected to be exemplars of Christianity in action. Among the school's student service positions are a Captain of Christian Service (who is also the student representative on the board of trustees) and a Captain of Student Services. At the weekly assembly, a prayer time or liturgy is led by senior students.

As with many Catholic schools, student commitment to Catholic practice outside the College setting is a challenge. An estimate given to the review team is that about 15% of the students would be regular Sunday Mass attendees.

The Catholic Special Character of St Peter's is emphasised in the physical setting with a number of icons, displays and prayer focus areas in public parts of the College, in the staff room and in classrooms.

The College is actively developing understanding of the charisms of the founding religious orders. This is a focal point through activities and growing awareness of staff.

*Partnership* Meetings attended by members of the review team demonstrated a collegial approach which includes staff, students and board of trustees members. Working relationships are strong and effective.

St Peter's links with the local Catholic primary school on several occasions each year. Catholic Schools Day is a highlight and for 2007 the schools celebrated their Mercy heritage by bringing the students together for a day of shared activities, culminating in the formation of a Mercy cross by those present gathering in a formation which was photographed from above. Virtually 100% of the students from St Mary's primary

school enrol at the College for their secondary education and Year 6 students are invited to the College's end of year assembly as part of their induction process.

An active Parent Teachers Friends Association supports the school by fund-raising and catering for school events.

The board of trustees is a dedicated group which recognises its critical role in maintaining the College's Catholic Special Character. Its members value the school's ethos and take justifiable pride in its achievements and reputation. It is noted that the board has not yet provided a compliance report to the Proprietor, but it has now been made aware of this requirement and will prepare an annual report.

*Values* St Peter's College is introduced in its prospectus as a school that prepares young people for life. Its first priority towards achieving this goal is stated as, "*We help students form Gospel Values through the example of teachers and senior students. Our students come to see that justice, compassion, family, integrity, and commitment all create better people.*"

The school has also developed a detailed statement of its Special Character values, highlighting values based on Gospel beliefs, with focus on a theme of love. The emphasis given to Gospel values centres around commitment, compassion, and community. The statement explains very clearly how these three elements are demonstrated at St Peter's.

*School Culture* The St Peter's College mission statement includes the expectation that "*The College provides a wide range of opportunities for each student to achieve success within a vibrant Catholic environment where gospel values are taught and practised*". The culture of the school supports this aspiration in terms of the relationships and the ethos observed by the review team.

*Leadership* The Principal provides a powerful model of faith and dedication to ensuring that St Peter's as an authentically Catholic school delivering quality education. He has a cogent vision for the school based on Christian life in action. Under his leadership, the Catholic Special Character of St Peter's is safeguarded in terms of its values, direction and outcomes for students.

In this mission, the Principal is ably supported by a very competent DRS who is equally committed to the ongoing strengthening of the school's Catholic Special Character. These two people form a most effective and collaborative leadership team, together ensuring that this school provides a fully Catholic learning environment.

*Stewardship* A notable number of staff members responded to the invitation to provide written input to the review of Catholic Special Character. They provided sincere and comprehensive comments about what working in a Catholic school means for them and about their own commitment to supporting the school's culture of Catholicity.

At each board meeting a very detailed report on Catholic Special Character and Religious Education is presented by the DRS. This enables the board to monitor the school's work in maintaining and promoting its Catholic focus. An indication of the board's faithfulness to this mission is the fair and adequate financial provision made in each annual budget for Catholic Special Character.

The board is interested in professional development provided for boards of Catholic schools and takes up opportunities as they are offered. The Principal, DRS, a board member and two students attended the national Catholic Schools Convention in 2006.

The application pack for teaching positions contains an exemplary statement on Special Character which includes key tasks and indicators. Also provided in the pack is a detailed information statement on the character of a Catholic school. Teachers' performance appraisals include one question about Special Character. This could be strengthened to include comment on the ways that teachers support and enhance this aspect of the school.

The difficulty of finding suitable appointees to tagged positions was discussed with the Principal and the board.

Staff induction is well organised. The induction manual begins with a welcome and a substantial statement on the school's Catholic Special Character and its ethos. It includes a clear declaration on what makes a Catholic school different from any other state school.

The Principal's job description has a section on Special Character requirements with a sound set of performance indicators.

In preparation for this review, staff members contributed to a thorough self-appraisal of the school's actions in terms of Catholic Special Character. This most comprehensive report was collated by the Principal and the DRS.

*Worship* Throughout the school year there are many celebrations of liturgies, Masses and the sacrament of Reconciliation. The year begins with a staff liturgy on a teacher only day. Each week there is a lunch-time Mass in the school chapel, with forms each taking a turn to prepare the liturgy. All staff and students are invited to be present at these Masses.

Students contribute to preparation and presentation of prayers and liturgies. A student Captain of Christian Service has a leadership role in the school and is a member of the Liturgy Committee which puts much thought and careful planning into arranging liturgical events.

An annual retreat experience is provided for each year level. The programme is well planned, showing a progression in the depth of reflection as students progress through the College. In discussion, students spoke with enthusiasm about their retreats and were appreciative of the efforts of staff members and the chaplain in presenting them.

*Service* Students are made aware of social justice issues and St Peter's has a fine record of social justice involvement. In the local area, student activities include visiting the elderly, collecting items for a food bank and taking responsibility for the environment. The school sponsors a child in Brazil. From an annual work day \$3,784 was allocated to charitable causes such as Caritas and the Child Cancer foundation. A Lenten project also raises funds for Caritas and recently a teacher and five students were enabled to attend the Caritas Festival of Global Concern in Australia.

*Collaboration with the Parish* Each of the Parish Priests of parishes served by the College was invited to provide comment on its work. Responses were universally positive, with particular appreciation of having the school newsletter available in the parishes and invitations to the priests to attend school events. Among the strengths noted were prayerful, well prepared Masses, parents' approval, the staff of the school, in particular the Principal and DRS and having a religious sister on the teaching staff.

The school's closest links are with the Gore parish of the Blessed Sacrament and school students provide music and readers for a fortnightly vigil Mass. The Parish Priest, who is also the Chaplain, is warmly supportive of the College. He has an excellent relationship with students and the DRS is grateful for his willingness to be involved in school activities and his encouragement of school initiatives.

The board is planning to further strengthen bonds with the parish by using the parish church for some school Masses.

## **Pastoral Care**

*Relationships* St Peter's is a welcoming and inclusive school. It has established a strong, effective model of pastoral care and student support structures. The reviewers observed friendly, positive interactions in the playground and classrooms. Students commented that in this school teachers are always ready to give a fresh start to anyone who has been in difficulty because of behaviour.

*Safety* A group of students have responsibility as peer mediators within the school. Any student with a concern is invited to talk it over with one of the identified mediators who have been trained in dealing with situations that may arise.

*Behaviour Management* Processes for behaviour management are well established and clearly understood by students. School and classroom rules are kept to a minimum. They emphasise respect and responsibility and set high expectations for student behaviour. The simple set of five rules is displayed in each classroom and is printed in student diaries.

*Cultural Awareness* There is a desire to further biculturalism in St Peter's and a number

of actions are being taken to move towards this. They include:

- a staff member having responsibility for initiating engagement with Māori families;
- promotion of biculturalism through liturgies;
- signage in te reo around the school;
- gradually bringing Māori elements into the fortnightly parish youth Mass;
- planning for delivery of a Māori spirituality programme as part of the Year 10 Religious Education curriculum; and
- initiating the establishment of a school bicultural committee.

The teacher who has taken responsibility for this project reports that many ideas for developing biculturalism are coming from the enthusiasm of students and staff.

*Organisation* Pastoral care is a key area of strength for St Peter's. Students feel supported by the school's processes and are aware of ways they can seek help or guidance if needed. Staff members have full guidelines about the implementation of pastoral care actions.

## **Religious Education**

*Leadership* Under the lead of the DRS, St Peter's has developed a very good policy and scheme of work for Religious Education at each Year level. Capable teachers have been appointed to deliver the programme and appropriate resources are made available to them. The Principal and the DRS work co-operatively to ensure that Religious Education is given appropriate priority within the school.

*Religious Education Curriculum* A sample of Religious Education classes was observed as part of the review. In all cases, the programme was seen to be effectively delivered according to the national curriculum. Teachers presented fully planned lessons with a great deal of student participation. Sound evaluation strategies were undertaken and useful records of student progress are maintained.

Each year a detailed evaluation of the Religious Education learning area is completed by the DRS. This gives a thoughtful analysis of the programme, reflections on its impact for students and consideration of changes for the following year.

Eight students are enrolled in a University of Otago Theology paper. This continues a practice of the previous four years. It is noted that to date the school has a 100% pass rate for this course.

*Integrated Curriculum* Religious Education is integrated across the curriculum and its principles underlie all activity within the school. In curriculum documents, however, the statements incorporating Catholic Special Character vary from good to non-existent. It is recommended that subject manuals and schemes be reviewed to ensure that this aspect of documentation matches the school's expectations.

St Peter's is part of the pilot scheme for the *Understanding Sexuality* programme. Three teachers have completed the course and are very positive about the programme.

*Resources* The recommended time allocations for Religious Education are followed at each year level. The DRS views the timetabling process as a fair one, with appropriate recognition given to priority for Religious Education.

*Professional Development* Teachers of Religious Education have been active in pursuing opportunities for professional development and in this they are well supported by the board. Of the six teachers with Religious Education responsibility, one (the DRS) has Level 2 accreditation. Two have completed the course time requirements for Level 2 but have not yet had this verified for accreditation. They should follow up on this matter so that their attainment can be recognised. One teacher has Level 1 accreditation and the two beginning teachers have started on the process of accreditation.

The DRS and a teacher are commended for this year undertaking University study relevant to Religious Education. The assistance given by the Catholic Education Office and the board of trustees towards course fees is appreciated by these teachers. Staff members with responsibility for Religious Education are encouraged to continue giving priority to relevant professional development activities and to advancing their Religious Education accreditation.

*Communication* Early in the school year a parents' meeting is held which includes an explanation of the Religious Education curriculum. Annually, parents are consulted about the relationships and sexuality programme. Students' progress in Religious Education is part of the school's reporting process.

School newsletters are very attractively presented and contain a wealth of information about the school, its activities and students' achievements. As an enhancement, it is suggested that consideration be given to including a spiritual element in each newsletter as part of the school's evangelisation role.

## **PROPOSALS FOR ACTION FROM THIS REVIEW**

### **Compliance Requirements**

The board of trustees has substantial and effective reporting processes in place. One additional requirement is the submission of an annual Special Character Compliance Report to the Proprietor. The format is provided in the *Catholic Special Character Review and Development* booklet.

### **Key Recommendations**

To enhance the very strong Catholic Special Character demonstrated by St Peter's College it is recommended that:

- teachers' performance appraisal documentation is reviewed so that it includes a specific focus on staff members' contribution to and support of the school's Catholic Special Character;
- teachers of Religious Education continue to pursue opportunities for professional development and for achieving accreditation in the teaching of this subject; and
- board of trustees members also continue to attend professional development events related to Catholic Special Character.

### **Opportunities for Development**

- The St Peter's College newsletters are very well presented. In the future, thought could be given to including a spiritual element in each newsletter.
- In discussion with the review team, school personnel identified a number of possible future developments for the school. These included:
  - further opportunities for students to be involved in social justice activities;
  - finding ways to continue to attract staff with a firm commitment to Catholic Special Character; and
  - further enhancing student learning about the school's history and its founding spirit.

### **Catholic Special Character Review Team - Dunedin Diocese**

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