

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

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*He Pūrongo Arotake Mātauranga  
Ahurea Katorika ā Waho.*

*Catholic Special Character  
External Evaluation Report*

*Aquinas College, Tauranga*

Evaluation conducted on 3 – 5 August 2022

Confirmed Report: 19 August 2022

### School Details

**Name of School:** Aquinas College  
**Address:** 183 Pyes Pa Rd, Tauranga 3173  
**School type:** State integrated, co-educational, Years 7-13  
**Actual roll:** 730  
**Maximum roll:** 750  
**Non-preference maximum:** 37 (5%)  
**Actual non-preference number:** 27  
**Required number of Special Character CI 47 positions:** 18  
**Filled number of Special Character CI 47 positions:** 18  
**Principal:** Mr Matt Dalton  
**Director of Religious Studies:** Mr Leon Roberson  
**Presiding Member, School Board:** Mr Steve McGregor  
**Parish Priest:** Fr Philip Billing (Tauranga)  
Fr Richard Laurensen ( Mt Maunganui)

### Student Numbers for each Preference Criteria

Preference Criteria	Number of students	% of Roll
5.1	604	83%
5.2	8	1%
5.3	61	8%
5.4	27	4%
5.5	4	Less 1%
Non Preference	27	1%
Totals	730	100%

**Evaluation Team:**

**Lead Evaluator:** Mrs Mary Cook

**Accompanying Evaluator:** Mr Terry Consedine

**Observer:** Mr John Coulam, Diocesan Manager for Education, Hamilton

### **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 rangatahi<sup>1</sup>. 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 Church<sup>2</sup>. 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.

### **Introduction**

Since the last review in 2018, a concerted effort has been made to ensure that all kaiako and rangatahi have the opportunity to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ every day. There has been a specific focus on developing the Graduate Profile and Intentional Discipleship Pathway. The intention behind this has been to focus on holistic education and to bring a Catholic character focus across every facet of Aquinas College.

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

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## **Progress with Recommendations from the 2018 Catholic Special Character Review for Development Report**

*1. That the workload of the Director of Special Character (DSC) be reviewed and brought in line with other members of the senior leadership team.*

**Response: This recommendation has been met.**

*2. To ensure that the Catholic Curriculum Review document is used by the Board in reviewing the strategic plan and developing the annual plan for 2019.*

**Response: The document has been the focus used by the Board and DSC in reviewing the Strategic Plan**

*3. It is recommended that Special Character themed murals be developed which will provide witness to the Catholic identity of Aquinas College.*

**Response: A stained glass window depicting St Thomas Aquinas has been installed in the foyer next to reception. Other iconography is being developed. The Graduate Profile and the Belong Believe Become device both are very prominent around the College reflecting the Special Character**

*4. Social Justice actions provide the difference in a Catholic school and as such are equal to, if not more important than, academic success. Immediate public profiles are the College website and annual magazine neither of which contain much information on the wealth of social justice participation which students and staff are involved in. This should be rectified firstly by including and regularly updating a section on the College website and secondly by incorporating at least four to five pages in the annual College magazine on Special Character activities and RE*

**Response: The College promotes all social justice participation through all publications and social media**

*5. To ensure that the staff induction process includes all aspects of Catholic Special Character, the Director of Special Character should be included in the induction team.*

**Response: This is the process which is now followed.**

### **Dimension 1: Te Tūtaki ki a Te Karaiti-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?***

Opportunities are provided for rangatahi to delve deeper into their relationship with Christ. These include reflections on their servant leadership at the end of every unit, opportunities to lead class prayer and to offer their own prayer. A variety of prayer forms used in Religious Education and mentor classes including readings, personal prayer, meditation and retreats. Opportunities for kaiako are also provided, for example before classes begin every Friday, all kaiako meet in the Chapel to listen to a Gospel reading and reflection, followed by the opportunity for individual prayer in small groups. A non-Catholic kaiako commented that it helped to centre her for the day. Student retreats are organized and delivered by senior students from the Intentional Discipleship Pathway classes, supported by Religious Education kaiako.

Tikanga, te reo Māori and Māori expression of Katorikatanga are visibly incorporated into aspects of Catholic special character. There has been a definite impact from these initiatives as seen in greater participation from rangatahi in whānau hui, cultural pursuits (e.g. Kapa Haka, Ngā Manu Korero) and improved academic outcomes. Rangatahi can now see their language, culture and identity recognised and celebrated throughout the school. Whānau commented that this is a positive move. The school leadership recognises that while this progress is celebrated, everyone is still on a journey.

Whānau are kept informed about Religious Education programmes, the liturgical year, special character events and activities taking place through the college newsletter and social media at the beginning of each term. Comments from whānau stated that they found the newsletters informative and helpful. Several parents commented that they valued the opportunities provided by the school for their rangatahi to be immersed in a Christ centred Catholic education with daily exposure to the Gospel, daily prayer and excellent role models. The Director of Religious Studies and Leader of Learning Religious Education are working together to develop a connection with their parent community to enable them to share in the faith development of their rangatahi.

A sacramental programme is run, in school time, led by the Year 7&8 Leader of Learning. Currently ten rangatahi are participating in the programme. As restrictions due to covid have allowed, a weekly school Mass is offered in the Chapel by one of the parish priests. Classes are rostered to lead the Mass and local parishioners are welcomed. Reconciliation is offered after Mass on a monthly basis. The two parishes have had changes in their parish priests. Owing to restrictions caused by covid, the pressure on priests in re-connecting with their parishioners has been huge. The secondary school-parish connections are now becoming able to rebuild commencing with a school Mass and blessing of Discipleship badges during August.

Since the last review considerable work has taken place on the internal review action plan strategies relating to the four dimensions of Catholic special character. Each year one of

Dimension 1-3 is evaluated, along with Dimension 4. This year Dimension 1 – *Encounter with Christ* was chosen. Evaluation has been by reflecting on NET and the school's Discipleship Pathway. As part of Dimension 4 a focus has also been on growing the number of Tagged Teachers - an evolving aspect of this is kaiako faith formation through encountering Christ.

The Intentional Discipleship Pathway has been developed as a direct response to identifying that rangatahi were seeking a deeper encounter with Jesus Christ through their faith journey. A genuine commitment to ensuring that the Pathway will be fully supported and actioned has the Deputy Principal, Middle School, leading this work supported by the Director of Religious Studies. This peer to peer ministry programme has been developed under the guidance of Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia (CSYMA) and the Australian Catholic University (ACU). This has been further enhanced by the teacher formation Spiritus programme. The programme provides the opportunity for faith formation and leadership development in evangelisation in education through practical application, while at the same time following the Religious Education curriculum prescribed by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Council (NZCBC).

The Principal is an outstanding faith filled leader. He has built up a strong senior leadership team (SLT), which includes the Director of Religious Studies. This team collectively ensures a Catholic special character lens is applied across the school's Mission and outreach. Religious Education is taught by teachers with qualifications. Three members of the SLT are teachers of Religious Education, two of them with the Discipleship programme. Opportunities are provided for all kaiako in faith formation. Recently twelve kaiako from across different curriculum areas attended the Spiritus Aotearoa 2022 conference. While eighteen kaiako hold CI 47 tagged (Special Character) positions, other kaiako participate willingly and accompany these teachers. This is as a direct result of inviting kaiako to participate and then wanting to share their faith following on from the lead of the Principal, Director of Religious Studies and senior leadership team members. The impact of having committed kaiako of Catholic special character across all curriculum areas was evidenced from the deep discussions and feedback comments made during the consultation with them about Catholic special character.

The impact from all of this work perceived from discussion with kaiako, whānau, and rangatahi from all levels, is that this school is a place where rangatahi and kaiako have the opportunity, and are encouraged to develop, share and practice their faith. Two kaiako have become Catholics as a direct result of working at this school. The Discipleship programme normalises that it is "cool" to talk about God in their own lives. It is enabling rangatahi to develop their own faith in a way which they willingly can share with others, as seen by the responses of other rangatahi from the retreat programmes that they deliver. One parent commented "*being in the Discipleship class has allowed her to explore her faith in a deeper, more meaningful level than*

before’.

### **Next Steps for Development**

- The college has very extensively analysed the four dimensions and includes progress in the Annual plan and reporting to the Board. It would be valuable to take these a step further and look at the impact of some of these initiatives.
- Continue to develop the Discipleship programme to allow more rangatahi to join to provide more opportunities for more people to Encounter with Christ in this way.
- Continue to explore ways to have a presence in the contributing parishes e.g. Youth Masses and other ways to support our rangatahi in their Faith Development.

### **Dimension 2: Mā te Mātauranga ka Tipu: 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?***

The Principal leads by example. He has a strong personal faith which he clearly articulates. This is demonstrated in leading liturgy, relationships with rangatahi and kaiako and the mana in which he is held by whānau, kaiako and rangitahi.

The Director of Religious Studies and Leader of Learning Religious Education have clearly defined roles and work closely to support each other. Both are faith-filled leaders who clearly articulate their own faith. All Kaiako teaching Religious Education in Years 9-13 hold a CI 47 position and all senior Religious Education teachers have a qualification in Religious Education. Most home room teachers in Years 7-8 also hold a tagged position and all are supported by collaborative planning. Apart from the Leader of Learning and one other Religious Education kaiako, all Religious Education kaiako teach in other curriculum areas. While this is a distinct advantage to be able to ensure that the Catholic worldview is being shared with kaiako in other curriculum areas, it leaves the responsibility for the future planning and development of the new Religious Education curriculum on the full time Religious Education kaiako.

#### ***(Refer Recommendation 1)***

The Religious Education programmes offered from Years 7-13 follow that prescribed by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference. In addition the Intentional Discipleship Pathway was introduced in 2020 at Year 11 and now provides a three year programme from Year 11-13 in Religious Education and discipleship. Whānau with rangatahi in these classes commented that their daughter/son was more open about their faith and enabled real discussions to take place at home on many ethical issues. Rangatahi were all able to explain how being in these classes had enabled them to find a real faith, debate real issues from a faith and knowledge base and want to share this with others. They perceived that having this faith background would give them real direction in their future lives.

Funding is provided in the Religious Education budget so that each kaiako teaching Religious Education has professional development and spiritual development opportunities. The spiritual director who works with the Leader of Learning also gives the opportunity for all Religious Education kaiako to engage in it. Money is set aside so that each Religious Education kaiako can go on a personal retreat.

The school is making a culturally responsive journey which has actively encouraged them to bring the “double hull” lens to all that they do across teaching and learning programmes. They are intentional about growing their knowledge of Tikanga and Catholic special character.

This year the Graduate Profile has been introduced. It is centred on the College Touchstones of *Truth, Family, Scholarship, Service, Prayer and Joy* which were identified at the foundation of Aquinas College, to underpin the Catholic special character and to link this to the philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas, as its patron saint. After numerous consultations, over a considerable period of time, the profile has been intentionally designed seeking to deepen the collective understanding of the Touchstones and encouraging rangatahi to live them out in a meaningful and authentic manner, bringing them closer in relationship to the person of Christ. Rangatahi have the opportunity to **Belong** in a faith community, **Believe** with Reason and **Become** Disciples of Christ. Every rangatahi can forge their own path and realise their true potential by developing their unique gifts and talents. The Graduate Profile is reflected in all learning programmes and across broader experiences of the school. The aspirational outcomes of the Graduate aim to grow students to be servant leaders who positively influence others through their actions and words. It is envisaged that the impact of this will be that all graduates will have a strong sense of self, be active participants in their community, lead with moral purpose and strive to be the best they can be. (*Refer Recommendation 2*)



There is a clear expectation that every kaiako has a responsibility to uphold and support the Catholic special character of the school and that it is reflected in their actions, words and content. The Catholic worldview is integrated into all curricula, embedded in curriculum documents and in the Graduate Profile. Kaiako were able to clearly articulate, with examples, how they achieved this. Some examples included: ethical subjects in Science, Social Sciences teaching social justice principles, ESOL explaining Catholic activities, Arts/Technology food for the homeless, Māori/Catholic views integrated in Years 7-8 homeroom classes. Kaiako stated that they saw the impact of incorporating the Catholic world view into their curriculum areas as promoting inclusivity, positive relationships between rangatahi in relation to human dignity, broadening thinking, provoking conversation on controversial topics from an informed base, to name but a few. A recent example can be seen when four rangatahi, as part of their Year 10 work in Social Studies, won the Caritas competition for their ideas to address key social and environmental problems. Caritas commented *"Their work showed how we can come together and use the Catholic principle of Stewardship to care for God's creation."*

The teaching of Health and Sexuality is currently under review to ensure that all parts of the curriculum are being delivered. A group of senior leaders, a college counsellor, RE teachers and Health and Physical Education teachers have participated in the National Centre for Religious Studies programme *"Having Life to the Full"*, approved by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference. (NZCBC)

### **Next Steps for Development**

- To continue to review the Health and Sexuality Education programme is covered to ensure that it is in line with the Sexuality Framework Document and taught through a Catholic lens. Ensure that all the teachers teaching the sexuality programme have completed 'Having Life to the Full' (NZCBC programme)

### **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?***

The school continues to re-establish relationships with both parishes and parish Priests after they were hugely impacted over COVID and traffic-light settings. It is anticipated that the level of support received from each parish plus a collaborative relationship will now start to grow as the school intentionally seeks to incorporate rangatahi and families into the life of the parish. The relationship with their three contributing Catholic Schools (St. Mary's Catholic School, St. Thomas More Catholic School and Suzanne Aubert Catholic School) is strong and benefits from their relationship in the Kāhui Ako.

The school has a strong commitment to the pastoral needs of rangatahi who are accompanied on their journey of growth and development. The pastoral care network is overseen by an assistant principal for pastoral care, with a dean and mentor teachers at each year level. This group is additionally supported by classroom teachers, peer mentors, student leaders, learning support and two guidance counsellors. The aim is to understand the needs of students by meeting them where they are at and using restorative practices to uphold the mana and dignity of every individual while maintaining relationships. The school has the strongest commitment to the development of the whole person, focussing on wellbeing while being guided by its Catholic special character. Whānau commented that they perceived the pastoral needs of students were well met. Rangatahi commented on the helpful support and advice that they receive from kaiako.

The impact of these relationships is seen on a daily basis in the interactions of all concerned resulting in a very calm, focussed atmosphere.

Commitment to the well-being of all kaiako is demonstrated by the appointment of a Well-being co-ordinator, who is also a school counsellor, and the myriad of strategies and initiatives to provide care and support for kaiako. Kaiako commented on the positive impact this has made especially in coping with the extra stresses brought on by covid issues.

There are numerous Catholic leadership opportunities for rangatahi ranging from Deputy Head rangatahi, to leaders of Special Character, Special Character Committee, Youth Ministry, Peer-Peer Ministry, school liturgies, student retreats, Caritas leadership day.. Rangatahi from the Discipleship programme have organised and run a number of youth group activities after school. These have included a Youth Night in 2021 for ākongā in Year 6 from the contributing schools and recently a Youth Night *"Pizza, Fun and Faith at Aquinas"* attended by over sixty Year 7-8 rangatahi.

The school actively supports a number of service projects including a foodbank appeal, multiple mufti days, service day, and projects within the school that support the vulnerable in the community. *"Under the Stars"* is a community project to help the homeless in Tauranga, rangatahi are involved by making sandwiches in school each week. Kura kai is another programme for any families that are struggling so that meals are provided for them. There is also a designated service project in Year 12 that focuses on students as servant leaders, who intentionally exercise their faith. There has also been a link made with the Cluny Sisters in Rarotonga and another project was envisaged to help an at risk community in Northland. Unfortunately, due to covid restrictions, both of these projects have had to be put on hold for the current year.

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

##### ***How effectively does the school, in its stewardship, and its compliance with legal obligations, safeguard and strengthen its Catholic identity?***

The Board of Trustees and Senior Leadership Team ensure that the vision and strategic direction for the college clearly and openly reflect the Catholic Character. Central to this are the six touch stones of Truth, Family, Scholarship, Service , Prayer and Joy.

At the time of the Review the school had submitted the attestation document covering off the compliance requirements and the 2022 Proprietor's Appointee report has been received by the Diocese.

##### **Staffing**

Since the last review the College has worked to fill all tagged positions for Catholic kaiako (teachers). The school's Integration Agreement requires the school to have eighteen tagged teachers and these have all been filled through both internal appointments and nationally advertised positions.

In reviewing the letters of appointment for permanent teaching staff, it was noted that the letters explicitly state if the position was tagged under Schedule 6, Clause 47 of the Education and Training Act 2022. A record of tagged staff is readily available and the Diocese notified each year of the number of tagged positions filled through the Annual Compliance report.

The Professional growth cycle of teaching staff includes the Catholic elaborations and includes a section on contribution to special character.

Consideration needs to be given as to what support is needed to continue building the knowledge in faith capacity of those in tagged positions and the wider staff.

It is pleasing to see that a number of staff in the Religious Education faculty hold an appropriate qualification in theology or religious education.

##### **Enrolment**

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

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currently 10 students taking part in the sacramental programme offered through the college in conjunction with St Mary's parish.

The school currently has 14 international fee paying students. Of the 730 domestic students in the school at the time of this visit, 83% (603) are enrolled under the under 5.1 preference Criteria.

The Board of Trustees employs a Director of International Students, who is responsible for the pastoral care of international students. Part of their responsibility is to attest to the statutory compliance each year relating to the care of these students. A member of the senior leadership team has responsibility for the overall pastoral care of students and is supported by a pastoral care group.

### Catholic Character

The Board of Trustees is very clear about its obligations around Catholic Character and do view all responsibilities through a Catholic lens.

The annual budget reflects the commitment to Special Character with money allocated for curriculum resourcing and development and also a separate allocation for staff professional development opportunities. The Director of Religious Studies/Assistant Principal and the Leader of Learning for Religious Education are both involved in the budgeting process. Money was available to send two of the senior staff to Canberra this year for continued faith formation and to send twelve staff to a two day hui in Hamilton on the Spiritus programme.

Under Strategic Goal 1, the Principal reports to the Board of Trustees at each meeting on matters relating to special character. Every second year the Leader of Learning for Religious Education reports to the Board of Trustees. The Director of Religious Studies/Assistant Principal reports to the board twice on progress towards meeting the annual special character goals.

All school promotional material reflects the Catholic identity of the school.

### Policies

All Board of Trustees policies are dated and reviewed as part of the board's 3 year review cycle.

The following key policies were viewed and the special character of the school was paramount throughout the policies; 1.1 Curriculum Delivery, 1.6 Special Character, 5.10 Student Behaviour Management, Policy 5.12 Child Protection.

### **Next Steps for Development**

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- Have a deliberate staff professional development plan for tagged teachers with the purpose of growing knowledge in the faith.

### **Catholic Special Character Evaluation Report Summary**

Areas of growth since the 2018 review report are seen in the Intentional Discipleship Programme; the commitment to Tikanga, te reo Māori and Māori expression of Katorikatanga; the Graduate Profile and commitment to intentionally seeking teachers who can fit the CI 47 Special Character positions. Each one of these initiatives is making a real impact on the expression of faith of rangatahi and kaiako and now spinning off into the community. While it is recognised that all are works in progress this is undoubtedly a faith filled school led by a strong Catholic Principal, Director of Religious Studies and leadership team.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1 Ensure that the Leader of Learning of Religious Education has the support required to enable the introduction of the new Religious Education curriculum (*To Tātou Whakapono*). At the same time continue to build kaiako. knowledge and confidence so that they are effectively prepared.
- 2 Take the Graduate Profile to the next step to enable it to become a fully operational system for kaiako, rangatahi and whanau.
- 3

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

The evaluation team thank the community of Aquinas College for the welcome, hospitality and cooperation extended to them and for the opportunity to experience the way that they safeguard and strengthen their Catholic special character. The organisation and preparation for the external evaluation by the college is greatly appreciated.



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(Lead Evaluator)

Mr Terry Consedine  
(Assistant Evaluator)

Mr John Coulam  
(Diocesan Manager for Education)