



Anglican Schools
of Aotearoa New Zealand
and Polynesia

Special Character Review



November 2019

REVIEW CONDUCTED THROUGH THE ANGLICAN SCHOOLS OFFICE

School type: Integrated co-educational full primary day school (years 0-8)

Review date: 27-29 November 2019

Principal: Dr. Averil Worner

Chaplain: Rev'd Canon Ben Truman (Vicar)

Reviewers: Rev'd Dr. Anne Van Gend
Rt. Rev'd Dr. Kelvin Wright

INTRODUCTION

Having reviewed St. Mark's School four years ago these reviewers had no trouble navigating our way to the school and felt a sense of familiarity arriving at the school gates. That sense of familiarity did not last long, however. The school was in the same place as before, but everything else was different. It is not necessary to rehash in detail the painful history of the time surrounding the last review - a time soon after the earthquakes when the school's buildings were damaged and the school community was in disarray – but we will refer to it from time to time when necessary. Every review takes place in a particular historical context, and the context of St Mark's is one of absolutely astonishing, intelligent and courageous change.

Before even entering the gates, it was apparent that this was not the same school. On the side of the revamped building was a large cross, and we recalled how difficult it had been on the last visit to find any outward and visible sign of the school's special character in its infrastructure. We were welcomed into a special assembly, and there were more signs of deep change. The assembly was led by a large, competent and very enthusiastic kapa haka group who performed waiata and the school haka. Next, the Vicar of St Mark's parish, the Rev. Ben Truman chanted a piece in Te Reo, and followed it closely with the English translation. It was the Apostle's Creed. Before the first line was completed the school, in chorus, joined him in reciting it by heart. Never, in any review, have we seen such an unselfconscious and natural expression of the Anglican basis of a school by its students.

Soon after we had picked our jaws off the floor a group of year 8 pupils took us on a guided tour of the restored and enhanced school premises. We were impressed by the children's social ease, their respect for and comfort with each other and with their knowledge of the school's structure and governing ethos. They explained in some detail, with phrases in Te Reo and English, the division of the school into waka, and the connection of each waka with the history and geography of the Opawa district and with the educational and personal stages of the "passengers" of each waka. Recurring themes in the children's account of their school were: the lack of bullying; the connections between different age groups; the family nature of the school; the school as a Christian community.

Over the next three days we met with the principal, the deputy principal, the heads of the boards, several staff, pupils, parents and support staff. We spent considerable time with the Rev'd Ben Truman. The documentation supplied to us was thorough and impressive in its detail, although it might have helped to have it a little earlier in the review process. We visited school assemblies and were present at a Religious Education lesson in the senior school. Communication was open and transparent and, in a welcome contrast to our previous review, there was never a sense of being subject to hidden agendas. The cohesion and high morale exhibited by the young people who showed us the school was echoed by everyone else we spoke to.

In preparation for this review the school surveyed parents on their attitudes to the special character. A thorough and thoughtfully organized template for a review, along with a helpful checklist, was produced by the Board of Proprietors and given to the reviewers before the review. These documents have been invaluable in framing this report. The school has a freshly revised integration agreement in which the special character of St. Mark's is closely linked to the Five Marks of Mission of the worldwide Anglican Communion, and, to give some consistency with and compatibility with the last review of the school, which was organized around the 5 Marks of Mission, we have chosen to organize this report on similar lines.

LEADERSHIP

It was soon apparent that the remarkable changes in the school boiled down to one thing: leadership. Dr. Averil Worner is an experienced and astute principal who manages her school with panache, compassion, integrity and strength. She has, in addition one asset which has been crucial in the transformation of the school: a mature, vibrant, well-informed, Anglican Christian faith.

The difficulties of four years ago found expression in differences of opinion on the special character of the school. The definition of special character in the older version of St. Mark's integration agreement allowed for the special character to be defined in terms of the *outworkings* of Christian faith – having solid values, good manners, a care for respectable presentation and so forth – rather than the core of Christianity which is faith in Jesus Christ. To be simplistic, the debate back then often seemed to devolve to an argument between proponents of “cultural” Christianity and “spiritual” or “experiential” Christianity. At considerable cost to herself Dr. Worner has guided the school into an emphasis on the faith end of the spectrum. In doing this she has not realized the fears of those who saw that such an emphasis would bring narrowness or exclusivity to the school's culture. Far from it. The school is now more diverse and more accepting of a range of belief than ever before and even those many members of the school community who do not themselves profess a Christian faith express admiration for, and attraction to, the ethos which has been developed. The school caters for families with a wide range of beliefs and spiritual practices and it would be naïve to think that every member of the school community will be comfortable with the readjustments made in the changing place of the school's special character, but criticism is declining as the results of the shift speak for themselves.

Like all good leaders Dr. Worner has assembled around herself a talented and hard-working team. Most of the teaching staff are new enough not to have been affected by the former troubles. The staff room is a happy place with a good feel. This is a staff with high morale and a good sense of purpose. The integration agreement allows for 3 staff positions to be tagged as special character appointments but there is, as well, a higher than normal percentage of staff who profess Christian faith. Amongst those who don't there is universal acceptance of and support for the school's special character.

The senior leadership team of St Mark's is particularly able. Mr. Adrian Rennie, the Deputy Principal, has been highly effective in introducing the Habits of Mind and integrating them with the school's special character. The vicar of the parish, the Rev'd Ben Truman is a man of great talent and energy who is very popular with pupils, parents and staff. He is adept at presenting the Christian faith in engaging and innovative ways. The transformation of the school is due in no small part to the providential teaming of Averil Worner, Adrian Rennie and Ben Truman.

ORGANISATION

Formally, the school has a fairly standard set up, with a division into junior, middle and senior school. In keeping with contemporary pedagogical theory there is a significant amount of shared physical space within each of these divisions. Integrated with this is a house system in which the school's three houses each draws members from across the school to give a healthy sense of belonging and rivalry in sporting and cultural activities. More subtly interwoven, and more closely aligned to the senior, middle and junior schools, is St. Mark's *Cultural Narrative*. In conjunction with tangata whenua the school has devised a schema based on the Opawaho (Heathcote), in a bend of

which the school sits. The narrative is based on three types of traditional craft: Mōkihi (small local river boats); Waka Pūhara (coastal vessels); and Waka Hourua (robust vessels for long voyages). The narrative helps children to grasp the essential skills and attitudes necessary for the particular stage of the journey they are making through the school. It helps them to understand the contexts of others in the school, both above and below them in age. It gives a deep sense of place, in its connection with the geography of Opawa and a history which extends for centuries before the arrival of Europeans. The cultural narrative is a stroke of genius on the part of St Mark's and contributes mightily to the development and expression of the school's special character.

As is required, St Mark's is governed by a Board of Trustees and a Board of Proprietors. There is a good level of communication between these boards and a high level of understanding of the areas of governance appropriate to each. The BOP lives with the tension common to all integrated schools of balancing the need for specialized skills and an understanding of the special character. The reviewers noted that the St. Mark's Foundation, the ambiguous position of which had caused so much confusion in previous years, has been disbanded. Monies stewarded by the foundation have been used in establishing a Scholarship Fund, which will be mentioned below.

As in any school, there are consciously chosen and explicitly stated school values. At St. Mark's these are grace (huatau), excellence (hiranga), courage (māiatanga) and faithfulness (piriponotanga). The list is admirable for its brevity and for its conformity to the statement of special character in the deed of integration. All pupils we spoke to unhesitatingly recited the values and were able to give age appropriate and informed definitions of each. Most were able to give examples of the ways the values might be lived out.

Complementing the school's values are the sixteen Habits of Mind. These are a set of problem solving, life related skills that are used in many other schools. St Mark's has refined them for its own context, integrating them to the school's values and to the cultural narrative. They are prominently displayed in all classrooms, and we were pleasantly surprised to find students who could name them all and to give thoughtful examples of their integration of the habits into their lives inside and outside the classroom.

FACILITIES

The school's buildings have been reconstituted, reshaped and redecorated following the devastation of the earthquakes. They are now in excellent condition: attractive, welcoming and comfortable.

SPECIAL CHARACTER

The school's integration agreement was revised in 2017 and the statement of the school's special character is stated in section 5 as:

THE School provides and shall continue to provide education with a Special Character the essential elements of which are:-

- (a) Association with the Anglican Church: The School has a close association with the Anglican Church which has been maintained since it became independent of St Mark's Anglican Church in 1981. The general School programme with its religious instructions and observances are based on the teachings and formularies of the Anglican Church. This

includes regular worship at the St. Mark's Anglican Church or an alternative determined by the local Anglican parish, regular religious tuition within the School curriculum, regular church services at the School and a leading role in School life undertaken by the Vicar of the Parish.

(b) Philosophies: There are three additional key elements to the philosophy of the School, namely

- (i) a local curriculum which encourages, models, and explores the Gospel of Jesus Christ as articulated in the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion (refer to Appendix A); these Five Marks include proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom; teaching and nurturing in the Christian faith; loving service of others; a commitment to reconciliation, healing, justice, hope and challenging violence of every kind; and to being responsible stewards of creation;
- (ii) an education delivered in the context of a supportive Christian community, which nurtures each child's God-given gifts and celebrates achievement;
- (iii) a recognition through its history and traditions that the School has created a set of enduring values which focus on the broad development of its students including: the wearing of a uniform; placing a particular emphasis on the delivery of the extra curricula activities of music, sport and cultural pursuits; and instilling in its students an appreciation of high standards of etiquette and behaviour.

(c) Balance of the School: St Mark's is a co-educational, full primary school with new entrants through to Year 8 and has a balanced ratio of boys and girls drawn from a varied socio-economic background.

We have seldom seen a statement of special character which is so clear and precise in its definition of the particular Anglican Character of a school. We applaud the conscious link to the Five Marks of Mission, and to the sensitive rephrasing which places the history and traditions associated with the special character (5.b.iii) into their proper context. We are delighted at the reference to the school as a Christian community (5.b.ii). This aspect of the deed is manifest in the school's efforts to make special character an integral part of the school's life and curriculum. The clear statement of intent with regard to inclusiveness in 5.c is welcomed.

The processes for admission are admirably clear, and the reviewers could name several other schools in the Anglican network which might profit from emulating them

RELATIONSHIP TO THE PARISH AND THE DIOCESE.

When we visited, the school was in the early stages of an interesting experiment: namely, the use of the school's facilities by The Parish of Opawa-St Martins. The hospitality and generosity of the school, demonstrated in, for example, the facilities offered to the parish and the remuneration negotiated with it, were remarkable. The Parish is in a phase of reinventing itself. It has a dynamic young vicar and an on-going building project, so is currently optimistic and upbeat. The links with the school are the product of the hopes and ambitions of the Parish in years past and represents considerable emotional, material and spiritual investment by the Parish over a long time. The buoyant state of the school must have an energizing effect on the Parish and be a source of considerable satisfaction to them. A growing closeness between parish and school will be beneficial to both.

The Bishop of Christchurch has visited the school on several occasions and is interested in its growth and development. Relationship between the school and diocese is currently very healthy.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMMUNITY

The relationship with the local community and with the city of Christchurch remains solid, and the school is involved in a number of community outreaches. A sponsored walk to raise awareness of those in Uganda who have to walk long distances for water was a well-supported and a very visible demonstration of the school's focus beyond its own boundaries.

What is most impressive is the connection of the school to its geographical and historical context in the Cultural Narrative. Children will pass through St Mark's knowing more about this part of Christchurch than many who have lived there for decades. This deep grounding will, no doubt, work itself out in the local community for a good while to come.

THE FIVE MARKS OF MISSION

There are many ways of approaching the question of how the “Anglican” aspect of a school’s “Special Character” can be explored. The following is the framework that was used for this review.

While the Anglican Church is known for the variety of people, beliefs and traditions within it world-wide, in recent years it united to form “Five Marks of Mission.” These five “marks” were agreed to across the Anglican Church as key ways they were invited to “join in with” God’s work in the world.

They are:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

(Bonds of Affection-1984 ACC-6 p49, Mission in a Broken World-1990 ACC-8 p101)

In the short sections which follow we will make comments on the school’s special character as it is expressed in these five marks of mission, but there will be a strong emphasis on the first two marks. This is because this is where the emphasis of the school currently lies.

The school has come a very long way in a very short time. It has made the journey it has by completely transforming the culture of the school, and this is being done in the way which has most promise for the changes to be permanent: from the inside out. The school’s self-identity as a Christian community of learning is now almost complete, and this has come by emphasising the Christian nature of the school’s foundations. The outworking of the special character in the last three marks of mission has of course started, and as the school’s transformation matures, these will inevitably find more prominence.

TELL: PROCLAIM

When a new pupil begins at St Mark's something happens which is unique in our network of Anglican schools. At their first assembly the child, along with any siblings at the school and any other family members present, is publicly prayed for by the principal. With this short informal act the school is reminded of their duty towards the newcomer, the new pupil is made to feel part of the community and the particular approach of St Mark's to its special character is emphasized. Prayer is demonstrated to be a part of normal school life and the presence of God is sought, not only in the chapel or the RE class, important though these might be, but in the lived experience of the community. After all, even the most faithful of Christians generally only goes to church once a week.

Soon after she arrived Averil Worner, in dialogue with the chaplain at the time, reduced the number of whole school weekly church services from four to two, not in order to reduce the school's Christian Character but to increase it. The reduction in church time allowed hard pressed teachers a little extra time to deliver curriculum and encouraged the school community to see God's presence as something not constrained by the walls of the chapel. The Vicar, relieved of some of the whole school obligations, was freed to spend more time in classrooms to lead age-appropriate devotions.

The worship services at school were spoken of enthusiastically for the way that the Christian message is presented in thoughtful and accessible ways. The involvement of pupils in the leadership of services emphasizes the community nature of the Christian faith. To be commended in this regard is the designation of deputy head boy and girl as church leaders, giving much kudos to the role of the chapel in the life of the school.

The school's buildings abound with symbols of the school's special character, from the large crosses at the entrances to the many Biblical quotes and other evidences of Christian belonging found in classrooms. The school's special character is prominently stated on the website and details of the chapel services, the Vicar and the Religious Education programme are easily found.

Moving on.

- There was some interest expressed in Christian Contemplation, and in developing silent prayer as a spiritual tool in the school community. This is best introduced from year 1 so students grow through the school with this as a natural and expected element of the school day. The Anglican Schools' Office (The Office) can provide training for classroom teachers to enable this development.
- A group of Chaplains, including Rev'd Ben, are working on sets of simple prayer cards for classroom teachers to use in order for them to have 5-10 minute prayer times with their class daily. Perhaps St Mark's teachers could trial them for 6 months and give feedback to The Office as to how to make them more useful and usable.
- Special Character begins with the Boards. They are doing an excellent job, but there was a suggestion that it would be helpful for their presence in the school to grow. The MOU between both boards also needs revisiting.
- The School is very conscious of how deeply the present changes rely on the leadership team (including the Vicar). It would be worthwhile discerning which of the distinctly Christian aspects of school life which seem to have grown organically, could be formalized in order to ensure their continuation.

TEACH AND NURTURE

There is a strong program of Religious Education across the whole school. The program follows a developmental model, with age appropriate materials and pedagogy at each level. In the junior school the program is based primarily on the *Jesus Storybook Bible* and associated resources. The success of this teaching will, obviously, vary with the confidence and expertise of individual teachers. The enthusiastic participation of staff regardless of their own perceived level of Christian knowledge is impressive, so, continuing PD on the use of The Jesus Storybook Bible will be important as staff work to develop their expertise. As well, classrooms usually have short periods of devotions, which will be even more dependent on the experience and confidence of the teachers for their success. Once again, the efforts of classroom teachers to maintain this aspect of the school's special character regardless of previous experience, is impressive. Some resourcing of teachers to enable taking short classroom devotions would be helpful. The emphasis on basic Biblical teaching in the junior school forms a good basis for what follows as the child moves through the school.

In the middle school the lessons are based on the Anglican Curriculum devised by Ali Ballantyne, a former director of the ASO. This is sound material, and some continuing care needs to be taken that it is kept current as far as content and pedagogy is concerned.

In the senior school the Middle School Theology units written by the Anglican Schools Office are used. These seem to be well taught and the children find them interesting, while teachers appreciate the way they encourage involvement and questioning regardless of the student's personal faith.

Moving on.

- Rev'd Ben is involved in the senior school RE classes, but his limited hours do not give him space to keep track of how junior and middle school RE is being delivered. It would be helpful if class teachers could give him their proposed RE curriculum outline each term. If he is aware of what is being covered, he may have extra resources he could give them, and it would also enable him to link the occasional RE lesson and chapel.
- The new Anglican Schools' Website has an updated primary school curriculum, together with a number of full units of work. It also has a wealth of supplementary materials for each of the Jesus Storybook Bible chapters. All material is free for any of our teachers to use.
- The Anglican Schools Office is happy to provide PD on RE teaching for classroom teachers.
- The School's Christian foundations could be explained more fully to those family members unfamiliar with basic Christianity. The school is working, and many parents are pleased and intrigued by this. Perhaps they would appreciate the opportunity to learn more of what is producing such positive results for their children. What are their children learning in RE and chapel? Why are they learning it? Senior students are quick to pick up on parental cynicism towards faith. Parents possibly need to be made aware of the impact of cynical comments, and be encouraged to be sensitive to burgeoning faith in their children even if they do not share it. Given the numerous demands on Rev'd Ben's time, perhaps helping to run Christian education classes for parents is a way the wider Diocese could assist the school.

TEND

The biggest shift in the school over the last few years has been in the quality of its community. Given the nature of children it would be impossible to completely eradicate bullying, but St Mark's has come fairly close. Bullying of staff, by staff and by parents; bullying of parents by one another; bullying of students by other students, all so distressingly often related by people to reviewers four years ago, all seem to have gone. This is the result of deliberate planning and intelligent application of the school's special character, and specific, targeted action. The school provided, for example, parental education around our Anti-bullying Aoraki Mātatu program. There was, as well, considerable community discussion to achieve a "safe telling" culture and the defining concept that issues were best addressed at the time of dispute and involve the persons most directly concerned. Above all, the aim in dealing with disputes and conflict has been shifted towards that of achieving reconciliation.

The school is superb at caring for the hurt and injured of its own community. We were impressed by the way a special needs child was spoken of, by other pupils as "**our** N." As the school grows in its new direction and as the principles of its special character become more consciously adapted, the school's extension of interest into caring for those outside its gates will grow.

The Scholarship Fund, which manages funds once held by the disbanded St. Marks Foundation has become an instrument of care for and development of school community members. The fund provides grants of up to \$4,000 to students and staff for specific actions that can be directly attributable to one of the 5 Marks of Mission.

It is impressive how simple ideas, such as "the emotional bucket" have been used. This could easily become a cliché, but it has become, instead, an easily accessible tool for children to assess and change their social behaviours. Similarly, the Habits of Mind have played an important role in the change of culture and in equipping students with new ways of thinking about and reacting to situations.

The school is more inclusive, in terms of its cultural and social diversity than at any time in its history, but there is still some way to go to match the mix of the surrounding community, particularly with regard to the numbers of Māori children in the school and the numbers of refugee families.

The School is growing a strong culture of service to others. This is primarily within the school, where the duty of "leadership" for students in Year 8 is unquestioningly understood in terms of caring for others. That is impressive. With this attitude as a foundation, other acts of service appear to grow naturally – such as making paper flowers out of two hands and putting them on chairs to welcome parishioners to their first parish service at the school.

Moving on.

- The sheer popularity of the school does raise the possibility that it will once again be seen by parents to have an "elite" quality. While no-one would want it to be less popular than it is, care will need to be taken that the welcome the school presently offers to students of wide-ranging abilities and different cultures grows rather than diminishes.
- Following on from Rev'd Ben's mentoring of his chapel leaders, the school is planning to assign staff members to each of the leadership roles in Year 8 so that students are mentored as they lead/serve others.
- The school has achieved so much already, but there was a repeated desire that it continue to find new ways of being involved in the local community through service.

TRANSFORM

The school is making an excellent beginning in the transformation of the unjust structures of society by transforming its own structures, which, in the past have not been nurturing.

It is worth noting that the projects supported by the Scholarship Fund often make a significant contribution to the school's service to the community.

St Mark's is a Restorative School. In practice this means a restorative approach to disciplinary and conflict issues. All children are given some basic strategies for dealing with conflict (the "stop hand" up for "no" and the "thinking wall") which seem to be well understood and universally used. The ideas of the school as a family and of the concept of "safe telling" were repeatedly relayed to the reviewers by children. Ideas such as "being an upstander not a bystander" and "what's the smartest thing to do right now?" were repeated with an understanding that shows they are well integrated into the mindset of the school community. The children's understanding and enthusiastic acceptance of the Habits of Mind has contributed hugely to the transformation of the school's culture.

Moving on.

- Restorative Practice is a deceptively simple way of doing things. It rests on a number of assumptions which run counter to secular society's cultural narrative and there is, therefore, a need for staff and other community members to be constantly upskilled in its tenets and practices. The school is growing in its development of Restorative Practice, adapting it well to each individual case. However, this is a powerful example of something which could easily fall apart with a change of personnel. We strongly advise that the full staff are trained thoroughly and professionally in RP. Once that knowledge and those skills are there, the practices can of course be shaped for individual situations – but without that foundation there is a danger that its essential tenets will be gradually diluted.
- Similarly, the Habits of Mind could become even more effective if staff and parents were more deeply conversant with them.
- There is a lot of potential for both Restorative Practices and the Habits of Mind to be grounded more clearly in the Christian character and for this to be understood more deeply by staff. Perhaps PD on this could be helpful.

TREASURE

St Mark's is firmly committed to the survivability of the planet. The gardening projects are a fine start to a more consciously connected relationship to the environment. It is impressive that much of the curriculum is taught in ways which connect the classroom to what is happening in the natural world. The school's Cultural Narrative encourages this.

There are many praiseworthy environmental initiatives being taken by the school. The parents made and sold reusable wax coated food wrappers, for example, and there is a growing emphasis on sustainability. There is a "Recycling puppet" awarded to the class with the cleanest recycling bin each week! Cooking classes use garden produce wherever possible, and each year from 3-8 has a particular focus. Year 3 look at insects in the ecosystem; Year 4 is responsible for the worm farm; Year 5 encourages litter-free lunchboxes; Year 6 does a river study and looks at plastics globally; Year 8 are Enviro Leaders. These are all great initiatives. Perhaps the one thing that could be added to this is ensuring that that care of creation is seen as a direct outworking of the school's special character.

CONCLUSIONS

It was a joy to be in St Mark's School, even if only briefly. This is a school in which so much is being done excellently. The school is fortunate both in the particular confluence of personalities in its senior team, and that it is so ably supported by the staff. There is a need to ensure that the gains of the past few years are well cemented in as a hedge against the inevitable leaving of one or all of the current school leadership. St Mark's is doing much that could be of wider interest and benefit to the Anglican Schools network.

We cannot emphasise enough the completeness of the change in the school and the short time in which this has occurred. The school is progressing at a fast clip, but it has not left anybody behind. The basic tenets of the school's culture are well understood and are accepted with enthusiasm. And so they should be, because they work. All people spoken to spontaneously recounted examples of the ways in which the positive and life-giving culture of the school has enriched their lives. Parents are positive in their assessment of the quality of their school but need to be more conscious of exactly why the school is working to ensure the future of the school's culture and for their own benefit. The school has some treasures to share, and some ideas to teach that could enrich the lives of community members well beyond the school gate.

For these reviewers, the real evidence of what is happening at the school came down to one parent. When she saw that we were soliciting comments from parents she was the first to sign up and on the day was first to arrive to speak to us. She was keen to bear witness to the transformation that has happened for her child, a latecomer to the school. Her child was isolated and struggling on arrival at St Mark's. A year later, surrounded by friends, doing well in the classroom, happy and excited about life, eager to get to school every morning and a little disappointed when the holidays arrive, a young life has been transformed. This is why we have our Anglican schools. This is why St. Mark's exists.

"Well done, good and faithful servants."