

St Mary's School (Christchurch) Education Review

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About the School

Location	Christchurch	
Ministry of Education profile number	3535	
School type	Integrated Full Primary (Years 1 to 8)	
Decile [1]	4	
School roll	80	
Gender composition	Boys 46 Girls 34	
Ethnic composition	NZ European/Pākehā	31
	Māori	7
	Samoan	9
	Asian	17
	Other Ethnicities	16
Review team on site	July 2012	
Date of this report	17 September 2012	
Most recent ERO report(s)	Education Review	December 2008
	Education Review	March 2006
	Education Review	October 2002

The Purpose of an ERO Report

The purpose of ERO's reviews is to give parents and the wider school community assurance

about the quality of education that schools provide and their children receive. An ERO school report answers the question “How effectively is this school’s curriculum promoting student learning - engagement, progress and achievement?” Under that overarching question ERO reports on the quality of education and learning outcomes for children and for specific groups of children including Māori students, Pacific students and students with special needs. ERO also reports on the quality of the school’s systems for sustaining and continuing improvements.

[1]

School deciles range from 1 to 10. Decile 1 schools draw their students from low socio-economic communities and at the other end of the range, decile 10 schools draw their students from high socio-economic communities. Deciles are used to provide funding to state and state integrated schools. The lower the school’s decile the more funding it receives. A school’s decile is in no way linked to the quality of education it provides.

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1 Context

What are the important features of this school that have an impact on student learning?

St Mary's School is a multi-cultural inner city school providing education for students in Years 1 to 8. The way students' cultural backgrounds are acknowledged and celebrated helps to support and enrich all students' learning.

The board, principal and staff work in ways that successfully promote the school's Catholic special character. They provide students with a positive learning environment that fosters caring and respectful relationships.

The Canterbury earthquakes have had a significant impact on the school and its community. The school was closed several times and students and teachers relocated. Many families and students have left Christchurch and this has led to a decrease in the school's roll.

The school's principal, teachers and board have responded very well to these challenges, displaying resilience, responsiveness and adaptability. They have actively supported student and family well-being while maintaining a strong focus on learning.

Developments since the school's December 2008 ERO review mean teachers now know more about students' achievement. Teachers and students make better use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) to support learning as well as to enhance communication. Older students now have a wider range of opportunities to develop leadership skills and contribute to school events and improvements.

2 Learning

How well are students learning – engaging, progressing and achieving?

Students are well motivated to learn. Reviewers observed many instances of very good levels of student engagement in learning tasks. The school's analysed achievement information suggests that most students achieve well and some very well.

Student achievement is highest in reading and in mathematics. The spread of achievement is greater in written language where more students are achieving below the National Standards.

The school is gathering an increasing range of evidence to help show the progress students make during their time at the school. A recent analysis of some of this information shows that two groups of students have made some significant gains in reading over time at the school.

The principal and teachers should now give priority to the more systematic analysis and reporting of student progress over time.

The board, principal and teachers have set several appropriate targets for raising student achievement. These focus on improving written language and the achievement of Māori and Pacific students who currently achieve a little lower than their peers. Useful additional learning support is being provided for targeted students and those with special needs.

Several students have gained notable success in external mathematics and writing competitions.

Senior students observed during the ERO review displayed many of the attitudes and skills associated with becoming life-long learners.

3 Curriculum

How effectively does this school's curriculum promote and support student learning?

The school's well-delivered curriculum provides students with a wide variety of experiences that are helping to promote and support student learning.

Areas of strength

Curriculum design

The school's curriculum successfully integrates its special character and values. It gives appropriate emphasis to developing students' learning dispositions and prioritises English and mathematics. Ongoing improvements to teaching programmes are extending the range of opportunities students have to achieve success across the curriculum.

Teaching practices

Reviewers observed teachers using a variety of effective teaching practices to promote student learning. Common practices included teachers:

- delivering well-paced lessons, focused teaching and providing students with interesting and varied activities
- making good use of assessment information to adapt programmes and groupings to better meet the needs of students
- asking questions that extend students' thinking and problem-solving skills
- fostering cooperative learning and celebrating students' successes.

Areas for review and development

School curriculum development

As the principal and teachers continue to develop the school's curriculum guidelines, several actions would enhance the quality of these. These include:

- making more explicit reference to the unique characteristics of the school's students, parents and community
- clarifying expectations about what counts as high quality teaching practices
- extending guidelines for implementing the curriculum beyond English and mathematics.

Extending the use of high quality teaching practices

The principal and teachers have identified, and ERO agrees, that students would benefit from building on some recent initiatives. These include:

- helping students extend their use of ICT to support their learning and to be clear about learning expectations
- using inquiry-based studies and further integrating aspects of teaching programmes
- extending the work teachers are doing to ensure assessment practices are robust.

4 Sustainable Performance

How well placed is the school to sustain and improve its performance?

The school has good governance and management practices. This means that the school is well placed to sustain and improve its performance.

Areas of strength

Leadership and management

The school is well managed and led. The principal and deputy principal work in ways that:

- maintain a strong focus on student learning and well-being, especially during recent challenging times
- promote collegiality, collaboration and teamwork
- foster reflective practices and ongoing school improvement.

Teachers feel well supported and led by their principal.

Governance

The board has developed a range of effective governance practices. These include:

- planning practices that help to make sure the board and staff are working towards common goals
- supporting students through providing significant funding for additional teaching and support staff hours
- improving the range of resources teachers have to support their teaching and students' learning.

The board fosters good relationships with school leaders, staff, students and the community. This is resulting in a positive school culture and a sense of partnership among those associated with the school.

Area for review and development

Self review practices

To build on the best of current practices and improve the quality and usefulness of self review,

the board and senior leaders should:

- extend the scope of board self review, including evaluation of its own effectiveness
- develop more comprehensive guidelines for undertaking curriculum self review
- incorporate more robust analysis of factors that have the greatest impact on student progress and achievement.

These developments should help to further support the board and school leaders in their decision making, in areas such as programme and professional development.

Board assurance on legal requirements

Before the review, the board of trustees and principal of the school completed the ERO Board Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklists. In these documents they attested that they had taken all reasonable steps to meet their legislative obligations related to:

- board administration
- curriculum
- management of health, safety and welfare
- personnel management
- financial management
- asset management.

During the review, ERO checked the following items because they have a potentially high impact on student achievement:

- emotional safety of students (including prevention of bullying and sexual harassment)
- physical safety of students
- teacher registration
- stand-downs, suspensions, expulsions and exclusions
- attendance.

When is ERO likely to review the school again?

ERO is likely to carry out the next review in three years.

Graham Randell
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Southern Region

17 September 2012