

St Mark's Special Character External Report 2024

Reviewers: Carl Becker, CEO of Axis Strategies

Helen Pearson, Reviewer

BOT Chair - Claire Bourne c.bourne@saintmarks.school.nz

BOP Chair - Nigel Georgieff n.georgieff@saintmarks.bop.nz

Principal - Adrian Rennie

School Type:	Year 1- 8
Roll Numbers:	236
Preference Students:	224
Teaching staff:	9 full-time teachers, four part-time teachers, one job-share position
Support staff:	3 Admin and caretaker staff, three support staff
Student, ethnic breakdown:	Māori: 31 NZ European/Other European (South African): 6 Asian: 15 MOE MELAA: 178



Review Process:

The Axis Strategies Special Character Review process is framed by faith, hope, and love as a matrix of knowing grounded in the Gospel. (1 Corinthians 13:12-13) Here, Paul measures all matters through the prism of faith, hope, and love, which is subsequent to the resurrection of Jesus. For Paul, reality is best 'known' in light of the story of faith, the experience of love, and the possibilities of hope. This is why Paul says, "These three remain" in 1 Corinthians 13:13.

The premise for this model is that each Christian school community's reality has a story about how it articulates the Christian faith, shaping its vision and reason for being. This story is expressed by rich learning experiences and loving encounters that reflect Jesus between teachers and students, staff, the school, and the wider community it serves.

We sense that vibrant Christian school learning communities are positively shaped by engaging in God's story when held together by loving encounters among their members. This results in shared aspirations to bring about new realities of hope in students' lives, both collectively and individually, as they seek to connect and partner with God in His world.

The reviewers focussed on discovering the St Mark's Special Character story by:

- Surveying all stakeholders, including students
- Processing school and board documents
- Meeting staff (teaching and support) 1 on 1
- Meeting with BOT and BOP members
- Talking to students
- Meeting with the Principal
- Spending time in classrooms
- Attending an RE class and a devotions class
- Attending a church service



Executive Summary:

This Special Character review was requested by the proprietors of St Mark's School, who recently became acutely aware of their responsibility to provide greater guidance to the school board and management regarding their expectations for the school's Special Character. Even though their engagement has been minimal, there is much to celebrate! This is a testament to the principal's leadership and key staff's motivation!

St Mark's School clearly expresses its Anglican heritage and values, which are the bedrock for an effective, warm and dedicated Christian learning community. The school has much to be grateful for and proud of, including a clear integration agreement outlining the Special Character distinctiveness of the school, a generous and open-hearted Proprietor who wants to upskill and engage with the school's Special Character in new ways, a strong engagement with the very supportive church of St Mark's, a strong and engaged Board of Trustees, a principal and senior leadership team who are respected by the school community for their pastoral care and who have continuity with the school over a long period, and a skilled staff who love the students, their school and the community they work within.

St Mark's School in 2024 is poised to begin a new and exciting season of growth in expressing its Special Character. It is looking for clarity of direction and a shared understanding of what its Special Character should look like and be shaped by. It needs a written framework to articulate and further shape its ethos, pedagogy, and curriculum. The St Mark's School Proprietors, who initiated this season of review and reflection, seek to grow professionally and strategically in understanding and outworking their purpose and the vision of the school. Thus, St Mark's is ready for a new season of increased clarity, communication and support. While all stakeholders in the school highly value the strengths of this St Mark's community, there is a unified desire for this guidance and growth that will trickle down to enrich the education the students receive.

The school management is ready for a clearer vision to help them shape and lead the next phase of the school's Special Character. They have effectively used the school values to express the Christian faith authentically.

The school's challenges of the past decade are behind it. With a new and engaged principal, a strong DP and chaplain, and an engaged proprietor, the school is well-placed to begin a five-year process that will enable it to clarify its vision and embed the Special Character with greater intentionality and success by 2030.

The review team from Axis Strategies has identified some key areas that, once the Proprietor, Board, and Management consider them further, will enhance the good work currently being done.

General Reflections:



The review process commenced six weeks before the reviewers were on site. At this early stage, it was apparent that neither the Proprietor nor the school leadership had a clear framework from which the reviewers would shape their work and frame stakeholder surveys. Subsequently (while on site), we discovered the significance of the Five Marks of Mission in the Integration Agreement as the primary foci for the school's Special Character and a glowing 2019 Special Character Review Report, which celebrated the cultural shifts in the life of the school over the last decade.

When reading the 2019 report, it appeared that the Five Marks of Mission, written into the new Integration Agreement of 2016, were embedded and shaping programmes throughout the school and the Special Character ethos of the school. This review showed little evidence that these Marks of Mission were at the forefront of the proprietors' thinking and found that although the school used them to frame high-level thinking, consistency of application or use in class was lacking.

The Special Character articulation captured in 2019 seems to have lost some clarity in the minds of the Board of Proprietors, Board of Trustees and school leadership, who now have a shared desire to bring greater clarity to the school's Special Character from the Proprietors through to the classroom. Much work has been done by the new principal in recent weeks to inform the community about St Mark's Special Character and valuable programmes through the development of the school website. It is noted, however, that there is little evidence of the Five Marks of Mission as a vehicle for shaping and delivering the school's Special Character. The next step is for the Proprietors to support the board and staff to articulate these as an overt pathway of translation into the lived experience of teaching and learning. School leadership is seeking more direction from the Proprietor and or the Church to show them the way forward. The Proprietor wants to fill this void, knowing that it is their responsibility, but lacks clarity as to the way forward. Staff are also seeking clarity; in the meantime, each seeks to do what they know best. One of the big questions leadership and management staff are wrestling with is whether they employ a RE Teacher connected to the church to do the heavy lifting. As Reviewers, we will be proposing that the current staff have the desire and capability to authentically shape and deliver the school's Special Character once they have greater clarity from the Proprietor regarding the outcomes they are looking for based on the Five Marks of Mission. It is our view that this Special Character focus could easily be integrated into the curriculum and existing practices such as Habits of Mind. Associated professional development and support will be needed over the next 2- 3 years to bring about these changes and embed them in the teaching and learning culture of the school. Despite all this, both groups genuinely desire to address this "wilderness" experience!

Areas of Strength:

- The school is an authentic and vibrant expression of Christian community
- A parent described the school as, *"a welcoming community where everyone feels supported and valued. They live out faith daily through kindness, respect, and service to others. Friday church service, and religious education help students explore and grow in their faith. St Mark's also encourages students to get involved in service projects, both in school and in the wider community, which helps put their faith into action."*
- There is a mutual desire for greater clarity with regard to Proprietor expectations for Special



Character shared by the board, staff and Proprietor.

- The newly appointed Principal and DP are respected and valued by stakeholders who appreciate their positive leadership. Their knowledge of the school community and history means they are well-positioned and equipped to lead the school forward in the next phase of Special Character development with the Proprietor and staff.
- Staff feel connected to the Special Character of St Mark's and desire to grow further in the understanding of, and effectiveness in, expressing and teaching the Special Character
- The students warmly embody the school's Special Character and values.
- There is a strong and healthy connection between the school and the St Mark's church.
- Parents highly value the school's Special Character.

Other Findings:

- A change of Vicar has been keenly felt by the school and has left a big gap in the coherence and cohesiveness of the Year 7-8 Special Character programme.
- The interface between the Board, Proprietor and Management needs to become more intentional and collaborative.
- Devotions vary significantly across the school.
- While the Board and parents generally agree that "The school's expression of its Special Character is relevant and engaging for students", the Proprietors are neutral or disagree and
- 25% of staff are neutral or disagree with the statement, "The school's expression of its Special Character is relevant and engaging for students". Comments have been made about the need to find ways to provide experiences that engage learners rather than teaching to them.
- While staff support the utility of the current model in which individual teachers draw from bible story books, their own experiences and faith journeys to enrich class devotions, there is a call for shared expectations, clarity of vision and an agreed-upon schoolwide framework for articulating the school's Special Character.
- Class devotions observed used a talk-based pedagogy followed by personal reflection in their books and extemporary prayer by a student and the teacher.
- The current programme is dependent on the skill set of the Vicar, who leads the church's Friday church services. For some, this, along with the school culture, has been the Special Character.
- Good attempts have been made to make the church services child-friendly, and the principal has some great initial ideas to further embed the services with student learning and presentations
- Staff desire to foster spiritual formation in their students and seek tools to support them in this

Recommendations

Areas of focus for:

The Proprietor by:

- Strengthening their interface with the Board of Trustees and Principal
- Becoming strategically focused on their vision for Special Character, school growth and property



- Implementing sound governance processes and practices as outlined in their Handbook
- Collaboratively developing Special Character Guidelines for the board and staff to outwork in the life of the school based on the Five Marks of Mission.
- Providing greater guidance concerning enrolment and appointment of staff
- Developing ways to stay informed and celebrate their Special Character
- Reviewing how it resources the Special Character programme once the new Guidelines are developed
- Determining whether they want a Minister-centred or staff-led delivery of its Special Character
- Engaging an external facilitator to lead them through these processes and consider adopting the Special Character Evaluator model developed by the Association of Integrated Schools to support the next phase of Special Character development

Once the Proprietor has worked through much of the above and created Special Character Guidelines for the School Board and Management Team, they will need to consider the following:

The Board by:

- Engaging with the Proprietor when developing Strategic and Annual Plans for Special Character development in the school, and when reviewing them annually

Management by:

- Establishing a Special Character team, if it can be resourced by the proprietors, to lead developments
- Exploring current research on Spiritual Formation in children and how such thinking could inform Special Character practices in the school
- Developing a Special Character Development Plan to include:
 - i. Curriculum and Pedagogy**
 1. Pursuing ways in which the Five Marks of Mission can shape the school curriculum, integrating these with Habits of Mind, School Values, and the New Zealand Curriculum
 2. Devising an implementation plan that considers local curriculum, values and pedagogy
 3. Having clear and reviewable expectations for the pedagogy and delivery of Special Character programmes across the school
 4. Developing processes to enhance student agency when processing biblical texts, Special Character themes or understandings related to the Five Marks of Mission
 5. Pedagogical approaches used to deliver Special Character, reflecting such dimensions as student agency, co-construction and inquiry learning, teaching students how to think rather than what to think.



- ii. **Community and Connections**
 - 1. Developing ways the class programmes are linked to church service content, perhaps via selected passages from the Lectionary.
 - 2. Continue to review the role, format and frequency of the Friday Church services through a student lens.
- iii. **Students**
 - 1. Engaging students in developing Special Character throughout the school
 - 2. Developing a Year 8 graduate profile, with progressions at Year 3 and 6 in which a shared vision for a learner's Special Character disposition is co-constructed and embedded
- iv. **Professional Capacity and Resources**
 - 1. Building internal capability rather than looking to the church to deliver the Special Character
 - 2. Developing a Professional Development Plan for Liz that supports her in her new chaplaincy initiative
 - v. Developing a plan for staff PLD regarding Special Character, including supporting staff to engage with and express the Special Character when planning, and ways for authentic integration in the wider curriculum.
 - vi. Reviewing resources for each age group
 - vii. Drawing on the resources of the church (Ministers and Anglican Schools Office) to support, shape and enhance the school's Special Character

The big piece of work going forward will be the development of Special Character Guidelines by the Proprietor. Once completed, this will require the board and management to develop a three year Special Character development and implementation plan aligned with the board's Strategic Plan for Special Character, supported by significant Professional Development for staff regarding implementation and integration.

Axis Strategies celebrates the good work that is happening in the school and is confident that the school will embrace this new season of Special Character development and focus as there is a collective will to further enhance what is already happening for students.

Reviewers:

Carl Becker
Helen Pearson
Axis Strategies