He Arotake Whanaketanga mō te Mātauranga Ahurea Katorika – Te Ture Tāuke mō ngā Kura Katorika

Catholic Special Character External Evaluation for Development Report

St Francis Catholic Primary Kura

Thames Auckland

Evaluation conducted. 15- 16 October 2025

Confirmed. 2nd December 2025

Kura Profile

Kura: St Francis Catholic Primary Kura

Address: 202 Mackay St Thames

Kura type: Co-educational Year 1-8

Actual roll: 85

Maximum roll: 120

Actual non-preference number:18

Maximum non- preference percentage: 10%

Roll based staffing entitlement: 4.7

Required number of Special Character Cl 47 positions: 3

Filled number of Special Character Cl 47 positions:

Director of Religious Studies: Oliver Fahey

Kura Tumuaki: Oliver Fahey

Parish Priest: Father Rob O'Brien

Presiding Member: Jenna Smith

Evaluation Team:

Christine Smith and Viki Trainor

One of the many ways Tamariki Encounter Christ at St Francis Kura

An infant's crib sits in the main foyer waiting to receive the Christ-child. As tamariki are observed being Jesus to each other, they are asked to place a piece of woolen thread in the infant's crib in readiness for his arrival.

Ngā Whāinga O Te Arotake-Aims of External Evaluation

The New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference wishes the external evaluation to show how effective the kura is in handing on the faith and forming a new generation of Catholics; this includes evaluating the efficacy of Religious Education and how the whole kura community engages in authentic Catholic Christian witness and evangelising. This is the evangelizing mission of the Church, in which the kura participates.

The external review process is based upon the *He Arotake Whanaketanga mō te Mātauranga Ahurea Katorika – Te Ture Tāuke mō ngā Kura Katorika – Catholic Special Character Evaluation for Development (January 2022)*. In the evaluation, kuras are asked to consider and demonstrate the ways in which they have provided for their students:

- Te tūtaki ki a Te Karaiti – an encounter with Christ,
- Mā te Mātauranga ka tipu – growth in knowledge,
- Te whakaatu Karaitiana – Christian witness.

And how the kura is:

- Te kaitiakitanga me te whakapakari I te tuakiri- Safeguarding and Strengthening Catholic Special Character.

The evaluation is designed to look at the work the kura has done, in its internal evaluation and development, to grow Catholic Character. It affirms what the kura has done and the opportunities for further development the kura has discerned. It challenges the kura to be more transformational. Evaluators encourage and commend good practice, and work with the kura to analyse opportunities to further strengthen and develop the Catholic culture.

Progress With Recommendations from the 2021 Catholic Special Character Evaluation

- Considering with your community, ways of using your newly acquired Van to undertake outreach in your community. *Achieved Well*
- Thinking about introducing Service Hours for senior students now that you have a van to support this undertaking. *Achieved Well*
- Finding ways to involve families new to the Parish with an existing family/ families. *Achieved Well*

Dimension 1: Te Tūtaki Ki A Te Karaiti-Encounter with Christ

How effectively does the kura encourage and facilitate the development of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ who reveals the transforming love and truth of the living God?

FOCUS AREAS:

1. Spiritual Formation

There is strong evidence that the kura very effectively provides ongoing Catholic spiritual formation assisting tamariki to enrich and deepen their personal relationship with Christ. The impact of this is a kura that is joyful and Christ-centred.

- *The wairuatanga of St Francis is deeply embedded in the kura's spiritual life. It is visible in the environment and in how the community lives out the Tātou Moemoeā Vision.*
- *The kura's vision and values are not just spoken they are lived. Everyday acts of kindness and authenticity reflect a genuine encounter with Christ and nurture an understanding of his person. Tamariki, whānau, and kaiako clearly expressed the impact of this to the Evaluation Team.*

There is a shared understanding of Catholic spirituality across the community. This shapes a strong Catholic identity, formed in the image of Jesus. Tamariki connect meaningfully with the kura's patron saint and charism and show both theological knowledge and spiritual insight.

"Committing my life to Jesus, saying prayers for those who need help, and giving thanks."
"We believe in transubstantiation... this helps us understand the miracles of Jesus." — Tamariki

Faith practice is central to daily life. Prayer and reflection shape the rhythm of the kura, guided by the kura's vision—ako ki te aroha, te aroha ki te ako—and the core values of Whakapono, Aroha, Pono, and Manaakitanga.

Kaiako support tamariki in understanding the Church—its history and its relevance today. Tamariki engage with the Gospels in meaningful ways, applying their teachings in everyday life. Their reverence and liturgical literacy reflect a mature grasp of Catholic identity.
"Tamariki are engaged... lessons from the Gospels are reflected in the playground." Kaiako

The kura demonstrates a deep commitment to both tūturu Katorika and tūturu Māori, affirming its place in the bicultural Aotearoa New Zealand Catholic Church, as recognised by the Bishops' 1989 Synod. This bicultural expression of faith is a defining strength and expressed through their spirituality.
"If we respect and love each other, we are showing God's love." — Tamariki

Evangelisation

Through effective practices and communications, St Francis Kura facilitates an encounter with Christ and spreads the Good News to the community. The kura and parish work collaboratively to find ways to encourage tamariki and their whānau to attend and participate in Sunday Mass. Sister Paula is a galvanizing force in the Parish. She serves on the kura Board and works tirelessly in the Parish. Father Rob leads each class in Mass, then holds a Q & A session with the class afterwards. Altar servers are published in the kura newsletter. The impact of these events has been evangelising, building community through kotahitanga. Over

the years these actions have strengthened the church and kura community, as together they act for the good of the other, resulting in a series of baptisms, including adults.

"It's lovely to see the Altar servers uplifted by publication in the weekly kura newsletter" (Whānau)

"We have a close relationship (with the Parish) through regular timetabled connections with Father Rob and Sister Paula. "(Kaiako)

Emulating the Parish and Kura relationship, whānau and kura operate with openhearted reciprocity, all are welcome, all of the time, to all liturgies, Masses, and kura gatherings and this is evangelizing hearts and minds of Whānau and this enables tamariki, kaiako and whānau to continue growing in a personal and communal relationship with God.

"My child fell in love with the Religious Education side of St Francis, and they pushed to be baptised. The history around Māori and religion could have been challenging, but the Tumuaki explained how Catholic and Māori are so closely aligned. It's just a lovely place to have our children." (Whānau)
"Students from a range of backgrounds are choosing Baptism." (Kaiako)

2:Faith-based Leadership
The Evaluation Team acknowledges the seminal leadership of the Tumuaki in his dual role as Director of Religious Education- Tumuaki of St Francis Kura. The Tumuaki and Board have ensured that Gospel Values, Vision and Mission have primacy in all key areas of the kura. They are at the forefront of Strategic and Annual planning at St Francis. The impact of this is a learning environment that is culturally cohesive and tūturu katorika, faithful to its Franciscan Charism. The Tumuaki embodies a compelling integration of professional excellence and deep spiritual conviction. His leadership is defined by a relentless pursuit of growth, both in capability and character and underpinned by a Christ-centred spirituality that informs every decision and direction. This unique blend of strategic acumen and faith-driven purpose sets a clear, intentional course for the kura, shaping a culture that is both visionary and grounded in Gospel values.

Leadership of the kura is visible and highly effective. Under leadership's guidance, the Kura Katorika has flourished, not only in its Catholic identity but in its expression of tūturu Katorika faith. Striking new signage, murals, and iconography now boldly reflect the mission and values of St Francis Kura. Leadership of the Kura has been transformational across many settings, inspiring others through a lived example of Catholic mission in action.

"The Tumuaki is a real person who just draws people to him, he cares about us and is highly relational." (Support staff)

"We now have kids going to the Marae weekly, we have a great relationship with Ngati Maru and external agencies, this is good for our tamariki and our kura." (Support staff)

Effectiveness of Dimension 1: Te Tūtaki Ki A Te Karaiti-Encounter with Christ

Spiritual formation, evangelisation, and faith-based leadership at St Francis are highly effective. Together, they foster a Christ-centred, inclusive kura where Gospel values guide daily life. Strong parish partnerships, visible leadership, and authentic Catholic identity inspire tamariki, whānau, and staff to grow in faith, community, and cultural understanding.

Dimension 2: Te Whakatupu Mā Te Mātauranga: Growth in Knowledge

How effectively does the kura assist its community to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ, his teachings, and the Catholic Church?

FOCUS AREAS:

1.Leadership

Leadership is highly effective in enabling growth in faith, knowledge, and understanding, the necessary factors in the disciple's journey. The Tumuaki/ demonstrates a deep and grounded understanding of how a synthesis of life and faith is enacted in the mahi of the kura and the daily lives of ākonga at St Francis. Leadership always has time for their community, Kanohi ki te Kanohi, face to face. This is a highly effective example of servant leadership, following in Jesus' footsteps. The Leadership team are regarded by their kura community as true Catholic Leaders. They demonstrate how a synthesis of culture and faith and a synthesis of life and faith is enacted in the work of the kura.

By working closely with each other the Tumuaki and Deputy Tumuaki, who is also an exceptional leader and SENCo, ensure ākonga have the opportunity to develop a robust understanding and knowledge tūturu Katorika. This was evidenced in discussions throughout the Evaluation. The Tumuaki has developed and implemented effective processes and tools to support kaiako with their professional practice.

In addition to this, leaders have a sound understanding of how Religious Education is delivered across the kura, enabling and supporting Kaiako towards improved pedagogy and practice, as a priority. Their commitment to ensuring St Francis's kaiako can professionally and spiritually grow is intentional and strategically planned, enabling ākonga to develop their God given potential.

2.Religious Education

Planning assessment, evaluation, and reporting procedures about and for ākonga are of the same very good standard as those in other learning areas. This is evidenced through ākonga's outcomes; these are also responsive, planned, and evaluated effectively. Kaiako effectively use assessment data and collaborate to understand their impact on student achievement. They subsequently report this progress to Whānau and the Board. As a result of deliberate curriculum design, St Francis is delivering highly effective teaching and learning programmes for tamariki.

Tumuaki and Special Character reports to the Board are comprehensive, presenting very good information to the Board. Digital and print platforms are used to communicate Religious Education learning to Whānau, Parish, and Community. Whānau, Senior leaders, and Kaiako described these as being effective. Tamariki expressed to evaluators that they value and enjoy Religious Education. They provided examples such as outdoor education activities, art projects, retreats, meditation, Mass, and liturgy. Importantly, they see the connections between their life, faith, and culture. The Religious Education and learning experiences at St Francis authentically reflect the identity, language, and culture of Tamariki, contributing to the very healthy and holistic growth of faith, knowledge and spirituality in Tamariki across the kura.

3.Catholic Curriculum

The curriculum at this kura is highly effective. The design is based on "Te Whare Tapa Wha"- (Mason Durie). The curriculum is intentionally organised, enabling a cohesiveness of delivery, ensuring authenticity and integrity in what ākonga are experiencing in classrooms.

"Students demonstrated a deep retention of RE learning by making meaningful connections across curriculum areas." (Kaiako)

The Catholic Curriculum at St Francis is responsively designed and integrated, enabling tamariki to connect Religious Education across subjects. Grounded in Te Whare Tapa Whā, it reflects Catholic values and Māori perspectives. Tamariki link RE to other areas, such as interpreting Colin McCahon's art through Catholic symbolism. The overarching theme, **God's Wild Wonderful World,** supports coherence and engagement. Kaiako very effectively use an integrated curriculum to deliver the wider curriculum. Religious education is taught as a separate subject and integrated as appropriate, to grow Catholic Character, faith formation, and to enable ākonga into a wider understanding of the place of Religious Education in our wider world. Strong leadership, authentic Katorika Māori practices, and partnerships with Ngāti Maru enrich learning and support cultural continuity across this kura.

While there is evidence of effective teaching and learning processes for ākonga, leaders of the kura agree, there is now an opportunity for a more agentic approach to teaching and learning across all learning areas of the Kura, and leadership and evaluators agree that Kaiako are ready for this approach.

The Tumuaki leads with intention and presence, supporting kaiako through kanohi ki te kanohi engagement and regular classroom walk-throughs. He ensures a strong Catholic lens is woven through the curriculum, with Tō Tātou Whakapono – Our Faith guiding learning from Year 0–6. There is a clear focus on liturgical literacy, and kaiako are well-resourced to deliver high-quality Religious Education. As one kaiako shared,
"The Tumuaki developed a scripture resource to support me in my practice... it made a great difference."
Katorika Māori practices are authentically embedded, with Te Ao, tikanga, and Mātauranga Māori visible across the kura. Tamariki and whānau expressed a strong desire for more reo Māori learning, with one kaiako noting,
"We didn't have anything until Oliver came, and now we have Te Reo in karakia, waiata, kapa haka—he's made the difference."
Weekly marae visits to Kopu and partnership with Ngāti Maru are enriching cultural learning and supporting tuakana-teina relationships. As the Board affirmed,
"It (Te Tiriti o Waitangi) is intrinsic in the kura; it is not an add-on, it is integrated into everything in the kura. We are all aware of the responsibility and why that is important in our community". (Board)

The kura is committed to deepening their understanding of Protection, Partnership, and Participation. Katorika Māori practice is evident at St Francis and is across the kura as part of teaching and learning as areTe Ao, tikanga, and Mātauranga Māori, and there is a very strong desire to continue to authentically embed these elements within the Kura. A range of whānau and tamariki told Evaluators they would like Kaiako to be given support to learn Reo Māori so everyone could speak with greater confidence in the classroom.
"The Kura gives them really good mata pono (values), the tikanga side of things".(Whānau)
The Health and Wellbeing programme is delivered using a methodology that now requires updating. Having life to the Full is the new Health and Sexuality programme for Catholic Kura and all Kaiako teaching in Catholic kura need to undertake PLD so that the programme is delivered to all ākonga years 0-8. The Tumuaki has this requirement organised for 2026.

Effectiveness of Te Whakatupu Mā Te Mātauranga: Growth in Knowledge
Leadership at St Francis is highly effective, modelling servant leadership and fostering faith, culture, and learning. Religious Education is well-planned, assessed, and enjoyed by tamariki, who connect it meaningfully to their lives. The Catholic Curriculum is cohesively designed, integrating Te Whare Tapa Whā and Catholic themes across subjects. Kaiako are well-supported to deliver both distinct and integrated RE, with Māori Catholic practices authentically embedded. Strong partnerships and strategic leadership ensure continued growth in faith formation and cultural understanding across the kura

Dimension 3: Te Whakaatu Karaitiana-Christian Witness

How effectively does the kura provide a hope-filled Christian witness which empowers its community members to integrate their faith and their life?

1.Catholic Kura Community
Whānau and ākonga recounted the effectiveness and authenticity generated from within the St Francis kura community, relating how it promotes active Catholic Christian witness and practice. The kura is open and welcoming, and everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

2. Partnership and Collaboration
Recognising that education is a collaborative responsibility, the kura very effectively builds strong connections with the many groups they relate too, including, whānau, parish, Diocese and the Bishop. Ākonga are enabled to develop an understanding of, and respect for, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the cultural diversity of St Francis is the lived experience of Aotearoa New Zealand.
"There is a great partnership in the way they use Te Reo Māori. There is a great partnership so that everyone is on the same level. Kids are allowed to wear taonga here and not all kura allow this. There is strong collaboration between Māori and the kura". (Whānau)
St Francis provides clear information and opportunities for whānau to understand kura systems and practices in general and in relation to Catholic Special Character. Community consultation is undertaken informally. Whānau appreciate the opportunity to be heard. Ākonga, Kaiako, and Whānau celebrate their cultural identity and respect the cultural diversity of others in the kura community. They believe their ideas are listened to, heard, and incorporated into the life of the kura and feel affirmed and acknowledged. There could, however, be some merit in evaluating the methodology of the consultation processes to ensure documentation is in place.

3.Pastoral Care
The kura effectively ensures that education occurs in a safe, nurturing environment supported by a strong pastoral care network in which each member of the community is known, respected, cared for, and aware that they are loved unconditionally by God. All staff were unequivocal in voicing their support of the very affirming professional environment that is celebrated at St Francis. An equally effective pastoral network is in action by the kura to enable support as needed. This makes a positive difference in the lives of tamariki and whānau at kura and home.

4. Service and Outreach

St Francis Kura embodies a Christ-centric, inclusive culture defined by service, justice, and community outreach. Grounded in Catholic values, the kura actively lives out the Gospel through meaningful action. Tamariki regularly visit a nearby retirement village to build relationships and share music with residents, fostering intergenerational connection. They also lead environmental efforts such as tree planting and shoreline clean-ups. These initiatives are deeply informed by Pope Francis's Laudato Si, with tamariki articulating to Evaluators a clear understanding of climate action as a moral and spiritual responsibility, rooted in Gospel values. Kaiako and tamariki lead both grassroots and global outreach and service initiatives, inspired by the Gospel message. They actively support others within the kura and wider community through initiatives such as sharing resources with the local Food Kitchen and with whānau in need and supporting organisations like Caritas and the Missions.

Tamariki are encouraged to develop social literacy and critically examine events through a Catholic lens with strong links made to the Gospels and Religious Education curriculum. Social justice is intentionally taught and woven into the curriculum at St Francis, offering tamariki rich, authentic learning experiences that deepen their understanding of diverse realities—locally, nationally, and globally. These experiences cultivate empathy, compassion, and a strong sense of moral responsibility. Evaluators observed tamariki engaging in thoughtful, mature discussions, demonstrating an exceptional awareness of others' experiences and a genuine care for social equity well beyond their years.

"We use our leadership to influence others in a positive way." (Tamariki)

"We help people in need because as Christians, we have a responsibility to do this." (Tamariki)

"Jesus welcomes everyone- not just one group of people." (Tamariki)

Effectiveness of Te Whakaatu Karaitiana-Christian Witness

St Francis Kura effectively empowers its community to integrate faith and life through authentic Catholic witness, strong partnerships, and inclusive pastoral care. Whānau describe the kura as welcoming and respectful, "There is strong collaboration between Māori and the kura." Tamariki lead Gospel-inspired service and outreach, expressing, "Jesus welcomes everyone—not just one group of people." And social Justice matters. These practices reflect a living faith that is inclusive, compassionate, and deeply embedded in the life of the kura.

Dimension 4: Te Kaitiakitanga Me To Whakapakari I Te Tuakiri Katorika-Safeguarding and Strengthening Catholic Character

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

FOCUS AREAS:

1. **Stewardship**

From the Board's perspective, Catholic Special Character is seminal to the life of the kura. They are a Christ-centric Board. They can see the connections between their life and their faith, and their faith and culture; it is an integral part of Kura life and for the lives of many whānau. The educational and life experiences of tamariki are in evidence in classrooms reflecting their identity language and culture enabling the changing and diverse nature of the growing roll at St Francis, to remain spiritually and culturally healthy.

Governance and management are cohesive, ensuring Catholic Special Character is embedded across all operational areas, organisation, employment, professional development, formation, and enrolment. The Board of the kura provides unwavering support to the Tumuaki and leadership team, ensuring the kura's vision and strategic direction are firmly grounded in Religious Education and Catholic Special Character. Their commitment to continuous improvement is evident in their reflective practices and clear examples of how Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Te Ao Māori shape their governance. As the Board of small kura, they are Christ centric stewards. They steadfastly govern for the wellbeing of the kura.

The Board demonstrates an authentic commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, actively upholding the principles of Protection, Partnership, and Participation. They are resolute in their goal for tamariki Māori to thrive in

both education and faith as Māori. Policies and procedures reflect an integration of Te Ao, Tikanga, and Mātauranga Māori, and their strategic plan clearly prioritises the holistic development of all tamariki and kaiako.

St Francis's internal evaluation processes support high-quality practice and leadership. The Annual Internal Report, including the Catholic Special Character Evaluation, was thorough carried out over two years, professionally insightful and relevant. Strategic directions are implemented by the Board, kura leaders, and kaiako, with clear, positive outcomes across the Kura. The Charter is strategic and forward-thinking, and annual planning effectively shapes kaiako practice and tamariki achievement. Leadership, in collaboration with the Evaluation team, has identified focused next steps for growth in Catholic Special Character and Religious Education, supported by a clear pedagogical framework.

Effectiveness of Te Kaitiakitanga Me To Whakapakari I Te Tuakiri Katorika-Safeguarding and Strengthening Catholic Character

The Board demonstrates effectiveness through strategic leadership, unwavering commitment to Catholic Special Character, and deep integration of Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles. Their governance drives continuous improvement, supports strong leadership, and ensures the holistic success of tamariki and kaiako across spiritual, cultural, and educational dimensions.

Catholic Special Character Evaluation Report Summary

St Francis leadership team is highly effective, with each member contributing unique skills. Their Christ-centered approach is evident in their actions and affirmed by feedback from kaiako, tamariki, and whānau. Kaiako and support staff are dedicated professionals, many with strong ties to the kura. Over the past four years, the Tumuaki and Board have made significant strides in shaping the kura's strategic direction. Digital platforms are well-integrated with the curriculum, planning, and communication, and play a key role in Religious Education.

St Francis uses internal evaluation to model and lead good practice. Strategic leadership supports growth in Catholic Special Character and Religious Education, with effective pedagogy driven by leaders and kaiako. Planning is robust and intentional, ensuring Tūtura Katorika and Tūtutura Māori are enacted with tamariki at the centre. A responsively designed curriculum ensures teaching and learning are authentically planned across classrooms through an integrated curriculum. Optimal professional leadership and a solid professional growth cycle enhance learning for both kaiako and ākonga, enriching Religious Education delivery.

Religious Education and Spiritual Development adeptly led by the Tumuaki / DRS, ensures that Religious Education, prayer, and spirituality are well-supported. New teachers receive guidance, and professional development is ongoing. The new RE curriculum, Tō Tātou Whakapono, is being effectively implemented.

Leaders of the Kura promote consistently high standards in RE and other curriculum areas. Increasing student agency and scaffolding learning are ongoing goals. Tamariki are thriving, confident, connected, capable, and joyful. The Tumuaki and leadership team provide bicultural direction, supported by capable kaiako and whānau. By building on existing strategic work, it is timely to embed Mātauranga, tikanga, and te reo Māori expressions of Katorikatanga, across all classrooms. Kaiako thrive within a strong professional learning community. The Board is future-focused and deliberate, with faith and foresight, the Board is preparing for the 2026 Tumuaki transition, committed to nurturing ākonga, kaiako, and whānau

alongside the process. Together, the Tumuaki and Board steadfastly uphold tūturu Katorika values, ensuring tamariki are enabled to grow and share their God-given gifts for the Common Good.

Recommendations

1.Engage the Diocesan RE Advisors to provide guided Religious Education support for kaiako throughout the coming year. This will be implemented strategically to ensure continuity and strengthen RE teaching as the new tumuaki transitions into Catholic leadership. The outgoing tumuaki/DRS will provide the overarching strategic direction to align this support with the kura Catholic character goals as documented in the kura Charter.

2. Develop a kura-wide continuum for students to learn Te Reo on a regular timetabled basis. Evaluators suggest that the Te Reo language continuum in Te Kamaka would be a good resource to support the kura in creating their own plan.

2A: Support teachers with Professional Development to develop their own learning of Tikanga and Te Reo Māori.

3. Develop agentic learners across all year levels. For kaiako to encourage tamariki to be critical and creative thinkers who are confident, critical thinkers, who are able to take responsible learning risks and respectfully and astutely question the world around them.

4. Reinstate the initiative of sending home a prayer kete to enable tamariki to have the opportunity to take home the kete over the year.

The Evaluation Team is confident that the Tumuaki, DRS, leadership team, and the Board, 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 Tumuaki, Board of Trustees and staff in compiling an action plan to address these recommendations.

The team thank the community 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 evaluation by the kura is greatly appreciated.

Christine Smith Evaluator

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Viki Trainor Evaluator

Philip Mahoney Manager, Catholic Education Serrvice