ARCHDIOCESE OF WELLINGTON

He Pūrongo Arotake Mātauranga

Ahurea Katorika ā Waho.

CATHOLIC SPECIAL CHARACTER EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

for

St Catherine's College Wellington

Evaluation Conducted 22 – 24 April, 2026

Confirmed Report: 5 May 2026

School Details

Name of school	St Catherine's College
Address	14 Upper Bourke Street, Kilbirnie, Wellington, 6022
School type	Single sex girls Years 9-13
Actual roll	208
Maximum roll	300
Non-preference maximum	30 (10%)
Actual non-preference number	31
Roll-based staffing entitlement	23.1
Required number of Special Character Cl 47 positions	9
Filled number of Special Character Cl 47 positions (not including the Principal or DRS)	7
Principal	Amelie Kelder
Director of Religious Studies	Jenny O'Brien
Presiding Member, School Board	Taima Fagaloa
Chair, Proprietor Board	Melanie Smith
Parish Priest	Fr Bill Warwick
Parish	Holy Trinity

Evaluation Team

Lead Evaluator	Mr Gerard Tully
Accompanying Principal	Mrs Myra Coley

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[1]. 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[2]. 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

St Catherine's College was founded in 1950 by the Sisters of Mercy. In 2023, the kura was transferred to the ministerial public juridic person, Whānau Mercy Ministries. Whānau Mercy Ministries entrusts the proprietorship to Whānau Mercy Education Ltd, which serves as the joint Proprietor of both St Catherine's College and St Mary's College. The college is situated in Kilbirnie, Wellington, within walking distance of St Patrick's College, with which it shares some areas of the curriculum to the benefit of all tauira. A new Tumuaki has been appointed since the last external Catholic Special Character Evaluation. The current Presiding Member/Chair of both the School Board and the Proprietor Board were appointed relatively recently to their position. The passing of Sister Stephanie, such a passionate advocate for the kura, has been acutely felt by the community.

[1] New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference. *The Catholic Education of School Age Children*. Wellington:2014.
[2] Ibid.

Progress with Recommendations from the 2023 Catholic Special Character Evaluation Report

1. That the Religious Education Department embeds the teaching of Health and Sexuality into its RE programmes at each year group. This will include the recognised differentiation of material/topics to be covered at each year level and the timetabling of when in the year these topics will be covered.

There is evidence of a timetabled Health and Sexuality programme for tauira in the senior years. Little formalised consideration is given to this subject matter for tauira in Years 9 and 10, although some related topics are touched upon as they arise in other content areas.

2. The school does not meet the required number of teachers with the Cl 47 tag. In advertising future teacher vacancies, it is recommended that the Cl 47 clause continues to be included to ensure that this legal requirement is met.

St Catherine's College has made significant progress on this recommendation and is now close to, but just below, the required number of Special Character Cl 47 positions.

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?

St Catherine's College is an authentic Catholic community that is committed to preparing young women to confidently take their place in Aotearoa New Zealand society. Through an intentional prioritisation of Catholic special character and Mercy values – *"it's not an add-on, it's embedded, it's the foundation of the school,"* (Board member) – tauira develop a deep understanding of human dignity, the challenges faced by many in the community, and concern for the disadvantaged:

- *"Going to this school has really fostered my Catholic faith"* (Year 11 tauira)
- *"There is a strong emphasis on social justice, empowering (tauira) to recognize and respond to the needs of those around them"* (a whānau member)

Whānau, kaiako, and tauira themselves report their willingness to get involved in the various forms of worship and spiritual growth provided, including prayer, Retreats, liturgies, Masses, service opportunities, and experiences such as YAFA and YCL for seniors. As one kaiako noted, tauira *"are willing to volunteer and their participation is meaningful."* Consistent with the Strategic Plan statements for tauira to be *"empowered"* and encouraged to *"grow their personal relationship with God"* (Aspiration Statements for Whakapono and Aroha), it has been observed

that tauira "*are so good at leading*" (kaiako) in special character activities. A Year 12 tauira commented that *"we are encouraged to find our sense of self, what you are good at and how you can use that to help others."* Many tauira acknowledge and appreciate the wide range of opportunities they are given to lead in both Catholic special character and in general kura life.

The various staff in the kura provide tauira with significant and wide-ranging role-modelling of faith and spiritual commitment, demonstrating that there is not a "one size fits all" way of living a Christian life. By actively promoting discernment and encouraging tauira *"to reflect on actions and decisions in light of our Catholic special character"* (kaiako), staff are leading tauira to consider their own faith development, and that "*it is OK to question, it is OK not to know all the answers"* (Tumuaki). The Tumuaki and the DRS provide strong and enthusiastic faith, special character, and social justice leadership, which is acknowledged and appreciated by the community.

Tauira encounter Christ at St Catherine's College through the witness, encouragement, care, and actions of others, and through the willingness and enthusiasm of so many of them to *"walk the talk"* (a kaiako observation).

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 Religious Education Department staff are experienced, knowledgeable, and passionate. Most Department members are also active in their local parishes, which serves as an example to tauira of kaiako being committed in their private lives to what they teach at kura: *"I try to live my faith authentically – model what a relationship with Christ looks like"* (kaiako).

Academic results within the subject in the senior years are excellent, with many tauira demonstrating deep insight and achieving at a very high level. Tauira speak positively about their experiences in Religious Education.

Many tauira appreciate the chance to be exposed in their learning to different faith denominations, religions, and world views, and particularly enjoy the more ethical considerations required in senior Religious Education. *"In senior RE we consider the Catholic way more globally, but also more personally and emotionally – it impacts how you develop your own perspectives on issues"* (a senior tauira). A number of tauira highlighted the atmosphere created within their classes for enquiry and critique: *"It's really open. They (kaiako) don't restrict your thinking, your opinions. It's a really safe environment to share"* (Year 13 tauira). Such reflections from senior tauira reinforce that specific actions articulated in the Strategic Plan - e.g. *"enable (tauira) to develop critical-thinking and challenge different perspectives that can co-exist"* and *"the*

environment of learning is safe and available for all" - are being nurtured in the classrooms of the kura.

Heads of Department of other curriculum areas were positive and gave multiple examples of a Catholic worldview being embraced in their subject areas and referred to where opportunities arose. There is a shared vision that Catholic special character and knowledge is fundamental to the identity of the kura. This is reinforced by the practice of timetabling Religious Education classes at the start of the timetable creation process each year.

A Journey Programme commenced this year for non-preference Year 9 tauira. This involves one timetabled lesson per week where tauira are gently introduced to key Catholic teachings and explanations of particular Church observances and Feast Days. It follows on from the Forming Faith evening held at the end of the previous year for whānau of tauira joining the College in 2026. The Journey Programme will eventually offer opportunities for tauira to consider the Sacraments of Initiation into the Catholic Church.

While there are some timetabled and planned opportunities for senior tauira to consider Health, Relationships and Sexuality, no such opportunities exist in the junior kura. Including some of the Achievement Objectives from the NCRS document *Wonderfully Made in God's Image* in the junior kura learning programme, with a specific lens on sexuality (e.g. contraception, abortion, STIs, same-sex couples and developments within Catholic Church teaching and society about these sensitive issues), is needed to round out a comprehensive Health and Sexuality programme. There is a significant opportunity here for positive collaboration with the Physical Education and Health Department.

See Recommendation 1.

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?

Significant efforts are made to ensure the kura is connected with the local Catholic community. A long-standing and mutually beneficial relationship exists with St Patrick's College, the local Catholic boys' kura. The Parish Priest of the Holy Trinity Parish is a regular visitor to kura, and St Patrick's Church, the venue for most College Masses, is very close by. The Catholic kura of Wellington City have decided to retain the Kāhui Ako relationship despite it being discontinued by the government, and the St Catherine's College Tumuaki is the lead this year. The theme this year at kura, inspired by the exhortations of Pope Leo, is "Build bridges, not walls."

There is no doubt when you enter the kura that you are in a Catholic kura in Aotearoa that is intentionally empowering young wahine. There is a real commitment to authentic partnership, giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and to ongoing and continued growth in this area. The natural

use of greetings, karakia, and waiata in te reo Māori is enhanced by artwork and artifacts displayed throughout the kura and by a desire to increase the mana given to mātauranga Māori in the curriculum. As with tangata whenua, while actual numbers of tauira from other ethnic groups are often small, efforts are made to celebrate the languages and cultural practices of the many cultures represented at kura. This includes representation through prayer and song in languages other than English during masses and liturgies, and the promotion of the various language weeks through the year.

The kura is small in comparison to most of the city's kura, and this is celebrated as an absolute strength of St Catherine's College. One kaiako commented that *"everyone is seen and heard – we know them, it is easy to support them,"* while a whānau member responded that the smaller size *"creates a positive atmosphere where (tauira) feel comfortable, valued and able to thrive."* There is a strong emphasis on inclusion and acceptance, and tauira report that they look out for each other – *"it's the sisterhood – we turn up for each other because we care about each other"* (a Year 13 leader). The pastoral care system places an emphasis on human dignity, mana, and a restorative approach when relationships are harmed.

Service to others and the wider community is ingrained at kura, and many outreach opportunities are provided for tauira to contribute time or goods to a wide range of groups such as the Soup Kitchen, Vinnies, Women's Refuge, the Social Supermarket, rest homes, etc. Mission Day and Mercy Day are both celebrations and reminders of the practical importance of Catholic social teaching.

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 School Board has excellent Strategic and Annual Plans that put Catholic special character at the forefront of the kura's endeavours. The Board Presiding Member emphasises that instilling Catholic special character and best preparing young women for modern life, as well as making Catholicism real so tauira remain connected beyond school, are key considerations for the Board as they navigate their governance role. The Proprietor Board also maintains a keen interest in special character matters pertaining to the kura. By design, they do so from a more over-arching position.

Both the School Board and the Proprietor Board (Whānau Mercy Education Ltd) have recently elected/appointed a new Presiding Member/Chair. Both governance leaders are experienced, positive, and committed to the ongoing success of the kura. The emerging relationships between these leaders and the College Tumuaki are critical to ensuring that the kura continues to thrive, in terms of both the Catholic special character and the excellence of the educational

opportunities available to tauira. Given the relative newness of this particular kura leadership, and in order to safeguard the longevity and effectiveness of these leaders, a concerted effort is considered necessary to establish agreed expectations and priorities for each Board and their interactions with the Tumuaki and each other. This holds particularly for Whanau Mercy Education Ltd, given its still very emerging nature. The Tumuaki holds the pivotal leadership role as the kura representative who constantly interacts with tauira, whānau, staff, boards and community. Ensuring that the Tumuaki's time and energy is prioritised on Catholic special character and educational leadership, and minimised on property and financial administration, is recommended.

See Recommendation 2.

Good progress has been made on increasing the number of Cl 47 positions on the staff. The Tumuaki is committed to ongoing progress.

Procedures around roll management/clearly identifying preference and non-preference tauira are clear and well managed.

Student Numbers for Each Preference Criteria at the Time of the Review

Preference roll as at the date of the review:

Preference Criterion	Number of Students	% of Current Total Number Students
5.1	128	62
5.2	4	2
5.3	22	11
5.4	15	7
5.5	3	1
Non-Preference	31 (plus 5 Internationals)	17
Total	208	**100%**

Recommendations

1. **Include some of the Achievement Objectives from the NCRS document, *Wonderfully Made in God's Image*, in the Year 9 and 10 Health and Religious Education learning programme, with a specific lens on sexuality (e.g. contraception, abortion, STIs, same-sex couples and developments within Catholic Church teaching and society about these sensitive issues), to ensure tauira are provided with a comprehensive Health, Relationships and Sexuality programme.**

2. **The School Board Presiding Member and Proprietor Board Chair co-construct with the Tumuaki agreed purpose, expectations, and priorities for each Board's relationship with the Tumuaki. Ideally, these relationships and expectations will be collaborative, mana-enhancing and well-being orientated, ensuring that the demands placed on each leader are realistic, achievable and purpose-oriented.**

The evaluation team is confident that the St Catherine's College leadership team (Boards, Principal, Senior Leadership Team and Director of Religious Studies) have the willingness and ability to address these recommendations fully before the next external evaluation. The Catholic Schools Education Services staff are available to assist the Principal, Boards and staff in compiling an action plan to address these recommendations.

The evaluation team thank the community of kura 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.

Gerard Tully
Lead Evaluator

Kelly Ross
Vicar for Education