

St Mary's College (Ponsonby) Education Review

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1 Context

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

St Mary's College (Ponsonby) is a Catholic girls' school in central Auckland. The well established state integrated Years 7 to 15 school is one of New Zealand's earliest colleges. The college has a strong Catholic character based on the values of its Sisters of Mercy founders. Heritage buildings such as the school chapel and music hall are well maintained and in regular use.

Students come from geographically wide spread and culturally diverse communities. Many families have intergenerational connections with the school and the parent, teacher and family association is very active in its support for the school. There are many opportunities for parents and whanau to engage in school events and, increasingly, in learning partnerships.

A new principal was appointed by the board of trustees in 2013. The change in leadership resulted in wide consultation about the school's charter and its vision for future-focused teaching and learning. The very collaborative relationships between the board, the principal and the senior leadership team enable school operations to be continuously reviewed and improved.

The roll has increased 15 percent during the five years since ERO last reviewed the school. That period has also seen the significant development of new buildings and teaching facilities, including the modern gymnasium. The college directors and the board of trustees are continuing to pursue a programme of well considered property and resource enhancement.

ERO's 2010 review identified many features of the school that impacted positively on student learning. These features have been sustained and are evident in continued high levels of student achievement. The board's strategic plan positions the school to make improvements that will further advance student learning outcomes.

2 Learning

How well does this school use achievement information to make positive changes to learners' engagement, progress and achievement?

Student achievement information is very well used.

Information reported to the board demonstrates continual improvement in National Standards at Years 7 and 8, and in the National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA). Senior students are performing well above national comparisons and schools of a similar type, and achievement levels in NCEA Level 3 and University Entrance have increased.

School leaders are setting more challenging annual goals and targets using base-line achievement information. The new targets are specifically focused on students who are most at risk of not achieving their potential. Student progress and achievement at all levels is monitored carefully throughout the year. Teachers know students well and adapt programmes to meet students' identified learning needs.

The school sets appropriate targets for Māori and Pacific learners each year. These are thoughtfully selected based on the actual numbers of students in each year level. Māori and Pacific students have made significant gains, particularly in NCEA Merit and Excellent Endorsement levels. School-wide targets are well analysed and reported, and are now included in the reports of curriculum leaders.

The school has inclusive values and practices. Students with additional learning needs are well supported and involved in all aspects of school life. The learning centre is well resourced and has a central position in the school. The new McAuley Room provides appropriate support for learners with high needs, who attend mainstream classes for much of their learning.

Teachers are exploring ways to use achievement information to inquire into the effectiveness of their professional practice. Expectations of teachers to examine evidence are becoming more evident in teachers' appraisal processes. Planned professional development enables teachers to share their learning and develop capability for meeting the diverse needs of learners.

Senior leaders are thoughtfully planning a school wide evaluation of teaching and learning. ERO discussed the value of exploring modern learning practices to raise teacher expectations of learning for the 21 century. An effective teaching profile that could result from this investigation could complement the school's vision of a successful learner.

3 Curriculum

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

The school's curriculum supports student learning very effectively.

The curriculum has a strong component of Catholic education. The Mercy values inherent in the school's special character are the focus of Religious Education (RE) for all students at all levels. Linking closely with RE is the well established whole school music and cultural programmes. Student leadership opportunities connected with RE, sport and music are sought after and valued.

The whole school Year 7 to 15 curriculum offers a unique opportunity to scaffold learning across all year levels using teachers' subject specific expertise to deliver engaging programmes. The planned curriculum review will enable all faculties to ensure that programmes are well connected across year levels and aligned to school goals. The introduction of e-learning is being carefully managed and the recent introduction of BYOD at Year 8 is enabling innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

The curriculum provides academic pathways that meet the aspirations of students and their families for university entrance qualifications. Parents and the school have high expectations of continued and successful lifelong learning. Well analysed student destination data clearly indicates that the majority of student leavers enter universities and tertiary education.

The curriculum is adapting to the changing interests of the modern learner. New subjects such as computer coding, health education, commerce, te reo Māori and enterprise are adding diversity and access to meaningful careers choices. A school-wide curriculum review will provide valuable opportunities to further examine what is taught, particularly in relation to the principles and competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum.

The board's strategic goal of promoting Hauora/wellbeing is thoughtful and appropriate. The holistic nature of wellbeing complements school values of compassion and social justice. Deans and counsellors work with form teachers to build meaningful connections with students and their families. Greater use of restorative practices could be useful in enhancing student wellbeing.

Students are confident and motivated learners. They are enthusiastic about their opportunities to achieve and participate positively in leadership, service and peer-support programmes. They engage well with teachers and are particularly responsive in learning contexts that are relevant and where their cultural identity and prior knowledge are reflected and valued.

In some subjects, including the arts and social sciences, teachers make good use of Pacific and Māori contexts for learning. Senior leaders agree that culturally responsive teaching is a key component to include in the planned curriculum review.

How effectively does the school promote educational success for Māori, as Māori?

Māori students report pride in their school, and the desire to be successful learners. The number of Māori students in the school has remained relatively stable in recent years.

The school's recently reviewed charter and mission statement reflect an ongoing commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi and the unique place of tangata whenua. Stated values of whānaungatanga and manaakitanga are consistent with school practices and Catholic character. The charter statements provide connections and particular meaning for whānau Māori.

Māori students achieve well overall and continue to improve at higher levels of NCEA. Whānau attend special events that celebrate achievement. A cultural enhancement team of teachers provides additional pastoral support for Māori students.

The recent appointment of a full time te reo Maori teacher is an important step in promoting further success for Māori students. It signals the board's recognition that language, culture and identity are critical factors in succeeding as Māori.

4 Sustainable Performance

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

The school is very well placed to sustain and improve its performance

The board of trustees exercises responsible decision making and draws on shared notions of stewardship to guide school development. Trustees bring a diverse range of experience and expertise to school governance. They contribute extensively to school operations, particularly in making decisions about long term finance, property and resources. Trustees are also keen to consult parents and respond to feedback from the school's community.

Trustees have made good use of external expertise to review their approaches to governance. The resulting school charter and strategic plan provide clear directions and are valuable resources to sustain good governance and support future trustees. Policies and procedures are now clearly defined and self review is systematic and thorough.

School operations, including planning, reporting and resourcing, are well aligned with the board's strategic intentions. Trustees receive well-analysed information and recommendations from school leaders. Increasingly, information is being evaluated and is goal-focused, providing evidence to support better self review.

The new principal is providing effective and professional leadership to the staff. Teachers are confident of the school's direction. This is evident in the ways they engage in professional learning and take a positive and active interest in improving teacher practice. The capability of curriculum managers to be leaders of learning has been strengthened through greater alignment with senior managers and strategic reporting.

Respectful and collaborative relationships with the board of trustees and proprietors enable school leaders to identify key areas for school development. The school is well positioned now to embed recent initiatives and undertake the planned reviews of curriculum, teaching, inclusion, pastoral care and appraisal, all of which have a clear focus on learning and innovation.

Senior managers are aware of the need to be proactive in leading these planned reviews. They have considered their respective roles, and strengthened ways of communicating with staff. The management team is open to external expertise, new learning and evaluation. With the principal's leadership, the outcomes of these reviews have the potential to move the school forward.

Provision for international students

St Mary's College is a signatory to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students established under the section 238F of the Education Act 1989.

At the time of the review there were 29 international students attending the school, mostly from China, Korean and Japan. The board has recently reviewed policies for international students and has clarified its purpose and responsibilities for accepting international students.

Pastoral care services for international students are well integrated with English language teaching. International students make good progress and achieve well academically. The majority gain qualifications that meet their aspirations for entry to a New Zealand or overseas university.

The international student department is well staffed, with a fulltime director, a school dean and a part time accommodation coordinator. The majority of students prefer home-stay arrangements to gain English language speaking experience in a family setting.

International students are encouraged to participate in co-curricular activities and engage in Catholic education programmes. Many students become involved in the wider social life of the school, particularly in musical performances and education outside the classroom.

The director meets regularly with the principal and completes the annual self review. The dean analyses academic progress and reports on student outcomes to the board of trustees. The board has attested that it complies with all aspects of the Code.

ERO's investigations confirmed that the school's self-review process for international students is thorough.

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
- processes for appointing staff
- stand-downs, suspensions, expulsions and exclusions
- attendance.

Conclusion

St Mary's College provides a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes learning and high levels of achievement. The vision of successful and capable young women with strongly held values is central to the school's guiding documents and practices. Students respond positively to the school's high expectations. School leaders and trustees are committed to providing high quality, well resourced education set in attractive and modern facilities.

ERO is likely to carry out the next review in four-to-five years.

Dale Bailey
Deputy Chief Review Officer Northern

29 June 2015

School Statistics

Location	Ponsonby, Auckland	
Ministry of Education profile number	50	
School type	Secondary (Years 7 to 15)	
School roll	957	
Number of international students	29	
Gender composition	Girls 100%	
Ethnic composition	Māori	8%
	NZ European/Pākehā	66%
	Pacific	15%
	Asian	9%
	other	2%
Review team on site	May 2015	
Date of this report	29 June 2015	
Most recent ERO report(s)	Education Review	February 2010
	Education Review	October 2007
	Education Review	November 2004