



Catholic Diocese of Dunedin
Te Hāhi Katorika o Otepoti

He Pūrongo Arotake Mātauranga
Ahurea Katorika ā Waho

Catholic Special Character
Evaluation for Development



Sacred Heart School
Dunedin

Evaluation conducted on 17 – 18 February 2026
Report confirmed 2 April 2026



School Charism: Dominican OP

Address: 63 North Road Dunedin 9011

School type: Contributing Primary Year 0 - 6

Actual roll: 60

Indian 28% Filipino 25% NZ European 20% Māori/Cook Island Māori 12% Pasifika 6% Korea/Japan 3% Other 6%

Maximum roll: 120

Non-preference maximum (5% of maximum roll) : 6

Current non-preference number: 10 (1 sibling, 2 St Joseph's PC, 1 Special Consideration)

Roll based staffing entitlement: 4.7 FTTE [3.7 confirmed]

Actual staffing: 4.07 FTTE

Required number of Special Character CI 47 positions: 2

Filled number of Special Character CI 47 positions: 2

Principal: Ellen Devaney

Director of Religious Studies: Claudia Cleland

Board Presiding Member: Melanie Ohren

Parish / Chaplain: Rev Aidan Cunningham IC

Evaluation Team

Lead Evaluator: Paul Richardson – Catholic Education Office Dunedin

Assisted by: Linda Scarlett – Director of Religious Studies, Sacred Heart School, Invercargill

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 rangatahi¹.

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. 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.

Evaluation Dimensions

- Te tūtaki ki a Te Karaiti - Encounter with Christ.
- Te whakatupu mā - te mātauranga - Growth in knowledge.
- Te whakaatu Karaitiana - Christian witness.
- Te kaitiakitanga me to whakapakari i to tuakiri Katorika - Safeguarding and Strengthening Catholic Character.

History of Sacred Heart School

Sacred Heart is an integrated Catholic Primary School of the Dunedin Diocese with a Dominican tradition. It was established in 1895 by the Dominican Sisters who taught the first classes in the parish church.

It is situated within the rohe of Kāi Tahu (Ngāi Tahu), the principal iwi of Te Waipounamu (South Island).

The first school building at 63 North Road was opened in 1904 and this served the area until 1986-87 when the present school was re-built and opened on the site.

The Dominican religious community had a strong presence in the area until 1993. The Sacred Heart Parish community is currently in the care of Rosminian Priests and is a part of the Northern Pastoral Area including Holy Name, Port Chalmers, Waikouaiti and Palmerston. The school celebrated the 125th year of its founding in 2020.

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

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?

Spiritual Formation

The spiritual care and development of children at Sacred Heart is evident in a shared spirituality, described by the Principal as, ‘the heart of who we are and what we do.’ The spiritual vision of the school reflects its Dominican charism, encouraging all to walk in truth and grow in relationship with Jesus. This is a spirituality that is evident through applying the core values of *Respect – Whakaute, Resilience – Manawaroa, Relationships – Whanaungatanga*, in word and action as the school goes about its daily routines.

The environment of the school with its various displays and symbols, including those significant for Māori, also gives strong witness to the Catholic Special Character of the school. The school is intentional about Tikanga, Te reo as lived experiences. This includes Te reo in Mass and liturgy. The impact of this is that Te ao Māori is affirmed within the community, and ākonga and all learners in this diverse community grow in appreciation of the richness of their faith.

The evaluation visit began with a warm and hospitable welcome including Mihi Whakatau and liturgy of welcome, led by students with reverence and sensitivity, giving all present an opportunity to experience the school’s shared vision and to encounter Christ in an authentic way.

The prayer life is well supported in Religious Education and ākonga relish opportunities to lead prayer at Mass, in liturgical activities, and in daily class prayer. They are encouraged to articulate their faith and ask questions with a natural progression to leadership. This is evident in discussions with students, who enjoy their learning, respect their teachers, and are influenced by the life of St Dominic as a follower of Jesus. The impact of this is that the school values are lived out daily through words and actions.

Evangelisation

The school's Catholic Special Character is exceptionally well-promoted and embedded across all aspects of school life, evidenced through clear communications, and focused leadership. This involves multiple opportunities for parents to engage with and deepen their faith through assemblies, liturgical gatherings, Mission days, Social Justice week and other events enabling an active whānau involvement.

The Principal's relational leadership style is a particular strength, establishing meaningful connections with families from the point of enrolment and sustaining these through ongoing personal contact. This relational approach has yielded significant outcomes, notably in the baptisms, which creates a strong foundation for the remaining sacraments of initiation. The Principal demonstrates a clear and sustained commitment to ensuring that every eligible child, and all others who express interest, are given a genuine opportunity to participate fully. Collectively, these efforts are enabling authentic spiritual growth throughout the school community.

Faith-Based Leadership

The Principal has shown commendable commitment to growing leadership capacity in this area, having provided effective mentorship to a teacher taking on DRS role. This teacher has since moved to further advance her career in Catholic Education. The incoming DRS brings prior co-DRS experience and a well-considered vision focused on building student confidence, supporting staff, and advancing their professional development in Religious Education.

All staff are meaningfully invested in Catholic Special Character, consistently modelling Catholic values and providing faith-based guidance in age-appropriate ways. This collective commitment has created the conditions for faith-based leadership to flourish at every level of the school community.

Further Development

- *Continue to maximise opportunities for tamariki and whānau to approach the sacraments of initiation, noting that (5.2 – 5.5) comprises 37% of preference enrolments.*

DIMENSION 2: Te Whakatupu Mā Te Mātauranga: 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?

Leadership

The school demonstrates high-functioning distributive leadership that is inclusive, affirming of staff talents, and effective in shaping a clear vision and direction for Catholic Special Character. Leadership in this area is purposeful and flows meaningfully through the wider school community.

A particular strength is the school's commitment to developing future Catholic leaders among both staff and students, evidenced through student leadership in liturgy, collaborative staff planning, and the DRS actively mentoring colleagues. The DRS is entrusted with significant responsibility and autonomy across Religious Education, liturgical life, sacramental preparation, staff development, strategic planning and internal evaluation — an investment that is visibly building leadership confidence and capacity.

The Board and Principal actively enable this through allocated time, appropriate resourcing, and formation opportunities, including the Principal's ongoing engagement with professional growth and development opportunities through the diocese and Principals' Association. Ongoing professional development is well-supported through termly Twilight meetings, diocesan teacher development days, DRS-facilitated staff meetings, and individualised support. Together, these conditions reflect a school where Catholic leadership is nurtured, sustained, and growing.

Religious Education

Strong collaborative leadership, grounded in Gospel and Dominican values, underpins the high status and sound management of the Religious Education curriculum. The incoming DRS has embraced her role with evident commitment and enthusiasm, bringing a wealth of prior experience that has ensured a seamless transition.

Tō Tātou Whakapono is being implemented effectively across all year levels, with the Principal drawing on multiple, well-considered means of assurance — including classroom observations, professional conversations, and the compelling evidence of students confidently articulating key concepts and making meaningful connections with daily life. It was a privilege to observe classroom prayer followed by well-resourced and balanced Religious Education. Students were actively engaged in discussion, reflecting and deepening their understanding through scripture, prayer, song, and silence.

The area of assessment and monitoring of progress is an emerging area of focus and will require attention as the new curriculum becomes fully established nationally. The school is well-positioned to develop this with the same intentionality it brings to all aspects of Religious Education.

Catholic Curriculum

Leaders demonstrate a clear and intentional commitment to ensuring that faith is reflected across all learning areas and embedded within everyday classroom culture. A Catholic worldview is deliberately woven into teaching and learning through the integration of Gospel values, Catholic Social Teaching, and the Dominican charism.

This is evidenced in purposeful practices such as the selection of reading texts that connect with Religious Education learning, explicit teacher-made links between curriculum content, scripture, and daily life, and the consistent application of the school's values of respect, resilience, and relationship across learning contexts.

Through deliberate planning, ongoing teacher guidance, and consistent modelling, a Catholic perspective has become a lens through which students interpret and engage with their learning - reflecting a school culture where faith genuinely shapes both how and why students learn.

Further Development

- *The ongoing effectiveness of student progress and assessment methodologies will require scrutiny and evaluation with equal status as Tō Tātou Whakapono across the school alongside the refreshed NZ curriculum.*
- *Consideration could be given to adopting a cross-curricula plan linking key learning areas of the NZ curriculum with Tō Tātou Whakapono.*

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?

Catholic School Community

A significant strength at Sacred Heart is the authenticity with which the value of relationship is lived out across its school and parish community. An atmosphere of genuine welcome is intrinsic to this small community, where ākonga and whānau are personally known and actively supported — a quality the Principal rightly identifies as central to the school's identity and something it does 'exceptionally well.'

The growing ethnic diversity of the community adds a celebratory and cultural richness that further strengthens this sense of belonging. The school's connection to its parish community is vibrant and well-maintained, with termly community and class Masses and shared liturgical celebrations providing regular opportunities for collective worship and the deepening of shared faith.

Visiting on Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday offered a privileged insight into this relationship in action. The long-serving Parish Priest is a regular and deeply valued presence in the school, and his sustained dedication has been instrumental in shaping the vibrancy and cohesion of this school-parish community. Together, these qualities reflect a community where Catholic witness is practised genuinely and joyfully.

Partnership and Collaboration

The school's strong relational culture extends well beyond its immediate community, reflecting a genuine understanding that education is a collaborative responsibility shared across parish, community, and wider networks. This is evident through strong parish /community relationships and links to its Dominican tradition.

Collaboration and engagement with the Dunedin Catholic Schools is continuing despite the formal conclusion of Dunedin Catholic Schools' Kahui Ako. This demonstrates an ongoing commitment to enriching student experience and professional learning through inter-school collaboration. A well-established tradition of senior ākonga visiting the local Catholic College for specialist subject experiences with Science collaborations is planned for 2026. This reflects the school's investment in broadening learning opportunities that will benefit both students and staff.

A notable Kāhui Ako initiative has seen the school partnership with local Mana Whenua to develop a cultural narrative for Dunedin Catholic Schools, deepening understanding of local history and tikanga and enabling local curriculum to authentically reflect diverse stories and perspectives.

The school's approach to Māori whānau consultation is purposeful and relationally grounded, evidenced in strategic planning, and through successful hui that enable whānau to shape the school's direction. This reflects the school's view that authentic consultation is built on strong relationships, intentionally building trust and connection to facilitate a good response.

Pastoral Care

There is a strong sense of whanaungatanga among staff, students and families, in a family atmosphere with a genuine sense of belonging and a commitment to supporting one another in both professional and personal capacities. This reflects the school's Dominican inspired spiritual vision to 'walk in truth and grow in relationship.'

Pastoral care extends meaningfully into the wider community, with practical outreach and support offered readily in times of need and actively supported by a pastorally focused Parents and Friends group. Parents described a culture of inclusion and acceptance that acknowledges the work of teachers and enables tamariki to thrive — a sentiment strongly affirmed by staff survey results reflecting an overwhelming sense of support and satisfaction.

Staff wellbeing is actively prioritised through wellbeing days, special morning teas, gifts and handwritten notes that acknowledge the efforts of all staff. School newsletters further reinforce this culture of celebration and recognition, honouring achievements, milestones, and the contributions of individuals.

The Principal's genuine belief that a happy and supported staff is central to school success is clearly evidenced in the culture she has cultivated — one where people are known, valued, and cared for as whole persons. Her proactive and visible presence at the school gate before and after school each day sets a warm and welcoming tone for the entire community.

Service and Outreach

Service to others is a vibrant and well-embedded expression of Catholic Special Character at Sacred Heart, flowing naturally from its core value of relationship and its commitment to caring for others. Tamariki have been actively engaged in a wide range of service initiatives, including Young Vinnies, Student Council, Social Action Week and non-uniform fundraising days. Recent projects include visits to local rest homes, contributions to the Night Shelter, community card writing, and local environmental clean-ups. Mission Day remains an annual highlight, and the school has earned a longstanding and outstanding reputation for its generous and sustained support of the Church's overseas missions.

Through this breadth of service experience, students are developing a genuine understanding of social responsibility and learning to live out Gospel values and school values in practical, meaningful ways — reflecting a community where faith is expressed through actions.

Further Development

- *The Principal seeks to continue to build staff and student capability in Māori tikanga and cultural practices.*

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?

Stewardship

The governance and management structures at Sacred Heart continue to be highly effective in safeguarding Catholic Special Character. This is clearly evident in the school vision – *Building a future through Faith, Learning and Community*, supported by lived core values that shape the daily culture of the school. [Dimension 1]

The strategic current annual plan goals aligned to Catholic Special Character are to:
Living and Learning our Catholic Faith - *Ensure that Catholic Character is embedded, valued and visible.*

Belonging – *Ensure all families have a sense of belonging by developing a culturally responsive and inclusive localised curriculum.*

Together, these structures and priorities demonstrate a deliberate, focused, and well-aligned commitment to ensuring that Catholic Special Character remains central to the school's identity and direction.

Internal Self-Evaluation

The school's current strategic initiatives and annual goals are grounded in evidence, informed by a recent and comprehensive internal evaluation focused on *Encounter with Christ*. The 2025 evaluation responded thoughtfully to a notable shift in the school's demographic landscape, with an influx of students from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds prompting meaningful inquiry into the effectiveness of Catholic Special Character practices. The process was extensive and collaborative, incorporating broad survey input from both students and staff to identify strengths and areas for growth.

The resulting improvement actions are strategically organised across four meaningful areas:

- *Strengthening Faith Practices and Knowledge*
- *Enhancing Engagement in Religious Education Faith Learning*
- *Building Community Within School, Parish and Whānau*
- *Living Catholic Values More Deeply*

These priorities also align with the Principal's goal of deepening understanding of diverse cultural expressions of Catholic tradition and strengthening parish relationships.

The internal evaluation represents a commendable body of work. Leaders demonstrate sound professional judgment in recognising that future evaluations may be conducted in a more streamlined form in order to prioritise improvement outcomes into manageable strategic actions.

Catholic Special Character Reporting

The Board receives comprehensive and well-structured information about Catholic Special Character through regular reports from both the Principal and the Director of Religious Studies. These reports cover the range of events, observances, celebrations, and insights into teaching and learning.

A particular strength has been the practice of presenting information aligned with the Dimensions — *Encounter with Christ, Growth in Knowledge, Christian Witness, and Safeguarding and Strengthening*. This structured approach supports board members in developing a deeper understanding of the scope of each dimension and can strengthen informed governance and strategic alignment.

To further enhance the reporting process, consideration could be given to incorporating more reflective and evaluative commentary that addresses the effectiveness of initiatives, their impact on learners and staff, and opportunities for growth and improvement. Such an approach should enrich board discussion, generate more purposeful questions, and potentially create stronger connections between governance oversight, internal evaluation, and strategic planning — taking an already sound reporting practice to a higher level of effectiveness.

Legal Obligations

A review of the documentation and annual attestation data shows general compliance. This includes *Safeguarding Practices* and *Health Curriculum* requirements:

- Confirmation that the overriding principle of the Safeguarding Policy adopted by the proprietor is reflected in the wording of the school's Child Protection Policy.
- Attesting that the school has sufficient measures in place to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults during all school related activities. (Children's Act 2014)
- Consulting with both the community and Proprietor, [Ed. & Training Act s.91] to ensure that the Health Curriculum programmes, and their delivery, reflect Catholic Special Character.

Further Development

- *Further simplify the Internal Evaluation process to achieve manageable strategic improvement outcomes.*
- *Adapting Catholic Special Character board reports to be more reflective and evaluative as a way of encouraging in-depth discussion and potential internal evaluation questions.*

Preference roll as at the date of the evaluation

Preference Category	Number of Students	% of Current Roll
5.1	30	50%
5.2	3	6%
5.3	8	13%
5.4	5	8%
5.5	2	3%
Non-Preference 4 available	11	18%
FFP International Students	1	2%
Total roll	60	100%
Maximum roll	120	50% of capacity

Examples of Strengths

- The Principal's relational leadership style establishes meaningful connections with families from the point of enrolment and sustains these through ongoing personal contact and influencing sacramental participation and evangelisation.
- A spiritual vision that reflects a Dominican charism and is evident through applying the core values of *Respect – Whakautē, Resilience – Manawaroa, Relationships – Whanaungatanga*, in words and actions.
- Building and enabling teacher capability to support and lead as a DRS within the school, strengthening both faith leadership and the delivery of Religious Education.
- Significant roll growth and increased cultural diversity with Indian and Filipino students comprising 53% of its population.
- A collaborative revision of the school vision and values through an extensive community process. Described by the Principal as a source of pride reflecting the shared aspirations and faith of school whānau.
- Insights from an extensive 2025 internal evaluation, showing the impact of an intentional focus on staff formation, community engagement, and Catholic Special Character. Together, they have strengthened the culture, relationships, and sense of identity within the school.

Progress with Recommendations from the 2022 External Evaluation

- Engage with further opportunities to maintain and enhance Special Character qualifications (previously provided for in twilight meetings) in order to maintain minimum levels for accreditation.

This is an ongoing focus amid significant staff change and revised national accreditation procedures.

- As schools prepare to implement the new Religious Education curriculum consideration should be given to the formation of staff not holding Special Character positions (non-tagged) to also engage in staff formation in the context of how the Catholic worldview is integrated into daily practice in the school and into all curriculum areas.

Staff are appropriately engaged in formation and have also benefited from in-school formation facilitated by the previous DRS who has grown and flourished in the role.

- Consider initiatives to raise the profile of the school primarily in Holy Name and Star of the Sea parishes as well as parish areas north of the city. The board is currently seeking an additional proprietor's appointee which presents an outreach opportunity.

Included in school newsletter outreach and also some interaction / choice between Sacred Heart and Holy Name Sacramental programmes.

- Refine the Catholic Special Character Internal Review process:
 - Emphasise a particular focus area, of challenge, within the dimension to show how the review will strengthen Special Character and use as a goal for action in subsequent annual planning.
 - Also report school observances and activities to the board under Review Dimension headings as a form of ongoing self-review. Where possible comment on the impact on ākonga.

Considerable development has, and will continue, to take place, [refer to Dimension 4 comments].

Key Recommendations to Support Development

- *To further enhance the reporting process, consideration could be given to incorporating more reflective and evaluative commentary that addresses the effectiveness of initiatives, their impact on learners and staff, and opportunities for growth and improvement.*
- *Prioritise the appointment of an additional proprietor appointee as a matter of urgency and consider representation within Holy Name Parish.*

In Conclusion

It was a privilege to visit Sacred Heart School, where the Church's mission is strongly evident through all areas of school life. The school board, Principal and leaders are deeply committed to having the Catholic Special Character at the centre of all they do. This report contains suggestions for further development across the dimensions and one general recommendation to strengthen existing good practice. The organisation and preparation for external evaluation, and hospitality extended to us is greatly appreciated.

Ngā mihi nui

Paul Richardson B Ed, Dip Tchg, Dip Ed L, Dip RE, CFLE

Lead Evaluator

2 April 2026



Catholic Diocese of Dunedin, Te Hāhi Katorika o Otepoti