

Jireh Christian School Special Character External Review Report

August 2019

REVIEW TEAM:

Warren Peat
Eoin Crosbie

DETAILS:

School Type: **Year 1 - 8**

Roll Numbers: **194**

Principal: **SANDRA BOSMAN** (sandra.bosman@jireh.school.nz)

Board Chair: **MICHAEL CAUSLEY** (michael.causley@gmail.com)

Land Trust Chair: **VAUGHAN DARBY** (vdarby@darby.co.nz)

INFORMATION SOURCES FOR THE REVIEW PROCESS

1 Online Surveys: Parents, Staff, Board and Proprietor.

2 On site visit over two days involving:

- Meetings with staff, parents, students, Board and Proprietor.
- In class visits during general class programmes.
- Time processing School and Board documents relating to the school's Special Character.

3 Board Attestation Self Evaluation.

The National Administration Guidelines (NAG 2) requires all schools to develop a Strategic Plan, maintain a programme of self-review and report to the community. The Proprietor occasionally works collaboratively with the Board of Trustees with regard to Special Character and property matters. The Attestation document completed by the Board identified no matters of significance that haven't been addressed in the body of this report.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jireh Christian School is a wonderful blend of rich histories and journeys in Christian education over 30 years, combined with the fresh opportunities created by a newly formed State Integrated School at the beginning of a new journey that is future focused and optimistic for Christ to be at the centre of the learning journey for all stakeholders in the school.

The leadership team is well established spiritually, educationally and relationally with 'a heart and love of Jesus' for the children who attend the school. They are developing a sound strategic direction for the implementation of the many strands that comprise the effective delivery of an education from a Christian perspective, or a biblical world view.

The newly elected Board of Trustees are similarly committed to the task of ensuring the delivery of education with a Special Character. They are early in their governance journey and understanding of the strategic directions of the school, having been elected within the last two months.

We unpack the concept of Jireh's Special Character as 'a rope with many strands' throughout the report that follows. While there will always be tweaks and changes to be implemented following periods of reflection, the reviewers have not seen a more comprehensive and thoughtful expression of a Christian education curriculum formation or delivery than that experienced at Jireh Christian School. The elements or strands of the rope are able to be articulated by teacher and learner alike, bringing purpose and intent to both delivery and desired outcomes.

At the heart of the school's endeavours, we reflect positively on the dispositions that we experienced in lives of the students with whom we interacted. They are a worthy expression as God's image bearers, a product of the faith, hope and love that surrounds them from a home and school partnership that is genuine and aligned.



FINDINGS

This section of the report provides feedback on the school's Special Character as it relates to each of the dimensions listed below.

Proprietor/Land Trust

The NZCPT are represented on the Board of Trustees. This position has been consistently occupied over the period under review, with monthly attendance in person. Good communication has been maintained between NZCPT, the Principal and Board Chair with supportive relationships in evidence between these people. The Kingsway Trust has number of Proprietor appointees also on the Board and maintains the ratio to be one less than the parent-elected representatives. Significant property maintenance and relocation costs have been incurred in the relocation process, with both 10-year maintenance planning and longer-term master-planning processes well underway for the future development of the campus.

The Board of Trustees

The Board is newly elected in June 2019 and has only met twice prior to this review period. Previously an Establishment Board of Trustees was in place to oversee the establishment of Jireh Christian School as a stand-alone State Integrated School from the beginning of 2018. The work of this group began in late 2016 when Jireh School was a satellite of KingsWay School. Not only did the Board transition the school successfully, they also took oversight of the merging of Jireh with Immanuel Christian School, who were closing at the end of 2017. This also involved the complete relocation of Jireh CS to the Immanuel CS site in Avondale. The Establishment Board appointed Sandra Bosman as Principal and Vicki Morris as Deputy Principal among their first priorities and together have delivered a remarkably seamless transition to the point today, where all stakeholder groups reflect very positively on their experience of this journey. It is a credit to all that the Special Character distinctives of both schools remained a priority throughout the transition, the process was covered with prayer and a desire to see God's will honoured, His voice heard and His direction for the future of the school recognised in the newly developed motto, vision and values of Jireh Christian School.

The newly elected Board are relatively inexperienced in governance matters relating to schools but bring great capacity in their individual faith journeys and their continuing commitment to serve the school that has provided a sound foundation for their children's education in a Christian context. Understanding and owning the school's strategic and annual plans are among the Board's early priorities, together with further training in Governance Essentials to better understand their roles. The Proprietor has completed an induction programme with all Trustees with regard to the nuances of governing a State Integrated School and the imperatives involved in the Education Act 1989 with regard to special character education delivery.

The establishment of strong and supportive relationships between the governance and leadership teams is already emerging. We encourage this work to be deliberate and not left to chance in these early days of being a 'stand-alone' entity, the burden of which tends to fall more heavily on the leadership in their role as educators of the Board.

The Senior Leadership

The Principal, Sandra Bosman, has previously led Jireh School when it was a satellite school of Kingsway. The DP of Immanuel Christian School, Vicki Morris, is now the Deputy Principal of JCS. This combination of leaders from the two contributing schools has made a significant difference to the culture of JCS in a very positive way. The carving outside the library is personified in the leadership of the school.



Sandra and Vicki complement each other well and have strengths in different areas. The infrastructure that has been built in the past year as the school has had its inaugural year as one school, has been built with dedication and thoughtfulness. It is now serving this learning community well. The documentation that supports the learning and that enhances the capability and development of staff is outstanding and a credit to both Sandra and Vicki. Staff appreciate the leadership that serves them with support and resources to grow as Christian Educators and to model Jesus to their children and whanau. Sandra and Vicki are loved by the adults who serve in this place. Clarity around future direction could be an area for further consideration.

The Curriculum

The New Zealand Curriculum forms the basis of the teaching and learning programme at the school. The Curriculum is supported by a 104-page document, outlining the philosophy and practice across all the subjects and Learning Areas, aligning the local curriculum with the NZC. The newly established school values described on page 14/15 are yet to be incorporated into the 5C's 'dispositions' that headline the school's intent for their student outcomes. This needs to be clarified.

Each Learning Area invests significant time into planning learning programmes for each term. Strands or threads of the Special Character 'rope' are highlighted

through integrating a Biblical theme often aligned to a value, a Jireh disposition, a key competency, the Discipleship development resources, the memory verses and the meta narrative of Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration; all into the learning activities and the inquiries. Manu, Ika and Tiwai (Years 1-3, 4-6, 7-8) teams plan collaboratively for the term and then weekly during the term. This is a thoughtful process driven by the team leader and scaffolded by senior leadership. One stand-out element to this is the synergy evident in the implementation of the planning.

The observations during the review all exposed a strong desire and commitment to outwork a Biblical worldview and Christian perspective into all learning, and also to apply this learning to life and living. Some children exhibited amazing maturity and ability to enunciate ideas and attitudes that Christian adults often struggle with.

Intent and Strategy

The Strategy Map for JCS sets out 6 key elements that define the foci strategically. The annual plan (called a workplan) builds a table of initiatives under each foci (with the exception of Stewardship). It is not quite aligned with the map and could be if the Kahui Ako section was re-positioned and Stewardship became the first heading in the Workplan.

The threads that weave the Biblical World View strategy into teaching and learning are deliberately and systematically built, through the announcement of a term by term biblical theme for the curriculum, a focus on a formational graduate attribute (disposition), a key competency, the classroom discipleship resources distributed term by term, the planning of each Learning Area in terms of the CFRR meta-narrative and the classroom inquiries. There is great synchronization and synergy generated amongst the staff which attracts significant attachment to the school's purpose, mission and vision.

Our observation and discussions with staff suggest that the rate of change from term to term does not allow enough time to consolidate thinking and practice. What is being done is highly valued by staff, but they would value more quality time for delivery than quantity in this season of the school's development.

One element of learning for further development in terms of Special Character is service. Creating time to build this response into learning, to consolidate and to genuinely outwork the CFRR would be a sound strategic objective for the future. For example, Creation and the Fall are done well – the two Rs are often skimmed over or certainly left incomplete in many units.

The reviewers could not access the school documents relating to annual goals, objectives or the variance report in order to assess the measurement tools that are being used to monitor outcomes.

Ethos

The school staffroom is noisy and energetic, a landing place for busy and engaged professionals who feel valued and make positive contributions both individually and collectively. There is a strong sense of team and shared vision, goals and outcomes. Christ-centredness is modelled here and flows readily into relationships with children, parents, guests and visitors.

Classroom environments are relational, warm, caring and loving. Teachers know and care for their students individually and well, this being reciprocated in the genuine love that students demonstrate towards their teachers.

Activities are purposeful, students demonstrate their ability to work effectively both individually and in groups, without direct teacher supervision, and meet their learning objectives that appear to be well understood.

Parents

Almost all parents interviewed have wanted Christian Education over a long period of time. Creation is a strong feature in the Curriculum and referred to a lot at home by the students. Memory verses are treasured by parents.

The school-home partnership is very strong. There is good information sent home about what is happening at school both as written and digital formats. It helps parents engage in their learning. The information is vast but can be understood with some inquiry on the parents' behalf. Inviting parents to ask for clarity could be helpful, particularly given the language barriers with the different cultures. Chat groups operate to help discern meaning for some subgroups.

The school walks with parents in their Christian journey as well, and this is appreciated. It makes a big difference in the families. Jireh children hold a different world view than their cousins who go to state schools. Parents sacrifice to send their children to Christian schools and the ones we interviewed were willing to do this even although the costs were significant in terms of fees and travel costs.

Last year, transition took place easily from a student perspective. Immanuel and Henderson parents were a bit nervous about the amalgamation, but kids adapt easily, and it was no problem for them, notwithstanding the enlargement of the community. The carpark chatter is growing, and parents thought that eventually this cohesion would be achieved.

Parents loved the cultural week this year... it was amazing. The group of parents that reviewers interviewed became quite animated when sharing about this event, It really developed community by celebrating diversity in a very positive way. They came to appreciate each-other more.

Staff

The staff of JCS are all Christian and take their role as Christian Educators very seriously. They engage with the opportunities for professional development and appreciate the discipleship resources prepared each term for their devotional programmes.

Staff felt honoured and valued to be able to attend NZACS conference this year and to have this all paid for by the BOT. This to them, displayed the commitment of the school to help them teach Biblically. The staff taking devotions and sharing this responsibility, is also appreciated as a way of helping define and imbed the Special Character of JCS.

The induction of new staff is thorough and helpful. Staff have also appreciated reading books together on Christian Education. Marion Sander's 'Memoirs of a Follower' was mentioned several times as being helpful. Teachers appreciate being challenged in their thinking and pedagogy and liked the idea of ako – continuous learning.

While teachers are at different ages and stages in their Christian Education capabilities, there is no resentment or grumbling about the learning journeys they are on. While there could be more individualization in their development, it was acknowledged that it is hard to achieve this in a small school and that they are very grateful for the opportunities provided.

Students

The students were a delight in every way. Their warm welcomes, willingness to connect and engage in a genuine way with us as reviewers was impressive and a good reflection on the ethos of JCS.

There was a clear grappling with Christian ideas and concepts in different contexts during the review. The student spoke naturally of Jesus and God, and clearly had good head knowledge. Translating this to matters of the heart and hands were less evident at some ages but we were not discouraged by this. We experienced more transformational evidence when meeting with students in small groups. The school is laying an excellent foundation for later learning, understanding and application. At more senior levels, students were arguing the alternative non-Christian view and were able to discern between respecting a person while disagreeing with their views. This was excellent to see.

We found no evidence of bullying or swearing at school. Students could articulate what this looks like but feel very safe in this environment. While looking up to and respecting leadership as modelled to them in their earlier years at school, students spoken to didn't seem to grasp their roles as providing this same leadership to current younger students. Further, they seemed to be saying that they were discouraged from engaging with young students. We offer this simply as an observation.

Manaakitanga was evident in the care shown towards others and the manner in which students related to one another. Their behaviour was exemplary and respect for staff obvious. When asked to articulate their learning they were able to give a reasonable account of the activities they were engaged in and why. Their conversations with us used the language of Christian Education in a natural way that indicated that weaving God into all that they do was usual rather than unusual for them.

In terms of the long-term transformation impact that the learning programmes and staff are having, it may be helpful to develop some tool to record and track progress in the 5Cs – the dispositions of a graduate of JCS. Students have a strong sense of a Biblical World view through their learning and when challenged by the 5Cs and their relevance to a secular



school could see that all but one applied but argued that all would be impacted and flavoured differently in a Christian context. E.g. Your confidence was grounded in Jesus, not self. We felt this was quite profound.

Administration

The school communicates effectively with its community. The in-person engagement and welcome is evident from all reception staff, where relationship is clearly important and valued. Newsletters are emailed regularly, and sensitivity exists towards the diversity in the school community for whom English is not their first language. A variety of anecdotal connections are also made by individual teachers to ensure that parents are regularly informed of learning successes in day-to-day classroom activities. This is warmly welcomed.

Effective relationships are maintained with the NZCPT administration office, with financial transactions and processes with parents becoming more consistent over time. It is important that administration staff continue to recognise that they play a pivotal role in ensuring that parents understand and meet their financial obligations, from the time of enrolment going forward.

CONCLUSION

The reviewers wish to sincerely thank Jireh Christian School for engaging with us in such a meaningful way during the period of the review. The genuine desire to serve God and see young lives impacted by the Gospel through the delivery of effective Christian education is evident throughout this community, from governance and leadership particularly, with a willingness from staff to know more and advance their own learning in how to be even more effective in the classroom.

The school is working through a period of 'new beginnings', building on rich histories and experiences while at the same time discovering God's intended purpose for a new future. We encourage leadership to walk through this season patiently and in a timely manner, allowing sufficient time for thoughtful reflection and deepening of understanding for all stakeholders, particularly staff and students. We recognise the tension that exists between moving too quickly and not achieving the 'shifts' that need to occur and encourage the leadership team to explore ways of checking in on a regular basis to ensure that the pace of development of their workplan is appropriate.

While further work is required in aligning strategic documents to incorporate the recent work that has been done around the School's values, we found that the 'rope of many strands' is already strong and well understood by staff in their planning and students in the delivery of the curriculum. We encourage further development of this visual representation of an entwined rope over an extended time frame, so that the community understands more fully the richness of the journey being undertaken, having the ability to rejoice in the progress that is being made to date and a confidence and clarity to undertake the next steps that have been mapped out.

Finding further opportunities for students to demonstrate the outcomes of the richness of this approach to their learning journey will be a useful focus for the future. As younger learners look up to those ahead of them in the school, so too providing opportunity for those more senior students to demonstrate their leadership in all areas, including this special character dimension, thereby demonstrating their readiness to face their next learning environment beyond JCS, is recommended.

We look forward to continued engagement with Jireh Christian School through the series of Annual Reviews prior to our next triennial review in 2022.

Praying God's richest blessings on all who journey in this community. You are a blessing.

Shalom

Warren and Eoin.

Recommendations

The Proprietor (KWT)

- Maintain a presence of up to 3 Proprietor Appointees on the Board of Trustees to ensure that processes and decisions are made with a Special Character perspective to the fore.
- Continue to develop a masterplan for the new school campus and undertake the necessary capital maintenance as required.

The Board of Trustees

- Professional development in governance essentials for Trustees, who are beginning a 3-year cycle, is a priority through the lens of an Integrated Special Character school.
- Begin to understand and own the school's strategic documents, particularly the strategic and annual plan documents.
- Ensure that Special Character goals and measurable outcomes are included in these plans.
- Build effective relationships with the Management team to provide the prayerful and practical support that is essential for a young school.

The Senior Leadership

- Continue to align the strategic documents to ensure consistency of language and clarity of direction, particularly around the recently defined School values.
- Consider the time allocation given to the implementation of curriculum objectives that allows for both coverage, reflection and evidence of deep learning occurring in areas of Special Character.
- Consider further opportunities for all students and particularly seniors to develop service learning as an outcome of their own faith journey.
- Consider ways to capture individual student growth in the 5 C's, that can provide all stakeholders with tangible ways to measure the overall outcomes of the learning programme.

The Staff

- Commit to a professional development pathway that intentionally deepens their individual theological understanding of an agreed Christian and biblical world view at KGS
- Collaborate to provide support to each other and continue to provide clarity to students about goals and aims in developing their faith positions
- Collate and intentionally select age-appropriate resources to support the SC delivery

General

- Pray that the Lord of the Harvest, who owns the cattle on 1000 hills, will bless this ministry with abundant resources of all kinds to achieve His purposes for this place at this time.