

St Mary's Diocesan School (Stratford) 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 Diocesan School (Stratford) is a state integrated Anglican boarding and day school for girls in Stratford, Taranaki. The current roll of 137 has grown since the January 2013 ERO report and 20 percent are Māori students. Forty four percent of students stay in the school hostel. Five international students from Asian countries are enrolled. The school offers small class sizes and some distance-learning opportunities.

The previous ERO review found that trustees needed to improve governance and strategic planning processes and to monitor progress towards annual goals and targets. Improvements in performance management systems and capacity building of teachers and leaders were identified as important areas for development.

Several new teachers have joined the staff since 2013 with some in curriculum leadership roles. Elected trustees and proprietors' representatives have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities through training and well-documented governance guidelines.

The school's strategic purpose is to develop "successful learners, resolute women and courageous leaders" with a vision belief that there are no limits to what our girls can achieve. The opening of a purpose built gymnasium in October 2015 has enhanced the range and frequency of learning and sporting opportunities.

2 Learning

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

School leaders, trustees and teachers use student information well to make positive changes to students' engagement, wellbeing and achievement. They regularly track, monitor and report on students' progress and wellbeing. As a result, resourcing, planning and interventions are well informed and focused on supporting all students to be successful learners.

In the past three years, results in National Certificates of Education Achievement (NCEA) have steadily improved at Levels 1, 2 and 3 and for University Entrance (UE), to be well above national rates and schools of similar type. Nearly all leavers have Level 2 and 75% of leavers obtain a Level 3 qualification. High percentages of girls are still at school when they turn 17.

Many teachers make good use of student data to inform inquiries into their practice. Some are beginning to report results of these inquiries with evidence of improved student progress and learning outcomes. Next steps are to better evaluate the effectiveness of the identified strategies and actions to accelerate the progress of targeted students.

Systematic processes for sharing information, addressing concerns and knowing all Year 9 and 10 students well, effectively support a focus on raising expectations and improving achievement across the curriculum for this group. Significant numbers of this cohort who entered the school with identified learning or wellbeing needs make accelerated progress to achieve NCEA Level 2 and beyond.

Leaders have developed appropriate systems and processes to support improvements in professional practices to improve students' achievement. They have focused on building an orderly and supportive environment conducive to student learning and relational trust, collaboration and participation across the school community.

Teachers make increased use of assessment and achievement information to inform the focus of teaching, identify target students and provide appropriate and responsive individual support for learners.

Students are beginning to lead their own learning through sharing of assessment data and goal setting in areas they identify that need improving.

3 Curriculum

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

Students access, and achieve successfully in, programmes and courses aligned to The New Zealand Curriculum and the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. The school has put in place appropriate systems and processes to ensure future learning pathways are a focus when students make course selections and prepare for successful transitions to further qualifications and training beyond school.

A focus on improving schoolwide literacy levels, involving teacher professional learning and development (PLD), was begun in 2014 to address low levels of literacy of some students on entry. This has led to teachers using a range of literacy strategies across the curriculum at all levels. These measures should assist the school to further improve rates of progress and raise achievement.

The principal provides a clear vision, leadership and resourcing of school improvement initiatives and programmes to build teacher capability and schoolwide capacity. As a result, teachers use a range of PLD strategies to improve their practice. These include professional learning and inquiry groups, sharing and discussing schoolwide student data and good use of school specialists and visiting experts.

Students participate and learn in caring, inclusive and collaborative environments. Learning centred relationships, high expectations and affirmations encourage students to take risks and extend their learning. Innovation and problem solving are encouraged and supported by leaders. High levels of sustained engagement were evident in classes observed by ERO.

Communication and information sharing strengthen student engagement and learning. This is evident in pathway planning and decisions, regular reporting to parents, student access to online learning resources and informative newsletters.

The school identifies and draws on community resources and expertise to extend learning opportunities and improve students' achievement. Te ao Māori is becoming an integral part of students' school experiences.

The school has well-established systems and structures to monitor and promote student wellbeing so that they can be successful learners. This is underpinned by the school values and guiding principles, including acting with care, respect and responsibility and nurturing the hauora of the whole individual.

The school should continue to build a shared understanding of effective teaching and learning

linked to the principles and values of its special character and The New Zealand Curriculum.

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

Trustees and leaders demonstrate an increased commitment to providing opportunities for the growing numbers of students who identify as Māori to gain educational success as Māori. Appropriate goals and targets in strategic plans include a range of strategies and resources to support improvement in outcomes for all Māori learners.

Māori students take part successfully in a range of leadership roles, bicultural ceremonies, chapel services, pōwhiri and kapa haka to promote their identity, culture and language. They participate in specialist careers and health promotion programmes and benefit from strengthened partnerships with whānau and iwi. Examples of success include a school cultural group winning a recent regional kapa haka completion.

Māori students achieve well in sports, service and NCEA qualifications. Their achievement at NCEA Levels 2 and 3 and UE is above national rates overall and that of their peers at some levels. Further improvement in rates of NCEA endorsements is a next step to maintain schoolwide improvements and high expectations of educational success for this group of students.

Initiatives to develop positive connections and relationships with whānau, hapū and iwi are continuing to be developed. They support Māori students to feel affirmed and confident in being successful as Māori.

The principal and teachers demonstrate a commitment to further develop their knowledge and confidence in te ao Māori through regular PLD and learning about te reo me ngā tikanga Māori.

4 Sustainable Performance

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

The school is well placed to sustain and improve its performance. School leaders and trustees have responded well to recent external evaluations to inform improvement and strategic priorities.

The school has a useful range of tools and procedures to build its capacity in evaluation and inquiry to inform and sustain improvement. The principal promotes and models evaluation through annual variance reports and regular board reports during the year.

Trustees are well informed through these reports from the principal and learning areas and use this information well for resourcing decisions that promote equity in outcomes for diverse groups of learners. A next step is for trustees to develop measures and processes to evaluate board performance and effectiveness.

The school has a coherent strategic approach to developing staff professional practice and systems for building schoolwide capacity for ongoing improvement. Staff are involved in a range of collaborative initiatives to improve their practices in line with school priorities and goals.

Leaders have improved performance management processes to sustain ongoing improvement. The recently developed appraisal system provides a framework to improve teachers' practice. This is enhanced through goal setting, teacher inquiries, reflective journals, feedback, student voice and guidance from the specialist classroom teacher to support group and individual initiatives to improve learning.

Further development of the appraisal system needs to occur so that:

- teachers and leaders are appraised against all practicing teacher criteria annually
- some appraisal goals relate explicitly to accelerating students' progress and improving student outcomes.

Leaders and staff know students, their families and whānau well. They actively share a collective responsibility that focuses on promoting students' holistic development to be successful learners both during and beyond their time at the school.

Provision for international students

The school is a signatory to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students (the Code) established under section 238F of the Education Act 1989. At the time of

this review there were 5 international students from Asian countries attending the school. The school has attested that it complies with all aspects of the Code.

Documentation and interviews show appropriate systems for provision of accommodation, pastoral care, English language learning and learning pathways to suit individuals' ages, needs and aspirations. Educational experiences include kapa haka, performing arts, sports and farm stays.

Provision for students in the school hostel

St Mary's Diocesan hostel plays an important role in the life of the school. Robertson and Girdwood, the boarding houses, accommodate boarders. They are owned by the School Board of Proprietors. The hostel environment closely reflects the school's special character and, like the school, has a family atmosphere.

The hostel provides a range of flexible accommodation options and arrangements to suit different family and whānau needs and circumstances. Each year level is accommodated in separate buildings or wings. Students, their parents and whānau receive timely, clear and useful information about how the hostel operates and what is expected of them.

Effective procedures, communication and regular monitoring between the principal and the hostel manager contribute to the smooth day-to-day operation of the hostel. Suitable staffing ratios and caring matrons promote the wellbeing and learning of the students attending. Boarders enjoy good facilities, support for their academic learning and a wide variety of recreational activities.

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

The school's special character and vision guide the ethos and high expectations for all learners. Leaders and teachers use student data well to support students' wellbeing and progress. Students achieve National Certificates of Educational Achievement very well and participate successfully in sporting and cultural activities. Extending inquiry and evaluation practices should sustain ongoing improvement.

ERO is likely to carry out the next review in three years.

Joyce Gebbie
Deputy Chief Review Officer Central

9 December 2015

School Statistics

Location	Stratford	
Ministry of Education profile number	180	
School type	Integrated Secondary (Year 9 to 15)	
School roll	137	
Number of international students	5	
Gender composition	Girls 100%	
Ethnic composition	Māori	20%
	Pākehā	74%
	Asian	5%
	Pacific	1%
Review team on site	October 2015	
Date of this report	9 December 2015	
Most recent ERO report(s)	Education Review	January 2013
	Education Review	December 2009
	Education Review	November 2006