

ST PATRICK'S SCHOOL

Taupo

Integrated, Catholic full primary school (Years 1-8)

Roll: 263

Ethnicity: Pakeha 70%; Maori 14%; Pacific Island 8%; Asian 2%;

Principal: Margaret Beck

History

Founded in 1997, the school occupies the same site as the local Roman Catholic Church and enjoys a close relationship with that church and its parishioners. The community of the school and the surrounding parish is proud of the school and its special character. Christian values in the Roman Catholic tradition, therefore, are the school's values and formed the starting point for the creation of the system of values education which exists today in the school.

Early in the school's history, however, the Virtues Project became a working document for the provision of useful structures through which values could be successfully integrated into everyday life at school. The Principal says that the introduction of this programme was, for a while, quite spasmodic in the classroom, and took some time. Finally she decided to step in and drive it herself, having had discussions and training sessions with staff (including all support staff) and observed that generally there was good support for the overall concept.

Progress began with a "Virtue for the Week" which was introduced in Friday assemblies. Information appeared in newsletters and parents enthusiastic. Then the Diocesan Special Character Manager from the Roman Catholic Education Office asked "How does this fit in with the Catholic character?" and the Principal was encouraged to further develop the programme to tailor the original material to achieve a closer fit with the school's goals as Catholic educators. Her solution revolves around her theory that you must "tell the story" of your culture – a theory that would seem to be appropriate for any group in any culture. She tells the stories of Jesus, and links the virtues to the Sunday Gospel readings. She says that this sits well with the expectations of the Roman Catholic Church, alongside the normal Religious education programme. They have now evolved a system that works for them.

Systems

- The Principal is clearly passionate about this aspect of school life and is committed to driving it herself. She provides staff with weekly sheets relating to the Virtue for the Week. Then the staff develop the concept in their own way, integrating the material across the curriculum.

- The language of the Virtues Project is used across the school at all levels and is well understood even by the youngest students. The parents are encouraged to use the same vocabulary at home, and may, for example, attach the weekly virtue statement from the newsletter to the refrigerator.
- The Virtues method and language form the basis of the school's Behaviour Management Plan. This detailed document includes an explanation of the Virtues Project and its aims for parents. It requires that a contract between parents and the school is signed supporting St Patrick's School as "a peaceful, non-violent school"... and will "accept the consequences of my child/ren behaving inappropriately"
- Virtues Vouchers are handed out in the playground when a child is seen behaving in a virtuous manner. These are acknowledged in assembly, small prizes may be given, and the voucher is taken home. The school avoids focusing too much attention on material prizes, however, as the aim is to encourage self-discipline and belief in the virtues for their own sake.
- There is a Virtues Board in the entrance to the Administration Office. Here staff may write the names of students who have demonstrated the Virtue of the Week. On the day of our visit there were approximately fifteen names on the board.
- Day-to-day modelling of the virtues is encouraged and opportunities are offered through leadership and service projects. For example the "Young Vinnies" are a St Vincent de Paul group who provide service for the under-privileged, their current project being making Christmas stockings for the local Women's Refuge. An Enviro Group works in practical ways on environmental issues, in particular by creating a large garden area in the school that is planted up with New Zealand native species. Rules for the garden are based on the Virtues.
- Material relating to the Virtues is easily observable throughout the school. Classrooms have posters, samples of student work, charts, art projects and other displays that clearly demonstrate how creatively the virtues are integrated into the curriculum and the day-to-day life of the school.

Results

- Parents have always bought into the Virtues initiative at St Patrick's, it is now a fully accepted part of school life, and feedback is extremely positive.
- Students understand the Virtues and the language associated with the programme. A recent survey completed by students that was about the selection of student leaders, showed students using the language of the virtues to respond to their concept of what makes a good student leader.

- A recent ERO report comments that “The school’s special Catholic character, supported by the Virtues Programme, is an integral feature of all classroom environments. Students are valued and respected for their individuality, and encouraged to work, learn and interact happily with their peers. The school’s learning environment is conducive to positive literacy learning and development.”

Key Features

- The vision, hard work and commitment of the Principal have been key to the success of the Virtues Programme at St Patrick’s.
- The Virtues Programme has been implemented consistently across the school supported by teacher training and very good documentation. The language is used by everyone so that the system is genuinely at the heart of every aspect of school life.
- There is strong parent and community buy-in.
- This school was in a position to implement the Virtues programme very early in its history. This “clean slate” start was probably an advantage in creating the practical systems for getting the programme up and running.