

St Joseph's School  
Nelson

E.R.O. Report  
2006

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**E.R.O. Report 2006**

The ERO report on our school has just been released.

The following bullet points are contained in the full report and are related to the delivery of the curriculum. We have decided to add these to the summary in case you are not able to access the full report on the internet.

As you will see the report paints a very positive picture of our school:

**Incorporating thinking skills in Writing and Topic Programmes**

***Background:***

- Since the 2003 E.R.O. review the principal has been working with staff to develop a shared understanding of a 'thinking culture' with the intention of "delivering the curriculum in such a way that students will recognise elements of higher order thinking and appreciate its importance".
- Professional development has involved attending external courses plus in-school development that has included observations of teaching.

***Areas of Good Performance:***

- School Charter:
  - clearly outlines values that support the school's special character, direction for practice and what this will look and sound like. The curriculum focus is on "developing excellence in the essential skills and in physical, academic, social, spiritual, emotional and aesthetic growth" and incorporates the use of higher order thinking skills
  - (Principal) Reporting to the Board:
    - an effective framework has been developed for reporting each curriculum area to the Board. This framework incorporates headings from the National Administration Guideline 1 assisting the Board to be better informed about how the school is meeting its responsibilities
- The principal has consistently advocated the benefit of students developing thinking skills as tools for learning. The deputy principal has had significant input into leading in-service professional development. The senior management team have reinforced this learning within the syndicates. Teachers are focused on increasing their knowledge and understanding of higher order thinking strategies. They are positive, enthusiastic and open to new ideas. There is a school-wide commitment to incorporating the teaching and use of thinking skills in all classroom programmes to improve outcomes for students.
- A useful framework has been developed to guide the introduction of various thinking skills across the school. This is enabling teachers to progressively build students' knowledge and skills at an appropriate level and in a sequential manner. The framework has been shared with parents to inform them about the direction of learning in the school and to enable them to support their child's learning.
- Long Term Plans:
  - appropriate plans have been developed in each curriculum area to guide teacher planning
  - the English plan has a particular focus on the inclusion of deeper features for each level of learning and in each genre
  - there is flexibility to adapt plans so that teachers can respond to identified needs
  - all unit plans are gathered by the principal to monitor contexts for learning and to ensure that thinking skills are included

- Unit Planning:
  - syndicates effectively include appropriate levels of detail
  - syndicates plan together utilising each teacher's strengths
  - there is a focus on including thinking skills and providing authentic and interesting contexts for learning
  - plans provide teachers with a sound basis for daily planning within individual classrooms
- Assessments
  - there is a consistent approach to how assessments will be recorded at the end of each unit of work. This includes the clear expectation that assessment is considered and established at the planning stage and agreed upon by each syndicate
  - a consistent measure is used when recording student achievement in the assessment of topic work and in end-of-year reports
  - classroom assessments show a mix of teacher, peer and self-assessment against identified criteria
  - there is a good level of written formative feedback in draft writing books that assists students to understand their achievements and next learning steps
- The quality of classroom practice is sound with some examples of high quality teaching. Effective strategies used include:
  - looking for opportunities to prompt students to consider the use of higher order thinking skills when developing creative approaches, justifying ideas and solving problems
  - providing scaffolding for learning
  - building on students' prior knowledge
  - using appropriate questioning techniques
  - sharing the purpose of learning so students know what they are working towards and why
  - ensuring effective classroom routines that enable smooth transitions between tasks
  - establishing clear expectations for learning and behaviour
  - fostering a team approach by using co-operative and flexible grouping
  - valuing students' ideas, contributions and completed work
  - encouraging students to carefully consider their own responses and question one another in a respectful manner

Where many of these strategies are used, students are able to articulate the value of learning about thinking skills. They have a good understanding of how these skills support their learning and are able to use processes that are appropriate to their level.

- Classroom Environments:
  - Attractive classroom environments are a feature of the school
  - Teachers make considerable effort to provide visually appealing classrooms
  - Student work is valued and effectively displayed
  - Teachers and students benefit from well resourced classrooms and pleasant working environments
- Teachers provide parents and teacher aides with direction and written instructions for working with individuals and small groups. This information fosters a targeted approach to supporting student learning and makes good use of valuable resources.

## **Achievement of Maori Students**

### ***Areas of Good Performance:***

- Maori students in mathematics and English language are, in most cases, achieving at levels above national norms.
- Maori cultural perspectives are actively acknowledged through the teaching programme. This includes te reo Maori and units of work that promote an appreciation and enhanced knowledge of New Zealand's indigenous culture.
- Maori students interviewed articulately expressed how they enjoy their studies and value the opportunities provided by the school for their learning.

## **Providing for Students who are Underachieving**

### ***Areas of Good Performance:***

- The following responses have been provided by the school to support those students who are underachieving:
  - use of external agencies where need has been identified such as resource teachers: learning & behaviour resource teachers: literacy and speech therapists
  - teacher aides who are provided with individualised teaching plans for targeted students
  - extra teaching hours to reduce class numbers during mathematics and target specific groups
  - reading recovery for selected students who are identified after their first year of school as needing assistance to achieve at the same level as their peers
  - "Rainbow Reading" to strengthen reading skills and fluency for selected students
  - peer tutor programmes in writing for those who would benefit from the support of an age appropriate student in years 5 and 6

## **Health and PE**

### ***Areas of Good Performance:***

- The school has carefully considered the place of health and physical education within the curriculum.
- Attitudes and concepts of the curriculum document dovetail well with the Catholic perspective and concepts valued at St Joseph's School.
- Good quality documents guide and support the planning and teaching of health and physical education.
- Good teaching practices included:
  - sharing the learning intention and the success criteria
  - building on students' prior learning
  - encouraging students to demonstrate mastery of new learning
  - ensuring that the diverse needs of all were supported and included
  - giving specific verbal feedback and feed forward
  - valuing students' contributions and their self assessment
- As well as the planned physical education lessons, daily fitness is a regular part of class routines. Students spoken with during the review were positive about these times and their participation in them.
- The school is well equipped for the teaching of health and physical education.
- Students play cooperatively to increase their skill levels.

## Strategies for the Prevention of Bullying

### *Areas of Good Performance:*

- The school describes its culture as one that recognises that bullying does occur and in which the principal and staff have a commitment to act immediately to try and prevent it.
- Staff recognise that bullies themselves are victims of their own actions and that those actions diminish them as people.
- To prevent bullying:
  - staff expect and affirm positive behaviour
  - the school's behaviour management policy is designed to empower students to make good choices
  - counselling is provided by the principal and teachers
  - the services of the resource teacher: learning & behaviour is utilised
  - appropriate classroom programmes, including religious education and the Kia Kaha programme are provided
- There are not a high number of reports of bullying from students, staff or parents.
- The reporting of unacceptable incidents has decreased over time.
- A school-wide anonymous student survey was carried out in 2003 and since that time, some teachers have carried out surveys in their classrooms.

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The **next two pages** of this letter contain the summarised ERO report on St Joseph's written by ERO and addressed to our parents and community.

In the last paragraph you will read that ERO identifies a need for the school to develop systems to more fully inform the Board about student achievement and it notes that it is timely to review progress made in the thinking skills work and refine some classroom planning. These are the only recommendations that ERO has made and they are based on developing or modifying two or three systems rather than weaknesses in teaching.

Achievement information in all curriculum areas has always been gathered at classroom and syndicate level. Up until now we have gathered, analysed and reported to the Board school wide data in English and Mathematics. These are Government priorities which have been given legal status through specific mention in the National Administration Guidelines. Nearly every New Zealand primary school has had this focus.

Mike Burton  
Principal

Graham Warner  
Chairman - BoT

2 November 2006

## **To the Parents and Community of St Joseph's School**

These are the findings of the Education Review Office's latest report on **St Joseph's School**.

St Joseph's is a large Catholic full primary school catering for students from new entrants to year 8. The grounds are attractive with well-established trees. Different levels provide a variety of areas for students to play and these have been enhanced by the addition of the sandpit, seats beside the senior block and new playgrounds for the junior and middle schools. Visually appealing classroom environments are a feature of the school and teachers make considerable effort to display student work effectively. Teachers and students benefit from well-resourced classrooms and pleasant working environments.

The Board of Trustees is comprised of a good mix of elected representatives and proprietor's representatives with a range of abilities and experience. All have taken part in professional development and are committed to the school and its partnership with the parish. The values that support the special character of the school are clearly outlined in its charter.

This review evaluates how well thinking skills are incorporated into the teaching of writing and topic. Some syndicates include assessment of an aspect of thinking skills in unit plans, however, there is no school-wide data on students' use of thinking skills. The 2006 results of tests in listening show that many students in years 3 to 8 achieve at a significantly high level compared to national norms with very few not achieving success. The review also includes evaluations of the teaching of health and physical education for students in year 8, the achievement of Māori students and provision for students who are underachieving. ERO reviewed aspects of compliance and identified that the school was not meeting all consultation and personnel requirements.

A useful framework has been developed to guide the introduction of various thinking skills across the school. This framework has been shared with parents to inform them about the direction of learning in the school and to enable support of their children's learning.

Teachers are enthusiastic and hard working. They are focused on increasing their knowledge and understanding of higher order thinking strategies. The quality of classroom practice is sound with some examples of high quality teaching. Syndicates plan together, utilising each teacher's strengths, and look for ways to use the local community and facilities to provide authentic and interesting contexts for learning.

Students are articulate, confident and supportive of each other. They enjoy a wide range of opportunities to participate in dance, drama, music and sport. Groups provide service to others in the school and local community. During the week ERO was at St Joseph's School the year 8 students won the Nelson/Tasman intermediate speech competitions.

This report identifies the need for the school to develop systems to more fully inform the board about student achievement, and review progress made in the thinking skills project to establish next steps. ERO and the board have agreed on recommendations to address these findings.

### **Future Action**

ERO is confident that the board of trustees can manage the school in the interests of the students and the Crown and bring about the improvements outlined in this report.

ERO will review the school again as part of the regular review cycle.

### **Review Coverage**

ERO reviews do not cover every aspect of school performance and each ERO report may cover different issues. The aim is to provide information on aspects that are central to student achievement and useful to this school.

If you would like a copy of the full report, please contact the school or see the ERO website, <http://www.ero.govt.nz>.



Lane Mohi  
Area Manager  
**for Chief Review Officer**