



# Ashburton Christian School Special Character External Review Report

Date: November 26 2013



Reviewer Carl Becker

# DETAILS

School Type: **Year 1- 10**

Roll Numbers: **92**

Principal: **Tim Kuipers**

Board Chair: **Margaret Butler**

Christian School Trust Chair : **Peter Van Rij**

Ashburton Christian School Trusts Chair: **Keith Townsend**

# INFORMATION SOURCES FOR THE REVIEW

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## PROCESSES:

### **1. Online Surveys: Parents, Staff, Board and Land Trust.**

### **2. On site visit over two days involving:**

- Meetings with staff, parents, student leaders, board and land trust.
- In class visits during devotions and 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. In Christian School Network (CSN) schools, this process must include provision for the maintenance and development of the each school's Special Character as defined by the Land Trust and recorded in the Integration agreement held by CSN on behalf of the Land Trust. The review and development cycle includes an annual internal self-review process and an external review every three years.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Executive Summary

Ashburton Christian school is a dynamic Christian School. It has real sense of purpose at all levels of operations. Its Christian Special Character is passionately held by the principal and is well translated into the learning and the wider school culture. The principal leads this well. His vision for and understanding of Christian Education is robust and coherent. Staff and students receive thoughtful leadership in such matters. All stakeholders have a high approval rating of the schools Special Character and its implementation.

Students speak well of the school. They warmly engage with learning and its application to Christian living and faith. The schools Special Character is often woven into subject areas, providing context for knowing and understanding. Student thinking is valued and there is some evidence of teachers extending the programme to wider issues of faith with students, by exploring pop culture and the associated implications, particularly in the senior classes.

The positive school behavior and learning culture has been a challenge for the principal to embed as the school experiences continued growth, changes in key staff and student turnover. The principal has been intentional with staff development with regard to behavior management, implementation of the Christian curriculum and ethos. His leadership and knowledge in these areas is laying a firm foundation for the school out of its Special Character.

The school's Special Character permeates the whole ethos of the school. It is encapsulated in board documents (e.g. Strategic Plan and Charter), job descriptions and the school curriculum. The Interact Curriculum has provided a scaffold for the devotions and learning themes each term. Students speak well of their learning experiences related to the schools Special Character and seem engaged. Teachers endeavour to connect the learning of scripture to the students world whether it's in Devotions or in a Literature or Social Studies classes.

The school is now well established in its Special Character, ethos and vision. The Proprietor (Christian Schools Network), the land trust (Ashburton Christian School Trust) and the board have worked well to build and establish the school over the last five years and should be proud of what has been achieved. The school would now benefit by formalising the Special Character outcomes and systems so that the foundations that have been laid are not lost, but can be built on going forward as people come and go.



# FINDINGS

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

## **1. Board**

The board has a holistic view of Christian Education and seeks to integrate its Special Character into its administrative documents and processes as evidenced in the school Charter and various policies such as Performance Management and Self Review. What is written in these policies is good practice and core to building a focused and continually developing Christian School, however there is little evidence of these being implemented in a consistent way. The governance structure of the school is quite complex as the board is also connected to the land trust (Ashburton Christian Schools Trust) and the Proprietor (Christian Schools Trust), each of which have distinct responsibilities but share a common vision for a Christian School in Ashburton. Things seem to be working well with all groups at this stage. It would be helpful if there was some documentation created to show the interconnectedness of the groups, their distinct responsibilities, and what is common to them all. This may help some on the board who feel a lack of connection with CST reps and an understanding of the role of CST members on the board, as proprietor.

## **2. Land Trust and Proprietor**

The land trust (ACST) and proprietor (CSN) have achieved a great deal in a relatively short period of time from when the school opened as a private school (2009), then became integrated as a state school (2011). It would appear that the ACST and the CSN have given a great deal of scope to the principal and staff with regard to the development of the school's Special Character direction and focus, while they focused on getting the school built and integrated. Very important tasks! Now that the school has all its core facilities to accommodate students up to year 10, it would be appropriate for the ACST and CSN to work with the principal to put some processes in place that clearly articulate the Special Character vision and outcomes they wish to see evidenced. It would be well worth considering how the proprietor may want the school management to provide feedback on Special Character matters on a year-by-year basis. This could be woven into the schools annual reporting cycle.

### **3. School Management**

School Management and staff are committed to the school's Special Character. The principal has an in depth appreciation of the many dimensions there are to Christian Education. He is valued for this by staff and board. He embodies and articulates the school's Special Character in a coherent and heart felt manner. It's the Principals robust understanding of Christian Education that has developed and held the school's Special Character through the foundational years of the school. The Principal allows for a lot of diversity of teaching around Special Character, which is not an issue when there are very clear guidelines and structures in place to ensure a unity amidst the diversity. This is something that would benefit by becoming more structured from Year 1-10 so there is a consistency at the core.

One area of challenge is the professional development of staff in relationship to teaching of the Bible as part of the Special Character programme. The principal has staff attend the annual Christian School's conference as funds permit. The school's geographical isolation make such Professional Development (P.D.) very costly (when the Operation Grant from the Ministry is so limiting in such a small school) and not something all can staff can participate in and learn together from. The funding of such P.D. is a matter the Land Trust may be able to assist the board with. Professional Development need not be limited to attendance at conferences. School management needs to be creative and consider ways in which relevant Christian Education books, podcasts and articles could be systematically processed by staff for the enhancement of the Special Character dimensions of the school. At present the only intentional work in this regard seems to be at the beginning of each term as the staff spend time (often a day) unpacking the Interact theme and how it could be developed and applied across the curriculum. This is a good model that needs to be built on through-out the year as a whole staff, but also through each staff member developing P.D. goals related to teaching of the school's Special Character programme, and have these embedded in the appraisal processes.

### **4. Admin Audit**

The Attestation Self Evaluation form completed by the Board Chair and Principal confirmed that the school has good administrative management with regard to matters related to being a State Integrated school. The process highlighted the need to develop better systems at the board and proprietor level with regard to the administration of aspects of Special Character as outlined elsewhere in the report.

### **5. Curriculum / Teaching and Learning**

The curriculum is broadly held together by the Interact material. The Interact theme for each term tends to be a focus whether it's a junior or a senior class. This creates a sense of community across the school through its Special Character. Students are familiar with the school motto and vision statements and often use the terms when talking about their learning experience in the school.

There is clear evidence of the Christian faith being woven naturally into the overall curriculum. It's not something that happens just in Devotions each day. When Christianity is brought into a curriculum it seems to be authentic and appropriate. There was some evidence of students in the senior classes having the opportunity to work with issues that they are facing in culture (contemporary music) and determining what may be an appropriate Christian/Biblical response to such matters. There was little evidence of this kind of inquiry/problem solving pedagogy happening in a structured way across the school. It seems to happen informally, in class discussions or during devotions. The school may want to consider being more intentional in this regard and focus more on teaching students how to think rather than what to think, and consider how this may look like at various levels of the school.

One of the challenges that the school seems to be facing is the wide disparity with regard to biblical literacy of students. This is something that staff need to respond to by determining what is meant by the term and what is the school's responsibility in addressing it. It would appear that there is not a clear sense of what this means and whether it is core to the work of the school. What biblical literacy may look like could largely be determined by the outcomes decided for the Special Character dimensions of the school. This could also shape professional development priorities for staff.

## **6. Ethos**

The vision statement seems reasonably well embedded in the school culture along with its motto. Students and staff use the language of these statements quite naturally when talking about what the school is all about. The staff have introduced a Restorative Justice behavior modification model into the school. Staff have received training, support and guidance from the principal in the implementation of this model. It is encouraging seeing how the principal is adapting aspects of this model to fit in with the school's Special Character ethos.

## **7. Parents**

Parents speak well of the school. Some spoke of the way it had created greater unity amongst churches in Ashburton. They feel as though the Christian dimension of the school is not forced, but natural and appropriate to a school context. Parents consider that the school's Special Character is impacting positively on their children's faith journey. They appreciate the way in which God is brought into all areas of the curriculum from science to handwriting. The school's welcoming and inclusive culture and excellent pastoral care was something rated highly by parents.

## **8. Students**

Students also speak well of their school and the education they are receiving. They consider their teachers to be genuine in their care for them, helping them when they do wrong and desiring to see them grow in their faith.

# SUMMARY

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**A summary of matters identified in the Review for the Management, Board, Land Trust and Proprietor to reflect on going forward:**

1. Special Character Guidelines document be created so it covers all aspects of the Special Character: vision, philosophy, implementation, outcomes and monitoring. This process could also develop a graduate profile so that the document maintains a student focus.
2. Board Policy Statements with reference to Special Character need to be intentionally implemented so they have value.
3. Governance structure needs to be more clearly outlined with reference to board, proprietor (CSN) and land trust (ACST).
4. The Principal to write up the schools philosophy about Christian education and model for implementation at each level of the school as appropriate. Then sets up consistent processes for implementation and monitoring of what is happening through planning, appraisals, reviews and structured feedback to board and proprietor.
5. Specific funds are budgeted for staff development in Special Character each year.
6. Appraisal process embedding Special Character outcomes in performance management and professional development processes.