



**Aquinas College  
Tauranga**

**Confirmed**

**Education Review Report**

# Education Review Report

## Aquinas College

The purpose of ERO's reviews is to give parents and the wider school community assurance about the quality of education that schools provide and their children receive. An ERO school report answers the question "How effectively is this school's curriculum promoting student learning - engagement, progress and achievement?" Under that overarching question ERO reports on the quality of education and learning outcomes for children and for specific groups of children including Māori students, Pacific students and students with special needs. ERO also reports on the quality of the school's systems for sustaining and continuing improvements. The report answers four key questions about the school.

## Findings

### 1 Context

#### **What are the important features of this school that have an impact on student learning?**

The special Catholic character of Aquinas College is focused on spiritual and educational outcomes for all students. The ongoing commitment by the college to promote collaborative relationships with students, parents, whānau, the parish and wider community contributes to positive learning experiences for students. All aspects of college life are underpinned by the 'Touch Stones of Prayer, Truth, Scholarship, Service, Joy and Family'. These values underpin all aspects of school life and the curriculum. Adults and students have mutual understandings and knowledge about learning. Significant features that contribute to students' development and engagement in learning include:

- students having a strong sense of belonging and being optimistic about their future
- students having a good understanding of college expectations where they share common understandings and values
- students' dignity as young individuals being well supported by a strong pastoral care process that is focused on their development into adulthood.

Trustees are committed to developing student strengths and interests within the school's special character. A highly skilled chairperson, elected parent representatives, proprietor representatives, and a co-opted whānau trustee guide college governance/stewardship responsibilities. Trustees have clear expectations for future development and have a strong presence in the school.

The experienced principal continues to build on previous strengths within the school. He has a distributive approach to leadership and is well supported by a knowledgeable senior leadership team. Extended self review and the implementation of school-wide initiatives, particularly in the development and implementation of the school's curriculum, is well organised.

The college is situated in a western suburb of Tauranga and caters for students in Years 7 to 13. The roll has remained relatively constant and 82 of the 753 students are of Māori descent. Most Māori students whakapapa to Tauranga Moana iwi and hapu. The school is a member of the recently established Faith Based Community of Schools (CoS), which includes Catholic schools in the Tauranga and Rotorua diocese. This collaboration is likely to contribute to a wider range of positive educational opportunities for college students.

## 2 Learning

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

School leaders, teachers, students and parents make effective use of achievement information to promote student engagement in learning. Trustees are well informed about student achievement and make good use of this information to inform resourcing decisions. Teachers and students are able to use school information and communication technology (ICT) systems to monitor student progress and achievement over time.

Robust moderation practices in Years 7 and 8 align reading writing and mathematics to National Standards and support overall teacher judgements (OTJs). Teacher collaboration increases the accuracy of OTJs and builds their understandings about student learning. These practices are responsive, guide department self-review, and ensure that students' progress is effectively monitored.

Students in Years 7 and 8 have a strong sense of ownership of learning and are focused on achieving their learning goals. They benefit from teachers sharing their achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. Students are able to reflect on their progress and achievement, and report this information to their parents and whānau during student-led conferences. This sense of responsibility is a significant factor that contributes to their learning.

A well-considered approach to standard based assessment for Years 9 and 10 students provides the college with a useful framework, which is aligned to National Certificate Education Achievement (NCEA) assessment. The senior leadership team recognise the possibility of aligning the Years 9 and 10 framework to National Standards at Years 7 and 8. This would provide a more seamless approach to assessment practice, which could subsequently include contributing schools and students from Years 1 to 13.

Māori students who are identified as being below in reading, writing and mathematics are provided with specific learning programmes to accelerate their progress. Long term achievement trends in NCEA indicate that nearly all of these students achieve success over time. In 2012 a large group of Year 10 students were identified as being at risk of not achieving in NCEA. A number of initiatives were introduced and recent NCEA data suggests that the achievement of these students has improved.

Student achievement in NCEA Levels 1, 2 and 3 are well above the national and similar schools' averages and have steadily improved over time. Provisional school leavers' data for 2014 shows that 96% of all students achieved above NCEA Level 2. This is well above national comparisons and the Ministry of Education (MoE) goal of 85% by 2017 attaining Level 2. A college focus in recent years has been on increasing the proportion of merit and excellent endorsements across all NCEA levels and in national scholarships.

Students with high needs benefit from individual education programmes (IEPs). Parents of these students are actively involved in their child's learning, and take a keen interest in how the curriculum is designed to meet their child's learning needs. Educational opportunities for these students and their access to a range of courses at local tertiary institutions contribute to their vocational pathways and opportunities for success in NCEA.

### 3 Curriculum

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

The following features of the Aquinas College curriculum promote and support student learning:

- access to a wide range of sporting, cultural and leadership experiences, including the Arts
- involvement in a programme of religious education, which provides opportunities for spiritual, liturgical and community service activities
- strong support for student wellbeing through a comprehensive pastoral care network
- a curriculum that is focused on learning, celebrates success, and encourages purposeful links to the wider world.

Students enjoy a sense of belonging and realise their potential as learners in well-managed learning environments. They have the opportunity to work collaboratively with one another and actively participate in the implementation of college values. Students are highly engaged and well supported by teachers and staff.

Ongoing curriculum review is purposeful and designed to be responsive to students needs. An appropriate balance of learning pathways takes into account the academic and vocational aspirations of students. Currently seven students are working towards university qualifications while still at school. The school has strong links with local employers and there are supportive relationships among careers department teachers, employers, students and parents.

There are many examples of high quality teaching practices evident in classrooms. Teachers in these classrooms demonstrate a range effective teaching strategies that promote learning. These include:

- well-considered curriculum topics, which build on students' prior knowledge
- teachers effectively differentiating the context of programmes to meet the needs of individuals and groups who need either extension or support with their learning
- questioning strategies that provide students with opportunities to lead the learning
- modelling task design and developing a classroom learning community that promotes active learning.

The high level of relational trust among teachers and students is underpinned by a three year professional learning and development programme about restorative practice. This initiative has resulted in a clear vision based on a very positive behavioural approach to building mutual respect and responsibility. It has had a significant and positive influence on students learning, behaviour and college culture.

The pastoral care team have a major role in monitoring the overall engagement and wellbeing of students. A wrap around approach from senior leaders, deans, guidance counsellor and careers advisors help each student to engage and gain purposeful credits that are linked to their goals.

The introduction of teacher professional learning communities (PLC) forums currently aims to promote teacher reflection about their practice. PLC provides the college with the opportunity to review the effectiveness of professional development programmes.

Leaders and trustees recognise the increasing number of diverse cultures in the college and in 2014 requested the MoE to run an 'Inclusive Survey'. The school acknowledges that there is a need to promote a curriculum that promotes, celebrates and affirms the identity of all students. This should strengthen the college's curriculum and contribute to the richness of existing school culture.

Parents are involved in interviews, information evenings and orientation of their children into the school. These activities are designed to provide new students with an open transition process and a welcoming connection to the college. Form groups include students across all year levels and new students are provided with support from older peers to support a sense of belonging.

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

The college has developed a curriculum that aims to promote success for Māori as Māori.

College leaders recognise the importance of reciprocal relationships with the whānau group. It is important for the college to work with the whānau group and contributing schools to build on current plans to include the aspirations of the college's whānau and Māori students. This community approach is likely to enhance relationships and build an equitable partnership focused on Māori student's success as Māori.

All students in Years 7 to 9 have te reo and tikanga Māori programmes. Te Taumata Wharenui, provides a presence and place of learning for these students and a unique place for Māori ako tangata whenua and Māori students from other iwi to congregate. Major aspects that promote Māori student success and success as Māori include:

- annual aims to strengthen the presence, engagement and achievement of Māori students through the curriculum
- the appointment of a Māori trustee
- a strategic goal to increase all teachers capability in te reo and tikanga Māori so they are able to support Māori identity throughout the school
- the use by some teachers of the MoE 'Tātaiako' document about building teacher competencies in te reo and tikanga Māori in English medium schools.

It is important that the school review the strategic goal about teacher capability to determine how they promote te reo and tikanga Māori through the curriculum.

## **4 Sustainable Performance**

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

The college is committed to promoting and sustaining productive and collaborative relationships among trustees, teachers, students, parents, whānau and the wider community. Strategic and spontaneous self review is effective and informs decisions about change. This approach to self review is focused on enhancing learning outcomes for students, teachers, parents and whānau.

The principal and senior leadership team provide well-informed educational leadership for the school. A collaborative approach to school development enables teachers to contribute their strengths, talents and ideas. Together school leaders have a good understanding about high quality education and care for all students.

College leaders skilfully manage and review all learning areas to improve and increase student achievement. Leaders of faculties biannually review their learning area in relation to student achievement and curriculum design, and share this information with trustees.

The teacher appraisal process and Practising Teacher Criteria are clearly aligned and provide teachers with the opportunity to reflect on their practice. Further review of implementation

practices in response to recent Education Council requirements and previous expectations should strengthen teacher reflection about teaching strategies that promote positive learning outcomes for students.

### **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. The school has attested that it complies with all aspects of the Code. ERO's investigations confirmed that the school's self-review process for international learners is thorough.

At the time of this ERO review there were 18 international fee-paying students in the school. These students are well supported by an experienced coordinator of international students who is also the home-stay coordinator. Policies and procedures are clearly documented and reviewed annually by the board of trustees.

Students have access to good quality education programmes that include English language support based on students' individual needs. Students are encouraged to participate in school activities. There is a strong focus on ensuring students' wellbeing and pastoral care. Student progress is well monitored and appropriate support in planning their learning pathways is provided.

### **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

Aquinas College is a Years 7 to 13 Catholic school situated in Tauranga. Students enjoy learning in a safe environment, with well-maintained facilities. Students' spiritual and educational needs are catered for and their achievements are recognised and celebrated. Positive and mutually respectful relationships are a school feature.

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



Graham Randell  
Deputy Chief Review Officer Northern (Acting)

10 September 2015

## About the School

Location	Tauranga	
Ministry of Education profile number	482	
School type	Secondary (Years 7 to 13)	
School roll	753	
Number of international students	18	
Gender composition	Girls 51% Boys 49%	
Ethnic composition	NZ European/Pākehā Māori Asian Pacific Other	82% 11% 5% 1% 1%
Review team on site	August 2015	
Date of this report	10 September 2015	
Most recent ERO report(s)	Education Review Education Review Education Review	September 2012 October 2010 November 2007