

Sacred Heart College, Napier



Sabbatical Report

Steve Bryan

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SABBATICAL REPORT 2011

Schools visited:

May 4 St Joseph's College, Lucan, Dublin
May 12 St Colm's High School, Draperstown, Northern Ireland
May 16 Notre Dame High School, Glasgow
May 26 Notre Dame Girls' School, Southwark, London
May 30 Notre Dame Des Missions School, Charenton, Paris

Features of Schools:

St Joseph's College, Dublin

Catholic girls 1st year – 6th year

Principal: Mrs Siobhan Corry

Founded by the Presentation Sisters

Governed by Board of Management as Trustees.

Roll 800 / 60 staff

Motto 'The truth shall make you free'

St Colm's High School, Northern Ireland

Catholic co-ed 11-16yr olds

Principal: Mrs Roisin McKenna

Governed by CCMS (Catholic Commission for Maintained Schools)

Roll 420 / Staff 28

Motto: 'Believe and Achieve'

Notre Dame High School, Glasgow

Catholic girls 1st year – 6th year

Principal: Mrs Philomena McFadden

Founded by Sisters of Notre Dame (foundress St Julie Billiard)

Only state funded Catholic girls' school in Scotland

Roll 800 (capped at 820)

'Educate the girl; educate the family'

Notre Dame Girls' School, London

Catholic girls' school

Principal: Sister Anne-Marie

Languages School for 11yrs – 16yrs

Funded by State

Roll 630

'Education for the Poor'

Notre Dame Des Missions School, Paris

Catholic co-ed private school for pre-school to 18yrs

Principal: Mr Philippe Vella

Roll 1000+

Strong Mission focus in South East Asia

Special Character

RE is a compulsory subject in the four schools in Great Britain and Ireland. However there is not a common curriculum across these countries.

At St Joseph's in Ireland a national exam exists in the junior curriculum as part of a Junior Certificate but not in the senior curriculum where RE is not part of the Leaving Certificate. Teachers reported that senior students had a good attitude to RE. The HOD of RE had 6 fully qualified RE teachers in the RE Department but did not have a budget; rather resourcing was on a request basis.

At St Colm's in Northern Ireland RE existed on the timetable with an equitable time allocation with other subjects (an interesting comparison to NZ where our Bishops are calling for minimum time delivery of RE which is still well shy of core curriculum subjects).

At Notre Dame High School in Glasgow one third of the roll is Muslim. Parents may request that their daughters are excused from RE (only two have made such a request this year). The HOD of RE described a similar junior curriculum to NZ but with no common senior assessments the attitude of senior students to RE was compromised. When I explained our national curriculum her response was, "You won a watch there"

All Catholic schools in London are required to deliver RE but it is non-denominational specific. With 80% of the roll of Notre Dame School in London born outside of England and one third of them also Muslim the RE curriculum has a multi faith foci.

In Paris at Notre Dame Des Missions School RE is a voluntary subject. Only one third of the roll (approximately 1000) take RE which is taught by 'volunteers'. One hour is timetabled per week for RE delivery. The Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions, RNDM, who live on the school site, are some of these volunteers.

By comparison in NZ our national RE curriculum provides us with a strong consistent focus. Our Achievement Standard curriculum allows students to achieve towards their NCEA qualifications and gain Endorsement Awards. The very recent NZQA approval of RE as a

University Entrance subject gives further weight and credibility to Religious Education in NZ. We have indeed “won a watch”.

The four British and Irish schools I visited reported religious observances were regular and important occasions on their school calendars. Masses, retreats, liturgies, and prayer were important aspects of their Special Characters. School Mission Statements were explicitly ‘Catholic’ with Gospel Values highlighted in documentation, visible in displays, and talked about by staff and students as part of daily life. The Special Catholic Characters of the schools were also very obvious through religious icons, wall displays, banners, and their Chapels or sacred spaces. All schools described student Special Character leadership roles similar to ones at Sacred Heart, and notice-boards for RE and Special Character activities were evident in all of the schools. At Notre Dame School in London some interesting Special Character student systems existed like references from Parish Priests for school leadership roles, and this in a school with such a multi-faith dimension.

The exception to the above patterns was Notre Dame Des Missions School in Paris where it was a struggle to get the community to support school Masses held at a local Parish Church.

The four British and Irish schools all reported the strength of Sacramental programmes at contributing primary schools. Because they do not have Integration Agreements like us, which preserve our Preference enrolment quotas, and because they are required to accept students whose parents make a ‘Request for Enrolment’ they may well end up with as many as one-third of their rolls Muslim. Muslim parents are drawn to Catholic schools because of their strong value dimensions and because there are no boys! So the strong Sacramental programmes delivered at Primary Schools ensure Colleges receive students already recipients of the Sacraments.

Mission or Social Justice programmes were strong features of all schools visited. These were both internationally focused, as the case with Notre Dame Des Missions in Paris which had a very strong Mission focus with the Phillipines, and nationally with the four British and Irish schools all involved in supporting Charity and Aid agencies. The provision of meals at these schools highlighted the support for their own families who were disadvantaged with many students recipients of the ‘Free Meal Entitlement’. The atmosphere and sense of community at lunch time was special as hundreds of students came together sharing a hot cooked meal. A special line for

Muslim students in the canteens ensured 'halal' food was served for them. At Notre Dame des Missions School in Paris the lunch time meal we shared with staff was better than most of our evening meals at Parisian restaurants (minus the vino!)

Reviews of the schools' Special Character lacked the co-ordination and structure we are used to in NZ. Two of the British and Irish schools did not have a formal review process while the other two schools' Special Character reviews came under the 'Whole School Inspection'. When asked then how could a parent scrutinise a schools' Special Character I was told 'word of mouth like everything else in Ireland'.

At St Colm's High School in Northern Ireland two aspects highlighted the interesting political and social factors which influence so much of life there. Firstly a dilemma exists between the traditional Protestant focus on school leavers entering a trade and the new upwardly mobile aspirations of young people furthering their education. The CCMS (Catholic Commission for Maintained Schools) has been dynamic and "sharpened us up" in highlighting student achievement in Catholic schools.

Secondly to ensure a religious and social balance exit in student co-curricular aspirations, the Pope John-Paul II Award has been established to rival the President's Award (aka Duke of Edinburgh Award)

Summary

It was a privilege to visit all five schools on my Sabbatical. Their Principals warmly welcomed me, gave generously of their time, and had arranged for me to spend time with staff and students.

That defining atmosphere of 'community' so often the first aspect experienced when entering a Special Character school was very much evident and alive in these schools. Staff and students worked together in caring and respectful situations. Students talked proudly of their school, of teachers, and shared learning experiences with me. In all schools I felt comfortable and a sense of belonging.

While in NZ Catholic schools a more robust and accountable RE curriculum exit, the other defining factors of Special Character were all alive and tangible. The scripture verse so prominent in the Mission Statement of Notre Dame High School reflected the place of Jesus Christ in all schools,

'I am the Way and the Truth and the Life' - John 14:6

Post Script

While on Sabbatical I read Andre Agassi's autobiography 'Open'. I thoroughly recommend it as it breaks the mould of sports heroes' stories and describes absorbing insights into his life. A friend once says to him,

'Andre some people are thermometers, some are thermostats.
Some people register the temperature in a room, some change it'

Which are you?
