





FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR CURRICULA


<p>Background – vision and mission</p>	 <p>IN 1964, the founders of Middleton Grange School expressed their vision to provide for “a school, undenominational in character,” whose mission was “at one and the same time, to provide a Biblically based teaching in the Christian faith and a first rate general education.”ⁱ</p> <p>Neither the vision nor the mission has changed. They are overarching and eternal in purpose; and, with the school now integrated into the state system, they are held in trust by the Christian Schools Trust, Board of Trustees and staff of Middleton Grange.</p>	
<p>Vision and mission confirmed</p>	<p>Therefore, the school reaffirmed the original intention of its founders in the 1995 vision statement:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Middleton Grange School assists families in the education of their children by providing an environment in which the Biblical truths of Jesus Christ are taught and lived.</i></p>	
<p>Home-school partnership</p>	<p>We see here that the school exists to “assist families” by providing an approach to teaching and learning which honours God, but neither displaces nor replaces the Biblical instruction, precept and example that should be present in the home. The school is in partnership with parents.</p>	
<p>Excellence “to the glory of God”</p>	<p>Additionally, the school’s task is the formal [1] education of its pupils, and this education should be “first rate”, ie of the highest standard and excellence; anything less is neither God-honouring nor responsible stewardship of the gifts and talents</p>	<p><i>(1) Formal here means that demanded by the compulsory curriculum.</i></p>


<p>Purpose of a curriculum review</p>  <p>Article 1: the Trinity</p>	<p>of each pupil. The issue is not essentially one of cognitive ability, which will naturally vary from pupil to pupil, but a disposition towards achievement—My utmost for His Highest.ⁱⁱ</p> <p>ANY CURRICULUM review necessarily focuses on the taught curriculum. However, it also impinges on all activity within a school across all levels.</p> <p>In the light of the founders’ vision, certain criteria emerge and serve as guidelines for a review. They derive from the need to “provide Biblically based teaching in the Christian faith.” They also flow out of the obligation placed upon us to provide “a first rate general education.”</p> <p>We would, therefore, conduct a curriculum review by asking whether teaching, content and school activities aim to achieve Biblically based teaching in the Christian Faith and a first rate general education.</p> <p>Biblically based teaching in the Christian faith:</p> <p>OUR CURRICULUM and everything pertaining to it should be enlivened by the beliefs that make up our credal statement.ⁱⁱⁱ The credal statement is Biblically based; it summarises and interprets the Biblical story.</p> <p>The first article in the statement, which speaks of “The unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead,” might seem alien to our curriculum and the running of the school, but it is not; while an evangelical emphasis on the Second Person of the Trinity (the Lord Jesus Christ) is essential and rightly commonplace in Christian schools, it cannot be at the expense of an equal emphasis upon the First and Third Persons of the Trinity (the Father and Holy</p>	
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<p>Basis of a functional Christian community</p>	<p>Spirit). Scripture is infused with Trinitarian interrelationship and accountability: Jesus did not do His own will, but the Father's; and, the Holy Spirit came as the Counsellor on Jesus' instruction to ensure believers would never be without His presence, despite the Ascension. And yet the co-essential and co-existent essence and ministry of the Godhead is known and understood only in part and remains a mystery of Glory.</p> <p>This is foundational theology in a Christian school, because within the mystery of the plurality of the Trinity lies the deepest possible understanding of relational wholeness and community. Moreover, in practical terms we have a precedent for authority; accountability; discipline; submission; respect; and order in school society, academic work and even artistic endeavour. In a nutshell, the life of the Trinity needs to permeate the life of the school; and it will have the character of love.</p> <p>The second, fourth and fifth articles of Middleton Grange School's credal statement also inform our curriculum review. They speak of God; God in Creation; human fallenness; redemption in Christ; and final judgement. Each of these intimations must test our curriculum.</p>	
<p>The existence of God</p>	<p>To speak of God, in the Christian sense, is to speak of something more than creation. It is to posit the existence of a personal Creator. It is to look further than secular curricula, which are bounded by materialism [2], and to emphasise an immaterial, metaphysical [3] reality. It is to beg questions, and through the special revelation of Scripture, to grapple with answers that have ontological [4] and ethical [5] implications. So, too, any account of life that does not link life directly to the Logos [6] is deficient.</p>	<p><i>[2] The material world is defined by the five senses. [3] Literally beyond the senses. [4] The nature of being —asking the question: Who am I? [5] How we should behave. [6] Christ the unchanging word.</i></p>
<p>Man is Made in the image of God</p>	<p>Likewise, a curriculum that does not give weight to the full stature of humanity, to the breathtaking</p>	

<p>i. The qualitative dimension</p> <p>ii. Our moral responsibility</p> <p>iii. Man's ability to think, plan, be creative and communicate</p> <p>iv. Relationships</p> <p>v. Stewardship</p>	<p>significance of one made in the image of God, is equally diminished. The qualitative dimension to being made in the image of God must be dwelt on: the human capacity to know good and to choose to do it (our moral nature and conscience); our ability to plan for the future; our capacity for observation and reason, for creativity and for the use of language; our emotional range; our being male or female; and the deep want of God planted within us, together with our vocation to love God and know Him forever, beg for consideration. So, too, the relational significance of being made in the image of God must be emphasised. The dignity of marriage, family and even life in the school proceeds from the character of God and is found among those who bear His image. This is the case with stewardship, also. Where we govern or “steward” our resources prudently, whether it is in the context of the home, the government of any organisation, or the workplace, or where we develop and sustain the physical and mental resources God has given us, or when we wisely manage the resources of the natural world, we do well: we are faithful to our calling as people made in the image of God. Curricula that treat humans in only naturalistic [7] and utilitarian [8] terms are grievously inadequate and genuinely hopeless. In contrast, curricula that always see “human being” in relation to God, and most clearly expressed in Christ, provide an unsurpassable basis for compassion, true fraternity [9] and moral conduct.</p>	 <p><i>(7) Man is purely physical and does not have soul or spirit. (8) Something is of value because it produces something. The opposite of the Christian view. (9) Brotherhood and sisterhood.</i></p>
<p>The fall of man</p>	<p>Additionally, curricula that fail to take seriously the depth of sin in the individual, and the consequences of sin at a personal and social level, run the risk of doing pupils and New Zealand society the greatest possible disservice. Curricula which are only therapeutic, pandering to pupil potential and self-maximisation, and which never mention the human capacity for selfishness, deception and violence, and which describe human fallenness, sin and even evil as impersonal and as the result of economic,</p>	

<p>Redemption through Christ</p>	<p>political or societal failure, are trivial. Our curricula cannot be so: they must bear the imprimatur [10] of Scripture and the awful revelation of the cross.</p> <p>Just as an understanding and an acknowledgement of sin as the scourge of humanity is necessary, so, too, our curricula must explore redemption. While they might note, comparatively, religious and political systems that appear to offer social, personal and even spiritual redemption, they must eventually focus on Christ and His regency in the Kingdom of God. To do otherwise is to fail the school and its pupils, and to be false to the testimony of history. The uniqueness of Christ as the Incarnate Son of God, together with His sacrificial death as our representative and substitute, speak decisively on human depravity and the character of God. They indict, too, religious and ethical relativism [11]. Plain confidence in the gospel, then, is not an exercise in the imposition of personal preferences upon pupils; rather it is truth to them.</p>	<p><i>(10) The mark of absolute authority.</i></p>
<p>Eternal consequences of what we are teaching</p>	<p>Curricula must also consider the implications of final judgement. Understandably and very correctly, the New Zealand Curriculum Framework concentrates on present needs with respect to science, sociology, technology and reading and mathematical literacy. As with other curricula, it prepares pupils for life. The Middleton Grange School curriculum, however, should also prepare pupils for death. It must have, so to speak, a real future focus—and one that looks to resurrection. For a life lived without thought of Christ will be no life at all. And a life that is consumed with self-gratification, or sensuality, or a lack of virtue will be without final reward. Therefore, should the school curriculum fail to communicate to pupils that their lives and actions have everlasting consequences, and that death and then judgement will be the measure of them, it will itself be found wanting.</p>	<p><i>(11) No fixed or permanent standard.</i></p>

<p>Christian context of education</p>	<p>“A first rate general education”:</p> <p>OUR CURRICULUM thus soundly anchored in Biblical truth should also aspire in its content to the highest standard of excellence.</p> <p>Turning to the founders’ mission to secure for its school’s pupils “a first rate general education”, it should immediately be noted that a first rate education <i>per se</i> will be a Biblically based education, or, put another way: that there is no authentic education [12] that is not Biblically based education. This is the case because the theological underpinnings of a Biblically based education address reality. With regards to the nature of reality, Biblically based education holds that the material universe is not in itself total reality; rather, reality has a metaphysical dimension to it, and that as a whole, it is circumscribed by God.</p>	<p><i>(12) An education that fully attends to the human condition.</i></p> 
<p>Being and becoming who you are in Christ.</p>	<p>A Biblically based education also resolves through its soteriology [13] the ancient dilemma of being and becoming or of actuality and potentiality. The Christian is both being and becoming; Christian salvation is presently experienced, but it has future fulfilment. Such an assertion stands against the open flux of contemporary thought with its consequent and experimental lifestyles. It echoes the Pauline and early catechumenical [14] exhortation: “Become who you are in Christ.”</p>	<p><i>(13) The study of the need for personal salvation.</i></p> <p><i>(14) The word comes from the underground caves (houses) where early Roman Christians gave instruction.</i></p>
<p>Unity vs diversity</p>	<p>Biblically based education, too, with its profound grounding in Trinitarian theology, makes sensible the otherwise overwhelmingly problematic tension between unity and diversity, between one and many, between singularity and plurality. It properly orders diversity and so prevents chaos. [15]</p> <p>These distinctions are important because secular curricula, trapped in naturalism, cannot reliably comment on metaphysical issues, and therefore, finally, neither are they able to treat on issues of life</p>	<p><i>(15) For example the individual Christian only reaches completion as part of the body of believers.</i></p>

<p>Truth and order</p>	<p>and death; of, for example, euthanasia, youth suicide, human embryo research and abortion. Put differently, Middleton Grange School's curricula will actively critique the thinking behind the New Zealand Curriculum Framework and encourage scholarship which is broader and deeper. It will provoke questions, rouse thought and answer to the desire for God within each of us.</p> <p>Moreover, secular curricula are in crisis because relativism has evacuated their traditional content. There is a lack of confidence in the moral relevance and theological significance of, for example, syntax and the role of punctuation, or, indeed, the vital pursuit of accurate representation and its relation to truth—this not only in languages, but in science, art and mathematics. Relativism in secular curricula has led the nation to moral indecisiveness, aesthetic confusion and to an intellectual dead end. A first rate general education holds as vital the pursuit of accurate representation and its relation to truth in the languages of all disciplines.</p>	
<p>An enriched curriculum</p>	<p>A first rate general education will not only meet national curriculum requirements but surpass them. Grounded in special revelation (Scripture), but not ignorant of general revelation (creation), it will hold to objective reality, truth, goodness, ordered liberty and beauty; and it will work with them. In secular curricula, objectivity is seen as a less and less credible concept. Truth, particularly in the humanities, is held to be subjective. This has meant that opinion and preference have come to play a role for which they are unfit. So nationally social studies, English and in some cases religious education have lost confidence when it comes to speaking about the value of one culture or form of government over and against another, or one work of art or piece of literature in relation to another, or of Christianity over Islam, or of intelligent design in the face of evolutionary theory, etc. Middleton Grange School's curricula should not be paralysed by such</p>	

<p>The significance of history</p>	<p>foolishness. The school's programmes and curriculum delivery have been sensitive to and diligent in these issues, but there is a need for continuing vigilance.</p> <p>A first rate general education will take great care when it comes to history. On a personal, local, ecclesiastical, national and international level, history records change and continuity. In this way, it is vital for self-understanding, and for gaining a comprehensive view of New Zealand and human society. Moreover, history has teleological, soteriological and eschatological [16] import; history attends to purpose, regeneration and hope. In short, it speaks of God's faithfulness. History is not only "the heart of the humanities", it is also the context in which we form all our understanding of God's purposes, revelations and relationships. As such, history must occupy a pivotal place in the curriculum of the Christian school.</p>	<p><i>(16) Teleological considers causes and purposes of human action. Soteriological considers Christian salvation. Eschatological considers the last days and Christ's return.</i></p>
<p>Geography as a vehicle of truth</p>	<p>Similarly, geography, the study of human interaction with the environment and each other, is critical to a proper understanding of stewardship and the care of creation. As <i>time</i> is to history, so <i>place</i> is to geography; both locate us. The centrality of <i>place</i> is always affirmed in Scripture and it is imbued with the formation of human identity and the memory of curse and blessing.</p>	
<p>Encouraging Biblical virtues</p>	<p>A first rate general education will also attend to virtue. While secular curricula focus on a foppish set of jejune [17] "values" [18], Middleton Grange School, in contrast, should actively seek to draw out of its pupils virtues common to humanity and particular to the Christian. These might be the capacity for mercy, compassion, courage, courtesy, fairness, faith, gratitude, hope, humility, love, magnanimity, obedience, patience, prudence, respect, self-sacrifice, temperance and truthfulness. Just as in His light we see light, so it is that through His life the staff and pupils of the school can hope</p>	<p><i>(17) A Fop is a Middle English word meaning superficial appearances while jejune means barren and dull. (18) Values are not permanent; they may be individual and private or formed by agreement within a group.</i></p>

<p>On conducting a curriculum review</p> <p>1. Test breadth of curricula</p> <p>2. Measure against Scripture</p> <p>Reaching beyond obligation</p> <p>Exercising stewardship</p>	<p>for virtue. Indeed, the vision of Middleton Grange School is wholly characterised by the distinctive Christian virtues of servant leadership and servanthood.</p> <p>SO THEN, a curriculum review will be conducted with reference to the mission of the founders of Middleton Grange School to “at one and the same time,” provide “Biblically based teaching in the Christian faith and a first rate general education.” A review will test current curricula to see whether they are expansive enough in vision and whether they introduce, or reinforce, the basic but boundlessly significant precepts of the school’s credal statement. At every turn our curriculum will be expected to depict reality as it is described in Scripture. It will distinguish between Creator and creation; it will speak of the grandeur but sinfulness of the individual; and, it will testify to Christian redemption and future hope. The curriculum will necessarily be seamless.</p> <p>Our curriculum will be expected to offer a first rate general education, too. It will deal to everything obligatory within the New Zealand Curriculum Framework; however, it will not be limited by it. Science, for example, will not be bound by naturalism; nor will health and physical education excise the immaterial part of human existence from a discussion of “well-being”; and art will consider aesthetics from a Trinitarian and Logocentric [19] perspective.</p> <p>Furthermore, Middleton Grange School’s curriculum review will be governed by the Biblical principle of stewardship. It will recognise that teachers and pupils have particular aptitudes, abilities and skills, and it will work with these to make sure that teachers are working where they might best serve the pupils of the school, and where pupils are best placed to excel in their gifting. Attention will also be given to the use of physical resources.</p>	<p>(19) <i>The Word</i></p>
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<p>Developing Christian character</p>	<p>Additionally, the curriculum review will at every opportunity look to further Christian character. It will attest to the evidence of history that knowledge without virtue is ruinous; that peaceful society and the generation of wealth require goodness. Further, it will work on the premise that Christian virtue is a commanding testimony as to the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit and a witness to the more general character of the Kingdom of God—something prized by the School’s founders and central to their vision.</p>	
<p>Conclusion</p>	<p>Finally, a curriculum review will be conducted with confidence and with joy. As Middleton Grange School draws inspiration for its curriculum from Scripture, it can reckon on delivering a comprehensive education to its pupils—indeed, one that opens the heart, soul and mind.</p>	

ⁱ Dunlop, E. (1989). *The Middleton Grange Story*. Dunedin: John McIndoe Ltd. 16.

ⁱⁱ Chambers, O. 1874-1917.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dunlop, E. (1989). *The Middleton Grange Story*. Dunedin: John McIndoe Ltd. 147.