

Cardinal McKeefry Primary, Wilton, New Zealand

“Everybody knows my name”



Cardinal McKeefry School in Wellington is the school that gave me the now famous butterfly bow, courtesy of young Anna. I first visited the school in 2003 and returned in 2005. In 2003 I was privileged to visit on New Zealand's Catholic Schools Day and be a part of the school celebrations.

When I returned in 2005 I parked the car and was greeted by a few shouts from the playground of "Hello, Andrew Chinn!" (it's rarely just Andrew!) And as I wandered about setting up in the hall children casually walked by, said hello, offered to help and started conversations with me. We were old friends in some ways but I did recall an almost equally warm reception two years previously.

I firmly believe that such a welcoming culture does not happen by accident. It happens because of modelling of staff, who greet each other and the children with warmth, and above all, dignity.

In 2005, the school's principal Colleen Restieaux worked with staff and the school board in developing perhaps the best school brochure I've seen anywhere. It's vibrant, attractive and includes short comments about the school from key documents and external reviews of the school. But attractiveness aside, I think what makes it an outstanding document is that it is authentic- it is an accurate reflection of life in the school.

The comment that really caught my eye and rang true for me was this one: *"Ours is a small school with a friendly, community environment where your child will be known by name to every teacher in the school at the end of his or her first day."*

Other than the title page this was the first thing the school said about itself. In doing so it put welcoming love as its first priority and from this all things flow. In being interviewed for teaching positions over the years I often stated that if a teacher had genuine love and empathy for a child that this was a vital foundation from where learning can flow. In that context of love, many "management" issues dissipate.

On the evening of my concert with the community at Cardinal McKeefry, I noticed this real warmth among the children as a new class member would arrive. I had witnessed the professionalism and then collegiality of the staff throughout the day and at afternoon drinks and this warmth extended to the relationships between staff and parents.

As one who visits many schools I can attest to the outstanding sense of welcome at Cardinal McKeefry School. As someone who visits many schools I can also contrast it to the odd school where visitors can sometimes feel a bit lost and, at worst, isolated.

The statement quoted earlier makes it clear that this role of welcoming is not limited to just one person, but rather it is the responsibility of all. We can never guarantee who the "first face" of our school will be but if our modelling is good and welcoming is something that we treasure as a key Catholic value, then we can hope to present the face of Jesus to those who enter our schools.