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**THE PHENOMENON OF SPECIAL
CHARACTER IN NEW ZEALAND STATE
INTEGRATED SCHOOLS**

**A NATURALISTIC STUDY OF
TWO CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
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ABSTRACT

This is a case study research project within a naturalistic research paradigm. It explores the nature, meaning and significance of the Special Character of New Zealand State Integrated schools. Utilising qualitative techniques of data collection and analysis, it focuses specifically on the cultures of two urban, single sex, Catholic secondary schools.

In the area of Catholic education, the theoretical framework for the research draws from a range of Vatican documents, contemporary international research in the field of Catholic education and the experience of the researcher as an educator in the New Zealand Catholic education system. In terms of theories of organisational culture, it has been influenced by the work of Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1991), Schein (1992) and Neville (1994).

Under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act, 1975, a Catholic school in New Zealand is a State Integrated school, providing an education with a Special Character. As such, it has both secular and religious purposes. As a State school, it delivers the New Zealand national curriculum in common with all secondary schools. As a Catholic school, its purpose is the development of the religious knowledge, faith and spirituality of its students within the specific context of the religious and educational tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. Under the Act, the maintenance and preservation of its Special Character is a legally binding responsibility for each school in partnership with the Crown.

Exploring the culture of each research school, this study examines those features that give rise to its distinctiveness and substance to its Special Character. It investigates the meaning attributed to the term 'Special Character' and considers issues arising from these perceptions. The process of Special Character transmission is outlined and its implications are discussed. These areas are explored through four major emergent themes, including cultural confluence, the significance of founding traditions, cultural transmission process and shared spirituality. Finally, in the light of the distinctive features that constitute the Special Character of the Catholic secondary school culture and the processes that both maintain and preserve it, a Grounded Theory of Special Character culture is proposed.

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