



Safeguard Special Character

Special character shapes the philosophy, values, and educational approach, influencing what is taught, how it is taught, and the culture of learning.

State Integrated School Board Professional Development and Learning Series

© APIS 2026

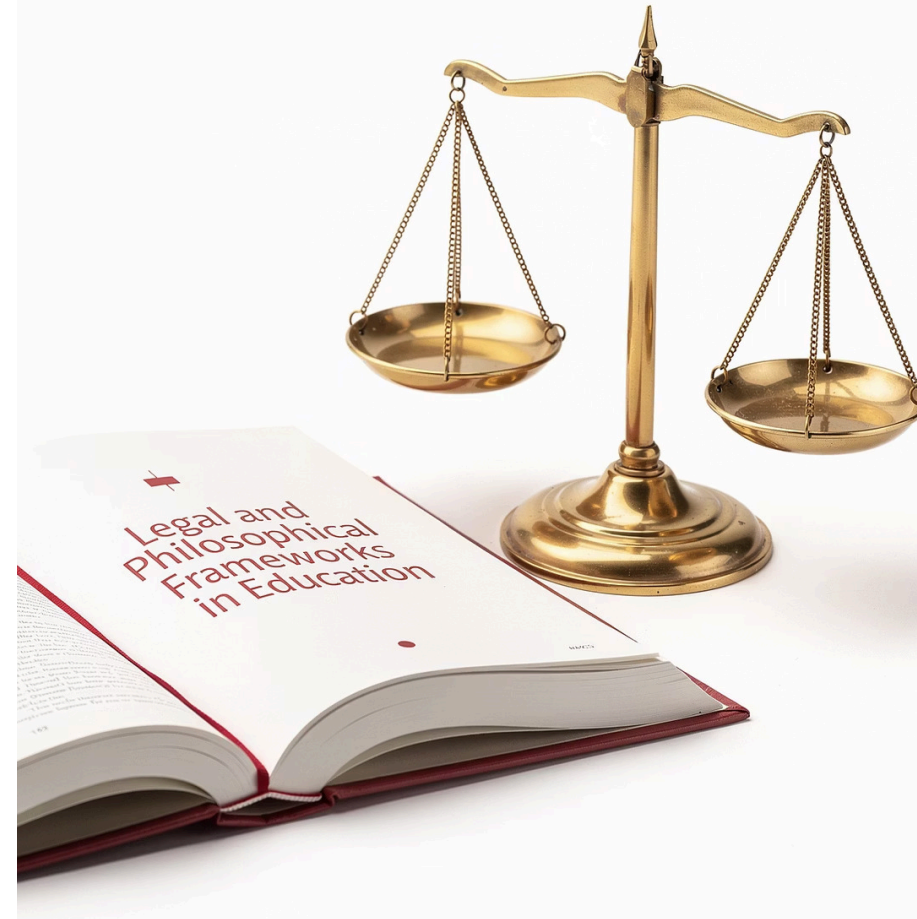
What Is "Special Character"?

The Ministry of Education defines a school's special character as the philosophical or religious framework within which the curriculum is delivered.

Under Schedule 6 of the Education and Training Act 2020, integrated schools have the legal right to reflect their special character through their teaching and conduct. The Proprietor is responsible for preserving that special character.

Education with a special character means education within the framework of a particular or general religious or philosophical belief, and associated with observances or traditions relating to that belief.

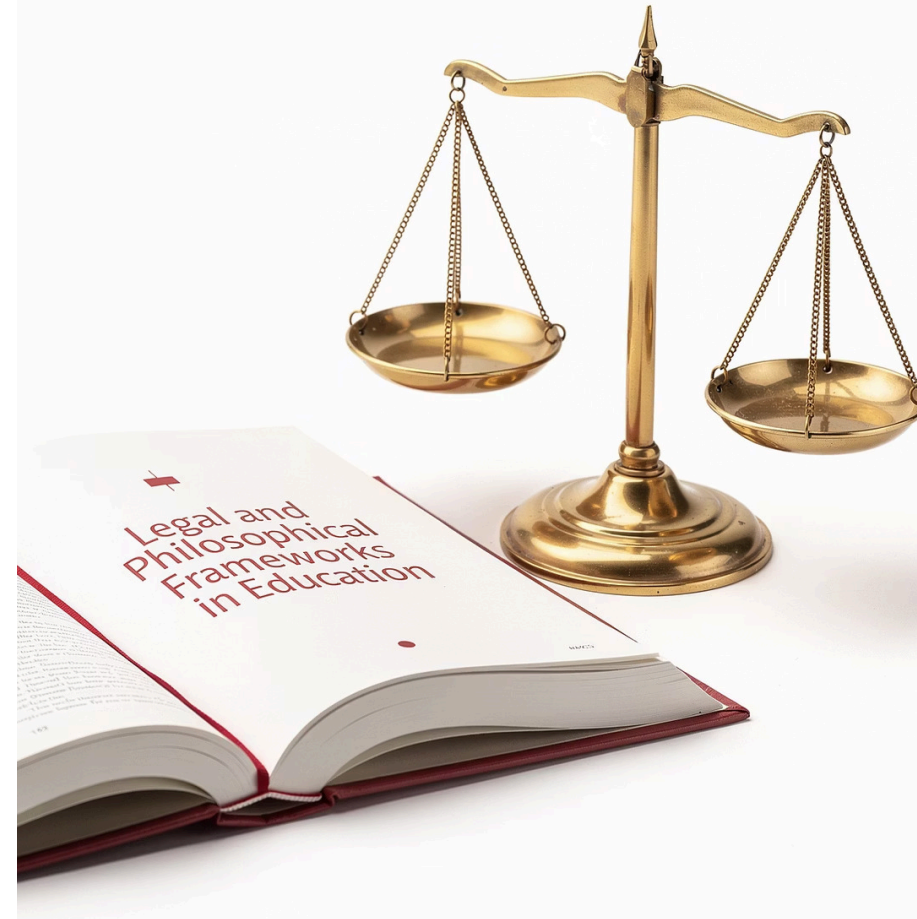
 **EDTA**= Education and Training Act 2020



What does the legislation say?

EDTA, Sch 6, Cl 6: Other matters that may be included in integration agreements:

- (1) Without restricting the provisions that may be included in an integration agreement, an integration agreement may include provisions for 1 or more of the following matters:
- (c) describing the education with a special character for which the school is or was originally established:
 - (d) prescribing the religious or philosophical instruction and observances that are to form part of the school programme after integration



What does the legislation say?

EDTA Section 10 - Interpretation:

education with a special character means education within the framework of a particular or general religious or philosophical belief, and associated with observances or traditions relating to that belief

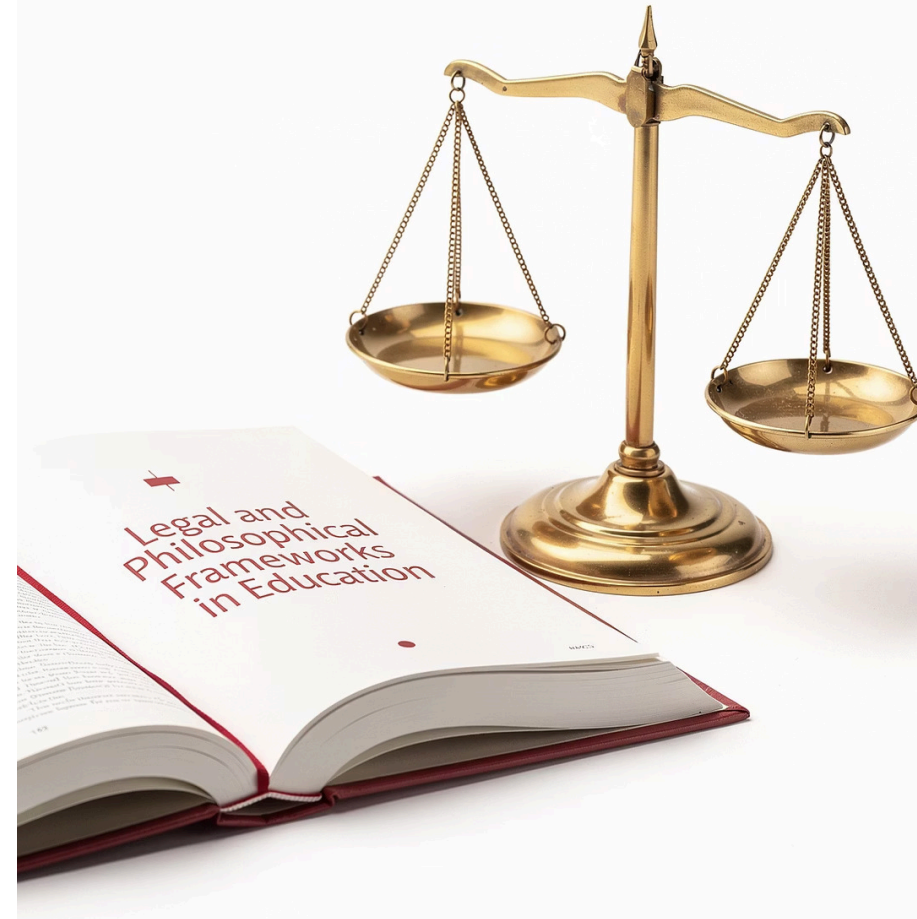
integration means the conditions and procedures on and by which a private school may become established as part of the State system of education, may remain part of that system, on a basis that preserves and safeguards the special character of the education that the school provides, and **integrated** has a corresponding meaning

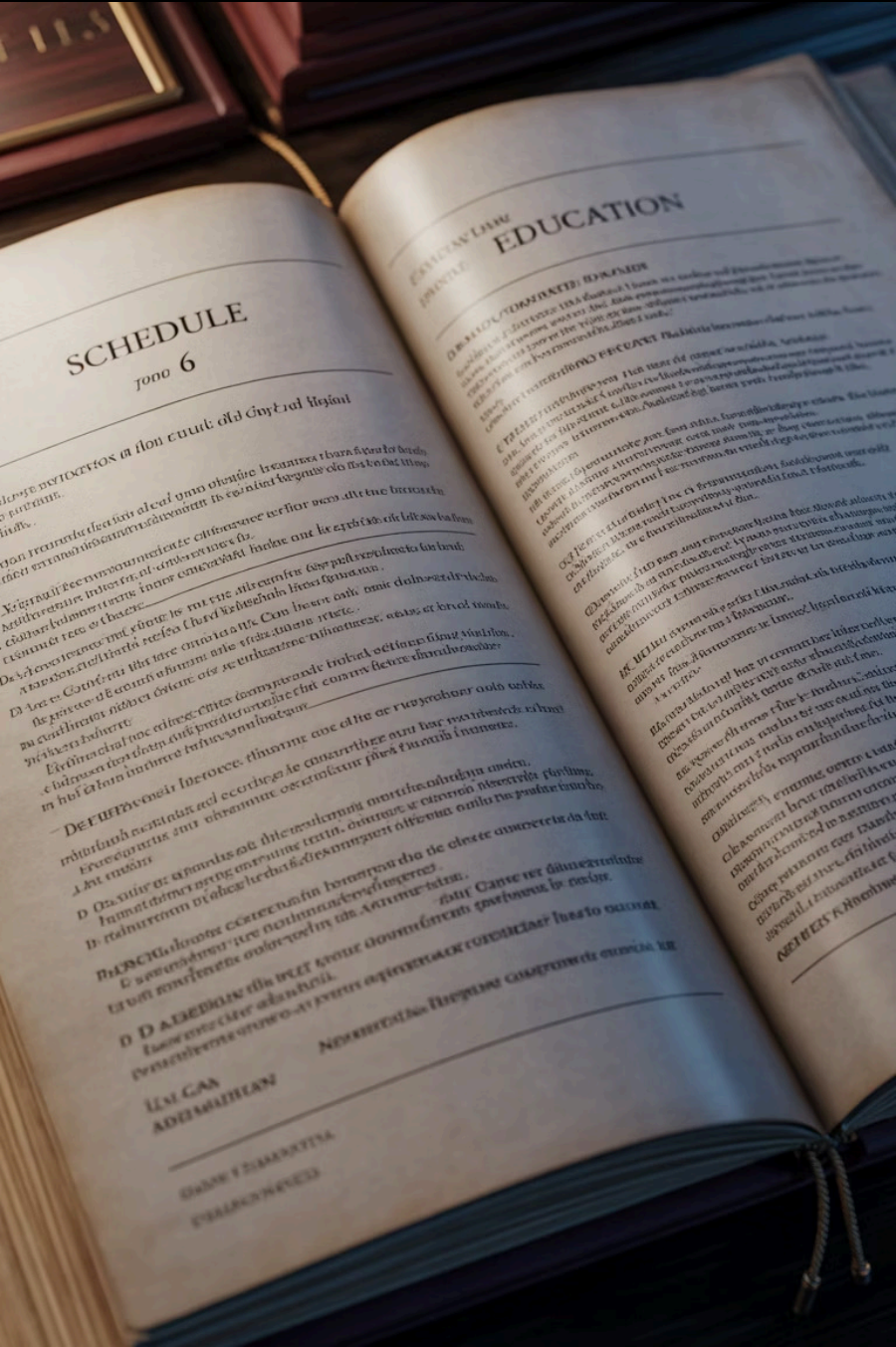
integration agreement means an agreement entered into under [clause 5](#) of Schedule 6

State integrated school means a State school that—

(a) offers education with a special character; and

(b) has been established as a State integrated school under [clause 5](#) of Schedule 6





Safeguard Special Character - the fine print

Definition of Special Character

Special character is fundamental to integration and is defined in Section 10 of the [Education and Training Act 2020](#) and the School's Integration Agreement as: *'education within the framework of a particular of general religious or philosophical belief and associated with observances or traditions to that belief'*.

The special character framework must be safeguarded and strengthened. Under the terms of Schedule 6 of the Education and Training Act 2020, the proprietors of integrated schools have a particular responsibility for determining, maintaining and enhancing the special character of integrated schools. Schedule 6: Clause 1, Education and Training Act 2020 protects the school's special character by ensuring that:

- the school shall continue to have the right to reflect the special character of its education through its teaching and the conduct of its staff
- integration shall not jeopardise the special character of an integrated school

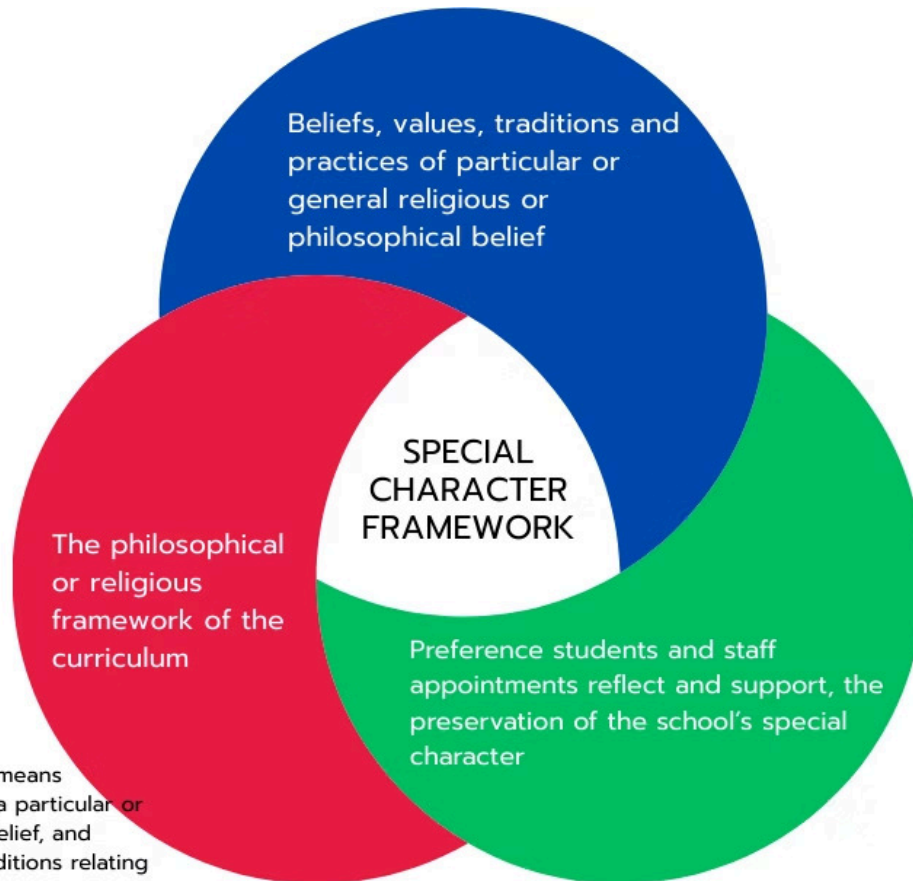
the Proprietor shall continue to have:

- the responsibility to supervise the education with a special character
- the right to determine what is necessary to preserve and safeguard the special character
- if in the Proprietor's opinion the school's special character is threatened, the Proprietor may invoke its powers under Schedule 6: Education and Training Act 2020.

However, the whole school community are kaitiaki stewards of this taonga for future generations. The taonga is kept alive, vibrant, and aligned with the goals of integrated school education through:

- effective governance and management,
- engagement of the school board in special character professional learning and formation,
- effective and ongoing special character evaluation
- sound employment policy and processes,
- sound enrolment policies and procedures,
- compliance with the school's integration agreement.

Special Character Framework



EDTA Section 10 - Interpretation:

education with a special character means education within the framework of a particular or general religious or philosophical belief, and associated with observances or traditions relating to that belief

The special character framework is built on three elements: the right to express the school's character through its general school programme, the people who make up and support the school community; and the beliefs, traditions, and practices that define that particular special character.

3 Ways Special Character Shapes the Curriculum



Curriculum Framework & Teaching Philosophy

Schools can teach, develop, and implement programmes that reflect their educational philosophy or faith tradition.

- A protected right for all integrated schools.
- Guides the overall teaching approach
- Sets the values and worldview behind the curriculum
- Schools implement programmes aligned to their educational philosophy



Curriculum Content & Methods

Special character is expressed in educational aims, curriculum content, teaching methods, organisational structures, festivals and celebrations.

- Influences subject content
- Sequencing, developmental focus
- Shapes pedagogical methods

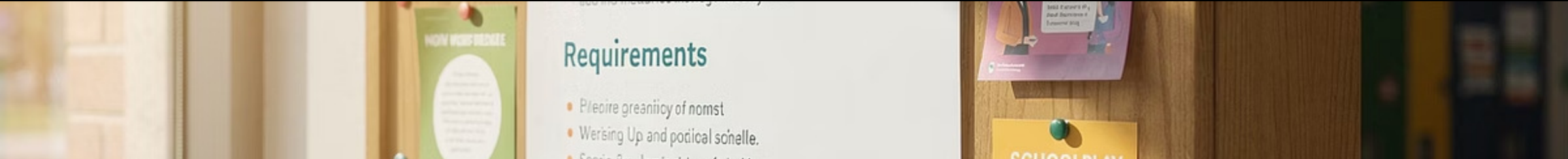


Whole-School Culture & Environment

Special character shapes the ethos, traditions, and daily life of the school.

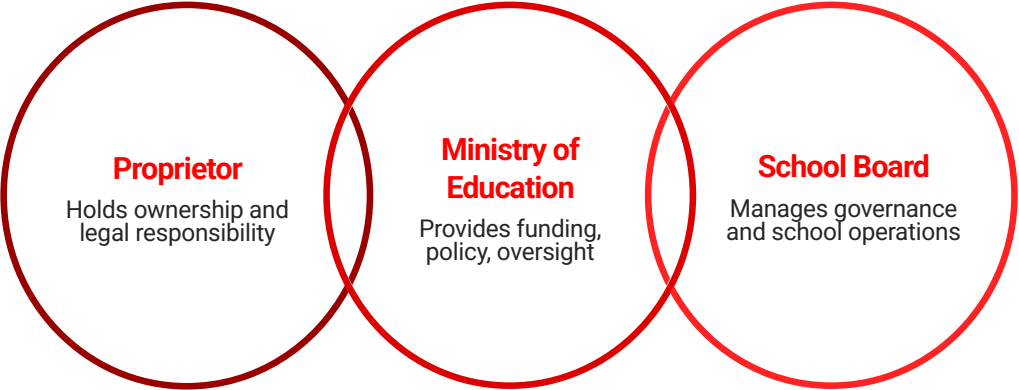
- From classroom rituals to school-wide events.
- Creates a learning environment consistent with the school's values
- Visible in daily conduct and teaching practices

Special character defines *how*, *what*, and *why* learning happens.



Partners and Support

Key Partnerships



State Integrated Schools are communities of partnership. The partners are the Proprietor of the school, the Ministry of Education, and the School Board. Each partner has a legal responsibility to maintain the school's special character.

Support Network

It is important to know who is there to support and guide you in your role as a school board member. Your primary contacts are:



[New Zealand School Boards Association](#)



[Ministry of Education](#)



[APIS](#) - For free advice and support, training, and workshops.