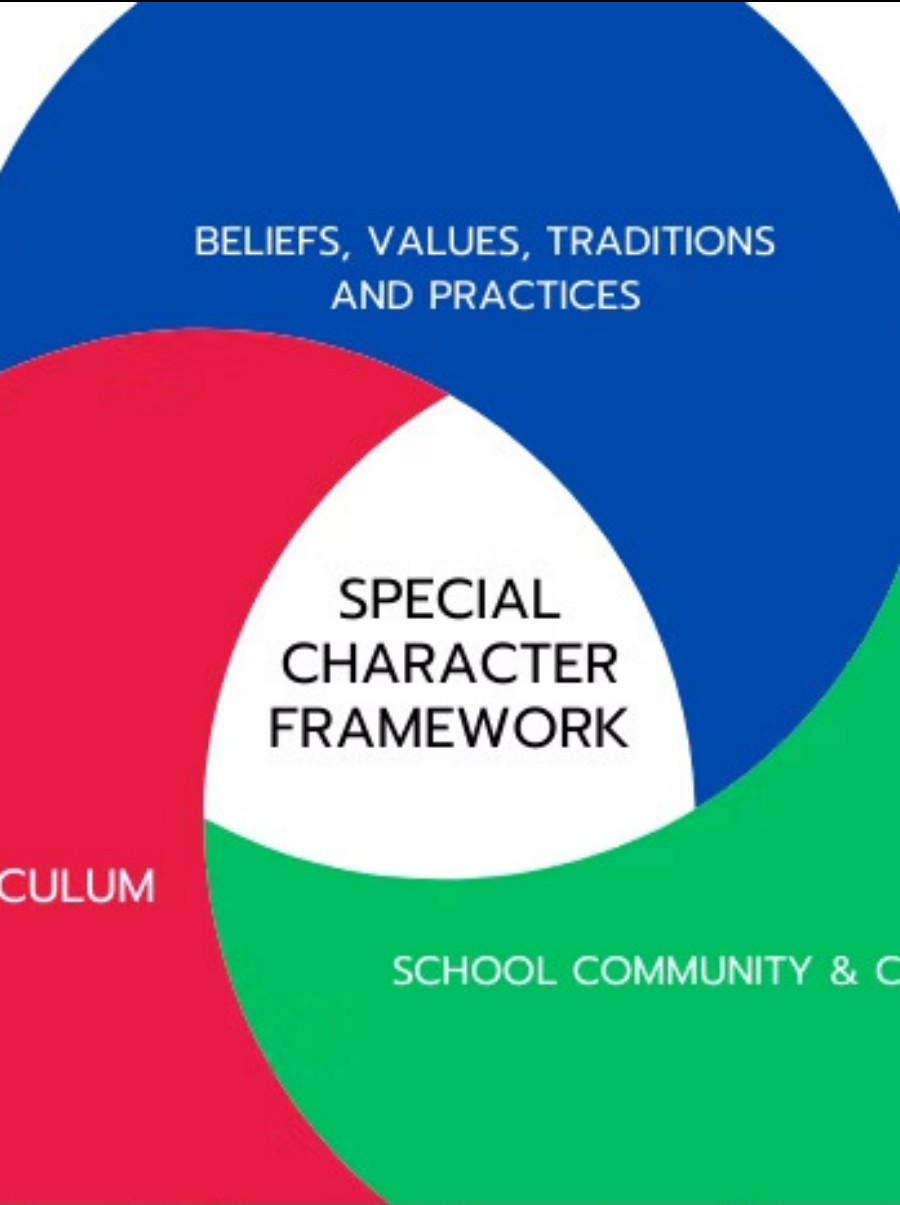




***Special Character is not an add on -
its foundational***

Special Character Guidelines

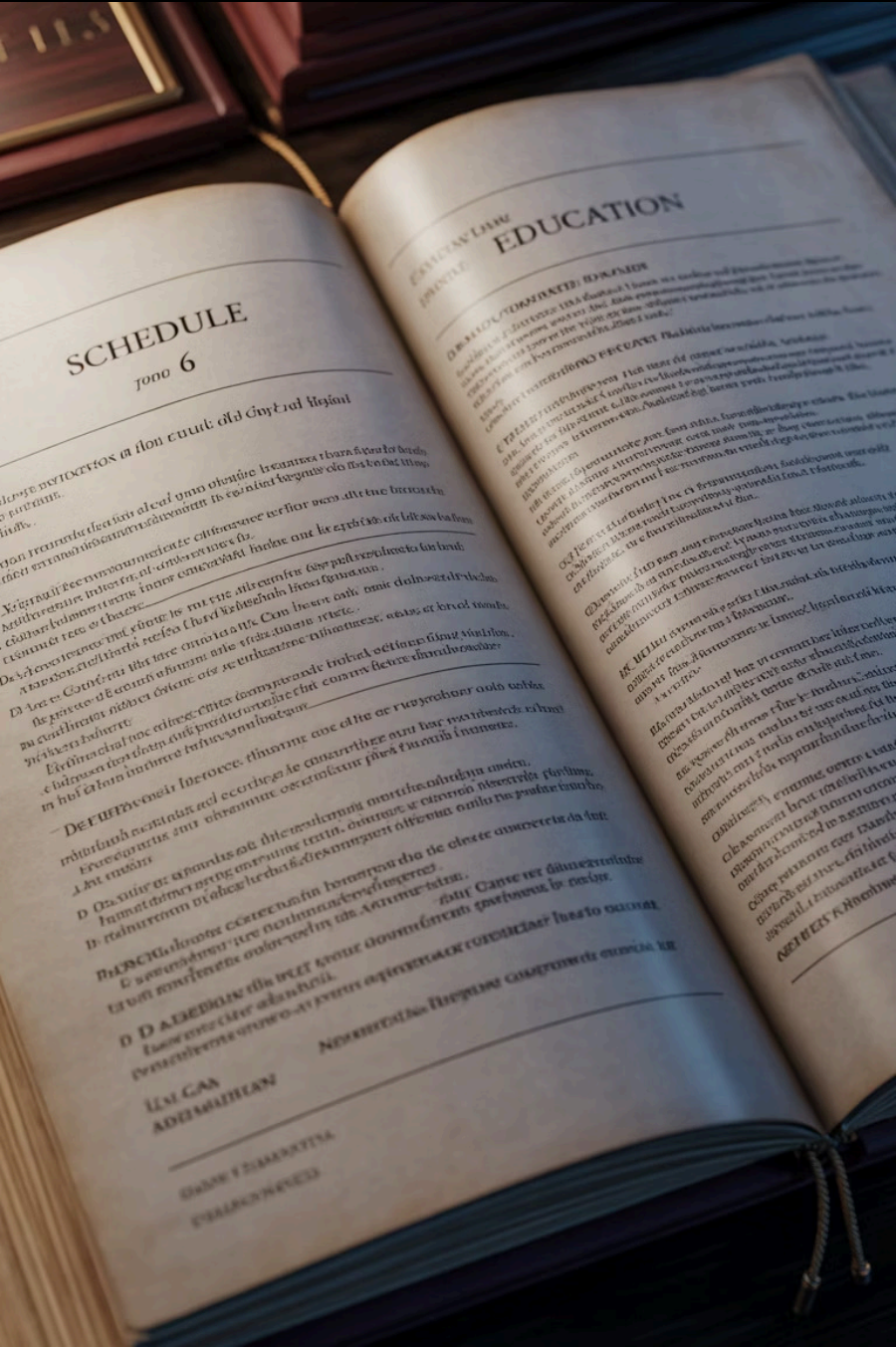
The Special Character Framework shapes the philosophy, values, and educational approach of state integrated schools. This influences what is taught, how it is taught, and the culture of learning.

The proprietor has a key role in providing Special Character Guidelines to school boards to ensure the school's special character is expressed, preserved, and enhanced in all aspects of governance, leadership, and daily operation.

This resources includes both summary pages and comprehensive information. We encourage boards to access the information in a way that works for them and their timeframes.

State Integrated School Board Professional Development and Learning Series

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Safeguarding Special Character

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.



Minimum Governance Standards for the Board Regarding Special Character



Safeguard & Strengthen

Actively keep special character central to all governance decisions and school operations — a core obligation.



Legal Framework

Comply with the Education and Training Act 2020, ensuring special character is never jeopardised and is reflected in teaching and conduct.



Plans, Policies & Procedures

Ensure the strategic plan, annual plan, and policies reflect the school's special character philosophy and identity.



Four Key Areas

Govern with special character in mind across Property, Employment, Enrolment, and Curriculum & Teaching.



Appropriate Staffing

Support appointments that recognise special character, including staff composition aligned with the school's identity.



Reporting to the Proprietor

Report annually on special character matters and communicate issues early to ensure risks are identified and addressed.



Positive Culture

Place special character at the centre of planning and foster a culture that reflects the school's values, traditions, and identity.

Minimum Governance Standards for the Board Regarding Special Character - detail and reference

1. **Safeguard and strengthen the special character.** Boards of state integrated schools must actively safeguard and strengthen the school's special character, ensuring it remains central to all governance decisions and school operations. This is a core governance obligation. [apis.org.nz]
2. **Operate within the legal framework (Education and Training Act 2020).** Boards must comply with all duties under the Education and Training Act 2020, including the requirement that special character must not be jeopardised. The Act confirms that integrated schools have the right to reflect their special character through teaching and conduct. [legislation.govt.nz]
3. **Reflect special character in the school's plans, policies, and procedures.** Boards must ensure the strategic plan, annual plan, and policies reflect the philosophy and identity of the school's special character. [apis.org.nz]
4. **Maintain governance standards across four key areas of shared focus.** Boards have special character responsibilities in relation to: • Property • Employment • Enrolment • Curriculum and Teaching. These four areas must be governed in ways that uphold the school's special character. [apis.org.nz]
5. **Ensure appropriate staffing for special character.** Boards must support staffing appointments that recognise the school's special character, including consideration of special-character positions and staff composition that aligns with the school's identity. [apis.org.nz]
6. **Maintain regular communication and reporting to the Proprietor.** Boards must report annually to the Proprietor on matters affecting special character and communicate any issues early. This accountability ensures risks are identified and addressed. [apis.org.nz]
7. **Promote a positive culture aligned with the school's philosophy.** Boards must place special character at the centre of planning and foster a culture that reflects the school's values, traditions, and identity. [apis.org.nz]

Special Character Guidelines - summary

“

APIS recommends Proprietors provide Special Character Guidelines to school boards to ensure the school's special character is expressed, preserved, and enhanced in all aspects of governance, leadership, and daily operation.
— Schedule 6, Section 39 of the Education and Training Act 2020

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Defining Special Character

What it means for the board



Proprietor's Expectations

Statement of their expectations



Board's Responsibility

Core role in special character

Governance "Lens"

For core practice framework and policy development



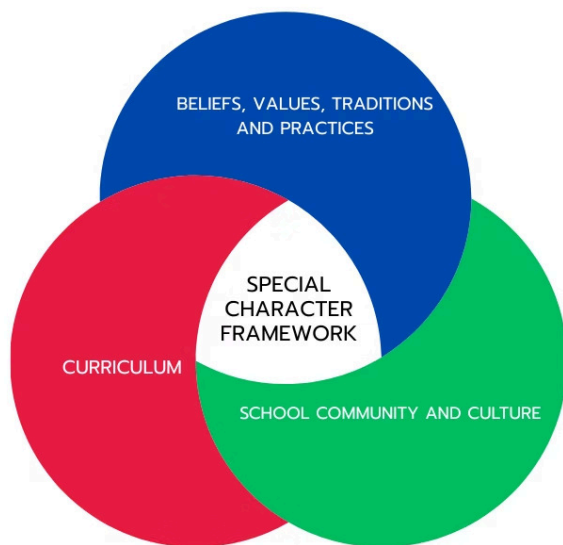
Role-Specific Expectations

Guidance for various roles



Review & Evaluation

Processes for ongoing assessment



The Three Pillars of Special Character
Special Character is not an add on - its foundational

Why Special Character Guidelines Help

What the Guidelines Provide

A clear statement of the Proprietor's expectations for how the Board governs and protects the school's special character, with a shared framework for planning, reporting, and review.

Core Practices

Guides how special character is implemented in culture, curriculum, spiritual life, service, and community engagement.

Clarity & Consistency

Promotes transparency in governance and ensures the Board understands how to give effect to the school's special character.

Stronger Partnerships

Reduces friction by preventing role confusion, strengthens trust through shared expectations, and supports evidence-based reporting and risk management.

Defined Standards

Clear definitions of special character, its purpose, and minimum governance standards for strategic planning, staffing, enrolment, property use, and communication.

A Clear Framework for Stewardship

Shows *what* must be protected, *how* it should be expressed, and *where* accountability sits.

Transparent Assurance Processes

Creates a clear cycle of reporting, evidence collection, and risk management so both parties can act early if special character is at risk.

Special Character Guidelines - what to include

What is the primary purpose of the Special Character Guidelines Template?

The guidelines are designed to help the school board preserve and strengthen the school's special character, ensuring it is incorporated into governance while meeting state school obligations.

How is "special character" defined and expressed within the school?

The guidelines need to clearly express the special character of the school's religious or philosophical foundation. It defines how the special character is evident in teaching, relationships, worship, leadership, and decision-making, with the Board ensuring all major decisions align with this character, and not just evident in religious education or education philosophy teaching.

What are the minimum governance standards for the Board regarding special character?

The guidelines should set out the minimum standards required for the board regarding special character. This would include being visible in the strategic and annual plans, included in policies and principal appointments, considered in board composition and development, and monitored through regular reporting and review cycles.

What kinds of questions are Board members encouraged to ask to keep special character central in governance?

The guidelines could include those questions the Board is encouraged to ask such as: how proposals strengthen or protect special character, possible risks, stakeholder involvement, staff support, and to use feedback to continually improve the implementation of special character within the school.

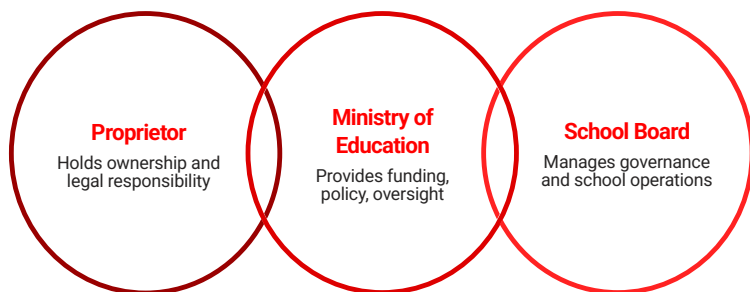
What actions are outlined if the school's special character is at risk?

If risks such as policy drift or sustained complaints arise, the process involves early notice to the Proprietor's appointee, joint problem definition, corrective actions, assurance reporting, and escalation procedures to safeguard the special character.

Resources, 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.



Resources

- ① Visit the APIS website and review the Resources [tab](#) for general resources and guidelines.
- ① Review the HOW PROPRIETORS AND SCHOOL BOARDS WORK [TOGETHER](#) web page for the special character guideline templates.

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.