

# THE CAIRN COMPASS

*Inspiring students to love, learn, and lead together in God's world.*



*Fall  
2023*

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## You are Not Normal!

*By Kevin Huinink, Executive Director*

*"The primary goal of Christian education is the formation of a peculiar people – a people who desire the Kingdom of God and thus undertake their life's expression of that desire." James K. A. Smith shares this in his book Desiring the Kingdom.*

You can imagine our curiosity when we were recently told that our school was 'not normal.' Perhaps we should have been immediately pleased, but our human nature had us concerned... after all, don't we want to be normal? In fact, we don't! We want to be peculiar!

The pages of this Fall edition of the Cairn Compass detail some of the specific and wonderful peculiarities of our learning community, our desire for the Kingdom of God, and our life's expression of that desire. Celebrate with us the abnormal mission of inspiring students to love, learn, and lead together in God's world!



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# School visitors identify Cairn Christian School as 'Not Normal'

By Bonnie Desjardins, Stoney Creek Principal

"You must realize that what's happening at Cairn Christian School is not normal."

What do you feel when you read that statement?

When a guest on our campus told the leadership team that, as a school, we are 'not normal,' I was taken aback. I automatically thought that he was referring to us not being normal as a negative thing. He went on to explain what he meant, and I agreed; we are 'not normal,' and we choose to celebrate that fact!

He and some guests from other countries spent the better part of a day with us, interacting with the leadership team, visiting classrooms, engaging in conversations with teachers, and walking the hallways and playgrounds of our Stoney Creek campus.

As he was leaving, his comment was made to Kevin Huinink, our Executive Director and me. He described for us what he had observed over the course of the day:

- Teachers' deep hopes for their students and their learning over the course of the year are posted both outside and inside their classrooms.
- Paraeducators (educational assistants, teacher assistants, personal support workers) who are deeply invested in the lives of the students they are supporting.
- Students who were able to converse with guests in French and Spanish.
- Hallway displays that demonstrated emotional zones of regulation (created by SK students to be used by all students).



- Conversations happening between students who had experienced minor conflict on the playground: students were standing facing one another as they genuinely tried to restore the harm that had been done by one to the other.
- A playground where older student assistants were helping younger students by pushing them on swings, playing soccer, and helping them figure out how to share sandbox toys.
- An Executive Director who was able to unpack Cairn Christian School's vision statement with them: *To be the leaders in education by inspiring a diverse and unified student body to love, learn, and lead with God's grace, bringing Christ's love to the world.*

The individual who made the 'not normal' comment is a retired Christian school Principal who now finds other ways to invest in Christian education. He noticed that our school is one where it is very evident that **all belong**. He observed that our students are seen, known, and loved by their teachers, their paraeducators, their principal and executive director, their school counsellor, their office administrator, and their peers. We know that his observations would have been similar at our Smithville campus.

The international guests who visited made some

insightful observations as well. They explained that in many of their countries, students who have any type of learning challenge or physical disability are not welcomed into the school setting. They either stay at home and don't receive a formal education or are sent off to a room with other neurodiverse students who are supervised by one adult, not receiving appropriate instruction.

Our visitors celebrated with us the many ways they noticed all students being invited into learning experiences and supported in ways that they needed in order to flourish in a school setting. In some cases, students have one-on-one support with an EA or PSW; in other cases, they work in small groups with the assistance of an EA or the student support coordinator, while at other times, they are fully integrated into the discussions and activities of their peers in the classroom.

While creating a community where we hold space for diversity and unity to co-exist, we know that we will encounter challenges. Rather than back away from these challenges, we consider them as opportunities to lean in and for continued growth and reflection.

We are thankful to have you journey with us in our mission of inspiring students to love, learn, and lead together in God's world, through our 'not normal' school!

# Reinforcing and Learning Character

By Michelle Nash, grade 8 teacher, Smithville

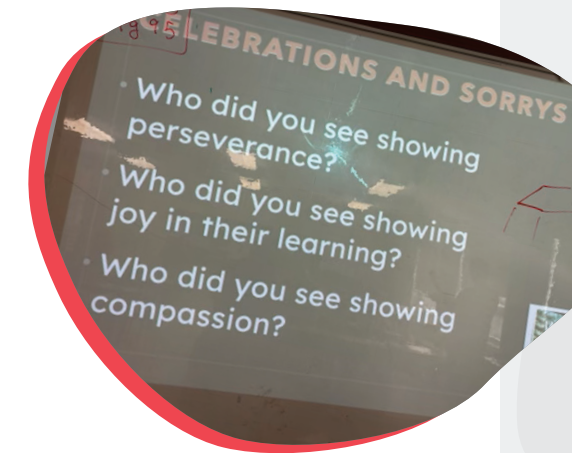
Curiosity, compassion, collaboration, integrity, perseverance, and joy...these are our school's six community character traits. During chapels, class lessons, and everyday interactions, students are 'coached, mentored, and taught' character development in every effort to become better Christian citizens. Along the way, students are celebrated for the times they put these character traits into action and show how they are, indeed, "Connected in Christ."

The most common way students are recognized for showing character traits is by receiving a pencil straight from the principal's hand, which has all the character traits written on it. When a student receives a pencil, they also have their name published in the weekly *Cairn Connection* under the 'catching character traits' section.

Some teachers go the extra mile to celebrate their students who exemplify character traits. Mr. Lee has a unique way to showcase each character trait in his grade 2/3 class. At the end of each day, Mr. Lee leads a time for 'celebrations and sorrys.' Students

take turns sharing what others did that was worth celebrating, or they can say sorry for something they personally did or even apologize to someone. Mr. Lee will respond by acknowledging the apology or by giving out trophies to those whose actions have been celebrated. Each character trait has its very own special trophy, such as a compass to symbolize integrity, a hiking boot to demonstrate perseverance, and a cross made of nails to show compassion. This routine in the classroom can play out in different ways depending on what was expressed by students that day.

In Mrs. Winter's Kindergarten class, the six character traits are individually laminated and attached to a lanyard. She starts each morning meeting by choosing a happy helper for the day. Selecting a happy helper isn't organized by alphabetical order but rather by witnessing a character trait that a student of hers displayed the day before. For example, a student is called up each morning while Mrs. Winter holds the batch of character trait necklaces, waiting to reveal



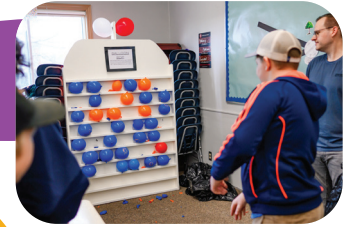
to that student what character trait they were caught showing. She then explains to the selected student and the rest of the class why she chose that character trait for them and describes what she saw them do to embody that trait. Every single day, a child is honoured by being acknowledged as a happy helper who exhibited a character trait, and they get to wear this honour all day long. This classroom rhythm serves two purposes: it celebrates each child and how they are developing their character, as well as modelling for the rest of the class what each character trait looks like in a very tangible way.

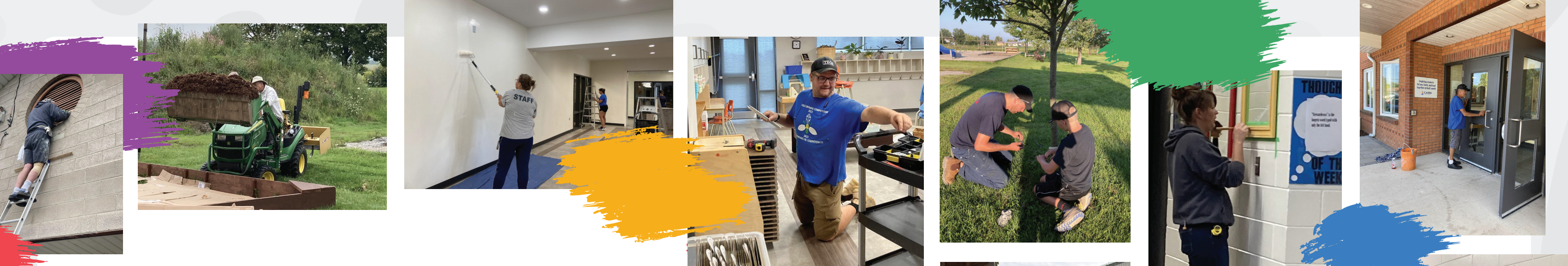
Both of these examples show different ways in which curiosity, compassion, collaboration, integrity, perseverance, and joy are encouraged in the classroom. Both teachers find meaningful times in the day to admire the character traits shown by their students who are living out Cairn Christian School's mission, which is to love, learn, and lead together in God's world. These are only a few examples of many where teachers are taking time to notice and encourage the wonderful ways that students are fulfilling community, developing their character, and showing how they are connected in Christ.



# Incredible Community Friend-raising!

This Fall, we have experienced the joy of a community that works together to make amazing fundraising happen. Whether sitting shoulder to shoulder peeling apples and assembling pies or volunteering to make our annual Fun Fest an exciting day for all who came out, having two schools invest in building relationships and raising funds is a special way that our learning community works!





# Celebrating our Volunteers

By Joyce Koornneef, Smithville Principal

Hello, are you able to help?...

This is often how I begin a phone call or email. There are many things that the school staff are able to do, but at times, we need extra help from people who have been blessed with different gifts and resources. We often ask others to partner with us in our important work of teaching and learning together.

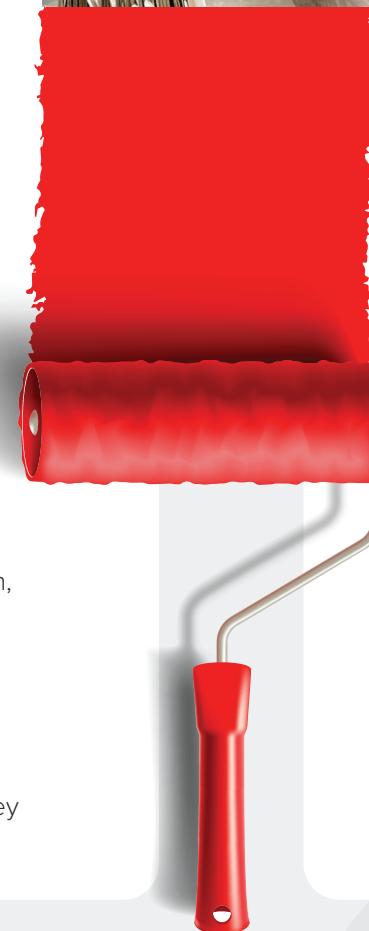
Cairn Christian School is not normal when it comes to our volunteers. Most recently, our construction contractors in Smithville identified

that our school community is one of the most generous volunteering groups they have experienced. Throughout the renovation and building process, people just kept showing up - excited to get involved. On a more regular basis, you will find volunteers mowing the lawn, weeding flower beds, fundraising, cleaning up, doing general maintenance and repairs, painting, and teaching robotics. These are all done by parents and supporters who love our students and our school. Volunteers connect the community and keep our school safe and looking beautiful. They help run programs. They

support teachers and bless our students.

How can you become part of this amazing community? Check the weekly Cairn Connection, Social Media, and email communications for opportunities to contribute to and support our learning community!

Thank you for making Cairn Christian School a school that is 'not normal, but a supportive, active, thriving school where students are inspired to love, learn, and lead together in God's world.





**Our Annual Fall Drive Goal: \$200,000 to fuel student flourishing this year!**

**Your support teaches, enables, disciples, empowers, and prepares our students**

**We have important work to do!**

*"For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building." 1 Corinthians 3:9*



Visit [www.cairnchristianschool.ca/donate](http://www.cairnchristianschool.ca/donate) to find a way to support our students and to let us know that you are working with us!



The Cairn Compass is a quarterly newsletter distributed to the Cairn Christian School supporting community.

**Our Mission**

*Inspiring students to love, learn, and lead together in God's world.*

**Our Vision**

*To be the leaders in education by inspiring a diverse and unified student body to love, learn, and lead with God's grace, bringing Christ's love to the world.*



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"Run the race in such a way as to win the prize" 1 Cor 9:24

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