

DIOCESE OF PLYMOUTH

Department for Formation



**St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Chapel Street
Devonport
Plymouth
PL1 4DJ**

URN 113491

**Head Teacher: Mr. B. Gill
Chair of Governors: Mrs J Soper**

**Record of Diocesan Review
20th July, 2010**

Introduction

The school was inspected by Ofsted in July 2010 and was judged to be a good school. A new Section 48 Inspection process is currently being developed for use in diocesan schools. Pending finalisation of this process and as an interim measure, Bishop Budd has given his approval to a formal review to be conducted jointly by a diocesan officer and the school, to meet the requirements of Section 48 of the Education Act 2005. This document is an agreed statement of the outcomes of that review, to be shared with governors, parents and other stakeholders as the school wishes. It identifies some of St Joseph's key strengths and also areas of focus that have been agreed to further strengthen the life and work of the school. The review covered a wide range of issues and as a process it sought to be creative and to support the school in its ongoing development as a Catholic community.

The review was conducted by Sarah Adams (Diocesan RE Adviser for Schools) working closely with the Head Teacher, Deputy Head and governors of the school. The outcomes of the review were agreed on the basis of:-

- observation of lessons
- documentation made available in school;
- participation in a whole school assembly
- meeting with the school council
- meeting with leader of RE within the school who is also Deputy Head
- meeting with school parent governor

Strengths of the School

As a Catholic School St. Joseph's has many key strengths which highlight its distinctive identity as a Catholic school and which demonstrate the commitment it has to educational success and to the mission of the Church in the world. The list below intends to be illustrative, not comprehensive.

Leadership

In this warm and friendly school there is a strong commitment on the part of those who lead it to provide the very best of care and education for the children and adults who form this community. The Head teacher presents as a relaxed and calm person who the children described as 'caring and interested' in them. They spoke of the way he guides them and supports them. His attitudes and way of being ensures that the school is calm and purposeful in all that it does. Throughout this visit, despite this being the penultimate day of a very long term, the children and adults were focused on their work and engaged with it meaningfully.

The focus during the past year for the leadership team has been on developing clear assessment procedures and increasing attainment levels to good effect. The plan for the next academic year is to develop a number of other areas of the school life including adopting a new RE curriculum along with the rest of the Diocese. Both the Head and the Deputy, who also holds responsibility for RE, are keen to see this implemented positively and creatively.

Religious Life

The mission statement of St. Joseph's is '*We love learning, we love Jesus and we love life*'. This is lived out in many ways not least the religious and spiritual life of the school which underpins all that the school does and strives to be. This was evident in the whole school assembly that took place on the day. This was totally child led and by children from years three and four. The material for the assembly came directly from the work on 'Treasures' that the children had been looking at in RE. The presentation had both a reflective tone and pertinent message. It included many thoughts and prayers written by the children themselves and revealed their capacity for thoughtful and prayerful writing. The children's singing was of a particularly high standard.

In addition to class assemblies, such as the one experienced during the visit, the children spoke with enthusiasm about the meditations that the Head teacher leads on occasions. This form of prayer seemed popular and meaningful to the children and a parent governor who had also experienced this on a previous visit to the school, described it as 'stunning'. It was very clear that this is an area which could fruitfully be developed further.

In addition it was evident in the classroom that prayers are a natural part of the day and children are comfortable with it. At the end of a lesson with years one and two children showed a good capacity for being still and attentive as well as participating with enthusiasm at the appropriate times.

Each week there is a class Mass in the parish church. At present this tends to be adult prepared and led but there is a commitment on the part of the leadership within the school to increase the involvement of the children in the preparation of Mass. Unfortunately there is no resident priest in the parish and so regular visits or contact with clergy other than for the weekly Mass can prove to be quite difficult.

Teaching in RE

Lessons in RE are taught carefully and with a conscientious level of care for the material and the children. In the lessons observed the teachers asked challenging questions and had high expectations of the children so that those who might be weaker were being stretched alongside the more able. Teaching assistants worked exceptionally well with the children, supporting them and guiding them without controlling them. They had an excellent yet inconspicuous rapport with the children. In a lesson with Class 2, which had a mixture of five and six year olds, the children were being asked to understand how they might see sadness as a treasure. The quality of questioning and activities offered both facilitated and enabled the children to come to this understanding in a meaningful way. Re-capping on a previous lesson it was evident that the children had reached a point of being able to ask the 'big' questions and reflect on them. As a consequence they were more than ready to do the same in this lesson. At all times the children were fully engaged and participated with enthusiasm. Children were encouraged to share their ideas without feeling pressured and expressed a high level of thinking.

When talking to the school council there was a general agreement that they like RE but would like to experience a greater variety of activities within the lessons such as greater use of ICT, drama, etc. This is something that the RE leader is keen to encourage and develop in the school. With a new RE curriculum being introduced in the new term there is real scope for teachers to use the skills they employ in other lessons within RE. There is already some evidence of this happening and as teachers grow in confidence the RE will become even more exciting and visionary. In addition this will be an opportunity for the staff to reflect on the manner in which they differentiate in RE and look to developing this dimension of their work so that all children are being challenged at an appropriate level according to their experience and understanding of RE rather than a response only to their literacy skills.

The school will continue to attend the Diocesan whole school INSET which will help them to develop their skills and confidence. In addition it will be important for the teachers to take the time before each topic to discuss it at their own level so that they feel confident about the theological content that they will be teaching.

Pastoral Life of the School

The quality of care and concern for the children who attend St. Joseph's is very high. This is a very important focus for the school and the commitment to it pervades the school. St. Joseph's is an inclusive school with a large number of children with special needs who are well cared for. The children are very clear about the expectations that the school has and spoke about the way the adults in the school are always there for them particularly when they need help with a problem or difficulty. The school encourages people to notice how the children treat each other and have a golden ticket reward system for this. One of the children described the guidance she had been given by her teacher for dealing with problems as a 'gift'.

Children at the school are respectful and appreciative of what they have. When asked what they would like to see developed in the school one response was 'a cooling zone' so that children who are upset or angry have 'somewhere safe to go to'. The children were very clear that it is the relationships that they have with one another and the adults in the school which really count for them as being central to their experience in the school.

The care the children show for one another is extended beyond the school to those further afield who are in need. Regular events take place to raise money for CAFOD and other charities including 'Walk for Water' and 'Send A Cow'. Being a part of the local community is also important for the school. The children visit the elderly in the locality and participate in Plymouth's 'Respect' Festival held each autumn. In addition the school take part in a local schools multi-cultural day and the Lord Mayor's carol service held each year. A national arts project that the school had just been involved in had proved to be very successful and the children were keen to talk about it. This involved performing at the Theatre Royal in Plymouth and working with set designers, dance professionals and play writers to put a production together.

Agreed Areas of Focus for Development

It was agreed that the school's mission as a Catholic School would be further enhanced by focusing planned development in the following areas.

- 1. By enhancing the current RE provision through the use of ICT, drama, music and other creative methods.*
- 2. By building upon the display work for RE around the school and considering the use of artefacts and other means to provide a clear prayer focus for the school hall.*
- 3. By adding to the liturgical life of the school to encompass additional services that enable children to deepen their sense of symbolic action and ritual. This can be done with support from the Diocese if required.*
- 4. Consideration of giving time to having a Diocesan 'Emmaus Week' to support the possible move to being a two form entry school. This would help the school to be confident in keeping its identity as a Catholic school and to fully understand what this means in every area of the school's life.*

Conclusion

St. Joseph's is a lovely school with great potential to develop further. Children and visitors feel welcome and safe in the warm and caring atmosphere that the adults provide. The school's commitment to the mission of the Church is significant and there is a genuine desire to hold fast to this.

In welcoming children of different backgrounds and giving them all a sense of belonging and mutual respect St. Joseph's makes a significant contribution to community cohesion as well as living out the call for the Church to be at the service of the world. The staff team are committed to providing the best for the children. They are open to new ideas and challenged to accomplish even greater things. Relationships are healthy and positive and there is a genuine commitment to the mission and vision of the school.

On a personal note I would like to express my gratitude for the very warm welcome which I received during my visit. I would also like to thank all those who participated so openly in this visit and for making such a clear commitment to on-going progress.

Sarah Adams
22nd July, 2010