

DIOCESE OF PLYMOUTH

Department for Formation



**St. John the Baptist Catholic Primary School
Milton Lane
Dartmouth
TQ6 9HW**

URN 113461

**Head Teacher: Mrs Liz Hamilton
Chair of Governors: Mrs Margaret Bridges**

**Record of Diocesan Inspection
26th February, 2010**

Introduction

The school was inspected by Ofsted in January, 2010 and was judged to be a good school with some outstanding features notably *'the care of each child is of paramount importance and consequently the provision for pupils' care, guidance and support is outstanding.'* 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 the key strengths of St. John the Baptist 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, the governors, and the RE co-ordinator, Madeleine Maishman. The outcomes of the review were agreed on the basis of:-

- documentation made available by the school;
- observation of lessons;
- talking to children around the school
- participation in a whole school Act of Worship
- Discussion with the Head Teacher and Chair of Governors
- Discussion with Madeleine Maishman, leader for RE

Strengths of the School

This is a small but highly effective school catering for an above average number of children with special needs some of which are great. As a Catholic School it has many significant strengths which highlight its distinctive identity as a Catholic school. In addition to being educationally successful it makes an enormous contribution to the Church's mission both as a Catholic School and in relation its commitment to community cohesion.

Leadership

St. John the Baptist is blessed by strong and visionary leadership. The Head teacher supported by her governors has a very clear sense of where the school is and in the direction she wishes to take it. The shared vision of the governors and staff of the school ensure that the children receive the best possible care and a commitment to providing them with creative and interesting experiences within the curriculum and from the large variety of extra-curricular activities on offer. Gospel values lie at the heart of this school and are lived out in daily prayer, a commitment to the wider community and in the way everyone is expected to treat each other. Although the school is small in numbers it has an above average number of children with special needs, some of which are very challenging. However the respect that all the children

and adults experience means that children with difficulties are totally included and appreciated. The energy of the staff and governors led by the Head teacher ensures that this is a vibrant and caring community with strong values and expectations. Despite residing in a very small and potentially insular environment the children are keenly aware of the needs of the wider community. This is very evident from the number of charitable events the children apply themselves to. On the day of the visit the children were actively participating in a series of events instigated by themselves and supported by the staff to raise money for the people of Haiti. Although it is difficult for the children to rub shoulders with people of other cultures they are not indifferent to them and have a keen awareness through involvement with a school in South Africa and from the knowledge they gain from the many charities they support which are both local and national.

Religious Life and Worship

The religious and spiritual life of St. John the Baptist is tangible and central to the life of the school. Despite the lack of a parish priest through illness, the school maintains its commitment to providing the children with meaningful experiences, both in school and when possible in the parish church. Liturgies and whole school worship is carefully planned and monitored. The children experience a variety of mediums employed within the liturgy. The use of music, scripture, silence and art all contribute to a prayerful and engaging time to pray and focus on Christ who is present at all times. Although the children do participate fully in the liturgy the school is keen to offer greater opportunities for the children to be involved in the preparation of liturgy and in the leading of liturgy. This is to be commended.

The very clear Catholic identity of St. John the Baptist is reflected throughout the school, physically and spiritually. Classrooms and school displays reveal the living faith of the children and adults. There is a sense that displays emerge organically out of the daily experiences which the children have. For example a large painting of the Last Supper was surrounded by comments concerning the children's observations from looking at the picture. It is something that the children are encouraged to add to and provides the opportunity for them to express their insights on an on-going basis. In addition the children make very strong links between their faith and the needs of the local and wider community. Their prayers evident in the classroom and beyond reflect their concern for the marginalised, the poor and those who are suffering as a consequence of war or natural disaster. The staff of the school work hard to help the children to appreciate their environment and the poverty that others experience thus developing in the children high levels of empathy and compassion.

The staff of the school are keen to build upon their success and to develop new ideas introduced by the Head teacher or members of the Diocesan team, Their attendance at whole school INSET and participation in after school training has born fruit in the confidence which is developing within the teaching staff. In addition the school is committed to using the gifts and talents of the teaching assistants. This is very evident in the high quality art work which features around the school and which often reflects current RE themes and seasons.

Teaching in RE

The lessons observed on the day of this visit were creative, dynamic and fully engaging. A large class children from years four, five and six were learning about Jesus as the 'Bread of Life'. This was a challenging lesson but taught in such a way that every child was able to access the information and to achieve a degree of understanding comparable with their particular capabilities. Given that this class has a significant number of children with special educational needs and 2 children with English as a second language this was commendable. The teacher, supported by two teaching assistants, guided the children to a point where they could apply their knowledge to their own life experience. The lesson included the use of film, music, scripture and visual objects such as bread and crucifix to help the children understand the material from a variety of resources. In small groups and the larger group the children demonstrated across the age-range their confidence in sharing their thoughts and ideas. The activities set for the children helped them to consolidate their learning and demonstrate their understanding. Across the board the activities were suited to age and ability.

In Class One which consists of children from reception and year 1 the children were fully absorbed in the variety of learning experiences which they were offered to help them to appreciate and understand the topic they were exploring. The energy and commitment of the teacher is reflected in the enthusiasm of the children who were able to respond to questions and have discussions at a profound level for their age. Again the commitment of the school to provide the best possible learning opportunities for the children was evident.

Throughout the classrooms there is much evidence to show the engagement of the children with their learning in RE. Displays of work, prayer corners and the quality of reflection in lessons make this an exciting and dynamic environment.

The teachers have been engaging in on-going monitoring of their work in school and this is proving to be very beneficial. They are gradually building up resources and confidence which is helping them to achieve a high standard of engagement with the children. They are keen to continue developing and have expressed a desire for further training and support with approaches to and use of materials in RE. In addition they have highlighted a need to develop their skills in stretching children who are particularly gifted and also to explore more fully the prior learning of children before they start a topic.

Pastoral Life of the School

Pastorally, St. John the Baptist demonstrates its total commitment to working with children from all backgrounds, abilities and cultures. With a higher than average proportion of children with very special needs the school works hard and succeeds in providing a fully inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome and at ease. It was very apparent from talking to the children that they feel well cared for and confident about where they can go if they are struggling or in difficulty. Respect for one another is very important to the whole school and is reflected in the way adults and children treat one another. This respect for one another is seen as part of a

wider need to respect every person wherever they are. Consequently it is not unusual for children to highlight the needs of people in the wider community and seek to support them. Spiritual, moral and cultural education is a strength of the school. Enthusiastic fund-raising to support a large number of charities are engaged in by the children. The links they have made with the local community further enhance the awareness of the children and their capacity to integrate and grow as responsible citizens.

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. The school has identified a number of areas within which they can develop their practice. These include the need to develop lessons to include more challenging activities and questions for the more able children.
2. The use of IT is growing in the school and continued training and opportunities to see how it can be used more fully in RE would be advantageous.
3. The school is keen to develop the liturgical life of the school to involve more children in the preparation and leadership of RE. Support for this can be obtained from the Department for Formation.
4. Opportunities for the spiritual and faith life of the adults in the school are being offered and are to be encouraged as this will develop their confidence in talking about matters of faith and moral issues.

Conclusion

St. John the Baptist is a very successful school with a great deal to offer the children and the adults who are part of this small community. It is a happy place to be and the welcome and hospitality offered to visitors is a hallmark of this Catholic school. Given the number of children who have special needs and with the reality of such a large class at the top of the school, the task of this school is very challenging. However, because it lives out of its mission as a Catholic school, this challenge is being met and with enthusiasm. The children like coming to St. John the Baptist. Children who have found it difficult to settle in other schools are welcomed readily and supported to find their feet and their place. The care that all the children are shown encourages them to want to care for others and it can be seen that seeds being sown now are already beginning to bear fruit and it is hoped that as they grow and mature the experience they have had at St. John the Baptist will guide the children in the choices they make for the future.

This visit to St. John the Baptist was very enjoyable. Throughout the day I experienced a warm welcome and kind hospitality for which I would like to personally express my gratitude.

Sarah Adams
March 2010