

# **DIOCESE OF PLYMOUTH**

Department for Formation



**St Joseph's Catholic Combined School  
Sancreed Road  
Parkstone  
Poole  
BH12 4EA**

URN 113831

**Head Teacher: Mrs. A. Mullany  
Chair of Governors: Mrs C. Gregory**

**Record of Diocesan Review  
11<sup>th</sup> January, 2011**

## **Introduction**

The school was inspected by Ofsted in December 2010 and was judged to be a good school with many outstanding features. 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 in KS 1, 2 and 3
- documentation made available in school;
- participation in an Act of Worship
- meeting with the school council
- meeting with leader of RE within the school
- meeting with chair of governors
- meeting with Parish Priest
- Discussion with groups of teachers including the head and deputy.
- Meeting with parents' prayer group

## **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**

St. Joseph's is a warm, friendly and calm school very ably led by the head teacher and the school leadership team. The team is passionately committed to providing the very best of care and education for the children and an environment in which all can flourish. Throughout the visit the commitment to living by Gospel values was clearly evident, not only in the enthusiasm for prayer and worship but in the gentle and respectful way that adults and children treated each other. The children have a strong sense of what is right and wrong and have this modelled to them by the staff and leadership of the school.

The head teacher is an enthusiastic person with vision and energy, looking to make progress in all aspects of the school's life but notably within the context of it being a Catholic school. The positive relationships within the leadership team encourages all staff and children to work creatively together, thus creating a strong sense of community. The children were particularly keen to emphasise the 'family' feel to the school and highlighted this as something that they would miss when they moved on.

## **Religious Life**

St. Joseph's has a strong sense of mission, reflected in its Mission statement which embraces the commandment to 'love one another as I love you.' (Jn 15:12) and recognises that whenever people come together in the name of Jesus, He is there. (Mt 18:20).

From the moment visitors walk into St. Joseph's they can tell that this is a Catholic school. The quality of welcome which people receive is to be commended. Parents comment on the friendly nature of the school and how they are made to feel a part of their children's education and encouraged to participate in it. The parents' prayer group that met on the day of the visit talked of the strong prayerful ethos of the school which had led them to want to set up a prayer group for parents. This is not only supportive to them but is also appreciated by the adults and children of the school. The ecumenical nature of this group ensures that all parents feel welcome at the school, whatever their particular religious affiliation.

From the very beginning of their time in the school, the children are exposed to a variety of liturgical experiences. Each week the school gathers for a Liturgy of the Word, prepared by the Deputy Head in conjunction with other members of staff. Adults and children participate by taking on specific roles and all join in with the responses and with the excellent music. Children are gradually developing their capacity for stillness and listening in the bigger environment. In addition they are learning the basics of liturgical ritual and this has led to their more confident participation in school and parish masses. The capacity of the children to be attentive and fully participate in classroom prayers is particularly inspiring. The school's commitment to developing the liturgical experiences of the children is to be commended.

The school has excellent links with its local parishes and enjoy good relationships with the local clergy who are supportive and keen to see the school as an extension of their parishes. Children have the opportunity to participate in and prepare liturgies within the parish church and are gaining appreciation and respect for the wider church as a consequence. The clergy are keen for the Catholic life of the school to develop even further with children developing a real sense of Catholic life and teaching.

Displays around the school highlight the engagement the children and adults have with the mission and purpose of the school. There is a vibrancy within the displays which reflects both the liturgical calendar and the work being done in classroom RE. Classroom prayer corners are carefully thought about and in many cases children appear to be central to their development.

## Teaching in RE

As with other schools across the Diocese, St. Joseph's has embraced a new approach to the teaching of RE and introduced 'God Matters'. The teachers have done this with great enthusiasm and energy. Lessons observed across the board were engaging and lively. In line with the liturgical year, children were looking at various aspects of 'Christmas'. Children in year 5/6 were looking at how the Gospel of Matthew expresses Jesus as the fulfilment of God's promise and in particular the impact of the birth of Jesus on the local community, with special reference to King Herod. This was an hour long lesson which fully engaged the children, throughout. There were a variety of activities which helped the children to explore Matthew's account of the Birth of Jesus. From highlighting the main points of the story, devising questions to ask the main characters, looking at the scriptures passages in depth to identify what the passage was saying about Jesus and reflecting on the feelings of different characters in the story, the children had the opportunity to gain an in-depth appreciation of the scripture passage and many of them did.. They enjoyed hot-seating and working with their partners and in small groups. It was particularly pleasing to see how a number of the children drew upon their previous learning about Isaiah from their Advent topic.

In year 7 children were looking at the story of Epiphany and its importance to Christians. This lesson required the children to sequence and to analyse different events in the story as well as being able to reflect on God's love for them and the gifts they have received from God. The teacher approached these areas by getting the children to work in groups and produce an affinity diagram. The quality of research and discussion that took place demonstrated the way the children have developed their skills and understanding in RE. The lesson moved quickly and children had no time to become dis-engaged or bored. When asked about their RE lessons the children expressed their enthusiasm for the variety of activities which they now experience in their lessons.

Within the foundation stage children were exploring the story of Christmas through drama, art and by the creation of special prayers which they used in the prayer time at the end. Making very good use of the excellent facilities, they had created their own outside crib and were learning about how they can respond to the Christmas story with prayer and praise. The children could name the people in the crib and to talk about what they might have seen. At the end of the lesson the teacher led the children in a time of quiet prayer, using the children's prayers and paintings as part of the liturgy. The capacity of children to be still and listening was very evident.

The capacity of teachers to differentiate on the basis of children's prior learning is growing and is to be seen as integral to the development of the child's learning. Particularly impressive in many of the children's books are the questions which the teachers write when they mark the children's books. Most of the time, it was evident that the children had been given the opportunity to answer these questions. This is not always easy to facilitate at the beginning of a lesson but is crucial for the children to demonstrate their development. The use of classroom RE books, that record many of the discussions and activities in any given lesson, are very helpful and a

great asset. The use of post-it notes and photographs to record discussions and drama is excellent.

With the introduction of any new curriculum teachers need to have the time and opportunity to reflect on the material for themselves. This is essential when it comes to the teaching of RE, which has a special place at the heart of the Catholic school curriculum. The teachers of St. Joseph's are deeply committed to the Catholic ethos of the school and are keen to do the very best they can when teaching RE. It will be important that they are supported to do this though the provision of resources and opportunities offered for them to gather and reflect together on the theology that they are being asked to teach. In this way the teachers will grow in their own confidence and will be able to share their own knowledge and understanding with one another.

### **Pastoral Life of the School**

St. Joseph's is without doubt a very pastoral school with a clear commitment to providing the best possible care to all its children. This is so important if it is to be a truly Catholic school with an inclusive ethos accepted by all members of the school community. A significant number of the children at St. Joseph's have special needs, in particular children with speech and communication difficulties. In addition the school admits an above average number of children who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school manages all these children very well. It was very clear during the visit that these children are well-integrated into the life of the school and do not stand out. Many of the support staff have developed or are developing the skill of being alongside children during lessons without needing to 'police' them. This is very important for children to feel loved and cared for unconditionally.

Children in the school are encouraged to take on roles and responsibilities and were proud to talk about how older children look after the younger children, particularly at lunchtime both during the meal time and in the playground. The younger children expressed their gratitude for the help the older children give them. The school has very good links with outside agencies and children who need extra support and help receive this, especially when it comes to helping those with specific physical needs.

In addition children talked about how the school helps them to understand what is expected of them and appreciate the high expectations that the school has. This was also echoed by the parents' group who feel that children are looked after very well and expected to treat others as they are treated themselves. The children also had a very clear sense of what to do if there is a problem. At the moment this tends to rely on children finding an adult to help them to resolve difficult situations. They do this well. The Head Teacher is now keen to see this developed so that children learn how to resolve issues themselves and develop the skills of restorative justice. This may take time but is an admirable goal to have.

In addition to the care that children and adults show one another in school, much time is given to supporting and helping people within the wider community. The children enjoy the fact that they can be seen to support local and international charities. CAFOD is a favourite charity along with Children in Need and holding parties for the elderly were just some of the activities that the children were keen to talk about. Mission lies at the heart of these events and children are encouraged to

see them as part of what it means to be a person of faith. As a consequence the children grow up at St. Joseph's with a real appreciation of what it means to be a Christian

### **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. For staff to grow in confidence and knowledge, they will need to have regular opportunities to meet as a staff group to explore topics in advance and to look at any areas that they need to develop. This would be served by developing a policy of gathering people before a new topic and exploring the major concepts and issues. The support of clergy or the Diocese has been offered for this work.*
- 2. To develop the children's capacity to resolve their own conflicts and to learn the value of building bridges and reconciliation.*
- 3. Review the liturgical life of the school with the children at class and whole school levels. To consider including additional services that may enable children to deepen their sense of different prayer styles to include meditation, silent prayer and further use of ICT. This can be done with support from the Diocese if required. In addition to build upon the excellent work already started by ensuring that children are well-grounded in the use of Catholic terminology.*

### **Conclusion**

St. Joseph's is a lovely school where 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.

Children from all backgrounds and of all abilities are made to feel that they belong in this school where there is mutual respect for all. This sense of inclusion makes a significant contribution to the cohesion of the community as well as living out the call of the Church to be at the service of the world. The adults at St. Joseph's are an open and committed group of people, comfortable with new ideas and able to embrace greater challenges.

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  
18<sup>th</sup> January, 2011

