

DIOCESE OF PLYMOUTH

Department for Formation

DRAFT

**St. Mary's Catholic First School
Folly Lane
Wool BH20 6DS**

URN 113824

**Head Teacher: Mrs Helen Brown
Chair of Governors: Mrs Sue Cox**

**Record of Diocesan Review
3rd December, 2009**

Introduction

The school was inspected by Ofsted in April 2009 and was judged to be a good school with some 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 the key strengths of St. Mary's 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 Headteacher, the governors and the RE co-ordinator, Karen?????. The outcomes of the review were agreed on the basis of:-

- documentation made available by the school;
- observation of lessons;
- a reflection with the members of staff,
- talking to the school council
- participation in two Acts of Collective Worship
- Discussion with Governors and Parish Priest
- Discussion with The Parent's Association

Strengths of the School

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

Leadership

This is a school where the leadership of the Headteacher promotes and ensures that everyone associated with the school knows what it means to be a Catholic school. All staff, whatever their personal position, have made a real commitment to the ethos of the school and make a genuine effort to live it to the full. This is particularly evident at the moment while the school goes through a public review with the prospect of re-organisation in the area. Through some very difficult times the Headteacher has maintained a good morale within the school and ensured a positive outlook for the children and the staff. There is no doubt that this approach comes from having a vision for the school that is rooted in the compassion and love of Christ. These are the values from which everything else flows and is readily integrated into the school's daily activities. Within the school the strong Catholic identity which embraces all people and aims to exclude no one is very apparent.

The dedicated leadership of the Headteacher and her deputy has been very instrumental in creating a vibrant and happy school where everyone feels valued and appreciated.

Religious Life

The spiritual life of St. Mary's is to be celebrated, for it pervades every aspect of the school life. Liturgy and acts of worship form a natural part of the school life both in the classroom and in the main hall when everyone is present. From the youngest to the oldest, children here are comfortable with prayer. They are happy to participate and do so with energy and enthusiasm. All the children regardless of age have a remarkable capacity for stillness and engaging in reflective silence. This is something that is encouraged within lessons and is bearing fruit in many aspects of school life. It encourages respect for one another and a genuine desire to care for others. This concern for others is very evident and the children are happy to talk about the importance of looking after each other.

The liturgies experienced on the day of this visit were profound and very moving. They began a theme day which focused on Advent and ended the day. All of the children had the opportunity to participate without there being any sense of 'performance' involved. The children sang well and joined in the prayers with reverence.

The parents also like to participate in the liturgies which they describe as moving and prayerful. There are some parents who have, because of the ethos of the school, sought to become full members of the Catholic Church.

Teaching of RE

Because there was a theme day which focused on Advent most of the day was taken up with the teaching of RE and associated activities. The quality of teaching revealed the commitment of the staff to provide stimulating and thought provoking activities for the children. An extended conversation with the school council revealed the enthusiasm the children had for the experience. The staff of the school has expressed some frustration with the RE curriculum and are keen to develop their resources so that they feel more confident in offering the quality of lessons seen during this visit, on a regular basis. This commitment to providing the best is typical of the school's ethos and one which the Diocese will be able to support. The RE co-ordinator works hard to support staff and has a clear understanding of the needs of children. Confidence of all the staff will grow when they have a curriculum which meets their needs.

Pastoral Life of the School

St. Mary's is a small school but one which takes children from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Some children have quite complex needs but the adults are confident in providing the best kind of care for every child. The children feel safe and

secure and know what to do if difficulties arise. They appreciate that in all schools there is bullying but they do know what to do when this arises and have a confidence in the staff that issues will be dealt with positively. This is something that they feel about all aspects of school life. The school has high expectations of the children and so that they might achieve these expectations the children are very clear about what these expectations are. The school offers a rich and diverse curriculum which all the children are able to access and which they are encouraged to participate in fully. The children enjoy what is on offer and feel positive about coming to school. They speak enthusiastically about 'Golden time' which they value as a reward for all their efforts in the course of the week.

The parents are equally positive about the school. They value the leadership of the Headteacher and the commitment of the staff to their children and are keen to offer whatever support that they can. This they do generously. It is not surprising, therefore, that they are concerned about the prospect of change. Despite their anxiety they have taken their lead from the Headteacher and are keen to present the school in the best possible way by their capacity to be reflective and respectful of all parties involved in the negotiations. Once again the ethos of the school permeates this attitude.

Although this is a school with very young children the whole community seeks to promote an understanding of the needs of others and focus particularly on raising money for CAFOD and Children in Need. The various charitable activities which the school takes on further serve to foster the community spirit within the school.

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 teachers have identified a need for greater resources and opportunities to share good practice in RE. It has been agreed that some focus will be given to this particularly when the school looks at a new RE curriculum.
2. The governors with the parents and staff of the school recognise the need to develop a sound but realistic programme for sex and relationships education. This will require some careful planning and considered application.
3. Though there are currently good links with the parish and the parish priest, there is a desire for these to be developed and further nurtured.
4. The school is keen to continue developing their appreciation and understanding of the role of liturgy in the life of the children.

Conclusion

St. Mary's is a very successful school and one which the Diocese can be extremely proud. The quality of education and the genuine care manifested by the staff for the children is to be celebrated and encouraged. The contribution the school makes to

being a part of the local community and to embracing children from all backgrounds reflects its response to the mission of the Church in the world. Whatever the future holds for the school there is no doubt that the children who attend it will benefit enormously.

As a Catholic school St. Mary's lives and breathes an ethos that puts Christ at the heart of its mission. The Headteacher is to be commended for her personal integrity and warmth which serve to make this a very happy and caring school. The teachers and all who work in the school are to be commended for their dedication and commitment which the children experience and thrive from.

Finally, I would like to thank the Headteacher, the staff, parents and governors of St. Mary's for a very inspiring and enjoyable day. I would also like to express my gratitude for the warm welcome and kind hospitality which I received throughout my visit. I would also like to thank all those, especially the children, for participating so openly in the review and for making such a commitment to on-going progress.

The Future

This review is not a one-off judgement on the school from outside but rather a joint statement from one point on an on-going journey. The diocesan department for Formation, the Headteacher and the governors of St. Mary's, Wool by their signatures on this document, commit themselves to continued partnership in supporting the mission of the Church. As a result of this review, both parties will agree a course of action to take forward the issues noted in this report and will make an annual evaluation of progress.

Sarah Adams
RE Adviser

Helen Brown
Head Teacher

Sue Cox
Chair of Governors