

**DIOCESE OF PLYMOUTH
VICARIATE FOR EVANGELISATION CATECHESIS AND
SCHOOLS**

**Section 48
INSPECTION REPORT**



St. Mary's Catholic Primary School
Lyme Road
Axminster
Devon
EX13 5BE

URN 140772

Head Teacher: Angela Herrera
Chair of Governors: Mark Burrough

Introduction

The inspection of St. Mary's Catholic Primary School was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with Plymouth Diocesan Framework and Schedule for Diocesan Canonical Inspection, approved by the Bishop of Plymouth. The inspection took place over a period of two days with two inspectors.

Context for the Inspection

St. Mary's is a smaller than average primary school with 119 pupils on role. Of these 4.2% of the children are EAL. 16.8% of children receive free school meals and the proportion of children known to be eligible for the pupil premium is also 16.8%. 5.9% of children are on the SEN register with 6 children having statements of special educational needs. The school is served by the parishes of Axminster, Lyme, Seaton, Honiton and Ottery St. Mary.

The school was last inspected in 2010 when it was judged to be Good (2) with some outstanding features particularly in the area of pastoral care

- Head Teacher left the school in 2012 due to ill health. There followed a significant period of instability in the school with a seconded HT in place for one year followed by another seconded HT for a further year. Both secondments were part-time and supported by a senior teacher who became acting deputy in the interim. The acting deputy was made a substantive post in July 2014 but that person has now left, leaving the school with limited leadership capacity.
- The constitution of the Governing body has changed significantly in the last year and is currently under-strength with the need for three foundation governors and a Clerk to governors to be appointed. In April 2014 the school became part of CAST – a multi-academy trust incorporating all Catholic primary schools in Plymouth Diocese.
- The school has a CAST initiated EMG (Enhanced Monitoring Group) in place to support the school as it moves forward.
- The current Head Teacher has been in post since September 2013.

KEY FINDING	GRADE 3
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JOHN 5:6-8

Grade: 3 'Do you want to be made well? The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way someone else steps down ahead of me.' Jesus said to him, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' John 5:6-8'

The sick man lying by the pool of Bethsaida has been there for a many years, stuck in the one place. Although he wants to be better he appears not to be able to move without some help. Jesus offers this to him and orders him to get up and walk. It could be said that the sick man has resided for too long in a 'blame someone else way of being'. Sometimes leaders and school communities do become 'stuck'. Leaders blame teachers, teachers blame students or leaders and the culture prevents an honest engagement in what needs to be done for any progress to be made. Schools stuck or struggling in this kind of cycle need help and support to break free. Healing and reconciliation may need to be a part of this journey. Honest clarification of priorities and challenging self-searching needs to take place for change to occur.

St. Mary's is a small school in rural Devon. Over the past few years it has gone through a turbulent time following the resignation of the then Head Teacher due to ill health. At the time the school was

regarded to be in a positive place both as a Catholic School and in terms of standards and data. However, without the security of a permanent Head Teacher and a deficit budget, the cohesiveness of the school appears to have suffered significantly. An inaccurate perception of how well the school was doing has led to loss of confidence while remedial measures are being implemented. A number of staff have left and currently the teaching staff is primarily constituted of temporary appointments and a number of job share arrangements. Morale in the school is low and the community appears to be fractured in its relationships. Restrictions of a deficit budget have made it difficult to bring about change as quickly as might be desired. However, the governing body, though not a full complement, and the Head Teacher recognise the challenges the school faces and are confident and committed to bringing about the necessary change. It is this that gives rise to the belief that this is a community that is moving from a place of being 'stuck' to one of gradually moving forward.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Gospel values are spoken about and visually evident in written form around the school but there is a lack of understanding about what they are and how they are lived out for the good of the whole community.
- The school revisited its mission statement in 2015 and throughout the school the strap line 'Living, Loving and Learning with God' is evident in every class and throughout the school.
- Some relationships are very positive but these are not shared with everyone and so it is hard for the staff to work together cohesively.
- Support staff are insufficiently trained in the nature of their role and as a consequence some do not work in a way that develops positive and nurturing relationships.
- Pupils are provided with a number of positive opportunities to grow spiritually. In particular singing and music is a positive strength of the school and an area which particularly enhances the faith life of the school
- Many teachers are new to teaching RE and have yet to have appropriate formation in the planning of RE lessons. Only one lesson observed was deemed to be of a good standard. Although teaching across the curriculum should enable children to gain skills in analysis, enquiry, interpretation or evaluation, there was little opportunity for the children to succeed in these areas within the observed RE lessons.
- Children at St. Mary's are interested in their learning and have a desire to make progress. However, standards of attainment in RE fall below what could be expected of them because the activities offered to them do not challenge or enable them to achieve at expected levels in accordance with levels of attainment indicated by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
- Most children are well-behaved and very engaging and welcoming, demonstrating how they love and care for one another. The school has a few children with challenging behaviours but the other children are sensitive and caring in their attitudes to them. This was seen in the way children sought to bring to an end a conflict which was causing a number of girls to be in tears.

Areas of Focus for Development

The school's mission as a Catholic School would be enhanced by focusing planned development in the following areas:

- For every member of staff to work as a community to develop trust, personal responsibility and meaningful relationships between adults so that a cohesive approach to the Catholic Life is held by all.
- For the Governing body, the Head Teacher and the EMG to continue the sterling work they have started to bring about the change the school needs, bearing in mind at all times the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Decisions made must be rooted in Gospel values and ensure the dignity of every person lies at the heart of those decisions for which the priorities at all times are the best interests of the children.

ST. MARY'S AS A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
GRADE 3:

(WELCOME, WELFARE, AND WITNESS)
John 5: 6-8

St. Mary's is a school which could have a very positive future. It has much to offer the children and the wider community. The quality of the Governing Body and the insightfulness of the Head Teacher have allowed them to make an honest appraisal of the challenges the school finds itself addressing. Standards, practice and a willingness to work for the good of all are weak. Being faced with this knowledge has been painful for the staff and relationships have become fractured and there is a high level of disillusionment. This is evidenced in the way that people do not respond to requests e.g. for planning, data etc. There is a tendency on the part of some to blame others for failures. None of this is surprising given the issues around leadership that have been in the school over the past few years.

There are, however, signs that this can and will change with the commitment of everyone to move the school forward. Most adults appear to genuinely care about the children and want the best for them. Teachers have excellent relationships with their classes. It was consistently observed how teachers modelled Christ in their interactions with individual children and engaged positively with them. However, a lack of training and appropriate deployment of some TAs and some staff has led to a culture of negativity towards those children who have particular needs. These children need a different approach and a consistent message that they are valued and loved.

Gospel values are identified around the school and are a key message of weekly liturgies but the depth to which the staff understand these appeared limited. Understanding Catholic Social Teaching would make sense for all staff as to why their voice is important and why their capacity to initiate and take responsibility for how the school moves forward, is key. Developing an understanding of the key elements of subsidiarity, dignity of the individual, the common good and solidarity would help staff to see how they can grow and develop as a school.

Induction for new staff particularly is welcomed and there were positive comments from them about the support received, from the mentor and the Head Teacher. There is a need for an experienced, supportive teacher willing to ensure that this is an ongoing process. Induction for new children is particularly strong in reception with very positive links between the reception and the on-site nursery. Vulnerable children in particular receive an enhanced induction which appears to be working well.

The school has recently become a member of the Jurassic Coast Learning Community and the Head Teacher hopes that this will bring benefits to the school. In addition the school belongs to the local Catholic Cluster within CAST but has yet to develop strong alignments with specific schools. This would be of benefit, despite the potentially long distances involved, to ensure that the best of opportunities for development are accessed.

Pupils at the school were a delight to spend time with. They appeared happy, relaxed and in some cases needy, but open. They are ready and able to share their opinions and opportunities for this should be maximised. They are encouraged and enabled to engage with the wider community through a number of charitable activities and were able to talk about these with enthusiasm. These included CAFOD, Red Nose Day, Children in Need, the Nepalese Earthquake appeal and Children of Syria. These activities, amongst others, are an asset to helping children to be aware of the needs of the world and for them to be able to offer their time and money to serving these causes.

Latterly through publicity and reporting in the news, the school promotes its Catholic Life by its participating in a number of events such as the ‘Minster Church’s Programme of lunch time concerts. The school has some excellent musicians and enjoy entertaining local people as well as parishioners and parents. For two years now the school has been a finalist in the BBC Radio Devon ‘Star for Christmas’ carol competition. There are many other activities in which the children are enabled to participate and which highlight their willingness to reach out to others. This is a strong dimension of the school’s Catholic Life.

The school has plans for improving their environment so that it enhances the Catholic Life. This will take time but is important for further embedding the spiritual and religious life of the school.

Focus for Development

- To find ways for Gospel values to become embedded in everything that the school does and for all staff to have the language and understanding to be able to impart these values when interacting with children, parents and one another. A study of Catholic Social Teaching will help in this respect.
- To develop the training and support of TAs to enable them to understand their role and how their practice impacts on the growth and emotional development of the child – particularly in areas of care and concern and in turn how this must reflect the ethos of the school.
- To develop high levels of communication which are understood and embedded across all groups so that everyone is confident and feels an integral part of the school community.

ST. MARY’S AS A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY Grade 3	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT John 5:6-8
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Although there have been significant developments over the past year the leadership and management of St. Mary’s will continue to require support and guidance to continue moving the school forward. The current governing body, though short of people, is making progress and has had a positive impact on the steps being taken to move the school forward. It has the capacity to meet the school’s needs and is influential in determining the strategic direction of the school. Governors know what their personal responsibility is and are in the process of introducing a range of monitoring activities relating to teaching, learning, spiritual development and other provision and outcomes for the school. The governing body is committed to improving outcomes and developing a staff group who are able to do this. The Head Teacher, who has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the necessary changes take place, will need support from the entire staff and Governing Body , resilience and stamina to stay with the process. Growing in a sense of solidarity will support the whole community in the face of the challenges it is presented with.

Unfortunately, in some areas the middle leadership team is less strong. Some middle leaders are not always clear about what it means to lead a subject and lack the confidence to do this. They require

greater support and training to be able to deliver at this level. The break-down of relationships in some areas and the absence of any kind of SLT to support the Head Teacher means that roles and responsibilities are not being undertaken as they might profitably be. To move this forward all involved in the running of the school need to reflect on their position and consider what they need to be effective and committed. In addition teachers need greater support to know how to deploy their TAs more effectively so that they are supporting lessons appropriately. A comprehensive programme of TA CPD needs to be developed so that colleagues feel confident and secure in their role.

Within the realm of RE, teachers, particularly those new to the school, need greater support and guidance about the curriculum and how to plan effective and meaningful RE lessons. Monitoring of lessons, planning and marking is taking place but not sufficiently to be effective. At present teachers are not clear about how the children progress in RE and lack an understanding of how to plan so that they do. The R.E. Leader's role in this is to support teachers with their planning, ensure that appropriate staff meetings are held to cascade information, identify concerns and respond to these concerns by offering individual guidance or arranging CPD opportunities.

Because the governors are enthusiastic and committed there is every confidence that with the support of the EMG the changes that need to take place can be realised. At the heart of this must be the determination that the whole leadership team sets an example of service and humility, reflecting Christ's call that we love one another. Changes, which will be necessary, will need to take place with this level of charity ensuring that the dignity of every person is honoured and respected.

Focus for Development

- Within the context of restructuring of the school, to maintain current focus on ensuring that Middle leaders are valued and facilitated with dedicated time to develop their subject and skills so that they are able to support others. There is the expectation that, with this investment they will grow, flourish and better understand the pivotal role they play in the school's leadership team.
- To develop a culture of mentoring for every member of staff so that the community grows in a sense of personal responsibility and service to one another. This would also mean that all staff feel confident and safe about seeking help and able to express their views without prejudice.
- To develop opportunities for children to express and contribute their views across a range of activities and especially in relation to their experience of worship.

ST.MARY'S AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMUNITY GRADE 3

WORD JOHN 5:6-8

At St. Mary's, teachers consistently model Christ in the way that they relate to children and deliver lessons. Teachers are kind, compassionate and understanding. They listen to children and relationships are positive. As a consequence children are ready and willing to learn. They want to progress and respond well to opportunities to do so. However, for a variety of reasons, including a lack of experience and being new to the curriculum, teachers are not offering the children sufficient opportunities to make the progress that they could. In addition there is currently insufficient

teaching of RE taking place in in most classes. As a consequence teachers do not have the time to develop themes and consolidate learning.

How to plan RE is not embedded and based on the five lessons observed teachers are not clear about how to plan lessons that enable children to progress. In some lessons children spent too long on the carpet and as a consequence some children lost focus. In other lessons there was little teaching and activities were given to the children with intense adult support. In nearly all lessons the teachers and TAs were doing all the work and the children were passive in their learning. In most lessons the work was neither challenging nor were the expectations high.

It is not easy to see the progress of children because they use one writing book for all subjects rather than a dedicated RE book. As a result the work in the books is minimal and often the RE is not being marked effectively. Each class has a Class RE book but these have yet to be embraced by the teachers so that they become a book of evidence of which children and teachers are proud.

For this to improve, teachers need on-going support to look at the level of tasks that they are offering pupils, consider a wider range of tasks and enable pupils to work more independently. The school has done some work on AT2 and in some lessons this was evident. However, opportunities for discussion were too frequently shut down in order to get on with the task. It is likely that a lack of theological confidence led to this.

Pupils spoke of enjoying their RE and could talk about some of their learning in RE but this was not consistent across the interviews with children. None of the children had an understanding of what their next steps in learning would be. Once teachers are more confident about their marking they will be able to help the children be clearer about what is expected of them.

Focus for Development

- For all staff to have CPD on the planning and delivery of RE and how to approach topics using levels of attainment as a guide to ensure that all activities enable progress. CPD needs to be built into the school's INSET or twilight programme and suitable people invited to deliver this: e.g. RE Adviser and other appropriate people who may be available.
- Prior to each topic all teachers engage in a theological discussion about the topic so that they gain a basic but sound understanding of Catholic Teaching to underpin their planning.
- For the school to draw upon external resources (e.g. parish, diocese, RE governor) to assist in the background preparation for teaching.
- To ensure that planning identifies attainment targets, strands and levels so that assessment becomes embedded.
- For all classes to have a dedicated RE book in addition to their whole class book so that children and adults can see attainment and progress through a consistent marking and feedback.

Whole School Acts of Worship, Prayer and Praise and classroom prayers all serve to reflect the commitment that St. Mary's has to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. There are many opportunities for children to grow in this important dimension of their life. Their behaviour,

responses and willingness to share reflect an openness to God's presence in their own lives and that of others.

The Head Teacher has been instrumental with the RE leader, Parish priest and Parish Sister in developing the celebration of the Eucharist as a key dimension to supporting the children's understanding and appreciation of the traditions and practices of the Catholic Church. Weekly class Masses take place in the Church and twice a term the whole school comes together for Mass.

Weekly whole school liturgy supports the children's understanding of Mass by being a Liturgy of the Word with familiar responses. The quality of music and singing in the school is exceptional and serves to enhance the liturgy in a special way. The school has a fully trained music teacher who is also class based but gives a lot of her time to developing the music life of the school. As a result it is clear that the majority of children enjoy singing and in particular singing in harmony.

The liturgical year provides a sound framework for the school's worship life. The school is well supported by its local parish priest and are fortunate to have his presence in school on a regular basis. The parish sister is also an added bonus helping the school with the preparation of Mass and supporting the children to fully participate.

Class acts of worship and prayer times are a part of everyday life in the classroom with some teachers being more confident about how to go about this than others. Children respond well and appreciate these times. However, at present they have no opportunities to express their feelings or thoughts on the experiences that are offered to them.

Focus for Development

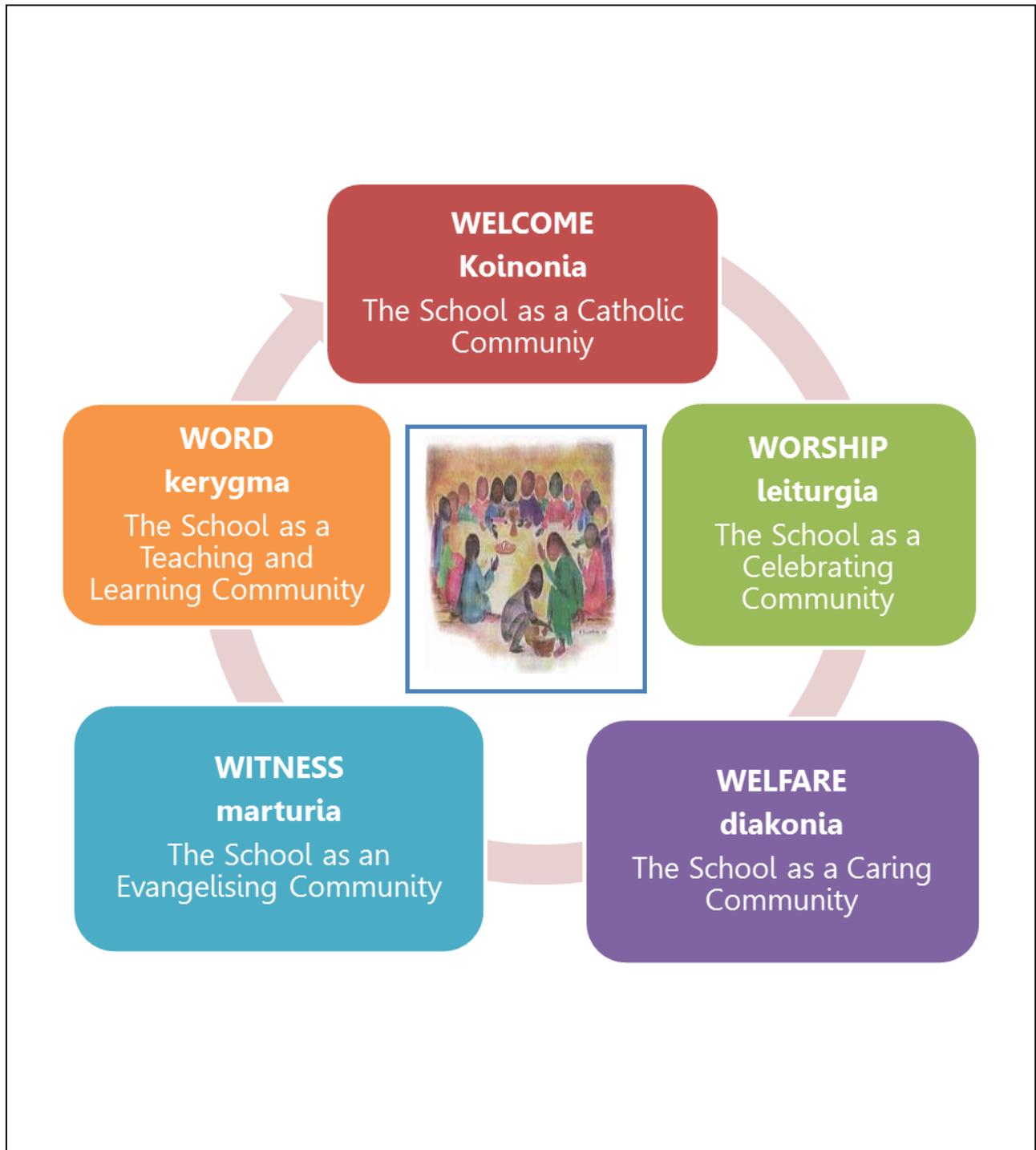
- To provide formation for all staff to develop their understanding of what constitutes an act of worship so that they can gain the skills needed to lead and facilitate children to develop their own liturgical skills.
- To build a bank of quality resources and support staff and children to use these effectively.

Conclusion

St. Mary's has been through a difficult time but it is moving forward. Staff, parents, governors and the wider CAST community working together have the capacity to bring about change with integrity.

Sarah Adams
February 2016

THE SCHOOL AS A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY



Introduction

The Catholic community is one that is rooted in Baptism, Eucharist and an on-going call to Conversion. The areas of Welcome, Worship, Word, Welfare and Witness can be described as the key components of what it means to live the Christian life. As such, the school as a Catholic community, is called to embrace these as a way of being community and living the mission of the

Church. The manner in which these are expressed reveal for us the heart of where the community lies.

Koinonia - (κοινωνία) Welcome

Koinonia is the Greek word for communion, for participation, for the sharing with one another. It is to be welcome an 'other' in fellowship and love. It is to be of an open disposition to receive from another and to respond in love. Within the community it can be minimalized to the gesture of greeting at the front entrance. In school it might simply be seen as the role of the receptionist. Koinonia however, requires a much greater vision of what it means to welcome. Ultimately it speaks of the disposition of every member of the community to be open to the needs of another, be that to listen, to hear, to respond, to act. The idea of welcome will be embedded in all aspects of the school's way of doing things.

Leiturgia – (λειτ-ουργία) Worship

The Greek word 'leiturgia' means public activity or in a religious sense it means 'respect' or 'service'. When it was adopted by the Church it meant to carry out a religious service. It is a public service as opposed to private prayer and concerns the Christian community gathering first and foremost to celebrate the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. It is also a time when the community gathers to be reconciled, to celebrate, to be fed, and to be sent out in mission. Central to the Catholic School is its call to be a Eucharistic community in the widest sense – that is to be the body of Christ ready to serve the world in its fullness. All prayer, all liturgy ultimately is intended to lead to this. It is not something that happens once a week and has no further meaning. It is an invitation to live each day what has been received through Word and Eucharist.

Marturia – (μαρτυρία) Witness

The core meaning of the Greek word marturia means to testify, to give witness, from which we get the word martyr. Simply it means to share our values and faith with the world and our local community so that others may come to know the love of Christ. Within the Catholic School community this will mean promoting a shared vision and shared values which stem from a shared sense of the teaching of the Gospel. The Christian is called to witness to Christ's teaching in the way they live their life. Like John the Baptist these values are those which direct others to Christ.

Diakonia - (διακονία) Welfare

The word 'diakonia' comes from the Greek word to mean to serve the poor and the oppressed. The emphasis within the word is on service and care for others. Within the Christian community diakonia is a way of being with others. It encourages care and concern for every person regardless of who they are or where they come from. Within the Catholic school, service lies at the heart of the community. It is about how children are supported in their learning, shown compassion when their behaviour is challenging and cared for when they are unhappy or in need. Equally it is about how adults are cared for and care for one another. At the same time the community is one that reaches out to the local community and the wider world, recognising the needs of others and responding to these generously.

Kerygma – (κήρυγμα) Word

Kerygma is the New Testament Greek word for preaching or proclaiming the message of Christ. Within the context of the school this is expressed both in how we expose young people to the

person of Christ as revealed in scripture, and the manner in which we teach. Access to the WORD of God through scripture and Christian tradition is considered to be a significant part of what the Christian community is about. By the way they are taught children come to know that God speaks to us in the way that we experience and engage with kindness, beauty, justice, the wonders of the natural world, relationships and the needs of others. It is therefore seen as important that in every subject, every lesson, positive values and attitudes are communicated. A confident and open attitude to teaching of lessons well thought about and prepared is central to achieving this.

Self-Review

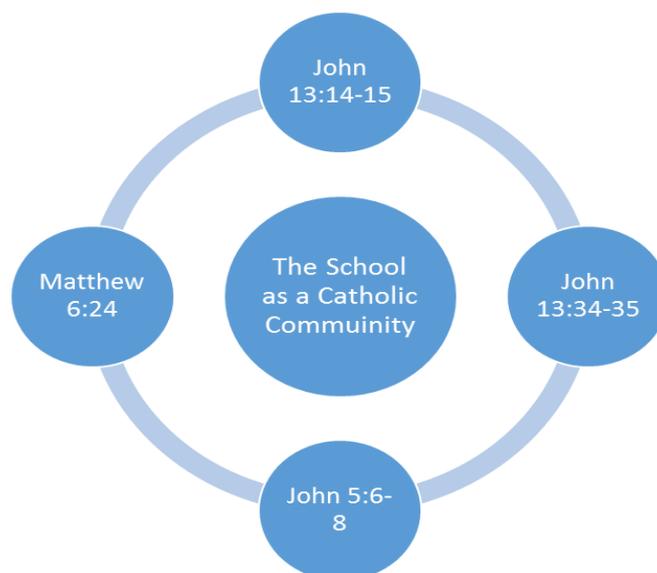
There will be three key areas within which these five elements will be reviewed:

- The School as a Catholic Community (Welcome, Witness and Welfare)
- The School as a Teaching and Learning Community (Word)
- The School as a Celebrating Community (Worship)

For each of these sections focus areas for evaluation are offered and means of gathering evidence to support this work. See appendix for further guidance.

Scripture Passages

Scripture passages have been selected to highlight where the focus for the community may be at any one time. These will act as a guideline for the self-review process when schools consider the health of its community. The approach to these is best considered within the context of a cycle. Any anyone time the school may find different areas of its life at different points on the cycle:



CONTEXT FOR THE CHOICE OF SPECIFIC SCRIPTURE REFERENCES –

Scripture has throughout history been interpreted in a variety of ways and is constantly being reinterpreted. The interpretations given here are one way of looking at how the passages may be

understood within our own context. Equally there are many other passages which may have been selected but for now these reflect what is at the heart of our mission and seem appropriate.

Grade 1: 'If I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you are also to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you'. John 13 14-15

The night before he died Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Peter, one of the disciples was affronted. To wash another's feet was the lowest job of all, one done by the servants. Jesus, as the leader of the community he was about to establish, was very clear. The call to Christian ministry is a call to service, a humbling act of giving to one another. Unless we can serve our brothers and sisters we can have no part of in the life of Christ. A secular understanding of leadership often results in a top down mentality and little shared responsibility. The Christian community however, is one where those in authority act out of their desire to serve, not to be served. As a consequence the message of serving one another permeates the whole community.

Grade 2: 'I give you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another'. John 13:34-35

The greatest of all commandments is that we love one another. Living the Christian life is to live a life of love which ultimately leads to washing one another's feet. This is a journey. There are times when we succeed and there are times when we become distracted. Other priorities take over or we fall susceptible to the secular world which may be offering a different set of priorities or values. Fear, anxiety or a lack of confidence can impact on the capacity of those in leadership to fully respond to the Christian call above all other demands. As a result, although most of the time the community is responding to the call to love, there are times when this gets forgotten and anomalies creep in.

Grade 3 'Do you want to be made well? The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way someone else steps down ahead of me.' Jesus said to him, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' John 5:6-8'

The sick man lying by the pool of Bethsaida has been there for a many years, stuck in the one place. Although he wants to be better he appears not to be able to move without some help. Jesus offers this to him and orders him to get up and walk. It could be said that the sick man has resided for too long in a 'blame someone else way of being'. Sometimes leaders and school communities do become 'stuck'. Leaders blame teachers, teachers blame students or leaders and the culture prevents an honest engagement in what needs to be done for any progress to be made. Schools stuck or struggling in this kind of cycle need help and support to break free. Healing and reconciliation may need to be a part of this journey. Honest clarification of priorities and challenging self-searching needs to take place for change to occur.

Grade 4: 'No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. Matthew 6:24

Throughout Scripture we are taught that we must choose between God and false gods. Jesus wants us to be free, not just of concerns but of all worries, in order to serve God. It is easy when we are under extreme pressure to respond in ways which are detrimental to our core beliefs and vision. Sometimes this happens because we are facing understandable difficulties. At other times we are

insufficiently discerning and go with what seems to be more attractive or safe. Schools can fall into this trap when results and progress become more important than the all-round development of the child. When this is the case the school has lost sight of its meaning and purpose. As a consequence children are being failed and adults not supported to do what is right. Only a radical re-evaluation of what it means to be a Catholic community and a Catholic school will lead to a rediscovery of the commandment: 'Love one another' and ultimately to people washing one another's feet.