

DIOCESE OF PLYMOUTH

Department for Formation

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

URN 113423

**Head Teacher: Mr. Mark Brown
Chair of Governors: Philip Mostyn**

**Record of Diocesan Review
19th November, 2009**

Introduction

The school was inspected by Ofsted on 18th June, 2009 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 Mary'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 headteacher and governors of the school. The outcomes of the review were agreed on the basis of:-

- A pre-meeting with the staff of the school
- further documentation made available in school;
- observation of lessons;
- meeting with the school council which has pupils representing all ages within the school;
- Participation in a class Act of Worship and a Key stage two act of worship
- A meeting with a group of governors including the Parish priest.

Strengths of the School

A significant number of key strengths were identified in the context of St. Mary's distinctive identity as a Catholic school as factors in its educational success and its contribution to the Church's mission in education. The list below intends to be illustrative, not comprehensive.

Leadership

In less than a year as leader of the school, the Head has made an immediate impact. He has high expectations that both staff and children respect and care for one and this is very evident. On the day of the visit the school had been dealing with the death of a parent. The whole community had rallied around the bereaved children and their family and ensured that they were supported emotionally and spiritually. There was a very real sense of community within the school which manifested itself in many ways from how people treated each other, celebrated each other's success and expressed concern for one another.

The leadership of the school ensures that in daily activities the school is well-ordered and clear about the children need. There seems to be a real appreciation of the values by which the school strives to live by and staffs appears confident and well-motivated. The headteacher has a relaxed yet purposeful manner which permeates the whole school and as a consequence children like coming to school and feel safe.

Religious Life

St. Mary's has a strong religious life and is committed to being a truly Catholic school. This is lived out in many ways. Children are clearly comfortable with prayer and used to participating in acts of worship. They are prayerful and join in with enthusiasm. They are encouraged to get involved in many ways including preparing the prayer space with a suitable focal point. They are able to pray spontaneously and have a respect for one another by listening and responding. The teachers reflect a positive attitude to prayer and help the children to feel fully involved. The prayer time itself helps the children to understand the nature of God and to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

The prayer life of the school is enhanced by the commitment of the Parish priest who visits each week to lead a school liturgy. The school is also welcomed by the parish to their own celebrations and members of the parish support the school in a variety of ways. There are good relations with the parish which the Headteacher is keen to nurture and develop. In addition to the links with the Catholic Church, the school also fosters positive links with the other churches in the area by taking part in their events. The school's choir were very proud to be able to take part in the 700th anniversary celebrations at Exeter cathedral along with children from other schools.

All of these activities demonstrate the school's commitment to its religious ethos and to fostering spiritual growth in the children.

Teaching in RE

From reception through to Key stage 2 lessons in RE were taught with energy and creatively using a variety of teaching techniques. Although teachers expressed some anxiety about expectations around the teaching of RE this was not evident in the classroom where the children responded with enthusiasm and confidence. Teachers and assistant teachers were very clear about what they expected of the children and supportive of those who needed additional help. The different learning styles by different teachers ensured that the children were engaged throughout!

Through this the children had learned to work in different age groups and ability groups as well as looking at a subject in a more in-depth way.

The staff reported that a recent Diocesan INSET that they attended had inspired them to be more positive about the teaching of RE and able to focus on the experience of the children without the fear of making mistakes.

The Headteacher is also the person responsible for leading RE. However, in time he hopes to encourage and provide relevant developmental support for a member of staff to take on this role. This would be a positive move and one which would enrich the professional development of the staff.

Pastoral Life of the School

There is a deep commitment to the pastoral needs of staff and children at St. Mary's. It is an inclusive school which aims to foster strong and caring relationships within the community. Clear boundaries and high expectations ensure that the school is a safe and secure environment for all the children. Children who do have difficulties are monitored for their needs. They are well cared for when they are distressed and as the children on the school council reported they know that they can talk to any of the adults and feel that they not only be listened to but heard also. The children had a very good sense that adults will respond and support them in whatever their need. Again the genuine compassion and empathy shown by adults and children to the bereaved family was very evident.

The confidence of the children on the school council regardless of age, reflects the belief that the teachers have in them. As well as being articulate the children are respectful and appreciative of what they have. Those in year 6 particularly expressed their sadness about their future departure but also their excitement about moving on to a new school. There was a healthy sense of belonging amongst the children.

Although a small school, the children and teachers are committed to supporting those people in the world who are suffering or in need. They see themselves as being very fortunate and express their gratitude for this by their charitable efforts. The children were proud to speak of their fund raising activities for CAFOD, Shoe Box and for their harvest festival just this term.

Being part of the local community is also important to the school. Through a variety of activities the local town experiences the presence of the school in their life.

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. Opportunities to develop the staff's confidence in matters of faith and appreciation of their own spirituality.
2. Providing a comprehensive and appropriate PHSE programme for the school in line with both government directives and Catholic teaching.
3. The nurture of staff to feel confident enough to take on the role of RE C-ordinator.

4. Through support from the diocese to develop the liturgical life of the school to encompass additional services that enable children to deepen their sense of symbolic action and ritual.

Conclusion

St. Mary's is a delightful school of which the Diocese of Plymouth and the Catholic Church in Axminster can be justly proud. This is a school where all children and adults are welcome. The recently appointed headteacher is to be commended for the warm and caring atmosphere he has brought to the school and which the staff emulates. The school's commitment to the mission of the Church is significant and reflects a genuine desire to live the beatitudes.

Throughout the visit a great deal of happiness was expressed. Children feel accepted and encouraged to do their best particularly in their relationships with staff and each other.

The staff team also feels respected and nurtured as professionals. As a consequence they 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 the review and for making such a clear 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 and the Governors of St. Mary's, Axminster, 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

Mark Brown
Head Teacher

Philip Mostyn
Chair of Governors

