

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

**CANON 806  
INSPECTION REPORT**



St. Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School  
Devon Road  
Poole  
Dorset  
BH15 3QQ

URN 140777

Head Teacher: Helen Armstrong  
Chair of Governors: Matt Desmier

## Introduction

The inspection of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with Plymouth Diocesan Framework and as a multi-academy Trust school (CAST) with the Schedule for Diocesan Canonical inspectors, approved by the Bishop of Plymouth.

## Context for the Inspection

St Mary's is larger than average-sized primary school with 421 pupils on roll. Of these 9.3% of children are eligible for pupil premium, 2.1% of children receive free school meals and 15% of children have SEN. 24% of children have English as an additional language.

Since the last inspection the school has undergone significant changes:

1. A new Head Teacher was appointed in September 2014 following an 18 month period during which the school went through a time of turmoil. During this time the school was supported by two consultant head teachers. The impact of what this caused on the staff cannot be underestimated.
2. The school has become a primary school after re-organisation within the Poole area. It was formerly a combined school that meant that children stayed in the school until the end of year 7.
3. The school has become an academy as part of CAST – a multi-academy trust incorporating all Catholic primary schools within Diocese of Plymouth.

## Key Finding Grade 1

## John 13:14-15

**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 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.*

Over the past two years St. Mary's has gone through great turmoil which led to ultimate change in leadership. The impact of this experience on the school cannot be underestimated. It is therefore to the credit of the whole of the adult community that they did not allow this to diminish their commitment to serving one another and in particular the children of this school. Everything about this school speaks of the love

and care that children and adults have for one another. There is a deep sense of the Gospel being lived out in every aspect of the school's life. The potential of the staff has been unleashed and they are now thriving as a group of people who share their gifts, talents and faith with each other so that the children are given a very rounded and life-giving education. The new Head Teacher's own personal faith, commitment to high standards and a desire to serve, nurture and engage the whole community both within and outside of the school is inspirational. Service is very definitely at the heart of this thriving school.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

- The spirit of the Gospel permeates all aspects of the school's life. This is tangible in the positive relationships which underpin every dimension of the school's life and is reflected in the school's mission statement which is quite simply, 'Love one another as I have loved you.'
- The profile of the school has changed significantly since the last inspection, enabling the school to really embrace diversity. This is now a school with a high proportion of children from different cultures who are positively welcomed and embraced.
- The school has a strong sense of what it means to forgive and let go. This was evident in a variety of ways but in particular in the confidence the new Head Teacher had to hold a retreat day for all staff and governors to reflect on the events that had caused so much pain and hurt for many people. Numerous positive comments followed from the day which brought healing and reconciliation. It represented the courage of the adult community and a new beginning for all.
- Since the arrival of the new Head Teacher, relationships with the local community have flourished. A genuine experience of reaching out has encouraged people from outside to feel the warmth of the welcome that the school has to offer.
- The teaching of RE plays an important role and teachers are committed to providing children with engaging and challenging lessons.
- The faith life of the school pervades all areas of school life. Displays, focal points, children's religious art work and artefacts all contribute to a deep experience of spiritual well-being and on-going prayer. It is apparent that this is a school firmly rooted in the Catholic Tradition.
- Children's behaviour is consistently excellent. They have a high regard for other people and reflect the modelling of the caring and compassionate adults who look after them.

### **Areas of Focus for Development**

- That the school's SEF reflects in its language the Gospel teaching which the school evidently holds dear and is experienced on a daily basis.
- To ensure that the school development plan has the Catholic Life as its first priority, so that everything that the school does remains firmly rooted in its mission.

Washing the feet of another person is a humbling act. It takes great humility to consistently serve at this level. The children of St. Mary's are blessed to have adults who not only do this for one another but absolutely do this for them. The quality of welcome, welfare and witness is tangible. It is rooted in love and reflects the genuine commitment the adults have to providing a rich and life-giving environment for all who come into this school.

The quality of welcome is reflected in the way in which the school embraces children from a wide and diverse cultural background and those children who are vulnerable for a variety of reasons. The school is blessed to have a dynamic and committed PSW (Parent Support Worker) who has worked tirelessly to engage with local agencies to develop positive and formative relationships. Her relationship with parents has clearly made an impact on the support that children receive. In addition, her work with the Catholic Children's Society to offer workshops to parents has proved invaluable. In particular this has led to a large number of parents taking up the offer of sessions which help them with their children.

Children settle quickly into the school and as a consequence there is a calm and peaceful atmosphere. Clear routines and learning expectations are a priority which help the children to feel at home and safe. In addition a large number of volunteers help in a variety of areas which supports the calmness of the environment. They regularly comment on the quality of welcome which they experience and are committed to supporting the school to provide many different opportunities and activities for the children.

In addition to the friendly, warm presence of the site manager and PSW at the entrance each morning and evening, the richness of the welcome at St. Mary's extends far beyond the gates of the school. An example of this would be a visit by children to a local MP to talk to him about issues of concern to them. Such was the quality of their engagement with him that what started out as fairly hostile on the part of the MP became a friendly and warm interaction. In another but completely different way children in year 6 regularly take the newsletter for the school and deliver it to all the homes in the local neighbourhood, thus ensuring that neighbours value the presence of the school and feel that it is part of their community.

At St. Mary's all children are considered to be unique and special, each made in the image and likeness of God. As a consequence, their time at the school leads them to grow into confident and rounded youngsters able and ready to face the demands of secondary school life. Their appreciation of the special nature of each person ensures that they always try to be inclusive. One way in which this is evident would be the 'Huff and Puff' monitors at playtime who make sure that everyone is included in some kind of activity and help those who might find it difficult. Children are keen to take on responsibility and have many opportunities to do this at St. Mary's. This might be as part of the School Council, the ECO team, as House Captains or as Play leaders or Peer Mediators. The children also run SMOG (St. Mary's Organic Garden). All the children involved in these activities act as fine role models for other children and work together to support younger children in their roles.

From all that has been said thus far, it is clear that the quality of witness to the Gospel lies at the heart of the school. Governors are increasingly engaging with the school. This again has happened more tangibly as a consequence of the commitment of the new Head Teacher who has worked very hard to meet with the governors either as a group or individually. Governors now come into the school on a regular basis as well as coming to attend liturgies

and other events. They have a growing sense of how important the Catholic life is to the over-all picture of St. Mary's as a school.

The school has strong partnerships with other schools both within the locality and in particular, the network of CAST schools to which they belong. As a result, the sharing of good practice in many areas is helping to further develop the adults and ensure that they grow in their own confidence and practice.

The school has many links with the global community and children consistently seek to support a variety of charities and be aware of the needs of those less fortunate than themselves. Charities such as CAFOD, Comic Relief and Leukaemia Busters are at the top of a long list of projects that the school supports with enthusiasm. It is impossible to name all the engagements that the school has with other organisations but suffice to say they reflect the very broad opportunities that children have to engage with and participate in events of a rich and diverse nature.

### **Focus for Development**

- To ensure a rolling programme of reflection to ensure that every aspect of the SEF continues to be developed.
- To review the Mission Statement so that all adults and children fully know what it is and can refer to it readily.

## **The School as a Catholic Community – Leadership and Management**

### **Grade 1**

**John 13:14-15**

It is worth repeating that the desire to serve one another lies at the heart of this school. This is truly reflected in the way that this school is now being led and managed. It is apparent that there is nothing that the leadership would ask anyone to do that they would not be prepared to do themselves. Their humility, and in particular that of the Head Teacher, ensures that they never under-estimate the pressures that staff are under. They are committed to having open minds and hearts to respond to the needs of children and adults. The leadership team has an attitude of not seeing problems only solutions, even when it can be difficult. Their positive and optimistic approach is catching and encourages everyone to strive for improvement on an on-going basis.

The school is well supported by an enthusiastic and committed governing body which has a new chair of governors and a clear sense of direction. They have engaged fully with the SCC (School as a Catholic Community) framework and are keen to maintain a focus on this document as a guiding principle for all future work and decisions.

The school is blessed to have a keen and passionate RE leader who teachers find supportive and encouraging. Her own faith commitment is unquestionable, leading her to participate in the Diocesan CCRS course to further help her to lead with confidence. Recognising the significance of the role the school has supported it with an additional person who has had the opportunity to shadow with a view to sharing the role with the RE leader. This has been a fortuitous move since the current post holder is about to take on an acting role as assistant

Head. It is hoped that a smooth transition will enable continuity and continuing growth of the role.

### **Focus for Development**

- That the new RE leader has the opportunity to work with RE leaders in other schools and that governors work closely with her to ensure that current strengths are maintained and developed.
- That the development plan for the next years builds on the outcomes of this inspection and a five year rolling programme of review is firmly rooted in the life of the school so that the SEF is fully implemented.

<b>The School as a Teaching and learning Community</b>
--

<b>Word</b>
-------------

<b>Grade 2</b>
----------------

<b>John 13:34-35</b>
----------------------

St. Mary's is a school with a dedicated and committed teaching community. Teachers are keen to do well and plan their lessons thoroughly. Their attitude to teaching, not surprisingly, is compassionate, thoughtful and open. Every child is treated with respect and supported to do their best. TAs appropriately engage in work with children in a kind and constructive way. There is a very real sense that both teachers and TAs model Christ in their interactions with children, challenging when necessary as well as guiding and directing calmly and gently.

Over the past eighteen months, the school has been heavily scrutinised and as a consequence, teachers have experienced an unprecedented amount of pressure to perform and obtain high standards in every lesson. As a consequence some teachers seem to have lost confidence in their own ability to teach when being observed. The senior leadership team is working hard to address this. Fourteen lessons were observed during the course of this inspection and for the most part they were creative, thoughtful and well-delivered. In almost all lessons children made some progress and enjoyed what they were doing. The quality of work in children's books is excellent and reflects the quality of teaching that goes on in many lessons. Marking is of a high standard and allows the children to see how well they have achieved and what their next steps are. Plenty of time is given to children so that they can respond to the comments made by teachers and answer any questions. The planning of lessons is very thorough and teachers are working hard to differentiate so that children progress according to their religious experience, knowledge and understanding. Work still needs to be done in this area but the teachers are on the right path. AT2 is currently an area where teachers feel less confident and as a consequence, opportunities for engaging in AT2 activities were missed or not planned for.

### **Focus for Development**

- To continue working on differentiation to ensure that all teachers understand how to differentiate appropriately and to embed it in all lessons.
- To work on developing a resource base for AT 2 activities and ensure that all teachers know how to plan and deliver appropriate and meaningful lessons with an AT 2 focus.
- To have regular pre-topic conversations to help teachers feel confident in their own subject knowledge.

Prayer lies at the heart of St. Mary's. The quality of liturgy and classroom prayer reflects the esteem in which the spiritual lives of the children and adults is held. The capacity of over four hundred people to engage in a meaningful liturgy, led entirely by the children and executed with gravitas and solemnity is no easy achievement. Yet this is common practice in this school. Children sing with enthusiasm, know how to be still and reverent and do this without adults needing to constantly remind them. The liturgy experienced during this inspection was meaningful in its content, uplifting and moving in its delivery. Children participated fully and appreciated the time together.

At other times during the visit, times of prayer were experienced happening as a normal part of classroom life. Excellent focal points, meaningfully reflecting the children's engagement with them, allowed most groups to pray with a sense of solemnity. The children have a great capacity for silence and for sharing of their own prayer needs which they did on a number of occasions.

Other opportunities for prayer are taken up with enthusiasm. For example during Lent a TA offered children in KS2 an opportunity to come to the small school chapel and pray the Stations of the Cross. Many children took this opportunity and adults commented on the impact that this experience seemed to have on the children. Another teacher works with a group of gifted and talented children to produce religious art. This is particularly inspiring because not only is the work produced throughout the school but the experience offers the children the opportunity to talk about their faith and religious experiences.

Links with the Parish, which have not always been very strong, are once again a significant part of school life. The Parish Priest is delighted with the development and keen to build on this. Whole school Masses take part in the Church at least twice a term and are an opportunity for parishioners to participate in these celebrations with the school. The Parish Priest comes into the school on a regular basis and has been a great pastoral support to the school particularly during recent difficult times.

In June the school, along with another local Catholic Primary school, is participating in a week of prayer run by the local Catholic/Anglican secondary school. Children in years 2-6 will be divided into groups and sessions will be facilitated by students from years 12 and 11. This is a very positive initiative. Both Parish Priests are also to be involved. This engagement of the three schools is a further example of the quality of Witness through prayer that these three schools are offering to the children and the quality of the relationship that is growing between the schools.

### **Focus for Development**

- To seek opportunities to share meaningful practice throughout the school so that all staff have the opportunity to experience a variety of approaches to prayer.
- To develop a way of monitoring and reviewing the prayer and worship opportunities that children have and seek their views on what they are offered.

There is no doubt that everything that the school does contributes to the spiritual and moral development of the children at St. Mary's.

Through the traditions and practices of the Catholic Church, children have a context for learning what is right and just. They are able to develop a critical conscience which ultimately gives them freedom because they know how to live and what gives them life. Their commitment to serving others and caring for their world is very strong and is supported by the many and varied activities on offer to them including those of prayer and worship.

They are surrounded by high quality artefacts that enables the community to experience the sacred, including the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in a very small chapel attached to the hall. The use of sacred and other appropriate music adds to their experience and ensures that there is great scope for those awe and wonder moments that give the community a genuine sense of the Divine in their midst.

### **Focus for Development**

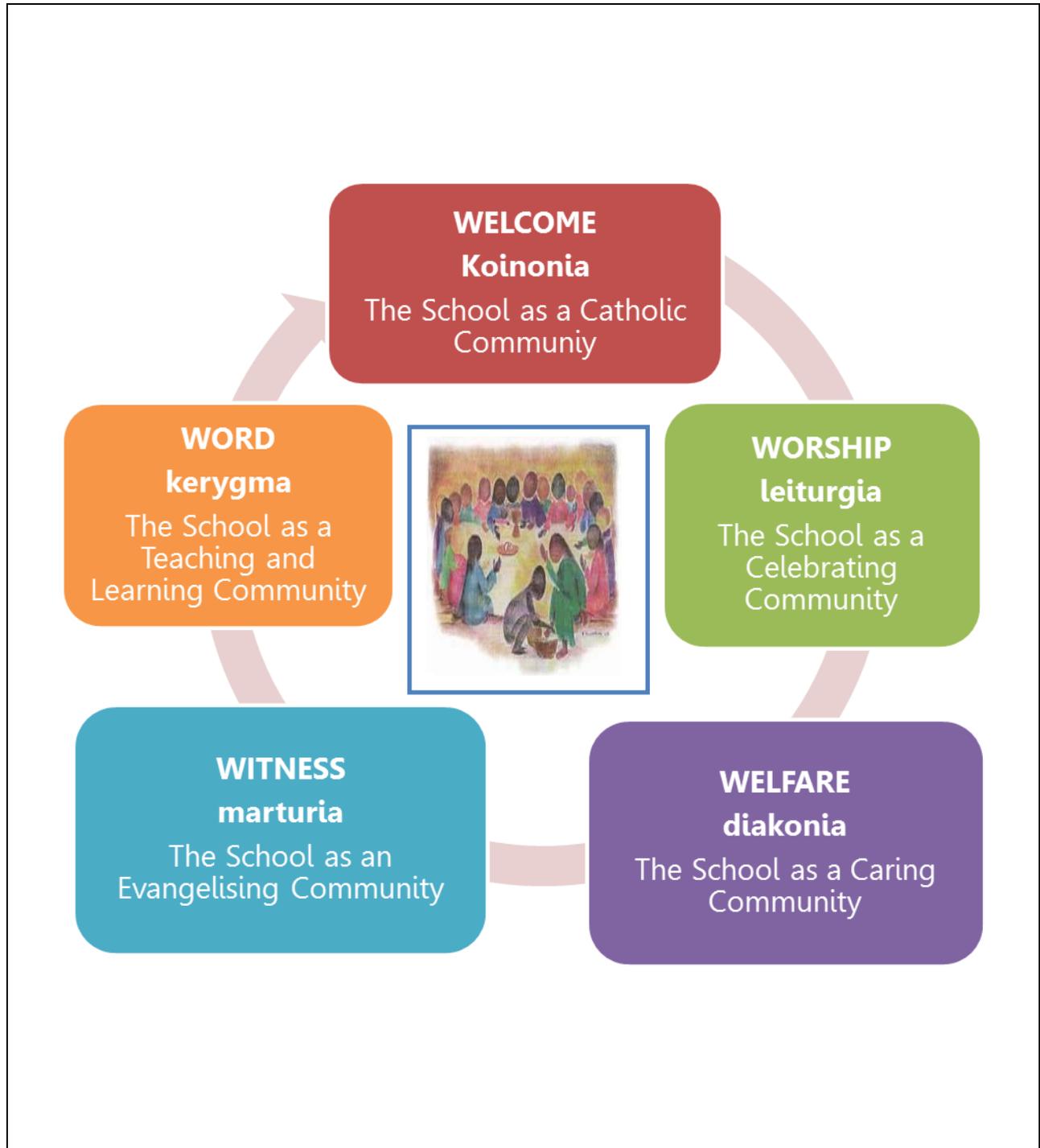
- To develop a variety of approaches which will further enhance the prayer life of the whole community e.g. opportunities for meditation/quiet reflection.
- To consider developing further the Sacred Space on the website.

### **Conclusion**

St. Mary's has been on a long and painful journey but they have responded with courage, integrity and an absolute commitment to over-coming adversity and growing as a community. They have achieved this. They have worked tirelessly and it is clearly evident. With a new and dynamic Head Teacher they have been given and taken the opportunity to fully blossom. This is a school with a real future and one which the Bishop, CAST and Plymouth Diocese can be truly proud.

**Sarah Adams**  
**April 2015**

## 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 work 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 – (Λειτουργία) 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**

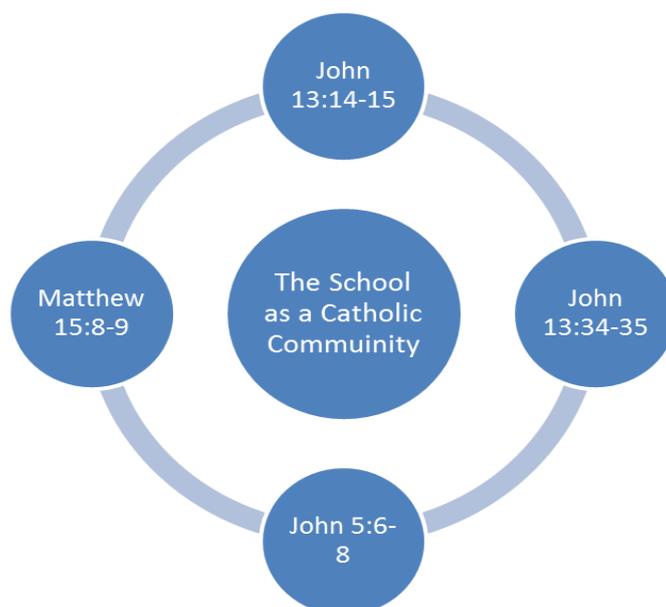
There will be three key areas within which these five elements will be reviewed:

- 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 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: 'This people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines. Matthew 15:8-9**

The Pharisees and scribes accuse Jesus and his disciples of breaking the rules. The rules have become more important and the heart has been lost. The Pharisees and Scribes may appear to follow the law but they have forgotten what it all means. Where there is little service, no attention to love and no understanding of what it means to live a fully developed Christian life, there is little heart. 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.