

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

**CANON 806
INSPECTION REPORT**



St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Primary School
Ringswell Avenue
Exeter
Devon
EX1 3EG

URN 139394

Head Teacher: Angela Folland
Chair of Governors: Jane Wardle

Introduction

The inspection of St. Nicholas 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. Two inspectors visited the school over a period of two days.

Context for the Inspection

St Nicholas is larger than average-sized primary school with 338 pupils on roll. Of these 9.7% of children are eligible for pupil premium, 6% of children receive free school meals and 27% are identified as being SEND with 4 children having a statement of special educational needs. 26% of children have English as an additional language. Currently 24% of the children is of ethnic minority compared to Devon's 6.5% and 11% of the children are EAL compared to Devon's 4.6%.

Since the last inspection the school has been through significant changes:

1. In June 2013 the school became a sponsored academy following its placement in special measures in January 12. From a position of inadequate the school was judged to be 'Good' with some outstanding features in February 2015.
2. Over the past four years the teaching staff profile has changed significantly and of the 19 teachers only 2 were at the school when it was placed in special measures. The Head Teacher and two Assistant Heads have remained in post and have been instrumental in raising standards across the school.

Key Finding	Grade 2	John 13:34-35
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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.

St. Nicholas Catholic Primary School in Exeter is a school which has been on a very challenging and demanding journey, as a consequence of going into special measures. The effort and commitment of the leadership team, including the governors, to turn the school around is to be highly commended. It is quite clear that the efforts made to improve standards and to establish a school with very strong foundations is beginning to bear fruit. One major challenge for the school has been the induction of new staff into the Catholic life of the school. With so many new staff, many without previous experience of a Church school, the school's commitment to providing quality CPD for RE teaching and raise standards in this area as well as across the school, has been crucial. This has to be seen as

an on-going journey for the teachers. They are making progress but will continue to need support, guidance and monitoring to enable them to grow into confident and creative teachers of RE.

St. Nicholas is a school where there is a deep commitment to growing children and adults. Throughout the inspection there were many examples of how people have been enabled to discover gifts they might not have known they had and use them effectively and meaningfully within the community. An example of this would be a TA who has become a dedicated Thrive practitioner. Her work with vulnerable children has had a significant impact on the team and the children she works with and is a true example of the school's commitment to serving one another in an atmosphere of love and acceptance.

Summary of Key Findings

- The spirit of the Gospel permeates all aspects of the school's life and truly reflects the school's mission statement 'Living and Learning in Spirit and Truth'. The school's rainbow vision has at its heart the desire that all children should grow to be 'life-long learners, assisted by rich opportunities for memorable moments, limitless ambition, endless discovery, nurturing tomorrows talent today and bringing faith to life'. Throughout the inspection many experiences witnessed to this vision.
- The profile of the school is such that diversity in its widest sense is embraced. Vulnerable children are well catered for with a number of staff trained as Thrive practitioners within a newly developed resource to support this work. Children from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds are positively welcomed.
- The school has excellent relationships with the two parishes which feed the school. The appointment of a lay chaplain funded jointly by the two parishes and the school, provides a strong and vital link. As a result there is a strong bond between the parish communities and the school, which is viewed positively by all groups.
- The teaching of RE has begun to develop and training and support for teachers is seen to be a priority with the SLT and governors. Teachers are growing in their confidence to deliver well planned lessons that engage and encourage children.
- The faith life of the school pervades all areas of school life. Displays, focal points, RE walls are taken seriously and are now an important dimension of the RE teaching and liturgical life of the school.
- Children's behaviour is very positive and as a consequence leads to a calm and purposeful atmosphere around the school. Children who struggle are supported with care and understanding.

Areas of Focus for Development

- 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.
- To firmly embed all progress made this far and reflect, as a school community, on how it can make that small step required to become a school where service lies at the heart of everything.

The quality of welcome, welfare and witness is very strong at St. Nicholas. There is a genuine desire on the part of all to ensure that children experience a life-giving environment where they can grow, emotionally, physically, spiritually and academically. Gospel values influence decisions and there is a genuine sense that leaders in particular understand what this means. An example of this would be the Head Teacher's belief that going into special measures, though deeply painful, was in reality an epiphany moment for the school.

An openness to others is the quality of welcome which pervades the school. From the time one arrives in school it is clear that people are warm, friendly and have a desire to make people feel at home. In particular children who have challenging or particular needs are identified early and supported to access the life of the school in its fullness. At the heart of this lies a belief that every individual is unique and special. Each person is accepted unconditionally. There is a genuine commitment to seeing the child in the way that Jesus saw the rich young man and loved him. In other words the school cares about the child at the heart regardless of their presenting behaviour.

A special dimension to the school is the Belvedere room where children who need additional nurture and care, are worked with by the Thrive team of teachers and TAs. This is proving to be very successful with children who may not otherwise cope, reaching a point where they feel safe and able to learn. When children make mistakes the approach of the school is to deal with them in a way that allows them to grow and see a way forward, positively.

How people are cared for is important at St. Nicholas. Not only are children cared for but there is a commitment to looking after the adults within the community. Although great demands are placed on the staff the SLT believes it is important at pressure times to test the temperature of how staff are managing and where appropriate respond with compassion by, for example, extending a deadline or offering support. All staff have someone that they can turn to if they are in difficulty, someone who can act as a link between the SLT and members of staff.

There are strong links with the local parishes and positive relationships are growing. A new parish priest for one of the churches has embraced the school with enthusiasm and regularly visits the school, particularly for liturgies but also to be a presence in the school. The care of the clergy for the school is invaluable and much appreciated. In their turn the school maintains strong links via their newsletter and the part the lay chaplain plays by being on the parish councils of both parishes. Parents also comment very positively on the way the school operates and the warmth and welcoming disposition of the staff. They believe that their children are safe, well catered for and make sound progress.

For the school to fully become a school that has at its heart service to one another, there needs to be a greater understanding of Catholic Social Teaching and in particular the areas of the dignity of the individual; the common good; solidarity; and subsidiarity. There is no question that the school does not operate out of this but it is not sufficiently understood for adults to feel confident about articulating it. These areas need to be understood in the context of Gospel values and British values so that all adults and ultimately children have at their own level an appreciation of what this might look like. An example of where this might be developed would be the degree to which the children have a voice in decision making and can also contribute to developments more significantly within

the school. In regard to this, outreach to the wider community, particularly in relation to service of the poor and vulnerable and the global community would be another way of developing an appreciation and understanding of CST in practice.

The school has growing partnerships with other schools 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.

Focus for Development

- To enable children to have a voice and greater interaction with the wider community.
- To enable all staff to have an explicit appreciation and understanding of Catholic Social Teaching in relation to British and Gospel values and how this will prepare children for global citizenship.
- To continue the work the school has started on developing an evangelising community rooted in mercy.

The School as a Catholic Community	Leadership and Management
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Grade 2	John 13:34-35
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The Governors and Senior Leadership team of St. Nicholas have much to be proud of. Since going into special measures in 2012 there has been a deep resolve to improve standards and make a real difference for the children who attend the school. This has not been an easy journey with many challenges and hard decisions to make. However, there is real evidence to suggest that this has been approached with love and compassion for all those involved even when it has had to be painful. As a consequence of the hard work the school was recognised by Ofsted as being 'Good' in 2015.

Governors have taken their role to heart and work hard to know what their remit is and how to implement it effectively. They are highly organised and have a clear sense of where the school is moving and what is necessary to continue this journey, so that ultimately their goal of being an 'Outstanding' school can be realised. They are keen to share their experience with other CAST schools. There is a welcome and generous openness to supporting CAST. It will be key, however, to ensure that they do not lose their focus with St. Nicholas which is still relatively young in its successful move from special measures to a 'Good' Ofsted judgement.

Whilst it would be easy for the governors to focus on raising standards to meet the requirements of Ofsted, like the SLT they have not lost sight of the importance of fully growing the Catholic life of the school. Together they have identified the importance of addressing what it means for the school to live its mission and to teach and live the Catholic Life of the school. One of the outcomes of this over the past three years is the appointment of a lay chaplain who also teaches one day a week in the school. As the RE leader she has also helped to develop the confidence of the teachers to deliver RE and begin to be more engaged in the liturgical life of the school. Another outcome has been the wisdom to appoint a further RE leader, a full time teacher, to shadow the role and grow in her own capacity to lead. It will also ensure that there will be continuity and continuing growth within the role.

Focus for Development

- To develop a system of gathering data about the attainment and progress of children so that it will inform the strategic direction of RE and its' development as a core subject.
- That the development plan for the next five 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.

The School as a Teaching and learning Community
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Word

Grade 2

John 13:34-35

St. Nicholas' is a school committed to raising standards across the board. This has been a necessary and significant issue to ensure that the school moved from special measures to 'Good' in Ofsted terms. Since achieving this attention has shifted to the teaching of RE and how to develop the teachers to deliver engaging and well-planned lessons.

There is no doubting that the teachers model Christ in the way that they teach. This is a school where the learning environment is calm and teachers ensure that children feel safe and know what is expected of them. For the most part they challenge appropriately and all teachers could demonstrate their capacity to be compassionate, gentle and open to the needs of the children. Teachers are respectful and thoughtful in their interactions with children, working hard to ensure that they are supported and enabled to make progress. TA's are a great asset, positively employed and equally supportive in their engagement with the children.

Lessons are taught in mixed year groups and 8 lessons were observed in total. Pre-topic discussion and the provision of a theological thread provides much needed support and guidance. Lessons are well planned in year group teams. This has many benefits, ensuring that there is consistency across classes as to what it being taught and when. It helps to ensure that all teachers are comfortable with the material.. However, it is important that within this structure, teachers feel able to move away from their plan and respond to the needs of the children in their class. It is also important that there is clear progression in terms of the difference between what is taught in KS1 and KS2. Although many creative activities were observed the progression that children could make was not always so evident. Occasionally children were kept for too long on the carpet leading to some children losing their focus. This said, in some discussions the depth of thinking and comments made by children revealed their capacity to achieve at a high level and possibly at higher levels than was being demanded of them. As teachers become more familiar with how to adapt their material and how to ask the higher order questions the progression of children should be more rapid. Differentiation is a key element in this. Currently children choose the activity/challenge which they think is right for them. Teachers do occasionally steer children to the activity they think a child should tackle and generally children do seem to choose appropriately and want to progress to higher levels.

The school is working to improve the quality of marking and feedback to children in all subjects. This is yet to be embedded in the teaching of RE. Too many books have minimal marking and although there is some evidence of seeking responses from children this is not sufficiently seen across the school. When meeting with children they are, however, able to talk about their learning and can articulate with confidence what it means for them.

The school has in the past year introduced class books which capture the quality of learning which takes place over the course of a topic. Although in its early stages the books are proving to be very successful. The teachers take a pride in their presentation and they often feature as part of the class focal point. In particular some teachers have used technology to record though video class discussions and activities. This is an innovative and inspiring way to honour the engagement of the children and to be commended. Hopefully this will not only be developed across the school but shared with other schools across the network.

Focus for Development

- To continue to evaluate the effectiveness of CPD opportunities and develop these further.
- To ensure that teaching enables all children to make progress with teachers having a clear understanding of what this looks like in RE.
- To ensure that good assessment procedures enable teachers to reshape tasks and explanations to improve children’s learning.

The School as a Celebrating Community	Worship
Grade 1	John 13:13-14

The liturgical life of St. Nicholas lies at the heart of the school. Through conversations with clergy, the lay chaplain and SLT it is clear that how the school celebrates the liturgical year is meaningful to children and adults. The lay chaplain, who has a strong sense of liturgy and how it can be celebrated in a variety of ways including school Masses, is working to ensure that all staff develop these same skills.. This is not always easy but such is her commitment to enabling others that teachers are now beginning to feel more confident in this area.

Children engage in prayer times quietly and respectfully. Parents comment favourably on the liturgies which take place in school and an increasing number are attending these and participating in them. Engagement in the Parish Masses has grown and increased significantly over the past three years. Children are keen to participate in these which the school leads on a monthly basis. The First Communion programme is run jointly between the parishes and co-ordinated by the lay chaplain. Both parish priests are involved and parents now have their own sessions as well as the children. This is a promising development and has had the impact of parents moving their children from other schools to St. Nicholas.

Focal points around the school play a fundamental role in the prayer life of the school, which is fortunate enough to have a large atrium area in the centre of the school building. This provides the space for a permanent but ever-changing focal point. This reflects the liturgical season and is a place where children can be found reflecting and re-engaging with what has taken place in whole school liturgies.

Classroom prayer is an area which the school is developing. At present it would seem from what was observed that the emphasis is currently on children doing or discussing a particular topic – almost as an extension of their RE lesson, although teachers did light a candle and try to create an appropriate atmosphere. It is an area where teachers need support to fully appreciate what an act of worship is and why we have them in school. The acts of worship experienced throughout the inspection tended to have an excess of talking to the children and little time for them to reflect, be contemplative or demonstrate their own skills in how to plan and lead prayer or worship. Given the journey the school

has been on and the desire of the teachers to develop the relevant skills, there is every confidence that this will become an area of strength in time.

Prayer outside of the curriculum day is also something which adults are taking up. There is a small prayer group which meets weekly and opportunities to pray for particular members of the community are welcomed.

The chaplain also runs what is known as the 'Mustard Seed' group which changes in constitution every few weeks and is determined by the focus of the group at different times. This means it attracts different children for specific projects. During the inspection the invitation was to any child who wished to make cards for a teacher off sick for some time. The main remit of the Mustard Seed group is to serve the needs of the wider community in a variety of creative ways and attract as many children as possible over the course of a year.

Through the traditions and practices of the Catholic Church, children are being helped to develop a strong sense of what is right and just. They are supported through a restorative justice approach to make reparation when they make mistakes and helped to see how their actions impact on one another. This is ultimately life giving and helps the children to grow as independent and socially aware young people.

Focus for Development

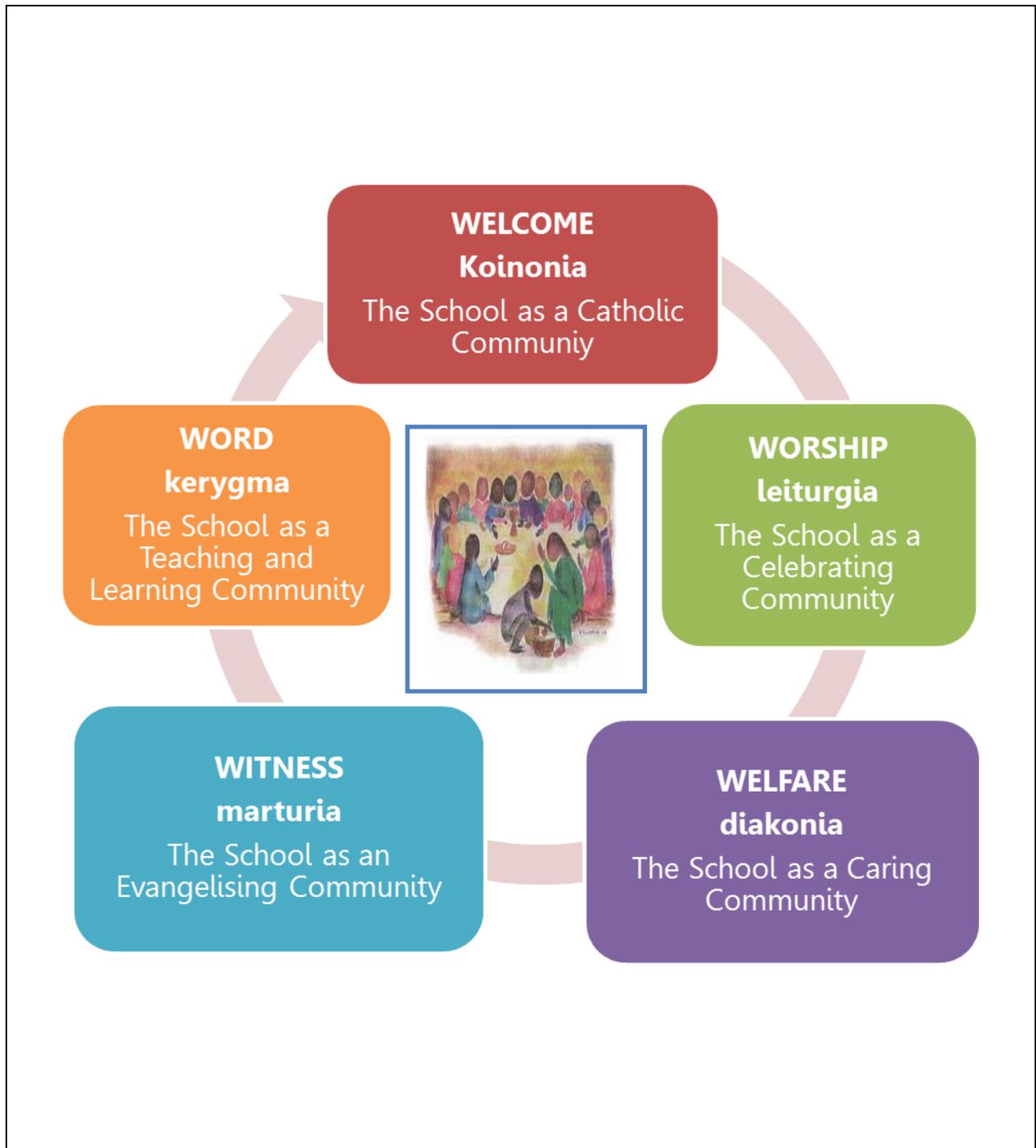
- To develop quality acts of worship to offer children opportunities for spontaneous religious experiences, including meditation, contemplation, and to develop their own skills in planning and leadership of worship in class and beyond.
- To develop a way of monitoring and reviewing the children's experience of worship through listening to their voice.

Conclusion

St. Nicholas' school has been on a tough and demanding journey but it is growing and becoming a school where everyone is committed to nurturing and developing one another. It is a school which has a real future and can look forward with optimism and confidence. It is also one which the Bishop, CAST and Plymouth Diocese can be truly proud.

Sarah Adams
January 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 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

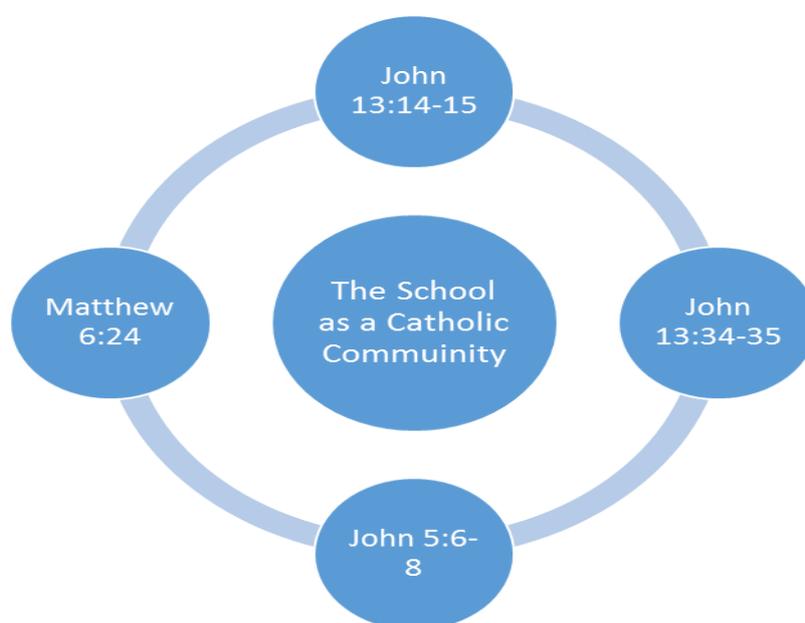
There will be three key areas within which these five elements will be reviewed:

- 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 '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.