

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

**CANON 806  
INSPECTION REPORT**



Our Lady's Catholic Primary School  
Chanter's Hill  
Barnstaple  
Devon  
EX32 8DN

URN 140739

Head Teacher: Kelly Dunne  
Chair of Governors: Sandy Anderson

## Introduction

The inspection of Our Lady's Catholic Primary School was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with Plymouth Diocesan Framework and, as the school is an academy, the Schedule for Diocesan Canonical Inspections, approved by the Bishop of Plymouth.

## Context for the Inspection

Our Lady's is an average sized primary school serving the community of Barnstaple and taking children from a much wider area. Although most of the children are from a white British background 16% of the children come from a diverse range of other ethnic backgrounds. 11% of the children have English as an additional language. 20% of the children are in receipt of free school meals and 23% of children are in receipt of pupil premium funding. 9% of the children are recognised as having SEND (Special Educational Needs/Disability).

Since the last inspection the school has become a part of CAST (a multi academy trust incorporating all the Catholic schools in Plymouth Diocese).

<b>Key Finding Grade 1:</b>
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<b>John 13:14-15</b>
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**"If I the 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 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.

The above commentary on John 13:14-15 truly reflects the life and witness of Our Lady's School. Spending time in this community is a privilege. The quality of witness is tangible in the relationships that exist amongst the adults and children of this community. The school's mission statement is a genuine expression of how this school functions and as a consequence the message and presence of Jesus Christ lies at the heart of the community. The open, warm and honest disposition of the leadership team enables adults and children alike to grow in their own confidence and ability to be welcoming, loving and generous in their desire to be a community which is faithful to the Gospel.

Our Lady's is a school which, on every level, is firmly rooted in the mission of the Church and demonstrates what it means to be a disciple of Christ. The commitment the school has to improving standards and ensuring that children experience high quality teaching and opportunities to learn is firmly rooted in a belief that this is what the gospel teaches. Learning across the school is supported by a rich liturgical and prayer life which all value and appreciate.

## Summary of Key Findings

- The spirit of the gospel permeates every aspect of the school life. This is tangibly evident in the way that the Gospel of Sunday becomes a thread running through the school week and is taken up in a variety of ways.
- The school's mission statement to 'bring the message of Jesus Christ to the centre of the community' is very evident in all areas of school life.
- Relationships within the school community are highly positive and contribute to the success and ethos in a variety of ways. There were many examples of this including the generosity of all the staff in the school (regardless of position) to spend half of their lunch time sitting with the children and provide a family meal experience for them. As a result behaviour at lunch time has improved and children are learning how to sit at a table and eat using appropriate utensils. Children commented very favourably on this new development.
- The school has invested heavily in THRIVE, a national programme which seeks to ensure that every child feels valued, appreciated and involved. The impact of this investment is that the whole staff group works as a cohesive whole to ensure that the needs of every child are met. As a result children feel safe and confident that all adults will know how to respond to them, particularly when they are struggling or distressed. Safe guarding is given a particular prominence in the school and as a consequence children feel safe and cared for.
- The faith life of Our Lady's pervades every aspect of school life. Stunning focal points, artefacts, stained glass windows and children's religious art work and writing are found throughout the school (in and out) testifying to the importance of faith and practice within the community. This is further enhanced by a varied and rich liturgical life. Children respond well and enthusiastically. They pray and sing with enthusiasm but also a gentle and quiet respect.
- The quality of teaching and learning is rich. Teachers take great care over their preparation and provide children with stimulating and engaging lessons. Teachers make sure that they know their children and as a consequence their capacity to differentiate ensures that all children have the opportunity to make progress.
- Different groups within the school ensure that pupils have a strong voice in decisions relating to their learning and well-being. The pupils are keen ambassadors for their school, in the parish and in the wider community.
- Across the school children's behaviour was exemplary.

## Areas of Focus for Development

The school is facing a major recruitment process as key people including the Head Teacher will be moving on at the end of this academic year. It will therefore be essential that whoever is appointed both to leadership and other roles are given the best possible induction so that the Catholic life of the school does not suffer or diminish. This will need to be planned and supported.

The gospel passage selected for this grade is Jesus washing the feet of his disciples and telling them that they must do the same if they are to be his friends. Our Lady's is a school where there is an absolute commitment to 'washing the feet' of all who come into the school. The quality of welcome, welfare and witness is tangible and will be clear from looking at the key findings. The adult members of the community have made a conscious decision to serve in all dimensions of school life and do so with love, warmth and compassion.

The quality of welcome in the school is reflected in the manner in which it embraces children with a diverse range of needs. These may be to do with language, emotional and behavioural needs or physical needs. All children are considered to be unique and special and those who are particularly vulnerable find themselves in a place where adults will always go more than the extra mile for them. The school has reputation in the wider community for the work that it does for the most vulnerable of children. 'Welcome' in this school is not simply the way people from outside are greeted on arrival, but very much a disposition of everyone at the school, both adults and children. This was very evident in the natural way children conversed with adults and one another. Adults consistently demonstrated their capacity to listen and be available to the children and to each other.

From the Parent's questionnaire it is clear that parents are very happy with the school. With no desire to be complacent, the school continues to seek ways to engage parents who may find getting involved in their children's education difficult. For example the school runs a 'dad's dinners' group where dads are enabled to cook a meal with their child and then take it home. This is proving to be a popular and successful venture.

Communication across the school is helpful and informative. This extends to the links with the parish where the parish council receives full and regular updates from the school about what is going on in the school. The school council minutes reflect rich conversations and positive decisions being made by the children with the support of adults. Thus the voice of the children is heard and they feel valued.

The school has strong links with the wider community and reaches out in a variety of ways through its charity work most notably for CAFOD, Shelterbox, Macmillan, Operation Christmas Child, the local Freedom Centre and other charities. The school has also forged links with a parish school in Makemo, Kenya and with a Polish school. Children are nurtured and encouraged to see the needs of others and are growing in their appreciation of what they have and what others lack. Through liturgy and prayer times the children are enabled to reflect on these needs and as a consequence have a heightened awareness of what is important and how much influence they might have in supporting others.

Other examples of the school's links with the wider community include the many relationships that the school has with other external bodies including the Diocesan network, the local schools partnership, and support for middle leaders aspiring to grow in leadership skills.

## **Focus for Development**

- To ensure that the language of the school's SEF truly reflects how the school lives the Gospel so that it:
  - a) It supports the induction of all new staff into the Catholic life
  - b) Encourages and enables a confident commitment to evangelisation.

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

### **Grade 1**

**John 13:14-15**

At the very heart of this school is an absolute commitment to service and a service that meets the needs of the children, providing them with the best possible education that they can have in the context of a caring, challenging and nurturing environment rooted in gospel values. This does not happen by accident. It requires effective and committed leadership by people who hold these values dear and strive to live them out. Our Lady's is blessed to have a highly dedicated team of leaders and an encouraging but challenging governing body.

The dedication and commitment of the adults at the school, which is commendable, is enriched and flows from feeling valued and appreciated. The leadership models for all staff what it is to witness to Christ and as a consequence everyone works to the best of their capacity, seeking support where necessary and being supportive to others. There is at Our Lady's a strong sense of shared mission, purpose and vision. This leads people to be self-evaluating, open to monitoring and willing to engage in searching analysis. Thus the school has sound systems in place to ensure well-focused plans are guided by gospel values.

Having the Catholic Life of the school as a standing first item on the agenda of governors meetings keeps the governors focused on the core purpose of the school and enables them to be confident in how the school is living its mission. The governors are growing in their own ability to evaluate the effectiveness of this work and support the leadership within the school to identify staff needs and respond appropriately.

Although the school faces some uncertainty until it appoints a new Head Teacher and other key staff, the staff are responding well to the challenge that this presents them with. Morale is generally high as the current Head re-enforces the belief that the school's success lies not in her but in the shared commitment that the whole staff has to doing its very best for the school and especially for the children. Without the school's absolute commitment to service this might not have been the case.

## **Focus for Development**

- The governors are only too well aware of the responsibility they have to appoint a strong, committed and dedicated Catholic to the Headship and to ensure that their induction fully embraces the ethos of this very special school.

Jesus is the model for anyone who wishes to teach in a way that reflects the gospel. His actions often spoke louder than his words as he reached out to everyone, finding different ways to enable people to hear his message and to learn effectively. Thus, in a school that is committed to modelling Christ, it is not surprising to find teachers and teaching assistants who reflect Jesus in their approach to teaching and learning.

Curriculum RE has a high status and is seen to be important to teachers and leaders. Governors are committed to the importance of RE and have in place a programme for monitoring to ensure that they are effective in their support. The enthusiasm and commitment of the RE leader helps to create an enthusiasm for teaching RE. Her encouragement is enabling teachers to grow in their confidence and desire to offer well prepared and thoughtful lessons. Her attendance at Diocesan meetings and the school's commitment to INSET ensure that the teachers are given the information they need to develop their teaching in RE. This has clearly been successful as all teachers plan skilfully and appropriately, conscious of meeting the needs of all the children and in particular preparing lessons that differentiate based on religious literacy.

Lessons observed were engaging, challenging and often dynamic. Teachers have excellent relationships with the children and they are keen to learn. It is a credit to the school that, as a consequence of their commitment to THRIVE and the training that the adults have taken part in, children who are particularly vulnerable, are supported fully to succeed and feel positive about their learning. Talking to children revealed that they enjoy their learning in RE and believe that all the adults help them to learn. In many of the lessons teaching assistants were used very effectively to support children's learning and worked well with them.

Marking across the school is consistent and ensures that children feel that their efforts are validated. Teachers give children time to respond to comments and to understand what they need to do to improve.

The success of the teaching in RE has come about as a consequence of the induction that the leadership enables for teachers when they first come to the school either as NQTs or as teachers with experience but less knowledge of the RE curriculum. The RE leader makes a point of supporting the planning of RE and ensuring that teachers are not floundering or lacking in confidence. Monitoring and self-challenge ensures that all teachers are constantly trying to improve on what they offer. The fruit of this is evident in the obvious learning that is taking place, the enjoyment of the children and the displays around the school which reflect the learning taking place.

### **Focus for Development**

- Continue to embed differentiation, be clear with children about their targets and continue to build upon current excellent practice.

The liturgical life of Our Lady's is a deep and profound expression of the strongly held gospel values which lie at the heart of the school. Throughout the school there are expressions of an alive prayer life which begins each day with Sacred Space, an opportunity for all adults who choose to gather and to reflect on the gospel of the day. Many of the adults including support staff, such as the care-taker, welcome this opportunity. Many expressed their appreciation of it, including a student who had found it a very positive experience on his placement. It is a sign of the welcome in the school that everyone is encouraged to participate and a sign of the faith life of the school that so many wish to do so, despite all the pressures of the day ahead.

Parents are encouraged to join the school for the weekly whole school liturgy and some are pleased to be able to do so. This is an opportunity for the whole community to gather, listen, sing (very well), reflect and pray together. The children clearly embrace the time and join in with enthusiasm. Each week awards are given out at the end of the liturgy to the person in each House who has achieved the most house points and there is also usually a Citizen of the Week award for each year group. During Lent, however, the school has had a particular focus on how the children are Fruits of the Spirit. Anyone can nominate a child for a particular Fruit and children decide which Fruit of the Spirit they are going to focus on each day. Again the children have embraced this with enthusiasm. The school's newsletter which is also on the website lets the parents know what the children are doing and reminds every one of the importance of living the gospel.

Classroom prayer times are also very reflective experiences. The children are used to sitting quietly, being prayerful and participating in ritual action. In year one children were able to talk about the symbols in the liturgy and share their own prayers that they had created. Focal points in the classrooms were genuine reflections of the work that children had been doing in RE and also showed the engagement that the children had with them.

The school has strong links with the parish and although the parish church is some distance away the school is occasionally able to celebrate Mass in the parish with the parishioners such as when the Year 6 are leaving. In addition the school celebrates other seasons in the Church when possible. At other times parishioners join the school in celebrating significant events

The school fully supports the children's First Communion programme and members of staff are catechists for this in their role as parishioners. On occasions such as First Communion and Harvest the school's choir provide the singing and also sing on other occasions such as with the Barnstaple Ladies' Choir.

### **Focus for Development**

- Ensure that liturgy is monitored and evaluated effectively, gathering from the children and adults insight into the impact of what is being offered and looking for ways to develop and improve the provision.
- Continue to develop the liturgical skills of the children so that they can lead and plan their own liturgies.

In every aspect of the life of this school the spiritual and moral development of the children is clear to see. Children are nurtured in their spirituality and encouraged to express their sense of God's presence in the everyday moments of life. This was specifically evident in a class act of worship where children easily and without prompting could say where they had experienced God that day. Their understanding of this concept was hugely encouraging. Their deep sense of awe and wonder is very real. Children are also able to speak of their ability to discern through an act of consciousness, where they have allowed God to be the light for them and where they might have blocked it. The on-going conversations and teaching that takes place in the school allows the children to do this.

The traditions and prayers of the Catholic Church lie at the heart of the school's liturgical life and provide a context that enriches the prayer life of the whole community and stimulates development of all the community. Meditation, prayer, ritual all add to the experience available at Our Lady's.

Scripture also plays a key role. Each week a quotation from the Sunday readings provides a focus for the week. During the week of this inspection the quotation was 'You are God's Work of Art'. This phrase formed the focus for the whole school liturgy and then a framework for the week, assisted by a framed image with the words, given to each class to go on the classroom focal point. The message of the liturgy is further explored by adults and children as the week progresses.

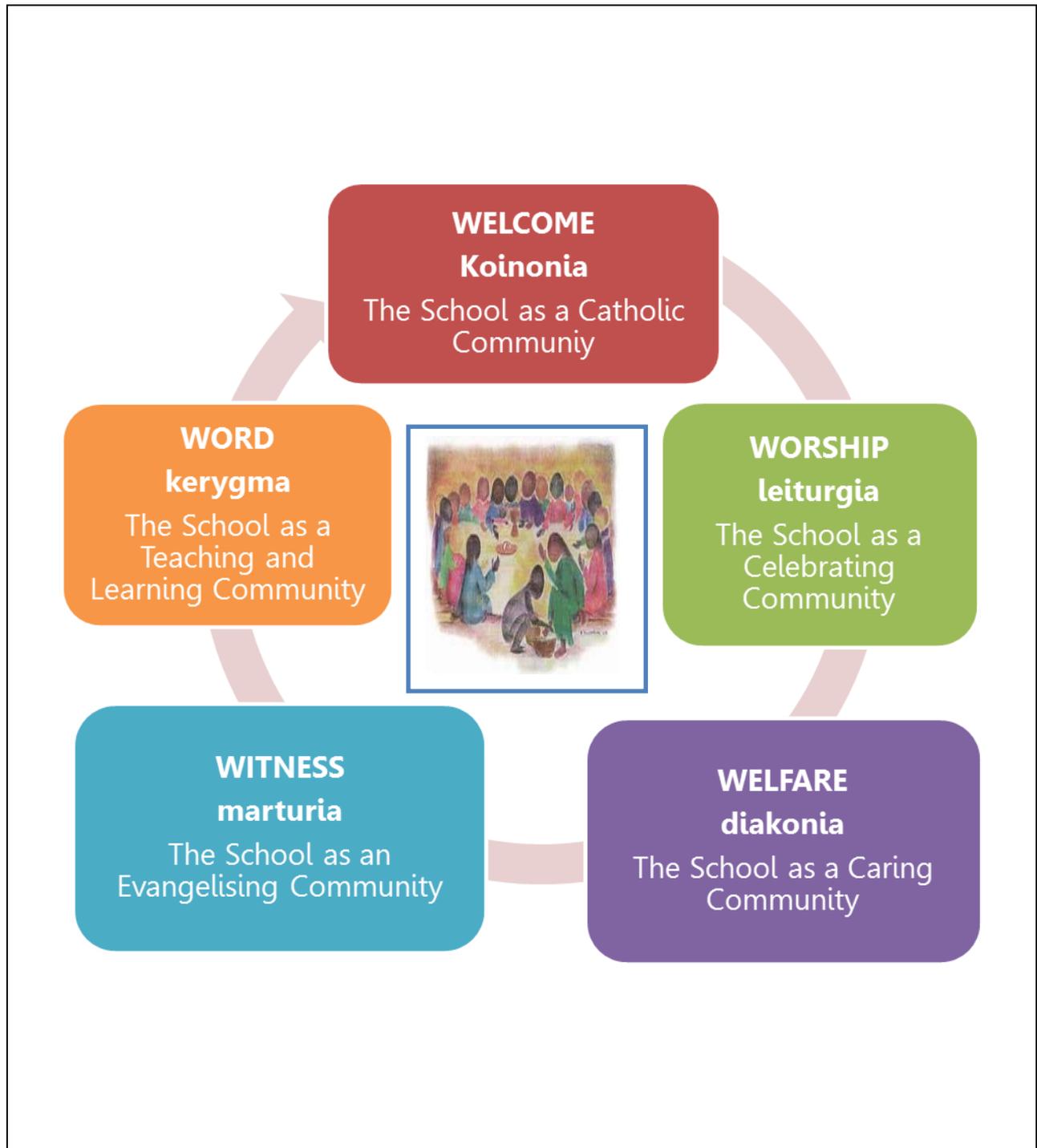
Engaging with the Fruits of the Spirit as a Lenten focus is proving to be a real opportunity for the whole school community to welcome the gifts of the Spirit in themselves and in others. Through this the school is seeing how precious each person really is.

## **Conclusion**

Our Lady's is a school firmly rooted in service to all and lives this from the heart. It is a school which is undoubtedly going to grow and flourish as a living, breathing Christian community. The absolute commitment to service will be what enables the children to become the best that they can be and for the adults to be nurtured and nourished to achieve even greater things. The current Head Teacher, who has given so much to this school, is to be congratulated and commended for her own rich faith life that has been so instrumental in bringing about the success of this school. She will be greatly missed but she leaves behind a committed and loving staff group who will no doubt carry the mantle and support the new leadership team once it is in place. Our Lady's is a school of which the Bishop, the diocese, parents and parishioners can be very proud.

**Sarah Adams**  
**March 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**

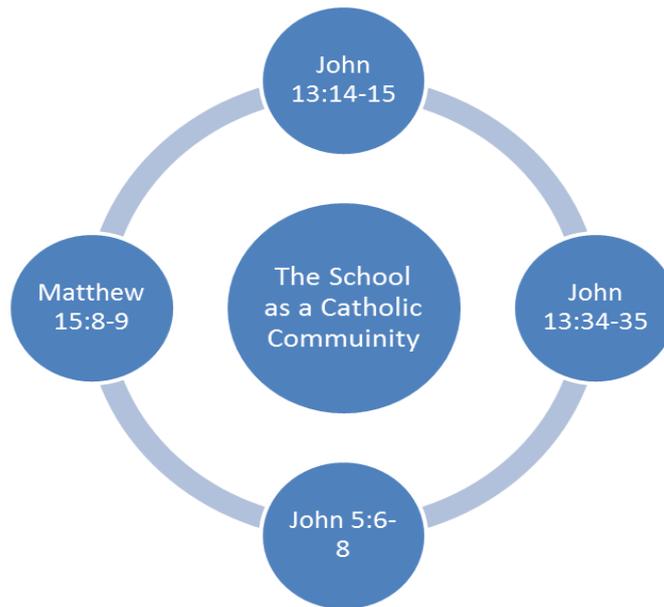
There will be three key areas within which these five elements will be reviewed:

- 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 one 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: '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.