

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

**CANON 806
INSPECTION REPORT**



St. Mary's Catholic First School

Lucetta Lane
Dorchester
DT1 2DD

URN 140771

Head Teacher: Miss Jackie Clayton
Chair of Governors: Mr. Jared Parkin

Introduction

The inspection of St. Mary's Catholic First School was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with Plymouth Diocesan Framework and Schedule for Diocesan Canonical Inspections (806), approved by the Bishop of Plymouth.

Context for the Inspection

St Mary's is an average sized First school with 154 pupils on role. Of these 5.8% of children are in receipt of pupil premium and 3.2% of children receive free school meals. Significantly 12.9% of children are on the SEN register and 1 child has a statement of special educational needs. 7.1% of children have English as an additional language and 1.2% of children come from British Service families.

Since the last inspection the school has become an academy as part of CAST – a multi-academy trust incorporating all Catholic primary schools within the Diocese.

There has been a complete change-over of staff apart from the Head Teacher since the last inspection and the Deputy Head is currently on maternity leave.

Key Finding Grade 2:	John 13:34-35
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'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. Mary's First School is without doubt a school where the Christian expectation to love one another is very strong. This is a school with many strengths. It is a school which nurtures faith, hope and love and where every child is seen as a unique and a special child of God. At the heart of the school's vision is the desire that all children can grow 'knowing and learning about God's love', rooted in Gospel values and attitudes.

Visiting the school quickly reveals how there is an absolute commitment on the part of parents, governors and staff to work together to provide a rich and nurturing learning environment for the children. Governors take their role seriously. They are not only challenging but also very hands on when it comes to responding to needs within the school. The school's parents association is also a great asset and having established some very positive links with the parish community many events involve a triad of groups, ensuring that home, school and parish links continue to grow. This has been enhanced by the arrival of a

new parish priest who has been warmly welcomed and in turn has embraced the school community as a significant and dynamic asset to the parish.

In terms of teaching and learning, the school has seen a number of changes over the last five years and the only member of the teaching staff present at the last inspection and still present is the Head Teacher. This gradual turn-over of staff has meant that all teachers are new to the teaching of RE and have required a significant degree of induction and support to deliver the curriculum. They have approached this challenge with a genuine desire to do well and have been ably supported by the Head Teacher. There continue to be areas for development and growth but confidence will come in time. There is a belief that there is the capacity for the school to move forward in this area, not least because the school has identified the areas where they need to make progress so that ultimately the children are enabled to achieve at the highest levels.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The school's vision and mission lies at the heart of the school. The mission statement emphasises that the school desires to 'build a community where all can grow knowing and learning about God's love'. This is very evident in the way the Gospel is at the heart of every action and decision made in the school.
- St. Mary's school is rooted in Catholic Tradition and has strong and positive links with the parish. It has a developing liturgical life and is well-supported by the Parish and Parish community.
- Children are happy at St. Mary's. They demonstrate this in their calm and joyful presence around the school. Their behaviour is exemplary. Teachers have high expectations and children respond appropriately to the boundaries set. Children are well cared for and experience consistent nurture and care from the adults around.
- With the changes in staffing over the years the teaching of RE requires some significant work. The teachers are committed to their own development and are committed to providing dynamic and positive learning experiences for the children.

Areas of Focus for Development

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

- Ensuring a full and supportive induction for the new Head Teacher
- Enable all teachers to develop their confidence in delivering effective and high level RE lessons.

The current Head Teacher is a well-established leader of the school who has been at St. Mary's for many years. Her personal spirituality is rooted in the Gospel and in particular to living out the message of Christ to serve one another. Within the school there is a genuine attitude of concern and care for every person. Relationships are warm and open. As a consequence St. Mary's is a very welcoming community. The senior leadership team model their own commitment to service in their interactions and concern for the needs of all. There are many examples of this which show that the school is slow to judge and reflective in its actions and words. As a consequence, relationships both within the school and further afield are strong and positive.

There is a very strong home-school-parish triage which is mutually supportive. As a result investment in the school is high on all levels. Parents, governors and parishioners work on a number of events each year to raise the profile of the school and to contribute to the wider community. In addition, the school's PTA has been very active in supporting the family of a child with leukaemia and getting the whole town to support the family. Parents and parishioners are regularly invited to school acts of worship and other liturgies.

The environment is well-kept and cared for by a very supportive Grounds team who work the school to keep the place looking neat and tidy. In addition children have their own gardening club where they grow vegetables which are then cooked and eaten in the school. The school's cleaner is also an asset to the school being supportive of its ethos and ensuring the safety of the children at all times.

The school has an exceptionally strong partnership with other local schools. This partnership ensures that a child's education from the start to the finish is carefully considered. Liaison with Middle schools around the transition of pupils enhances the care the school has for each pupil. Teachers work together across the schools to ensure the children's individual needs do not get lost. This is particularly so for vulnerable children when additional sessions are provided to support their transition and ensure that their needs are understood and met. In addition to the academic support across the schools the partnership collaborates in shared events such as the Olympic Torch event and Forest School events. The shared citizenship goals and presentation event is popular with children and adults. The school's Catholicity is something which the local partnership values and recognises as a strength of St. Mary's. Staff in other schools speak positively about the children when they move to the Middle school and recognise that they come from St. Mary's.

The school is also growing in its links with other Catholic Schools in Dorset as a consequence of Plymouth CAST (Academy Trust). St. Mary's makes a positive contribution to CAST by consistently participating in all that is on offer including INSET, Heads meetings, Teachers new to the Diocese training and other events. Because of the strong and long partnership with the other Dorchester schools, St. Mary's has something to offer CAST when it comes to collaboration and sharing of ideas. It is hoped that this is something the school will grow in confidence to offer further.

All of this and many other things demonstrate the high quality of Witness taking place at St. Mary's. This witness to Christ, in so many different ways, means that the school is well placed to engage fully with the Year of Mercy. Their corporal acts of mercy are numerous ensuring that children are growing into young people who are very aware of a world beyond

themselves and recognise the many riches they have which others do not. All the adults contribute to this message in their own demeanour and positive disposition to helping the children be alert to these needs.

Focus for Development

- Governors and leaders will need to ensure that the school's mission and vision continues to be at the heart of the school as it moves into a period of transition following the retirement of the current Head Teacher.
- To continue to find ways to share experience and good practice with other CAST schools.
- To develop links with another primary school with an ethnically diverse community to enable children to fully appreciate different cultures living within Britain and further afield.

The School as a Catholic Community

Leadership and Management

Grade 1

John 13:14-15

At the heart of St. Mary's leadership team is a resolute and determined governing body supporting an experienced and committed Head Teacher. The leadership has vision, confidence and at the same time humility to keep their focus on what Christ is calling them to and to serve with compassion and integrity. It is clear that they value every member of the community. The recent death of a member of staff called for a heartfelt response and an awareness of the impact of this on other staff. How this was dealt with and modelled was revealed in the way that year four children responded to another teacher who lost her parents in the space of two weeks. Their gentleness, understanding and openness with the teacher, seen during the inspection, revealed a highly developed level of empathy.

The team works well together. Governors are a regular presence in the school and engage with many areas of the school's activities. Each governor is linked to a subject area and ensure that they are aware of the developments and issues for teachers. They consider themselves to be 'critical friends' and act in accordance with this being supportive yet challenging when necessary. Equally the senior leadership has an established monitoring system of observations, lessons alongside book and lesson plan scrutiny. These help to identify areas of need for development. Teachers are given support and ways forward to develop their professional skills and application.

The leadership team is keen to develop the staff and so all staff are enabled to lead or manage at different times. They are encouraged to cascade training they have received and time is allocated for this to happen. This commitment means that external training is taken seriously. There is also a desire to ensure that middle leaders are grown and supported to move on to higher positions. To date the school has had four members of staff who have moved on to become Headteachers – one went through advisory for a time, supported by the school)

As a consequence of the faith and trust that the senior leadership team places in all staff there is strong morale and a genuine sense of collegiality. Team is at the heart of leadership and a team approach permeates all aspects of school life.

Focus for Development

- For Governors to ensure that the new Head Teacher is fully supported to maintain and move forward the life of the school by appropriate and constructive induction.

The School as a Teaching and learning Community
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Word

Grade 2

John 13:34-35

St. Mary's is a school where teachers truly model Christ in their approach to teaching. They relate well to children and have very positive relationships. Qualities of compassion, understanding and gentleness are evident ensuring that children feel safe and able to learn. Children are consistently on task and enjoy their RE. They readily worked in groups and were rarely off task. They can speak with a degree of eloquence about their learning.

Despite this the relatively high turn-over of staff in the last five years (three new teachers this year) means that development in RE has been slower than it might be. This is not due to any kind of complacency but for some a lack of experience in teaching RE. All teachers have embraced the RE curriculum and have been well-supported by the Head Teacher who is also the RE Leader. Her own personal faith, understanding and theological background have been very instrumental in helping teachers approach their planning and grow in their own knowledge. However, it is early days and it will take some time to embed all the dimensions (Attainment Targets, Levels and differentiation) needed to produce consistently high quality lessons where children can achieve at the highest levels. In some lessons observed expectations were not as high as they could be and although most children showed signs of progression there were others who did not.

Once teachers gain confidence in their approach to teaching RE they will see how and where they need to challenge children so that they move forward in their learning. The variety of activities offered to children suggests that teachers know how to be creative with their lesson planning and some do know how to differentiate based on RE rather than a child's literacy ability.

Marking in books lacks consistency. In some books there were some excellent examples of dialogue between the teacher and the pupil. Careful questioning in some books offered children a real opportunity to develop their learning but this has yet to happen on a consistent basis. Once teachers fully understand the purpose of the driver words in the level descriptors they will be more effective in their planning and the outcomes that they achieve.

The school has a large number of TAs who work very well with children. They are given targeted planning to work effectively and are a source of great support to the children. They work quietly but efficiently and have excellent relationships with the children.

The school is very aware of and has identified clearly the progress that teachers need to make, particularly in the area of AT2. Although planning does identify occasional AT2 activities teachers have yet to develop their own confidence in providing children with the

opportunity to explore topics from an AT2 perspective. In addition while there was some evidence of differentiation particularly in one lesson, this is another area for development.

Focus for Development

- To continue to provide appropriate pre-topic opportunities for adults to develop and share their subject knowledge to ensure a growing confidence in their ability to deliver engaging lessons where children consistently make progress.
- To ensure that all teachers develop their understanding of AT2 and assessment to enable all pupils to achieve their best.
- To create opportunities for teachers to observe RE and work with other teachers in CAST schools.

The School as a Celebrating Community
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Worship

Grade 2

John 13:34-35

It is clear from the calm and peaceful environment that St. Mary's is a school rooted in prayer and where children and adults are open to the presence of God in every aspect of daily life. Children have many opportunities to grow in this important relationship. Class meditation on a daily basis helps to focus the children to be still and reflective. They enjoy this and comment on it favourably. In addition a rich and varied worship life enhances these periods of silence. In addition to formal class prayers the children participate in class acts of worship that are intimate and thought provoking. TAs are encouraged to participate and do so willingly, often leading the meditation and in the case of one TA leading a lunch-time voluntary prayer group which a number of children attend. Scripture is revered and children are introduced to different books of the Bible not only in their RE lessons but in their worship also.

Whole school acts of worship are based on the Gospel message for the Sunday and children are given a mission to follow this message in the week ahead. This is often accompanied by a ritual action which further serves to enhance children's appreciation and understanding of the liturgy. Although children might be given small roles within the context of liturgy they are not currently preparing or leading liturgies. This is something that the school has identified as an area for development.

There is no doubt that the children of St. Mary's are enabled to grow spiritually and morally during their time at the school. Children have a clear sense of right and wrong, compassion for others and an appreciation of the presence of God in the world and in their own lives. The rich opportunities given to the children ensure that they are able to grow spiritually and may respond well if given the opportunity to participate in a retreat type experience by the time they reach year 4 and move on to their middle school.

The school has an excellent relationship with the parish priest who visits on a regular basis both formally and informally. New to the parish, it is early days but already the children enjoy his presence. He has been a great source of comfort to the school through a difficult period of loss. This has meant that the school have been able to pray and reflect as a

worshipping community. Just before the inspection he had helped the school to have a memorial service for the teacher who had died.

The prayer life, emphasis on Scripture and the disposition of the adult community all contribute to the children growing into responsible and spiritually aware young people.

Focus for Development

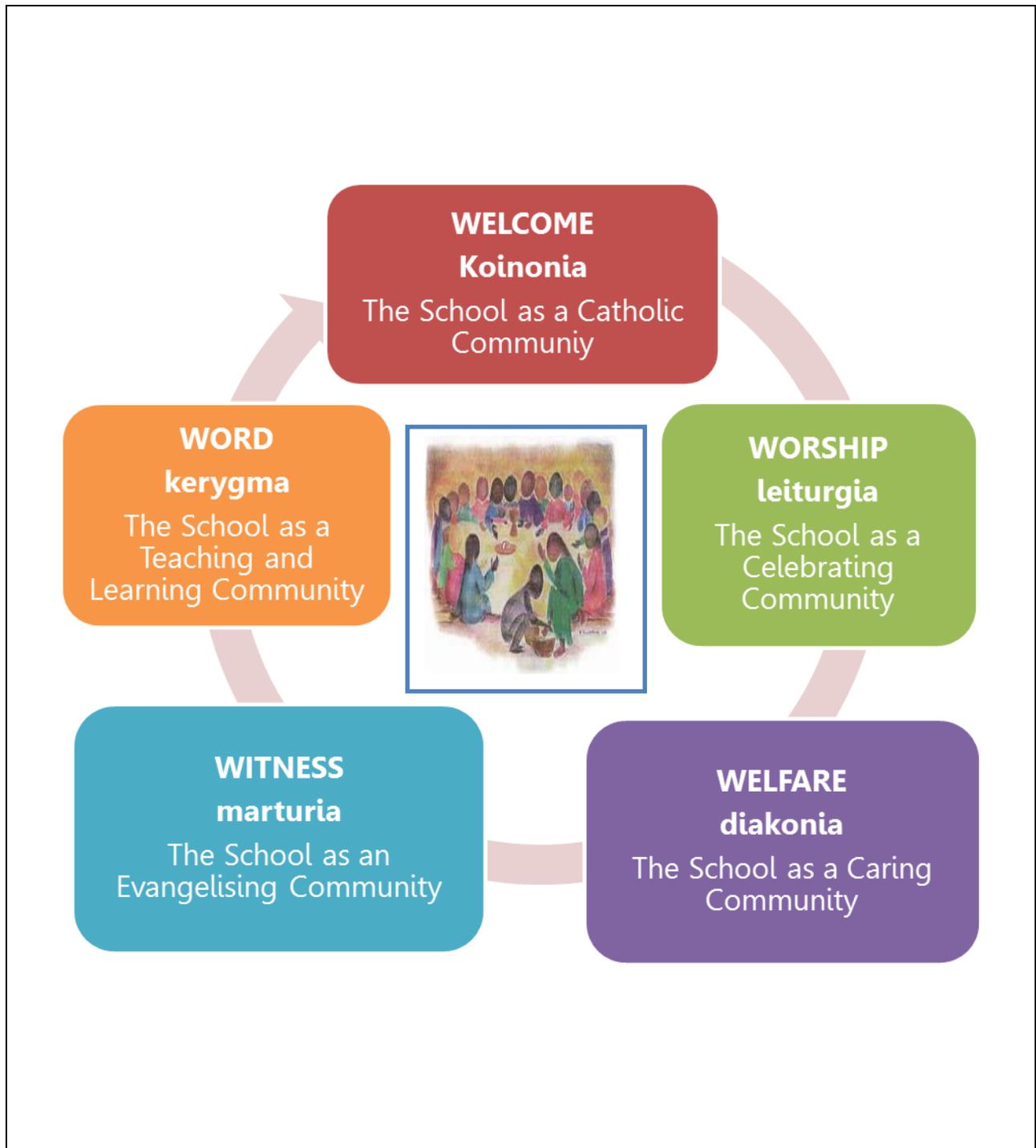
- To build upon current practice and begin to develop liturgy where children have a more active role outside of Mass.
- To ensure that teachers are helped to grow in their own understanding of the liturgical form so that they can differentiate an act of worship from something that in essence is not far removed from a lesson.

Conclusion

St. Mary's is a delightful school which provides children with a rich and rewarding experience. Children are enabled to learn and grow with confidence. The current Head Teacher who has led with such integrity is about to retire. She leaves behind her a school in a very positive place, ready for further challenge and growth. She is to be commended for the generous and rich spirit with which she has led the school. There is no reason to believe that the school shouldn't move forward and go from strength to strength. The Bishop can be confident that this is a school which takes its mission seriously and is an asset to the Diocese.

Sarah Adams
December 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

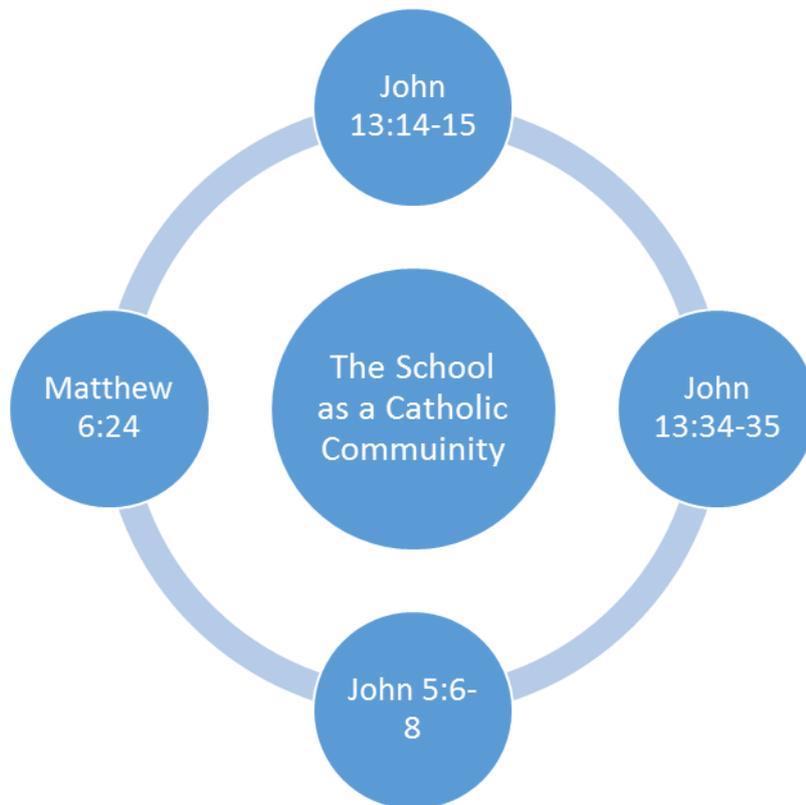
There will be three key areas within which these five elements will be reviewed:

- 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 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 '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.