

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

**Section 48  
INSPECTION REPORT**



St. Mary's Catholic Primary School  
Buckfast Road.  
Buckfast  
Devon  
TQ11 0EA

URN 140774

Head Teacher: Nicola Slack  
Chair of Governors: Rev. Fr. Francis Straw OSB

## Introduction

The S48 inspection of St. Mary's Buckfast 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

St. Mary's is a small primary school of 76 children with a wide catchment area serving the communities of Buckfast, Ashburton, South Brent, Totnes and Holne and further afield. A higher than average number, 21% of the children are in receipt of free school meals and 26% of children are in receipt of pupil premium funding. 24% of the children are recognised as having SEND (Special Educational Needs/Disability). Within the community inward mobility rates are also high with 34% of the current pupils on roll having joined after Reception year. The issue is more marked in some cohorts, such as the present year 6 where the percentage of inwardly mobile pupils is 56% and in Year 4 it is 50%.

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

The Head Teacher has been in post for 3.5 years.

<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 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.*

The above commentary on John 13:14-15 truly reflects the life and witness of St. Mary's School. Spending time in this community is a privilege. The quality of witness permeates all dimensions of school life. The school's mission statement based around the principles of 'Build, Nurture, Enable, Respect and Love Unconditionally' unconditionally is a genuine expression of how the school operates.

St. Mary's is a school firmly rooted in the mission of the Church. Gospel values are clearly understood and permeate all dimensions of school life. The dignity of every person coming into the school is genuinely respected and honoured. Parents and visitors consistently report their positive experiences when in the school.

The open and warm disposition of the leadership team enables every member of the community to grow in confidence and feel a part of a community which is faithful to the Gospel. On every level the school seeks to walk in the footsteps of Christ. As a result, children and their needs are central to every decision. The motivation to raise standards and provide a high quality learning environment not only reflects Gospel teaching but ensures that every child receives the best possible starting point to becoming the person God has created them and is calling them to be.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

- The spirit of the Gospel permeates every aspect of the school life. Numerous examples of this were experienced during the inspection. In particular, it was noticeable how children are encouraged to have a strong voice and to initiate activities in the school which flow from Christ's message. An example of this would be the children asking for, setting up and running their own 'FairTrade' tuck shop. This is highly positive and also maintains the school's drive for healthy snacks.
- The school's mission statement to 'Build, Nurture, Enable, Respect and Love Unconditionally' underpins every activity within the school and in the wider community also. All members of the school community participated in the generation of the mission statement and as a consequence all value it and work to live by it. Artwork around the school inspired and created by the children, depicts this. A visiting artist worked with the children to design and create lasting murals. A magnificent stained glass window incorporating the words of the statement has been made by a parent as has a large wooden Cross. Both are central to the new school hall and serve to be a constant reminder of the strong Catholicity of the school.
- Relationships within the school are highly positive and contribute to a warm and positive atmosphere. As a consequence, all staff believe that the school is a place where they know they can find help if they need it. (Staff Survey 2015)
- The school has a high proportion of vulnerable children. All staff take responsibility for ensuring that they are not left behind or excluded in anyway. The presence of a lead Thrive practitioner within the school and ensures that every member of staff is supported to work effectively and compassionately with the children. TAs play an active role in supporting these children. Through a staff survey the need for on-going professional development was an area identified and as a consequence all teaching assistants have had the opportunity and time to carry out action research projects with different groups of children. In addition, they have been enabled to attend training programmes where necessary. This is already having an impact on the children and is seen as a positive development. It is another area where members of the school community feel listened to and valued.
- The Faith life of St. Mary's is exceptionally strong. Excellent, dynamic focal points, artefacts, children's religious art work, the stained glass window and prayer walls around the school testify to the importance of faith and practice within the community. This is a dynamic element which fully supports the rich and varied liturgical life of the school. Children respond well and have a growing sense of the beauty of God around them. They pray and sing with reverence and lead liturgies with confidence.

- The quality of teaching and learning is strong. Teachers work hard to provide stimulating and engaging lessons which ensure that all children are constantly being enabled to make progress.
- Across the school children's behaviour was exemplary.

Area of Focus for Development
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- To continue the work of reflecting on what it means to be Catholic School.

St. Mary's as a Catholic Community
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(Welcome, Welfare, and Witness)
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<b>Grade 1:</b>
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<b>John 13:14-15</b>
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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. St. Mary'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. There are many examples of the quality of the school's Catholic Life. What follows is merely a snapshot of the most striking elements.

The quality of welcome in the school is reflected in the open disposition of the whole school community, particularly the adults, which as a consequence leads children to have open hearts and minds. There is a genuine desire within the school to believe in the uniqueness of each individual. This is seen particularly in the way that the school embraces children with a diverse range of needs. All children are considered to be special and those who are particularly vulnerable find themselves surrounded by adults who will always go the extra mile for them. It is clear that children feel safe at St. Mary's. Conversations between adults and children demonstrate the confidence that children have in the adults to support and enable them.

Pupils are encouraged to take care of themselves and their own safety through a variety of curriculum initiatives, which have brought into the school visitors such as health care professionals, the fire service and the Dog's Trust. By writing their own anti-bullying policy the children have developed a strong sense of what it means to care for others.

From the parent's questionnaire and a record of comments made by parents when visiting, it is clear that parents are very happy with the school. The school works hard to support and encourage parents to be in school wherever possible. An example of this would be the recruitment and training of parents to be librarians and support the Year 6 librarians in running the library. Parents have daily opportunities to meet staff both before the school day begins and at the end of the day. The Head Teacher makes a particular effort to meet with parents as and when they need to see her. In addition, the school has a Parents Association which also works to ensure that parents can feel involved in the life of the school community.

The school has strong links across the community and in particular with the Parish. St. Mary's is fortunate to be attached to Buckfast Abbey. This brings many blessings. The school shares its newsletter with the Parish and vice-versa. Every half-term the children also produce and edit their own newspaper. The editorial team for this apply for the positions and once appointed take their role very seriously. As a consequence, their newspaper is produced to a high standard. These go on the school website so that all may read it. Additional links with the Abbey mean that the school is offered regular access to the Abbey education centre. This is

an excellent resource, providing children with many opportunities to have time for reflection, learn through experience about the life of the monks and develop their understanding of key liturgical seasons. Some of this is through workshops and some through specific opportunities for prayer, e.g. attending Compline with the monks.

St. Mary's is strongly committed to engaging with the wider community. The school council works proactively to suggest and organise fund raising events which reflect their own interests and passions. For example, as a result of learning about habitats, the year 3/4 class decided to raise awareness within the school about the World Wildlife Fund and then went onto raise funds for the organisation. Other key fundraising initiatives include CAFOD, Sports Relief, Dementia Awareness and Sign to Sing. In addition to having excellent links with the local community the school also communicates regularly with communities much further afield. The Gardening club has strong links with a gardening project in Uganda. Regular communication via email and texts ensures that this is a real engagement with children on both sides learning about daily life at school and life living in Uganda and England, particularly relating the food that is grown and eaten. As a result of a parent's visit to Gambia, the school now has links with and children communicating with a school there. The importance of all this stems from the school being part of a Global Development Network. Along with other schools it has developed its curriculum to reflect a global awareness amongst pupils. An example of this would be children participating in a Refugee Day. This helped the children to develop empathy and understanding for those in other parts of the world. All of these ventures are supported by the prayer and liturgy life of the school which serves to enhance appreciation and an understanding of different faiths and communities in the wider world.

On an adult level 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**

Due to the large catchment area of the school many parents do not have the strong links with the school that is desired. The school has identified a need to develop further opportunities for parents to meet together in school, to increase involvement and to nurture supportive relationships with parents.

St. Mary's as a Catholic Community – Leadership and Management
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<b>Grade 1</b>
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<b>John 13:14-15</b>
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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. St. Mary's is blessed to have a highly dedicated team of leaders and an encouraging but challenging and effective governing body.

The Head Teacher of St. Mary's is a strong, committed and inspiring leader who works well with other people and enthuses them to be fully supportive of everything that the school does. Her passion, that children should take responsibility for their school, means that they have a strong voice and staff are supported to enable that voice. The dedication and commitment of the adults in the school is enriched and flows from feeling valued and appreciated. Most notable is the way that school surveys of staff and pupils are responded to. Surveys are carried out and then carefully analysed so that needs identified can be met. This leads to staff feeling valued and heard.

The leadership of the school models for all 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 St. Mary'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.

Whilst not underplaying the importance of understanding and challenging standards, governors are particularly concerned to ensure that the Catholic life of the school remains a clear focus. It is a standing item on the agenda of Governors meetings and ensures that the governors are 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 effective in their own evaluations and support the leadership within the school to identify areas for development and growth and respond appropriately.

### **Focus for Development**

The school has identified, appropriately two areas of development

1. To look for further opportunities for staff to develop professionally in the school and wider community.
2. To develop opportunities for staff to discuss matters of faith and be supported in looking at their own faith journey.

St. Mary's as a Teaching and learning Community
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Word
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<b>Grade 1</b>
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<b>John 13:14-15</b>
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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. As the RE Leader, the Head Teacher is particularly committed to the teaching of RE and her enthusiasm along with a very dedicated group of teachers, means that teachers are becoming more confident in their ability to offer well-prepared and thoughtful lessons. Teachers plan skilfully and appropriately, conscious of meeting the needs of all children and in particular preparing lessons that ensure that children consistently make progress.

St. Mary's is a school which other schools visit to look at examples of high quality RE teaching and also to engage in an ethos walk, looking at the many displays, working RE walls, focal points and other dimensions of how the Word is celebrated around the school.

Lessons observed were engaging, challenging and often dynamic. Teachers have excellent relationships with the children and they are keen to learn. Children are not passive in lessons but engage with energy and enthusiasm. Talking to the children revealed a high level of religious literacy. They enjoy their lessons and believe that the teachers are there to help them learn. They make sense of the topics they are being taught and can apply these lessons to other situations. For example, within the context of learning about Pentecost the children could make links between the mission of the disciples and their own mission as disciples in the world. This is evident not in an abstract way but in the many outreach activities that the children choose to engage in because of what they are learning about within RE, acts of worship and their general experience of learning within the school. In addition, and importantly, teachers are adept in asking quality questions that elicit deep responses from the children. The approach seems to be to start simply and then enable children to go deeper. This was very successfully observed in most lessons.

Children are given many opportunities to learn from and work with other schools locally on shared projects for example 'Christian Storytelling Festival', CAST Art Exhibition with 'Creation' as the theme and a Wonderful Woodland Day. Monks from the Abbey also support the children's learning by visiting regularly to talk about the various RE topics. These experiences add to the enjoyment of the subject for the children.

Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the learning environment. They are well prepared, supporting the children in a gentle but effective manner. They are actively interested in what helps children, particularly vulnerable children, to make progress and take opportunities whenever possible to engage in on-going support and training. This is a credit to their commitment to the school.

Marking across the school is excellent. It is consistent and ensures that children feel that their efforts are validated. Children understand the marking system, know what they need to do to improve and value their teacher's comments.

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 work on finding meaningful ways to assess RE and provide support for teachers and support staff to increase their knowledge and understanding of relevant Catholic Theology.

The liturgical life of St. Mary's is a profound expression of the strongly held gospel values which lie at the heart of the school. The traditions and prayers of the Catholic Church lie at the heart which provide a context for all aspects of the school's life and serve to enrich the prayer life of the whole community and stimulate development of all the community. Focal points, prayer walls, regular class prayer times which go beyond formal prayers and a sustained commitment to providing children with opportunities to grow spiritually, ensure that the faith life of the school is very much alive.

Each week a prayer theme helps to focus the whole community. This is written the newsletter in advance and forms the basis of class prayers. The focus is also displayed outside the school office as a reminder to everyone during the week. Parents have access to this and are encouraged to support their children by reflecting on the theme at home. Parents and carers are also encouraged to attend liturgies in school and in the Abbey when the school are celebrating Mass there. Although many do not come from Catholic families, an increasing number are beginning to take up these opportunities. Special occasions are always celebrated with some kind of liturgical event and most recently, as a consequence of an INSET day the school held a rich and inspiring Prayer Space event. Children spoke highly of this experience and are looking forward to the next one. During this time, children were given the opportunity to participate in quiet and reflective prayer activities

Children engage with reverence and ease in the prayer life of the school. As they go through the school they are enabled to lead liturgy and be fully involved in the music, readings and prayers. Music is a strength of the school and serves to enhance the beauty of the liturgy. Classroom prayer times are also very reflective experiences. The children are used to sitting quietly, being prayerful and participating in ritual action. Focal points in the classrooms are genuine reflections of the work that children had been doing in RE and also showed the engagement that the children had with them.

As has been noted, the children gain considerably from being so close to Buckfast Abbey. There are several churches within the Parish of Buckfast and the school engages with them all. In particular, each year the school participates in the annual crib blessings and take part in special services in the four churches. There are strong links with the school and the Parish working together on a number of projects. This ensures that the children know that they are part of a Universal Church and have a role to play within it.

As a consequence of the many spiritual opportunities, the high quality pastoral care, the opportunities for working outside in the environment and ultimately the strong pupil voice which is encouraged, it is not surprising that children of St. Mary's are well-behaved, respect one another and have a strong sense of what is right and wrong. They work well together, supporting one another and ensuring that this is an inclusive, caring school.

### **Focus for Development**

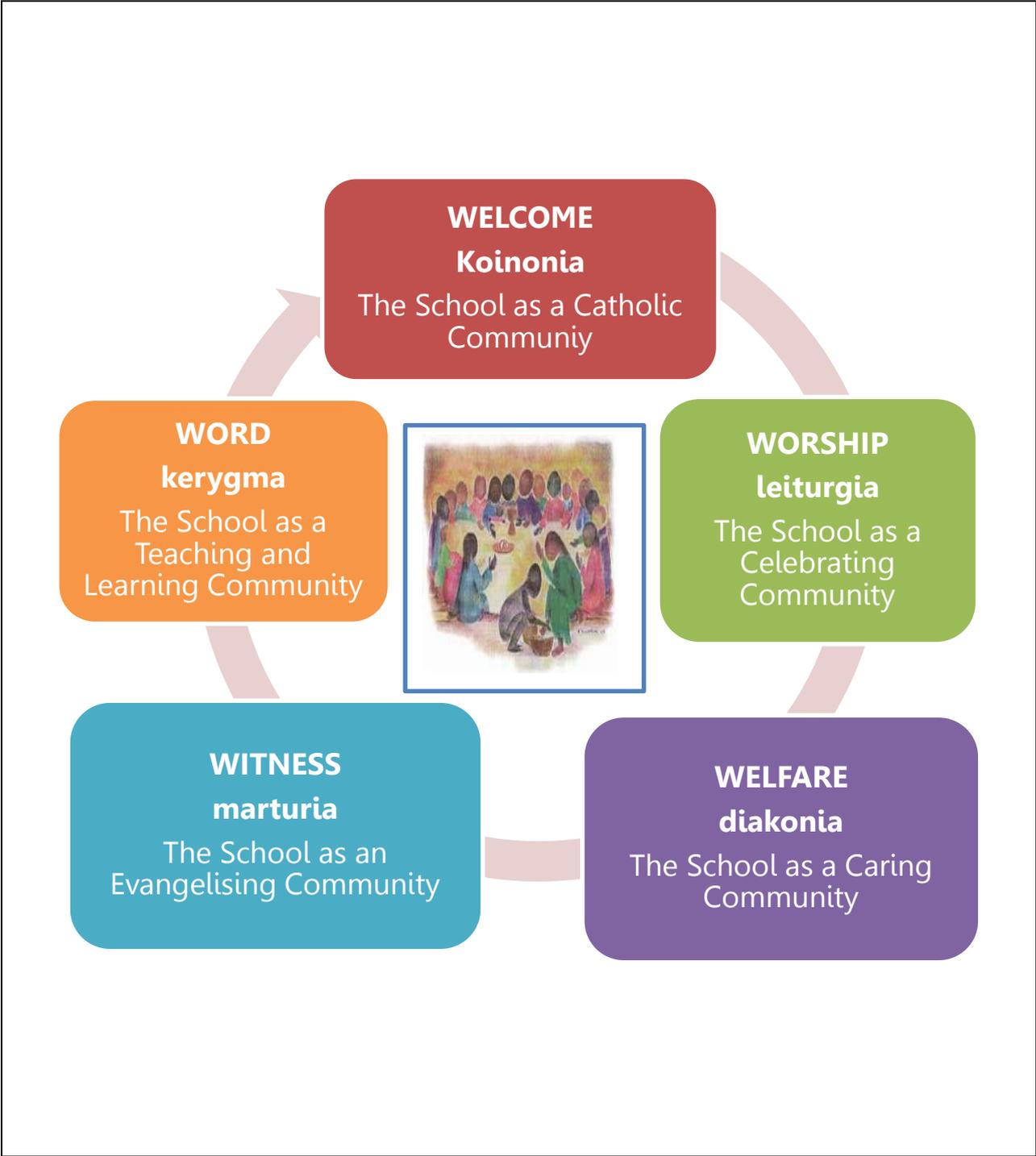
- Continue to build opportunities for pupils to be involved with staff in the planning of liturgies.

### **Conclusion**

St. Mary's is a school firmly rooted in service to all and lives this from the heart. It is a school which can only continue 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. This is a school of which the Bishop, the Diocese and all connected with the school can be justly proud.

**Sarah Adams**  
**June 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 word 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

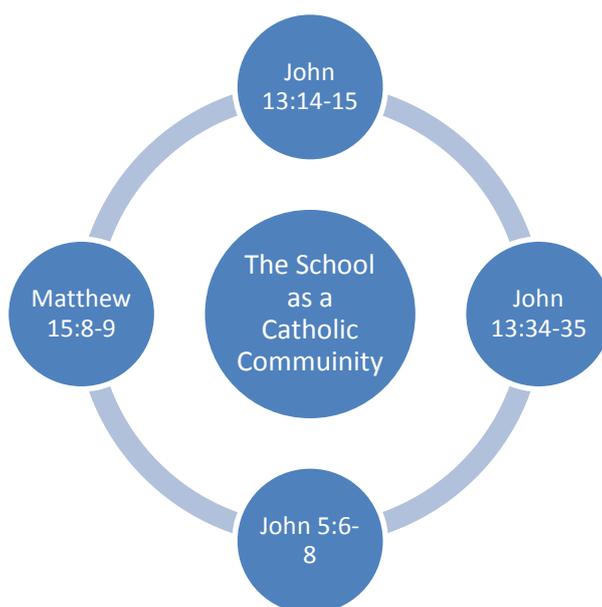
There will be three key areas within which these five elements will be reviewed:

- 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: '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.