

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

**CANON 806  
INSPECTION REPORT**



The Cathedral School of St. Mary  
Cecil Road  
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URN 140785

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## Introduction

The inspection of The Cathedral School of St. Mary was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with Plymouth Diocesan Framework and Schedule for Diocesan Canonical inspectors, approved by the Bishop of Plymouth.

## Context for the Inspection

St Mary's is a smaller than average-sized primary school with 112 pupils on role. Of these 53% of the children are EAL representing fourteen different ethnic groups and sixteen languages spoken across the school. 35% of children receive free school meals and the proportion of children known to be eligible for the pupil premium is significantly higher than the national average.

Since the last inspection school has undergone significant changes:

1. The transition from a single school to a federated school with another Catholic primary school in the area. The school now has an executive Head over the two schools, a Head of teaching and learning and a shared governing body. Becoming an academy as part of the CAST – a multi-academy trust incorporating all Catholic primary schools in the Diocese.

<b>Key Finding Grade 2:</b>	<b>John 13:34-35</b>
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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.

All the evidence is that St. Mary's is a happy school where children feel safe, valued and enabled. Parents recognise the enormous effort and commitment of the staff to ensure that the children in the school receive the best of care and opportunities. The school's mission statement developed by all members of the school community reflects this desire and has at its heart strong Gospel values, not least the unique nature of every human person being born in the image and likeness of God.

Very striking in the school is the way that children, from a considerable variety of backgrounds, are treated with respect, nurtured and enabled to grow to be the best that they can be. Many examples of children being cared for were observed. For example on our

arrival a small boy was fearful of our presence. His anxiety was taken seriously and he was helped to overcome his fear. Later he was keen to tell us what a fantastic school he was in.

Across the whole community there is a deep desire to be the best it can be. In line with other Diocesan schools the school is beginning to embrace a new framework for working. As all members of the adult community become familiar with this document and its expectations there is every belief that St. Mary's will continue to develop in all its fullness. Areas of focus for development will highlight where the school can improve and ultimately lead to it accomplishing its goal.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

- The school's mission statement states that it seeks to 'promote a catholic ethos of caring and forgiveness', and to nurture all aspects of a child's growth so that everyone can 'feel free to express themselves in a safe environment'. Over the two days of visiting this mission was very evident in all areas of school life.
- The faith life St. Mary's pervades every aspect of school life. Gospel values permeate and children and adults seem comfortable talking about and expressing their appreciation of this important dimension. Throughout the school evidence in the form of beautiful displays and artefacts testify to the importance of faith and practice within the school.
- The school has a rich and varied liturgical life. Children participate with enthusiasm and adults are growing in confidence to contribute to this important area. The quality of singing in the school is particularly notable.
- Children enjoy their RE lessons and some are making excellent progress. With greater focus on planning, differentiation and assessment in RE all children will have the chance of achieving at the highest level.
- St. Mary's has a very gentle and loving atmosphere and at the same time a real sense of purpose. Children engage meaningfully with staff and behave extremely well. High expectations and clear boundaries help the children to know how they are meant to be while still experiencing genuine care and affection from the adults. There is a strong sense of welcome not only in terms of going into the school but in the openness that people have to one another, especially when it comes to supporting and assisting one another.

### **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.

- That all adults, especially governors, become familiar with the Diocesan framework and have a planned approach to its full implementation and regular review.
- To provide and monitor consistent CPD for teachers so all can deliver consistently strong and engaging RE lessons. This would include:

1. Greater appreciation of differentiation in lessons to ensure that activities are appropriate to the needs and abilities of all children.
2. Ensuring that marking is consistent and focused on how children move on in their learning.

<b>St. Mary's as a Catholic Community</b>
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<b>(Welcome, Welfare, and Witness)</b>
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<b>Grade 1:</b>
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<b>John 13:14-15</b>
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The gospel 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. At St. Mary's there is an absolute commitment to 'washing the feet' of all who pass through the doors of the school. The quality of welcome, welfare and witness is tangible. Adults are open, honest and consistently caring of the children and each other. Parents are very happy with the school and feel confident that their children are being offered the best they can be. They themselves feel valued and appreciated, demonstrated in their desire to fully engage with the life of the school, despite for many, not having the language skills to fully participate in activities. Children who come to the school know that their needs are going to be met by the many different and varied support staff who work at the school. Thoughtful and careful analysis of the needs of the children has led to the school seeking out the specialist help they need to provide for the children be that linguistically, therapeutically or physically. Safe-guarding of all children is of paramount importance. Children feel safe and able to settle into the routines of the school day without anxiety.

The openness of the school means that parents know that they are welcome and who they can talk to. Problems, when they arise, are dealt with efficiently and sensitively. The school has made a point of running adult learning groups to support parents. These have proved so popular that further groups are planned. In addition the school has a real commitment to supporting families who are struggling. Specific examples include providing the means for children to get to swimming and going to family homes to help children get to school.

Within the school children from Year 6 take care of and become buddies to the children in the foundation class. This is immensely popular and something that the Year 6 children take very seriously and the little children really appreciate. It is another indicator of how the school witnesses to Christ and ensures that children understand this also.

The school has strong links with the local community and reaches out in a variety of ways. Links with the parish in particular are strong and continue to grow. In addition the school has many links with local organisations which enable children to engage in a vast array of activities in addition to the many charitable causes which the children and adults support. The vast majority of staff, through survey, report that they work in a place which helps them to think about the wider world and those around them.

Probably one of the strongest elements of this aspect of the school life is the sense that this school is one where everyone, including staff, feel cared for and appreciated. Staff surveys show that they feel that the school cares about their personal welfare which encourages them to want to do the same. Many examples record how staff consistently rally around when there is a need to be flexible for example in times of illness. As well as supporting each other, the school regularly supports students from a range of situations including childcare apprentices, medical students doing research, trainee social workers and trainee teachers.

### **Focus for Development**

1. To ensure that the SEF reflects the Gospel values that the school community lives.
2. To explore opportunities to offer adult formation on the Catholic way of life to staff and parents (e.g. CAFÉ programme)

<b>The School as a Catholic Community – Leadership and Management</b>
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<b>Grade 1</b>
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<b>John 13:14-15</b>
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The leadership of the school is firmly rooted in serving the needs of the school to ensure that the children receive the best possible education in a caring, challenging and nurturing environment. Gospel values inform the way leaders act and make decisions. The capacity of the leadership team to be reflective and consider how they work results in inspiring the whole school community to have a shared sense of purpose, mission and vision.

The school has a clear sense of where it needs to grow and make progress, particularly in teaching and learning. Leaders are open and honest about the work that needs to be done to improve standards and to support staff to analyse and self-challenge their own performance. Staff are encouraged and enabled to seek appropriate and effective training for their own development.

Governors have a clear sense of the mission of the school and make a valuable and effective contribution to its work and direction. Their knowledge and ability to challenge ensures that the focus of the school remains firmly rooted in its mission. All leaders including the governors recognise the work that they still need to do and are working hard to ensure that the school continues to make progress.

The leadership of the worship and RE is particularly strong. Both are given a high priority, seen in the on-going work through CPD to develop teaching. The RE leader has worked hard to develop the worship life of the school to ensure that it is meaningful to children and reflects fully the Christian mission of the school. Her very open and generous nature as both RE leader and Head of Teaching and Learning is an exceptional witness to the Christian life and an inspiring model to all.

### **Focus for Development**

1. For the governors to have a full appreciation of the on-going process of reviewing the Catholic life of the school by establishing a standing item on their agenda.

Throughout the school teachers and support staff consistently model Christ in the way that they relate to the children and deliver lessons. They are engaging, compassionate and reassuring so that children feel safe and willing to learn. It is clear from the planning and annotated planning that the teachers work hard. However, it is also apparent that teachers are unsure about how to approach their teaching in RE and as a consequence miss that dimension of Christ's teaching which was to challenge in such a way as to take people forward. In this respect teachers need to develop their capacity to offer lessons which will enable the children to learn and make progress.

The teaching varied across the school but generally reflected a need for help and guidance in both planning and delivery. Too often children were not challenged sufficiently. This is a school where a good proportion of the children come from practising Catholic families and who as a consequence are already in many ways religiously literate having a breadth and depth of religious knowledge and understanding. Unfortunately very little of the teaching really took this into account and the possibility for children to show their knowledge and move forward was not enabled.

For the most part activities offered to the children engaged them but did not always develop them or allow them to achieve at the highest level. Despite this children spoke of enjoying their RE and their books did reveal a variety of learning activities and approaches. For this to be even better the teachers need to be clear about the purpose of an activity and focus more on the RE content to avoid being too literacy biased. Children were not sure about their next steps. Once teachers are more confident about their marking they will be able to help the children be clearer about what is expected of them.

Planning of RE tends to be focused on AT1 activities. There appears to be little record of the AT2 discussions that take place and which the children were able to talk about. Further CPD and further work in the area of differentiation would make all the difference to the quality of teaching being offered. From conversations and observations it is clear that the teachers are committed to developing their teaching of RE but need greater support and confidence to do this.

### **Focus for Development**

1. For all teachers to develop their understanding of the religious experience of the children and differentiate lessons accordingly so that all children make progress.
2. To consider a variety of activities that help to engage the children in expressing their own thinking, beliefs and opinions (AT2).
3. To ensure that planning makes the best use of support workers by providing clear instructions and tools for evaluation. In line with this for the school to develop a robust assessment process which is consistent across the school.

The liturgical life of St. Mary's is a strong reflection of the deeply rooted values which lie at the heart of the school. The school has put considerable effort into developing the quality of prayer and worship experienced by the whole community. Classroom prayer and whole school acts of worship are prayerful, joyful and involve both children and adults leading and facilitating. A particular strength is the quality of singing which enhances the beauty of the prayer. Children clearly enjoy opportunities to gather. They participate with enthusiasm and quiet sensitivity. They are comfortable with periods of silence and respond well when invited to join in with prayer responses.

The school has been working on developing the liturgical skills of the children and when involved they participate with confidence and enthusiasm, taking their own roles seriously. In addition the school is keen to help parents become more involved and able to participate as opposed to being passive observers.

The school has strong links with the local parish and Mass is a regular part of the school's worship. The parish priest enjoys coming into classes to celebrate Mass and on special occasions the school join the parish community in the Cathedral to celebrate. Although this is a large space they enjoy being there and talk of how special it is to go to the Cathedral. The school fully supports the children's First Communion programme and all staff attend the First Communion Celebration each year.

An important aspect of the worship life of the school is the way it impacts on the lives of the children and adults. The messages received by reflecting on biblical stories and the teachings of Jesus are consistently lived out in the school. Forgiveness and reconciliation are very evident in the desire of children or adults to make amends when things go wrong. This is the culture of the school rather than one of punitive measures. Children recognise that they are uniquely special, something which is re-enforced on a daily basis with a song they sing – 'God made me as I am, part of Creation's plan'. When asked about this the children were able to explain that it helps them to see every person in the school as special. As a consequence they believe that relationships are strong and for them the fact that there are many different races in the school is a blessing rather than a challenge.

It is safe to say that at St. Mary's the prayer life is not only engaging and inspiring, it has a direct impact on the way children behave, relate to one another and deal with difficulties such as bereavement or loss. Children develop a strong moral code in their time at the school, a code which is rooted in a strong Christian vision with values that emanate from that.

### **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.

As has been highlighted all aspects of the life at St. Mary's contributes to the spiritual development of the pupils. Both adults and children are open to God's presence in all they encounter and as a consequence the desire to grow and develop spiritually is both tangible and encouraging.

Children demonstrate a mature capacity to be able to be still, reflective and to share their own experiences of God. This was evident in children as young as those in the foundation stage as well as children higher up the school.

Through a variety of opportunities and experiences the children are given clear messages about issues of morality and helped to understand how they form a part of a bigger community and contribute to it positively. Frequently acts of worship and assemblies lead to charitable activities and an appreciation of the needs of the wider world. Through their work on different Faith traditions the children are growing in a deep respect of other races and religions as well as growing strong in their own tradition and beliefs. The importance of this cannot be underestimated.

### **Focus for Development**

- Consider other opportunities for individual prayer outside of arranged times and develop meditation or opportunities for quiet contemplation for both adults and children.

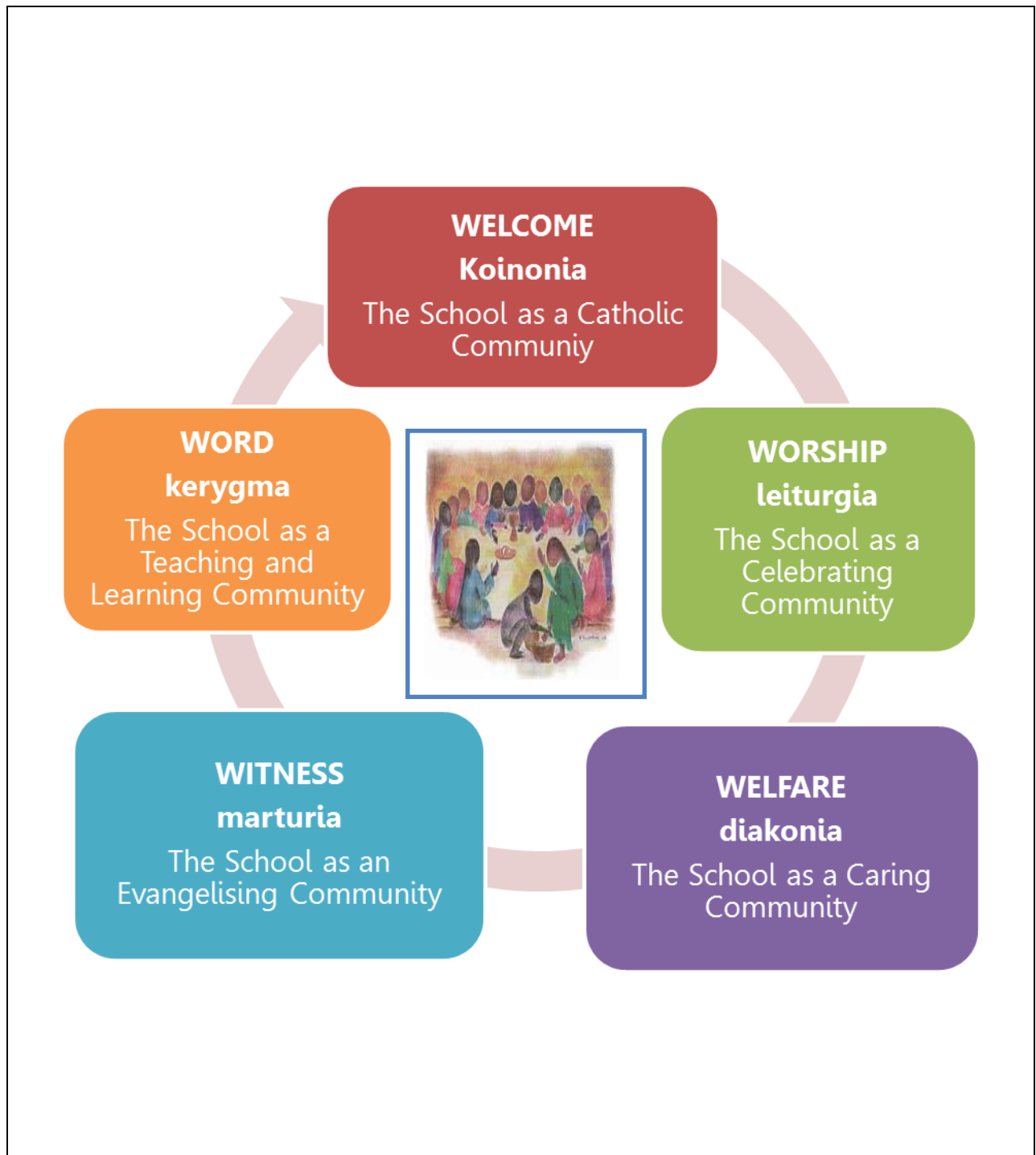
### **Conclusion**

The Cathedral school of St. Mary's is a school with a tremendous amount to offer and one which can be proud of its growing community. Service is absolutely at the heart of the school and it will be this that will enable the teaching and learning to ultimately develop and provide the best academic opportunities for the children. The strong community, committed staff and supportive parents, governors and parish make this a very special school of which the Diocese can be 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 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**

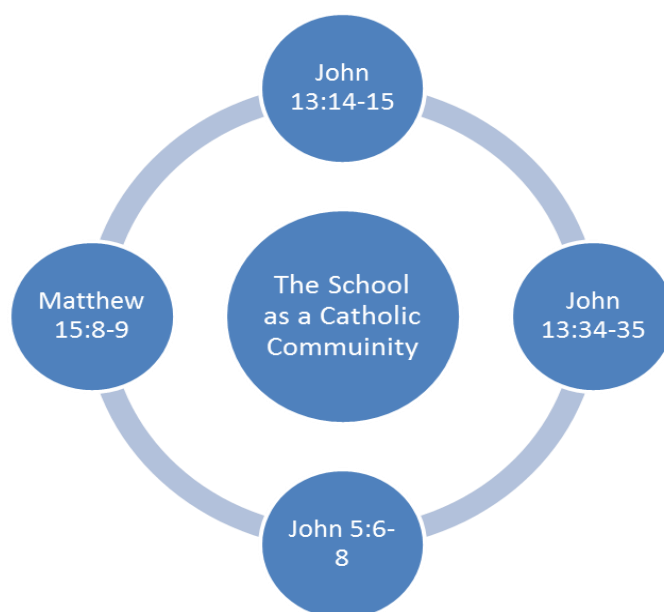
There will be three key areas within which these five elements will be reviewed:

- 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 anyone time the school may find different areas of its life at different points on the cycle:



### CONTEXT FOR THE CHOICE OF SPECIFIC SCRIPTURE REFERENCES –

Scripture has throughout history been interpreted in a variety of ways and is constantly being reinterpreted. The interpretations given here are one way of looking at how the passages may be understood within our own context. Equally there are many other passages which may have been selected but for now these reflect what is at the heart of our mission and seem appropriate.

**Grade 1: 'If I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you are also to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you'. John 13 14-15**

The night before he died Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Peter, one of the disciples was affronted. To wash another's feet was the lowest job of all, one done by the servants. Jesus, as the leader of the community he was about to establish, was very clear. The call to Christian ministry is a call to service, a humbling act of giving to one another. Unless we can serve our brothers and sisters we can have no part 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.