

DIOCESE OF PLYMOUTH

Department for Formation

**Holy Cross Catholic Primary School
Beaumont Road
Plymouth PL4 9BE**

URN 113487

**Head Teacher: Mr Paul Cotter
Chair of Governors: Marcia Wolstencroft**

**Record of Diocesan Review
24th April, 2009**

Introduction

The school was inspected by Ofsted in June 2008 and was judged to be an outstanding school. A new Section 48 Inspection process is currently being developed for use in diocesan schools. Pending finalisation of this process and as an interim measure, Bishop Budd has given his approval to a formal review to be conducted jointly by a diocesan officer and the school, to meet the requirements of Section 48 of the Education Act 2005. This document is an agreed statement of the outcomes of that review, to be shared with governors, parents and other stakeholders as the school wishes. It identifies some of the key strengths of Holy Cross and also areas of focus that have been agreed to further strengthen the life and work of the school. The review covered a wide range of issues and as a process it sought to be creative and to support the school in its ongoing development as a Catholic community.

The review was conducted by Sarah Adams (Diocesan RE Adviser for Schools) working closely with the Head Teacher, the Chair of Governors (Marcia Wolstencroft) and the RE Co-ordinator, Juliet Wilde. The outcomes of the review were agreed on the basis of:-

- documentation made available by the school;
- observation of lessons;
- a reflection with the members of staff, including the RE Co-ordinator;
- talking to children
- observation of an Act of Collective Worship
- observation of class acts of worship
- Discussion with the Parish Priest, also member of governing body.
- Discussion with Chair of Governors
- Conversations with staff members

Strengths of the School

As a Catholic School Holy Cross has many key strengths which highlight its distinctive identity as a Catholic school, emphasise its educational success and demonstrate its contribution to the Church's mission in education. The list below intends to be illustrative, not comprehensive.

Leadership

The Head Teacher's exceptional leadership skills mean that there is a very strong commitment to the Catholic ethos of this inspiring school. The governors, staff of the school and the local clergy have such strong working relationships that the children experience being in an environment where the spiritual commitment to the school flow out of Gospel values. The school's has a strong sense of identity as a Catholic school which is reflected in its religious life and its over-all pastoral care of the children. The leadership of Holy Cross has been very successful in developing a school where all staff and children know and understand the values which the school

stands by and lives out of. A particular strength of the leadership team is the role played by Juliet Wilde, the RE co-ordinator who supports the staff in helping them to develop their teaching with quiet efficiency.

Religious Life

The school has good links with the local parish priests who visit the school regularly and play an active part in the life of the school. Although the school no longer has easy access to the parish church due to its closure, the RE co-ordinator with the staff has worked hard to ensure that the children are able to participate in and celebrate meaningful and joyful acts of worship. Throughout the school the staff is also working hard to create meaningful prayer spaces for the children to focus on during the day.

During the visit the quality of prayer experienced in the school reflected the importance of prayer in the life of the school. It was very evident that children were used to being still, reflecting, and participating with depth in acts of worship. The main school Act of Worship led by the Head Teacher was joyful, engaging and prayerful. The children sang with enthusiasm and prayed with reverence. This reflected the commitment the school has to the celebration of different forms liturgy throughout the year including but not exclusively, traditional Catholic practices such as the rosary, the May procession and Stations of the Cross.

Throughout the day of the visit the behaviour of the children, their quality of welcome and inclusivity reflected their understanding of what it means to be in a relationship with God and with others. They showed a high degree of respect for one another and a genuine commitment to caring for one another. Throughout the day children were smiling, laughing and seemed totally at ease with teachers and each other. The teachers and other adults were equally respectful, modelling for the children positive attitudes and ways of behaving.

Teaching in RE

The lessons observed were well planned and creatively delivered. The children were engaged at different levels of understanding and seemed to enjoy the lessons which were delivered at a good pace and interactive. The use of ICT within the lessons gave the children an opportunity to access the subject in a lively and meaningful manner. Although the teachers have expressed some anxiety with the teaching of RE they work very hard to ensure that what they are teaching is accurate and well prepared. They are growing in confidence and with additional support to develop their ideas about how to approach the RE scheme, their teaching will become even more effective. This is an area that they have identified as something that they would like some additional help with.

Pastoral Life of the School

Holy Cross is a school with a very mixed population of children coming from across the ability and socio-economic range. It is a school which is rich in diversity and totally committed to inclusion. The school works hard to meet the needs of all the children and children who do struggle when they first arrive either with language or communication difficulties, soon make progress. This is partly to do with the quality of teaching they receive but also because of the caring commitment that all the staff have for the children. There are high expectations but there is also a great deal of compassion and understanding which results in children quickly feeling at home and safe. Their capacity to play and explore is nourished and nurtured leading to a confidence in learning. No child is ignored and adults and children are quick to notice the child in need. In addition a buddy system in the school where older children have responsibility for keeping an eye on and supporting younger children ensures good relationships between children of all ages.

This is a school that in the past year has also had to cope with a diminished staff capacity due to very tragic circumstances. The quality of the school is such that everyone has united in working together to support each other and their absent colleagues. This has ensured that the children have not missed out or been neglected at any time and the school as a whole has lived its mission as a Catholic school with honesty, integrity and joy.

Relationships with parents are also key to the success of the school. The strong welcoming atmosphere of the school means that parents feel free and able to attend school events and school liturgies/assemblies. Interactions with parents were positive and supportive ensuring that parents feel able when and if necessary to raise issues of concern.

Agreed Areas of Focus for Development

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

1. An on-going discussion with clergy and governors to explore creative ways of developing the sacramental life of the school and forging stronger links with the parish to overcome the loss of a local church building.
2. Development of RE teaching so that staff feel confident about the material and can develop resources which will enhance their teaching.
3. The staff have expressed a strong desire for increasing the time and space they already commit to for their own personal prayer and spirituality. It was identified that the opportunity for a day or weekend retreat would be appreciated.
4. The staff group is keen to develop the liturgical life of the school in the absence of a 'church building'. They have expressed a desire for help in how to create a prayerful environment for worship. This would be a positive step forward to help the children be even more inspired than they already are.

Conclusion

Holy Cross is a very successful school and one which the Diocese can be extremely proud. The quality of the school's pastoral care is second to none and parents can feel quite safe, knowing that their children are in good hands when at school. The children are warmly welcomed from the moment they arrive for the first time in the school and everyday that they attend. There is a strong sense of community cohesion and a genuine reaching out to others regardless of their background or ethnicity. The contribution the school makes to community cohesion and its response to the mission of the Church to be at the service of the world is significant and rich. This is a very happy school where children feel accepted and encouraged to achieve their best, first and foremost in their relationships with one another and the staff.

I thoroughly enjoyed my visits to Holy Cross both prior to and on the day of the main Review. I would like to express my deep gratitude for the warm welcome which I received and the generosity of warmth which I experienced throughout my visit. I would also like to thank all those who participated so openly in the review and for making such a clear commitment to on-going progress.

The Future

This review is not a one-off judgement on the school from outside but rather a joint statement from one point on an on-going journey. The diocesan department for Formation, the Head Teacher and the governors Holy Cross, Plymouth by their signatures on this document, commit themselves to continued partnership in supporting the mission of the Church. As a result of this review, both parties will agree a course of action to take forward the issues noted in this report and will make an annual evaluation of progress.

Sarah Adams
RE Adviser

Paul Cotter
Head Teacher

Marica Wolstencroft
Chair of Governors