

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

**CANON 806  
INSPECTION REPORT**



St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School  
Chapel Street  
Devonport  
Plymouth  
PL1 4DJ

URN 140764

Head Teacher: Brendan Gill  
Chair of Governors: Sue Pitcher

## Introduction

The inspection of St. Joseph's Catholic Primary 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 Joseph's is a small primary school with 159 pupils on roll. Of these 26% of children are in receipt of pupil premium and 19% of children receive free school meals. Significantly 18% of children are on the SEN register with 1 child having a statement of special educational needs and 1 child who is EHC. 25% of children have English as an additional language and 8% of children are 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.
- The school was inspected in 2013 and graded as 'Requires Improvement'. Prior to the inspection the Governing body had resigned leaving the school vulnerable.
- Since that inspection the school now has a new Governing body which, although not at full strength is now fully supportive of the school.
- Staffing has changed significantly. There is now a full time deputy and several new teachers have joined the staff group.
- Standards across the school are improving.

### Key Finding Grade 2:

John 13:34-35

**'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.*

Following a period of some turmoil, St. Joseph's is a school that has engaged in a challenging journey of faith, hope and a genuine desire to bring about change. It has not been easy but it has been positive. The recruitment of a new Governing Body, which, though not experienced, has been not only essential but very positive. It has embraced its role and recognises it as a pivotal dimension for the success of the school. The community which had been fragmented is now working cohesively and with a sense of purpose. The school's mission statement, 'Love Jesus, Love Learning, Love Life' provides a true reflection of what the school strives to be and as a result children are happy to be in school and enjoy learning. Parents are very positive and believe that their children are well cared for and provided with the best possible opportunities.

St. Joseph's is a warm, welcoming and joyful school. Within the context of a two day visit it is easy to pick up the dedication of the staff who enjoy being with and supporting one another. Their desire to provide an engaging and challenging learning environment is evident throughout the school. Though there is progress to be made with the quality of teaching of RE, there is genuine enthusiasm and desire on the part of the staff to deliver well-crafted lessons. Talking to children about their learning revealed that solid learning is taking place. In addition to this, children feel very positive about RE and can talk with confidence about it. With continuing support and guidance, teachers have the capacity to grow in confidence as to how they plan and deliver their lessons so that all children learn. When this happens there is every possibility that RE lessons could become a strength of the school.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

- The school's vision and mission has been embraced by the whole school from the care-taker to the Head, pupils, governors and all staff. There is a sense of purpose within the school but also an atmosphere of joy and genuine belief.
- Gospel values are central to the school's movement forward. These are becoming increasingly embedded in the kindness, respect and concern that everyone has for one another. Every member of the community is encouraged to identify 'random acts of kindness' and record these. Each week acts of 'witness' in this way are recognised and celebrated.
- The liturgical life of the school is rooted in the Catholic Tradition with Christ very much at the heart of daily life of the school. Following in the footsteps of Christ permeates how people treat one another and seek to serve one another.
- Throughout the school, dynamic and engaging displays reflect a community growing in faith. Adults and children are encouraged to pray in a variety of ways and fresh, up-to-date RE working walls and focal points place the faith life at the heart of the school.
- The school has strong and developing liturgical life which enables children and adults to grow spiritually. Parents are increasingly participating in these and the school is actively seeking ways to support parents to engage more fully with these.
- Although the teaching of RE continues to need development, particularly in the areas of planning and assessment of AT2 it does have its strengths. Marking is particularly strong and feedback to children of a high standard. An added dimension but not insignificant is the manner in which teachers and TAs model Christ for the children in their interactions and engagement. This ensures that all children and particularly the most vulnerable are nurtured and treated with the dignity they deserve.
- The school has a significant number of children with particular needs. The school has an excellent reputation in the wider community for the way in which it works with very needy and in some cases troubled children. Great care is taken to ensure that children's needs are identified early on. Prior to joining the school staff from Foundation Stage ensure that they have met with every family so that they can prepare fully for the arrival of every child. As a result each child has their particular needs identified and met from the earliest stage of entry to the school.
- Induction is well-planned and maintained over time for staff new to the school, In addition induction for new children is carefully considered and implemented so that children integrate quickly and successfully.

## Areas of Focus for Development

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

- To have a clear and robust strategy for ensuring that the newly formed leadership team has the means to become well-established and embedded so that the whole staff team becomes stable and secure for the future.

## St. Joseph's as a Catholic Community

(Welcome, Welfare, and Witness)

### Grade 1:

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.*

It has been said that out of adversity can come great strengths and in the case of St. Joseph's this certainly seems to be the case. In telling their story it is clear that both before and at the time of their last Ofsted, the school, for a variety of reasons had lost its direction and sense of purpose. Three years on the school thinks very differently about itself and there is much evidence to support the perception that they now have of themselves.

From being a school where relationships were difficult and unhappy, the school is now one where service to one another lies at the heart of the mission of the school. Throughout this visit the quality of 'welcome, welfare and witness' became tangible in many ways, too numerous to mention. Highlights include the manner in which children with very particular needs clearly feel at ease and at home in the school.

Gospel values permeate every aspect of school life. This has been enhanced by the whole community, including parents having the opportunity to engage in a process to create a new mission statement. In the first instance the adults created the full statement. The children were then enabled to give their views on it and out of it decide what a child version of this would be. The school council were particularly involved in this process and what emerged is a straight forward, accessible but meaningful interpretation of what the adults had devised. As a consequence the children know and appreciate the purpose of the mission statement. They can talk about it and have high expectations that it is lived out.

The school's capacity for welcome is striking in the open and warm relationships that people have with each other. Visitors and governors comment regularly on the quality of relationships. Every visitor has the opportunity to comment on their experience of welcome to the school via a record sheet. These records ensure that the staff know how well they are doing and what, if anything, they need to do better. Generally the response is very positive. An open disposition is key to the quality of welcome which a school can offer. At St. Joseph's many adults commented on the trust that has developed between them so that if anyone is in need, people are quick to respond. This might be in an area of the curriculum or in practical support with carrying, fetching and other more potentially tedious tasks.

Parents are regularly welcomed into the school and know that if they need to talk to a teacher or member of the leadership team, there will always be an open door with people ready and willing to listen and respond to their needs or concerns. In addition they are actively encouraged to attend and participate in the liturgical life of the school.

Although the school has a significant number of children with particular needs and challenges they did not stand out or present as children causing the school difficulties. This is because the training and support that is given to all staff enables them to work effectively, discreetly and with genuine care for those children. As a consequence children are integrated within the classroom and only taken out when it is appropriate and to avoid distress to the child or other children.

All staff are encouraged to share their views, offer suggestions and initiate new ideas. To this end they are growing in confidence and a belief that everything that happens within the school is owned by the whole community. In addition the school council is an exceptional example of how children can contribute to the running of their school. They are highly independent and enjoy the fact that they can run their own meetings, write up minutes and ensure that all children know about their work by producing a newsletter. The children have their own budget and are learning how to decide how it should be spent and how to gain the views of the other children.

Throughout the school vibrant displays, up-to-date working walls, focal points and a variety of different artefacts reflect the Catholic life of the school. Great care is taken to maintain these and ensure that they are attractive to children and continually engaging.

Although newly formed, the leadership team is committed to offering opportunities for all staff to contribute to the life of the school and be nurtured in their capacity to grow as teachers. In addition they model in different ways what it means to be at the service of others. As a consequence throughout the school the desire to 'wash the feet' of others is becoming increasingly evident.

All the above reflects the quality of witness that is now becoming embedded in the school. Children have many opportunities to absorb the shared values of the adults. Older children are given regular opportunities to care for younger children and develop strong relationships. As a consequence the school is growing in its capacity to consistently live as a community rooted in the Gospel of Christ.

## **Focus for Development**

To build upon the richness of what has been developed and find ways to root this in an adult prayer life; specifically considering the possibility of a voluntary staff prayer group and opportunities for adult retreat experiences.

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

**Grade 2**

**John 13:34-35**

Following significant changes the leadership team has made very positive progress in developing an effective and supportive environment where it is possible for all staff to grow and develop. There is a genuine desire on the part of the team, to ensure that the school can become the very best it can be.

Governors have played a significant part in bringing this about. Although new to governance the support they have received, particularly from the CAST Central support team has enabled these developments to be fruitful and productive. The Governors consistently engage in opportunities to support the development of the school. Attendance at parents evenings, staff INSET days, and other school events has allowed the governors to gain an understanding of the working of the school and as a consequence it is growing in the confidence required to challenge effectively, engage fully and participate in the movement to bring about change. This has been encouraging for staff and parents.

The leadership team is highly supportive of the RE leader who has demonstrated an excellent capacity to identify areas for development and move the school forward in its understanding of what it means to be a Catholic School. Her dedication to the role has had a significant impact with all staff now having a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Her supportive and enthusiastic guidance has enabled staff to fully embrace the religious life of the school. Currently she is the driving force behind what has been necessary change and development. Her next step is to enable all staff to take responsibility for the Catholic life and grow in their confidence to make it a part of their role.

Monitoring of RE is a key dimension of RE teaching and some very positive work has taken place in this area. As a result effective changes have taken place, particularly in the area of marking. The leadership team is aware of the developments that still need to take place and are committed to making this happen so that the quality of teaching which children experience is in line with other teaching in the school. The RE governor is committed to understanding the role further and is beginning to develop the necessary skills to ensure that the governors know what is happening in RE and the impact for the children in this area.

### **Focus for Development**

- For the Governing Body to reach its optimum number and ensure that it continues to develop its understanding of what it means to oversee what it means to be a Catholic School.
- To consolidate the SLT to really embed current practice.
- To develop opportunities for all staff to gain a full understanding of Catholic Social Teaching so that they can articulate how it is implemented in the school.
- Ensure that the leadership of RE, which is a strength of the school, becomes something which all staff embrace and take responsibility for.

Throughout the school teachers and support staff consistently model Christ in the way that they engage with children, relate to them and deliver the teaching of RE. Their openness allows them to be compassionate, gentle and at the same time challenging. Their reassuring disposition enables children to feel safe and as a consequence they are very keen to learn. Teachers work hard and planning reflects a genuine commitment to provide engaging lessons where children can make progress.

In addition to visiting the Foundation Class, five lessons were observed. The quality of RE teaching varied. In most lessons teachers provided children with positive and engaging experiences which allowed for children to make progress while being challenged to think deeply and apply their learning. In most lessons children were consistently on task and could work independently. In other lessons the teaching prior to independent work did not always enable children to engage with the tasks set. It is clear from the planning that though teachers work hard at this they are not completely confident or clear about how to develop activities so that children can make sense of what is being asked of them. One way of arresting this would be to ensure that teachers understand, for example the context of the scripture that they are using. Another example would be to use the skills of teaching literacy within RE, so that deep thinking is recorded.

From lessons observed, talking to children and looking at their books it is easy to see that the children are growing in their capacity to go deeper and apply their learning to their lives. A strength of the school is the marking which encourages a dialogue between the teacher and the child. Children know what they can do to move forward and can articulate this with some confidence.

Currently AT2 is not being assessed, an area which the school recognises needs developing. This will be helped if teachers, when planning, identify the levels that children are working towards. This will also help to make planning more precise. In the lessons observed there were plenty of AT2 activities offered and differentiation was evident in a number of lessons. Once all of these are consistently in place across the school, the teaching is likely to become a strength.

### **Focus for Development**

- To ensure that assessment of RE includes AT2
- To provide on-going support and CPD for teachers to gain confidence in their subject knowledge.
- For all staff to be supported to be able to plan lessons where all children are challenged and able to make progress.

From the moment one enters St. Joseph's it is apparent that this is a school with a strong Catholic Identity rooted in prayer. A combination of whole school liturgies, classroom prayer and spontaneous prayer opportunities (such as the prayer wall in the hall) contribute to the spiritual development of the pupils.

The school has been proactive and invested in trying to change a multi-purpose hall into a sacred space. This has been very successful and from the wall displays to the permanent focal point used for liturgies the change has been enriching and successful. It is a hall that, through artefacts and displays, reveals the importance the school places on its religious life.

Over the two days many comments and conversations with children and adults demonstrated the openness of the community to God's presence in their lives and the lives of others. This is particularly evident in the capacity children and adults have to recognising that God is present in every person. As a consequence a genuine effort is made to see every individual as a child of God and shown dignity in all circumstances. This is particularly evident in the way people relate to one another even when challenged by behaviour or demand.

The school's prayer life is rooted in Catholic Tradition. Children are encouraged and enabled to participate in the sacramental life of the church, to engage with the parish through weekly Masses and introduced in creative ways to different ways of praying. An example of how normal this is could be seen in the attitude of year 6 children to a time of reflective prayer where they were invited to contemplate their need for God's forgiveness. During this time of prayer the children were given plates of sand and encouraged to draw or write something that they were sorry for and then to smooth this out in the belief that God would forgive them. The capacity of the children to engage prayerfully in this activity, immediately following the lunch break, revealed how at ease the children feel with this kind of prayer time.

The school has developed a weekly whole school act of worship, based on the Gospel, which reflects the Liturgy of the Word. This engages many children and adults in particular roles from reader to acolyte. It provides every class with a mission for the week and something physical reflecting the theme of the liturgy to take back to the classroom focal point. It is reflective and meaningful liturgy with no sense of performance but delivered with great sincerity. Children and adults sing with enthusiasm, can sit in silence with ease and respond to the prayers with confidence. Children with particular behavioural needs did not stand out, so comfortable were they with the experience. The next step for the school will be to help the children learn the skills of creating such a liturgy, writing their own prayers and leading all aspects of it.

Gradually the children are being encouraged and enabled to engage in spontaneous opportunities for prayer. For example a prayer wall in the hall allows the children to add prayers when they wish to the wall. The prayers are often pertinent and reflective of what is going on in the world. It is clear that the children would gain much from the opportunity to engage further in different forms of prayer.

As a consequence of the prayer life, the consistently high expectations placed on children and the witness of the adult community, children are enabled to grow spiritually and morally during their time in school. Discussions in class and with individual children demonstrated that they have an excellent sense of what is right and wrong. They are compassionate towards others and have a real appreciation of the presence of God in the world and in their lives.



The school's commitment to the wider community reflects their desire to serve others and their desire to fulfil the remit offered to them through Catholic Social Teaching. Though they may not be able to articulate this fully they are living it.

### **Focus for development**

- For children to be enabled to develop the skills to plan and deliver liturgy.
- For the school to review how children are developed spiritually across the curriculum.
- To look at ways for providing opportunities for prayer/retreats in addition to the current experience within the classroom and in whole school acts of worship. E.g. voluntary prayer group, retreat programme etc.

### **Conclusion**

St. Joseph's has come a long way in a relatively short space of time. This is now a community where all feel a part of one community. As a consequence, children are the absolute focus of the day and are being offered the opportunities which will allow them to become the very best that they can be. Staff come across as happy and committed to one another and the school as a whole. Everyone can feel confident that this is now a school rooted in its mission and offering a model of rich and genuine Catholic education.

**Sarah Adams**  
**March 2016**

## THE SCHOOL AS A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY



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**

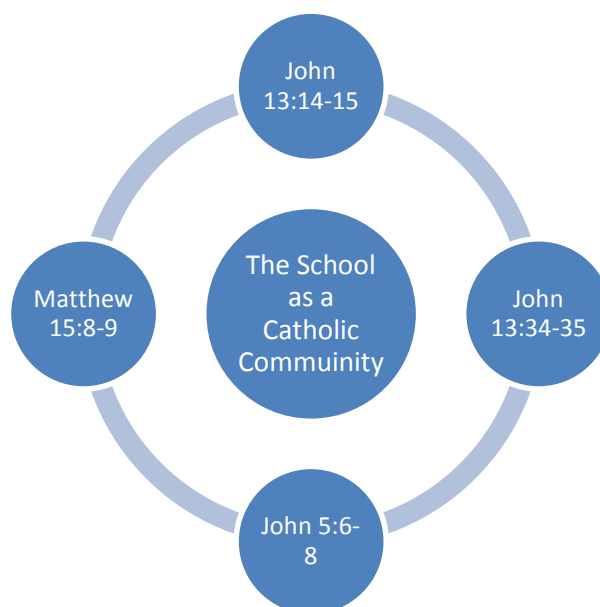
There will be three key areas within which these five elements will be reviewed:

- 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: '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.