

Understanding

St Mary's RC High School



Four brief papers that explain the principles, philosophy and values that underpin the way in which the school operates.

Clive Lambert

November 2016

Contents

- 1. What is the role of a Catholic school?**
- 2. Learning at St Mary's.**
- 3. How does St Mary's work?**
- 4. Sustainable leadership at St Mary's.**

What is the role of a 'Catholic School?'

There has been Catholic education provided in Herefordshire for over 150 years. Originally church schools were formed in the more deprived areas of cities and towns to provide a 'free education' for poor children. The local parishioners paid this for; priests and clergymen were a common sight around homes with their collecting tins. Of course education became 'free' following the 1944 education act but a legacy of those days remains in that governors are still required to fund 10% of capital projects in exchange for some autonomy, most notably, in admissions on faith grounds.

In 2014, Pope Francis expressed his firm belief that parents should have the right to choose a *"moral and religious education"* for their children. He pointed out that in today's ever-changing, technological world, our children are bombarded with so much information that it's difficult to filter through it. Because of this, the Pope drove home the point that families and teachers must guide students to critical thinking and a moral compass. That is exactly where a faith-based education comes in. It can be argued that Christ's message is as relevant today as always and we can be sure that has been stated by every preceding generation and will be in the future. Therefore, what is this message and how should it be manifest in school?

My words are inadequate to explain it, but others such as the Rev Marcus Stock, former Director of Schools for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, now Bishop of Leeds states, *"... A Catholic School should: Put Christ at the centre of everything that it does by integrating Gospel values and the teachings of the Catholic Church into every aspect of learning, teaching and the totality of school life"*.

What are *Gospel values*, a term commonly used in Catholic schools? Unless the term is explained and a common understanding formed of what true Gospel values are, there is a danger that what should be an objective Christian foundation, will itself become a random list of subjective values.

The Rev Stock says, *"Gospel values cannot be values chosen subjectively from the vast corpus of the Old and the New Testaments but are objective values revealed to us through Christ's proclamations"*.

What he is saying is that objective values can be found in the teachings of Jesus with His 'Sermon on the Mount'. These are known as the 'Beatitudes'. They reveal the goal of human existence and as such are the objective 'values' given by Christ. (St Matthew's Gospel chapters 5-7)

Let us remind ourselves and attach values to a few of them.

'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth' (Humility and Gentleness)

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied' (Truth and Justice)

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.' (Purity and Holiness)

There are more. Rooted in the teachings of Christ, these Gospel values should constitute the goals of the educational enterprise in every school. Pupils need to be helped to understand them and how they relate to their everyday lives both at home, at school and

outside. This enterprise is not in addition to the quest for high academic standards and vocational excellence but integral to it:

Pope John Paul II stated in 1997 when addressing Catholic teachers and students, *“Catholic schools, while providing a quality education, hold up Christian (gospel) values to children, inviting them to build their own lives on them. Teaching these values, for those who know how to accept and live them consistently, yield highly positive results- as experience confirms- at the personal, family and professional levels.”*

So what of our role as teachers and support staff in this mission? It is according to the Congregation of Catholic Education *“a mission in education as a work of love”*. This ‘mission’ is to provide an excellent and broad balanced education to help young people grow to their full potential and pay regard to their whole formation as a person, so *“that all may attain their eternal destiny and at the same time promote the common good of society”*. In its ‘work of love’ be motivated to offer *“to all, and especially the poor and marginalized the opportunity of an education, of training for a job, of human and Christian formation.”*

Teaching as a work of love requires a radical commitment and service: Pope John Paul II stated in an address to Catholic Educators as far back as 1984,

“The Church looks upon you as co-workers with an important measure of shared responsibility... To you it is given to create the future and give it direction by offering to your students a set of values with which to assess their newly discovered knowledge... [The changing times] demand that educators be open to new cultural influences and interpret them for young pupils in the light of the Christian faith. You are called to bring professional competence and a high standard of excellence to your teaching... But your responsibilities makes demands on you that go far beyond the need for professional skills and competence... Through you, as through a clear window on a sunny day, students must come to see and know the richness of joy of a life lived in accordance with Christ’s teaching, in response to his challenging demands, To teach means not only to impart what we know, but also to reveal who we are by living what we believe. It is this latter lesson which tends to last the longest”.

This is a challenging and timeless statement. Not only are we responsible for the education of the child in its entirety but the means of this are at least partially accomplished by the example we set. As staff we truly are role models for the adults of tomorrow, they must see by the way that we behave towards them and each other an example that they would wish to emulate.

So what is the staff role in the school? Pope Francis states, *“You must not teach just content, but the values and customs of life... there are three things that you must transmit: how to love, how to understand which values and customs create harmony in society. ... [Teachers] must aim to build an educational relationship with each student, who must feel welcomed and loved for what he or she is, with all of their limitations and potential”*.

We have to be aware of all that has gone before and the responsibility that we have to maintain and sustain it. Further, It is to reflect on the words of Pope John Paul II, *“...to teach means not only to impart what we know, but also to reveal who we are by living what we believe. It is through discussion, a willingness to be open and the security of sharing thoughts and opinions without fear or ridicule, which helps us to move forward on our*

individual journey. As a community we will have our different views and opinions and it is right and proper to share them appropriately. Our role is clear not only are we educating children as future learners but we are doing so in the Catholic faith.

The Rev Marcus Stock challenges us to look ahead.

“By seeking and developing ever new ways of placing the person of Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church at the centre of every aspect of school life, governors, headteachers, staff, parents and pupils will help to continue the primary purpose of the Catholic school whilst at the same time engaging positively with changes and developments in education. As the 21st century progresses, envisioning what Catholic schools will look like in the future requires openness and imagination. At the same time, for Catholic schools to play their full and effective part in the education provision of that future, it is essential that those who are called to work in them are clear about their identity and purpose”:

- *To assist in the Church’s universal mission*
- *To assist parents in the education of their children*
- *To serve the needs of the local Church*
- *To be a service to society.*

I leave the final word words with Pope Francis

“Effectively, Catholic schools and universities are attended by many students who are not Christian or do not believe. Catholic educational institutions offer to all an approach to education that has as its aim the full development of the person, which responds to the right of every person to access to knowledge. However, they are also called upon to offer, with full respect for the freedom of each person and using the methods appropriate to the scholastic environment, the Christian belief, that is, to present Jesus Christ as the meaning of life, the cosmos and history.”

Clive Lambert
November 2016

LEARNING AT ST MARY'S

The following section explains how we are using the theories developed by Carol Dweck, the Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology at Stanford University. For 35 years she has studied theories of motivation, stating; *“My work bridges developmental psychology, social psychology, and personality psychology, and examines the self-conceptions people use to structure the self and guide their behaviour. My research looks at the origins of these self-conceptions, their role in motivation and self-regulation, and their impact on achievement and interpersonal processes.”* ([Stanford University website](#))

In terms of education, her seminal text is *Self-Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality and Development* (1999), which is an academic text describing the research carried out to support her theories. This was followed by *Mindset: the New Psychology of Success* (2006) a popular account of her work and ideas which has become an international bestseller.

Dweck has worked with many different researchers. It is the work that she has carried out in schools across the USA and replicated by studies in other parts of the world that we are applying at St Mary's.

This was the first stage of a journey through learning that has taken us seven years, and is one that continues. We have embraced a study of motivation termed, *Self-Determination Theory*

In this, Professors of Psychology Tim Kasser and Richard Ryan identified four basic needs:

- To feel safe and secure
- To feel competent
- To feel connected to others
- To feel autonomously and authentically engaged in their work and play

A person's sense of well-being increases when these needs are met and, by extension, their performance will too. These needs underpin our aspirations for our pupils. If they are taught in a way that fosters autonomy they do better, are more focussed on the satisfactions of learning, get more enjoyment and will cope better with failure. The same applies to adults so our model of leadership is constructed around self-determination theory (Ref: [Sustainable Leadership at St Mary's 2016](#) and [How Does St Mary's Work?](#)).

Alongside this we include *Visible Learning*, the work of Professor John Hattie, who has conducted more than 800 meta-analyses (a method of combining the results of many different research studies) of nearly 53,000 studies relating to achievement across all phases of education. Hattie's main findings are some of the major factors affecting learning and achievement:

- Feedback by teachers
- Prior cognitive ability of students
- Instructional quality by the teacher
- Students disposition to learn

Teachers adopt models of learning which are student-centred and encourage children to construct their own learning questions and enquiries. It is an active process that helps children to make connections and encourages them to take on challenging activities. This is also integral to the work of Carol Dweck, as mentioned above. It provides opportunities for children to take risks and try out different ways of learning within well thought out scenarios, sometimes initiated by the teacher and at other times by the children themselves.

Dweck says that we need to build resilience within our pupils so that they can learn to overcome the problems that are bound to confront them. If we focus on learning and how we do it, this significantly contributes to well-being. The language we use to provide feedback and praise to children is vital to promote a *growth mindset*. If children have a *growth mindset* they are more likely to take on challenges, want to learn and ‘*bounce back after a failure*’. Indeed they seek to learn from what went wrong: they see this as a learning opportunity. Teachers need to provide constructive feedback, such as *what went well* or *what you can do to make it better*. In addition they need to encourage the pupil to think about and reflect on the processes they have used. The latter is quite sophisticated but very powerful as it helps the student to build up a repertoire of skills and strategies for future use. It is called metacognition and is a key area for development at St Mary’s. The education of children has three elements: the curriculum (what is taught), assessment (how progress is measured) and pedagogy (how it is taught). Successive governments are inclined to impose their particular principles on the first two whereas *pedagogy* is left to the discretion of schools. This is where we concentrate most of our resources because it is *how children learn* that has the greatest impact. What we are trying to achieve is a long-term sustainable model of education and learning that will give children a range of ways in which they can learn, the ability to solve problems, face challenges and the resilience to ‘*bounce back*’ after disappointment and adversity. This is underpinned by a sense of who they are and is driven by strong moral values.

Clive Lambert
November 2016.

HOW DOES ST MARY'S WORK?

This might seem a strange question but it is an important one.

In 2007 Ofsted said, *“St Mary’s is a school that achieves superb outcomes through its unique way of doing things. The leadership team have allowed the staff to get on with the job and staff have responded splendidly”*.

Since then, particularly from 2009 onwards, the emphasis has shifted to understanding how children learn and the factors that enable that to happen most successfully, whilst at the same time ensuring that the well-being of children remains at the top of our list of priorities.

In the 2013 Ofsted reported, *“Senior leaders have created a climate for learning where both students and staff feel happy and secure. As a result, students have outstandingly positive attitudes to learning.... Senior leaders encourage teachers to improve their practice by incorporating the latest approaches to learning into their teaching. Training time focuses on research based around best practice in the classroom. Teachers work collaboratively to reflect on their performance and to discuss innovative ideas, particularly around enhancing student’s sense of well-being.”*

The philosophy and values that drive St Mary’s can be found in another paper entitled *Learning at St Mary’s*.

With reference to the paper *Sustainable Leadership at St Mary’s 2016*, it can be seen that there is a leadership structure predicated on ensuring that there are contributions from a wide range of people and that senior/middle managers are gaining significant experience on key committees or in key roles: the focus of such committees or roles is on the way the school is run so that its values are fully embedded and not dependent on a few individuals who in time could move on or retire. In this way the near future of the school is protected. It allows new appointees at senior level time to observe, be part of and evaluate the various practices before making their own contribution. **Above all, it encourages staff to be autonomous, yet connected.**

Furthermore, membership of the mini leadership groups (ref: *Sustainable Leadership at St Mary’s 2016*) can be on a volunteer basis and is an excellent way of raising staff awareness of whole school issues, as well as future leadership development. The fact that these groups have executive powers means that staff can be involved in important school decisions; examples might be aspects relating to Spiritual development, the assessment process or the evaluation of learning strategies. This approach means that leadership runs deep through the organisation. The voluntary element to this structure means there is no exclusivity or divisiveness.

In order for the philosophy and values of the school to be understood, and to enable the development of greater understanding about learning and teaching, the school has a very active programme of in-service training. Much of this is voluntary, apart from aspects relating to the Safeguarding of children. In this way, motivation comes from the staff themselves to be involved. They are well attended sessions.

Another important element to the operation of the school is the *learning seminars*. These are held twice annually and consist of groups of heads of department meeting with the

head, deputy head and one of the directors of learning to discuss the learning and teaching of children in their respective departments. The group size is normally around 6 or 7, which allows for open and productive discussion. At these seminars a theme is adopted and the subject leaders are invited to feedback to the group how a particular initiative is working, and to share the practice of their department. This leads to greater awareness of what is happening in the school and, as the staff feel increasingly confident with each other they share ideas and often work together on a particular aspect. These are valuable sessions in both monitoring how school initiatives or priorities are being addressed, as well as enabling people to share and develop ideas. Frequently at these sessions the head might introduce a new idea for consideration and further thought. This is often taken over to the Teaching, Learning and Curriculum leadership team for further development or discussion before going out to trial. There is an expectation that the conclusions of these seminars are taken back and discussed in departments.

The above is substantiated by themed visits to year groups or subjects to observe lessons and the initiatives at work. A unique feature are the *open classroom* weeks in which teachers volunteer to allow staff to watch their lesson, often illustrating a particular method or strategy. To encourage this practice the school provides cover for the teachers who go to observe. Teachers really enjoy this opportunity to use their findings for their own development and classroom practice.

All the above activity serves to enhance the understanding of staff about the values and principles of the school, with its emphasis on well being and learning. It encourages involvement, it facilitates sharing and discussion and firmly places the learning of children, in the Gospel context, at the forefront of our activity.

This happens alongside the normal meeting routines, which are essential for the operation of the school; however, these are kept to an absolute minimum and department meetings have moved away from administrative matters to a clear focus on the learning and progress of children.

I hope that this paper provides a flavour of how St Mary's works. There is much more of course: organisations, although simple from the outside, contain many complexities in the relationships between different parts of the school. However there are clear principles and a way of working, which I hope I have been able to convey to the reader.

Clive Lambert

Head teacher

November 2016.

SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE FOR ST MARY'S RC HIGH SCHOOL

Context

Until 2014, St Mary's exercised a flexible almost informal style of leadership which emphasised the autonomy of groups and of individual staff. This worked providing the common purpose of the school was well understood, and as long as groups and individuals exercised responsibility.

This served the school very well and evolved into a distributed pattern of leadership, where many individuals were able to be involved in key decisions or were able to take decisions on their own for the good of the school. This *self-determination* led, on the whole, to an atmosphere of '*relaxed purpose*'. Furthermore, because areas of responsibility had been left deliberately '*fuzzy*' it enabled staff to feel they can be involved and thereby removed a sense of exclusively allocated roles.

However such a flexible style of leadership had led to some gaps developing, for example in relation to tracking of pupil progress. This was an area where the model of leadership had failed to grasp the overview required for *rigorously monitoring the progress of pupils and the necessity to identify shortcomings leading to remedial action*.

Therefore a structured refinement of the current model was put in place from summer 2014, which retained the elements that contribute to making St Mary's a place of relaxed Catholic purpose where people enjoy working, feel involved and can develop.

It consists of a number of mini leadership groups, which report to a strategic leadership group. In this way, the *riskier* elements of *self-determination* are contained as there is a structure to report to or provide more guidance as necessary. However, more significantly it can ensure that the groups cover **all aspects** required for the successful execution of the school's core functions.

Furthermore, this expanded leadership structure enables more individuals to have key roles in the running of the school and provides valuable and genuine leadership experience to the next generation of senior leaders at St Mary's. This is important as there are currently three senior members of staff approaching retirement. The impact of such a change should not be underestimated and, while governors may wish to recruit from outside of the school, it is going to be increasingly important that there are individuals within the school who have the background, experience and credibility to fill some of the gaps left behind by retirements.

Leadership groups

Strategic leadership group (CL), PS, MK, MF, SW, AL, BF

This group has overall responsibility for all of the leadership teams. It contains the chairperson of each respective group as well as the head teacher and deputy head. This group sets the strategic parameters within which the other teams operate and oversees, monitors and, if necessary, calls to account the work of the mini groups.

Mini leadership groups

These groups have **executive function**, in other words they can make decisions and implement them. They merely have to report what they have done to the strategic steering group (SLG). This is not as risky as it sounds, because the chairs of these respective groups are members of the SLG and so will be fully aware of the strategic direction of the school, its values and its purpose. Unless near total autonomy is granted, the groups become mere *sounding boards* and never have to be accountable for their decisions: consequently they do not develop. If key decisions are contained within a small number of senior leaders, middle budding senior leaders never gain the necessary experience to assume new roles. This is vital: it is hard to let go of some decisions but it is a necessary step to the promotion of sustainability.

Teaching, learning and curriculum (SW) AG, PS, AL, AH, NW, JH-D, JM, EG & GT

Does what it sounds like it should do. This group is responsible for the development of learning of children and the structure of the curriculum, which enables that to happen most effectively. This group leads on development and training. It also takes on the *quality of teaching* section of the school self-evaluation.

Tracking and evaluation of achievement (AL) EG, SW, AG

This group is responsible for ensuring that there exists a strategic overview of **all** pupils' progress in the school and for identifying both excellence and deficits. This information can be fed back into the school to enable urgent remedial action to be taken. The group identify trends, such as; boys performance relative to girls, the progress of children who receive pupil premium and the attainment of SEND pupils.

Furthermore, this group takes on the *achievement* section of school self-evaluation.

Often the above two groups amalgamate, as there is much work in common.

Appraisal, staff development, school evaluation and planning (CL) JM, PS, GT

This group has oversight and responsibility for ensuring that the appraisal system works effectively for the good of the school. They ensure that the process is kept up to schedule and that it informs the training and development needs of all staff. They work closely with the tracking group to ensure coherence and to ensure that the progress of pupils is properly accounted for.

This group is responsible for the production of the school self-evaluation document (sef). It works closely with the tracking and curriculum groups above who have responsibility for the production of the *achievement and quality of teaching* section of the sef. This group also produces the draft school strategic plans for the consideration of the steering group

Pastoral Care and Safeguarding (MK) FRi, J H-D, GT, FRO, DM

This group oversees the pastoral care and Safeguarding for the school, ensuring appropriate training is provided and having oversight of the well-being of all children in the school. MK often works alongside SW and AL with regard to well-being and Safeguarding of vulnerable and identified children.

As can be seen there is inevitably some multi membership amongst the four groups. However, they also provide an opportunity for a lot of staff to be involved. They meet twice a term and individuals within each group typically have tasks to perform in the interim to carry out the group's functions.

There is also the following group which is core to the maintenance and promotion of the Catholic values of the school.

Spirituality Group (PS) MK, SW, BA, JC, SB, DC, AL

This group has been in existence for a while under different chair people. Usually the chairperson is drawn from the RE department, which provides continuity, and this group has the essential task of promoting the Catholic life of the school in all its forms. Ideally the chair is a member of the Strategic Leadership Group.

St Mary's RC High School Leadership Organisation Chart



November 2016

