**St Mary’s Living, loving and learning with God**

**Sept 2021**

**What we teach , why and how**

**We say that we live with God by loving and learning. God is at the centre and we show by how we are loving and learning that God is at the centre. Our faith principles and our values are our solid ground. Everything is linked by these and by British Values that are our heritage.**

**Our values**

We reflect back to our values all of the time. They help children to develop their learning skills and attitudes as well as to understand and support each others differences. Our shared trust values are built into our principles and approaches. Our school values are experienced and shared every minute of every day.

**Learning**

We teach child knowledge and skills through their subject curriculum. We also teach them about how to learn and how to live and work alongside others.

Our class teaching approach is much more of a workshop style than you would have experienced in school. We invite conversation so that children explain their understanding. By explaining their understanding it shows that the children do understand and this helps the knowledge to stick.

We also encourage learning by heart. Repeating information can help it to stick. Times tables, tricky words (eg. ‘now’ and ‘what’…..words which can’t be sounded ) and key subject facts are all better learned and able to be used if the children do know them well.

You may remember yourself as a learner trying to solve fractions and either being a child who got them straight away or was mystified by how others were solving them so quickly. Fractions are solved by using our multiplication and division knowledge so these skills need to be learned first.

The same is true for reading. At St Mary’s we prioritise this skill very heavily in the early years so that children can make as much progress in this as possible. This means in later years they can sue these skills across all of their learning.

We really do recognise and value the input from parents with much of this learning. If you invest in this learning at home it makes a huge difference to your child.

**How we celebrate success**

Firstly we communicate to every child and every class all of the time, that each child is important and unique. We work for each child to know their own learning profile; what they are good at , what they find straight forward, what they may find more challenging or haven’t learned YET….. we encourage each child to understand that they are on their own unique journey. Comparing with others is not helpful or valued. If you have a strength in something we will encourage you to share that skill. Within class children work with each other to share skills for the development of everyone. Children are encouraged to self challenge.

Children are given team points and lots of verbal feedback. We talk to the children about success and how it was achieved. We encourage the effort that children put into an activity. Each child is encouraged to be the best that they can be and we work to notice that as much as possible.

**Learning about good learning**

We model to the children all of the time. Teachers break down learning and demonstrate how to achieve success in that subject or lesson theme. In each subject we teach units so that the children can see that they build up their knowledge and skills within that unit. If we start a geography unit in year 2 asking how much the children know about the UK and the answer is very little the children will see that as they go through the unit their knowledge grows. In writing we use a text as the theme and the children explore this with the teacher and each other , building up their experience of the text and their skills and knowledge.

This approach to building up skills and knowledge ensures that children are never faced with the sorts of learning from the past; I recall one history teacher standing me up because I did not know the kings and queens of Britain and humiliating me because that was expected to be known….I was 14. It had never been something that we had been taught so the assumption made by the adult was that because I hadn’t learned it out of school then I was ignorant. Thankfully current wisdom in good teaching supports our own belief that at all times learners should be treated with dignity and respect……

It should make children confident to approach learning in class. We work to build this confidence and to support all learners to achieve.

**Loving**

Respect

We teach every child that they have rights. We teach children that if something someone is doing or saying makes them feel unhappy or unsafe they have the right to stay stop. If that persons doesn’t stop or the child doesn’t feel able to ay stop then they must tell. Every child has a handprint with the named people they say they feel safe to tell.

This is a lesson that our little ones find quite straight forward. They tend most of the time to live this quite quickly.

Some of our older children have found this more challenging to adopt. We continue to support and challenge children to apply it in ways that move them forwards.

When children find themselves stuck in their friendships or a social situation we ask them to be ‘ready, steady, so that we can go…….so that we can begin to solve a problem.

Sometimes a problem is solved very quickly. Other times it can take a bit longer. We work to teach that we can get beyond a problem and that we can get back to a safe place.

The Unicef Rights Respecting work continues in school. Last year we achieved the Silver Award . This reflects our school commitment to embedding a process where children respect each other and learn to be aware of the rights of all children in the world and to show empathy ( and appropriate action ) to support those who do not live in societies where their rights are respected.

It does not mean that children will always get on and will not face challenges in their friendships. It means that we will use set principles and approaches to support them to move forward. It means that we are building a community with respect at the centre.

**St Mary’s Catholic Primary School**

St Mary’s is a faith school. Jesus gave many lessons to his disciples. The last time he was with them he told them that of all the teaching he had shared then the most important was that ‘they should love one another as I have loved you’. Jesus provides us with many helpful attitudes and lessons. Our faith principles and values are not an add on they are at the very centre of every aspect of school life

**Change Makers**

We want to empower children for the world they live in now and for the future. We believe that if we give each child the skills to develop their own voice, to navigate their own pathway to success and a sense that we can make a difference then we will have given them the best start.

Some colleagues nationally describe that children are becoming fearful. Around them they are hearing a lot about the damage done to the planet. They have lived through the pandemic. For some of them a quarter of their lives or more has been lived in a pandemic. We are working to help children realise that they are empowered. They do make a difference and they can make a difference; through the many small positive actions that they take each day and through the many small actions that we take together.

**Leadership at St Mary’s**

We teach that we are leaders; we can all be role models and examples for each other.

Our year 6 children have specific leadership tasks. We do not identify a small number of pupils who appear more significant or important than others , such as the prefect system. All year 6 children are buddies and play leaders. This is part of their personal development and a way to contribute to the life of our school. As buddies they are paired with children in Robin Class to support and encourage them. As play leaders they are trained to support positive play at lunchtimes.

School Councillors support positive changes in our school. They are elected by the children to be a formal voice for all children. They discuss and action change that will make a difference to the lives of the children.

The GIFT Team is an initiative that was started by our children. We talk about being lights for God, shining in our school. The GIFT Team bring light. Anyone in school can be a member of the gift team. Those who volunteer wear a silver button badge. To be on the Gift Team children have to want to be kind to others. Last summer our Year 4 pupils ( now Year 5 ) undertook training to be GIFT Team Leaders. Those that then chose to volunteer were commissioned by Bishop Mark to be our GIFT Team Ambassadors. These children wear a blue star. Their first project this year will be to produce a good news newsletter to bring added joy to our school.

Seeing changes in action :

**Bristol Children’s Hospital Thank you**

Last term the children ran over 8,000 miles and raised £1,539.75 for Bristol Children’s Hospital. This was inspired by Poppy not being able to be in school. We were trying to show the children that we can turn something that was a sadness into a positive.

On Friday in our first whole school celebration assembly we were able to show the children the certificate and the very special gift we had received from the hospital in thanks for our achievement. They have given us an actual Giggles statue. It was lovely that Poppy was with us and we were able to share a little of how the hospital continue to support Poppy in building her strength after her last major operation.

**A Work in Progress**

Having returned from the summer break all children have settled in well. Learning is going well and we are finding out how to live alongside Covid. Our school family is ever evolving. Nothing and nobody is perfect….we are a work in progress and always will be.

If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of school life please know that you can talk to us. Teachers can be seen at the end of each day and appointments made. Emails and phone messages into the office will always be followed up. You are your child’s first teacher and critical eyes and ears as part of our school partnership. it is important we work with you on your child’s journey to success.

**Stepping forward this half term**

**Harvest**

This is another opportunity for the children to see very clearly how if we each take a small action then together we achieve something incredible. For the last three years we have brought in food that will go to the Axminster Foodbank. This was to recognise the increasing challenge of local people who are temporarily stuck in hardship. During Covid this need rose sharply so we are supporting this charity again this year. We will be asking children from next week to bring in specific items to support this. Thank you in advance for your contribution to this.

**PTFA** Please could you consider making a contribution to the PTFA. Parents are urgently needed to ensure that the many activities offered by PTFA, that enrich the lives of the children and our community, can begin again. Please let the office know, or speak to Mrs Mannix on the playground.

Covid is still with us. Devon rates have been falling but against national remain high and Devon schools remain part of an enhanced monitoring scheme. The children are enjoying being outside at break and lunch and being able to mix with one other class. We are meeting as a whole school for assembly but keeping this short and with lots of ventilation. In class children are working together in groups more and resources are shared some of the time. Children are still washing their hands much more than we did before and we are still having a touch point clean in the daytime. We are stepping out with reasonable care. Thank you for your continued vigilance and support.

Currently if a suspected or positive case occurs amongst our school population or within a household, other members in that group are not required to self isolate if they are under 18 or have had two vaccinations. This seems very against all of the regulations from before summer but it is the sign of the progress made. We should take heart.

**Attendance and time out of school**

If your child is going to be absent from school please let school know. If your child is unwell please email or telephone with a reason so that admin staff do not need to contact you. It is a requirement that every child is accounted for daily so by informing us of an absence does assist greatly with this process.

**If it is a planned absence then admin can provide you with a form to complete.** We work with Devon local authority guidance and have monitoring via a local authority educational welfare officer. School can authorise absence for medical appointments and for educational visits. The other authorised absence are for close family weddings and funerals. All other absence will be unauthorised. This is not due to any personal values it is simply a system that allows us to keep a very clear and transparent record of school attendance.

**Parent Meetings**

In the last week of this half term we will have parent meetings. These can be face to face or by phone/ Zoom. We will be arranging these in the next week (letter to follow shortly)

**Robin Class Welcome Assembly**

We are expecting to host a welcome assembly for our newest parents at the end of this half term. This will be lead by Year 6 and will share something of the journey your child will take at St Mary’s. It will also be an opportunity for parents to see the classroom and learning space as we were unable to host any open events for parents in the summer term. We will share the dates as soon as possible.

**New starters 2022 Applications** for places for next year foundation are now open. If you have a child who will be starting school next September or you know of someone who has then a visit can be arranged by contacting the school office.

We do not host open events for large numbers of prospective parents as we believe this does not allow parents to access the individual and unique journey we offer each child.

Living, loving and learning with God

