

**Not just any old school
or
Why St George's College Junior School has to be different
because it is a Catholic, Christian, Josephite School.**

This paper is based on two talks given by

Fr Martin Ashcroft cj

to

The English Region of the Josephites

on

Monday 9 April 2001

St George's College Junior School is not just any old school since it aspires to be a Catholic, Christian, Josephite School. It also wants to be a very successful school – an outstanding school - the Number One Independent Catholic Co-ed Junior School in the country.

Each of us will have our own probably differing criteria as to what constitutes a good school. These differing criteria will reflect what we consider to be important for the education of young people. Which schools we come to regard as good schools will depend, therefore, on how individual schools live up to and match our differing criteria and expectations.

We know that certain schools have built up reputations for themselves over the course of time. Millfield, for example, is synonymous with all-round sporting excellence; Winchester and Manchester Grammar School with academic excellence; Westminster Cathedral Choir School for its choral singing while some schools – usually from the maintained sector - have less favourable reputations. St George's College and its Junior School are currently well known for their achievements in hockey.

For politically expedient reasons – and we need to remember just how much Government has been proactive in what now takes place in schools – the so called School League tables are here to stay. Like them or hate them, these League Tables have become one of the essential reference points for the majority of parents when they choose schools (especially independent schools) for their children.

When, in the future, these league tables reflect “value added” rather than a simple calculation based on exam results, these tables may become meaningful but, even then, they are likely to remain just as pernicious since all league tables will have to invariably reduce the quality of education offered at a given school to a basic points score even if not totally based on public examination results.

To put the issue of League Tables in very real terms, can one honestly claim that Ampleforth offers a better Catholic Education than St George's College, Weybridge simply on the basis that last year it had in a higher place in the league tables than the College?

Preconceived notions about education can also be found in the tertiary sector of education. A Classics Degree was often regarded as a prerequisite for entry into the colonial service since it virtually guaranteed that you had been to the “right school” and the “right university – ie “Oxbridge”.

Since the Great Education Reform Act of the late 1980s, the number of significant educational initiatives sponsored by the prevailing Secretary of State for Education has dramatically increased. The National Curriculum, *Ofsted*, The Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, Government sponsored tests for 7, 11 and 14 year olds. Official prescriptive Government issued syllabus – The Foundation Stage – which must be followed by every 3 and 4 year old child in England and Wales whether these children are attending state or private nurseries. These are just a few of the many changes – mostly driven by political rather than educational orthodoxy - which have caused the world of education to be in its present state of flux and turmoil.

It would be wrong, however, not to acknowledge that some of these Government initiatives have contributed to the raising of the standard of education offered in schools to young people by making these schools much more publicly accountable but, unfortunately, this has sometimes been at the cost of narrowing the curriculum especially in primary schools.

Happily, albeit somewhat late in the day, the very best teachers in the maintained sector are now at last beginning to be given the recognition they deserve in terms of their salaries. Classroom teachers can now cross “The Threshold” into a new Upper Pay Scale instead of being capped at Point 9.

It is now possible for the very best teachers to become Advanced Skills Teachers with an upper salary limit of £44,000 while Secondary Headteachers can earn up to nearly £79,000 in the maintained sector. Primary School Headteachers are much less well paid!!

As a general rule, people also like to feel valued and wanted at their work place. The more people feel they have a positive role to play within an organisation – the greater will be their job satisfaction.

The more they feel their efforts are recognised and appreciated by their line managers and other superiors, the greater will be the effort and care they will put into their work. Indeed, for many people their quality of life at work (ie job satisfaction) is far a more important criteria for staying in their present job than the size of their monthly pay cheque.

I am reminded of the story about man who had the job of sweeping the yard. When asked by a visitor what he did, he replied:

“Well it is like this. In there - the body parts which pass through here - are spray painted. If there is any dust or dirt on the metal before it is painted, then this will ruin the painting process and the rejected parts will have to be stripped down and repainted. This takes time, money and slows down the production process. My role in the company is to keep the yard clean and in doing so I ensure no dust or dirt gets on the metal sheets as these sheet pass through the yard.”

Although he could have simply replied he was a broom pusher or a cleaner, as it happened he could clearly articulate how his apparently simple and menial job was very crucial to the entire company. Somebody had taken the trouble from within the organisation to explain to this person his role and how important he was to the company despite his apparently simple, menial task. As a result, he felt much more involved and valued and worked accordingly.

Schools can still learn a lot about people management from the world of commerce and industry.

One of the significant opportunities which has been made possible at the Junior School following “The Move” last summer is the involvement of the entire staff (including – the teachers – the classroom assistants – the caretaker – the cleaners – the dinner ladies – the lunch time supervisors – the “Lollipop Lady” – the grounds staff – the maintenance staff – the secretaries) as well as the pupils, parents, reading mums, Governors and Josephites in the development of this new culture at the Junior School in which everybody involved with the school will feel that they are actively involved in the Junior School and that what ever their job role may be, they will be able to articulate how their specific role contributes to the running of the school.

This process of inculcating this new culture has already started but it is going to take some two years before this is finally completed and will, hopefully, end with the Junior School being recognised as an “*Investor in People*”. Gaining the “*Investor in People*” standard will be an official recognition that everybody associated with the Junior School is trying to learn and work together so that the school achieves its aims enabling the pupils to experience the very best education possible.

So far the members of the Senior Management Team and the Heads of Year at the Junior School who have been involved at the “sharp end of this culture change” have been very positive about this culture change. They appreciate the added responsibility which they have been given and welcome the shift towards a “no blame” culture in which they feel supported and valued.

The next stage in the development of this new whole school culture will be the INSET day on 23 April 2001 (St George's Day) and will involve the teaching staff at the Junior School. This culture change at the Junior School will have to be managed and monitored very carefully but, in the end, there is no doubt that it will substantially enrich the education offered to the pupils at the Junior School.

I would like to suggest that one of the hallmarks of all good schools is that "these schools know what they are aiming to do and know whether they are meeting these aims successfully".

Schools need to have clearly enunciated aims which are known by all if the school is to be successful since, unless schools have these clear and explicit aims, which are subject to regular scrutiny (hence the need of both internal monitoring and an external inspection system), there can be no real and meaningful system of quality assurance within these schools. This external benchmarking will, of course, involve some form of whole school evaluation, monitoring and review.

While present Government's "Performance Management" initiative is restricted to teachers in the maintained sector, I believe that all those involved in schools (and not just the teachers) must embrace some form of "Performance Monitoring" which will allow staff to clearly know their personal roles in the school, how they can help to promote and fulfil the aims of the school and to have the assurance that the school is committed to helping them develop as people.

This means that all staff not only have to possess job descriptions but they must also have a clear understanding of their job role in the school and how their individual role helps to create a better school for everybody. Coupled with this is the recognition of the need for continuous professional development (ie what new skills do staff have to acquire to help the school improve even more) which must become an integral part of Performance Management or Monitoring – within schools.

Up the Down Stair Case is the title of a book about life in a downtown secondary school in New York City. While I have long forgotten the contents of this book, the title has always been important to me since I always mentally translate the original title to "Up the Down Escalator".

This image of walking up the down escalator serves to remind me that nothing stands still in education. Unless one is actively engaged in improving the overall quality of the teaching and learning in a school, the school will gradually but surely slip backwards just as people do who stop climbing up the down escalator go back down.

Simply to try and stand still and do nothing in education is, therefore, not a realistic option since to stand still on the down escalator means that one will be taken downwards by the natural movement of the escalator.

Whole school improvement is always challenging and sometimes made more difficult if one is always having to engage and win over a small but often vociferous minority who want to maintain the "status quo" of the past.

Some commentators have identified four different groups of teachers:

1. Those who are good teachers and fully support the school's ethos.
2. Those who are poor teachers but who fully support the school's ethos.
3. Those who are good teachers but do not support the school's ethos.
4. Those who are poor teachers and do not support the school's ethos.

For a school to really succeed and be successful, it needs all its teachers fall into the category of good teachers who fully support the school's ethos. The greatest threat to a school are not those who are poor teachers, for there are clearly established ways and means of dealing with such teachers, but those good teachers who do not support the underpinning ethos of the school. These staff, by resisting what the school is trying to achieve, are major obstacles to the overall success of the school. As we have seen schools are essentially about the two inter-related processes of teaching and learning. In the past perhaps too much emphasis was given to the teaching aspect of education and not enough to how children, pupils, students learn. The emergence of the "Effective School" movement has certainly played its part in making teachers realise how important it is to understand that there is more than one way a pupil can learn just as there is more than one way one can teach.

It is perhaps also worth reflecting that no matter how perfect the teacher may think the lesson has gone, sometimes the message is not quite communicated in the way intended - as in this case.

I had the privilege of listening to Gervase Phinn at the IAPS conference earlier this year. His entire after dinner speech was a series of amusing anecdotes about his time as an HMI in the Yorkshire Dales. Most of the stories, as it happened, were about events which took place either in religion classes or school assemblies whilst he was an HMI.

In one religion class, the teacher had tackled the story of the "Prodigal Son" or "The Forgiving Father" as it is often called. The teacher had spent the lesson trying to explain how pleased the father had been to see the return of his younger son in marked contrast to the attitude of the elder son. The teacher was going round the class, as one does, to ensure the pupils had grasped meaning of the story. Finally she turned to a young boy and asked him who was not pleased with the return of the young son, only to be given the reply "Guess the fatted lamb was not best pleased Miss".

This is not presently, as we know, a good time for farmers but Gervase Phinn also recounted the story of a severely special needs child in the local secondary school who could not read or write properly. This child had often be told he was quite useless but yet there was nothing this young boy did not know about sheep. His knowledge was almost encyclopaedic and he could describe clearly and accurately all the different breeds of sheep not only on the Dales but throughout the world. This story should serve to remind us that we forget at our peril the age old adage that there is more to education than IQ scores.

Daniel Goleman in his book, *Emotional Intelligence* argues that:

"our view of human intelligence is far too narrow, and that our emotions play a far greater role in thought, decision making and individual success than is commonly acknowledged".

Although it is easy to forget in the humdrum hustle and bustle of day to day life of the school, one must continually remember that for the Catholic school, the process of education involves much more than the teaching and learning which goes on the classroom.

During the last two years there has been an aspiration that the Junior School (and the College) should be seen as Catholic Christian Josephite Schools.

The new proposed staff contracts make very explicit references to the Junior School (and the College) being Catholic Schools and Josephite Schools and that all teachers as required to support this unique ethos of both schools.

As you will know, the Josephites have begun to articulate what is meant by “Josephite Spirituality” and the “Ethos of a Josephite School” as originally conceived by our Founder and how this has evolved and developed through the course of time. We have been attempting this task so that the “Josephite Spirit or Ethos” can be presented to and understood by the present teaching staff and Governors so that they, in their turn, can pass it on to future generations of teachers, other staff, parents, Governors, and pupils at the College and the Junior School.

This paper will, hopefully, go some way in helping to explain what being a Catholic Christian School might entail. As for the Junior School claiming to be a “Josephite School”, Fr Robert will shortly be producing a separate paper about “Josephite Spirituality”.

In the meantime it may be help to reflect for a few moments on the concept of the “Family Spirit” as reference is often made to the “Family Spirit” which permeates Josephite Schools.

The “Family Spirit” which underpins the “Ethos” of Josephite Schools is very much rooted in Scripture. In essence, it requires all those involved with the school to live out the Gospel values in a very radical way. It involves a realisation that we have to live our lives in a dynamic relationship with God and that there is a constant call to conversion as children of God. The “Family Spirit” finds its resonance in the words of Jesus found in Mark’s Gospel:

Who are my mother, brother, sisters? And Jesus looked round at them and said “Here are my mother and my sister and my brother. For anyone who does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother”. (Mk 3:34-35)

The Pedagogical Guide for the Josephites, drawn from the teachings of Constant van Crombrugghe, the Founder of the Josephites, is full of guidance as to what are the essential characteristics of a Josephite School. Above all the guide stresses the importance of the love and the pastoral care which teachers must always show to their pupils:

§ 71. When a teacher is known by his pupils as a person who loves them and who wants nothing more than their happiness at all time, that teacher has won a major prize in education since he has the key to their hearts.

§129. I am speaking here of real, deep and enlightened love; pastoral and paternal love; this love is everything and accomplishes everything. In a word, be like fathers to them, and that is not enough: be like mothers. You must love the children and make them feel that you love them; not only by avoiding in your dealings with them, all hardness, unjust coldness and discouraging severity, but by caring tenderly for them and having a blessed and cordial affection for them; letting them see that you have devoted your life to them, that you are happy to be with them, not only in work and study, but in everything else and in every detail of their school life.

But I must add one thing of the greatest importance: To love the children and to identify with them, teachers must love one another. Be of one heart and mind – *cor unum et anima una*. Putting this into effect is as simple as it is pleasant.

Some of you may remember that a Junior School pupil, David Clark, died in the summer of 1997. His sudden and unexpected death from leukaemia was all the more tragic since just a few weeks earlier he had collected enough points to come third overall in the ten event Victor Ludorum Athletics Competition held in the last two weeks of the summer term.

There is a tree planted on The Piazza at the College in David's memory and a small plaque has been placed on the side of the School Hall here at the College to commemorate his time at the Junior School. His epitaph, which is inscribed on the plaque reads "*He tried to achieve success from the challenge*".

These words have continue to live with me ever since David died and I have tried to apply them to my own life and to the Junior School. My own personal motto has now become "Achieve Success from the Challenge". One can either avoid challenges by trying to run away from them or one can see challenges as opportunities for growth and development.

Pruning is a necessary requirement from time to time to ensure that as far as possible a good crop materialises each year. Who could have imagined that following the severe pruning of the Junior School in 1993 that the school would have evolved into the large flourishing tree which it is today.

What about the future of education in general and schools in particular? Various authors have tried to envisage what schools will be like in 10 years time. These schools of the future will be organised in a very different from most schools of today. These schools are likely to become the focal points of the community in a way the local church was for many in previous generations.

The huge explosion in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) means that learning is no longer restricted to the classroom or the library or to "the school day". Anybody can hook up their computers to the Internet. There they will find unlimited information at the touch of a few keys. The website for the National Grid for Learning opens the door into Art Galleries and Museums. Visit the Natural Science Museum's website and one will find there a whole array of interactive learning programmes. Schools will tend to be open much longer becoming resource centres for people of all ages. Teachers will become learning managers, pupils will have their own Individual Education Plans (IEPs) with a tutor to manage them.

Is this all sounds too far fetched, it is not as community schools like the ones described above already exist in embryonic form throughout the country.

The future of the Junior School is already being addressed and already a number of major strategic decisions have been taken which will have a bearing on its future direction. Only siblings and Roman Catholics are currently being offered places at the Junior School.

The Lower Nursery will close in September 2002 thus reducing the size of the Nursery to 48 pupils which represents a reduction of 50% in the number of children currently attending the Nursery. 36 registrations have already been placed for entry into the Nursery at 3 years old for 2003.

No more registrations are being accepted for entry into the Junior School into other Year Groups for entry before September 2003. The class size in the Lower Years will be gradually reduced from 20 to 16-18 pupils per class. The Year Three (7+) intake is to be revived to allow up to 16 additional pupils to join the Junior School at the start of Key Stage 2.

These changes will alter the academic profile of the Junior School which will put further pressure on places.

One of the aspiration of the Governors which underpinned “The Move” was the belief that the College and the Junior School should become recognised “Centres of Excellence in Catholic Education” in the South of England. Schools which are exemplars of recognised good practice.

It is always good to celebrate success in an appropriate manner and during this year’s 50th birthday celebrations of the school, we have been a little less diffident in “blowing our own trumpet” and perhaps therefore more willingly to celebrate our achievements a little more openly.

I will not bore you with a long list but perhaps just a few achievements of the last 12 months or so which also help to show the wide and well rounded education which the pupils enjoy at the Junior School. Hopefully as Josephites we will also feel that we have played our part in these achievements of the Junior School not only today but also during the last fifty years.

Academic

The creation of the 5th largest Prep School in IAPS and still oversubscribed
The creation of one of the most sought after co-ed Prep schools in NW Surrey
13 Scholarships this year – 11 last year.
Pupil entry into boys’ selective schools such as RGS, Hampton, Tiffin.
Pupil entry to girls’ selective schools such LEH and Sir William Perkins
2000 KS2 SATs with English, Maths and Science gaining over 70% at Level 5
Winner of Eagle House Maths Challenge 2000
Winner (2000) and Runner-Up (01) in Woking Catenian Public Speaking Competition
Record number of Distinctions in the Y4 and Y5 English Speaking Board exams 2001

The Creative and Performing Arts

Symphony Orchestra of 50 pupils plus two Music scholarships in 2000 and 2001
Over 244 pupils learning musical instruments and a Choir of 60
Wide range of Drama productions and excellent LAMDA results 2000
Outstanding art work produced through the school especially in Years 5 and 6

Sport - Girls

IAPS National Netball Finalists 00 – no competition this year
Surrey Hockey Champions 00 and 01
South of England Hockey Champions 00 and Runners Up 01
National Hockey Champions 00
National Catholic Prep School Athletic Champions 00

Sport - Boys

Under 9 National Rugby Finalists 01 – finals cancelled due to Foot and Mouth
Surrey Hockey Champions 01
South of England Hockey Champions 01
National Hockey Finalists 01 – for the 9th time in 12 years
National Catholic Prep School Athletic Champions 00

Naturally one feels a sense of pride in all these achievements and yet these achievements do not actually meet my own criteria for what makes a school successful.

For St George’s College Junior School to be deemed to be a successful school, its needs to be judged against a different set of criteria because it claims to be a Catholic Christian Josephite School.

My reflections in the second part of this paper will, hopefully, enable a judgement to be made as to whether or not the Junior School is a truly a successful school – that is - whether it does deliver what it sets out to accomplish – to be a Catholic Christian Josephite School.

The most frequent title of address for Jesus in all four Gospels is “teacher” (*didaskalos*). Jesus often refers to himself as a teacher and on over fifty occasions the Gospels describe the work of Jesus as teaching. From his first appearance in public, Jesus made clear that he intended to teach the people how to live for the reign of God – with love and compassion, peace and justice, holiness and freedom.

At the time of Jesus, students typically sought out their teachers – Jesus himself was found three days later in the Temple “sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. (Lk 2:46-48)

In his public ministry Jesus took the initiative and went recruiting out his own disciples (*mathetes* - which also means “learners” or “apprentices” in Greek).

As Thomas Groome puts it:

Jesus was totally inclusive in whom he sought out and welcomed as apprentices – women, tax collectors, those of other races, public sinners, the outcasts of society. His pedagogy, epitomized in the parables, deeply engaged the everyday lives of the learners – farming and fishing, cooking and homemaking, robbers and taxes. He challenged old perspectives – both religious and social – and proposed new ones. And always he invited people to change their hearts, their lives and their world by following his “way”. (Pages 38-39 “Educating for Life”)

Mark notes in his Gospel that:

“the people were astonished at his (Jesus) teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes”. (Mk 1:22)

This is all the more surprising since Jesus had no official status as a teacher in his society – unlike the scribes. Jesus himself wanted his apprentices, followers, disciples to be teachers as well:

“Who ever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”(Mt 5:19).

The final mandate of the Risen Jesus to his eleven disciples was to

“Go and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you”. (Mt 28:20)

My late uncle John was a great fan of John Dewey regarded by many as the greatest American philosopher of education. I much prefer the writings of Jerome S Bruner and Thomas Groome. Sadly my uncle did not live long enough to finish his thesis on John Dewey but I would just like to share with you a sentence taken from Dewey’s Pedagogic Creed:

“I believe that the teacher always is the prophet of the true God, and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God”. (Page 32 “Dewey on Education”)

For Dewey and others, the vocation of the teacher in a Catholic School is inextricably linked with the proclamation of “The Good News”. I will return to this point later.

It is worth perhaps remembering at this point that to be a teacher is not for the fainthearted since, as St James reminds us in his letter:

“Only a few of you should be teachers, bearing in mind that we shall receive a stricter judgement”. (3:1)

On the other hand teachers should also take heart from the Old Testament prophet Daniel who wrote:

“At that time Michael will arise – the great Prince, defender of your people.....Of those who are sleeping in the Land of Dust, many will awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting disgrace. Those who are wise will shine brightly as the expanse of the heavens, and those who have instructed many in uprightness as bright as stars for all eternity”. (Dan 3:1)

or as an older translation puts it:

“Those who teach others unto justice shall shine like stars of heaven forever”.

These words are echoed in the title of a book “*And The Stars Shall Shine*” which is about the life of the Founder of the Josephites.

All of us who are or have been actively involved in teaching, whether in the classroom, training an apprentice or instructing an engaged couple will know the challenges which face both teacher and those being taught or as it is perhaps more accurate to say those who are doing the learning.

Education involves both teaching and learning. We ourselves know from our own experience that good teachers inspire us, that we work harder for them and we probably produce better results than might have been expected as a consequence of their teaching and inspiration.

Christopher Fry was obviously inspired by his teacher Miss Spence:

“I remember the morning when Miss Spence opened my eyes to the life of words....what stories she read to us when we sat at her feet I don't remember, but suddenly words were not only sentences but individuals. She gave each word so exactly its proper weight and meaning, yet so lightly, I felt I could hold the words like coloured stones in my hand. Perhaps because my ears were alerted so were my eyes. I can still see the light touching the golden wood of the polished floorboards where we were sitting.” Christopher Fry “*Can you find me?*”

We all have our own criteria of what makes a good teacher.

Each of us will have memories of our own school days and particular memories of those teachers who really did inspire us as well as the less happy memories of those teachers who drove us to distraction with their boring and uninteresting lessons.

Whether inspiring or not, all teachers are engaged with the process of enabling pupils to learn.

At the Junior School it is truly a delight to be able to go a visit the young children in the Nursery and Reception classes. These children, although while they appear outwardly to be living in our world, they actually live in another world all together. They are open, unfazed, trusting and very responsive. They have vivid imaginations turning tables and chairs into space stations to be explored. As they cannot tell the time, they have a different convention for how time passes. They will determine time in terms of “sleeps” – it is only to more sleeps to my birthday. This very special world is wonderfully captured in a poem called by “*Half-Past Two*” written by U.A. Fanthorpe.

Great teachers are to be able to engage and teach pupils at the pupil’s own level of ability and learning without appearing to be patronising. It is often said that one of hallmarks of those Josephites who have taught is “they always meet the pupils where they are and not where they should be”.

As a general rule, all teachers – among their many other skills – must be able to offer the following qualities to help facilitate the learning processes of their pupils:

- Arouse and create interest in their pupils.
- Plan their courses and lessons based on and for their pupils’ lives.
- Pose engaging questions to the pupils.
- Challenge pupils to go beyond their present levels of achievement.
- Arouse curiosity among their pupils.
- Getting pupils excited in their subject.
- Be enthusiastic in their teaching.
- Vary their teaching methods.
- Ensuring their lessons are “fun” and at times humorous.
- Help pupils to give meaning to their lives.

Those teachers who cannot deliver these qualities in the classroom are not only failing their pupils, they are failing themselves.

Learning is not simply about acquiring facts and figures to be repeated at exam time – though this is a necessary aspect of our present educational system. Learning at this basic level can best be described as “Shallow Learning” in contrast to “Deep Learning”. Teachers, especially those teaching in Catholic Schools, must be involved in the process of “Deep Learning” is about empowering young men and women to:

- increasingly take personal control of their own lives,
- to accept their personal responsibility to live out their lives as committed Christians,
- to be aware of the needs of others
- to do what they can to make their world, God’s world, a better place to live in.

Again as Thomas Groome puts it in his book “Educating for Life”:

“Such a vision calls for ways of educating that engage people as active agents in their own learning, instead of passive recipients; that help them to develop all their gifts and abilities, especially their capacity for freedom and responsibility;...that are designed to inform, form and transform participants and society toward wisdom of life and social well being”. (Page 36).

Perhaps the essential differences between “Shallow Learning” and “Deep Learning” might be teased out a little further through a short reflection about the teaching of the topic “Environmental Pollution”.

Having examined the salient facts of what is pollution - including how it is caused, the differing types of pollution, what effect pollution may have on the environment, (all Shallow Learning) the issue now arises of how the pupils are going to change their own personal lifestyles to reduce the effects of pollution in their own lives through agreeing to recycling, picking up litter, make less noise. Once they have engaged in this positive response and changed their personal attitude to pollution - including a commitment to reduce the effects of pollution in their lives - then “Deep Learning” can said to have taken place for these pupils.

I am also reminded of the challenge made to the Head of Maths at SGC during an INSET session by Sister Judith Rossi who asked “What is the Christian Message you are putting across when you teach Maths with your students?”

The question to ask a teacher of a Catholic School is not “What subject matter do your pupils learn in the classroom?” but rather “To what extent do you enable and encourage your pupils to take personal responsibility for their learning so as to enable them to continue their growth and development as committed Christians?”

If - by the end of Year Six at the Junior School - the pupils have become:

self-reliant young people with very high personal self-esteem,
who enjoy coming to school to learn with a spring in their steps
who are honest and open with each other
who treat and support each other with care and compassion
who have no time for bullies
who take a real and active concern for those who are in need
who are prepared to live out the words the Good News in their daily lives

then I shall have every right to be a very happy and content Headmaster.

When all the Junior School pupils begin live their lives in such a way, then and only then might consideration be given as to whether the Junior School is being successful.

Once the children have started to live their lives this way, the next stage will be to ensure all the staff – not just the teachers – do so as well.

It is always worth remembering that it is possible to disagree professionally without these professional differences of opinion having to spill over creating a negative effect within the day to day personal relationships of the staff.

Therefore the real success of the Junior School is proportionate to how the entire school community lives out those words of the prophet Micah:

“To act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly before your God”.

As a Catholic, Christian and Josephite School the way pupils and staff support and care for each other as Christians and people of goodwill is of vital importance and goes right to the very core of what the Junior School is all about.

The expected quality of this care and concern for each other at the Junior School is in marked contrast to the apparent care shown by a certain a Roman Catholic teacher called Mr Thomas in this Elizabethan playground rhyme:

“Tommy is a holy man,
He goes to Mass on Sunday,
He prays to God to given him strength.
To slap the boys on Monday”.

As Gerald Grace has written very perceptively:

“Do Catholic Schools in their practice live up to the principles of their mission statements? It is easier to write the principles of a schools’ mission statement than to live the principles in the every day pressures and preoccupations. And yet, if there is to be a distinctive conception of a Catholic School culture and ethos....then Catholic schools always have to strive to live out the commitments of their mission statement... Catholic schools have to try to show as much concern for, and respect of, the pupils who do not fulfil the ideal pupil role ie those who are disruptive and challenging, those who are slow to learn, those who are disorganised etc.”(Page 9) *“Catholic Schools and the Common Good; What this means in educational practice”*:

It is easy to teach model pupils who are compliant, well behaved and given their work in on time. Yet we must also remember that Jesus spent considerable time and energy with those who were not perfect. Those who needed help because they had been rejected by others. As a Catholic School, to help those who are struggling must be very much part of the Junior School’s mission.

There are those who believe that these so called “Vision Statements” and “Mission Statements” are at best unnecessary and at worst totally alien to the world of education. I am not one of these people. These unequivocal statements about the aspirations of a school are the very touchstones against which the individual school can be judged as to their success or otherwise.

As I have made clear already the Junior School seeks to be the “Number One” Independent Catholic Co-ed Junior School in the country. In someway it already is the “Number One” Independent Catholic Co-ed Junior School in the country as we have seen above.

Whether or not the Junior School ever achieves fully this status as the “Number One” school is not the real issue. What is at stake is the very clear unambiguous statement that the Junior School seeks excellence in everything it does. It seeks to be simply “the best at everything it does”. Our pupils and parents deserve no less than this.

This vision in turns gives a internal dynamism and enthusiasm to everything which takes place at the Junior School.

It makes clear to all - especially prospective parents that the success or otherwise of the Junior School is not about exam results and league tables.

The Mission Statement of the Junior School – which is identical to that of the College – throws into sharp relief that which makes the Junior School different from other Independent Junior Schools.

The Mission Statement summaries what we are and what we hope to do in our schools.

We are:

- independent Roman Catholic day schools that welcome Christians of other traditions allowing all to grow together in faith and worship.

We seek to:

- promote Christian values within a Roman Catholic context;
- promote our Josephite tradition which encourages a strong sense of family;
- create an environment where all, whatever their strengths and weaknesses, will be equally valued and encouraged to fulfil their aspirations and potential;
- attract able boys and girls to a broadly-based appropriate education in which they will strive for academic excellence and aim for the highest standards in their sporting and extra-curricular activities;
- offer a structured and challenging academic education within a disciplined and supportive environment which will enable pupils to play a responsible role in the shaping of society;
- foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and compassion which will reach out to all our families, Old Georgians, the local community and the wider world.

There is something very distinctive about catholic education which must be at the heart of the catholic school – namely its role in the bringing about the “Kingdom of God” – the mandate given by Jesus to his disciples.

At the Junior School we talk about creating “God’s Holy Mountain” within the school.

“The wolf and the young lamb will feed together.... the lion will eat hay like the Ox....No hurt no harm will be done on all my holy mountain, Yahweh says”. Isaiah 11:6-9 and again Isaiah 65:25

Every Catholic School should be a community comprising the serving ministries of the Early Church.

1. A welcoming community (*Koinonia*)
An inclusive community of faith, hope and love.
2. A word-of-God community (*Kerygma*)
To preach, evangelise, teach God’s word.
3. A worshipping community (*Leitourgia*)
An assembly of faith celebrating God’s covenant with us.

4. A community of welfare (*Diakonia*)
Caring for people's spiritual, psychological and physical needs.
To help build up God's reign of peace and justice at every level.
5. A witnessing community (*Marturia*)
To be a credible Christian witness in and to the local community.
To be living through lifestyle and example what it preaches.

In a very real sense, the catholic school is part of the kingdom of God since it is a community comprising members of God's family.

When as Headmaster I meet with prospective parents, the topics usually raised by parents include exam results, facilities, size of classes, sport, and entry procedures.

I am much more interested in talking about the fact that Junior School is a Catholic, Christian, Josephite School. I will always make the point that, unlike most other schools, we set out overtly to develop – in an appropriate manner - the individual spirituality – one's way of life – of each pupil.

While I make it clear that I do not set out to “convert” all the pupils at the Junior School into Roman Catholics - I also make it very clear that I want each pupil to become a more committed Christian by the time they leave the Junior School by trying to help the pupils to deepen their own personal relationship with God.

“Spirituality”, it must be remembered, is not synonymous with “religion” and Christian spirituality can never be reduced to teaching about “Christian values” or simply equated to the content of RE lessons. RE lessons teach about God.

At some point there comes a special and precious moment when “knowing about God” is transcended to “knowing God as a personal friend”. Christian spirituality is all about developing “each person's relationship with God”. In some traditions, spirituality is often made to sound esoteric and removed from life – confined to the interior self rather than lived out in the everyday.

For Christians, our spirituality is realised in how we live our day-to-day lives. To neglect our spirituality is to be less than who we are especially in these post-modernist times.

We, who are teachers and educators, will do well to remember the words of Blaise Pascal, the French Mathematician, who wrote:

“There is a God-shaped hollow in the human heart that nothing else can fill”.

While there are some significant benefits of living in this “post-modernism age” – for example the desire to create a society which is flexible and adaptable, where people learn together, where there is a search for wholeness rather than fragmentation, where bureaucracy and red-tape are swept aside, there are a number of very serious challenges to the Christian faith posed by post-modernism.

Crucially, post-modernists claim there is no ultimate truth or knowledge, no belief in the certainty of reality – instead we create our own reality (as do the children in the Nursery) - and there is an increasing emphasis away from a hierarchical structured sense of values which can lead to excessive self-centredness, self-indulgence and overweening self-importance.

In a very real way, Catholic Schools are already having to offer - and must continue to offer - a counter-culture to our post-modern day society. Being a counter witness can be very challenging and, at times, painful. I became quite unpopular with a number of people last term over my stance against fund raising at the Junior School for Comic Relief on Red Nose Day since many of the charities supported by Comic Relief are contrary to the traditions of Roman Catholic orthodoxy.

We know that many of our pupils and their families no longer set foot in church apart from our own school chapels. We know that many of their parents are ill equipped to inculcate the message of faith in their children. This is perhaps the biggest the challenge Catholic schools face today, the same challenge Jesus himself faced as set out to challenge the prevailing culture in his own proclamation of the Good News 2000 years ago.

In conclusion the measure of success for Catholic Christian schools has to be found not in their many academic, cultural and sporting achievements - as impressive as these may be - but in the degree that these schools have begun to realise "the true kingdom of God" within themselves and in doing so offer to their pupils (and everybody else connected with the school) the opportunity and space to develop as committed Christians.

The Junior School is a school which has the clear and explicit aim of offering its pupils a Catholic, Christian and Josephite experience of education. Against this – and this alone – should the school be judged as succeeding or failing its pupils.

This is why St George's College Junior School is not, cannot and must not become just any old school - no different from all the others.