

British Values and Our Catholic Ethos

The government set out its definition of 'British values' in the 'Prevent Strategy' (2011), which was designed to prevent the extremism and religious radicalization of young people. British values are considered by the present government to be *democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs*. The promotion of 'British values' is central to Catholic education because British values have their origin in the Christian values of our nation.

"We are proud that Catholic schools promote values that are both Catholic and British, including: respect for the individual, democracy, individual liberty, respect, tolerance and inclusiveness. Our schools promote cohesion by serving more ethnically diverse and poorer communities. Catholic schools provide high standards of education which are popular with parents from all social, economic and faith backgrounds." Paul Barber (Catholic Education Service 15 December 2014).

At St. Mary's we recognise, not only the importance of helping students to flourish academically but also spiritually, morally, socially and culturally, so they are fully prepared for life in British society and for their role as citizens, able to make the strongest possible contribution to the Common Good of all. We teach the importance of British Values by going much deeper into the meaning of what it means to live a good life, within a framework of Catholic Christian Values. This provides the context and meaning for understanding why *British values* are important.

At St. Mary's we provide an education which focuses on the formation of the whole person and on our vocation and purpose in life. We are guided by our mission statement 'Happy together in God's family, we love, grow and learn' as we reflect on our place and purpose in the world. We place a significant emphasis on the celebration of individuality and difference within our communities and our calling to work for the Common Good, in the service of others. Our Catholic ethos, which includes explicit reference to Christian and *British values*, makes a tangible difference to the way we work together and with our wider communities. Within this framework it would be impossible to overlook the government's view of British values expressed as 'democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs.'

At St. Mary's we further promote British values through our work in English. Classes choose texts each term which promote one or more of the values and provide children with opportunities for rich discussion and further understanding through the tasks set. This often allows the children to express their own views and interpretations through drama and dance.

The Rule of Law: the importance of laws, whether they be those that govern the class, the school, or the country, are consistently reinforced throughout every day, as well as when dealing with behaviour and through assemblies. The curriculum is designed to ensure students are taught the values and reasons behind laws, that they govern and protect us, the responsibilities that this involves and the consequences when laws are broken. Visits from authorities such as the Police and Fire Service are regular parts of our learning programmes and help reinforce this message.

Individual Liberty: students are actively encouraged to make independent choices knowing that they are in a safe, secure and supportive environment. We educate and provide boundaries for students to make choices safely, through the provision of a safe environment and an empowering education. We encourage students to see themselves as unique individuals able to make a unique contribution to building community. Students are encouraged to know, understand and exercise their rights, responsibilities and personal freedoms and receive advice about how to exercise these safely, for example through our exploration of E-Safety in computing.

Mutual Respect: at St. Mary's we promote respect for others, reiterated through our classroom and learning environments as well as extra-curricular activities such as sport. In line with our commitment to democracy, students are always able to voice their opinions as we foster an environment where students can safely challenge others and have respectful and meaningful discussions. We have a successful school council who meet regularly to offer ideas to make the school even better and we encourage students to substantiate opinions and to realise the value of co-operation and consensus as well as decision making through voting. Our emphasis on ethics, fairness and justice means that we ask our students to ensure that they look out for those who might be marginalised and disadvantaged.

Tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs: this is achieved through equipping students with the ability to develop positive values, understand their own beliefs and their place in a culturally diverse society. We give our students opportunities to experience such diversity within the wider community – visits to mosques / synagogues / 'Churches together'. All students experience a connection with other cultures and beliefs through our RE programme and theme weeks (Interfaith weeks). Our Religious Education curriculum follows the teaching of the Church in providing a broad and balanced education, which includes an understanding of and respect for people of other faiths or none and other religions, cultures and lifestyles.