Actions speak louder than words – we all know this to be true. It's not that words don't have any value, just that words that are not confirmed in action are empty and hollow. It means that we have confidence in someone who acts out what he or she says in words.

The theme of Catholic Education Week is “Shining the Light of Faith”, picking up on the first encyclical of Pope Francis – The Light of Faith. In this teaching, the Pope speaks about what it means to believe, to have faith and he reminds us that faith should lead to action.

Faith without action is just dreaming. Faith comes alive, becomes real when it is lived out. Pope Francis reminds us that faith in Jesus as our Saviour enables us to think big, to do things that we would not be able to do if we did not believe. We know that to be true. It is only when we believe in something that we are able to put energy and commitment into it. He reminds us that the essence of being parents, living out a lifelong commitment to another person and having children, is only really possible because we believe in something that is bigger than ourselves, we believe in someone who shows us how to be faithful.

We should be able to experience the difference that faith makes to a Catholic school.

Schools are, of course, communities of learning as well as faith. Faith and learning should be intertwined, faith itself being a way of knowing. Pope Francis reminds us of the relationship between faith and truth. There is no point in learning if we cannot have confidence in what we learn. We need to learn about those things that are true. As parents we want our children to grow up with solid understanding and knowledge. The combination of faith and learning in a Catholic school provides the best foundation for this.

How Parents can be involved in Shining the Light of Faith

by Parental Involvement Working Group (PIWG)

The Catholic Education Commission has established a Parental Involvement Working Group to support parental involvement in Catholic schools. When the Group was being established it undertook a survey of the views and concerns of Parent Councils and found that one of the main issues for parents was on how to build the faith dimension of the school within a secular society. All it takes is for a few of us parents to find ways, even small ways, to put our faith into action for faith to have an effect. The theme of Catholic Education Week this year poses a challenge to all of us parents – to put our faith into action more to the benefit of our schools, to make our own faith shine a bit brighter.

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We send our children to Catholic schools because we know that in these schools our children will be taught about how to live their lives based on faith as well as on the knowledge and understanding they need for their future.

We parents reinforce this faith by how we live our own lives. We provide encouragement to staff in the school to witness to faith and contribute to building a community of faith.

A useful and important tool to do this is the document, “Shining the Light of Christ in the Catholic School” which sets out ways for a Catholic school to evaluate how it is fulfilling its mission to be a community of faith and learning. This document should be discussed with the Parent Council and should help to inform the School Improvement Plan. Parent Councils should take the time to understand this document and to make use of it to help build the school as a community of faith and learning.

Things you can do as a parent to support your Catholic school:

- Discuss with other parents your hopes and aspirations about how your local school is working to put faith into action.
- The Parent Council could organise a faith sharing / faith supporting group within the school and encourage participation from parents and pupils.
- Pray for those who lead and teach in Catholic schools that they will be witnesses to their faith.
- The Parent Council could consider what the whole school community (pupils, staff and parents) can do to shine the light of faith in the local community.
- The Parent Council could facilitate a discussion for parents whose children are preparing for sacraments.
- At a personal level, be courageous and find some way to shine the light of faith more brightly within your family, at your workplace, among your friends.
- In a secondary school, keep your self informed about progress with the Caritas Award: how many are involved? what parishes? what activities in school & parish?
- In a primary school, ask about the Pope Francis FAITH Award and how the school is, or will be, involved.
- Speak to the Headteacher about “Shining the Light of Christ in the Catholic School” and find out how he / she is using this to evaluate the school.
- The Parent Council could have a discussion about “Shining the Light of Christ in the Catholic School” at one of its meetings or organise a particular event for this.
- The Parent Council could use “Shining the Light of Christ in the Catholic School” to think about how the Parent Council can contribute to the School Improvement Plan.
- Enquire about the school’s Religious Education programme - what is taught? how often each week?

If you want to find out more information about the Parental Involvement Working Group go to www.sces.uk.com/parental-involvement.html or e-mail parents@sces.uk.com