

# St. Mary's College Dundalk



# Teaching & Learning Policy

Approved by BOM 25<sup>th</sup> April 2017

## **Mission Statement**

St. Mary's College is a Catholic secondary school under the patronage of the Marist Fathers. The primary aim of the College through its spiritual and humanistic endeavours, is to promote and develop a sense of community where those entrusted to its care can be brought to the fullness of their human potential in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel.

The College, through its academic, pastoral and spiritual undertakings strives to provide for the holistic development and welfare of each of the students in its care.

## **Introduction**

At St. Mary's College students avail of a broad based academic curriculum, a progressive approach to the use of new technology in education and a highly engaged teaching and parental community. The highest academic standards are promoted in St. Mary's College with the majority of our students going on to third level education. An analysis of our student placement and results is presented annually to the Board of Management. Our classes are mixed ability and we encourage our students to take higher level at both junior and senior cycle.

Participation, teamwork, self and peer assessment and the ability to undertake independent research and learning are all core elements of our subject planning and delivery.

We take advantage of modern technology to help students become digitally literate and adept, ensuring they actively apply the concepts they have learned using stimulating and creative means.

## **How do our students experience teaching and learning in St. Mary's College?**

Our teachers are highly motivated and we pride ourselves on a very high level of teacher and student engagement. Subject departments and subject planning are important parts of school planning. The staff is working on new DES initiatives such as School Self Evaluation (SSE) and School Improvement Plans (SIP), Literacy and Numeracy and Junior Cycle Reform (JC2).

## **Management's commitment to Teaching and Learning**

The Management of St. Mary's College are committed to excellent teaching and learning.

Where possible the following will be undertaken annually:

- Students will be given access to the widest possible curriculum.
- Continuation of class teacher to ensure consistency.
- Commitment to encourage teachers to teach in a consistent manner across the subject department.
- Commitment to standardised assessments.

The Board of Management sets priorities and targets for improvement of teaching and learning at a whole school level. This is based on a range of factors including evidence gained from quality assurance processes, progress monitoring, behaviour monitoring and staff collaboration. Whole school targets are identified on the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and progress against the plan is regularly reviewed by the Board of Management. The targets in the SIP are reflected in subject development plans.

The Board of Management will:

- Ensure that all students receive a broad and balanced curriculum based on their individual needs and abilities.
- Set high expectations for students' progress and the quality of teaching.
- Establish and implement clear policies, practices and quality assurance procedures for assessing, recording and reporting on student progress.
- Set targets for improvement based on evidence, including in-school evidence and best practice.
- Analyse, interpret and evaluate data on student performance against targets and external comparative data.
- Monitor students' progress through questionnaires.
- Arrange developmental, collaborative, teaching practices and procedures to support continual improvement of high quality teaching.
- Monitor and assess the impact of individual subject development plans.
- Develop the capacity of teachers to enable and empower them to lead in these areas so that there is effective devolved leadership throughout the organisation.

## **Teaching and Learning with Young people**

We believe that young people learn best when they:

- Achieve academically.
- Develop and practice social skills.
- Develop and practice independence.
- Work co-operatively.
- Our creative.
- Work in teams / peer mentoring.
- Learn leadership skills.
- Use their initiative.
- Make decisions.
- Solve problems.
- Work individually, in groups and as a class.
- Improve speaking and listening skills.
- Develop and discuss their own ideas.
- Explore areas they are interested in.
- Develop and practice life skills.
- Receive support.

## **The Learning Environment**

Learning takes place in a safe environment which:

- Is challenging and stimulating.
- Is peaceful and calm.
- Is happy and caring.
- Is organised.
- Is well resourced.
- Makes learning accessible.
- Is encouraging and appreciative.
- Is welcoming.
- Provides equal opportunities.

## **Planning for Teaching and Learning**

Our teaching practices include profiling of students, individualised student reports and the most effective teaching and learning methodologies. We believe that all teaching should be of a high quality leading to each student making significant and rapid progress academically, socially and emotionally and in relation to any other specific need or individual target. This is achieved by:

- A culture amongst all staff that is focused on continual improvement together, sharing good practice and achieving the best outcomes for every student.
- Every member of staff with responsibility for delivering teaching having a detailed understanding of the specific learning needs of their students and planning accordingly to allow each student to make significant progress. This may involve: consulting with the Learning Support Co-ordinator about the needs of individual students - using IEPs / student passports as working documents to inform planning and resources.
- Differentiating work, resources and engagement strategies for individual students, including differentiating lesson planning for students in the same lesson
- Regular effective developmental evaluation, including self-evaluation, of the quality and effectiveness of teaching.
- Effective assessment of the ability and needs of a student on entry which is used to set individual targets for students that are achievable and if met will mean significant and rapid progress both academically and in relation to individual specific needs.
- Monitoring student progress against targets and making timely and effective intervention where students are not making progress; tracking progress and intervention in each subject in a consistent manner to contribute to whole school planning.
- Establishing positive behaviour in class, following the Code of Behaviour and Discipline Policy and ensuring incidents of appropriate and poor behaviour are shared with others so that all staff can understand the whole picture of each student.
- Planning for each student to develop the ability to evaluate and take responsibility for their own learning and behaviour.
- Monitoring attendance, punctuality, rewards, sanctions, uniform and where appropriate independent learning tasks / homework.
- Regular high quality Continual Professional Development (CPD) to support the development of all staff and meet identified training needs in keeping with the school development plan.

## **Planning and Preparation of Teaching**

Regardless of the setting all students have a right to expect to receive lessons that should lead to their progress. This expectation applies to lessons delivered in the College, at home or by on-line means. This progress should be evident over time. Lessons will only lead to progress if they have a clear direction over time and will only meet the needs of individual students if those needs are planned for. Therefore staff must be able to provide evidence that subject department plans have been well thought out. Staff are expected to do this in a collaborative way, for example by splitting tasks between all those who deliver a subject or by planning as a team.

### Lessons are expected to:

- Ensure students' progress in their learning.
- Clearly support learning.
- Use a clear structure.
- Have elements, such as plenaries, that allow students to summarise their learning and teachers to assess their progress in the lesson so they can help students understand how to improve.
- Allow students to develop over time and practice higher order thinking skills such as creativity, analysis, problem solving, decision making and application.
- Be differentiated for the individual needs of the student by task, resource, and / or outcomes.
- Use stimulating resources which engage the individual student.
- Use ICT or e-learning when appropriate because it will lead to progress.
- Provide pace and challenge for each student.
- Use effective questioning, feedback and reflection techniques to engage, challenge, encourage and develop students' understanding and progress.
- Incorporate numeracy, literacy, ICT skills where appropriate.
- Meet any external requirements.
- Be informed by prior learning and tracking of progress.
- Be enjoyable and interesting.
- Effectively use other staff where they are present in the lesson.
- Take account of the varying needs of differing groups of students, such as gender, ethnicity and so on.

Teachers should maintain exemplars of good and outstanding work, work showing clear progress, creativity or other positive features. Teachers should also maintain data and records to inform planning and improve their own teaching practice.

### **Teaching Strategies**

All staff should use teaching strategies which:

- Provide students with a balanced education so that they are not always experiencing exactly the same thing.
- Use positive behaviour management and encouragement for students to achieve, including praise and rewards.
- Allow students to learn in a variety of styles, including teaching students how to learn in a variety of ways and to recognise what to do when a teaching style is making it difficult for them to understand what is being taught.
- Encourage students to work independently or collaboratively with others;
- Nurture students' creativity.
- Take account of individual academic and non-academic targets of individual students.
- Make use of good practice developed by colleagues within the College.
- Aim to develop rapid progress for individual students.
- Provide clear feedback to students so that they know what to do to improve.
- Include regular opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning and understanding.
- Make learning enjoyable and incorporate fun where it leads to progress.

Students are expected to:

- Be ready to learn.
- Be in class on time.
- Dress appropriately in full uniform.
- Listen to others and expect to be listened to.
- Follow instructions first time.
- Use appropriate and positive language.
- Look after the building, displays and equipment.
- Follow classroom rules / College rules / staff expectations for health and safety.

Students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning and work with staff to make progress in both academic and non-academic ways. The views of students to inform planning and delivery are therefore important and students should be listened to and treated with respect when they discuss their own barriers to learning, what engages them and what helps them succeed.

### **Using physical space to support learning**

All teaching areas are expected to be kept to a high standard. Equipment necessary for learning activities should be available at the start of every lesson. Notice boards, displays, and posters should be kept up to date, relevant to the learning taking place and should where possible be used during lessons to help the students make better progress. Staff are encouraged to make physical areas welcoming and interesting for students so that it helps them make better progress.

Transition areas, such as corridors, can also be effective places to support learning and staff are encouraged to make the most of such areas.

Staff are encouraged to use displays of students' work as a reward and motivation tool so that students make better progress.

### **Quality assurance of Teaching and Learning**

A robust and rigorous quality assurance process will ensure the quality of teaching is continuously improving and therefore the outcomes for students will continuously improve. All those who are involved in teaching students are expected to contribute to the quality assurance process.

The quality assurance process will:

- Identify key aspects of teaching for development.
- Identify good practice, how it can be shared and how it can be implemented as widely as possible.
- Track progress of teaching and learning.
- Support the development of staff.



## **Continuous Professional Development (CPD)**

All staff should:

- Update their subject knowledge regularly.
- Explore new topics or areas within their subjects that are relevant to the interests of students and could be used in the class.
- Keep their teaching practice and strategies up to date with current trends and initiatives.
- Actively discuss and share good teaching and learning strategies, especially those that have worked with hard to reach children.
- Proactively input to their personal CPD programme.
- Actively engage with whole staff training.
- Support the development of colleagues through collaborative planning and where possible shared developmental lesson observations.

## **Co-Curricular Activities**

### Sport

Soccer, Gaelic, Basketball, fitness, Rugby, able-tennis, Athletics, School Run / Walk.

### The Dramatic Arts

Scoil dramaíocht, Seachtain na Gaeilge, School Choir.

### Public Speaking

Debating and Public Speaking Workshops (Irish and English), Poetry Competitions.

### Positive Education

Buddy system, Mental Health awareness, work experience, Green Schools, Peer Ed.

### Active Citizenship

Student Council, Young Social Innovator (YSI), SVP Youth for Justice, Mini-Companies, Student Mentors, Volunteering, Gaisce – The President's Award.

### Subject Promotion

History week, English week, Maths week.

### **School Self -evaluation (SSE)**

SSE is a management tool which helps schools to focus on the effectiveness of their practices. The theme for the next few years is on teaching and learning. As part of the process parents, students and teachers are surveyed about aspects of teaching and learning in the school and a School Improvement Plan (SIP) is devised to target the areas identified for improvement.

### **Pastoral Care**

The personal development of students is a core value of St. Mary's College. We believe that teachers care for their students and that education takes place in a genuinely caring atmosphere. Please see our Pastoral Care Policy.

### **ICT Facilities**

Teachers and students are already experiencing the benefits of our upgraded ICT facilities, cloud capability and the use of additional interactive whiteboards. Our facilities include well equipped classrooms with data projectors, OHPs, DVDs, laptops and PCs; Specialist rooms, i.e: science laboratory and computer labs with the latest high specification equipment including interactive smartboard. ICT supports and promotes the curriculum in St. Mary's College.

### **Special Education Needs**

We have the support of Learning Support Co-ordinator and Resource Teachers. Access to all of these supports is allocated on relevant needs.

### **Assessment for Learning**

Assessment is the process of generating, gathering, recording, interpreting, using and reporting evidence of learning in individuals and in groups. Assessment relies upon a number of instruments, one of which may be a test. It provides information about progress in learning. Assessment for learning is about using assessment in the classroom as a tool to improve students' learning.

### **Literacy and Numeracy**

Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life, the National Strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people. St. Mary's College promotes numeracy and literacy in all its subjects.

### **Junior Cycle Reform**

The junior cycle of post-primary education in Ireland is changing. Since 2014, the new junior cycle will feature newly developed subjects and short courses, a focus on literacy, numeracy and key skills, and new approaches to assessment and reporting.

### **Policy Evaluation**

This policy will be reviewed every three years, but revisited annually to ensure national changes are incorporated into policy and practice.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Chairperson, Board of Management, St. Mary's College

Dated: 25<sup>th</sup> April 2017