St Mary's High School
Downpatrick

'Every Child Matters'

Learning & Teaching Policy

May 2017

Context

In St Mary's High School, we are constantly working towards improving the teaching and learning of all our students. All staff take an active interest in their own professional development and how it impacts on the classroom through Staff Development Days and by attending external courses. Teachers constantly seek feedback from their colleagues through PRSD, the 'critical friend pilot' and from students about the effectiveness of their practice; and feedback is used to adapt and improve the learning process. We want to ensure that our students achieve their full potential by developing 'a can do attitude' with the resilience to meet the challenges that will come their way in their learning and in life. We acknowledge that as teachers we have a lasting effect on our students and their relationship to their learning in all areas of life, influencing how they engage with new ideas and attitudes.

Aims of the Policy

- To clearly articulate the expectations of the standards of learning and teaching in our school
- To ensure that all students in our school are provided with high quality learning experiences that lead to consistently high levels of student achievement
- To create consistency across all classes with a shared understanding of what works well in the classroom

Guiding Principles of the Policy

- All staff will be guided by the school's motto 'Every Child Matters'
- All staff will be guided by their subject Departmental Action Plans to improve learning and teaching
- Varied teaching methods and strategies will be used effectively and appropriately to accommodate differing learning styles
- Staff and students will strive for continuous improvement through the use of self-evaluation
- Professional development is essential in supporting all adults to develop their own learning
- Teachers will take an active role and responsibility in developing their teaching
- Teachers must address barriers to learning which may prevent students from achieving such as disruptive, passive behaviour or lack of confidence
- Teachers need to focus at departmental and pastoral level on promoting achievement, resulting in actions that challenge underachievement
- Identifying and challenging underachievement is the responsibility of all teachers
- All teachers are leaders of learning and demonstrate through their own example that they are lifelong learners

Planning and Preparation

Teachers should plan lessons which:

- Allow the students to progress in their learning

- State the objectives and learning intentions clearly ie having a clear beginning, development of learning and plenary
- Use plenaries to summarise learning and help the students understand how to improve
- Are differentiated for varying needs by task, resources, outcomes and/or method
- Allow the students to develop and gain experience of using higher order thinking skills ie creativity, analysis, problem solving, decision making and application
- Will have higher order questions based on Bloom's Taxonomy to direct and challenge the students
- Provide pace and challenge for all students
- Use stimulating resources including the use of ICT and e-learning which are differentiated as appropriate to the students
- Incorporate the school's Literacy, Numeracy and ICT policies
- Meet external requirements

Teaching Styles

Teachers should use a range of strategies and methodologies which:

- Allow the students the opportunity to learn in their preferred style i.e. visual, auditory and kinaesthetic
- Allow students to work independently and collaboratively and which contribute to one another's learning
- Use positive behaviour management and encouragement for students to achieve including praise i.e. text messages and post cards home
- Use other students and external agencies where appropriate to address the class

The Learning Environment

The way in which teachers manage the classroom will have a significant effect on students' learning and behaviour. Students learn and progress in a structured and stimulating environment. A register must be taken for every lesson and absence should be followed up in the next lesson. Students must enter and leave the classroom in an orderly way.

We believe that learning takes place in an environment which is:

- Challenging and stimulating
- Peaceful and calm
- Well organised
- Happy and caring
- Encouraging and appreciative
- Welcoming

The Learners

We encourage our students to:

- Be prepared for all lessons
- Take pride in their work through consistent expectations across all subject areas
- Make positive contributions to class discussion
- Take responsibility for improving their own learning
- Ask for help if required
- Follow the school's Behaviour for Learning Policy

Purposeful Reinforcement of Learning

Homework should be a purposeful learning activity. When setting homework we need to ensure the following:

- It should be structured and focus on the opportunity for independent learning
- It should be an opportunity for reinforcement of learning through practice questions or learning core information
- It can be used to prepare for the next topic thus forming a link between one lesson and the next
- The completion of homework by students should always be monitored in the next lesson by the class teacher
- Marked work should be returned promptly with effective feedback
- The corrections/actions advice given to students in teacher feedback should be followed up to check learning

Cross reference with the school's Homework Policy

Celebrating Learning

Achievement must be recognised and rewarded in the following ways:

- Praise by the teacher within the classroom lesson
- Sharing of good student practice
- Positive notes in student planners for parents/guardians
- Use the department's reward system
- Displaying students' work
- Sending students to the Head of Department or SLT to show good work

Roles and Responsibilities in Learning and Teaching

Subject Teachers

The role of the subject teacher is to undertake the following:

- To talk to students about their learning in order to establish reasons for underachievement
- To set targets that are usually negotiated and reviewed
- To take action when work or behaviour fails to meet an acceptable standard
- To inform the Head of Department and the Head of Year if students fail to respond to the actions
- To set regular short term achievable and meaningful targets with the student

Heads of Department

The role of the Head of Department is to undertake the following:

- To ensure that planning of Schemes of Work within the department is shared
- To ensure that Schemes of Work are available, appropriate, rigorous and sufficiently challenging and to review/amend as appropriate with the team
- To monitor and track the progress of individuals and groups of students against relevant data and liaise with the Head of Year when necessary
- To ensure that there is consistently high planning for learning across the department
- To quality assure the work produced in the department through Book Scoops, moderation etc

Form Teacher

The role of the Form Teacher is to undertake the following:

- To set the standards and expectations of students for the day
- To support the students in their learning, personal development and dealing with pastoral issues
- To work with the Head of Year to monitor the academic and personal development of students in their form class

Heads of Year

The role of the Head of Year is to undertake the following:

- To work in partnership with the Form Teacher and class teachers in promoting the school ethos across the year group
- To work with Heads of Department and class teachers regarding any student who is a cause for concern
- To track the performance of students in their year group in the 4 Tracking Assessments and school reports to identify under performance
- To monitor e-reports and support cards for identified students
- To work with the Senior Teacher, Heads of Department and class teachers to set up intervention meetings in January, August and at any other time during the academic year
- To work with parents regarding underperformance

Senior Leadership Team

The SLT is responsible for the overall management and development of teaching and learning across the school. They will undertake the following:

- To organise staff development days regarding learning and teaching and to evaluate their effectiveness
- To work with Heads of Department and Heads of Year to ensure that the personal and academic needs of all students is being met
- To work with Heads of Department and Heads of Year regarding under achievement
- To quality assure the learning and teaching across the school through the PRSD model, 'critical friend' pilot and share good practice
- To undertake Book Scoops and to monitor moderation practices in the school
- To set up focus groups that will report back to staff on the impact of learning and teaching eg the passive learner

Learning Support

Teachers and Classroom Assistants should:

- Be aware of the specific learning needs of their students such as SEN (Special Educational Needs), EAL (English as an Additional Language) and G&T (Gifted and Talented)
- Consult with the needs of the individual students when appropriate
- Follow the strategies outlined by the SENCO for Classroom Assistants to support students (See Effective Use of Classroom Assistants to Support Teaching and Learning)
- Use IEPs (Individual Education Plans) as working documents

Assessment, Recording and Reporting

Teachers should:

- Assess the student's work regularly in line with the school's Assessment Policy and Marking Policy
- Use analysis of tracking assessments to inform their teaching and support the student's progress
- Use data to ensure students are working at their full potential and set targets accordingly
- Inform parents and appropriate staff ie Head of Department, Head of Year re the student's progress or underachievement so that intervention meetings and support strategies can be put in place

Monitoring and Evaluating the Quality of Teaching and Learning

Teachers are responsible for students in their classes, for evaluating the quality of teaching and the standards of student's achievements and setting targets for improvement. We seek to achieve this by:

- Self-evaluating the quality and effectiveness of their own teaching and classroom management
- Tracking and monitoring student progress to ensure they achieve well against prior achievement
- Encouraging and developing the ability of students to evaluate and take responsibility for their own learning
- Evaluating the teaching of their subject, the planning of their lessons and using this analysis to identify and share effective practice that leads to improvement
- Implementing policies and practices for assessing, recording and reporting on student progress and setting targets for further improvement
- Undertaking through PRSD and the 'critical friend' pilot lesson observations in order to share good practice and identify areas of strength or areas for improvement
- Monitoring standards of students' work by regularly sampling work books