

## **St. James' Catholic High School**

### **Teaching and Learning Philosophy statement (Policy)**

St. James' Catholic High School is a caring Christ-centred school, where our mission statement is at the centre of everything that we do:

'St. James' Catholic High School aims to promote a Christ-centred, caring environment, where individuals develop their full potential and achievement is celebrated'

#### **INTRODUCTION**

At St. James' Catholic High School we believe in the concept of lifelong learning and the notion that learning should be a rewarding and enjoyable experience for everyone; it should be fun. Through our teaching we equip children with the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary to be able to make informed choices about the important things in their lives. We believe that appropriate teaching and learning experiences help children to lead happy and rewarding lives.

#### **AIMS & OBJECTIVES**

The teaching and learning policy is intended to promote consistency and high standards. At St. James' we aim to provide a caring, supportive and stimulating environment with high quality teaching and learning that create:

- A high level of literacy and numeracy and an enquiring mind which wants to learn more each day;
- Independent learners who are confident, adaptable and willing to cooperate with others;
- Imagination and creative expression through a wide range of media;
- Conscientious, active citizens of our multi-cultural society who are tolerant and respect others' values;
- Pride in achievement and a desire to do well in all aspects of their lives;
- Dynamic links between the school, home and the community which promote aspiration and high expectations;
- Equality of opportunity for all.

#### **The Heart of the St. James' Framework:**

##### **VAKE Methodology and Mind Friendly Learning**

The quality of teaching and learning at St. James' has always been good. However, since becoming a Humanities College, our teaching and learning philosophy has been driven by two key ideas: the use of VAKE methodology (Visual/ Auditory/ Kinaesthetic/ Emotional) and Mind Friendly learning in lessons. This reflects a conscious whole school effort to become outstanding in all areas of the curriculum.

Members of the Specialist Schools cross-curricular team attended VAKE and MFL training, provided by Peter Greenhalgh. Over four sessions of INSET, the team explained the ideas behind VAKE and MFL to the whole staff, and colleagues were given a practical demonstration of activities. Staff were then encouraged to come up with their own new ideas, and given departmental time to include them in schemes of work.

### **VAKE Methodology**

VAKE Methodology stresses that pupils learn in different ways, and that our teaching styles should reflect this. It identified four **intelligences** (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic & emotional that all of us possess). For pupils to reach their potential and access work at their own level, schemes of work should include:

**VISUAL** activities: e.g. picture sources, video and DVD material; explaining and recapping objectives.

**AUDITORY** activities: e.g. listening to music in the background of a lesson.

**KINAESTHETIC** activities: e.g. moving around the room, moving into different groups, snowstorm activities.

**EMOTIONAL** activities: e.g. reflecting on how people react to different situations, discussion work, understanding and empathising with different emotions.

VAKE focuses teaching away from teacher-led lessons and focuses activities and learning back on to the pupil. This does not mean that each lesson should address all of the four styles. But it is probably appropriate that schemes of work should provide opportunities to address the four intelligences at least twice.

Every department's teaching and learning policy statement contains further details on how VAKE ideas have been incorporated into schemes of work

### **Kagan Learning**

Another approach to learning embraced by the St. James' Framework is Kagan Learning. This emphasises the importance of good group work, and activities that encourage co-operation and respect amongst students. Lots of resources can be found on the Y Drive at staffonly/KAGAN, including ideas for lessons, starter activities, software for effectively grouping pupils and timers. For more information, see Mark Devine and Laura Redpath in school.

## **Mind-Friendly Learning**

Mind-Friendly Learning (MFL) theory explains how the brain learns. It also stresses the importance of being in the right frame of mind to learn. At times, we need to be stimulated to learn, whilst at other points we need to be calmed down and reflective.

MFL works in close partnership with VAKE. At the start of a lesson, pupils need to be focused and entering in classroom activity with the teacher present (Meet and Greet) can help this. Starter activities need to be short and clear, so that pupils can see where the lesson is going. During the lesson, 'calming down' activities such as 'Brain Gym' and recapping on learning allow pupils to embed lesson objectives.

VAKE-style activities keep pupils motivated and willing to learn. At the end of a lesson, interactive activities such as hotseating and quizzes confirm pupils learning and ensure that they depart ready and alert for their next subject.

The school's Teaching and Learning File contains information on suggested activities for 'Brain Gym' and other VAKE/MFL that can be used in lessons.

## **EFFECTIVE LEARNING**

Based upon our foundation of VAKE and MFL, we provide opportunities at St. James' for children to learn in a number of different ways. These include:

- investigation and problem solving;
- whole class work;
- responding to visual and audio material;
- research and finding out;
- questioning;
- debates, role plays and oral presentations;
- group work;
- use of the computer;
- designing and making things;
- pair work;
- fieldwork and visits to places of educational interest;
- participation in physical activity;
- independent work;
- creative activities;
- reflecting on what has been learned

## **EFFECTIVE TEACHING**

Effective learning can only take place when the teaching focuses on motivating children, builds on their existing skills, knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. Outstanding lessons are thoroughly prepared and form part of a sequence of lessons clearly identified in a detailed scheme of work. The following sets out the expectations of the Framework.

The Framework is based on three stages within every lesson and firm consistent routines. The three stages in the lesson are:

- Starter
- Main teaching phase
- Conclusion/ Plenary

### **Starter**

- The aim of the starter is to get the group settled and focused ('warm up the brain').
- Short tasks, quizzes or 'brain teasers' are often useful ways of getting students thinking.
- The starter should review the last lesson and/or homework.
- It sets the aims for the lesson ahead.
- It's not based on 'hands up'.
- Teachers should avoid confrontation with difficult students wherever possible.
- The starter should start quickly and not overrun.

### **Main Teaching Phase**

This section addresses the key learning objectives and can be split into two parts: the introduction and the development phase.

The introduction phase is led (modelled) by the teacher, guiding students and demonstrating the skills they will require; students should feel confident and supported as they contribute and "assist" the teacher. Throughout the pace needs to be brisk in order to ensure progression and that students apply their new learning to the next task.

- Learning is assessed orally throughout the phase.
- Opportunities are provided for students to develop their confidence in speaking and listening.
- A large part of the development phase is interactive, both between teacher and students, and between the students themselves.
- It is important for the teacher to plan the transition between each part of the phase carefully.

There are a number of techniques which make up the repertoire of strategies the teacher can employ in this phase:

### **1) Teacher Exposition/Demonstration**

This technique will often start off the main teaching phase.

- It should employ a good range of resources.
- Teachers should 'commentate' on their thinking when explaining or modelling.
- New language/spellings should be 'flagged up'.
- Students should be concentrating on understanding what is happening, and on trying to remember what they have learnt.

### **2) Pair/Group Discussion Work**

- This is a very good way of ensuring all students are engaged in the lesson, and provides excellent opportunities for students to think for themselves in a less pressurised setting than whole-class questioning
- It provides a good link between teacher exposition and structured whole class questioning or student demonstration
- Clear timescales and expected outcomes need to be set by the teacher
- Teachers should not be worried about all students 'reporting back'. The main aim of this technique is to allow opportunities for all students to engage with the learning

### **3) Structured Questioning**

This provides opportunities to develop understanding.

Teachers should:

- Ensure a range of questions are asked from low to high order ('descriptive, reflective, speculative').
- Rarely use hands up - much better to select students to answer. This enables teachers to ensure students have had adequate 'thinking time' and means questions can be targeted to push more able students.
- Teachers should not be afraid to ask the same student a series of progressively more challenging questions.
- Teachers should not repeat a student's answer. This encourages students to mumble. If a student is too quiet he/she should be encouraged to repeat the answer more audibly.
- If a student is reluctant to answer, then give them time to respond. If this fails, rephrase the question or ask another instead. Never move on to another student until you have gained a response and praised it.

### **4) Student Demonstration**

This is perhaps the hardest technique to introduce, but the one which can contribute the most to learning when successfully implemented. It is very dependent on the creation of the right classroom ethos and the teacher needs to train students in the routines.

- It is best used towards the end of the main teaching phase.
- The teacher should model an explanation first, followed by a confident student first.
- When students are at the front, the teacher should consider moving to the side of the room.

- Listening students should be encouraged to give feedback and ask questions of the student at the front.

### **Independent Practice**

The aim is to reinforce and develop learning from the interactive parts of the main teaching phase and will often be the last part of the main teaching phase. Independent practice will usually involve students working as individuals, but in some practical subjects it may be more appropriate to work in groups.

- Time is provided for the teacher to support less able students.
- Tasks can be set to develop further more able students' thinking and understanding.
- Independent practice provides opportunities to check understanding.
- The teacher needs to explain very clearly.
  - i) how written or practical work should be presented.
  - ii) where it should be done.
  - iii) the importance of handwriting, spelling, punctuation, etc, where appropriate.
  - iv) any health and safety considerations.
- Where appropriate, students should mark or evaluate their own or each others' work at the end of the phase.
- This enables students to gain early feedback on their progress and understanding.
- For some practical subjects, more time may well need to be given to independent practice than is suggested in the broad guidelines.

### **Conclusion/Plenary**

- An opportunity for reflection.
- A chance for students to express what they've learnt, and for the **teacher to check for understanding**.
- The **teacher should summarise** key learning points.
- Homework can be explained/demonstrated.
- Opportunity to praise the group on how they are working.
- It is important for the teacher to **protect this time** and for a routine to be followed for every lesson.

### **Pre-conditions for Learning**

For the framework to be effective, there are certain pre-conditions for learning which need to be in place.

Routines:

At the beginning of lessons:

- Students line up in an orderly fashion at the door, remove their coats and tidy their uniform.
- Students are met and greeted at the door – always. Teacher-student interaction demonstrates the value we place on positive relationships and sets the right tone for learning.
- Students stand behind their chairs, are formally welcomed by the teacher and invited to sit down.
- There is a starter activity ready for students to begin immediately.

- WALT & WILF, as appropriate are on the IAWB screen.
- The register is taken.
- Late comers are acknowledged, to be dealt with at an appropriate time in the lesson.

During the lesson:

- Teacher establishes routines for making contributions e.g. hands up, “pop corn”.
- Students are given time targets for the activities they undertake.

At the end of lessons:

- Conclusion/plenary signals the start of the third part of the lesson.
- Time is set aside for homework to be recorded and reports to be completed.
- Students stand behind chairs, check the floor and desk for litter and put it in the bin. They also return any remaining apparatus to the teacher.
- Teacher checks the desks for graffiti and if any is seen it is to be removed by the offenders, at an appropriate time.
- Teacher dismisses the class at the door ensuring orderly behaviour on the corridor.

### **Classroom Culture**

The framework is about:

- Collaboration in the classroom, not competition or humiliation.
- Integration,
- Dialogue, not monologue.

It is important for teachers to make very explicit what they expect students to actually do at every stage in a lesson

Teachers should always challenge behaviour that does not meet expectations, in line with the School Code of Conduct. As always, it is the notion of respect which underpins the St. James’ Framework and our Code of Conduct

New policy written by Dr S Guscott  
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