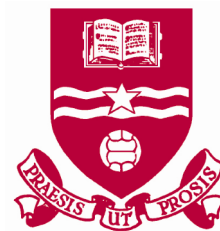


## SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION REPORT – DIFFERENTIATION



### Mission Statement of De La Salle College, Waterford

De La Salle College Waterford is a Catholic school. It is a learning community where all students are valued and educated in preparation for a meaningful life.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### The focus of the evaluation

A school based self-evaluation of teaching and learning was undertaken during the period September 2015 to May 2016. During the evaluation, teaching and learning in the following was evaluated:

- The quality of learning outcomes for students – Differentiation ,supported by effective questioning.

This report summarises the strengths that were identified and the areas that have been prioritised for improvement.

### School context.

De La Salle College Waterford is an all-boys Catholic school. It is a learning community where all students are valued and educated in preparation for a meaningful life. The school offers the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate programme to its students. We have an enrolment of 1200 students in 2014/2015. The schools catchment area includes Waterford City, Co. Waterford (East), South Kilkenny and South Tipperary. De La Salle College Waterford is an all-boys Catholic School under the trusteeship of Le Chéile. The college is managed by a Board of Management, is funded by the Department of Education and Skills. De La Salle College Waterford was founded in 1891 by the De La Salle Brothers and serves as a Catholic school for boys. De La Salle College Waterford seeks to promote an atmosphere of friendliness, discipline and co-operation where everyone can experience respect, encouragement and support. While every school is a community in which adults and young people live and work together, the La Sallian School is inspired by the vision of St. John Baptist De La Salle that Gospel values must permeate the life of a Catholic school in such a way that students internalise those values and reflect them in their behaviour.

## 2. The Findings

The *Framework for Junior Cycle* states that assessment will focus on supportive learning. In order to support learning we need to know what students are thinking. Research suggests (Mason and Watson) that if we know what children are thinking we can find out a lot about how and what they are learning. To do this we need to ask questions that:

- Interest, challenge or engage.

- Assess prior knowledge and understanding.
- Mobilise existing understanding to create new understanding.
- Focus thinking on key concepts.
- Extend and deepen learners' thinking.
- Promote learners' thinking about the way they learn.

We collected information from parents, pupils, teachers, Curriculum and Assessment facilitator, Principal and Deputy Principals in preparing this report.

The evaluation based on a survey of Teaching staff, a focus group with Junior and Senior cycle students, Subject Department meetings and regular informal discussions between teachers and senior management team indicate the importance of questioning and how learning is best supported by effective questioning.

The results of the survey carried out among the teaching staff is as follows:

1. I think about the questions I am going to ask in class and plan one or two really good questions per lesson.  
Always 26.7%  
Sometimes 66.7%  
Never 6.6%
2. I ask questions that challenge and engage the students.  
Always 66.6%  
Sometimes 33.4%
3. Before teaching a new topic I use questions to assess the students' prior knowledge and understanding.  
Always 56.6%  
Sometimes 40%  
Never 3.45
4. I ask questions that force students to use existing knowledge or understanding to create new understanding  
Always 48.4%  
Sometimes 51.6%
5. I ask questions to encourage creative and critical thinking  
Always 65%  
Sometimes 35%
6. I try to avoid asking too many closed questions  
Always 35%  
Sometimes 61.6%  
Never 3.4%
7. I allow time for thinking after a question is asked in class  
Always 48.4%  
Sometimes 45%  
Never 6.6%

A focus group comprising of Junior and Senior cycle students was also carried out. All the students present felt that questioning is very important in class and the following are the reasons stated for their importance:

- Clarifies problem areas for the student.
- Highlights general problem areas for the teacher.
- Gives students an opportunity to engage orally in the class.
- Teacher led questions will highlight problem areas for “quieter” students who won’t ask questions themselves.
- Aids good communication within the classroom (student to student and teacher to students).
- Questions encourage students to remain focused in class (in case the teacher may ask a random question)
- Questions promote class engagement, discussion and dialogue.
- Questions allow promote learning.
- Questions encourage students to dig deeper in the knowledge provided and seek their own answers.
- Questioning allows all students to access the curriculum.
- Questioning allows students to benefit from the curriculum and allows students to improve their grades.

The outcomes of discussions among staff at subject departmental level were shared with the whole staff, stressing the importance of differentiation and effective questioning across all subject areas. There was a whole-staff agreement that continuing CPD on different types of strategies that could be used to enhance student learning through differentiation and effective questioning was required.

#### Summary of School Self-Evaluation findings

Our school has strengths in the following areas:

- There is awareness of the importance of effective questioning amongst staff and they see themselves as having a role to play in differentiation.
- A dedicated staff that is willing to engage in programmes in order to enhance student learning and professional development in this area.
- Good support from the learning support department
- A positive rapport between staff and students as highlighted in our WSE which promotes encouragement to students to ask questions
- The majority of teachers ask questions to students to encourage creative and critical thinking.

The following areas are prioritised for improvement:

- To create a classroom climate in which questioning is encouraged.
- Plan questions in advance to ensure the questions are focused
- Raise the quality of questions, consider the purpose of questions.

