



## **Loreto College St. Stephen's Green**

### **Literacy Strategy**

#### **Introduction**

The Board of Management of Loreto College St. Stephen's Green is committed to providing the very best educational opportunities for each student in its care. The fostering of autonomous learning, independent thinking, critical thinking and analysis and an ability to research and a love of words is central to what we do at the College and there is widespread acknowledgement that each of these skills can only flourish in a learning environment where literacy is developed and embraced as a lifelong asset.

The Board of Management welcomes the Department of Education and Skills' document *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* and in particular its broader definition of literacy to include 'the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication, including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media' The Literacy Strategy, set out below, outlines the steps the school community intends to take to raise awareness of the importance of literacy as a life skill, to remediate where deemed necessary, to foster a love of reading for pleasure and to encourage a whole school approach to effective communication.

#### **Why a Whole School Approach to Literacy**

The promotion of an integrated whole-school approach to literacy...is critical at post primary level' DES C/L 0025/2012. Research on what works, indicates that within post primary, a school wide approach, starting in First Year is very effective in improving literacy standards. The consolidation and development of basic skills in this crucial year will prepare the student for success in the years that follow at secondary school and beyond.

The school community is adopting a whole-school approach to literacy beginning in September 2012. The focus for particular attention is the First Year Group.

#### **Literacy Working Party**

This group was established in September 2012 and is responsible for supporting the development and implementation of a whole-school approach to literacy, encompassing

professional development for teachers, short term interventions for students and a school-wide enrichment policy.

The Literacy Working Party comprises:-

- Ailis Travers School Development Planning Co-ordinator
- Jill Cunningham AFL Co-ordinator, Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator
- Ann Marie Smith Maths Department Co-ordinator
- Ann Freeman Learning Support Co-ordinator
- Jackie Dempsey Principal
- Des Fitzgerald Deputy Principal
- Ella Doran Librarian
- Grainne Madden Librarian
- Year Heads

### **Audit of existing Provision for Literacy Development**

A preliminary review of literacy provision was undertaken and the following good practice was established:-

- A standardised test is carried out on each student prior to her first day in First Year.
- There is a well-stocked library with easy access for all students to books, written materials and computers.
- There is a librarian on duty all day.
- There is a budget available to all subject departments to purchase new books as required.
- There is a well-funded Learning Support department and a Learning Support Co-ordinator.
- There is a Literacy and Numeracy and AFL Co-ordinator

### **Priority Areas for Development**

- Focus on First Years in this first phase.
- Promote literacy as part of subject department plans.
- Parents of First Years to be informed of plans and kept abreast of developments.
- Use new AFL strategies to promote literacy (see AFL strategy document)
- Analyse results of standardised tests so that they can inform teaching and learning more effectively.
- Administer the NGRT Test to all First Years students in to establish exact reading ages. Establish targets for each student. Re-test at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> Year to establish the efficacy of the interventions used as part of the literacy strategy.

## **Planned Interventions**

- Word walls in all classrooms
- The insistence on perfect grammar and spelling on all posters throughout the school. Mistakes will mean they will be removed.
- Students' notices for announcement on the intercom will only be made if the spelling, punctuation and grammar are perfect.
- Corridors, stairs and locker areas will be areas for print rich material. The First Year locker area will have a special notice board with interesting pieces from magazines and newspapers, with an exhortation to 'take time to read'.
- BOOK BOX initiative. In each First Year classroom there will be a box of 24 books chosen specially by a team of 5<sup>th</sup> Years. Each student will be encouraged to take a book during a study period and to read an extract. This should provoke discussion, maybe a follow-up visit to the library to borrow the book or a request at home to buy or borrow the book.
- A reading list will be emailed to all parents of First Years with a recommendation that each student read 20 books in the school year, including the summer holidays.
- The Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) strategy will be used twice in every term. This promotes reading across the whole school. The idea is that, at a set time, everyone stops what they are doing and reads for fifteen minutes. It is a shared experience, gets people talking about books and reading while conveying a strong message that the school believes in reading. Students read, the Principal and Deputy Principal read, teachers in the staff room read, phones are taken off the hook and secretaries read, the caretaker reads and all visitors to the school are offered books to read or magazines to look through.
- Teachers on supervision will be encouraged to be seen reading a novel so that it is judged a worthwhile activity and not a waste of time.
- A questionnaire will be given to students to establish how long they spend in a week reading for pleasure and how many books they have read in a specified two month period. A similar questionnaire will be completed at the end of Second Year and the results compared.
- The questionnaire will also be sent to parents of First Years to establish their perceptions of their daughters' reading habits.

## **Role of Parents**

It is recognized by the Board of Management and the teaching staff that parents have a pivotal role to play in improving the literacy standards of their children and that without the support of parents a whole –school approach to Literacy is doomed to failure. The *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009* shows what most parents know intuitively: children-of all ages- benefit from their parents' active interest in them. PISA also shows that it is not the quantity of time that makes the difference, but rather the depth of parental engagement.

Considering the age group that we deal with, PISA findings show that even such non academic parent-child activities as ‘discussing books, films or television programmes’, ‘discussing how well children are doing at school’, ‘eating main meals together around the table’ and ‘ spending time just talking with one’s children’ are also associated with better reading performance in school.

According to PISA results, students whose parents discuss political or social issues with them either weekly or daily secure 28 points higher in reading, on average, than those whose parents discuss these issues less often or not at all.

PISA concludes that it does not take lofty qualifications or unlimited hours to make a difference in their children’s school careers. What it does take is genuine interest and active engagement in their children’s lives.

### **The Role of the Library/Resource Centre**

The Library has a vital role in supporting student literacy and merits particular attention in the school’s literacy strategy. Through the expert selection and provision of a wide range of books and other materials, the library can both support the acquisition of literacy skills and help foster students’ love of reading.

The Library/Resource Centre is located on the Science corridor and is easily accessible to the whole school community. Opening hours are from 08.30 – 13.30 and 14.30 to 16.30. The aims of the Library are to support the curriculum and to promote and encourage reading for pleasure. The Resource centre provides access to traditional and electronic resources to ensure that the Library is well equipped to meet the ever-changing needs of students and teachers and is funded by the BOM.

Currently the Library holds approximately 8,000 items including fiction, reference, CDs and DVDs as well as periodicals, journals and daily newspapers. The main book stock is divided into Fiction, Information and Reference. The Fiction section includes the classics as well as contemporary works and caters for younger and older teenagers as well as adult readers. The Information section covering a wide range of subjects – curricular and extra-curricular – is organised using the Dewey Decimal Classification System. The Reference section includes dictionaries, atlases, encyclopaedias, year books and directories. The college is committed to updating stock on a regular basis and a fund-raising Bookstall, held on the evening of the First Year Parent/Teacher meeting facilitates parents of First Year students who may wish to donate a book to the Library.

First Year students have an introductory visit to the Library during their first week in the school, when library cards are issued to them and they learn how the library is organised and how to search for information. The Oliver library management software for cataloguing and lending is used. It also has enquiry module and all students can search the catalogue to find what we have on their favourite author or subject. Internet access in

the Library/Resource Centre is available where students can work on projects and research using all resources available to them.

The resource centre holds an annual programme of events to promote reading and a love of books which include competitions throughout the year e.g. at Halloween and Christmas and to mark World Book Day in February. Quizzes, crosswords, short story or poetry competitions and book reviews are also used. Active participation in the Readathon is encouraged and author visits to the Library are organised.