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De La Salle College, Mangere East, NZ



De La Salle College, Mangere East is situated in Manukau City, Auckland. Helen Clarke, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, recently praised the school for what it had achieved educationally and held it up as a model of what schools could achieve.

The De La Salle Brothers have an association with three schools in New Zealand including De La Salle College, Mangere East (also known for educating All Blacks John Kirwan and Isaia Toeava), as well as John Paul College in Rotorua, and Francis Douglas Memorial College in New Plymouth (former school of current All Black Conrad Smith and Western Force coach John Mitchell).

Manukau City, where De La Salle College is located is particularly noted for its multicultural population and cultural diversity. It has a very large youth population where over 40% are under the age of 25.

Although being a Catholic school where the majority of the students have Christian faiths, there is significant religious diversity. Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and students of other faiths also attend the school. There are approximately 930 students ranging from 11 to 18 years of age. 90% of students come from Pacific Islander or Maori families, and for Polynesian students, at home English is a second language.

The main issues faced by students in the area are related to socio-economic and family matters such as unemployment, mental health issues, domestic violence, and substance abuse.

Through the school, the Brothers provide a safe, supportive and nurturing environment. They work to improve literacy levels and the positive engagement of youth in the education process. Often students experience a lack of motivation and an indifference to learning. In the senior levels the Brothers work closely with families and students to highlight the benefits of attending school and improving education and employment opportunities.

Brother Anthony Cummins, pictured with some of the students, works in Campus Ministry. Along with teaching, he also encourages students and their families to engage in faith related activities.

Brother Steve Hogan, the College Principal, sees the school as a proud place where students form strong bonds as "brothers to each other", and are made responsible for their own learning.

As a testament to the tremendous work of the Brothers and teachers at the school, 90% of Mangere East students leave with level two NCEA, when the national average is 60%. The Brothers attribute this to a number of factors that are all related.

One of the main factors is a dedicated literacy centre for students in Year 7 and 8. For the past five years, staff have assessed students and tailored reading to their individual needs, catering to both struggling and gifted students. One student for example, increased his reading age by six years in one school year. The average improvement is two to three years.

Year 9 students have had a dedicated computer suite with programmes that help develop their understanding of text. A learning support centre has provided extra help for students who need a boost.

For Year 13 students best suited to a vocation rather than academia, an education for employment programme offers them individually designed learning plans that integrates class time, trades training and work placement.

As a result of these strategies, nearly all senior students gain a nationally recognized qualification during their time at De La Salle.

De La Salle College also attributes its high NCEA achievement rate to its culture of brotherhood, which means students do not wish to drop out of school because their friends are still there.

The roar of voices and thump of many stomping feet is not uncommon heard, as students practice "house chants" for intra school competitions that promote incredible team work and camaraderie amongst the students.