

Junior Cycle at Scoil Aireagail

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1. Scoil Aireagail Vision for Junior Cycle

Scoil Aireagail is committed to providing a junior cycle programme which realises the ambition of the school's mission statement and achieves the learning outcomes and experiences for students as envisaged in the Framework for Junior Cycle (FJC).

Mission Statement

"Scoil Aireagail will provide a holistic education in which each student is valued and their individual needs are recognised and catered for.

We will provide a structured, caring environment enabling each student to reach their full potential and enter society as a responsible adult."

2. Junior Cycle Curriculum

Curriculum Design

The curriculum is predicated on the eight principles and twenty-four statements of learning contained in the FJC. It is a flexible programme designed to meet the needs of the students and the particular context of the school. The eight principles are manifest in the curriculum and in the students' experience of it. All students will be exposed to the statements of learning in the course of their junior cycle experience. The reduction of subjects for certification from ten to nine facilitates teachers and learners the opportunity to meaningfully engage with formative assessment and to thoroughly cover course content. Two short courses offer students a range of experiences while the broad range of extra-curricular activities available to students ensures a range of other learning experiences.

The introduction of a new subject 'Learning to Learn' supplements the existing wellbeing offering. It is a three year programme covering areas such as transition to secondary school, study skills, emotional intelligence and resilience.

Curriculum Content

- Students are required to take nine subjects and 2 short courses for certification purposes at junior cycle. These are English, Gaeilge, Maths, History, Science, four optional subjects (chosen from the following; Woodwork, Metalwork, Business, French, Technical Drawing, Art, Music, Home Economics, Geography)
- First year students participate in a taster programme in the optional subjects.
- Students complete two short courses, in C.S.P.E. and Physical Education (PE).
- The Wellbeing programme consists of 400 hours of timetabled classes in the following subject areas; PE, CSPE, SPHE and 'Learning to Learn'. School trips, guest speakers, pastoral care activities etc. constitute the remaining twenty-two hours.
- The number of subjects for certification was reduced from ten to nine for the following reasons;
 1. The requirement allocate 400 hours to Wellbeing necessitated a reduction in allocation to other subjects.
 2. Teaching and learning is best served when students and teachers have adequate time to cover respective courses.

3. Teaching and Learning

'The Junior Cycle will be underpinned by the further integration of formative assessment as a normal part of teaching and learning in the classroom' (FJC, p. 29). There is a continuous focus on formative assessment in pedagogic practices in the school and particularly at junior cycle. This is evidenced by the School Improvement Plan (SIP) for Assessment Practices 2015-2018 and by ongoing staff discussions on pedagogic practice at staff meetings and subject department meetings. The staff handbook outlines formative assessment methodologies which teachers are expected to use regularly in their teaching and learning practices.

Co-operative learning is also promoted as an effective teaching methodology. This is consistent with the junior cycle principles of *Learning to Learn* and *Engagement and Participation*. This approach also develops a number of Key Skills (Communicating, Working with Others, Being Creative). The development of all Key Skills is integral to teaching and learning at junior cycle. Students are aware of the skills they are engaging with and that these skills are assessed when completing CBAs.

The use of Magenta Principles and the implementation of the SIP for Digital Learning are important contributing factors to pedagogic practice. Magenta Principles places student engagement at the centre of the learning experience. The promotion of digital learning for

teaching/learning and assessment is designed to engage students, expand their educational experience promote independent learning and to provide high quality feedback.

4. Classroom Based Assessments

Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs) provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their learning and skills in ways not possible in a pen and paper examination (oral communication and investigational skills). CBAs will be undertaken in subjects (2 CBAs) and short courses (1 CBA) and will be facilitated by the classroom teacher.

CBAs will be undertaken during a defined time period within normal class contact time and to a national timetable. Students will complete one CBA in second year and one in third year in most subjects.

Once the second CBA is completed, students in third year will complete a written Assessment Task on what they have learned and the skills and competences that they have developed in that CBA. This task, set by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), is undertaken during normal class time and will be sent to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) for marking. This Assessment Task will be worth 10% of the overall mark in the case of most subjects. At the end of third year, students will sit the final SEC examination in June which will account for 90% of the final SEC grade.

The state examination that students sit in their subject at the end of their junior cycle will also be graded differently. Instead of A, B, C, D, E, F and NG the following descriptors will now be used:

- Distinction 90 to 100 %
- Higher Merit 75 to 89 %
- Merit 55 to 74 %
- Achieved 40 to 54 %
- Partially Achieved 20 to 39 %
- (not graded) 0 to 19 %

5. School Policy around Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs)

1. As CBAs are reported on the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) it is vital that students and parents note the dates of the CBAs and do their very best to ensure students attendance within the set timetable. Parents should be aware that teachers must input results promptly after the CBA final dates and have very little leeway to give any form of extension.
2. Scoil Aireagail realises that students may have to attend important appointments/extracurricular events or are very sick during the CBA timeframe. In this instance, a student's absence from class needs to be sanctioned by both the Deputy Principal and Parent/Guardian on the yellow form and returned to the subject teacher ahead of time if possible. Students

should take responsibility on themselves to catch up on any work missed due to such absences.

3. As the Assessment Task in Third year (10% of final examination) is based on the work submitted for the students CBA 2, students who fail to submit any work will unfortunately **not** be allowed sit the Assessment Task in that subject.

While it is necessary to establish rules around the CBAs it is also important to reflect on how they support and consolidate each student's learning. The CBAs will allow each student work over a period of time supported by their teacher and others, ensuring they can produce their best work. The CBAs are reported on using the following descriptors;

- Exceptional
- Above Expectations
- In line with Expectations
- Yet to meet Expectations
- Not Produced

Most students will receive the "In line with Expectations" descriptor. It is important that both the teachers and parents reaffirm each student that it is not only the descriptor that matters, but also what they actually learned about themselves through the CBA experience. In particular they should reflect about how the project work and experience helped them engage with the subject and how the feedback they received will enable them to progress in the future.

6. Subject Learning and Assessment Review

Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings enable teachers to come together in professional discussion to reflect on the quality of their own students' work (guided by externally set features of quality), informed by the subject specification, assessment guidelines and other support material including annotated examples of students' work provided by the NCCA.

The time for review meetings will be provided for in the school calendar from the allocated 22 hours of professional time for each full-time teacher each year. One teacher of each subject (facilitator) will be allocated two additional hours by school management to prepare for and coordinate each review meeting. This role will normally be rotated among the relevant teachers. Each meeting will:

- be subject specific
- be approximately two hours long
- take place at a time as near as possible to the completion of the Classroom-Based Assessment

- involve the review of student work related to a specific Classroom-Based Assessment.

Where there is a single teacher of a subject in a school, the teacher can be facilitated to participate in a Subject Learning and Assessment Review meeting in another school or with another teacher in their school qualified in the subject area.

7. Facilitator Role

Teachers will fulfil the role of facilitator during Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings on a rotational basis. The facilitator will model effective questioning during the discussion of the samples of student work focusing on how well students' work matches the Features of Quality.

During review meetings, where it is not clearly evident which descriptor should apply, the group should look for the evidence in the student's work that matches all or nearly all of the Features of Quality associated with a particular descriptor. This 'best fit' approach allows teachers at the review meeting to select the descriptor that 'on-balance' best matches the work being assessed. The facilitator will submit a short report of the review meeting to the school principal.

Teachers should not assume that the results of a group of students being assessed will follow any particular distribution plan as the student's work is being judged only against the Features of Quality rather than other students' performance.

8. Reporting

In line with good practice, the learning opportunities and experiences during junior cycle should be valued, acknowledged and affirmed. These elements are outlined below.

- Results from state certified examination incorporating Assessment Task (10%)
- Outcomes of Short Courses and/or Priority Learning Units
- Outcomes of Classroom-Based Assessments 1 and 2
- Other learning achievements
- Wellbeing

During the three years of junior cycle, oral and written feedback to parents/guardians and students will be essential in supporting the student to build on strengths and address areas where learning can improve. Existing parent-teacher meetings provide an important opportunity to communicate the outcomes of classroom-based assessments and affirm other learning experiences. Parents/guardians should be given a comprehensive picture of students' learning. Linking classroom assessment and other assessment with a new system of reporting that culminates in the awarding of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) will offer parents/guardians a clear and broad picture of their child's learning journey over the three years of junior cycle.

Reporting at the end of second year will document the achievement of students in Classroom-Based Assessments completed in that year, and reports on the Classroom-Based Assessments in both second and third year will be included in the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement issued to each student in the autumn following third year.

In short, reporting at junior cycle aims to contribute to the personal and educational development of students, to support and underpin ongoing learning and assessment, and to be manageable, accessible and effective for the school, teacher, student and parent/guardian.

9. Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA)

Junior cycle students will receive a new Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). The JCPA will reflect a much wider range of your child's achievements over the three years of junior cycle. This will be issued by the school and signed off on by the Principal. It will be a complete report on your child's progress during their entire Junior Cycle education.

The Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement is divided into sections as outlined below:

1. The results of the formal Junior Cycle written exams taken at the end of Third Year.
2. The results / descriptors for Classroom Based Assessments taken in 2nd and 3rd Year.
3. Other Areas of Learning (OAL) - a summary of the student's extracurricular activities and achievements over the last 3 years.
4. The student's achievements in the area of Wellbeing This section will report on student achievement in the area of Wellbeing from 2021

10. Other Areas of Learning (OAL)

OAL are an important innovation in the Junior Cycle as they encourage students to become active members of the school community. Crucially, they also contribute towards a more accurate and holistic overview of a student's achievements throughout their Junior Cycle career. These learning experiences could include student engagement in debating competitions or musical performances. They could also include extracurricular activities, such as: membership of the school student council, school chess club or participation in school sporting activities.

In April of Third Year, students will be asked to complete a short report on the Other Areas of Learning that they feel should be included on their JCPA. Parents / Guardians will be asked to review, amend and sign that report, which will be used to frame the Other Areas of learning part of the JCPA.