

Loreto Secondary School, Wexford

Junior Cycle Reform

Overview

Introduction:

From September 2020, all junior cycle students will follow new subject specifications in their chosen subjects. The purpose of this document is to outline the main changes associated with the new junior cycle, highlighting changes in teaching methodologies, assessment and grading terminology.

Rationale:

At the backbone of the new junior cycle are a set of principles, key skills and statements of learning. Through a broad curriculum, students will experience a wide and varied junior cycle. The reform also aims to make the transition from primary to post-primary easier, reduce the duration of state exams, increase student engagement with their learning, and encourage students to learn new skills.

Eight principles inform planning and the implementation of the junior cycle. They are:

- Learning to learn
- Choice and Flexibility
- Quality
- Creativity and Innovation
- Engagement and Participation
- Continuity and Development
- Inclusive Education
- Wellbeing

Within the curriculum, students will develop eight key skills. These skills permeate across the whole curriculum. They are:

- **Managing Myself:** This key skill helps learners to understand themselves both as individuals and as learners so that they can develop personal goals and plans. It also helps them develop strategies to make considered decisions, to take action and to reflect on their progress.
- **Staying well:** This key skill recognises that learners' overall wellbeing must be supported alongside their intellectual development. Being healthy, physically and emotionally, being socially active and being able to take care of oneself and of others helps learners become happy and confident. This key skill also helps young people become positive and engaged in their learning.
- **Communicating:** This skill helps learners develop good communication skills in all aspects of life, using a variety of media. As well as developing literacy skills, it also develops learners' confidence in communicating, expressing opinions, writing, making oral presentations and performing.

- **Being Creative:** This skill enables learners to develop their imagination and creativity as they explore different ways of doing things and of thinking. Students learn to stay with challenges or tasks to completion and to learn from their experiences.
- **Working with others:** This skill helps learners develop good relationships and to appreciate the value of cooperating to reach both collective and personal goals. Students also learn to value the input and opinion of others.
- **Managing information and thinking:** This key skill helps learners gradually improve their capacity to search for information from different sources. They also develop their skills in judging and discriminating between information types and sources and they develop strategies for organising information so that they can understand it and use it later. This skill also develops learners' thinking skills so that they can become more skilled in higher order reasoning and problem solving.
- **Being Literate:** This skill helps learners develop an understanding and an enjoyment of words and language. By being literate, students will be able to write, express ideas clearly and accurately, and develop their written and spoken language.
- **Being Numerate:** This skill helps learners express ideas mathematically by estimating, predicting and calculating. Students will be able to see patterns, trends and relationships. They will also be in a position to gather, interpret and represent data.

Finally, there are twenty-four statements of learning which describe what each student should know at the end of her junior cycle. Through the full curriculum, students will have the opportunity to engage with each of the statements of learning.

The 24 Statements of learning are:

The student:

1. Communicates effectively using a variety of means in a range of contexts in L1.
2. Listens, speaks, reads and writes in L2 and one other language at a level of proficiency that is appropriate to his or her ability.
3. Creates, appreciates and critically interprets a wide range of texts.
4. Creates and presents artistic works and appreciates the process and skills involved.
5. Has an awareness of personal values and an understanding of the process or moral decision-making.
6. Appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which he/she lives.
7. Values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts.

8. Values local, national and international heritage, understands the importance of relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change.
9. Understands the origins and impacts of social, economic and environmental aspects of the world around her/him.
10. Has the awareness, knowledge, skills, values and motivation to live sustainably.
11. Takes action to safeguard and promote his/her wellbeing and that of others.
12. Is a confident and competent participant in physical activity and is motivated to be physically active.
13. Understands the importance of food and diet in making healthy lifestyle choices.
14. Makes informed financial decisions and develops good consumer skills.
15. Recognises the potential uses of mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding in all areas of learning.
16. Describes, illustrates, interprets, predicts and explains patterns and relationships.
17. Devises and evaluates strategies for investigating and solving problems using mathematical knowledge, reasoning and skills.
18. Observes and evaluates empirical events and processes and draws valid deductions and conclusions.
19. Values the role and contribution of science and technology to society, and their personal, social and global importance.
20. Uses appropriate technologies in meeting a design challenge.
21. Applies practical skills as she/he develop models and products using a variety of materials and technologies.
22. Takes initiative, is innovative and develops entrepreneurial skills.
23. Brings an idea from conception to realisation.
24. Uses technology and digital media tools to learn, communicate, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner.

Junior Cycle Curriculum:

Students can study a maximum of 10 subjects for their state exams. In this school, students in junior cycle follow the following curriculum:

First year:

Students in 1st year take the following core subjects:

1. English
2. Maths
3. Irish
4. Religious Education
5. History
6. Geography
7. Wellbeing (incorporating PE, SPHE, I.T./CSPE and Choir) *
8. French/German
9. Business Studies
10. Science

In addition to the subjects listed above, students have the possibility of studying the following optional subjects:

11. French or German or Spanish (this allows the possibility of studying up to three languages)
12. Visual Art
13. Home Economics
14. Music
15. Graphics or Applied Technology

*Wellbeing is not examined as part of the state exams.

Second Year:

Students in 2nd year take the following core subjects:

1. English
2. Maths
3. Irish
4. Religious Education
5. History
6. Geography
7. Wellbeing (incorporating PE, SPHE, CSPE, My Friends Youth, Communications and I.T.)*

They also study 4 optional subjects from the list below:

8. Science
9. Business
10. French
11. German
12. Spanish
13. Visual Art
14. Home Economics
15. Music
16. Graphics
17. Applied Technology

*Wellbeing is not examined as part of the state exams.

Third Year:

Students continue to study the same subjects that they selected in 2nd year. Students entering 3rd year in September 2020 will follow the old syllabi and examination structure in Technical Graphics, Technology and Religious Education.

Assessment:

As part of the new junior cycle, there is a substantial change in how subjects are assessed. To begin with, the old grading system will be gradually phased out. In the past, students were awarded grades based on the system below:

Percentage	Grade
85 to 100	A
70 to 84	B
55 to 69	C
40 to 54	D
25 to 39	E
10 to 24	F
0 to 9	NG (Not graded)

By way of replacement, the following grading system will be used:

Percentage	Grade Descriptor	Abbreviation
90 to 100	Distinction	DN
75 to 89	Higher Merit	HM
55 to 74	Merit	MT
40 to 54	Achieved	AD
20 to 39	Partially Achieved	PA
0 to 19	Not graded	NG

Maths, Irish and English are taken at either higher or ordinary level. Under the new Junior Cycle framework, all other subjects are taken at common level. The maximum duration of each exam will be 2 hours.

Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs):

During 2nd and 3rd year, junior cycle students will undertake CBAs in their chosen subjects. These are facilitated by the subject teacher and take place during class time, following a national timeframe. In most subjects, students will complete one CBA in 2nd year and one in 3rd year. Owing to the school closures between March and May 2020, junior cycle students in 2nd and 3rd year will undertake fewer CBAs during the 2020/21 school year. Subject teachers will guide students in this regard.

Upon completion of each CBA, the relevant subject teachers meet to discuss the quality of the work. They apply subject specific criteria, known as features of quality, to each assessment and award it a grade descriptor. The features of quality are externally set, by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The descriptors are as follows:

Descriptors
Exceptional
Above Expectations
In line with expectations
Yet to meet expectations
Not Reported

More detailed information about CBAs can be found on our website, under the ‘Junior Cycle’ tab.

The Assessment Task:

Following the completion of the second CBA in 3rd year, all students will complete a written assessment task. This task, set by the NCCA, is undertaken during normal class time, to a national timetable. It will be sent to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) for grading and it will be worth 10 % of the overall final mark in most subjects.

State Exams:

In June, following completion of third year, students will sit their state exams. These are externally graded and take place according to a national timetable.

Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA):

Following the release of the state examinations results, Transition Year students will be awarded their JCPA. This normally takes place in December. The JCPA is an official document which provides a record of the following:

- State exam results
- Results of the CBAs, completed over two years
- Other areas of learning that the student participated in throughout her junior cycle.

Other Areas of Learning:

Over the course of the junior cycle, students have the opportunity to involve themselves in many additional activities. We, as a school, encourage all of our students to embrace these opportunities. These activities are recognised on the JCPA, in the other areas of learning section. This information is collected and verified by the school. Examples of activities that may form part of this section include:

- Student leadership roles, through the Students’ Council and Prefects’ Council
- Taking part in extra-curricular activities

- Representing the school in various competitions
- Charitable fundraising

Wellbeing:

As part of the new junior cycle, wellbeing is a new area of learning in the junior cycle curriculum. From September 2020, students will have 400 hours of timetabled wellbeing related learning, over the course of their 3 years. As noted above, wellbeing includes subjects that have been part of the curriculum for a long period of time, namely Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Physical Education (PE). All three of these subjects have been updated with new subject specifications. In this school, choir is also part of our wellbeing provision. More detailed information on our wellbeing programme can be found under the ‘Junior Cycle’ tab on our website.

Useful Links:

The following links provide further information for students and parents:

www.jct.ie. This is the official website of the new Junior Cycle. Information on all new subject specifications and assessment procedures is available here.

www.examinations.ie. This is the State Examination Commission website. It contains all previous exam papers and marking schemes used in the state exams.

www.curriculumonline.ie. This website contains information about national developments in education and the different stages of education in Ireland

www.ncca.ie: The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is responsible for developing subject specific syllabi/specifications for the Irish education system.