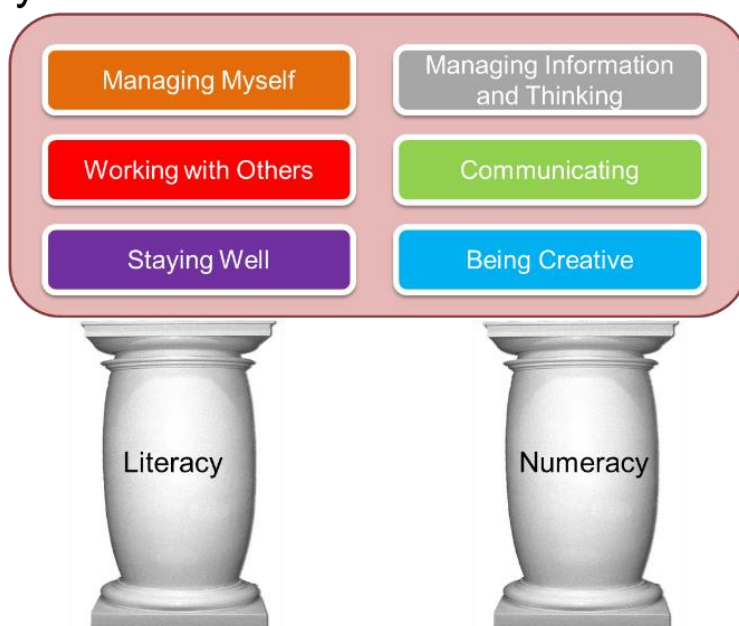


## Key Skills: Unlocking the Potential of Junior Cycle in Classrooms

Welcome to our first “**Junior Cycle in Focus**”. This month we introduce you to the eight key skills of Junior Cycle. In future months we will focus on different aspects of Junior Cycle and on work that is being developed in schools.

### Key Skills of the Framework



#### The Eight Key Skills

There are eight Key Skills in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* ([here](#)). The Framework document references Literacy and Numeracy and six others (p9).

The school you teach in has an existing Literacy and Numeracy policy, while some of you are familiar with the six Key Skills posters and Toolkits developed by the *National Council for Curriculum and Assessment* (NCCA).

#### Key Skills

Key Skills help learners develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to face the many challenges in today's world.

These challenges are found in the areas of self-management, health and well-being, problem solving, group-work skills, literacy, numeracy, creativity and communication.

These are the skills and competences, that we as teachers, want the students we teach to develop during their time in Junior Cycle.

#### Classroom Practice

The Framework document says that Key Skills are to be embedded in classroom practice. There are examples of this already happening, for example, teachers using group work and debating, active learning techniques and journaling in their classrooms. These practices will become more explicit and regular, with students actively learning within the classroom space.

Many of the Network Schools involved in developing aspects of the Junior Cycle worked with Key Skills and experienced positive student engagement through them, within subject areas and through other learning experiences.

The Framework for Junior Cycle necessitates Key Skills be embedded and mediated in all subjects and across all aspects of school life. As subject specifications are phased in, there will be support for the Key Skills particularly relevant to that subject.

Teachers develop these key skills through their choice and use of teaching and learning strategies. JCT, in supporting schools will focus on supporting teachers to introduce, develop and embed a range of strategies in classroom teaching.

### Continuing Professional Development

That said, the Key Skills are *immediately* relevant to all subjects and teachers will explore ways to embed and mediate them, both in their classroom practice and across subject areas. To this end, the *Whole School* Continuing Professional Development (CPD) provided by *Junior Cycle for Teachers* (JCT) includes a two-hour workshop for teachers on Key Skills

JCT is also developing a number of strategies, supporting teaching and learning around Key Skills, which you, your colleagues and the students you teach can use in the classroom.

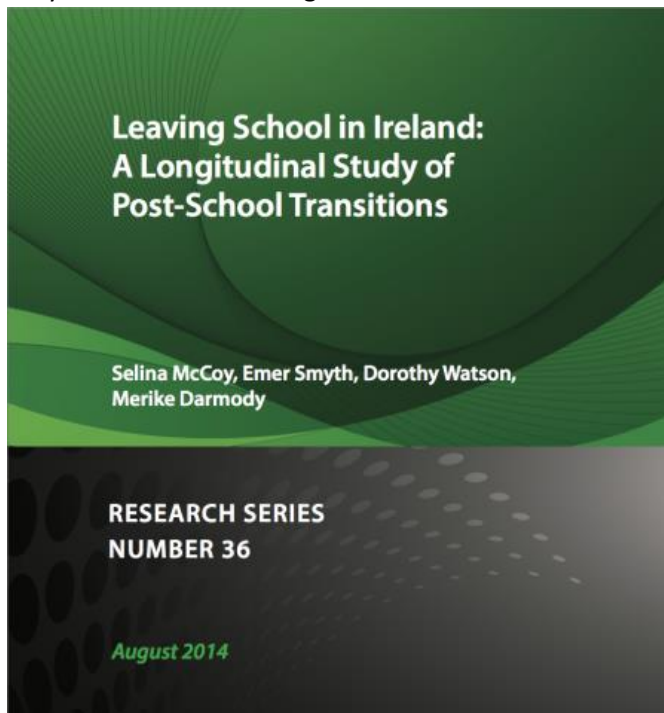
It is the intention of JCT to support schools to build up their own capacity to deliver Key Skills and to offer opportunities to share that practice with other schools and teachers.

### NCCA and PDST Supports

The *National Council for Curriculum and Assessment* (NCCA) has also developed Six Key Skills Toolkits ([here](#)), while your school has an existing Literacy and Numeracy Policy with Link Teachers now being supported by the *Professional Development Service for Teachers* (PDST) ([here](#)).

### Learning to Learn

Evidence from Irish research shows that students struggle to develop as self-directed learners as they enter further and higher education. The *Economic and Social Research Institute* talk of a



mismatch in teaching and learning in *Leaving School in Ireland: A Longitudinal Study of Post-School Transitions* (2014 [here](#) p. 211). One of the principles for Junior Cycle is, the student *learning to learn*, which will help address this issue.

The Key Skills are named and explained in the Framework document in language that students can access and understand, helping them to take greater responsibility for their learning.

The Junior Cycle seeks to place emphasis on student *learning to learn* and their teacher as the leader of that learning, as the student engages with the content. As the Chief Inspector, Dr. Harold Hislop puts it "*Students will require a good knowledge of a range of subjects, but they should also*

*have opportunities to delve deeply into that knowledge, to learn to question and evaluate it, to be able to re-assemble different pieces of knowledge in new contexts and to use their knowledge and skills with others to approach new situations with open, creative solutions (2014 [here](#) p.7)."*

### **Background to Key Skills**

The idea of Key Skills has evolved from the movement for lifelong learning (e.g. a brief history [here](#)).

Key Skills and Competences are also an important policy of the European Parliament and are defined as *"...a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. They are particularly necessary for personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment (2006 summary [here](#))."*

KeyCoNet, the European Key Competence Network on School Education (of which Ireland is a member through the NCCA) refers to Key Skills as *Key Competences* (video [here](#)) while others refer to them as Twenty First Century Skills. This, for example is a list of such skills from the *National Council of Teachers of English* from the USA ([here](#)).

Educational authors and researchers write about, for example, the *Minds for the Future* (Howard Gardner [here](#)) or *Building (the) Learning Power* (Guy Claxton [here](#)), we need to help our students develop.

It is within these and indeed other contexts that we as teachers can explore and develop our own understanding of Key Skills as we engage with the Framework for Junior Cycle.