

Schools, parents, students and Junior Cycle Reform

BETTY McLAUGHLIN, WELLBEING TEAM LEADER, JCT, OFFERS GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOLS

**“Junior Cycle places students at the centre of the educational experience, enabling them to actively participate in their communities and in society and to be resourceful and confident learners in all aspects and stages of their lives.”
Framework for Junior Cycle (2015)**

Parents and guardians are the primary educators. They can support their child's learning and wellbeing in the most effective way by listening to them and believing in their potential. Every child can succeed in the new Junior Cycle as a result of its focused reform.

“All of us need ‘one good adult’ in our corner. This is someone who gets us, who listens to us and who believes in our potential” (Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines, NCCA 2017).

The Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), a dedicated continuing professional development (CPD) support service of the DES, has recently added an informative PowerPoint on Junior Cycle Reform to its website that schools can use during parents' evenings or Open Days. This presentation explains:

The students' learning experience.

- Structure of the Junior Cycle.
- Subjects, Short Courses, Wellbeing and Other Areas of Learning.
- Assessment and Reporting.
- Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

Please check out this presentation on:

<https://www.jct.ie/leadership/resources>

There is also a downloadable information leaflet available on:

<https://www.jct.ie/perch/resources/leadership/jcinfofparentsprimaryleaflet.pdf>

Who better than a parent or guardian to provide the support and understanding that students need in Junior Cycle and beyond?

Parents may consider the following:

INFORMATION: It would be most helpful if parents have an opportunity to understand what JCR is all about. A good starting point is to examine and reflect upon one of our comprehensive brochures on www.jct.ie or www.ncca.ie.



TASK: Recognise that your child could be doing differing types of activities for homework e.g. more active research, presentations, groupwork, using digital technologies. Discuss with the teachers what you can do as a parent to support the new inquiry based, self-directed and more independent experiential learning that your child will be engaging in. For example, you will see your child participating in project work, particularly in English, Science, Business, MFL, Gaeilge, History, Geography, Home Economics, Business, English and Wellbeing.

LISTEN: Listen, discuss and support your child's ideas, ask your son/daughter how they are coping in class, where are the challenges, what is important for them in their learning, how did they cope with the difficulties and/or did they ask for help. These questions will encourage students to reflect upon their learning and this is a huge part of the JCR in terms of making learning more meaningful for students.

SUPPORT: In order to best support, understand and empathise with their children, and, to have the important, focused and helpful conversations, parents need to know that throughout the Junior Cycle, students will be engaged in:

- [a] Reviewing feedback from their teachers and identifying what they have done well.
- [b] Identifying what they should do next.
- [c] Setting and achieving personal goals.
- [d] Drafting and redrafting and correcting their own work.
- [e] Giving feedback to their peers.
- [f] Considering examples of good work and

identifying how they can improve on their own work.

CLASSROOM-BASED ASSESSMENTS (CBAs): will be undertaken during a defined time period within normal class contact time and to a nationally set timetable. Generally, students will complete one CBA in Second year and one in third year per subject (except in Gaeilge). CBAs will be reported on in the JCPA, and issued to students by schools, using the following descriptors:

- **Exceptional**
- **Above Expectations**
- **In Line with Expectations**
- **Yet to Meet Expectations**

CBAs are a pause in the students' learning that both supports and consolidates their learning. The grade at the end of the three years is no longer the only marker of the young person's achievements. The CBAs will allow your child to work over a period of time supported by the feedback from their teachers and others, ensuring that they can produce their best work. It is also important that you affirm your child that it is not only the grade that matters but rather it is just a snapshot in time. What is important for them in the CBA experience, is what they have actually learned about themselves throughout the CBA experience. Here, it is important for your child to reflect upon how it has helped them to engage with the subject and their personal growth while examining the feedback as a tool to enable them to progress further in the future. Essentially, parents need not be overly concerned about the grade achieved but rather parents should continue to keep the all-important lines of communication open by asking their child what the difficulties are they have encountered and to discuss some possible strategies to help them into the future.

There may be opportunities for your child to practice their CBA in front of you. When doing so, you can support them by asking them what kind of feedback they are getting and how are they learning best in the different subjects.

REPORTING in JUNIOR CYCLE: A New reporting structure at Junior Cycle will contribute to the personal and educational

development of students. It will support and underpin ongoing learning and assessment. Reporting will:

[1] Provide information to parents about their son or daughter's achievement and progress in school.

[2] Support students in their learning by suggesting the next steps to be taken or providing feedback to help students to move forward in their learning and to help students' self-evaluation. As we support students in their learning we are also supporting their wellbeing in schools.

New Teaching Strategies:

Parents can log onto www.jct.ie, www.curriculumonline.ie & www.ncca.ie to view the new teaching strategies videos on the JCT website. This will enable you to understand the changes and to see what is different now in classrooms compared to what you learned and experienced in school. This will help you to support your child's learning. Ask your son/daughter 'How did the class go? How did you feel about this task?'. These reflective questions are in keeping with the strong emphasis on student voice that is a major progressive step in the reformed curriculum. Please encourage your child to speak openly and to express their thoughts and feelings, building self-confidence and their all-important communication skills.

Through engaging with these new teaching strategies, in Junior Cycle, students will:

- Be more actively engaged with learning.
- Take greater ownership of their learning
- Have a critical engagement with digital technology.
- Be encouraged to problem solve and think creatively.

KEY SKILLS: It is important to encourage the development of the eight key skills as depicted in the infographic below which are central to the students' learning experience in Junior Cycle.

CONSIDER: As a parent/guardian, you might pose some of the following questions:

- How do I support and manage my child's learning?
- Do I supervise homework?
- Do I give my child responsibility for their learning?
- Do I discuss the feedback my child receives from teachers to encourage them and support them to move forward in their learning.



The New Wellbeing Programme:

How we feel about ourselves and others influences everything we do. Wellbeing is essential for successful learning and a happy life. The new Junior Cycle recognises this. It emphasises the importance of supporting learners to develop the knowledge and skills they need to maintain positive mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. The wellbeing curriculum is about promoting a caring, learning environment that enables students to develop

confidence and positive relationships. Learning through health and wellbeing

promotes independent thinking and positive attitudes/dispositions. More self-assured students will gain an awareness of the effect they have on others. Students will acquire capabilities to make healthy lifestyle choices now and into the future. Achieving educational potential while maintaining a healthy balance in life are desired outcomes for students. Students will have opportunities to engage with and to experience the six wellbeing indicators: active, aware, respected, resilient, aware and connected.

Positive Outcomes for Students

Given the support and necessary new learning experiences which are central to the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015), the principles of learning and the development of key skills, students will undoubtedly become **confident, happy, successful and self-directed learners, eager to learn, creative, active, connected, resilient, ambitious, experiencing joy and success in their lives while feeling affirmed and Supported**

Parents may find the following videos helpful:

NCCA Student Voice:

<http://www.juniorcycle.ie/Curriculum/Student-Voice>

Carol Dweck:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGvR_omNpWM

TED Talk:

https://www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve?language=en

Please do not hesitate to contact us on info@jct.ie or betty.mclaughlin@jct.ie if we can be of any assistance to you on Junior Cycle Reform and all its facets.

INDICATORS OF WELLBEING



ACTIVE

- Am I a confident and skilled participant in physical activity?
- How physically active am I?



RESPONSIBLE

- Do I take action to protect and promote my wellbeing and that of others?
- Do I make healthy eating choices?
- Do I know where my safety is at risk?



CONNECTED

- Do I feel connected to my school, my friends, my community and the wider world?
- Do I appreciate that my actions and interactions impact on my own wellbeing and that of others, in local and global contexts?



RESILIENT

- Do I believe that I have the coping skills to deal with life's challenges?
- Do I know where I can go for help?
- Do I believe that with effort I can achieve?



RESPECTED

- Do I feel that I am listened to and valued?
- Do I have positive relationships with my friends, my peers and my teachers?
- Do I show care and respect for others?



AWARE

- Am I aware of my thoughts, feelings and behaviours and can I make sense of them?
- Am I aware of what my personal values are and do I think through my decisions?
- Do I understand what helps me to learn and how I can improve?