Teaching and Learning in Lower Secondary Education

Curriculum, Subjects, Number of Hours

Lower secondary education consists of a three-year Junior Cycle. Students usually begin the Junior Cycle at age 12 approximately, having completed the primary programme.

Beginning on a phased from September 2014, a new Junior Cycle was introduced, replacing the former Junior Certificate examination with the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). The new Junior Cycle features revised subjects and short courses, a focus on literacy, numeracy and key skills, and new approaches of assessment and reporting. Schools will have more freedom to design Junior Cycle programmes that meet the learning needs of all students. For students, the new Junior Cycle will mean that the curriculum available in their schools will be a mix of subjects and short courses as well as other learning experiences. Details of this new programme are detailed in Framework for Junior Cycle, 2015 [1].

The new curriculum and assessment specifications for subjects are being introduced on a phased basis as outlined in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Other Areas</th>
<th>Introduced to First Year Students in:</th>
<th>First Recorded in JCPA in:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1: English</td>
<td></td>
<td>September 2014</td>
<td>Autumn 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2: Science and Business Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td>September 2016</td>
<td>Autumn 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3: Irish, Modern Languages (French, German, Spanish, Italian) and Art, Craft and Design.</td>
<td>Wellbeing</td>
<td>September 2017</td>
<td>Autumn 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4: Mathematics, Home Economics, History, Music and Geography</td>
<td></td>
<td>September 2018</td>
<td>Autumn 2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Subjects continue to play an important role as part of the Junior Cycle programme. Students will study a maximum of ten subjects for assessment by the State Examinations Commission. Apart from English, Irish and mathematics, each subject will require a minimum of 200 hours of timetables student engagement that includes teaching, learning and assessment activity. English, Irish and mathematics will each require a minimum of 240 hours of timetabled student engagement. Most students will study between eight and ten subjects of their equivalents. Where students are studying a combination of subjects and short courses, a maximum number of eight subjects can be studied for assessment by the SEC for students studying three or four short courses. A maximum of nine subjects can be studied for assessment by the SEC for students studying one or two short courses.

When all the new specifications are in place, there will be 21 subjects available for study. This does not preclude a further review of subjects at a future date. Detailed specifications for all subjects are available here.

The strengthening of Irish is a core goal of the Government’s 20 year strategy on the Irish Language and is a fulfilment of promises in the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 and the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022. The introduction of new specifications for Junior Cycle Irish represents a significant change from existing approaches to the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish at Junior Cycle level. In the Junior Cycle specifications for Irish, students consolidate and deepen their understanding of Irish. Students are enabled to communicate in an effective, interactive, confident manner in formal and informal settings in the language community. The fostering and development of awareness is emphasised: language and cultural awareness as well as students’ self-awareness as language learners. Junior Cycle Irish seeks to consolidate and develop the skills students bring to post-primary school. Students are empowered to assume ownership of Irish; an important life skill. Students are encouraged to:

- use language effectively and confidently, both personally and in communicating with other users in the language community;
- enjoy creative and innovative communication in Irish;
- appreciate Irish and have a desire both to speak it and use it;
- express themselves through consolidation of their literacy skills;
- attempt to use newly-learned language aspects;
- engage with a wide range of texts in various ways, for learning, research, and recreation;
- have an appreciation and respect for literature in Irish so that they may enjoy literature and benefit from it;
- gain a better understanding of Irish culture and have respect and understanding for other cultures and languages.
During the latter half of the 1990s and in the years since 2000, the numbers of young people with English as an additional language (EAL) attending post-primary school increased. These students came from a variety of backgrounds – some were the children of migrant workers, some were the citizens of other European Union member states, others were refugees or asylum-seekers. Many of these young people experienced language barriers in their ability to access the curriculum on offer as English was not their first language. An independent level of language support was made available to such young people varied until recent years depending on their status; those recognised as refugees received greater support than asylum-seeking young people. Since the 2012/2013 academic year, students with language support needs are provided for from within a general allocation of additional teaching and learning resources to schools.

The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) was introduced in September 1996 to cater for the needs of a small group of students whose needs were not being adequately addressed by the existing Junior Certificate programme. These young people were regarded as being educationally disadvantaged, often displaying difficulties with basic literacy, numeracy and other skills. They were deemed to be at risk of early school leaving and had experienced high degrees of educational failure already. The JCSP offered an alternative approach to achieving the aims and educational standards of the Junior Certificate programme. Key aspects of the JCSP are being incorporated into the overall junior cycle curriculum as the Framework is rolled out.

Teaching Methods and Materials

Curriculum Guidelines are provided for teachers offering advice on the best methods for teaching most of the subjects in the Junior Cycle programme. These documents emphasise the non-prescriptive nature of the suggestions offered and recognise the professional right of teachers to decide on the methods and strategies they will use within their own classrooms.

Recognised schools, public and private, must conform to State requirements with regard to educational standards and the general structure of curriculum. The Education Act 1998 provides the legal basis for the Minister, following consultation, to prescribe the curriculum for schools. Sections VI and VII of the Act set the legal framework for the role of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and SEC for public examinations, while Section XIII stipulates the role of the Inspectorate in promoting school improvement through its evaluative and advisory roles.

There is no prescription at national level of the methods to be employed by individual teachers who are expected to exercise their own professional judgment in terms of the ways in which they decide to teach their subject(s). The NCCA produces and issues guidelines, supports and booklets to teachers as a form of support indicating possible ways in which the syllabus aims and objectives can best be met.

The new approaches to teaching and learning in the Junior Cycle are supporting students to actively engage in their learning and to develop the skills needed for the 21st century. When fully implemented, the modernised Junior Cycle programme will provide each student, and their parents, with a much broader picture of the student’s learning in a new Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). The JCPA record will reflect all of the learning opportunities and experiences encountered during the three years of Junior Cycle and will provide opportunities for all this learning to be valued, acknowledged and affirmed.

The focus of the new reforms is to ensure that students are at the centre of the learning process and will engage with a modernised curriculum across all subjects. They will experience new ways of learning and a broader range of skills, while innovative classroom-based assessment will support that learning. Teachers will have the necessary professional time and resources to implement the new Junior Cycle successfully.
The new Junior Cycle features newly developed subjects and short courses, a focus on key skills, and new approaches to assessment and reporting. The Framework for Junior Cycle, provides the basis for post-primary schools to plan quality, inclusive and relevant education programmes with improved learning experiences for all students, including those with special educational needs. The Framework contains 24 statements of learning, underpinned by the eight principles, to provide the basis for schools to plan for, design and evaluate their junior cycle programmes.

The **Teacher Education Section (TES)** of the Department of Education and Skills and its support services, notably the Professional Development Support Service [10] (PDST), continue to facilitate teachers in developing a wider range of teaching and learning methods more appropriate to the needs of the revised syllabuses and the greater diversity of learners. As new and revised courses are introduced into the curriculum, the TES, in conjunction with the Inspectorate and teachers, initiates in-service for different subjects focusing on the management of diverse strategies for learning. A support service for teachers, Junior Cycle for Teachers [11] (JCT), leads the delivery of continuing professional development for school leaders and teachers.

**DID YOU FIND WHAT YOU WERE LOOKING FOR?**

**YES**

**NO**

Contact *

Message *

Leave this field blank

**Source URL:**

**Links**