Reporting Guidelines

March 2018

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Introduction

The *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) underlines how important the process of reporting, culminating in the awarding of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement, is to the new junior cycle.

> *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…*
>
> *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.*

These guidelines set out an approach to reporting at junior cycle that will contribute to the personal development of students, support learning and teaching while being manageable and accessible for everyone involved. A broader approach to reporting that spans first to third year will help avoid placing too early and too great an emphasis on examination preparation and performance. The importance of building on the range of existing effective reporting practice in schools is recognised in this document.

Effective reporting in junior cycle

In the *Framework for the Junior Cycle (2015)*, formal reporting arrangements are seen to complement other reporting opportunities including parent-teacher meetings, teacher-student dialogue and other home-school written communications. At the heart of this broad process, all reporting is seen to be about informed discussions, either orally or written, between teachers, parents and student about how to improve learning.

In building a process of effective reporting, we aim to ensure that the students' learning and achievement are clear to all and that parents are actively engaged in the student's learning on an ongoing basis. This can be best achieved by providing clear feedback on a student's learning. When this occurs, it creates an opportunity for discussion and engagement between the student, parents and teacher on the next steps required to support and improve learning.

Guiding principles underpinning reporting in junior cycle

Underpinning the changes to the reporting process are the following set of guiding principles.

Reporting should:

- **Encourage authentic engagement with parents**

- **Provide opportunities for students through feedback to reflect on their learning**

- **Value the professional judgements of teachers**

- **Use the language of learning to provide effective feedback**

- **Be manageable and not take time away from learning and teaching**

- **Clearly communicate students' progress in learning**

- **Provide information on a broad range of achievement**

- **Be sensitive to the self-esteem and general wellbeing of students and take an inclusive approach**

Encourage authentic engagement with parents

The new arrangements for reporting place a significant focus on the relationship between students, teachers and parents as a means of improving learning. In the context of this triangular partnership, parents as the first teachers are valued as having a key role in the learning process.

The importance of the role of parents in students' learning is also reflected in research evidence. Harris and Goodall (2008) emphasise *how parental engagement in children's learning in the home makes the greatest difference to student achievement*, while Byrne, D and Smyth, E. (2010) in their study of parental involvement in post-primary education in Ireland conclude that the bulk of international research on parental involvement has delivered a broad consensus that involving parents in the learning process enhances educational outcomes for children and young people.

It is important however to stress that simply involving parents in schooling is not the same as engaging parents in learning. In their conclusions, Harris and Goodall note:

> *…that while involving parents in school activities has an important social and community function, it is only the engagement of parents in learning in the home that is most likely to result in a positive difference to learning outcomes*

The reporting arrangements outlined in these guidelines and in the accompanying booklet *'Ongoing reporting for effective teaching and learning'* outline opportunities for schools to support parents' engagement with student learning.

Provide opportunities for students through feedback to reflect on their learning

The Framework emphasises the role that students themselves will play in the reporting process through a process of reflection and discussion of the progress they are making in their learning. This reflects the message at the heart of Article 12 of the United Nations Rights of the Child where the case for every child having the right 'to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them' is clearly made.

Research has also shown that providing greater student ownership and involvement in the learning process is fundamental to improved learning outcomes. Substantial research evidence provided by Hattie (2009 and 2012) shows that one of the most effective ways of closing the achievement gap is to teach all students how to self-assess and provide them with plenty of feedback during the process.

In line with this research, the new reporting arrangements are aimed at encouraging students to play a central role as active and motivated participants in their own learning. In this context, rich reporting on student progress is most likely to occur when it has been developed within the context of regular feedback in class where students are provided with frequent opportunities to reflect on their own learning.

Value the professional judgements of teachers

The third part of the reporting triangle involves a focus on professional judgements of teachers in coming to decisions about student progress. This will require teachers being able to provide a comprehensive picture of student achievement and may require a shift from an emphasis on summative judgements towards a greater emphasis on decisions about student progress based on a broad range of evidence.

Under the new arrangements set out in the Framework, teachers will increasingly move away from a reliance on marks and test results towards an approach which balances these results with greater consideration of how well a student is performing using a range of evidence from day-to-day learning judged against a set of success criteria or Features of Quality.

Use the language of learning to provide effective feedback

One significant aspect of change in the junior cycle will be the language used to capture students' performance in classwork or homework based on success criteria or Features of Quality. While reporting may also include summative judgements of student performance in end of term

examinations and/or class tests, there will be a gradual shift towards schools reporting student progress based on a broad range of evidence from a variety of sources together with an indication of particular strengths and areas for development.

A significant challenge for teachers, parents and students will be to move away from the present system of reporting based mainly on percentages, marks and grades. The present emphasis on reporting student progress based on a single test does not sit well with the advice in the Framework for Junior Cycle that schools will 'use a variety of assessment approaches that will allow students to demonstrate their understanding of concepts and skills and their ability to apply them in ways that would not be possible in a written examination'.

It is expected that confidence in reporting student progress based on the language of learning associated with success criteria and Features of Quality will develop over time as teachers become more familiar with the new approaches. Teachers may find the support material in the Focus on Learning Booklets http://www.juniorcycle.ie/Assessment/Focus-on-Learning useful in developing teachers' practice in the area of learning intentions and success criteria.

Be manageable and not take time away from learning and teaching

The Framework emphasises that reporting should be *efficient, manageable and appropriate*. In line with such advice it will not be necessary to summarise every aspect of student progress in every written report. It is also anticipated that the majority of feedback will be provided orally by teachers to students. In terms of the management of the reporting process, it will be important that teachers and school managers see good planning as critical. Such effective planning will enable teachers to focus their attention on only the most relevant evidence of learning to be recorded and so avoid unnecessary bureaucracy.

Teacher journals are currently used by teachers in post-primary schools in a broad range of ways including as a record-keeping tool for capturing a wide variety of student information such as learning progress, attendance, behaviour, effort, and assessment results. This information is often used to inform discussion at parent-teacher meetings and may be one tool that teachers find useful for the recording of a broader range of evidence of student progress. Teachers may also find it useful to involve students in the recording of their own progress as part of the ongoing reporting process.

While teachers are adapting their approaches to gathering a broader range of evidence for reporting purposes, schools may wish to consider the benefits of reducing the frequency of in-school exam events – particularly in first and second year of the junior cycle.

Clearly communicate students' progress in learning

Providing reports which are easy for parents to understand is an important principle which should be at the heart of the reporting process together with the need to communicate meaningful and useful information. The benefits of reporting in plain language include being able to help parents feel more informed about their child's education. Clear jargon-free reporting is also likely to lessen the amount of time spent explaining unfamiliar terms to parents. Reporting provided in this way will also help students to understand where they are in their learning and what they need to do to improve.

Provide information on a broad range of achievement

The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) emphasises the importance of valuing all students' learning opportunities and experiences during the three years of junior cycle and providing parents and students with a broader picture of students' learning. Reporting in this way will increasingly become a key feature of the reporting process and may include aspects of key skills development and an opportunity to indicate student learning in the school's Wellbeing programme. Reporting in junior cycle will provide an opportunity for schools to report on other learning experiences and events where learning has taken place e.g. involvement in civic awareness or social justice advocacy, charity fundraising events, coding club, debating, ECDL, Green Schools project, musicals and drama, science club, student council, to name just a few.

Be sensitive to the self-esteem and general wellbeing of students and take an inclusive approach

Effective reporting practice is also sensitive to the self-esteem and general wellbeing of students while providing honest and constructive feedback. Reporting need to focus on learning and progress and so build on the ongoing feedback students receive in class about their learning throughout the school year.

Schools may wish to consider how they identify the progress of students who have special needs and are achieving at their own level of ability. In developing their reporting practice, schools may wish to find ways to show how **all** young people can learn and improve. In reporting the progress of students with special educational needs, particular care should be given to the impact that reporting could have on students' self-esteem and motivation. For these students, schools may wish to adapt their reporting so that the emphasis is primarily on qualitative comments about their progress. As with all students, the reporting process should provide a focus on 'next steps' for learning.

How reporting links to the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA)

Coherence and consistency in reporting practice in junior cycle is most likely be achieved by ensuring that the way progress and achievement is reported through the JCPA builds on reporting practice across all three years of junior cycle. This consistency will be best achieved when the JCPA builds on the same key guiding principles (p.4) that are used in the school's process for reporting student progress.

Communicating student achievement

The approach to communicating student achievement in these guidelines reflects the importance, outlined in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*, of giving prominence and importance to ongoing assessment used by teachers as part of their day-to-day practice. At the same time, there is a focus on maintaining a dual approach to assessment that includes the use of Classroom-Based Assessments and continued use of state-certified examinations at the end of the third year of junior cycle

Formal reporting of student progress

The reporting templates provided in the Appendix to the booklet –'Ongoing reporting for effective teaching and learning' include a common set of features that will be important for ensuring consistency in school reporting. The templates have been designed to have a similar 'look and feel' to the JCPA with the aim of emphasising the connection between reporting throughout junior cycle and the JCPA.

A number of schools have worked with NCCA to pilot some of the approaches to reporting set out in these guidelines. Feedback from this network of schools has indicated that the introduction of new reporting templates will require time to implement. In particular, they have stressed that successful implementation will require discussion, engagement and professional learning as staff develop their expertise in providing effective commentary on student learning. It will also be important for schools to engage with parents before the templates are introduced so that parents are fully informed as to the rationale for the changes in a school's reporting process. Similarly, it will be important for students to understand the changes that are being made to how their progress is being communicated.

Feedback from schools involved in developing their reporting practice has suggested that in the early stages of the development it is important for schools to have as much flexibility as possible in using

templates to suit their local context and needs. Schools have also recommended that early examples of the draft templates should prioritise examples of reporting for second year students

The draft template in the appendix to the booklet [Ongoing reporting for effective teaching and learning'](#) provides some examples of how student progress might be reported at the end of second year in junior cycle. The template illustrates how a school might adopt a phased approach to the inclusion of the new terminology of junior cycle within their reports. As previously noted this formal report will be supplemented by a range of other forms of reporting throughout the school year, including parents' meetings and a range of informal written and oral feedback on student progress.

Reporting using descriptors

Classroom-Based Assessment descriptors of achievement

There are four descriptors of achievement for classroom-based assessment as follows:

- Exceptional

- Above expectations

- In line with expectations

- Yet to meet expectations

Understanding of standards and expectations associated with these descriptors is most likely to be developed when teachers come together in professional discussion to reflect on the quality of their own students' work. This discussion will be informed by the curriculum specification, assessment guidelines and other support material including annotated examples of students' work. The Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings will play a key role in supporting teachers' understanding of standards and expectations.

Where a school decides to continue using end-of-term school examinations as part of the junior cycle, it should report the results of these examinations using the descriptors adopted by the State Examinations Commission:

Descriptors in school examinations
- Distinction (90-100%)

- Higher Merit (75-89%)

- Merit (55-74%)

- Achieved (40-54%)

- Partially Achieved (20-39%)

- Not Graded (0-19)

The draft reporting templates provide examples of how both these descriptors might be included in a student's report and as previously indicated it will be important that schools spend time developing an understanding of the new terminology with parents and students

Conclusion

As has been noted throughout these guidelines, the move towards a situation where teachers' professional judgements have greater prominence in reporting student achievement will take time and will involve significant professional learning for teachers. A change in the reporting process will also require significant engagement with students and parents who have traditionally received feedback about progress based primarily on marks, grades and percentages.

In developing reporting practice, every effort must be made to ensure that the processes put in place to gather evidence from ongoing assessment for reporting purposes are manageable and sustainable. In particular, the need to maintain large collections of evidence of student work should be discouraged and teachers should instead be asked to identify opportunities for efficiently and effectively noting student achievement and progress where it naturally occurs in a classroom. In line with this approach, teachers can broaden the scope of what is assessed and reported on. It will be important for assessment and reporting that what a student says, does and makes is recognised as well as what a student may write. Examples of ways in which this can be done in an efficient and effective way are included in the Reporting Booklet as part of the NCCA Assessment Toolkit In keeping with the prominence given to ongoing assessment in this document, schools will wish to consider the role that end-of-term, in-house tests play in their planning.

Assessment and reporting in the new Junior Cycle is designed on the basis of a dual approach featuring increased use of ongoing assessment and Classroom-Based Assessments, as well as the continued use of state-certified examinations. Ensuring that time is not taken away from a focus on ongoing assessment by an over-emphasis on end-of-term tests will be a challenge of the new approach. However, it is a challenge that must be faced in order to ensure that an excessive, overall assessment burden is not placed on students and teachers.

The new processes for reporting student achievement in junior cycle will also provide opportunities to support transition between primary and post-primary schools and into senior cycle. The new junior cycle reporting templates have the potential, therefore, to provide greater coherence and consistency with primary school reporting practice. In addition, the junior cycle reporting process will provide a useful platform for supporting student learning in senior cycle. The broader range of assessment information made available through the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) has the potential to be an important bridge into senior cycle where it can be used to inform decisions about future learning pathways.