

DOWN HIGH SCHOOL
LEARNING AND TEACHING POLICY

Revised 2023

The Vision for Learning and Teaching in Down High School

Pupils in Down High School are motivated, ambitious, fully engaged and self-regulated learners, who recognise that their abilities are not fixed. Pupils are helped to evaluate their study habits to develop as effective and efficient learners who are intellectually curious, both inside and outside the classroom. They are taught by caring teachers, each with their own individual strengths and preferences, within an overall framework that makes learning relevant and achievable through the effective use of learning intentions, success criteria and other Assessment for Learning strategies. Lessons are well planned in terms of pace and structure, with pupils supported, challenged and stretched by a variety of active classroom methodologies in an atmosphere characterised by high expectations and mutual respect. Classrooms are welcoming and stimulating environments, with current work displayed on the notice-boards. Pupils are helped to become resourceful, resilient learners, well prepared for the challenges of university learning and the world of work.

Rationale

Learning and teaching, supported by excellent pastoral relationships, is the core business of Down High School. This policy is designed to recognise and consolidate current good practice, while signposting future development and improvement in terms of both pedagogy and pupil learning behaviours. The policy is produced for the entire School community, with each stakeholder taking responsibility as learner, parent, teacher or school leader for the promotion of effective and reflective teaching and learning.

Expectations

It is expected that pupils are:

- motivated, engaged, and curious learners who continually self-evaluate and improve the way that they work
- self-directed and adaptive in their learning and revision methods and behaviours and who consciously seek, access, filter, and utilise appropriate resources and support – online and in other formats
- aware that self-regulation enables success and is a positive contributor to their mental wellbeing
- capable of reacting positively not only to success, but also to setbacks
- aware that they are not simply being taught, but are drivers of their own success through the completion of their best work
- respectful of their peers, classroom assistants and teachers by being punctual for lessons, properly equipped and ready to learn
- global citizens who are aware of their responsibilities and see value in learning

It is expected that teachers are:

- self-evaluative and reflective in their approaches as knowledgeable, motivated, well prepared and resourceful classroom practitioners
- ambitious for their pupils and establishing consistently high expectations in the classroom, with a focus on assessment for learning as well as assessment of learning
- modelling lifelong learning through the acquisition of new skills, knowledge, and technologies
- pupil-centred, with a combination of pastoral and academic priorities
- invested in the development of self-regulated, curious pupils who can monitor the effectiveness of their learning by adapting their learning and revision methods and behaviours
- professional in terms of punctuality and appearance and respectful in their approach to pupils

It is expected that parents and carers are:

- asking their children not just what they learn in school but how they learn
- partners of the school in promoting pupils' good learning habits and behaviour
- supportive of their children's endeavours with regard to personal organisation, homework, revision and the achievement of targets

Learning Environment

The classroom environment will be enhanced by displays of pupils' current work, which will reward, motivate and inspire. Display materials will be used to support pupils' self-evaluation and stimulate learning; for example, maps, formulae, timelines, symbols, key individuals relevant to subject areas. Seating arrangements will be flexible to promote the use of a range of teaching methodologies. Classrooms must be safe and should be environmentally friendly.

The virtual classroom environment will be stimulating, research-led and designed to promote the curious learner.

Relationships

The teaching and learning in Down High School is based on positive relationships and mutual respect. Teachers learn and use pupils' names at the earliest opportunity and have high expectations in terms of their punctuality and how they enter and exit the classroom. There is silence when a teacher or pupil is addressing the class. Teachers make full use of the support that can be provided by classroom assistants and other support staff.

In line with the school's Positive Behaviour Policy, teachers will lead classes in a warm, good-humoured, purposeful and business-like manner, where learners will feel comfortable asking and answering questions. Praise on the basis of ability alone – rather than commending a pupil's effort and approach – can inhibit progress and produce a pupil mindset that lowers personal expectations because they can become more concerned about how able they are, rather than focusing on how well they work. Pupils will be helped to recognise that ability alone is no guarantee of success. Such a climate makes it

more likely that pupils will take risks in their learning, self-evaluate, and use their mistakes as valuable learning moments.

Teaching Strategies

“The teachers use a range of effective approaches that: provide open-ended activities and challenges; focus on explicit thinking; encourage children’s questioning; enable collaborative learning; promote independent learning; and make meaningful connections beyond the classroom.”

(Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework Effective Practice and Self-Evaluation Questions for Post-primary)

- Teachers in Down High School employ a wide range of methodologies that are inclusive and cater for the needs of all pupils, who will be involved actively in their learning.
- Lessons are planned effectively, with clear learning outcomes and strategies that are matched to learners’ abilities, using differentiated tasks for pupils who are struggling and for the most able pupils, including those with special educational needs.
- Teachers use a wide range of teaching methods, building activities to make use of all learning styles into most lessons, recognising that each pupil learns in many ways.
- Active learning strategies are used to ensure that all pupils participate in every lesson. Teaching strategies include paired work, group work and role-play as well as whole class teaching. Creativity is valued in all subjects.
- Questioning strategies include open questions and provide sufficient wait time to allow pupils to develop their thinking. Pupils asking questions is a key indicator of high quality learning and teaching.
- Most lessons end with a plenary session to consolidate learning and help the teacher to assess formatively the extent to which learning intentions are achieved.
- Learners benefit regularly from the use of new technologies (such as digital projectors, interactive whiteboards, lessons in computer suites, integration of iPads and related demonstrative applications such as Notability and Explain Everything), using ICT to learn rather than for its own sake.
- The use of Google Classroom as the school’s core facility for developing pupils’ on-line learning.
- Regular staff training on software that can promote blended learning as a means of devoting more class time to the teaching of higher order skills.

Learning Skills

Whilst the achievement of high grades in external examinations is deemed essential for academic progression, Down High School sees its most important function as helping our pupils to learn how to learn. This means teaching pupils the tools of the learning trade.

In essence this means:

- Teaching pupils to develop greater responsibility for their learning, promoting self-evaluation so that pupils are capable of being self-regulating
- Building learners' capabilities, perseverance and curiosity by encouraging them to ask questions
- Equipping learners with the confidence to ask for help, persevere and take risks in their learning, so that mistakes are seen as powerful learning opportunities
- Pupils experimenting with learning and revision techniques to develop effective strategies that they know work for them, including using software designed for the retrieval of learning and assessment of learning
- Challenging pupils to make connections between different parts of their learning experiences, *within and between* subject areas
- Collaborating with other pupils in their learning, both inside and outside the classroom
- Challenging pupils to reflect on their learning and express their views on the learning experience
- Developing their note-making and processing skills
- Using software effectively to motivate and facilitate self-regulation and reflection among our pupils as they seek to improve

Reflective Practitioners

Central to effective learning and teaching in Down High School is the principle that teachers are self-evaluative classroom practitioners who engage in formal and informal professional reflection on an ongoing basis.

- Are the relationships in my classes founded on mutual respect and are learners encouraged to express their opinions?
- Do I communicate clearly high expectations with respect to pupils' behaviour, classwork and homework?
- How effectively do I share learning intentions with the class and revisit them to find out that the aims of the lesson have been achieved?
- Do my lessons cater for the needs of each of the pupils in my class (including those with special educational or medical needs)? How do I know?
- In what ways is the quality of my teaching being developed through the use of pupil feedback?
- How up to date am I with developments in my subjects and in teaching methodologies?
- What types of questioning strategies do I use to motivate pupils, and are they afforded 'wait time' to develop their thinking?
- How frequently do pupils ask questions in my lessons and do my responses encourage them to do so?

- Are learners encouraged to ‘have a go’ and take risks in their learning?
- Do I use pupil data to maintain ambitious expectations for all of my students, including the use of Class Charts?
- Are all pupils fully engaged in my lessons and does my teaching meet the needs of every pupil through differentiation?
- In what ways is my teaching being improved through the discussion of methodologies with colleagues and observing fellow professionals?

The policy will be reviewed annually as part of the monitoring and evaluation of the School Development Plan.