Gaelscoil Uí Néill

Learning and Teaching Policy

2020

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1. Mission Statement and Goals:

In January 2019 we undertook a school and community consultation and discussion initiative which led to agreement from all stakeholders on the over-arching ethos of GaelscoilUíNéill, with a series of agreed goals grouped under the four aspects of school life: Education, Language, Culture and Community.

From this process emerged our Mission Statement:

We believe that our mission is to ensure that every young person in our school achieves their potential, through the medium of Irish, while contributing to the fabric of our community.

Goals:

The following goals, generated from the consultation described above, are particularly relevant to the promotion of high quality learning and teaching in GaelscoilUíNéill:

Education Goals:

- To deliver the Northern Ireland Curriculum, in a bilingual setting, laying the foundation for life-long learning
- To ensure high standards of teaching and learning, promoting a safe, positive and happy learning environment
- To promote a full inclusive approach, catering for all abilities
- To help the children develop as confident, independent learners, nourishing their sense of curiosity

Language Goals:

- To ensure that the children become confident and fluent communicators, in both Irish and English
- To help the children develop their social language skills in a relaxed environment through a full range of extra-curricular and after school activities
- To foster and nurture the enhanced emotional, learning and thinking benefits our pupils gain as a result of their bilingualism

Culture Goals:

- To celebrate our Irish cultural identity, taking part in and enjoying such activities as sport, music, dance and focusing on our local and national history as well as cultural and religious festivals
- To encourage an understanding and appreciation of other cultures by developing links and exchanges with other cultural organisations within our community
- To embrace digital culture responsibly, incorporating social media as appropriate and developing a suitable on-line presence

2. Purpose of Learning and Teaching Policy

This policy is designed to facilitate high quality learning for all children, ensuring each child makes the best possible progress during their time at Gaelscoil Uí Néill, through provision of consistently high quality learning experiences.

3. Aims - our aims for every child to achieve success

In GaelscoilUíNéill our aim is for all children to:

- achieve in line with their ability
- develop as confident, independent learners, utilising their sense of curiosity
- become confident and fluent communicators in both Irish and English, using an increasingly sophisticated range of language to discuss their approaches and share their ideas with each other
- take responsibility for their own learning
- think for themselves
- have high expectations for themselves as learners
- develop a positive mind-set towards their ability to learn and to develop knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas
- apply their learning across different areas of the curriculum and in real life contexts
- be resilient, resourceful, responsible and respectful of others

4. High Quality Learning and Teaching

In Gaelscoil Uí Néill we have agreed to implement the following aspects of high quality learning and teaching:

a. **Develop a positive learning environment in our classrooms and across the whole school:**
We believe a positive learning environment is one where every person feels comfortable, has a sense of rapport with their teachers and peers and believes they can be successful.

i. **Relationships for learning – child: teacher; child: child**
We will:
- Model respectful relationships – be approachable, polite, consistent and fair; keeping an appropriate tone and level of voice
- Motivate children to achieve the highest standards - praise and reward positive behaviour, quality of work and caring for others
- Encourage children to develop a positive mind-set towards their ability to progress and achieve success – model how to regard mistakes as positive opportunities to learn,praise effort and resilience rather than ability, and provide opportunities for children to reflect on their learning successes and analyse why they were successful
- Develop strong supportive and challenging aspects of relationships between children – facilitate informal conversations and more structured activities involving children praising each other's successes and efforts and identifying where improvements can be made
- Encourage children to become independent, self-motivated learners - give choices about how to approach tasks, review achievements through informal conversations daily/weekly e.g. what have we enjoyed/learned this week?,
- Expect every child to develop the ability to take on roles and responsibilities – give every child the opportunity to carry out meaningful jobs within the classroom during the year
- Make children aware of the teachers high expectations for everyone – compile class rules together to define the expected positive behaviours, agree success criteria for learning tasks together, revisit expectations regularly
- Provide a calm, purposeful and learning-orientated environment within the classroom at all times – consider use of mindfulness techniques, calming background music, develop children's ability to organise themselves both individually and as a group

ii. **Physical environment**
We will:
- Ensure wall displays are used to celebrate children's achievements, to provide support for their learning, to encourage independence and promote development of the Irish language
- Organise practical resources to allow children to self-select - resources kept in places where children can easily access them, labelled to facilitate children independently selecting
- Visually display agreed class rules, codes of conduct or organisational arrangements– refer to as required

- Set tables and furniture to facilitate flexible group working
- Plan the layout of the classroom carefully to provide a stimulating, child-friendly, clutter-free working environment

b. Make the learning visible – share and agree Learning Intentions and Success Criteria

We believe that children learn most effectively, and become more independent learners, when they know what they are supposed to be learning (Learning Intentions), and when they are involved in the process of identifying what they need to do within any activity in order to achieve that learning (success criteria).

We will:

- Make children aware of what they are going to learn through sharing of learning intentions, using appropriate language/ pictures/symbols/objects
- Discuss and agree success criteria with children so they know what they need to focus on during activities
- Provide feedback to children on how well they have achieved the success criteria
- Provide regular opportunities for children to use the success criteria to assess their own and each other's work

c. Build on children's prior learning

We believe that children make the best possible progress, and achieve a deeper understanding of key concepts, when their learning activities are designed to take each child to the next step along their learning pathway, using their previous learning as a secure foundation from which to proceed.

We will:

- Meet at end of each school year to share our evaluations of children's strengths, areas for improvement, understanding of key concepts, preferred ways of working and interests to assist each teacher in planning suitable starting points for learning
- Plan activities carefully to assess each child's prior knowledge and understanding at the beginning of each school year, and when introducing new topics within each curricular area
- Ensure medium and short term planning takes into account the agreed long term learning progressions which we have produced for each area of the curriculum
- Carefully evaluate how well children have achieved their learning intentions, and use this to plan next steps in their learning – judging whether each child needs further consolidation or is ready to move on to the next stage
- Start each lesson with a re-cap of prior learning e.g. using a 5 minute quiz

d. Provide well-paced and suitably challenging learning activities, effectively differentiated

We believe that children are motivated to engage with their learning activities when those activities are part of a well-paced lesson, with children neither overwhelmed with too much new learning required, nor bored with too little new learning required.

We will:

- Make children aware of the teacher's high expectations – everyone is expected to produce their best work
- Have clear routines for early finishers (after reviewing their work and making any necessary improvements) – know what their options are; ensure that children 's

extension work is designed to stretch and challenge, within the planned learning intention
- Ensure that all available time is devoted to learning - organise starting activities before teacher speaks to each group at the beginning of each lesson
- Plan to meet the needs of the different ability groups within each class through differentiating the: learningactivity, level of support, language used, guidance and/or expected outcome - as shown by the success criteria for the activity

e. **Provide opportunities for children to apply learning across the curriculum and in real-life contexts**

We believe that children are motivated by meaningful activities which relate to their own interests and experience. Furthermore we believe that learning can only be considered effective when the learner is able to transfer that learning across a range of contexts.
We will:
- Use a Topic approach to provide meaningful and motivating contexts for learning activities – number and duration of topics to be agreed within each Key Stage, with input from children to ensure that their interests are taken into account
- Facilitate children's input into what they want to learn within a topic – eg KWL grid
- Discuss with children about how their learning can be used in real life
- Plan learning activities to allow application of cross-curricular skills – Communication, Using Mathematics, Using ICT – across all areas of the curriculum
- Provide children with opportunities to transfer their learning, applying knowledge and skills in a wide variety of contexts both across the curriculum and in real-life contexts
- Utilise incidental situations to practise application of skills and knowledge in real-life contexts – e.g. Work out their own change for dinner money, How long left until break/dinner time
- Enable children to organise and participate independently in whole school and class based initiatives which allow them to apply literacy and numeracy skills in meaningful real-life contexts – e.g. school book fair, jumble sales, Christmas fair

f. **Use effective questioning to extend children's thinking**

We believe that children should be asked to consider questions which require significant thinking and invite explanations (open questions), as well as those which assess their knowledge (closed questions). Open questions give the children the opportunity to think carefully, perhaps in pairs or small groups as well as individually, and improve the thoughtfulness of their answers. The children's answers to these questions also provide valuable feedback to the teacher regarding the depth of their understanding of key concepts.
We will:
- Carefully plan questions to spark and sustain children's curiosity
- Use a combination of closed and open questions
- Carefully consider the children's responses and use these as evidence to assess their knowledge and understanding of key concepts
- Provide thinking time for open questions, enabling children to collaborate, to discuss their responses, to think more deeply and to be able to justify their answers

- Give opportunities for children to ask each other questions e.g. during news sessions, in role plays, general conversations
- Make children aware of different types of questions; when appropriate use the terminology, open/closed- encourage children to think up "thoughtful" open questions
- Develop children's ability to participate in focused discussion – e.g. defend their own answers – why?...... Because........
- Use evaluative questions to draw out children's ideas about their own and others work, novels, mathematical problem solving
- Use differentiated / progressive questioning – to give all children an appropriate level of challenge and to extend their thinking
- Use Guided Reading sessions as contexts for open questions - look for cues from pictures and text to develop children's ability to infer meaning e.g what season is it? How do you know?

g. **Provide opportunities for children to develop their own thinking skills and personal capabilities**

We believe that thinking skills are the tools which we can help children develop to go beyond mere acquisition of knowledge towards those life skills of constructing their own understanding, applying their own ideas, analysing patterns and relationships, being creative in their thinking and problem-solving and evaluating their own performance and progress. We believe that the personal capabilities of self-management and the ability to interact effectively with others are also key life skills, which need to be developed in all children as they progress through our school.

We will:

- Implement consistently our whole school progression for Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TSPC), ensuring children are made aware of the skills and language at their particular stage of the progression
- Carefully plan learning activities to provide opportunities for children to utilise and practise TSPC, e.g. Self-Management: marking code, task boards within a lesson, writing checklist, Accelerated Reader and Maths Facts in a Flash; Working with Others: paired and small group work –children encouraged to select what role they want to take on
- Give children opportunities to decide how they approach a task , providing teacher direction only as absolutely necessary
- Use incidental opportunities to help children develop these TSPC – ask children how to solve problems as they arise in the classroom – e.g. ICT glitches
- Enable children to self and peer assess their work both for quality of content and quality of skills shown – e.g. "How well did you work together as a group? Give some examples."
- Celebrate achievements in TSPC through certificates presented at weekly assemblies
- Provide children with regular open-ended problem-solving activities e.g mathematical investigations, challenges in play-based learning, ICT coding challenges

h. Enable children to reflect on their learning, identify successes and areas for further development

We believe that children become effective independent learners when they are able to review and evaluate their own (and others) work, set their own targets for improvement and understand what they need to do in order to achieve those targets.

We will:

- Plan plenary sessions at the end of lessons to give children the chance to feedback to the teacher on how successfully they have achieved the learning intentions and success criteria,
- Encourage children to use the agreed success criteria to assess their own and each other's learning and identify successes and areas for improvement
- Provide opportunities for children to further develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in the identified areas, and to demonstrate resulting improvements

i.   Evaluate children's learning in order to:

i. Provide meaningful feedback to children on how to improve

We believe that children's learning is more effectively supported when the feedback they receive focuses on highlighting successes and clearly showing how improvements can be made, rather than just measuring performance. The emphasis on effort rather than ability in the feedback comments builds children's confidence and send a clear message that everyone can improve.

We will:

- Use a range of strategies to evaluate children's learning against agreed learning intentions and success criteria
- Select an appropriate strategy or strategies dependent on each child's level of development and the nature of the learning activity, to include: observation, participation in discussions, verbal responses to teacher's and peer's questions, analysis of children's work – practical, written, pictorial and/or ICT-based
- Use this evaluation to provide feedback to children, based on agreed success criteria, which is understandable to them and identifies successes whilst also giving clear guidance on where and how improvements can be made
- Give children the opportunity to revisit aspects of their work in order to make any necessary improvements and to demonstrate improved learning

(For further detail please refer to our Marking and Feedback Policy)

ii. Inform our next planning to ensure all children make best possible progress

We believe that in order for all children to make the best possible progress their learning experiences should always provide opportunities for new learning based on moving on from the secure foundation of their previous learning. For this to happen consistently it is vital that the level every child's understanding is assessed to evaluate whether there is that secure foundation on which new learning can be constructed.
We will:
- Evaluate the quality of children's learning as described above
- Record any lack of understanding or non-achievement of learning intentions, for groups and individual children, using short notes on planning documents
- Carefully plan follow-up activities, interventions or discussions with children as appropriate in order to address the identified learning issues
- Provide opportunities for children to practise and consolidate their learning as required, and to demonstrate resulting success

5. Development of Irish Language

We follow the early-immersive model of bilingualism in Gaelscoil Uí Néill; the children initially develop their receptive language skills in the Naíscoil and Foundation stages and gradually develop their expressive language skills throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. Teachers focus on the essential vocabulary relating to the various areas of the curriculum, but also centre on incidental opportunities for the pupils to enrich the spoken Irish.

6. Assessment

a. Formative

Teacher continuously assess the children's learning through observation during lessons, watching and listening to the children during lessons. They also assess the children through questioning and open discussions with the children. Finally, marking the children's written work is another key strategy in assessing the children's learning.

b. Summative

- Drumcondra Reading Test in Irish from Primary 3 to Primary 7 (third term)
- Spar Reading Test in English, Primaries 4 and 5 (first term)
- Progress in English, Primaries 4 to 7 (third term)
- Progress in Maths, Primaries 4 to 7 (third term)
- CAT 4 cognitive test, Primary 4 (Term 1) and Primary 5 (Term 3)

7. Target Setting

a. Individual

- Under-achieving children are set individual targets in Irish, English and Maths from Primaries 5 – 7
- Teachers support children in various classes in setting their own targets for improvement in a range of areas

b. Group

Year group targets based on data analysis from standardised assessments are set in Irish, English and Maths from Primaries 5 – 7

8. Planning

- The school has produced long-term plans for literacy in Irish, literacy in English, Numeracy and Personal Development and Mutual Understanding, as well as all areas in the Naíscoil.
- Teachers complete short-term plans for literacy and numeracy
- Teachers complete six-week plans for PDMU and draw up topic webs for their World Around Us topics
- The Naíscoil teacher completes weekly and monthly plans

9. Homework

- In the Foundation Stage, the teacher sets homework in Irish and English, parents are asked to read with their children, maths games, PE bag, topic-based work and practical activities to develop fine motor skills
- In Key Stage 1 and 2, the teacher sets homework in Irish or English each night, Maths homework each night and spellings in both Irish and English each night
- Suggested maximum times for homework are: 10 minutes for the Foundation Stage, 20 minutes for Key Stage 1 and 30 minutes for Key Stage 2

10. Celebrating achievements

- Teachers celebrate the children's work with in-class displays and rewards
- The pupils receive certificates and education-based prizes at weekly assemblies
- The children's achievements are celebrated on the school website

11. Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching

Co-ordinators monitor and evaluate children's achievements and standards through a variety of methods across the whole school through the focus of each Action Plan, namely: review of planners, review of children's written work, classroom observations.

12. Role of B.o.G.

The School Improvement Sub-committee meets monthly to review/discuss outcomes from school's monitoring processes and make recommendations to the full Board of Governors.

13. Role of parents:

a. Informing and supporting to help their child's learning

- meetings are arranged with individual teachers when required
- in the Naíscoil, settling-in meetings in Term 1 with other meetings focussing on specific projects e.g. Big Bed Time Read, Happy Healthy Kids
- in the school, progress meetings are held with parents in Term 2
- parents receive an annual written report in June

b. Responsibilities of parents

Parents are encouraged to support their children with regard to attendance (required to send in a letter on return to school), punctuality, coming to school ready to learn, bringing fruit and water every day, homework being completed and returned to school, parents attend meetings when required, keeping contact details up to date and Informing the teacher of any information which could affect their child's learning.

14. Staff Development (Teacher Professional Learning)

Staff development is an on-going process, focussing on development sessions in relation to action plans, sharing of practice, sharing examples of children's work, TCN observations, statutory child protection training, SLT, SEN, Autism, First Aid, Nursery clusters, and EA nursery unit engagement sessions

16. Pupils' Input

What makes a good teacher?
- The múinteoir helps people
- The múinteoir tells jokes
- The múinteoir helps with puzzles
- You take care of us
- You show us what to do
- You teach us new words
- You read us a story
- You teach us to read and give us reading books
- You make sure that all the kids are not hurt
- helpful, kind, friendly
- listening to the children
- making sure that you are happy and safe
- they make things easy to understand
- a week off homework after the holidays
- they spend time explaining WALT and WILF
- they listen to you
- they do art, cookery and trips
- strict but not too cross
- having a sense of humour
- spending one-to-one time with us
- explaining the work carefully
- coming in happy

What makes a good lesson?
- learning letters and numbers
- taking turns with toys
- sport
- using the white boards
- being outside, looking at leaves
- Big Books
- Playing Bingo
- The Big Sack
- working in pairs and groups
- games on the iPad
- talking about the work
- getting help from the teacher
- games and competitions
- maths games on the white board
- research on the iPad
- more art, computers and drama
- interesting topics (let the children pick the topics)
- practical activities and less writing
- group work with each person having a different role
- reporting at the end
- visual aids
- working at an appropriate level
- FUN!!!

17.Arrangements for policy review

Policy to be reviewed bi-annually.