An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Junior Cycle
Information for Parents/Guardians

About the Junior Cycle

Junior Cycle, previously known as Junior Certificate, covers the first three years of secondary school/ post-primary education.

Junior Cycle aims to achieve a balance between learning subject knowledge and developing a wide range of skills and thinking abilities.

English, Irish and Mathematics can be studied at either higher or ordinary level. All other subjects are studied at common level.

Junior Cycle aims to move the focus from assessment by final examination to more ongoing, or formative, assessment.

Subjects your child may study

Schools can offer the Junior Cycle curriculum in one of the following ways:

- A maximum of 10 subjects for final examination and reporting;
- 9 subjects for final examination and up to two short courses for reporting;
- 8 subjects for final examination and up to four short courses for reporting.

Students with special educational needs may follow a Level 1 or Level 2 Learning Programme, consisting of a combination of Priority Learning Units (PLUs), and/or short courses and/or subjects. These can be chosen to suit their individual needs. More information on the Junior Cycle is available on this website.

Junior Cycle Short Courses

Schools may offer students the opportunity to take a small number of short courses.

Short courses are not intended to replace existing subjects, but will broaden the learning experiences for students and address their interests not covered by curriculum subjects available in the school.

Wellbeing at Junior Cycle

The Wellbeing programme is designed to promote a feeling of confidence, happiness, healthiness and connection. Each school provides 400 hours of Wellbeing for students and will include Physical Education (PE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) in addition to other areas of learning.

Assessment at Junior Cycle

As well as ongoing in-class feedback, there are two main forms of assessment at Junior Cycle:

Classroom-Based Assessments

Classroom-Based Assessments are when the teacher assesses a student during class time on a specific subject or short course.

State Examinations

At the end of the third year of the Junior Cycle, usually in June, students will sit State examinations. These are run by the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, assessment adjustments have been made for the 2023/24 academic year.

This means that students entering third year in the school year 2023/24 will be required to complete a minimum of one Classroom-Based Assessment rather than the usual two and will not be required to complete an Assessment Task in relevant subjects.

Junior Cycle

Benefits of Classroom-Based Assessments

Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) take place during normal class and adhere to a timetable published by the NCCA. This will provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their understanding and skills in a way which would not be possible in a formal examination.

Teachers guide, support and supervise students throughout these assessments. Students learn from the feedback and advice they receive during the process. Schools have been advised that CBAs should replace in-house exams to avoid over assessment of their students.

How CBAs are assessed

Descriptors are used to record student achievement in CBAs. Descriptors are a reference or standard point used to reflect the knowledge, skills, and processes demonstrated by each student. There are four descriptors of achievement for each CBA:

For each assessment, the subject teacher reviews the CBA and decides on a provisional descriptor.

Next, a Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meeting is completed by subject teachers. At this meeting the teachers will share and discuss samples of their assessments of students' work and build a common understanding about the quality of students' learning.

Based on the outcomes of the SLAR meeting, individual teachers may re-consider each student's provisional descriptor. Where necessary, they make the appropriate adjustments to the level of achievement awarded to the student's work to ensure descriptors awarded are in line with national standards.

Junior Cycle Reporting

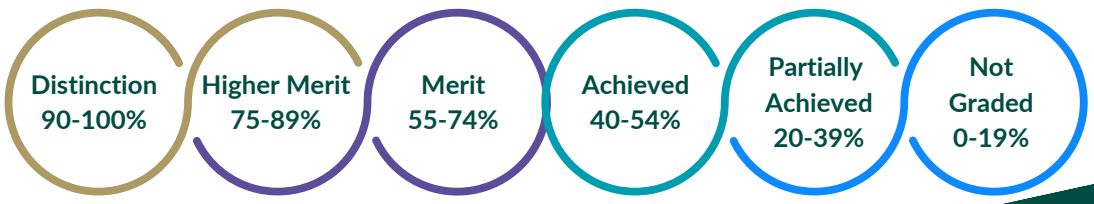
Formal reporting on the progress and achievements of students will be through annual reports in first year and second year. At the end of the Junior Cycle, students are awarded a Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) by their school for their learning over three-years. Each school will print the JCPA for each student.

The JCPA will reflect the student's achievement across all relevant areas:

- Results of Classroom-Based Assessments
- Success in other areas of learning
- Events students may have taken part in
- Achievement in Wellbeing
- State-certified examinations

In autumn following their Junior Cycle exams, students will receive provisional grades from the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and the JCPA will be issued after this.

The grade descriptors awarded to subjects are:



More information is available on the website curriculumonline.ie