

Coláiste Muire Cobh, Cork– Literacy Policy

Introduction and Scope of this Policy:

This document sets out the policy of Coláiste Muire Cobh, Cork, in respect of the advice, supports and tuition of literacy as part of the integrated education of students.

Relationship to school's Mission / Vision / Aims:

The Colaiste Muire, Cobh Mission Statement is as follows:

Coláiste Muire is a Christian community of students, staff, parents, chaplaincy and management who work together towards the common goal of preparing young people for living life to the full, as committed Christians, as concerned and loving people and as responsible members of society.

We provide excellent opportunities for academic, spiritual, social and personal development for our students. We believe in active School/Home co-operation. Regular contact is maintained with parents through Parent/Teacher meetings, individual meetings and the Parents' Council. The Students' Council plays an active role in our community of school, pupil, parent, community partnership.

This Literacy Policy is another important framework within which “the development of whole people, empowered to lead effective lives in the wider society” is enhanced in our school. The dignity of each student, staff member and parent / guardian is honoured and reflected in school policies and structures, including this policy.

This policy is informed by the school's Mission Statement which commits us to preparing all students for the challenges of adolescent and adult life and to respecting the dignity, worth and individuality of every member of the school community. The school's role in the development of young people supports and is enriched by the active participation of teachers and parents / guardians in many aspects of students' lives.

Rationale:

In Coláiste Muire, Cobh, Whole-School Literacy is seen as an essential part of the teaching and learning process. We recognise the importance of literacy in the school environment, to life within wider society and to the personal growth of individuals. We are committed to the development of a whole-school approach to literacy and recognise the need for a multi-stranded approach. We are committed to using a whole-school approach to literacy to improve learning and raise standards.

This Literacy Policy aims to ensure that appropriate opportunities and procedures are in place to enable the school

- to offer a quality and holistic education to our students;
- to ensure that the education programme is supported by the development of literacy skills in our students;
- to ensure that all students are supported in improving their literacy skills;
- targeted interventions support students with poor literacy skills;
- to ensure subject specific literacy is taught in all subject areas, including subject specific vocabulary and to recognise the reading and writing demands of specific subjects;
- to promote whole-school literacy by maintaining a positive ethos, creating a high public profile e.g. creating a print rich environment using displays, literacy award schemes and paired reading;

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- To develop cross curricular links with literacy which can be supported by all subject teachers. These will include whole-school spelling and marking approaches, whole-school use of homework policy, widening the range of texts available and literacy specific targets;
- to develop the specific teaching of literacy within English and related departments (e.g. Learning Support and Resource);
- to link literacy to the transition programme from primary to secondary school;
- to devote time to staff through in-service training in the area of literacy;
- to promote continued parental involvement and support of their child's literacy development and
- To ensure that parents / guardians are as fully informed as possible about literacy issues.

Goals:

The school shall have in place appropriate means and processes

- to assess students' literacy skills;
- to inform students about the best way to improve their literacy skills;
- to improve literacy skills;
- to inform parents / guardians about literacy skills of their children in the school;
- to involve parents / guardians in the literacy development of our students and, ultimately,
- To support the role of parents / guardians as the primary educators.

The Literacy Working Group

A Literacy Working Group will be appointed to implement and drive the plan and to liaise with the subject departments & teachers, learning support teachers, management, and the feeder primary schools. The Literacy Working Group will be responsible for:

- Developing and implementing a Literacy Plan for the whole school.
- Establishing a schedule / calendar for literacy development.
- Putting in place structures to monitor, evaluate and review the literacy development plan in action.
- Driving and activating the school literacy development plan, focusing particularly on first year students and on developing a whole school aspect.

The Literacy Working Group is comprised of the following:

- Literacy co-ordinator
- A teacher of English
- A teacher of a subject other than English
- Learning support / Resource teachers
- Principal and Deputy Principal

The group liaises with some of the following: Class teachers, Parents / Guardians and Student representatives.

Literacy – Possible Things to do as a School Community:

- Target Junior Cycle Students especially; (SPAG Testing in 1st and 2nd Year)
- Focus on students with a Reading Age below their Chronological Age; (SNIP Programme)
- Appropriate Professional development for teachers;
- Focus on developing a range of reading strategies and skills;
- Provide specific individualised instruction;
- Follow up in SUBJECT classrooms;
- Regular use of assessment and assessment feedback;
- Provide frequent opportunities to practice in reading and writing

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Literacy – Agreed Initiatives for Implementation as Whole School Activities:

Literacy Booklets

All classrooms will have a literacy booklet within their rooms. Within this booklet there will be a number of helpful resources for use in questioning students, developing students' ideas and understanding of topics, keyword bookmarks for each subject as well as planning sheets for stories and general long answer questions. Punctuation is a huge aspect of literacy across the board and a literacy mat included within this pack contains key words / terms that students are expected to learn, understand, be able to spell and use in the right context. Words on the mat relate to common words found in examinations. Punctuation definitions are also displayed on the mat as well as writing guidelines for students. The 'Coláiste Muire Literacy Mat' will also be printed in A3 and will be displayed in each classroom in the school, allowing each subject teacher to make reference to it for aspects relating to their subject.

Drop Everything and Read (DEAR)

This is a great way of promoting reading across a year group. The idea is that at a set time everyone stops what they are doing and reads for forty minutes. It is a shared experience, gets people talking about books and reading while conveying a strong message that the school believes in reading. Students and teachers read during the chosen class which changes on a weekly basis so as to ensure that no one class is disrupted on a regular basis. The initiative can be used to organise boxes of books, magazines, and newspapers per class, as well as one for the staffroom and office!

Library

Reading is an essential component of all subject areas so why not make it a visible component as well. To instil in students an awareness of the importance of reading, the library can provide an environment in which reading is clearly valued. The initiative can be used to create reading corner with shelves that have books on a variety of topics, written at a range of reading levels and provide a wide range of genres, both fiction and non – fiction, including such reference books as dictionaries, thesauruses, encyclopaedias, etc. It is hoped that the reading corner will be within our main library. Furniture was recently purchased for this corner and will be put in place in summer 2015. A review of library books will take place in the coming months

Literacy Board

There is a literacy board displayed upstairs in the main corridor. This board is used to highlight activities associated with literacy as well as the literary focus for each term. The literary focus is used across the curricular subjects to ensure that improvements within work can be seen among teachers and students. The literacy focus for each term is displayed on the school website along with an image of the board which shares tips that all students can benefit from. Pretesting and Post testing will take place based on the focus for each term to see if the initiatives in place are of benefit to students.

Literacy – Other Possible Initiatives:

One book, One Community Initiative:

One Book – One Community a short-term reading intervention, where students are challenged to read a book for six weeks. (Junior Cycle Students) Parental involvement is an element of this intervention. One Book – One Community motivates students to read and review books; they also track their reading and are awarded for successfully meeting the reading challenge. The following support materials are provided to schools: As the chosen book, generally relates to the area in which the students live or are based on their hobbies, it develops a sense of reading for pleasure.

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Activities: First year focus for students who are seriously underachieving in literacy

Some ideas for first year literacy development:

- 1 class per week devoted to literacy development; (Currently in place 2014/15)
- Small teaching team and Team Teaching;
- Formative profiling;
- Paired Reading;
- D.E.A.R. Programme (drop everything and read);
- Oral language development programme;
- Listening skills training programme;
- Writing skills module;
- Library/Information-skills;
- Critical literacy skills training module;
- Spelling Drive; (Learning Support)
- Marking policy;
- Literacy day / week;
- Book boxes in the English Subject classrooms;
- Consistent approach to writing, layout, punctuation ;
- Individualised literacy programmes where appropriate, principally reading age under 8;
- Use of appropriate I.T. software;
- Access to books readily and freely.

Literacy - Things for the School to do:

Pre-Enrolment Data Gathering and Sharing by school management:

Gather and collate the *student passport* provided by the transferring national school.
Review the current use of tests to ensure that they provide meaningful data for 1st Year teachers.
Administer the agreed tests pre enrolment. (CAT4)
Add the data provided to the *national school student passport* and prepare copies for parents / guardians and teachers before the beginning of each school year.

Other provisions to be made by school management:

Re-assess students' literacy competencies as follows: 1st Years in the first term and 5th Years in September.
Compare and review the results / scores with previous data and respond appropriately.
Provide dictionaries to each classroom (until all students own a personal dictionary for use in school and at home).
Provide thesauruses to each subject classroom for guided use by the class teacher(s).
Create a *Resource Room* and furnish and design it for multiple literacy related uses.

Literacy - Things to do as Teachers in Subject Departments (as appropriate):

Create a visual, print rich, interactive learning environment – display educational posters and display students' work.
Include the promotion and development of literacy in subject plans – yearly plans, term plans and daily lesson planning.
Participate fully and enthusiastically in the agreed whole school literacy initiatives.(Literacy Mat displayed in room and use of Key Word Vocabulary Book for first years.)

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Literacy - Things to do as a Teacher (as appropriate):

Give homework in every class and indicate to students the average amount of time this work should take.

Monitor diaries / journals and the use of dictionaries in every class.

Use frequently the classroom thesaurus provided by the school.

Write homework on the board for students to note it.

Give the last two minutes of class to ensure homework is recorded.

Check homework every day – ensure date, page and title is on every entry.

Correct homework regularly and date the corrections.

When correcting classwork and homework, provide positive feedback and treat literacy issues as important. (Comment Based Marking is often more beneficial than Graded Work)

When marking exams / assessments, *give positive, instructive and developmental feedback.*

(Appendices 1 (Subject Department Literacy Checklist) of this document should be used by teachers and subject departments to enhance the promotion of literacy in the school).

Literacy - Things for Students to do:

Students should remember that all subjects require full attention to literacy.

In School

Students must bring the official school diary / homework journal and personal dictionary, which they will be given in September, to every class. They should be placed, open, in the top right hand corner of the desk. Paying full attention in class is a minimum requirement and makes classwork and homework easier to complete. Students must record all their homework, both oral and written. All homework must be presented to the teacher as required on the specified date.

At Home

Students should try to do their homework:

- At a definite, fixed time each day.
- As soon as is realistically possible after arriving home.
- In a warm, well lit, quiet room, with no distractions from television, stereo or other people.
- On the night it is given. This is particularly important where a period of days elapse between the assignment being given and presentation dates, e.g. work given on Monday to be handed up on Thursday. Students should be encouraged to do such work as early as possible.
- With both their homework journal and their personal dictionary on the desk in front of them.

School Wide Strategies for Teachers

Keywords

- Check texts and identify essential words
- Make a list, keeping it as short as possible.
- Pre-teach keywords
- Revise keywords.

Key concepts

- Identify key concepts
- List key concepts
- Discuss and explain each one.

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Key spellings

- Carefully choose a small number of key spellings you want all students to know.
- Select a small number of keywords per topic.
- Pre teach these words – meanings, context and usage.
- Have students write a keyword list in the back of copies, in their keyword books, on bookmarks or give them a typed list.
- Display keywords lists on walls
- Use them regularly and read them frequently.
- Give students the opportunity to discuss, use and revise them.
- Check comprehension and spelling regularly.
- Revise often.

Teachers’ Corrections of Students’ Work

- The **correction** of a students work should be **clear** and **focused** on how the student can make improvements.
- Corrections are **opportunities for feedback**. They should be **constructive** and **informative**.
- Make positive and constructive comments.
- If students are poor spellers **correct only keywords** or limit the correction of the word to the first paragraph.

Presentation of Work by Students

- Page should be ruled with red pen along the top line of the page.
- Date must be written at the top right hand side of every exercise.
- The title of the work must be written at the top of the page at the beginning of each exercise.
- Students should be encouraged to keep their copies neat and tidy and the condition their copies should be regularly checked.

Reading

- Time for reading should be given in all subject areas.
- Teachers should model reading behaviour. (e.g. if students are asked to read, teacher should read also.)
- Reading should be given for homework. (e.g. questions could be asked to discover what students have learned from reading rather than asking them to read aloud.)
- If teachers read aloud to students, students should be encouraged to follow on written text.

Writing

Written work should be **differentiated** according to student’s level of ability. **Cloze procedure** (fill in the missing word) is a good way of using differentiation in the classroom can be used by students of all abilities. Another useful tool for differentiating is using **writing frames**.

Homework

Students should be given homework in accordance with the homework policy. When instructing students about homework teachers should:

- Write homework on the board at the beginning of class. Reinforce verbally.
- Consider those students with special education needs (SEN) by ensuring they understand the homework which is to be completed and differentiate tasks according to students’ ability.
- Ensure all students have homework written correctly into their homework Journals.

Spelling

- Spelling strategy: Look – Say – Cover – Write – Check, to be used by all subject teachers.

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Look

- Look at the correct spelling of the word. Try to memorise the correct spelling and shape of the word.

Say

- Say the word out loud as it is being learned.

Cover

- Cover the word and try to visualise it.

Write

- The word without looking at the correct version.

Check

- The correct version against your own.
- Identify areas where mistakes occurred.
- Repeat the process if necessary.

Recommendations

- Repetition and reinforcement of keywords.
- Marking of pupils work and correction of spelling.
- Display keywords and students work in the classroom.
- Students are encouraged to correct their own spellings using a dictionary or keyword list.

What can Parents / Guardians do?

The school is a supportive organisation in respect of the primary educators – parents / guardians. Our efforts to provide holistic education, in its various forms, are most meaningful and effective when parents / guardians both understand and support our aims and activities.

Parents / guardians should work with the school to emphasise the importance of schoolwork, homework, study and reading. They should check the student's diary / journal to ensure that homework is recorded and, then, should look at the student's copies to ensure it is completed. Reading in quiet spaces should be encouraged at home.

Parents / guardians can create the climate at home, quiet room, no distractions, fixed time each day, etc. to ensure homework can be fully done, as required by the school.

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Strategies for Improving Literacy within senior year

The following is a list of ideas aimed at improving literacy in senior years. The list was compiled after researching a number of areas including literacy support for Leaving Certificate Applied and the PDST website recommended reading on literacy development in schools.

We see Transition year and 5th year as a time in which we can develop students' capacity to be independent learners and this is closely linked in with improving proficiency in areas like literacy.

In the classroom:

- Develop the importance of the Point, Quote, Explain method to encourage students to frame their answers using this model so that they can develop proficiency in sentence construction and learn to integrate higher order skills in their answers. The use of this should be explored in every subject.
- Learning outcomes should be shared at the beginning of the lesson. A few simple sentences (a maximum of three and a minimum of one) informing the students of what they will be able to do by the end of the lesson would suffice. A plenary session at the end of the lesson would aid assessment for learning. This could involve a simple round of oral questions or getting students to write down a few bullet points outlining what they learned.
- Encourage students to read at home and facilitate the discussion of materials that are not featured on the school curriculum. An example of this could be asking students to do a weekly review on a magazine, film, song, album, etc. This would engage other areas of literacy that are familiar to the student.
- Encourage cooperative learning in the classroom. This involves group and pair work. It encourages students to respond orally in a group setting and become active listeners. It also encourages them to direct their own learning as well as peer assessment.
- Pre and post reading exercises should be encouraged. No matter what the subject, students should be introduced to everything they read prior to reading and the text should be evaluated after it has been read. Underlining words they do not understand while they read and using dictionaries to find out their meaning is valuable.
- Encourage the use of word walls of key vocabulary, personal dictionaries and vocabulary exercises.
- The use of thesaurus and dictionary should be encouraged in every subject. This will help weaker students but also facilitate the opportunity for the exceptional student to improve their literacy.
- Encourage students to read aloud in class. Group reading can aid the less confident student.
- As many students struggle with the considerable amount of writing required at Leaving Certificate level, the use of writing frames could be encouraged. These are a simple breakdown of a task into more manageable sections. For example an essay on the comparative study in English could be broken down into paragraph headings to aid the student with a more structured approach. Simple questions that govern each paragraph will give them motivation and encouragement without actively 'spoon-feeding', this approach would also help to develop more independent learners. Examples of this will be made available following consultation with subject departments.
- Encourage self-evaluation; students should be able to identify what they have done well and where they need to improve. Getting them to write this down at the end of a piece of work prior to it being submitted to the teacher will encourage them to think critically about their work.

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In the school:

- Computer Literacy is often one area where our students excel and it is a skill we should draw on as much as possible. Liaising with teachers of LCVP and encouraging the use of computers for spell check and/or editing would be a valuable support to students' literacy. This needs to be addressed by the entire school with a particular emphasis on the use of Microsoft Word & Microsoft PowerPoint.
 - ✚ Within Colaiste Muire, Transition Year students avail of the opportunity to develop their literacy skills through developing a number of brochures throughout the year, a newsletter twice a year and through the development of websites. It is hoped that a Book Club for Transition Year will begin in September 2015.
- A rewards system could be put in place whereby a student who is working hard or has excelled in something particular could be offered phone credit, a cinema voucher or positive report home. This could be linked in, within the use book reviews on the literacy board or through self-evaluation.
- We would strongly advocate a literacy week. This could include quizzes on key words throughout all subject fields, word puzzles, raising awareness of the importance of literacy etc. We could invite speakers into the school for example poets, writers, even business people who could discuss writing cover letters and CVs etc.

Review Procedures:

The Literacy Policy will be reviewed regularly by teachers and by the Board of Management every two years. Any staff member who is unhappy with the content or the implementation of any school policy may request a review at any time and such a request will be dealt with as quickly as possible. The Parents' Council may request a formal review at any time and such a request will be dealt with as quickly as possible by the Board of Management.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on 19th May 2015.

Signed: _____
Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed: _____
Principal

Date: _____ Date: _____

Review Date: February 2017

A Literacy Working Group: Any literacy co-coordinator or working group should include members from the various subject departments to help implement and drive the plan and to liaise with other subject departments & teachers, learning support teachers, management, and the feeder primary schools. All department teachers are encouraged to attend literacy in-service.

Promoting cross-curricular support

Assessment of students work: Teachers should include targets (min 1 max 3) after correcting classwork/copies outlining what is required for that particular student to progress.

Encouraging literacy at the heart of learning

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Literacy Checklist

| | Yes | No |
|---|------------|-----------|
| Are all teachers in the subject department aware of students with learning difficulties or Special Educational Needs? | | |
| Are learning objectives outlined in Schemes of Work and Lesson Plans? <i>Knowledge, Understanding, Skills and Attitudes (KUSA)</i> | | |
| Are methodologies varied to suit different types of learners? | | |
| Is differentiated homework given for 1st Years? | | |
| Is differentiated homework given for 2nd Years? | | |
| Is differentiated homework given for 3rd Years? | | |
| Is differentiated homework given for Transition Year students? | | |
| Is differentiated homework given for 5th Years? | | |
| Is differentiated homework given for 6th Years? | | |
| Has the subject department/teacher outlined targets and plans for SEN students? | | |
| Has the subject department/teacher outlined targets and plans for EAL students? | | |
| Has the subject department/teacher outlined targets and plans for exceptional students? | | |
| Is student work displayed in the classroom? | | |
| Is student work displayed outside the classroom? | | |
| Has the subject department developed and displayed a set of Key Words and Definitions for each year group? | | |
| Are spelling, grammar and punctuation corrected? | | |
| Is ICT used to support literacy development? | | |
| Are students given independent reading tasks? | | |
| Are cloze tests and short assessment tasks used? | | |
| Are there rewards and incentives for improvements or achievements in literacy? | | |

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Good Practice for Literacy

Whole School Approach to Literacy Planning

In their research report, *What works in Secondary School (1999)* the Basic Skills Agency outlines some of the elements of a successful school-wide approach.

Good practice: This a common theme in most school's literacy plans published online and used by a lot of schools in their own plans.

- Targeting first year students
- Focus on students with 8.00 - 10.00 R.A.
- Professional development for teachers
- Focus on developing a range of reading strategies and skills
- Provide specific individualised instruction
- Regular use of assessment
- Provide frequent opportunities to practice reading
- Regular use of IT for individualised programmes

Bad practice: *Should our plan promise to prevent bad practice?*

- Lots of copying from whiteboards
- Pupils encounter a minimal range of texts
- Reading is often restricted to short bursts of a few seconds
- Writing usually consists of very short unfinished pieces
- Pupils aren't taught how to use reference materials
- Widespread use of worksheets - often ill-designed
- Insufficient opportunities for oral work
- Good practice that isn't shared