

RATHMORE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

LEARNING AND TEACHING POLICY

Value Statement

Rathmore is a school that cherishes each pupil, fosters academic excellence and, through its curriculum, seeks to develop the potential of each individual and the growth of the whole person, summed up in the school's motto "Ut Vitam Habeant"- "That They May Have Life." Effective learning and teaching, which is central to the life of the school, depends, among other things, on the quality of relationships both inside and outside the classroom and the quality of communication between pupils, staff, parents and others in the development of a secure and stimulating learning environment in which all can prosper. The creation of a safe, happy and purposeful learning environment based on the Christian values of caring, compassion, inclusion and justice is central to our ethos. This policy therefore has particularly strong links to the school's Pastoral Care Policy, Positive Behaviour Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy and SEN Policy.

Rationale

The purpose of the policy is to create a shared understanding among staff of the principles underpinning effective learning and teaching. Such shared understanding should encourage the implementation of consistent learning and teaching strategies based on agreed best practice, enabling each pupil to achieve his/her full potential.

Aims

The aims of our Learning and Teaching Policy in Rathmore are consistent with the aims of Every School A Good School. Therefore our task is to:

- ensure the delivery of the NI Curriculum;
- ensure that pupils have a positive learning experience which enables them to achieve their full potential;

- equip our pupils with the skills necessary to have a positive influence on their lives now and in the future;
- inspire our pupils to become fully rounded human beings shaped by the Christian values of honesty, respect for others, generosity and compassion;
- encourage our pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and actively work to enable them to become independent learners;
- ensure that our teachers are dedicated to improving learning through their commitment, enthusiasm and positive relationships with pupils, parents and colleagues;
- ensure that our teachers use adaptable, flexible teaching strategies that respond to the diversity within the classroom;
- ensure that all forms of pupil records are used effectively to inform learning and teaching and to promote improvement;
- ensure that pupils with special educational needs are identified, supported and offered early intervention to assist their performance and enable them to reach their full potential;
- ensure that rigorous self-evaluation is carried out by teachers and the whole school, using objective data and leading to sustained self-improvement; and
- ensure that systems and structures are in place to closely monitor the quality of teaching and learning through careful curriculum planning, observation of lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work, tracking of pupils with particular learning needs and the regular evaluation of those pupils' individual learning plans.

Planning

Heads of Department have overall responsibility for schemes of work within their subject area while all teachers have a professional responsibility to contribute to their development. Schemes must be sufficiently detailed to include learning objectives, learning outcomes, challenging and differentiated activities with suggested resources as well as planned assessment activities.

All staff are expected to plan their lessons in advance, ensuring they include a range of appropriately challenging and enjoyable activities suited to the needs, interests and aptitudes of the pupils in the class. The lessons create high expectations of the pupils, stretching the more able while enabling the less able to experience a sense of achievement. In their planning, teachers take account of the individual learning needs of their pupils. They recognise the importance of creating opportunities for pupils to develop thinking skills and the cross-curricular skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. Projects involving connected learning are identified, developed and evaluated.

Teaching

Effective learning is more likely to occur in lessons which are well structured, with clear stages and an emphasis on variety, pace, challenge and high expectations. A variety of teaching strategies including whole class teaching, group work, pair work and individual work and a variety of enjoyable learning resources and interactive activities including ICT are more likely to promote effective learning. An introduction to the lesson capturing the interest of the pupils and linking to previous learning, smooth transitions between the various stages of the lesson and a short summing up towards the end will ensure the engagement of the pupils throughout. In keeping with the school's Homework Policy it is important that any homework tasks should be given before the end of the lesson.

Learning Environment

There is no doubt that the learning experience is enhanced through the promotion of a safe, secure and stimulating learning environment. Good relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils and pupils, based on mutual respect, are essential if effective learning is to take place. Assertive discipline techniques have proven to be valuable in the creation of a calm, disciplined learning climate. Such techniques include positive recognition, the praise and encouragement of achievement and desired behaviour and the use of "I" statements by the teacher to help develop assertiveness and high expectations. As part of The Positive Behaviour Policy, the pupils' Classroom Code, which has been agreed by all staff and which teachers should share with their pupils, provides a simple but useful framework within which classroom behaviour can be managed. Bright, interesting classroom displays featuring pupil work, litter-free

spaces and the general tidy organisation of the classroom by the teacher help create the conditions in which effective learning occurs. Pupils should ultimately be encouraged to take responsibility for their own behaviour through the exercise of responsible choice.

Learning Support

Learning support staff make an invaluable contribution to the learning environment both inside and outside the classroom. In their planning, teachers should consider the role of the learning support staff, taking account of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) where relevant, so that, through their collaboration, effective learning takes place. Support for learning can include working one-to-one, working with small groups and generally facilitating classroom management from a practical standpoint. Each department is provided, at the start of the academic year, with a handbook containing confidential information about the medical, emotional or specific educational needs of pupils at Rathmore. Each member of staff also receives individualised strategies for supporting each pupil with particular needs in their classes. Information on particular conditions e.g. Dyslexia, Asperger's, visual impairment, ADHD can be found in RM Staff under "Learning Support". Teachers are also provided with extra details on pupil circumstances with a marksheet which sits behind the standard classroom register in Lesson Monitor – teachers are aware that this information is confidential and that it should be treated with discretion.

Assessment for Learning

In Rathmore we believe that Assessment for Learning is an effective strategy to enhance learning and improve performance. It is a process which gives pupils more control over their learning by helping them to identify where they are in their learning, what they need to do next and how they can improve. Therefore it is important to observe the characteristics of Assessment for Learning and make it central to practice. Learning Intentions should be clearly shared with pupils and success criteria established to highlight the key stages of the learning, so that pupils are clear about what it is they are going to learn, and what steps they must take to achieve the learning objectives. Teachers should use questions carefully so that they relate to the chosen success criteria and encourage pupils to think creatively. A range of assessment strategies allows teachers to give meaningful oral and written feedback to pupils so that they are clear about how they can improve. Pupils are given

opportunities to engage in self and peer assessment and they are encouraged to become independent learners. The sharing of good practice across the school with the purpose of enhancing Assessment for Learning is strongly encouraged.

Continuous Assessment

In keeping with the principles of Assessment for Learning, it is the school's policy that pupils are assessed on a regular basis, both through homework and through class-based continuous assessment tasks. Each department's homework policy should reflect the whole school Homework Policy, which states that homework should be set and marked regularly.

With regard to continuous assessment in Years 9 to 11, two standardised assessment tasks are normally set in each subject in Term 1 and one assessment task in Term 2. Year 8 pupils sit the GL CAT4 assessment tests within their first two weeks and one standardised assessment task later in Term 1; they take a further standardised assessment task in Term 2. In Year 12, Lower 6 and Upper 6 one standardised assessment task is set in Term 1 and another in Term 2. The results of all the assessment tasks are recorded centrally in Assessment Manager and in all cases pupils are provided with formative feedback enabling them to identify areas for improvement. The process of standardised continuous assessment and centralised recording enables us to track the performance of each pupil and more easily identify those pupils who are high achievers as well as those in need of support at an early stage. Summative assessment for pupils in Years 8 to 11 takes the form of end-of-year examinations in June and for Year 12, Lower 6 and Upper 6 mock examinations in December. Year 11 pupils also sit a mock exam in Maths and Religious Studies at the end of Term 2. A full report is sent to parents of Year 12, Lower 6 and Upper 6 pupils in January. Parents of pupils in Years 8 to 11 receive a short report in December and a full report in June.

Using Data

As mentioned above, pupil performance data, available in Assessment Manager and in the tables supplied by DENI, is used to monitor pupil progress in both formative and summative assessments and compared to targets which teachers and pupils have set. Such targets should be realistic but challenging and, where pupil achievement has fallen below

realistic targets, the teacher should use the strategies for improvement developed and agreed at departmental level.

Where data indicate a discrepancy in achievement between boys and girls, strategies which are known to be effective with both genders should be used to try to redress the balance. For example, it is well known that boys thrive on clearly defined tasks which have a given time span and a strong element of competition. Research has also shown the potential of ICT to enhance motivation and performance in all pupils.

Role of Parents

We believe that parents have a fundamental role to play in supporting their child's learning by promoting a positive attitude to school and learning. They are encouraged to monitor their child's homework using the Student Planner to communicate where necessary and to contact the child's Tutor when issues arise which require attention. We inform parents about their child's progress on a regular basis through annual reports, feedback following continuous assessment tasks and hosting parent-teacher meetings.

Self Evaluation

Self evaluation of the quality of learning and teaching is a fundamental responsibility of all members of staff. As professionals we must engage frequently in reflecting on our practice, both individually and through dialogue with colleagues, to gauge our strengths and areas where we can improve. The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland's publication, "Teaching: The Reflective Profession", while acknowledging that teaching is a complex value-based process, nevertheless provides us with a useful set of practical criteria against which we may judge our effectiveness as professionals. The true mark of our professionalism is that, although we are a successful school, we avoid complacency by continually striving for excellence and that we are a learning school in every way.