



Carrickfergus Grammar School	Learning and Teaching Policy
Date ratified	January 2020
Date implemented	January 2020
Date to be reviewed	January 2022
Consulted	Governors, Staff

Values

At Carrickfergus Grammar School we aim to offer a world-class education. It is the purpose of this school to provide an educational environment suited to all of the students entrusted to its care, with the highest of aspirations and expectations for all. The school will seek to promote a disciplined, well-ordered, caring and supportive environment, where staff and students can work and learn in an atmosphere of mutual respect and without fear of interruption or learning being hindered, so that each and every student achieves the highest level of academic, intellectual, personal, physical and social development of which he or she is capable.

Effective learning and teaching, which is central to the life of the school, depends, among other things, on outstanding teacher subject knowledge, excellent subject-specific and general pedagogy, high-quality relationships both inside and outside the classroom and quality communication between students, staff, parents and others in the development of a secure and stimulating learning environment in which all can prosper.

The creation of a purposeful learning environment is central to our ethos. This policy therefore has particularly strong links to the school's Assessment and Homework Policy, Pastoral Care Policy, Behaviour Management Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy and SEN Policy.

Rationale

The purpose of the policy is to create a shared understanding 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 student to meet and exceed his/her potential.

Based on staff professional knowledge and understanding as well as a thorough awareness of current research-based evidence into high-quality learning and teaching, Carrickfergus Grammar School has identified six key principles which shape and embody its pursuit of consistency in learning and teaching in the classroom. These six principles are:

- Stretch and Challenge for ALL students;
- Effective Questioning and Oracy;
- Effective Modelling;
- Scaffolding;
- Independent Practice;
- Robust Assessment and Feedback.

Aims

The aims of our Learning and Teaching Policy in Carrickfergus Grammar School are consistent with the aims of 'Every School a Good School', 'Preparing for Success' and ISEF (the Inspection Self-Evaluation Framework), the latter providing the framework for the School Development Plan 2020-2023. Therefore our task is to:

- ensure the delivery of the Northern Ireland Curriculum;
- ensure that students are exposed to the highest quality learning and teaching experiences which stretch and challenge them, allowing them to meet ambitious learning intentions in lessons;
- ensure that students have a positive and stimulating learning experience which enables them to achieve their potential at the highest possible level;
- equip our students with the domain-specific skills which will give them the edge in later life;
- inspire our students to become well-rounded individuals as well as contributors to society and the economy, shaped by values of honesty, respect, generosity and compassion;
- encourage our students 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 opportunities to refresh their knowledge base and through continued professional development;
- prioritise high-quality professional development opportunities for all teachers;
- ensure that our teachers use effective pedagogical strategies in the classroom, thus ensuring a personalised approach to learning which allows all students to learn effectively and to a high level;
- ensure that all forms of student records and data are used effectively to inform learning and teaching and to promote improvement;
- ensure that students 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;
- ensure that systems and structures are in place to closely monitor the quality of learning and teaching through careful curriculum planning, the co-construction of

lessons, peer and collaborative observation of lessons, scrutiny of students' work, tracking of students and the regular evaluation of individual learning plans and profiles;

- develop students' ability to study and revise effectively.

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 activities with suggested resources as well as planned assessment activities.

The school recognises that Schemes of Work are 'working documents' which may evolve and develop as the sharing of good practice, in particular, highlights effective strategies to enhance students' learning.

All staff are expected to plan their lessons, ensuring that they include appropriately challenging activities suited to the needs, interests and aptitudes of the students in the class. The school has high expectations of students. Lessons recognise the importance of creating opportunities for students to acquire powerful knowledge and domain-specific skills.

Learning Support Assistants make an invaluable contribution to the learning environment, both inside and outside the classroom. In their planning, teachers 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 teacher has access to the Individual Education Plans for all children on the SEN spectrum. Each member of staff also receives individualised strategies for supporting each student with particular needs in their classes. Training on particular conditions e.g. dyslexia, Asperger's Syndrome, visual and hearing impairment is commonplace.

Professional Development of Staff

The Sutton Report into 'What makes great teaching?' (2014) highlights the fact that the subject knowledge of teaching staff has one of the strongest impacts on student outcomes.

Therefore, staff should be able to avail of opportunities to keep abreast of latest research and developments in their subject area through well-conceived, robust and effective professional development opportunities.

Additionally, exposure to professional development activities which reinforce effective approaches to high quality instruction in the classroom is crucial, both at a subject-specific and general pedagogical level. Consequently, the school seeks to provide the following professional development opportunities where possible:

- attendance at CCEA events and agreement trials (every second year) and as appropriate;
- attendance at subject-specific courses and conferences;
- in-house training on learning and teaching;
- use of external agencies to provide bespoke training linked to School Development Plan priorities;
- bespoke training in collaboration with the Education Authority;
- attendance at BETT, SLF and other educational trade fairs;
- use of internal systems such as PRSD and RLS;
- visiting other leading schools;
- sharing with leading practitioners in other schools / institutions.
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The school subscribes to the DENI Learning Leaders' Strategy.

Quality of Instruction in the Classroom

Similarly, the Sutton Report into 'What makes great teaching?' (2014) highlights the quality of instruction in the classroom as having a strong impact on student outcomes.

Carrickfergus Grammar School believes that this is at the core of its commitment to students. Following exploration of evidence-based research, including the works of Allison and Tharby, Tom Sherrington and Daniel Willingham, the school has identified six principles which will encompass its pursuit of high-quality learning and teaching in the classroom:

- 1: Effective Learning and Teaching must be embedded within a constant and unrelenting framework of '**Stretch and Challenge**';
- 2: Effective Learning and Teaching will be facilitated greatly by planning for, and embedding, **effective questioning** within the classroom, and ensuring that **oracy** reflects high quality academic register;
- 3: Effective Learning and Teaching requires **effective modelling**, breaking complex processes into steps, providing time to check understanding and making sure students have opportunities to ask questions;
- 4: High Challenge activities to support effective Learning and Teaching in the classroom will act as a **scaffold** to allow all students to reach our high expectations;
- 5: Effective Learning and Teaching should allow for **(monitored) independent practice** to allow for mastery through differentiation by outcome;
- 6: **Formative assessment and feedback** (most notably retrieval practice) will help plan for, implement and evaluate effective Learning and Teaching strategies.

These principles align with Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction, to which Carrickfergus Grammar School subscribes.

All classroom approaches should be framed around these principles. Appendix A details the 6 principles comprehensively, with links to Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction where appropriate.

Current PRSD / Research Lesson Study approaches undertaken in school hinge around these six principles of quality instruction in the classroom.

Furthermore, the school subscribes to the 'desirable difficulties' as referenced in Bjork's research (1994). This suggests that there are certain 'difficulties' which can be introduced that appear to have a desirable effect on our ability to retain and transfer information between contexts. These desirable difficulties include:

- **spacing** out information to be learned over planned intervals;
- **interleaving** or mixing topics together instead of presenting them in neat termly blocks;
- **testing** students' ability to retrieve information instead of showing it to them again.

Assessment for Learning

In line with our six principles, Carrickfergus Grammar School believes that Assessment for Learning is an effective strategy to enhance learning and improve performance. It is a process which gives students 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.

Aspirational learning intentions, focusing primarily on the knowledge to be acquired, should be clearly shared with students and success criteria established to highlight the key stages of the learning, so that students are clear about what it is they are going to learn, and what steps they must take to achieve the learning objectives. Success Criteria, where applicable, should be clearly linked to effective modelling such as deconstruction of excellence and benchmarking brilliance.

Teachers should use questions carefully so that they relate to the chosen learning intentions and success criteria, and encourage students to think deeply, moving from surface knowledge to deep knowledge.

A range of feedback strategies allows teachers to give meaningful oral and written feedback to students so that they are clear about how they can improve. 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 students are assessed on a regular basis, both through homework and through class-based assessment tasks. Further details can be found in the school's Assessment and Homework Policy.

Using Data

Diagnostic, formative, summative and standardised student performance data is used to monitor student progress and compare to targets which teachers and students have set with the aid of relevant data. Such targets should be realistic but challenging and, where student achievement has fallen below realistic targets, the teacher should use the intervention strategies for improvement developed and agreed at departmental level and as noted in tracking documents, departmental development plans and whole-school literature.

The school also has a mentoring strategy which links to subject-specific intervention, generic mentoring as well as literacy and numeracy initiatives to enhance performance. More information on this is outlined in the Mentoring Strategy document and the Assessment and Homework Policy.

Classroom Climate

We believe in the necessity of direct / explicit instruction. This involves a teacher explicitly imparting their knowledge to students from the front of the room. We believe that this is particularly advantageous in Key Stage 3 and 4, when students are relatively novice in relation to the subject domain. Explicit instruction incorporates all of the six principles outlined above, and acknowledges also the need for rote learning in order to ensure that students embed knowledge in long-term memory.

The setting of high expectations for all students is paramount at this school. Aspiration and expectation should be a key feature of every lesson, every day.

Furthermore, a positive rapport between teachers and students will enhance effective learning habits. There should always be mutual respect and courtesy, and an absence of sarcasm. Furthermore, teachers' contribution to ensuring good classroom relationships is outlined as follows:

- teachers show a personal interest in all students' learning and their development;
- teachers avoid expectations of poor work and/or poor behaviour;
- teachers praise students, when appropriate, for the effort they put into work, their behaviour and their attitude. The merit system is available to assist this process;
- teachers accompany praise with a clear indication of next targets for improvement;
- teachers demonstrate effective classroom management techniques;
- disagreement is dealt with in a mature and non-threatening manner.

There is also a clear expectation that all students will play their part in establishing a positive and happy classroom climate. As such, students are expected to adhere to the high standards as outlined in the Positive Behaviour policy.

Role of Parents

Carrickfergus Grammar School strongly values and encourages the support of parents / guardians. Research clearly suggests that there is a clear link between parental effort with children's education and their ultimate outcomes. 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, by valuing the powerful role of education in a person's life, by fostering cultural capital at home and by nurturing

high aspiration. Parents are required to monitor their child's homework using the Homework Diary, and to contact the child's Class Teacher or Head of Year when issues arise which require attention. We inform parents about their child's progress on a regular basis through annual reports and hosting parent-teacher consultations. Parents are requested to attend these consultations.

Self-Evaluation

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

APPENDIX A

Carrickfergus Grammar School's 6 Principles for Learning and Teaching

1. Effective Learning and Teaching must be embedded within a constant and unrelenting framework of 'Stretch and Challenge';

- We have high expectations of all students, all the time;
- We believe that it is good for students to struggle just outside of their comfort zone, as that is when they are likely to learn most. This involves high challenge, low stress and deep thinking which leads to effective learning;
- Learning intentions are most effective when they are single and challenging for all students;
- High challenge, anchored from the outset in all lessons, is made explicit to students;
- We believe that students embrace challenge most effectively when they adopt a growth mindset to their work and effort;
- We believe that staff should have ongoing access to professional development in their subject area, thus ensuring that stretch and challenge opportunities are utilised to the maximum in all lessons;
- We believe in 'benchmarking brilliance' through displays of high-quality students work in classrooms and in corridors;
- We believe that surface learning is a necessary pre-requisite to deep learning;
- We believe in high-quality presentation and content of written work. Integral to this is our strong belief in the drafting and re-drafting process. If it's not excellent, it's not finished.

2: Effective Learning and Teaching will be facilitated greatly by planning for, and embedding, effective questioning within the classroom, and ensuring that oracy reflects high quality academic register; (Rosenshine Principle 3)

- We believe that really deep learning is best facilitated through highly effective questioning techniques which enhance and broaden understanding and the ability to synthesise information;
- We believe that student questioning should be planned out in advance of lessons, to reinforce the adage that 'memory is the residue of thought';
- We believe that highly effective questioning is fluid, that it occurs in different forms and during each part of the learning and teaching cycle;
- We believe that good questioning initiates and sustains a high level of academic rigour;
- Effective questioning sows the seeds of rich discussion which engages, activates, challenges, connects and deepens knowledge;
- We believe in the importance of ensuring that students speak in a manner which reflects the academic register of the subject, and we encourage them to use high-level vocabulary in their responses;

3: Effective Learning and Teaching requires **effective modelling**, breaking complex processes into steps, providing time to check understanding and making sure students have opportunities to ask questions; (Rosenshine Principle 4)

- As a school we believe that it is our duty to show students how to use and manipulate their knowledge to form end outcomes and to ensure that these outcomes are as high a standard as possible – otherwise known as ‘modelling’;
- We believe that modelling, and the deconstruction of excellence, is an integral and vital part of the learning process;
- We believe that teacher explanation and modelling are inter-connected;
- We believe that modelling a complex procedure in small portions, followed by focused practice, is an effective strategy for successful student outcomes;
- We believe that success criteria should be accompanied by effective modelling;
- Effective modelling can be undertaken in a range of ways, including live modelling, prepared modelling, peer modelling, expert modelling and the sharing of multiple models;
- We believe that it is also incumbent upon teachers to model academic register and high-quality grammar in the classroom.

4: High challenge activities to support effective Learning and Teaching in the classroom will act as a **scaffold** to allow all students to reach our high expectations; (Rosenshine Principles 2, 5 and 8)

- ‘Scaffolding’ is the process which moves students from point ‘A’ to point ‘B’ in their learning – from knowing vaguely what to do to being confident, independent practitioners;
- We define scaffolding as ‘those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner’s capacity, thus permitting him or her to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence’;
- We believe that we should always scaffold upwards with students, and never downwards. In this regard, the best scaffolding will support students’ thinking and their ability to integrate new concepts, as well as providing a structure;
- We believe that similar high expectations must be set for all students, but we understand that everyone will need a different level of support to achieve these expectations; same bar, different ladders;
- Scaffolding also includes the ability to prompt students to shift their speech from everyday language to academic register.

5: Effective Learning and Teaching should allow for **(monitored) independent practice** to allow for mastery through differentiation by outcome; (Rosenshine Principle 9)

- We believe that (monitored) independent practice is one of the best and most effective indicators of high-quality learning and teaching;
- We believe that independent practice follows strategic and effective questioning, modelling and scaffolding to allow students to meet aspirational learning intentions;
- We believe that independent practice reflects the confidence and ability of students to complete tasks by themselves with limited prompting.

6: **Formative assessment and feedback** will help plan for, implement and evaluate effective Learning and Teaching strategies. (Rosenshine Principles 1, 6 and 10)

- We believe that feedback matters. We believe that it is best when it is a reciprocal process, allowing students to reflect upon their progress and modify strategies accordingly. In this regard, feedback helps to close a 'learning gap' as it helps identify regular and specific improvement strategies;
- We believe that timely feedback enhances the growth mindset;
- We believe that feedback must be fit for purpose, timely, manageable and designed to move students forward in their learning;
- We believe that regular low stakes retrieval practice in the classroom has the ability to expedite the process of knowledge embedding in long-term memory, allows for the identification of misconceptions and facilitates responsive teaching approaches as a result.