A logo for a special school

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**Assessment Policy**

# Introductory Statement

Assessment is central to the teaching and learning in our school. Assessment for and of learning takes place in line with the Assessment Guidelines and the alternative curricula and syllabi that we provide in line with the recommendations published by the Department of Education and Skills.

# Rationale

Assessment is central to effective teaching and learning and therefore it is necessary to assess, inform and monitor the progress of all pupils. The information that we glean from the assessment process has to impact on the subsequent teaching and learning in our classrooms if all pupils are to succeed. Our policy therefore covers both **assessment *of* learning** and **assessment *for* learning**.

Assessment ***of*** learning is assessment for accountability purposes, to determine a student's level of performance on a specific task or at the conclusion of a unit of teaching and learning, as well as assessment to enable teachers to compare the reading and Math performances of their pupils with reading and Math age norms. This type of assessment includes standardised testing. The information gained from this kind of assessment will be used in reporting. Assessment ***for*** learning, on the other hand, acknowledges that assessment will occur as a regular part of teaching and learning and that the information gained from assessment activities will be used to shape the teaching and learning as well as the planning process in our school.

# Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School

Our school motto states, ‘Enable Encourage Enrich’ and this is linked directly to our policy on assessment. We as a staff endeavour to use assessment to inform teaching and learning in every classroom and as a staff we will model the characteristic spirit of our school, which in essence means that we ‘keep trying’.

# Aims

Working from the understanding that *Assessment* refers to the process of gathering information, recording, interpreting, using and reporting information about a child’s progress and achievements in developing knowledge, skills and attitudes, the aims of our policy on assessment include:

* to inform our teaching methods, strategies, resources and approaches
* to monitor the holistic progress of every pupil
* to generate baseline data that can be used to monitor achievement over time
* to involve parents and pupils in identifying and managing learning strengths or challenges
* to inform teachers’ long and short-term planning
* to coordinate assessment procedures on a whole school basis
* to inform the establishment of instructional groups
* to diagnose difficulties in learning in order to provide intervention strategies
* to give positive feedback to the learner with clear ways forward
* to keep records of attainment that will inform the reporting process.

Purposes of assessment are:

* to inform planning for, and coverage of, all areas of the curricula and syllabi
* to gather and interpret data at class/whole school level
* to identify the particular learning needs of pupils/groups of pupils
* to inform the Individual Education/Pupil Profile Planning process
* to contribute to the school’s strategy for prevention of learning difficulties
* to monitor pupil progress and attainment
* to enable teachers to modify their programmes in order to ensure that the particular learning needs of individual pupils/groups are being addressed
* to compile records of individual pupils’ progress and attainment
* to facilitate communication between parents and teachers about pupils’ development, progress and learning needs
* to facilitate the involvement of pupils in assessment of their own work
* to enable teachers to monitor their own approaches and methodologies.

# Assessment *of* and *for* Learning

As recommended during our whole school evaluation a checklist with each pupil’s progression in specified areas such as literacy; numeracy and social skills, so information on every pupil can be updated and passed on with ease of access from teacher to teacher. These are provided in the appendices in our relevant plans/policies. In St. Francis Special School we use a variety of assessment methods and these include:

* Teacher observation (every class)
* Teacher-designed tasks and tests (every class)
* Interview and questioning (every class)
* Diagnostic tests
* Standardised tests
* Psychological tests
* Adaptive skills tests
* LPL1 and LPL2 PLU Portfolios
* Classroom based Assessment
* LCA tasks and key assignments.

Work samples, portfolios and projects are used to assess post-primary syllabi in our school and are examined by both external and internal examiners. The assessment relies on the production of work samples, projects and portfolios which are developed by the pupils over time. Other formats of assessment are also used and include:

* Assessment of the Junior Cycle and the Leaving Certificate Applied in line with the Office for State Examination Commission and the Department of Education and Skills
* Some assessments are given at the discretion of individual teachers. However, it is necessary for the whole school to have a cohesive approach to assessment of each pupil and therefore the checklists provided in the relevant plans/policies will be completed for each pupil individually
* Assessments of literacy and numeracy will be carried out by the class teacher to identify areas of need and inform areas of learning for teachers
* Checklists, mastery records, profiles and teacher notes will be used to support teacher observation
* Portfolios and work samples will be used in all classes and in particular the post-primary classes
* Our school has a centralised system for storing and monitoring information on a pupil’s behaviour. This can be accessed by staff on the server and provides information on pupil’s progress with regard to behaviour.
* This centralised system has been designed to support our Code of Behaviour and will form the basis of future references for pupils.

Note: It is mandatory for each class teacher to complete the literacy, numeracy and social skills checklists provided in the relevant plans/policies at the end of each school year and record these on the pupil’s profile on the Aladdin communication system, for use by subsequent teachers.

# Psychological Assessment

It is mandatory for a prospective pupil to have an up-to-date psycho-educational report before enrolling at St. Francis Special School. Our current enrolment policy states that assessment, including psychological assessments, are a central component in school life in St. Francis. Parents are requested to sign a consent form in this regard when the pupil is enrolled. However, if during the pupil’s time in the school it is necessary to carry out a psychological assessment, the parents will be informed by the psychologist, explaining the procedures to be followed. The parent will have the right to refuse permission for a psychological assessment at any time. After the assessment, the parents will be invited to a feedback session where the results of the assessment will be explained. Where pupils refuse permission for a psychological assessment to be completed and where this impacts on the placement of the pupil in the school, the BoM may have to make a decision in relation to the placement of a pupil on reports that are already available. With parental consent the class teacher and school principal are responsible for requesting and arranging an assessment for pupils from specialists needs such as a Speech and Language Therapist, Audiologist, Occupational Therapist etc. This can be facilitated through the school. The psycho-educational assessment will be central in drafting an educational plan for a pupil. A psychological report is stored in the pupil’s personal file. These files are kept in a locked filing cabinet in the administrative area of the school which is further protected by an electronic alarm system. All information is stored in compliance with Data Protection principles. Please see our Data Protection Policy for details.

# Standardised and Diagnostic Assessments

Standardised and diagnostic tests are available for use within the school and are administered in relevant classes where necessary. The appropriateness of a test for a particular pupil will be established before being administered. This refers to culturefairness, special needs, home language, sensory impairment and learning difficulties of the individual pupil. The MALT which is used for screening in numeracy for the primary classes, can also be used as a standardised and diagnostic assessment. The Young Group Reading Assessment and WRaPS (word recognition and phonic skills test) are used to obtain age equivalent scores so that the whole school reading scheme can be organised in accordance with pupils’ level of ability. Any exemption from testing / assessment will take place in accordance with Circular 0138/2006. If it is not possible to administer a standardised test due to the significant challenges a particular pupil may have, a dynamic assessment will be undertaken where possible.

Results can be recorded by giving the age equivalent and, where possible, a standard score and percentile rank may be given but only if deemed appropriate. Analysis and interpretation of results will be carried out by the management team in consultation with the teachers. The information gathered from tests will be conveyed to the class teacher and parents as appropriate. This information will be central to the formulation of Individual Education Programmes, preparation of lessons, including differentiation and the provision of remediation by the relevant class teacher. In addition, results will be used for the formation of instructional groups within the school and the deployment of teachers who have skills appropriate to the group’s needs. Results of testing and the pupil’s holistic progress will be communicated to parents twice during academic year. In the first term information will be provided to parents at the IEP/PPP meetings. Written reports to parents will be *qualitative* rather than *quantitative* in nature and school reports will be completed via the Aladdin Communication System.

**Record Keeping** Regarding recording the results of assessment:

* pupil screening and standardised assessment results are recorded on pupil profile on Aladdin which are stored electronically for 7 years after the pupil has left the school
* psychological reports are kept in the pupil’s personal file and retained by the school indefinitely
* agreed terminology is used to communicate results and teachers are mindful of the need to record any comments in an objective and instructive manner
* sensitive data is securely stored in the relevant files of each pupil which is stored in a locked filing cabinet
* test results are communicated to those with an involvement in the pupil’s learning – parents, therapist, school to which a pupil is transferring etc.
* once requested, relevant records, are given to the parents to give to the school to which the pupil is transferring.

Note: Please see lists of assessments used for state examinations in our school in appendix 1.

# Success Criteria

A range of informal and formal assessment modes are used to place assessment as an integral part of curriculum planning, teaching and learning in St. Francis. Procedures run smoothly and efficiently because there is clarity about what is expected and who is responsible for different aspects. Transfer of information from class teacher to class teacher happens efficiently at the beginning/end of school year. The success of this policy will depend on the progress of all of our pupils. This progress will depend on the impact that assessment has on the teaching and learning in our school.

# Roles and Responsibilities

All of the staff will have responsibility for ensuring this policy is implemented. The management team will oversee and co-ordinate the assessments of the Junior Cycle, and the literacy, numeracy and checklist assessments by each class teacher.

# Implementation, Ratification and Communication

# Appendix

**Assessments in our School**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Primary** | **Junior Cycle** | **Senior Cycle** |
| **Literacy**   * Literacy Checklist * MIST Screening Test * Young’s Group Reading Test * WRaPS       **Numeracy**   * MALT Numeracy   Test   * Numeracy   Checklist | **Literacy**   * Literacy Checklist * Young’s Group Reading Test * WRaPS         **Numeracy**   * Numeracy   Checklist   * MALT Numeracy   Test   * PLU Checklist   Level 1 & Level 2   * PLU Portfolio’s L1 & L2 * Classroom Based Assessments in   Short Courses | **Literacy**   * WRAT 4 * Detailed Assessment of Speed of   Handwriting 2007 for Age Range 9 to 16:11   * Detailed Assessment of Speed of   Handwriting 2011 for Age Range 17 to 25   * Young’s Group Reading Test * Literacy Checklist     **Numeracy**   * Numeracy Checklist |

**Reference Section**

* Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum – Guidelines for Schools, NCCA, 2007
* Special Educational Needs – a Continuum of Support, Guidelines for Teachers and Resource Pack for Teachers, NEPS, 2007
* Learning Support Guidelines, DES, 2000
* Circular 0138/2006 Supporting Assessment in Primary Schools
* Circular 02/05 Organisation of Teaching Resources for Pupils who need Additional Support in Mainstream Primary Schools
* Primary School Curriculum – section on assessment for each subject
* Working together to Make a Difference for Children, NEPS
* Drumcondra English Profiles. G. Shiel & R. Murphy, ERC, 2000
* Commonsense Methods for Children with Special Needs, Peter Westwood, Routledge Falmer, 1997
* A range of assessment tests are listed on the SESS website [www.sess.ie](http://www.sess.ie/)
* Report Cards Templates. [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie/)
* info@ncca, September 2005. Issue 1, p. 8. Assessment for Learning