Assessment Policy of ETSS Wicklow

School Address: Crinion Park, Wicklow Town

Roll number: 68345R

School Patron/s: Educate Together

1.0 Introduction

This Policy recognises the important work of Educate Together Secondary School Wicklow (ETSS Wicklow) in assessing the progress of students during each year and providing feedback and results to students and their parents/guardians. Assessment is integral to the teaching and learning of all students. As such, ETSS Wicklow strives to assess in ways that encourage further learning, as well as facilitating the important business of preparing students for state examinations. This Assessment Policy will be reviewed regularly by the Advisory Board of Studies and all school partners.

1.1 Legislation

The Education Act (1998) requires schools to regularly evaluate students and periodically report the results of the evaluation to students and their parents. In fulfilling this requirement, schools develop assessment procedures, which provide an accurate account of a student's progress and achievement.

1.2 Definition

The term *assessment* refers generally to the gathering and interpretation of information related to a student's learning abilities, learning attainments, learning strengths and learning needs.

2.0 Rationale for Assessment

Assessment is an essential part of good teaching and learning the following reasons:
- (a) To provide the students and parents with information regarding progress;
- (b) To gauge the present level of students;
- (c) To provide information that helps improve learning;
- (d) To improve achievement and grades in the future;
- (e) To motivate students to achieve their full potential;
- (f) To identify appropriate levels for students to gain maximum success from state examinations;
- (g) To help students in making subject choices as they move through the academic programmes in the school;
- (h) To become independent learners capable of critical and reflective thinking;
- (i) To become resilient learners capable of taking critical and constructive feedback that will move their learning forward and prepare them for the challenges of further education when they leave school;

2.1 Assessment should enable teachers:

- (a) To meet statutory requirements;
- (b) To assess student progress;
- (c) To evaluate student learning needs;
- (d) To adapt planning as required;
- (e) To establish baseline data in relation to a student's attainment in certain subjects;
- (f) To ensure that students know how to improve the standard of their work;
- (g) To evaluate teaching and learning styles and outcomes;
- (h) To review and change practice;
- (i) To provide the students and parents with information regarding progress;
- (j) To identify suitable levels for students in Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle;
- (k) To assess a student's eligibility for additional support and services and to inform consultations with the NEPS psychologist where necessary;
- (l) To assist in the identification of students who may need to be referred to an outside professional or agency for assessment or direct intervention;
- (m) To identify students who may need additional supports (Reasonable Accommodation, special centres, etc) in the Junior Cycle and/or Leaving Certificate examinations;

2.2 Assessment should enable parents:

- (a) To be involved in their child's learning;
- (b) To understand and encourage the progress their child is making;
- (c) To check their child's progress throughout their time in secondary school;

3.0 Formative Assessment

The most common assessment type used in the school is ***informal*** in nature and takes place regularly in the classroom. It is called ***'formative assessment'*** and can be considered as ***practice featuring student involvement***. This assessment approach includes timely feedback and constructive advice.

ETSS Wicklow has adopted the ***Assessment for Learning (AFL)*** approach to assessment, meaning the whole process is designed to help learners improve their learning. In relation to formative assessment, this means forming, shaping and guiding learning on a day to day basis. It is about ***learning to learn***.

The premise behind formative assessment is that assessment is about supporting learning as well as measuring outcomes. Effective formative assessment for learning enables students to improve their work by:

(a) Helping them to understand the assessment criteria (success criteria) before an assignment starts;
(b) Providing feedback which explains what has been done well and what could be improved;
(c) Making exemplars available as models;
(d) Helping students to plan effectively;
(e) Observing how students learn most efficiently;
(f) Using a differentiated approach to teaching, learning and assessment;
(g) Recognising all educational achievements;
(h) Encouraging students towards independent and reflective learning;

3.1 The five pillars of formative assessment

There are five key pillars of formative assessment:

(a) **Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success:** requires that teachers engage students in understanding how and why they are learning. Students will be explicitly told what they are aiming to identify or evaluate in the learning intentions and by using success criteria will develop the ability to self-assess what they have learned in a lesson;
(b) **Effective classroom discussion and other learning tasks that elicit evidence of student understanding:** teachers offer thought provoking questions that involve students reflecting on the content in order to assess levels of knowledge and to prepare for ongoing learning. These discussions will also help the teacher gauge the ability and understanding of the class with future lessons in mind;
(c) **Providing feedback that moves learning forward:** comment-only feedback is regarded as a very beneficial form of feedback for a student to receive. For the student to fully develop and benefit from this feedback, it must explain what was done well, why it was done well, what needs to be improved and how to make these improvements;
(d) **Students as learning resources for one another:** peer-feedback is a useful form of assessment where students help each other to learn;
(e) **Activating students as the owners of their own learning:** When students are allowed the opportunity to assess, create and own their learning they can produce improvements in their outcomes and achievements;

4.0 Summative Assessment

Summative Assessment is a *formal AFL* and aims to provide a summary of the achievements of the students up to a certain point in time by comparing it against some standard or benchmark (previous results or class averages etc…). The results generally take the form of a grade or a percentage. Teachers, students and parents assess how learning is progressing, identify gaps and devise methods to close those gaps.

All forms of summative assessment strive to meet any additional needs of students in the classroom. Strategies such as differentiated assessment, visual aids, hearing aids, spelling waivers, increased time and dictionaries, etc… may be used from time to time, as determined by the SEN co-ordinator/SEN Core Team and the individual subject teachers.

Where feasible, and as determined by each subject department plan, common agreed assessment tests across a year group will be used in each subject area.

4.1 Why test students?

(a) To monitor student progress and find out how well students are learning;
(b) To identify strengths and weaknesses across the subject range;
(c) To inform teachers if instruction has been successful or not. If the entire class performs below expectations in a test, the teacher can use this information to change instruction approach, spend more time teaching missed concepts or use different instructional materials;
(d) To help teachers clarify instructional intentions. Developing tests prior to instruction encourages teachers to create a clear roadmap for learning, which includes standards, instruction and assessment;
(e) To assign grades for continuous assessment;
(f) To motivate improved student and school performance;

4.2 Examples of summative assessments

(a) Monthly/End of Topic Test
These tests are conducted at the discretion of the teacher on a monthly or 'end of topic' basis. They are formal tests which act as a vital component in providing feedback to teachers, students and parents on the progress of students in their subjects. Constructive feedback is given by subject teachers to students and the results from these tests will be used in the school's formal reporting structure where appropriate.

(b) House examinations
- First, second, fourth and fifth years will sit house examinations at Christmas and at the end of the year;
- A more informal examination system may be implemented at Halloween and Easter time. Details will be confirmed by management in consultation with teaching staff;

- When appropriate, and as determined by each department plan, common examination papers may be given in designated subjects across a year group. This will provide for increased cooperation and a common benchmark for students in all classes in that year group;
- All house examinations are conducted in the spirit of trial runs for state examinations;
- The duration of the House Examinations are as follows:

Year Group	Duration
1st Year:	1 to 1.5 hours
2nd Year:	1.5 to 2 hours
3rd Year:	2 hours
4th year:	1.5 hours
5th Year:	2 hours

A half hour study session before exams will be built into the overall plan where timetabling allows.

(c) Mock Examinations
Third and Sixth Years will sit Mock examinations in the year of their Junior and Leaving Certificate respectively.

(d) State Examinations
- The timetable for the State Examinations is made available by the *State Examinations Commission (SEC)* at the start of a calendar year;
- Third and Sixth Years have written and aural State Examinations that commence on the first Wednesday after the June Bank Holiday each year.
- Oral examinations for Irish and Modern Foreign Languages and Practical examinations take place during periods specified by the SEC. Students and parents are informed of these dates by the school once they are announced;
- Other assessment components such as course work and portfolio work are managed in accordance with the regulations and timetable set down by the SEC.

(e) Continuous assessment - Halloween Assessment & Easter
All year groups will receive continuous assessment periods from the beginning of the school year up to the Halloween mid-term break and from the start of the second term up to the Easter holidays. There will be a minimum of three assessment grades per subject per period (in any form, as decided by the subject teacher and/or subject department) with the average result recorded.

5.0 Junior Cycle Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs)

The Junior Cycle programme aims to provide improved learning experiences for all second-level students. All Junior Cycle subjects include two *CBAs* (Junior Cycle Short Courses include one *CBA* – details about the *NCCA's* Short Courses are available on www.curriculumonline.ie – the points below only address *CBAs* in Junior Cycle subjects).

5.1 What are CBAs?

- *CBAs* act as distinct markers in the students' learning journeys;
- They are an integral part of ongoing assessment and routine classroom practice;
- They provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate knowledge and skills that may not be demonstrable in House and State Examinations;
- They may include oral or investigative assignments;

5.2 When do they happen?

- *CBAs* are facilitated by the classroom teacher within normal class contact time and in accordance with a national timeframe;
- Students complete one *CBA* in Second Year;
- Students complete another *CBA* in Third Year;
- More details about when *CBAs* take place are outlined in the individual Assessment Guidelines published by the *National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)* for each subject. Updates on the *NCCA's* website and in the relevant Junior Cycle implementation circular that the *Department of Education and Skills (DES)* publishes each year will also inform schools about when *CBAs* should take place.
- *ETSS Wicklow* will use all of the available information to create a suitable *CBA* calendar that meets the needs of the students and the school.

5.3 How are they assessed?

- Students' *CBAs* are assessed by their subject teachers using a nationally agreed marking system designated by the *NCCA*. Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings are used to support the assessment of *CBAs*. There are some exceptions. For example, the second *CBA* in Visual Art is assessed by the *SEC*. See the Assessment Guidelines for each subject for more details on www.curriculumonline.ie
- The results of the *CBAs* will be reported in the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement using one of the following descriptors:
    - *(a)* Exceptional
    - *(b)* Above Expectations
    - *(c)* In Line with Expectations
    - *(d)* Yet to Meet Expectations
- Teachers use the Features of Quality to award descriptors to students. These Features of Quality are the criteria for assessing CBAs. More information regarding the Features of Quality is available at: www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/Junior-Cycle-Subiects
- As advised by the *NCCA* and the *DES*, *ETSS Wicklow* will use the Christmas and summer assessment to report on the results of Second Year CBAs and the mock exams and summer assessment to report on the results of Third Year CBAs.
- Second and Third-year students will have time allowances built into their programmes to work on CBAs.

5.4 Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings

To support teachers in assessing students' Classroom-Based Assessments, teachers will engage in Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings. At these meetings, teachers will share and discuss representative samples of students' work and build a common understanding about the quality of their students' learning.

Where there is a single teacher of a subject in the school, that teacher can participate in a SLAR meeting with another school. The potential of digital technologies to support such meetings may be explored.

It may be necessary, in the case of short courses, for schools to consider SLAR meetings electronically with teachers of short courses from other schools.

SLARs should take place, save in exceptional circumstances, for the assessment of CBAs that are completed in short courses. The achievement of students will be described using the descriptors:
- *(e)* Exceptional
- *(f)* Above Expectations
- *(g)* In Line with Expectations
- *(h)* Yet to Meet Expectations

SLAR meetings play a key role in developing a collegial culture and building up expertise in judgements by teachers on student achievement.

The professional time that has been made available to schools is used to facilitate the time commitment associated with the conducting of the SLAR meetings.

6.0 Assessment Tasks
- After the completion of the second **CBA**, students will complete an Assessment Task in most of their subjects;
- Where the students complete an Assessment Task, it is based on the second CBA;
- Students complete the task in a booklet during class time which will be returned to the **SEC** for marking. The **SEC** provide information to schools about the instructions for administering the Assessment Task.
- At the end of Third Year, in the month of June, students sit the final **SEC** examination. This written exam accounts for 90% of the students' overall result in the subject.
- The Assessment Task accounts for the remaining 10% of the students' total marks in the subject.

7.0 New Grading System for Junior Cycle

Grading will be with the following descriptors:

GRADE	MARK
Distinction	90-100%
Higher Merit	75-89%
Merit	55-74%
Achieved	40-54%
Partially Achieved	20-39%
Not Graded	0-19%

A comprehensive guide to the Junior Cycle is available on:
www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle

8.0 The Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) – *Other Areas of Learning*

The Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) includes a section for *Other Areas of Learning* which gives recognition to students for their achievements in school outside of the classroom. These achievements could include Student Council work, Talent Show accomplishments, sporting achievements, active citizenship work, etc.

An 'Other Area of Learning' template will be available for students to report on their contributions to various aspects of school life and class tutors can give guidance how to complete the form.

8.1 Sample JCPA

9.0   Other examples of assessments include:

- Literacy Tests [diagnostic assessment]
- Cognitive Ability Tests [(CAT 4 Tests – diagnostic assessment]
- Aural Tests
- Oral Tests
- Folders of Excellence
- Learning Support Assessments
- Maths Tests
- Psychological Assessments
- Portfolios
- Project Work
- Student Presentations

10.0   Reporting

There are a variety of different methods whereby the results of formal and informal assessments will be reported to students and parents/guardians. Some examples of reporting to parents are listed below:

(a) Student Journal

Students will record all continuous assessment results in their journals for all subjects and tabulate their progress in the charts provided. The teacher may communicate the outcome of any assessment to the parents/guardians of a student by writing a note in the student's journal. Parents/guardians are expected to acknowledge receipts of notes by countersigning them. This must be countersigned by the parent/guardian to acknowledge receipt of the note, thus keeping lines of communication open with regard to academic progress. The teacher may decide, as they see fit, to contact the parent/guardian directly with respect to the outcome of any assessment undertaken by a student. Parents are also welcome to contact teachers if they need any further information about an assessment or any aspect of their sons'/daughters' education. Teachers have a consultation hour each week and parents are encouraged to make appointments if they want to discuss educational issues with subject teachers;

(b) Signature of Parent on Assessment

The teacher may send corrected assessments home to be viewed and signed by parents/guardians.

(c) Parent/Teacher/Student Meetings

There are Parent/Teacher/Student meetings for all year groups throughout the academic year. At these meetings it will be possible for teachers to relay the outcomes of various assessments to parents/guardians of individual students to generate an accurate picture of student progress. Students, together with their parents/guardians have the opportunity to discuss feedback with their teachers on academic performance.

(d) *School Reports*
- Each student receives a minimum of 4 school reports per year (Halloween, Christmas, Easter, summer);
- Third and Sixth Years receive school reports at Halloween, and after the 'Mocks' and official DES results from State Examinations;
- School reports are an important part of the communication between school and parents. They inform parents of student performance, effort, areas for improvement, behaviour, attendance and punctuality. Parents are encouraged to keep these reports as a record of their child's progress in school;
- ETSS Wicklow's teachers use 'free form' reporting comments on the Vsware system which supports the formative assessment approach that is so important to the school's ethos. This individualised form of feedback allows students and parents to identify strengths and areas that require improvement.

(e) *Parental and Student access to school reports on VSware:*
Parents may access VSware at any time to view their child's academic progress and attendance record using their username and password provided by the school.

11.0 Analysis of School Reports and Target Setting

A review of reports is planned within two weeks after they have been issued. The Principal, Deputy Principal, Year Head, and class tutors are available to meet and discuss reports with students and parents/guardians. Students should update their results analysis sheets by subject.

12.0 How can Parents Help?
- Parents should work with the school to emphasise the importance of students setting targets for achievement in the State Examinations;
- Parents and students should attend all formal Parent/Teacher/Student meetings and information evenings organised by the school;
- Parents can create a good study climate at home by providing their children with a quiet room with no distractions so that homework and study can be completed at a fixed time each day;
- Parents should read and reflect upon all school correspondence, especially school term reports and related correspondence concerning students' performance;
- The Deputy-Principal is available to inform and advise parents and students on the implications of level changes if required.

13.0 Homework Policy
The school's Homework Policy forms an integral part of the assessment process. Due to the important nature of this policy, it is given a special status as a 'stand-alone' policy.

14.0   Assessment and technology

ETSS Wicklow uses iPads for its Junior Cycle classes. These devices provide teachers and students with an array of methodologies that have the potential to hugely benefit teaching, learning and assessment. However, **ETSS Wicklow** has adopted a blended approach to the use of technology and as such, teachers are deeply conscious of ensuring the continued development of active learning skills such as writing, communication and team work. This will be reflected in the approach to assessment which continues to include hand written tests, hand written project work, oral exams, presentations, project work etc… - students' copies remain an important part of teaching, learning and assessment and should be used frequently and maintained to the highest standards possible. Work in copies will be monitored and assessed regularly by teachers and written feedback recorded in students' copies. Where possible, tests should be completed in copies. This allows students to be well organised and have a clear record of their progress throughout the school year. It also allows parents to monitor their children's progress with ease.

Chairperson of the Board of Management

Principal

Review Date: 2020-2021