



Glenstal Abbey
SCHOOL

Curriculum, Learning and Assessment Policy

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Curriculum, Learning and assessment Policy

What is our Curriculum?

The curriculum of Glenstal Abbey School is the total learning experience provided to our students within and beyond the classroom.

Our curriculum is a six-year journey, carefully planned to create a rich experience that is coherent across all areas of school life. It includes formal and informal learning experiences, co-curricular opportunities, social and religious experiences in the context of the ethos and learning environment of the school. It includes, but is not limited by, the Junior and Senior Cycle framework. Our curriculum is broad, balanced and allows for wide-ranging options at Senior Cycle, meeting the needs of all learners. This breadth of opportunity aligns closely with our Benedictine school vision.

We nurture excellence by focusing on the individual and our student-centred curriculum, in the context of a small school, seeks to meet the needs of our diverse community. This is about knowing, valuing and supporting our students as unique learners.

After the academic school day Glenstal Abbey provides a rich co-curricular and extracurricular programme, allowing students to be creative, perform, play sport and be active. Sports and Music underpin this programme.

We also provide extensive development pathways through aesthetic, creative, social, linguistic and literary, mathematical, sporting, scientific, spiritual and technological activities, as well as many trips and residential experiences. Leadership and individual development opportunities are offered throughout the school as we seek to support our students to develop into compassionate, resilient and responsible young people. Our senior student leaders act as role models for younger students. We are proud of the spirit of collaboration and care which characterise our school community.

The impact of our curriculum is clear to see. Our students achieve high outcomes in terms of academic qualifications at both Junior and Leaving Certificate. Of equal importance is that our students embody the skills and qualities espoused in the school's Benedictine vision, resulting in the happy, curious, resilient and well-rounded individuals who are the hallmark of our school.

Enabling Students to Excel

Glenstal's distinctive strengths that enable such beneficial outcomes include:

- our Benedictine ethos and tradition
- very capable and committed teaching and support staff
- smaller class sizes and individual care and attention
- remarkable companionship between students
- the experience of living in a vibrant community
- the unique beauty of the Glenstal demesne
- a safe and secure environment

Who are our Learners?

Our curriculum takes into account the comprehensive nature of our cohort in terms of their abilities and prior learning experiences

What is the Philosophy underlying our Curriculum?

Our curriculum is founded on our Catholic understanding of the uniqueness of each human person created in the image and likeness of God, called into relationship with God for eternity to a 'future full of hope.' (Jeremiah 29, 11) It is informed by a belief that our intellectual development leads us to an appreciation of the divine. Catholic teaching recognises that knowledge is an intrinsic good, but is completed only with the real illumination of relationship with God: "Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4, 8). We acknowledge that all aspects of human knowledge proceed from and lead to God, and we recognise that all aspects of the curriculum in our school are interconnected and are of equal value. We also acknowledge that the curriculum embraces all learning and new learning, respecting different viewpoints and opinions and the personal right of freedom of conscience. "A creative God-centred curriculum in dialogue with the wisdom of both past and present should maintain the truth of the Christian Gospel without becoming isolationist or introspective." Hans Urs von Balthazar.

Taking inspiration from the Rule of St Benedict our curriculum seeks to offer appropriate challenge : "the strong have something to strive for and the weak have nothing to run from" (chapter 64).

Our curriculum affirms the Church's teaching that parents are the first educators of their children. We seek to work in partnership with parents to provide education for our children in a prayerful environment of love, safety and security.

What are the Key Features of our Curriculum?

- Our curriculum is broad, balanced and coherently planned and sequenced;
- It promotes high-quality teaching and learning tailored to the needs of all students who are supported to achieve their full potential, irrespective of their starting points;
- It is a rich, progressive, knowledge and skills base which seeks to draw on evidence-based pedagogy and a broad range of resources;
- It promotes a positive and aspirational attitude towards learning,
- It prepares students for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life and the world of work;
- It supports students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development;
- It supports students' physical development and responsibility for their own health, enabling them to be active;
- It enables students to develop views and opinions and become emotionally resilient, providing students with access to guidance and counselling and other means of supporting emotional health and development;
- It develops rich cultural awareness whilst promoting diversity and encouraging social cohesion;
- Religious education and Christian catechesis are at the core of our curriculum.

Learning and Teaching

We are committed to a dynamic, research-led approach to developing our teaching and learning which is reviewed and refined through reflective praxis, our SSE process, a teacher led community of practice, and CPD – both formally and informally such as through the Subject Based Learning and Assessment review process (SLAR).

We pursue excellence in teaching by empowering our teachers and support staff with the very best research-based approaches for outstanding pedagogy. We implement the national key skills framework which places the learner at the centre and develops 'Information Processing, Communicating, Being Personally Effective, Working with others and Critical and Creative thinking'. We enable subject teams to develop specialised approaches and to question and drive their own curriculum so that they have a clear understanding of subject-specific learning goals and needs, ensuring that all statutory requirements are implemented and exam specifications

fully covered. We actively engage with the Junior and Senior Cycle redevelopment and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the National Council for Special Education Curriculum.

We believe that students should develop independent, enquiring minds and an enjoyment of learning, developing their whole selves, and finding an appreciation of God's creation and revelation. This is central to the School's Mission. Effective teaching and learning and sharing of best practice raises levels of achievement through a stimulating learning environment where talents are nurtured and the students can achieve personal best standards.

How is the Curriculum Delivered?

The acquisition of knowledge through a well-planned, carefully structured and sequenced curriculum enables students to build an interconnecting schema. Self-regulated learning enables our students to be active learners who are self-motivated and aware of their own learning. Students assess tasks, evaluate strengths and weaknesses, plan their approach, apply strategies and reflect.

Strategies in the Classroom

To fulfil our commitment to breadth of opportunity, academic rigour, a student centred curriculum and holistic education, we employ a range of research-led teaching and learning strategies. For example:

All lessons start by sharing a learning intention with students

- Teachers regularly expect students to undertake a short retrieval task to review previous learning. This ensures that knowledge and skills are retained in students' short- and long-term memory
- Collaborate with students to create success criteria, ensuring clarity and shared ownership of learning goals
- To ensure clarity of instruction and high pace, teachers call attention to shifts in activities during a lesson so that students perceive milestones and time limits for tasks clearly
- Taking account of manageable cognitive load, new learning is broken down and transmitted using techniques such as dual coding
- Teachers model worked examples to narrate the decisions and choices they make and develop students' ability to self-regulate their learning
- Questioning is targeted and frequent, both low-order (e.g. simple knowledge recall) and high-order (analysis / evaluation / synthesis of learning) and is used to check understanding

- Questioning techniques include targeted questioning to ensure the involvement of all
- Effective circulation enables teachers to check understanding and give live feedback
- Learning is structured to maximise short- and long-term memory retention. Teachers use spaced learning and regularly check prior knowledge through tests

Co-curricular Programme

This curriculum is enhanced by a wide-ranging co-curricular programme which provides a broad curriculum offer and supports student wellbeing. This includes the following regular activities as well as an extensive range of trips and visits.

Sports activities

Athletics, Badminton, Basketball, Equestrian, Golf, Gaelic Football, Hurling, Soccer, Tennis, Table Tennis, Volleyball, Swimming, Rowing, Rugby, Surfing, Sailing

Wellbeing

Several residential retreats take place during the year, run by the Chaplaincy Team. Charity activities are organized by all students through the course of the year.

In addition, special International Days and Themed weeks, such as Seachtain na Gaeilge feature in the annual calendar of events.

Students are encouraged to take on leadership opportunities throughout the school, for example as members of the School Council or as a Fifth Year Monitor or Sixth Year Prefect.

Higher Prior Attainers

Aims

- To identify more able students by prior attainment and ensure that their targets are appropriately challenging.
- To promote and raise the attainment, motivation and aspirations of students
- To promote a culture of high expectations for students and teachers, and ensure that work is appropriately challenging and differentiated.
- To maintain a challenging and stimulating learning environment which supports students, actively encourages questioning and challenge, creativity and higher-order thinking skills.
- To develop a coordinated and coherent programme of learning opportunities, underpinned by a balance of challenge and support. This includes providing students

with activities outside the formal curriculum which will develop their thinking and creativity.

- To recognise and meet the social and emotional needs of our students through pastoral and Guidance support

Provision

Systematic challenge will be evident in:

department plans, lessons, resources and assessments.

Programmes of study will include details of provision, including;

- tasks which demand higher-order cognitive skills to challenge learners
- access to advanced resources and materials that support the level of challenge
- more complex, creative and open-ended tasks
- modelling of high-level answers and outstanding work linked to grading criteria so that students can see what is required to progress to that level
- in-class and out-of-class challenge tasks, additional reading, research projects

Assessment and Feedback

Assessment Rationale

At Glenstal Abbey School, we believe in the principle of recognizing and valuing the achievement of all students through effective and worthwhile assessment, both formative and summative.

Purpose

- To ensure that assessment is an integral part of the learning process.
- To involve students in self- and peer-assessment.
- To use assessment to develop student voice dialogue through which teachers help students develop the skills they need to reflect positively on their learning, so that they are able to build on their strengths and work purposefully on the areas for further development.
- To use assessment diagnostically to determine the knowledge and skills students already possess and help identify particular strengths and weaknesses to give appropriate guidance and support.
- To use assessment formatively to inform planning of the next steps of a student's education and to show the student how to make progress.

- To use assessment summatively and positively to indicate the progress and attainment of an individual.
- To use assessment to show the success of their learning.
- To recognize and celebrate the whole range of students' achievements and experiences so that the process can help to nurture self-esteem and is positive and motivating.
- Assessment will take place in a variety of ways, varying from informal teacher observation and short tests (including peer-to-peer and self-answer tests) to examinations under full examination conditions.

Assessment Objectives

In all types of assessment, we seek to enable each student to:

- recognise strengths and identify areas for development
- reflect on and assess their own performance and progress
- make informed decisions on how to improve
- experience formal examination conditions
- become effective learners and more confident people.

The following provision is in place for all students

- In class questions opportunities for student voice in learning design
- Marking of exercises in copy books, past questions, etc
- Regular tests in class
- Class Based Assessments moderated in SLAR's
- Formal Autumn and Summer examinations
- Mock examinations - Junior and Senior Year
- Informal feedback in lessons
- Formal feedback to parents at Parent Teacher meetings
- Formal reports for each year group four times per academic year with formative targets
- Tutor feedback to parents re academic achievement
- Pastoral feedback to parents from Deans, Guidance Counsellors and Housemasters

Policy Review

This Policy was adopted by the Board of Management in December 2024.

Signed: 
Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: 10 Dec 2024

Signed: 
Headmaster/Principal

Date: 10 Dec 2024