

Dilseacht don Fhíor agus don Dúchas

Scoil Ailbhe Naofa

St. Ailbe's School

Policy Document
On
Literacy

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Introduction

Why a whole school approach to literacy?

There are a large number of schools within the Irish Education system with a concentration of students with poor literacy skills. Schools have identified poor literacy skills as a key reason why young people drop out of school. It explains why some young people get very little out of school despite succeeding in the examinations.

There are no easy solutions to this problem but recent research in Ireland and internationally points us in certain directions. In the *Summary Report on Remedial Education* (1999) Shiel & Morgan recommend that 'schools in which low achievement in English and/or Mathematics is a serious problem should be made aware of school - wide restructuring programmes that have been shown to increase achievement across all pupils in these subjects.' More recently the findings of the *Ready for Life ?* (PISA) study (2001) by Shiel, Cosgrove, Sofroniou and Kelly 'suggest a need to implement focused school wide and individual programmes in second level schools that are designed to target students with serious reading difficulties and, where such programmes are already in place (e.g. learning support), to examine their effectiveness.' A focused approach to addressing the needs of students with very low achievement in mathematics and science, where language skills are also implicated, was recommended.

Research on what works in other countries indicates that, within post primary, a school wide approach starting in first year is very effective in improving literacy standards. The consolidation and development of basic skills in first year will prepare the child for success at second level and beyond. While students with a reading age below 8 are usually offered individualised programmes by the learning support teachers, those with a reading age between 8 – 10, to whom learning support resources cannot usually stretch, respond very well to a school – wide approach. School has had success by broadening the awareness of reading among all the teachers and encouraging the whole staff to analyse the reading needs of their subject. For the

students this means that instead of a short withdrawal period once or twice a week when reading is attended to, they have an opportunity to work successfully at their subject all week long.

In their research report *What works in Secondary School* (1999) the Basic Skills Agency outlines some of the elements of a successful school –wide approach. These include:

- Targeting first year students
- Focus on students with a Reading Quotient is below their Intelligence Quotient (IQ).
- Paired Reading/Mentoring
- Professional development for teachers
- Focus on developing a range of reading strategies and skills
- Provide specific individualised instruction
- Follow up in SUBJECT classrooms
- Regular use of assessment
- Provide frequent opportunities to practice in reading
- Regular use of IT for individualised programme

Why a School Literacy Plan?

For the success of a school-wide literacy approach that caters for all of the learners there needs to be a whole school commitment to literacy. This means the development of shared goals and vision of the staff around literacy and the communication of those goals in a systematic way. The process of developing a literacy plan allows, and indeed requires, staff to play an active role in planning for improvement.

In order for this to come about, staff will need time to discuss issues and 'own' policies and ideas, time to develop:

1. a cohesive definition of literacy,
2. a whole school literacy policy
3. a whole school acceptance and understanding of what should be the school's short term literacy aim.

Schools with a high concentration of students who are underachieving in literacy will need to get agreement among teachers that literacy development will become a priority. Establishing literacy as a priority will mean:

1. setting up/supporting the appropriate structures
2. creating a reading ethos
3. making literacy part of the curriculum.

An important part of the plan is the opportunity to look at the literacy provision currently available in the school and the kind of practices that may be common but are less than ideal. Audits of literacy practices in English schools have thrown up some interesting results -typical findings:

- lots of copying from blackboards
- much unchallenging comprehension work
- pupils encounter a minimal range of texts
- reading is often restricted to short bursts of a few seconds
- writing usually consists of very short unfinished pieces
- pupils aren't taught how to use reference materials
- widespread use of worksheets - often ill-designed
- insufficient opportunities for oral work
- good practice that isn't shared

(National Literacy Trust)

The development of the school literacy plan is an opportunity to address these practices. It will also serve as the reference point by which to measure progress and to keep the literacy work on track.

Mission Statement:

St. Ailbe's School is a Co-Educational Post Primary under the trusteeship of the South Tipperary Vocational Educational Committee, Administration Offices, Western Road, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.

Tel: 052 21067

Our mission statement is as follows:

- To provide quality education that meets the actual needs of young people in the best quality learning environment, creating an atmosphere of trust and confidence between students, parents, and staff which enhances self-esteem and self worth.

- To help all pupils reach their full potential in all areas of life, moral, Academic, social and vocational, recognising that there is no single standard that applies to all.

- To help pupils grow in confidence with a positive outlook on life and with the due consideration for others and for property.

Characteristic Spirit of St. Ailbe's School

This policy reflects the ethos of St. Ailbe's School which has inherited a commitment:

"To learn to think independently, to tolerate and value diversity, by fostering an atmosphere of respect, understanding, and encouragement between all who teach, work and learn in St. Ailbe's School."

The Literacy Working Group

The Literacy Working Group will be responsible for:

- Developing and implementing a plan for a whole school approach to literacy development, encompassing teacher development, short-term interventions and a school wide enrichment policy.
- Establishing a schedule/calendar for literacy development.
- Putting in place structures to monitor, evaluate and review the literacy development plan in action
- Driving and activating the school literacy development plan, focusing particularly on first year students and on developing a whole school aspect.

A literacy co-coordinator will also be appointed to implement and drive the plan and to liaise with the subject departments & teachers, learning support teachers, management, and the feeder primary schools.

The core group is comprised of the following:

- Literacy co-coordinator
- JCSP co-coordinator
- School Completion co-coordinator
- Head of English
- Learning support /resource teacher

The group liaises with some of the following:

Management representative

Home School Community Liaison co-coordinator

Class Tutor(s)

Parent/Home visitor

Teachers of practical subjects

JCSP Literacy Related Initiatives & Materials

Keyword Initiative:

The intervention was developed by a JCSP school Co-coordinator. Students are challenged to learn keywords and key spellings across subject areas over a six-week period. Parental involvement is an element of this intervention.

Materials are available to support the initiatives

- Keyword notebooks
- Keyword wall charts
- Keyword folder inserts
- Keyword wall magnets
- Keyword bookmarks
- Key Spelling Bookmarks.

Reading Challenge Initiative:

Reading Challenge is a short-term reading intervention, developed by a JCSP school Co-coordinator. Students are challenged to read a book a week for six weeks. Parental involvement is an element of this intervention. Reading Challenge motivates students to read and review books; they also track their reading and are awarded for successfully meeting the reading challenge. The following support materials are provided to schools:

- 'Reading Challenge' teacher guidelines
- Students book review 'Reading Challenge' booklet
- Reading Challenge student achievement certificate
- Reading Challenge bookmarks
- Reading Challenge wall poster

"Who Wants to Be a Word Millionaire?" Initiative:

"Who Wants to be a Word Millionaire?" is a short-term reading intervention, which challenges a class group of JCSP students to engage in recreational reading, at home with the support of their parents, and to collectively read a total of one million words (or more) over a six-week period. The following support materials are provided to schools: Teacher guidelines, "Who Wants to Be a Word Millionaire?" achievement certificates and "Who Wants to Be a Word Millionaire?" wall charts for entering and tracking the cumulative totals of words read to date.

Readalong Initiative

A continuation of the very successful Readalong initiative which supports students in reading for pleasure, using walkmans/MP3 players and books on tape/CD/audio downloads. Readalong is a short-term reading intervention where students read while listening to the book being read on tape or CD. Students can also review the books and track their reading. After completing a six-week Readalong programme students are awarded for their achievement. The following support materials are provided to schools:

- Teacher Guidelines for Readalong
- Information on Audio books a Suppliers
- Student book review booklet
- Reading Project Achievement Certificate
- A variety of bookmarks

Paired Reading Initiative

Paired Reading is short-term reading intervention. Student reading is supported by a tutor. Paired Reading runs 3 to 4 times a week for six weeks. A Paired Reading initiative can work where JCSP students act as tutors to a primary school class or senior cycle students are reading tutors for a JCSP class or parents work with students as tutors. Students are awarded for successfully taking part in this reading project. The following support materials are provided to schools:

- Paired Reading teacher guidelines
- Paired Reading tutor training video 'Everyone Reads'
- Paired Reading student achievement certificate
- Paired reading tutor achievement certificate

- A variety of bookmarks.

Reading Programme in the English Classrooms Initiative:

This initiative enables schools to use a reading laboratory e.g. SRA outside of the learning support context with a JCSP class group. It is envisaged that schools would run a six week programme using a reading laboratory resource, aimed at accelerating reading and providing students with a regular opportunity to read at their own level and track their progress. Schools are requested to select first year JCSP students to participate in this initiative.

Subject Topic Boxes:

Many textbooks have readability levels of 14 + making them relatively inaccessible to students who are underachieving in reading. With this initiative schools have the opportunity to purchase topic books and resources related to their individual subject areas with a wide range of reading levels. This will allow students to read about a topic that interests them and support the work of the textbook. This will be relevant to all subjects e.g. Materials Technology Wood, Materials Technology Metal, History, Geography, Home Economics, Science etc

Spelling Challenge:

This initiative is aimed at subject teachers interested in improving the spelling of key vocabulary offering the students a challenge in order to motivate the learning process. Spelling journals are available for the challenge.

Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) :

This is a great way of promoting reading across the whole school or year group. The idea is that at a set time everyday for a week *everyone* stops what they are doing and reads for fifteen minutes. It is a shared experience, gets people talking about books and reading while conveying a strong message that the school believes in reading. Students read, principals read, teachers in the staff room read, phones are taken off the hook and secretaries read, the caretaker reads and all visitors to the school are offered books to read or magazines to look through. This initiative can be used to organise boxes of books, magazines, and newspapers per class, as well as one for the staffroom and office!

Author in Residence Initiative:

This programme would particularly focus on creative writing skills development where an author would work for a period of time with a group of students. The aim would be to produce a piece of work that could then be exhibited as part of the Make A Book exhibition. Schools could link with Poetry Ireland Writers in Schools Residencies Scheme. This scheme is based on the idea of a short residency by a writer to a school, working closely with one teacher and with the same class or group of students. Many projects have a strong local flavour, in that the writer is local. The thinking behind these residencies is to take a more developmental approach towards the teaching of literature and to develop approaches, which enable the participants to explore the world of the imagination over a longer period of time, in the company of an experienced writer. The participation of a key teacher and the development of a working alliance between the teacher and writer is fundamental to this approach.

Storytelling:

Storytelling with an outside storyteller / seanachai who will introduce the art of storytelling. Sharing and creating a common experience in storytelling aids in the development of oral language patterns and listening skills. Students need a wide experience with spoken language, if they are to achieve success in reading. This initiative could be part of a wider project involving students creating and telling their own stories. The recordings of student stories could be entered for Make a Book.

Primary Picture Books:

This initiative is based on a very successful project in O’Fiaich College, Louth. JCSP students link with a primary school class and choose an appropriate picture book to read to the students. The students are prepared to visit the primary school and each student is assigned a reading partner to whom they read the book. On completion, each student presents the book to their reading partner.

Reading Corners:

Reading is an essential component of all subject areas so why not make it a visible component as well. To instill in students an awareness of the importance of reading, classrooms can provide an environment in which reading is clearly valued. This initiative can be used to create a classroom reading corner with shelves that have books on a variety of topics, written at a range of reading levels and provide

a wide range of genres, both fiction and non-fiction, including such reference books as dictionaries, thesauruses, and encyclopedias etc. Bean bags and walkmans could also be a feature of the classroom reading corner.

Digital storytelling and Oral Language Development

Everyone has a story to tell. Digital storytelling revolves around the idea of combining telling stories with any of a variety of available multimedia tools. Digital stories are short films made by students using computers and photographs, drawings, sound etc. The short film/video can be created by an individual or group of students.

The following web sites contain more information on digital storytelling:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/tellinglives/>

<http://www.storycenter.org/principles.html>

<http://www.coe.uh.edu/digital-storytelling/gettingstarted.htm>

<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/digitalphotography/photostory/default.aspx/>

<http://electronicportfolios.com/digistory/>

General Literacy Initiatives:

This will allow schools to come up with their own imaginative response to the literacy difficulties that they are encountering among their students. We hope to encourage some projects using mobile phones and texting to be linked to literacy improvement. The schools will be asked to document the projects and evaluate its success.

Make a Book

An annual event which brings together several strands of the JCSP: it provides an audience and motivation for student writing, it brings teachers together in cross curricular work and it celebrates students' work. The annual exhibition features a colourful and exciting range of student 'made' books and displays.

Integration of literacy development with other school activities

Literacy development to be effective should take cognisance of the need to integrate a personal development programme into the literacy and numeracy strategy. This could be achieved through involvement in outdoor education programme, JCSP formative profiling and involvement in sport and fine art.

The activities would dovetail into the specific JCSP work such as JCSP

Initiatives:

- The Reading Challenge
- Readalong
- Paired Reading
- Cross Age Peer Tutoring
- Drop everything and Read (DEAR)
- Word Millionaire
- Reading Programme (SRA) in the English Class
- Make a Book
- Celebrations

Activities: First year focus for students who are seriously underachieving in literacy

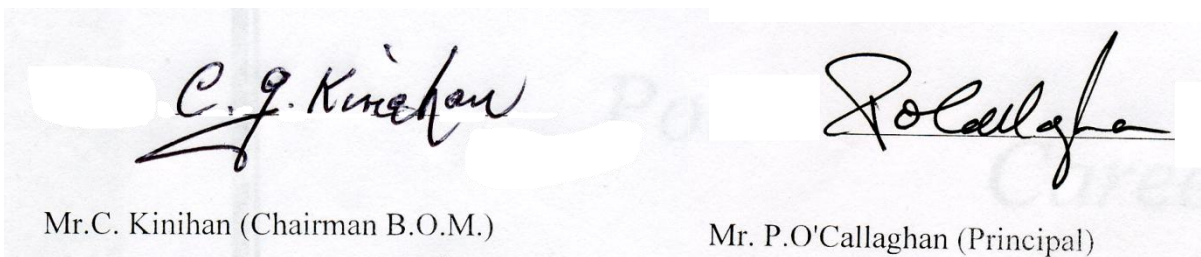
Some ideas for first year literacy development:

- 1 class per day devoted to literacy development
- Time for reading at least 3 times per week
- Twenty timetabled minutes per day where students read at their own level.
- Small teaching team
- Formative profiling
- D.E.A.R. programme (drop everything and read)
- Oral language development programme
- Listening skills training programme
- Writing skills module
- Library/Information-skills
- Critical literacy skills training module
- Spelling Drive

- Marking policy
- Literacy Day/ Week
- Book boxes in the classroom
- Consistent approach to writing, layout, punctuation
- Individualised literacy programmes where appropriate (particularly reading age under 8)
- Use of appropriate IT software
- Team teaching
- Access to books readily and freely

This policy was ratified by St. Ailbe's School Board of Management on Tuesday October 21st 2008.

Signed:



Mr.C. Kinihan (Chairman B.O.M.)

Mr. P.O'Callaghan (Principal)

A review date will be set during the school year beginning September 2010

