

# info@ncca

supporting teaching and learning

## Transition units

Teaching transition  
year students to  
teach each other

page 14

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**NCCA** 

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment  
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta

**this issue** / Updates / Assessment  
for Learning / Reviewing Science /  
Using Report Card Templates /  
Education in Japan

**and much more...**

# welcome...

**....to the sixth issue of info@ncca. As summer approaches and the school year winds down we find ourselves thinking about teaching and learning as acts of inquiry. This theme is prompted by feedback from our readers – the questions you have posed and the issues you have raised. In response to these we include some practical ideas that we have gathered from teachers, based on our ongoing work with schools.**

So if, as you prepare to put away the lesson plans for this year you find yourself dwelling on the question, *'Which knowledge is of most worth?'*, you'll be interested in the piece on key skills in the context of our work in Senior Cycle.

In response to your question, *'How can assessment support students in learning skills and concepts?'*, we've included lesson ideas from our Assessment for Learning project which we hope you find useful. There's also an update on the draft Report Card Templates (RCTs) supporting principals, teachers, parents and children in primary schools, and

an invitation to use the RCTs for your end-of-year reporting and send us feedback to improve them.

Students' perspectives on learning are highlighted in the piece on the Transition Module in Sports Coaching in which one teacher describes his experience running the course and presenting it as a Transition Unit using NCCA's template.

If you find yourself wondering, *'How significant are relationships in the learning process?'*, you'll be interested in the outline of one day in the life of an Irish teacher in a high school in Japan, including the special roles and relationships described for teachers and students.

In issue 3 we promised more answers to your question, *'How can classrooms and schools be more inclusive for students?'*. In this issue you'll find ideas promoting intercultural education, based on the NCCA's guidelines for post-primary schools.

Throughout this issue we've focused on your questions and issues as a starting point for teacher inquiry. If inquiry is learning and learning is evolution... we wish you *evolutionary times*, as you bring your school year to a close and head off on your summer holidays. We look forward to checking in with you again in the Autumn.



Sarah Fitzpatrick  
Deputy Chief Executive National Council for  
Curriculum and Assessment



# what's in this issue



Updates	4
Guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities	5
Assessment for learning	6
Reviewing science	8
→ Using report card templates	9
Making connections	10
A curriculum for excellence	12
→ Transition Units	14
Education in Japan	16
Interculturalism	18

## Supporting teaching and learning...

**info@ncca** is published three times over the school year, in September, January and April.

Copies are distributed to teachers in every primary and post-primary school in the country. Electronic versions of the newsletter, in both Irish and English, are available to download from our website, at [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie). If your school requires extra copies of **info@ncca**, please send your request by email or post.

We welcome articles from teachers as well as comments and queries about content.

Contact details:

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Post: **Editor, info@ncca,  
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24 Merrion Square, Dublin 2.**



## Student voice

The NCCA has recently completed a project for CIDREE (Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe) on principles and practices of involving students in developing curriculum. As well as discussing the promotion of student involvement, the report on the project includes several case study descriptions contributed by the NCCA and colleagues from five other countries. Available on the CIDREE website, [www.cidree.org](http://www.cidree.org).

## Framework for Early Learning

The *Framework for Early Learning* will be published later this year and made available for infant teachers. As part of our work on the *Framework*, we have developed a number of background papers that set out the research and the theory we've used to shape it. Two of these papers are now complete:

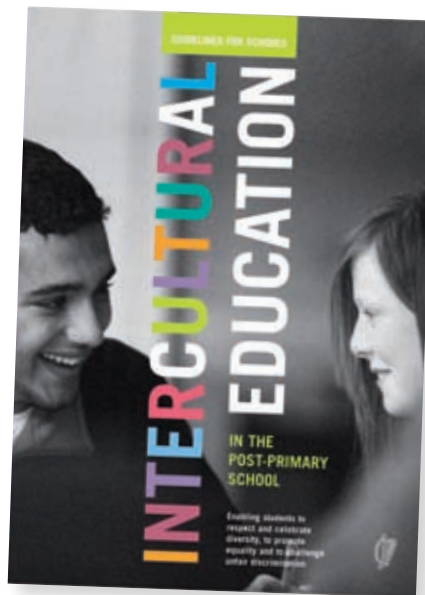
- children's early learning and development
- perspectives on the relationship between education and care in early childhood

If you are interested in having a look at the papers, log on to the NCCA website and follow the links to the *Framework for Early Learning*. A further two papers, on play and assessment in early childhood, are currently being developed and will be available on the website later in the year.

## ICT framework

We would love to hear more of your views on the *ICT Framework as a structured approach to ICT in curriculum and assessment* for primary and Junior Cycle teachers. To this end, we have provided a short feedback form on our website, along with the draft *Framework*. We are very grateful to teachers who have already provided feedback this year. Based on your

input, we will be editing the *Framework* over the summer months and the report on work with schools will be published with the revised framework in the autumn.



## Intercultural education

Copies of *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School—Guidelines for Schools* and the accompanying CD have been sent to all schools. A copy is provided for every teacher in each school, so make sure you have received yours.



As you begin your planning for the 2007/2008 school year, check out the guidelines for ideas on how to incorporate intercultural education into your planning and teaching. The CD has lots of exemplars to help get you started.

The guidelines are also published on the website, [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie), in both English and Irish.

## ACTION website

Not only have we developed [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) and [www.curriculumonline.ie](http://www.curriculumonline.ie) to keep you surfing, but a new website, ACTION, is now under construction and will be the final component of our suite of websites. ACTION stands for Assessment, Curriculum and Teaching Innovation on the Net and it will do exactly what it says on the label! The new site will host samples of teacher and student work and examples of good practice in the classroom through video, images and various multimedia. ACTION will also house NCCA-developed resources, e.g. report card templates and the ICT framework. Watch this space for further updates!

## EAL

Since publishing the teacher guidelines, *English as an Additional Language in Irish Primary Schools*, online last June we've been working with schools to gather samples of teacher and children's work and take photo and video footage of classes in action. These multimedia materials will be used to enhance the guidelines and will be available on the forthcoming ACTION website. The guidelines, which provide advice on school and classroom planning, teaching methods and assessment and some background information on language acquisition, will be published in hard copy and distributed to schools in the new school year.

For further information  
on any of the projects  
mentioned on this page,  
please visit our website at  
[www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)

To comment on [info@ncca](mailto:info@ncca) or  
suggest topics for inclusion,  
email: [newsletter@ncca](mailto:newsletter@ncca)

# Guidelines

## For teachers of students with general learning disabilities

Schools will be kept busy unpacking parcels from the NCCA in the run up to the holidays. Hot on the heels of this issue of **info@ncca**, you will also be receiving copies of the new *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities*.

Informed by the consultation process that followed the release of the draft guidelines in 2002, the *Guidelines* feature both revised and new materials. They are a support for the teaching and learning of students with mild, moderate, severe and profound general learning disabilities. While these students have many common needs, teachers can select from the guidelines what is appropriate to their student's personal strengths and learning needs.

To facilitate a pick-and-choose approach, the guidelines are published as a digital pack (digi-pack), which includes the overview booklet and a CD-Rom. The overview booklet looks at the rationale and background and describes the relevant categories of special educational needs. It also shows you how to navigate the CD-Rom and how to explore the guidelines.

There are 29 sets of guidelines for primary education and 11 sets for post-primary education. Curriculum areas covered at primary level – for teachers of students with mild, moderate, severe and profound learning disabilities, are

- communication & language
- Gaeilge
- mathematics

- social, environmental and scientific education
- drama
- visual arts
- music
- physical education
- social, personal and health education.

Subject areas covered at post-primary – for teachers of students with mild general learning disabilities, are

- language, literature and communication
- social, political and environmental education
- home economics
- science
- religious education
- physical education
- social personal health education
- arts, craft, design
- music
- technologies
- mathematics.

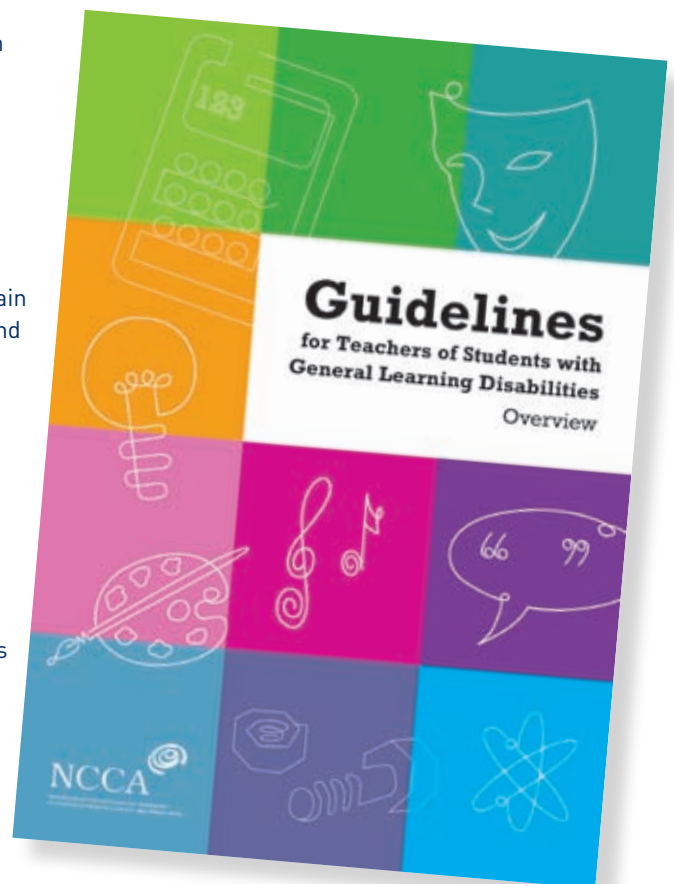
All of the guidelines contain an introductory section and a section on approaches and methodologies. In the approaches and methodologies section the potential areas of difficulty that students may experience and the implications of these difficulties for learning are explored and teachers are offered possible strategies to address them.

The CD-Rom includes an introductory section that explores some of the more general issues that affect the learning and teaching of students with general learning disabilities:

- planning at school, classroom & individual level
- communication and language
- assessment
- ICT
- managing challenging behaviour.

Apart from the CD-Rom, the Guidelines will also be available to download from our website. And, don't forget, your feedback is always appreciated.

Email: [newsletter@ncca.ie](mailto:newsletter@ncca.ie).



# Assessment

## Talking about learning...

**Tuning into yourself in class – listening to what you are saying – can sometimes be a less than positive experience. As a teacher colleague once memorably noted, it can be a salutary lesson to find out that you are boring yourself!**

The routine exchanges of classroom management, the reminders, the pleas, the warnings, the orders, the rebukes, and those inevitable instructions about which copy to use, can take up so much of lesson talk, that talk about learning becomes squeezed out. Teachers using Assessment for Learning approaches in their classrooms get to talk more about learning. And what's more, many are finding that because of the positive impact of their new skills on student motivation, the need for the other kinds of lesson talk is greatly reduced.

Keeping the focus on the learning intention, talking to the students about their progress towards it, getting them to talk about their progress and the progress of others and discussing success and ways to improve learning brings the students inside the learning process. It makes learning something that they do, organise and talk about, rather than something the teacher does for them and to which they can respond or ignore.

The two examples here, from geography and from French, show that using AfL requires no special equipment or avant garde methodologies. Just more talk about learning and its outcomes, and less about the other stuff... and less chance of listening to yourself, and having to stifle that yawn.

### An example from a 1st Year Geography class

**Syllabus area:** Human Habitat – Process and Change. The Earth's

Surface: Shaping the Crust.

**Topic:** Plates - Earthquakes.

**Learning intention:** Students will understand the concept of mobile plates and the features that occur as a result of plate interaction. They will also identify the impact of earthquakes upon humans.

### Criteria for success

Students will be able to:

- give specific location and time of earthquake
- identify the two plates involved
- describe the overall scene
- use these key words:
  - Plates
  - Richter scale
  - Seismograph
  - Focus / Epicentre
  - Shockwaves
- name three pieces of specific damage as a direct result of this earthquake.

**Task:** Imagine you are a journalist 'live at the scene' immediately after an earthquake. Write a newspaper/television report.

### Conditions under which the students completed the task:

Having completed the topic, the students are given the task as homework. They are also asked to present it to the class.

### Comment

Below is an example of student work that is a successful response to the task. In giving feedback to this student,

the teacher has referred to the criteria for success, which have all been met, although the last one could have been developed in more detail.

### EARTHQUAKE IN L.A.

*An earthquake occurred last night in Los Angeles U.S.A causing mayhem and chaos everywhere. Many are feared dead. Scientist's using a seismograph reported it measured 6.5 on the Richter Scale.*

*The earthquake happened when the Pacific and American plates collided at the focus. Shockwaves were felt over a 50 mile radius, from the epicenter.*

*One eye-witness said that late that night, around 11.00 pm, the first tremor was felt. "Buildings began to sway and people everywhere were screaming and running for cover."*

*Emergency officials say hundreds of people are feared dead and thousands more injured in the earthquake. People attending a football match in the city's stadium of Light were trapped for many hours. Rescue attempts are continuing throughout the day.*

*Authorities have ordered the evacuation of the Southern part of the city due to severe damage and flooding*

**Your reporter in Los Angeles**

### Feedback for student

- You have presented your work well, with appropriate heading and layout.
- You have written a realistic account of how a place might look in the immediate aftermath of an earthquake. Well done.
- You have identified the location and time and you have named the plates involved.

# for learning

- You have managed to include all the key terms and you have added an additional one. Well done!
- In order to improve your work further, in paragraph three, you could refer to other specific pieces of damage in more detail. What other damage could an earthquake cause?

## Comment

This is a good piece of work that, as we can see, the teacher praises in the feedback for the student. While the criteria for success have been met, the teacher identifies an area that could be improved upon and gives the student a prompt in the form of a question. This approach makes the students think and helps them become more autonomous in their learning.

Now, here is the teacher's reflection on the standard of this piece of work, presented as a commentary for colleagues:

## Commentary for teachers

- This is a very good piece of work that illustrates a high level of understanding of the task and material. It would merit a high level of success as the student has fully met four of the five criteria
- For a higher performance the student could have given more examples of damage caused by the earthquake
- The use of the key terms as set out in the criteria for success indicates a high level of understanding. The student also uses the additional term *tremor*.

## An example from a 1<sup>st</sup> Year French class

**Syllabus area:** Letter Writing

**Topic:** The House.

**Learning intention:** Students will practice the layout and structure of writing a letter in French. They will use vocabulary pertaining to the house and will demonstrate ability to use the present tense.

## Criteria for success:

Students will be able to:

- give a good description of their house and bedroom using an appropriate range of vocabulary
- use the present tense accurately
- demonstrate an ability to use adjectives correctly
- follow the rules for structuring a letter as they have been taught (date, greeting, body of letter and salutation).

**Task:** Write a letter to your French pen pal describing the house you live in, some of the rooms in the house and your bedroom. Finally, ask your pen pal some questions.

## Conditions under which the students completed the task:

Having completed the topic 'The house' and having practised how to structure a letter correctly, the students are given the task as homework.

## Comment

To the right you will see an example of student work that is a successful response to the task, although not all the criteria for success have been met. If you are a French teacher or even if you only know some French (you don't need to be fluent!), you might like to consider the student's work against the criteria set by the teacher. What would you say that would help the student improve their work even further?

In giving feedback to this student, the teacher has referred to the criteria for success and has also developed a symbol-based system to highlight specific linguistic points that the student needs to address. The target language,

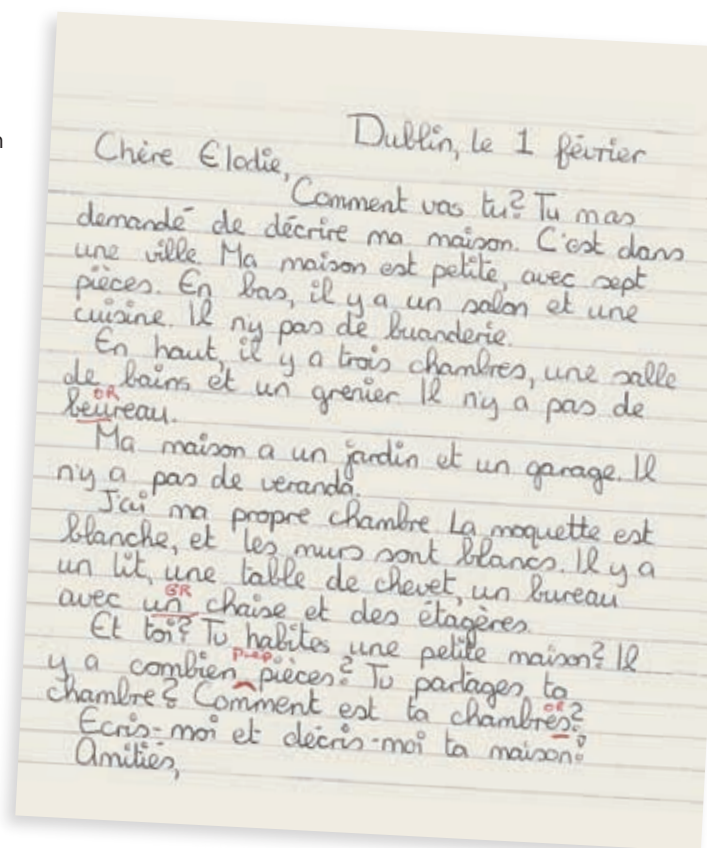
in this case French, is used to give feedback to the student. For this reason, the teacher's comments are expressed in simple French so that the student can understand them. This approach is meant to encourage target language use in every aspect of language teaching and learning.

## Feedback for student

- La présentation et la structure de la lettre sont excellentes.
- Tu utilises bien le présent
- Les verbes et les accords des adjectifs sont corrects. Bravo!
- La construction des questions est très bonne. Bon travail!
- Il faut décrire les autres pièces de la maison.
- Plus de détails sur ta chambre!



## LA MAISON



**OR.** Attention à l'orthographe!

**GR.** Attention à la grammaire!

*Chaise, c'est un mot féminin!*

**PRÉP.** Quelle préposition après *combien*?

### Comment

At the beginning of the feedback, the teacher praises the student for the aspects of the work that have been successful. Then, the teacher indicates what criteria for success have not been fully met by the student. Finally, the teacher indicates what linguistic aspects the student might need to improve upon in order to enhance their work.

Now, here is the teacher's reflection on the standard of this piece of work, presented as a commentary for colleagues:

### Commentary for teachers

- The layout of the letter is excellent, with adequate paragraphing.
- The student makes good use of accurate grammatical structures. There is only one misspelt word: *beureau*; the other errors relate to gender and number of nouns. Question formation has been demonstrated accurately and agreement of adjectives has been adhered to.
- Some of the criteria for success have not been met. The student has not described some other rooms in their house. There is also limited information regarding their bedroom; it could be more fully developed, considering they have learnt a good range of vocabulary.

- If the student had described other items of furniture in their room, more evidence of accurate forms of grammar and agreement of adjectives could have been demonstrated.

### Comment

The two examples of practice shown on these pages will join examples collected from teachers in other junior cycle subject areas on our website as soon as the collection and development process is completed.

In the meantime, if you would like further information on Assessment for Learning you can consult our website or email us at: [newsletter@ncca.ie](mailto:newsletter@ncca.ie).

# Reviewing science

Just when you thought it was safe to laminate those lesson notes.....the NCCA decides to take another look at chemistry, biology and physics. Don't be too hasty about hitting the shredder button, however. Review doesn't necessarily mean 'all change here'. It is a considered process which provides an opportunity to address issues experienced by teachers in the classroom. So....with the focus on key skills, assessment and learning outcomes and the emphasis on retaining the best features of the current syllabuses.....you may find yourself drawing smiley faces on your lesson notes in the future!

The development and revision of the science syllabuses are part of the Senior Cycle Review and will involve embedding the key skills, as appropriate, in each of the curriculum components. The key skills are communicating, working with others, being personally effective, critical and creative thinking and information processing. The process will also involve

- considering the balance between content and skills in the course
- reviewing the assessment methods with a particular emphasis on moving beyond terminal written examinations
- updating and modernising the course where necessary and appropriate.

The review offers the opportunity to widen the scope of the assessment process to acknowledge and reward candidates for their participation in practical work throughout the course of their Leaving Certificate studies. The current Biology, Chemistry and Physics syllabuses were written with the expectation that a second component of assessment would be developed and thus are framed within the context of a practical approach to teaching and learning. Thus, a second component of assessment will be developed that assesses those learning outcomes and key skills that cannot be assessed through a written examination. This second component will be consistent across the science subjects and will help to shift the emphasis towards a more practically based method of teaching.

The syllabuses will be presented in terms of learning outcomes, defined in terms of what students will be able to do at the end of a unit of study rather than what they should be taught. This will place particular emphasis on the links between knowledge, skills, attitudes and values and will give better alignment with the revised Junior Certificate Science syllabus.

Carrying an emphasis on an investigative approach to teaching and learning through from Primary to Leaving Certificate ensures not only continuity and progression, but a more authentic experience of science in school and the development of essential skills for lifelong learning.



# Using report card templates

## All you need to know

It's so hard to believe that the summer term has come round again and with it come the end-of-year school reports. Yes, it's that time again... You might recall reading in the last issue of **info@ncca** that we have been developing draft Report Card Templates (RCTs) for use in primary schools. There was a great deal of interest in response to the news that they are ready to download from our website, so we thought that readers would appreciate some further information on how to access and use them. Please note, however, that as these RCTs are still being trialled getting your hands on hard copies depends on your agreement to provide feedback on their use.

There are six different templates for sharing information with parents at the end of the year. The purpose of these templates is to support teachers in reporting to parents on their children's progress and achievement in learning.

A number of schools around the country are currently trying out the RCTs in real-time in their classrooms in order to find out

- how accessible the RCTs are for principals, teachers, parents and children
- how feasible the RCTs are for schools
- how useful the RCTs are to principals, teachers and parents and how beneficial they are for children.

With the summer holidays not that far away (phew! you might say), you may be interested in checking out the end-of-year draft RCTs which are available in both English and Irish on the NCCA website. Templates 1A, 2A and 3A are for Infant classes while Templates 1B, 2B and 3B are for 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class. A guide to using the RCTs is also available on the website.

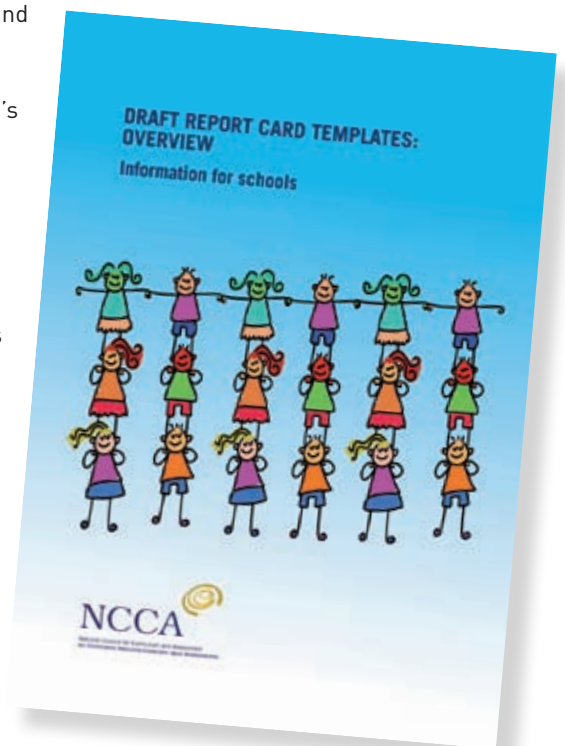
Each template has three sections and each section has different options on how to report information. For example, when reporting on a child's progress and achievement across the curriculum, you might like to indicate the child's achievement in subjects on a scale, while adding a comment (as in RCTs 1A and 1B). Or you may prefer the approach in 2A and 2B, where the curriculum is reported on through comments on broader areas of learning.

Similarly, when reporting on a child's social and personal development, graphics can be used to present information in different ways. All the templates provide space for teachers' suggestions to parents on how they can support their children's learning. In addition, some of the templates provide an opportunity for the children to have a voice in their own reports.

If you are interested in using one or more of the RCTs in your classroom this term, have a look at them on the NCCA website and choose the template which best meets your needs. If you are happy to provide feedback to the NCCA on whether, or to what extent, you found the RCTs useful, we will supply the number of copies of the template that you require, with attached duplicates for the school's records. (Be warned, though, if you order hard copies we *will* pursue you for the agreed feedback!)

Your order needs to be with us by **Friday 11<sup>th</sup> May** using the order form on the NCCA website. If you have any questions, please email them to **newsletter@ncca.ie**. We look forward to hearing from you.

Good luck with your report preparation!



# Making connections

## Embedding key skills in Senior Cycle

‘I don’t see key skills as something new, or a ‘big thing’ to be added on. I now see them as what we are doing the whole time, just a new emphasis.’

(Teacher, School Network)

**Since September 2006, a group of teachers from the school network have been reflecting on how key skills are embedded within their teaching in English, Gaelge, French, Spanish, mathematics and biology. The school network was formed between the NCCA and 20 schools to work on developments in curriculum and assessment for senior cycle. Feedback from the key skills group has been both interesting and valuable and indicates that time given to reflection on practice can lead to benefits for both teacher and students.**

### Key skills

The five key skills identified as central to teaching and learning across the curriculum are:

- information processing
- being personally effective
- communicating
- critical and creative thinking
- working with others.

### Critical reflection

The teachers in the key skills group were asked to reflect initially on:

- current teaching practice
- how they could embed the 5 key skills into their teaching practice
- what they would change about their teaching in order to embed the key skills.

Having put new methods into practice, they were asked to then reflect on how, and if, they worked and, if they did work, how that was evidenced in the classroom.

Reflecting critically on their own teaching and the embedding of key skills has been a productive exercise for this group. They recognised the cyclic nature of the process – looking at what is good and building on that; seeing what is not working and trying something new. They found it ‘good to step back and reflect’ and talked about the need to see what they do from as many angles as possible:

- from their own experience
- through the students’ eyes
- from the perspectives of colleagues
- from what current educational literature has to say.

Critical reflection encouraged members of the group to experiment and to try out new teaching methods, with positive results:

*‘it pushed me to be innovative’*

*‘it challenges one’s assumptions about how students learn’*

*‘it gave me a fresh perspective on my teaching methods’.*

### Reflection in practice

So, how has the reflection process been working in practice? And what differences does it make?

According to the teachers, they

- take more time to plan their

classes, sometimes preparing worksheets or exemplar materials

- use more group work and class discussion

- give the students more responsibility for their own learning

- share ideas with, and learn from, colleagues.

In implementing the process of critical reflection it became evident to the group that

- changes had to be planned for prior to teaching, so more time is needed for planning
- a reduction of content would help so that they could spend more time in class on developing skills
- group work needs careful planning
- classes are more enjoyable
- students like the group work and discussions
- group work and cooperative learning enhance the development of skills
- relationships in the classroom change for the better
- longer class periods would facilitate more group activities, especially in language classes.

### Reflecting on ‘reflections’

Some teachers found it difficult to change familiar practices but were ‘surprised how key skills appear when structure and methodology are changed’. In some cases the students were reluctant to change but, on reflection, teachers were reassured that the change was working and students were learning:



*'I found that students understand what they are doing in mathematics if they have to explain how they got the answer to another student. I now use more pair and group work in my classes.'*

Having implemented changes over a number of classes some teachers reflected on their teaching and observed that they 'were working harder and the students were working less'. This realisation prompted them to give students responsibility for their own learning and instead of, for example, doing up notes in advance of the class they gave information in a variety of ways and taught

students how to write their own notes, thereby enhancing their information processing skills. When students were brought on board and told what skills they would be learning and when both the teacher and the students agreed how best to develop those skills through a particular topic, those particular skills were enhanced:

*'Learning is definitely more effective if you implement the key skills.'*

With the Leaving Certificate being such a high stakes exam teachers needed the reassurance that what they were doing was helping their students learn:


*'My students can now explain why they are doing a maths problem the way they are.'*

*'The skills work is showing in their test results, they are doing better.'*

The members of the group agree that their classes have become more enjoyable and that students like the group work and discussions. For one teacher, the change in relationships in the classroom, 'made me realise the importance of having a positive and respectful atmosphere...also how important it is for students to experience success and be confident enough to express themselves and make mistakes.'

A key part of this exercise has been regular meetings between members of the group at which they exchange experiences and ideas. The teachers have found the support of colleagues reassuring and productive:

*'I now see how I've developed patterns and habits of teaching over the years. We all do that and we assume that they work! It's great to get a chance to share new ideas and learn from other teachers.'*

The work of the key skills group continues and in the next issue of **info@ncca** we will be reviewing this project from the perspectives of the students. For further information on developments at senior cycle: [www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle](http://www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle). 

**“ Reflecting critically on their own teaching and the embedding of key skills has been a productive exercise for this group. ”**

# A curriculum for

**May Sweeney** is the National Co-ordinator for *A Curriculum for Excellence*, the review of the Scottish curriculum. Always interested in curriculum and assessment developments in other countries, we took the opportunity of her recent visit to the NCCA offices to ask May some questions.

## Biography May Sweeney



Based at Learning and Teaching Scotland, May has a leading role in the communications and engagement strategy for *A Curriculum for Excellence* and contributes to all aspects of the work of the national team. Seconded from Stirling Council, her most recent post was Head Teacher of McLaren High School. From the beginning of her teaching career in 1975 she has held a range of posts including Head of Modern Languages and senior management positions.

In the course of her career she has been a member of a number of local authority and national committees, covering a diverse range of educational themes including curriculum; national qualifications; pupil support; health promotion and equal opportunities. In 1999, she was a member of The Scottish Executive's Excluded Young People's Action Team.

A member of Court at the University of Stirling since 2001, she served on various committees. She spent a short while teaching in Ethiopia and has been involved in international study visits to Canada, Japan and Australia.

## Why was there a need to review the curriculum?

Scottish education has always been separate and distinct from England's. Scotland is of course a small country and, like Ireland, it faces particular global, social, political and economic pressures. Increasing economic performance and the reduction of poverty has to start with education.

In 2002 the Scottish Executive held a national debate on education and this showed that while the current curriculum has strengths, a significant proportion of young people aren't achieving what they could and should. In fact a significant minority of our young people leave school to find themselves 'not in education, employment or training', we call this section the NEET group and improving the chances of these young people is a key aim of the curriculum review.

## What is good about the current curriculum and what's not working?

The national debate showed that people value the flexibility of the existing system, no-one wanted greater prescription. The quality of teaching was regarded as being good and the combination of breadth and depth offered by the curriculum was perceived as being about right. The principle of comprehensive education was endorsed strongly but there was a universal call to reduce over-crowding in the curriculum and to make learning more enjoyable. People realised that the various

stages between the ages of 3 to 18 needed to be connected in a more coherent way. The need to prepare young people better for life and work as well as global citizenship was also identified.

The then Minister for Education responded to all this by saying it signalled new thinking for school education and one of the key areas that she identified for action was a review of the curriculum. So really *A Curriculum for Excellence*, the curriculum review, is a response to the National Debate which involved the entire nation.

## How did you set about the review process?

Well, a Curriculum Review Board was swiftly convened and they produced a document, *A Curriculum for Excellence*, in 2004, which was immediately endorsed by the Minister. This document established the values purposes and principles for education for all children and young people aged 3 to 18. It acknowledged that the existing curriculum had been developed separately and the threads needed to be pulled together to produce a simplified, prioritised and coherent curriculum allowing for seamless progression. That means the improvement of approaches to transition from nursery to primary and from primary to secondary has become a priority.

Another key area of work, and I know it's one that you have also identified in Ireland, is maintaining

# excellence

## Reviewing the Scottish curriculum



the motivation of young people who are in their first and second years of post primary education. That will mean harnessing some really innovative learning and teaching approaches to provide more challenge and enjoyment, in fact this addresses one of the curriculum design principles of *A Curriculum for Excellence*.

I have been fascinated to hear about your transition year and to listen to some of the children involved. Their enthusiasm, especially in relation to their learning experience, is I think something we can learn from and perhaps apply some aspects to this stage of post primary education in Scotland.

### What stage are you at in the review process and what role did you play?

The programme of work is accelerating quite rapidly now. I have led the engagement process, initially raising awareness of the review and its values purposes and principles. At the heart of the whole programme is the aspiration that all children should develop their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society. Initially I worked with just one other colleague, a seconded primary school head teacher, and in 12 months we spoke to literally thousands of teachers across Scotland about this.

The engagement team expanded around six months ago and that has enabled me to take an international perspective by looking at curriculum

change in other countries, hence the reason for my visit to Ireland. Teams of writers comprising seconded practitioners have begun the task of producing new learning outcomes and we expect that science will be the first curriculum area to appear.

The 3-18 curriculum is being organised around eight curriculum areas; these groupings are a device for ensuring that learning takes place across a range of contexts. The draft learning outcomes for science will be shared with the profession and their thoughts will be fed back into the programme of work, which is very much a partnership between the Scottish Executive, Learning and Teaching Scotland, HM Inspectorate of Education and the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

The profession has been included at every step and feeding back the thoughts of teachers to the Programme Board is an important aspect of the engagement process and will take place until implementation for all areas of the new curriculum begins. We expect this to take place in August 2008.

### What similarities/differences have you noticed between the Scottish and Irish systems/development?

We're both small countries, sharing similar challenges in terms of the need to prepare young people for the global future with its rapid changes in technology and the new skills required. We face the same tensions associated

with change and share a common heritage and values, which place a particular value on education.

However, there is less diversity of sorts of schools in Scotland and we have a lower percentage of children educated in private schools. Single sex schools are less usual than in Ireland, there is only one such state school in Scotland.

Education Authorities have responsibility for schools in Scotland and they employ teachers although there are national conditions of service.

### What advice would you offer to people working in education in Ireland, especially to schools/teachers?

Retain what is good about your system. The directions for development in the senior cycle and the junior certificate school programme look very exciting.

Like ourselves you will need to look creatively at the experiences young people will need to be global citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Above all, as someone who very much enjoyed your Irish hospitality, I would say keep your sense of Irish identity and humour!

### Useful links

A Curriculum for Excellence:  
[www.acurriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk](http://www.acurriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk)  
Learning and Teaching Scotland:  
[www.ltscotland.org.uk](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk)

# Transition Units

## Teaching Transition Year students to teach others

In the last issue of **info@ncca** we discussed the introduction of Transition Units (TUs) as one of the new curriculum components currently being developed at senior cycle. We suggested that schools might begin to take a look at their Transition Year Programmes to see if any of the courses or modules already being offered could be modified to fit the TU template that the NCCA has developed.

Among the many responses we received to this article was this description of practice from Michael Carey, a teacher at Glanmire Community College, who has decided to convert his module on Sports Coaching into a Transition Unit:

“ I have been running a Transition Module in Sports Coaching for the past 3 years with my PE department. In the past, badminton and basketball were the sports of choice but Gaelic Games and Volleyball were picked this year, and they proved really popular. The choice really depends on the interests of the students within Transition Year (TY).

This course prepares TY students to develop basic coaching skills, before then allowing them to work with students from local primary schools for a number of weeks. In their preparation they undergo an extensive program of practical and theoretical aspects of coaching younger students in basic skills (safety aspects, organizational skills, demonstration and communication skills). Part of this process entails holding ‘practice sessions’ with their own classmates before trying the real thing!

Over the course of the module, students clearly improve in terms of communication, organisation and creativity. They work in small groups and they really benefit from this. Students with little sporting experience can excel when it comes to interacting with younger students, so they really enjoy and participate fully in the module. The unit encourages students to engage in reflection following the sessions with the younger students. They notice what went wrong or how they excelled, and plan accordingly for the next day.

Student feedback is always positive and at the end of the most recent module, included comments such as:

*‘The thing I most enjoyed was getting the experience of coaching a group, and learning different leadership and management skills.’*

*‘I got to work with children which is something I hope to do when I leave school.’*

*‘It was tough at first, but then I got a lot more confident and comfortable at coaching, and I really enjoyed it.’*

This unique opportunity is one that makes the students step outside of their comfort zone, which is what TY is all about. The initiative also helps foster good relationships with local sports clubs and particularly neighbouring primary schools who comment on the powerful ‘positive role model’ effect that this course creates.

I’ve decided to write this Module up as a Transition Unit, using the NCCA’s template, for 3 reasons:

- other teachers in neighbouring schools have asked me in the past to outline the type of preparation the TY students need before working with younger students and I can now refer them to this clear framework.
- as occurs in any school, staff members come and go, and teachers spend a lot of time reinventing the wheel. Having a template will allow this well-established and worthwhile learning experience for the students to continue when I retire at 26 or go on maternity leave!
- creating a template has really allowed all the materials in the course to be drawn together to form a solid plan. By documenting the process, we reflect and having the framework leads to easy modification for next year. ”



The TU template is too long to reproduce on these pages but here is an excerpt which will give you an idea of the format:

TRANSITION UNIT DESCRIPTOR	
<b>Title of transition unit</b>	Sports Coaching
<b>Area of study</b>	Personal Achievement (with link also to Events, and Work and Future)
<b>Overview</b>	This transition unit prepares students to develop basic coaching skills, before then allowing them to work with students from local primary schools for a number of weeks. In their preparation, they undergo an extensive programme of practical and theoretical aspects of coaching basic skills to younger students. During the unit, students have to step outside of their comfort zone, and in doing so improve their communication and organisation skills and learn to think creatively. The initiative also helps foster good relationships with local sports clubs and particularly, neighbouring primary schools.
<b>Aims</b>	<p><i>This transition unit aims to:</i></p> <p>Provide learners with the technical skills necessary to conduct a series of safe and effective coaching sessions for primary school students.</p> <p>Help students to develop their ability to plan suitable, motivational and enjoyable activities for primary school students.</p> <p>Encourage students to critically analyse and evaluate their own work and the work of others.</p> <p>Support the leadership and cooperation potential of students.</p>
<b>Learning outcomes</b>	<p><i>On completion of this unit students should be able to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. List the technical skills and principles involved in coaching young students</li> <li>2. Identify the safety and organisational principals involved in coaching young students</li> <li>3. Complete critiques of 2 coaching sessions conducted by their cooperating coach</li> <li>4. Investigate a number of different sources for coaching information</li> <li>7. Complete their coach logbook in relation to the 12 sessions</li> <li>6. Reflect upon and critically analyse these 12 sessions</li> <li>5. Plan and conduct 12 coaching sessions for 3 different groups (TY students, primary school students, a local underage team).</li> </ol>
<b>Methodologies</b>	<p>A variety of teaching methodologies will be employed to optimise learning and understanding among the students. Direct purposeful experience, through active coaching, will form the basis of student learning in this unit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ The experiential approach being the most suitable methodology, with the cycle of pre-planning, coaching and reflection supporting this.</li> <li>→ The use of group-work, paired and individual task-based methodologies will help to actively include all students in the learning experience.</li> <li>→ Theoretical aspects will be taught through a variety of methods including group-work, discussion and didactic approaches.</li> </ul> <p>The planning element of the unit involves research which requires students to engage in independent learning and use information technology.</p>
<b>Assessment methods</b>	<p><b>Assessment</b> of this module will involve</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Practical coaching demonstration This authentic method offers a genuine form of formative assessment. Focused feedback will be provided which will help students to improve their learning.</li> <li>2. Written assessment. This method offers an opportunity to measure achievement in comprehending the theoretical aspects of the unit.</li> <li>3. Submission of completed coaching log-book. (Session critiques, session plans and self-assessment sheets). This authentic method displays the progressive nature of the unit.</li> <li>4. Presentation. This short presentation allows students to present to peers on the major events of their experience, and their perception of their performance.</li> </ol>

## Resources

### Physical Resources

- Coaching personnel and players from local clubs
- Teachers and students from local primary schools
- Local Sports Development Officers for chosen sport/sports

### Resource Materials

Coaching Handbooks and Logbooks for chosen sports.

- Session Plan templates
- Reflection Sheets
- Critique Sheets

## Websites related to coaching are available for most sports.

Some examples for Gaelic Games include

[www.dublingaagamesdevelopment.ie/resources/index.php](http://www.dublingaagamesdevelopment.ie/resources/index.php)

[www.castleknock.net/coaching/default.asp](http://www.castleknock.net/coaching/default.asp)

[http://gamesdevelopment.gaa.ie/page/coach\\_education\\_resources.html](http://gamesdevelopment.gaa.ie/page/coach_education_resources.html)

### Volleyball

[www.volleyballireland.com](http://www.volleyballireland.com)

### Basketball

[www.basketballireland.ie/coaching](http://www.basketballireland.ie/coaching)

### Soccer

[www.fai.ie](http://www.fai.ie)

### Badminton

[www.badmintonireland.com/development](http://www.badmintonireland.com/development)

If you would like further information on developing Transition Units, please contact [newsletter@ncca.ie](mailto:newsletter@ncca.ie).



# Education in Japan



## Turning Japanese

Therese Courtney shares with us her experience of teaching in a Japanese school.



8.35 a.m. The teachers gather for the morning meeting. They're discussing the business of the day and making special announcements. At least I think that's what's happening, my Japanese is still quite limited!

The first of 6 periods starts at 8.45 a.m. It's a long 50 minutes as the students are never very 'genki' this early in the morning. The ten-minute break at the end of each class gives me opportunity to have a quick chat with my Japanese teacher about how the class went.

Team teaching is both rewarding and challenging. I teach with 9 different teachers so the dynamic changes with every lesson. Teamwork is essential. It is great to have an extra pair of hands in the classroom so I have the chance to talk to at least some of the students individually.

In Takashima High School, a school with twelve hundred 16 to 18 yr olds, there are very few discipline problems. There are, however, certain things you must adapt to when you live and work in another culture. A boy emailing from his mobile phone, a girl checking her make-up in her mirror, and I still have difficulty with the fact that students are allowed to sleep in class. I have been assured this is caused by overexertion during club activities and not boring lesson plans...!

In Japanese schools the staffroom is open at all times. The students are free to wander in and out as they need. It took a little getting used to. Having taught in two different secondary schools in Dublin, I could not imagine what it would be like if certain students were allowed free-run of the staffroom. The one oasis, the haven where the mysteries of the teacher shall be forever hidden, open to the curious eyes and wandering hands of some cheeky adolescent! But within a very short space of time I began to understand why.

The relationships that exist between Japanese teachers and their students are very special. Club activities often start at 7.30 and after classes are over, clubs often practice until 6 or 7 in the evening. Students and teachers spend a lot of time together. It seems to go beyond the pastoral role that exists in Irish schools. The role of a Japanese teacher lies somewhere between educator and parent, and yet the closeness and familiarity that exists somehow never compromises the respect students have for their "sensei".

My favourite part of the day comes when the classes are finished. For 15 minutes at the end of the day, students and teachers work together to clean up the school. Everyone has a specific task, but because everyone is involved in the cleaning, it means no one really litters during the day. It's a great concept, which obviously works, because Japan is one of the cleanest countries I have visited. This aside, it means I get to talk to the students outside the classroom.

Cleaning time, club activities, breaks between classes, my bike ride to work, these are the times when I really get to communicate with my students. Kazuyo's lunchtime visits, Ryoma saying "Hi" with his big friendly smile, the handball team céilí dancing with my Dad on the train. 8000 miles apart, but just like my Irish girls, my Japanese students make me smile and laugh.

## The System

### Facts and figures from INCA

#### National level

Education occupies a very important place within Japanese society. The central aim of education is to bring up self-reliant citizens of a peaceful and democratic state and community with a respect for human values. Central characteristics of the Japanese education system include equality of access, nine years compulsory education and co-education.



## Educational phases

The four principle phases in the education structure in Japan are as follows:

**Pre-compulsory (kindergarten)** (age 3-6)

**Elementary/primary** (6 – 12 years)

**Lower secondary** (12-15)

**Upper secondary** (15 – 18+).

## Class organisation

All classes are mixed ability; weaker students are integrated with the gifted. The recent introduction of team teaching has facilitated teaching by ability levels particularly in mathematics, science and English. There is now less emphasis on rote learning, an increased emphasis on learning a foreign language (preferably English) and no school on Saturdays!

## The curriculum

The National Curriculum sets guidelines for the objectives and standard content of each school subject for each of the four school levels. The curriculum guidelines ensure that all Japanese students are working towards a common goal while each school can still organise its own curriculum in accordance with the guidelines.

## So what do students learn at each level?

### Pre-compulsory (kindergarten)

At this level, the emphasis is on learning through play and fun. The curriculum centres on five inter-related aspects: health, human relationships, the environment, language and expression. Students are taught the first stages of reading and arithmetic and moral education, suitable for their age.

### Elementary/primary (6 – 12 years)

The elementary school curriculum is made up of three strands: compulsory subjects, integrated studies and elective courses. The compulsory subjects are the Japanese language, arithmetic, social studies, science, moral education, music, arts and handicrafts moral education, health and physical education, homemaking and homeroom activities. Homeroom activities include assemblies, club school events, volunteer services and maintaining a clean school environment at the end of each day.

Teaching and learning focuses on the basics necessary for daily life such as reading, writing and arithmetic. Non-academic subjects account for up to a third of the curriculum and are considered an integral part of the education of the whole person.

### Lower secondary (12-15)

In lower secondary, the curriculum aims to help students acquire the basic abilities and skills necessary for social life. Students study similar compulsory subjects to those in the elementary phase. However, more elective subjects are introduced to develop students' individuality and to encourage greater independence, e.g. Integrated studies

includes project type work on non-traditional topics including media studies, information technology and the environment. Students are also required to study a foreign language, preferably English.

### Upper secondary (post- compulsory) (15 – 18)

In Upper Secondary level, students can choose between different types of schools: general academic upper secondary schools, colleges of technology, special training schools and miscellaneous schools. Students' progression is by the attainment of credits for course completion/ graduation.

Schools have more autonomy in upper secondary but they are still required to teach the statutory curriculum and to provide two weekly periods of 'home room' activities. Students may take upper secondary school courses full-time, part-time or by correspondence.

### Assessment and certification

There is no external examination system in Japan. At the end of post-compulsory education, students receive a Certificate of Graduation. This certificate is required for access into further education but it does not guarantee it as education institutions can determine their own admissions procedure.

### 'Grind' schools

Similar to other education systems in the developed world, Japan has its 'grind' culture. A large percentage of students in junior high school and academic senior high school attend grind schools called 'Juku' after school hours for up to 3 hours per night, 3 nights a week. Many students who fail to gain entry into university having attended 'Juku' go on to attend 'Yobiko'. Yobiko is a grind school which focuses specifically on preparing students for university entrance. In some instances, the 'Yobiko' is attached to a specific university. Some students take two or three years to be successful in their bid for university entrance.

For further information about the Japanese education system, [www.inca.org.uk](http://www.inca.org.uk)



# Interculturalism

## Welcoming new students to the post-primary classroom

We have always been aware of the importance of supporting new students in our schools and classrooms and we have been doing it naturally for many years. However, many teachers experience anxieties around how to make students from minority ethnic groups feel welcome and involved, especially where the young person doesn't speak the language of instruction (usually English or Irish).

Help is now at hand for those teachers experiencing difficulties. The recently distributed guidelines, *'Intercultural Education in the Post-primary School'*, describe a number of ways in which creating a supportive environment (the key to the successful integration of new students) can be achieved:

- Introduce new students in a positive way, focusing on their capacities (*'Goran speaks Croatian fluently, and also speaks some English'*) rather than on their needs (*'Goran doesn't speak English well'*).
- Provide structured opportunities for new students to work with other students for the first few days. Where language allows, this can be done through paired work or group activities in most classes. Where there is not a shared spoken language, art, music or drama activities provide ideal opportunities.

- If possible, seat those who are beginning to learn English with someone who speaks their first language for the first few weeks. If there is no-one who speaks their first language in the class, it may be possible to introduce the student to another member of the school community (another pupil, for example) who speaks their first language during break time or at lunch time during the school day. These arrangements should be discontinued after a few weeks, in order to ensure that the newly-arrived student has an opportunity to develop relationships with his or her classmates.
- Establish routines in the class which are clear and explicit and which can be learned and understood by students who are new to the peculiarities of the Irish education system or who are learning the language of instruction as a second language. This will provide some basis of familiarity, which will allow pupils to learn the ways in which the school system works.
- Support all the students in developing an inclusive community in the classroom (rather than one in which the teacher simply polices and prevents discrimination) by identifying how students can make each other comfortable and feel that they belong. This may mean that the students will agree strategies which they themselves utilise to ensure that no one in their class is excluded.

### CHECKLIST: WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD THE SUBJECT TEACHER HAVE WHEN A NEW STUDENT JOINS THE CLASS?

- ✓ How are the names of the student and their parents correctly pronounced?
- ✓ What language(s) does the student have, and what is their level of proficiency in these language(s)?
- ✓ How does one say some key phrases in the student's first language, such as a greeting, 'please/thank you', 'join in', 'stop', 'well done/very good', etc?
- ✓ Are there subjects the student will not be taking and what will they be doing during those times?
- ✓ Are there any cultural practices that might affect classroom interaction? Are there actions which are deemed inappropriate or rude in the student's home culture but which may not cause offence to members of the dominant ethnic group, or vice versa (showing someone an open palm or the soles of the foot may be rude in some cultures; a young person making eye contact with an adult may be rude in some African cultures while in Traveller culture young people often speak very directly and openly to adults, something which is sometimes seen as rude in schools; standing close to a person may be deemed rude in some cultures, while it may be normal in others etc.)? How is teaching the student the culture of the school to be handled?
- ✓ What is the student's religion, how is it practised, and has this any implications for classroom planning?
- ✓ Will the student have specific requirements concerning food, jewellery or clothing (for example, the range of tastes catered for by the school canteen or the symbolism of the schools crest on the school uniform)?



All of the above points, along with more detailed information and practical tips can be found in your copy of *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School*. A copy of the guidelines (along with the accompanying CD) was recently delivered to each teacher in your school. Do please let us know ([newsletter@ncca.ie](mailto:newsletter@ncca.ie)) if you haven't received yours or/and if you have any comments to make about the publication.