

SAINTFIELD HIGH SCHOOL



LITERACY POLICY

2011

'Literacy is not a luxury, it is a right and a responsibility.

If our world is to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century we must harness the energy and creativity of all our citizens'.

President Bill Clinton, International Literacy Day, September 8th 1994

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All teachers are teachers of literacy. Saintfield High School is committed to developing literacy skills in all of our pupils, in the belief that it will support their learning and raise standards across the curriculum because:

- pupils need vocabulary, expression and organisational control to cope with the cognitive demands of subjects;
- reading helps us to learn from sources beyond our immediate experience;
- writing helps us to sustain and order thought;
- language helps us to reflect, revise and evaluate the things we do, and on the things others have said, written or done;
- responding to higher order questions encourages the development of thinking skills and enquiry;
- improving literacy and learning can have an impact on pupils' self-esteem, motivation and behaviour;
- high standards of literacy allow pupils to learn independently and
- the ability to communicate is empowering.

'If standards of achievement are to be improved, all teachers will have to be helped to acquire a deeper understanding of language in education. This includes teachers of subjects other than English, since it is one of our contentions **that every school should have an organised policy for language across the curriculum, establishing every teacher's involvement in language and reading development throughout the years of schooling**'.
The Bullock report – A Language for Life (HMSO 1975)

This advice still stands. Raising standards of literacy in children and young people is now more important than ever; for all of us communication is the gateway to social inclusion and being active global citizens. 'Count, Read: Succeed', a strategy launched by the Department of Education Northern Ireland in March 2011, states that '**the skills of literacy and numeracy are so essential to delivering the curriculum that helping children and young people to develop and improve them can never be seen as something additional, rather it is at the heart of what good teachers do every day**' (DENI, 2011). It is essential that we understand we are all teachers of literacy. This document asserts that '**it is important that post-primary schools ensure that teachers of all subjects help to develop and promote pupils' literacy and numeracy skills through a whole school approach**' (DENI, 2011).

In the context of this document the term “literacy” is used to embrace all aspects of language development

- reading
- writing and
- speaking and listening.

Roles and Responsibilities

- **Teachers across the curriculum:** contribute to pupils’ development of language, since speaking, listening, writing and reading are, to varying degrees, integral in all lessons;
- **Literacy co-ordinator (Miss S-L Hynds):** supports departments in the implementation of strategies and encourages departments to learn from each other’s practice by sharing ideas.
- **English Department:** provide pupils with knowledge, skills and understanding they need to read, write and speak and listen effectively;
- **Parents:** encourage their children to use the range of strategies they have learnt to improve their levels of literacy;
- **Pupils:** take increasing responsibility for recognising their own literacy needs and making improvements;

Across the school we shall:

1. Identify the strengths and weaknesses in students’ work from across the school.
2. Adopt current objectives in policies from the Department of Education Northern Ireland as a way of planning for and assessing literacy skills.
3. Adapt the identified literacy cross-curricular priorities for each year.
4. Seek to identify progression in the main forms of reading, writing, speaking and listening undertaken in each department and strengthen teaching plans accordingly.
5. Plan to include the teaching of objectives to support learning in own subject area.
6. Review this literacy policy annually.

WHOLE SCHOOL POLICY FOR LITERACY

Rationale

Literacy underpins the school curriculum by developing students' abilities to speak, listen, read and write for a wide range of purposes, using language to learn and communicate, to think, explore and organise. Helping students to express themselves clearly orally and in writing enhances and enriches teaching and learning in all subjects. All departments and all teachers have a crucial role to play in supporting students' literacy development.

Aims

The aims of this policy document are to:

- support students' learning in all subjects by helping teachers to be clear about the ways in which their work with students contributes to the development of students' communication skills;
- develop a shared understanding between all staff of the role of language in students' learning and how work in different subjects can contribute to and benefit from the development of students' ability to communicate effectively;
- recognise that language is central to students' sense of identity, belonging and growth;
- raise students' own expectations of achievement, thus raising standards;
- develop students' confidence and self-expression;
- promote knowledge and understanding of the students' standards of achievement and assessment in speaking and listening, writing and reading, and the identification of any areas of strength and weakness.

Aims of the three language modes

Although the following is divided into three sections, Talking and Listening, Reading and Writing, we recognise that the three language modes are interdependent.

Talking and Listening

Talk is our main means of communication in everyday life and is fundamental to the development of understanding. It is only by teaching pupils the skills associated with Talking and Listening within a variety of curriculum contexts by meaningful and relevant activities that teachers can ensure that students will become literate in the true sense of the word, and that they will enjoy language and communication in all their forms. All lessons depend upon oral as well as written communication. The teacher explains, questions, describes, organises and evaluates in the classroom and does this mainly by talk.

It is the responsibility of all staff at Saintfield High School to foster these skills in their pupils so they can use speech appropriately and listen actively. The former includes being able to adjust ways of speaking clearly and effectively according to the audience, context and purpose. The latter involves skills of concentration and sensitivity to the speaker's viewpoint.

We want our students to develop increasing confidence and competence in speaking and listening so that they are able to:

- clarify and express their ideas and explain their thinking;
- adapt their speech to a widening range of circumstances including paired and group discussions and speaking to a larger audience;
- use varied and specialised vocabulary;
- speak for a range of purposes e.g. to narrate, to analyse, to explain, to reflect and evaluate;
- listen with understanding and respond sensitively and appropriately.

Reading

Reading allows pupils access to countless avenues of exploration and sources of knowledge. It equips them with the ability to understand the ideas of others in the past, present and future and can be an enjoyable experience. Perhaps most important of all, reading develops pupils' potential as learners.

Fluent reading is the product of a complex combination of knowledge, skills and understanding. All readers, from the apprentice reader to the experienced readers, have to use and integrate various kinds of information in order to create meaning from text.

Reading is an active process in which the reader makes sense of messages encoded in writing by making connections between what is read and what is already known.

Making judgements about what is read is also a part of the process. The ability to respond critically to what is significant in a text develops as readers gain experience of a wide variety of texts.

We want our students to enjoy reading, to be able to use their reading to help them learn and to develop increasing confidence and competence in reading so that they are able to:

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- read fluently, accurately and with understanding;
- become independent and critical readers and make informed and appropriate choices;
- select information from a wide range of texts and sources including print, media and ICT and to evaluate those sources;
- apply techniques such as skimming, scanning, and text-marking effectively in order to research and appraise texts.

Writing

Many lessons include and depend on written communication. Writing development is recursive. Pupils do not learn particular features of written language once and for all at a specific stage. They should therefore be encouraged to behave as independent writers throughout their school career. They should be expected to compose written work from Year 8, gradually developing the range and extent of their writing. Teachers will, therefore, have diverse roles to play in the development of independent writers. They will need to be observers, facilitators, modellers, readers and supporters. In particular, all teachers will need to address writing development as well as subject content. We want our students to develop increasing confidence and competence in writing so that they are able to:

- write in a widening variety of forms for different purposes e.g. to interpret, evaluate, explain, analyse and explore;

- write coherently about a wide range of topics, issues, ideas and incidents, organising text in ways which help the reader;
- craft their writing, showing an improved control of grammatical structure and of a differentiated vocabulary;
- develop ideas and communicate meaning to a reader using wide-ranging and technical vocabulary and an effective style, organising and structuring sentences grammatically and whole texts coherently;
- present their writing clearly using accurate punctuation, correct spelling and legible handwriting;
- know when and how to plan, draft, redraft and proof-read their work;
- apply word processing conventions and understand the principles of authoring multi-media text.

Implementation

Successful implementation of this literacy policy is dependent upon the extent to which we:

- take account of the needs of all students, with regard to ethnicity, gender, ability and social and cultural factors
- value students' language achievements including those in languages other than English and dialects other than standard English;
- structure lessons appropriately in ways that support and stimulate language development and show how learning objectives for students are to be achieved;
- recognise how resources will be organised and used to support this teaching;

Talking and Listening – Suggested Strategies

- In our teaching we should provide planned opportunities across the curriculum for students to engage in purposeful talk, both formally and informally.
- In planning for talk we should consider pace and timing so that purposeful talk is maintained.
- Whilst teacher exposition is essential we should take account of demands on concentration to ensure that students are required to listen for realistic lengths of time.
- We should give students regular opportunities to speak and listen in the following contexts:
 - in pairs with a working partner;
 - in small groups with opportunities to take on the roles of chair or scribe;
 - with the teacher or another adult;
 - in whole class discussions;
 - presentations to a wider audience;
- In these contexts some of the following activities should take place:
 - exploring and describing events, activities and problems, exploring and developing ideas with others;
 - reporting back to a wider audience in order to consolidate ideas and understanding;
 - asking questions as well as answering them;
 - speculating, hypothesising and imagining;
 - planning, organising and reviewing activities;
 - investigating and solving problems collaboratively;
 - evaluating experiences and reflecting on learning;
 - talking at length and adopting the 'expert' role.

In 2010/2011 Saintfield High School has addressed the following issues:

- the integration of Talking and Listening with Reading and Writing;
- the improvement of the classroom environment so that it is conducive to questioning and answering ;
- the management of lessons and management of classes to allow pupils frequent opportunities to make oral contributions, answer open-ended questions and ask relevant questions and
- the monitoring and evaluating of pupils' oracy skills.

Reading – Suggested Strategies

- We should use available data on students' reading levels in order to make informed choices about appropriate texts and to plan appropriate support for pupils in order that they may successfully access texts.
- We should take opportunities to demonstrate pleasure in reading.
- We should make opportunities both in lessons and in tutorial times for students and teachers to share their reading experiences.
- We should provide planned opportunities across the curriculum for students to:
 - read and follow written instructions;
 - read and engage with narratives of events or activities;
 - follow up their interests and read texts of varying lengths;
 - question and challenge printed information and views;
 - read with understanding descriptions of processes, structures and mechanisms;
 - read and explore ideas and theories;
 - learn how to sift and select, and take notes from text and read to locate and relocate information;
 - learn how to scan for overall meaning and scan for key points, words and phrases;
 - use reading to research and investigate from printed words and moving images ICT texts.

Choosing texts

The following may be used when selecting texts and when generating texts i.e. worksheets, study units.

1. Scanning for overall impressions

print

- is the print clear?
- are the lines of print short enough to be easily read?
- is the size and style of font appropriate?

illustrations

- are the illustrations appropriate? informative? attractive? accurate?
- are the illustrations representative? e.g. of the whole community?
- are the graphics clear? helpful?
- how well does the text relate to illustrations and graphics?

signposts

- are headings and sub-headings clear? helpful?
- are the contents pages, index and glossary appropriate? clear?

quality

- is the text balanced in its presentation of gender?
- is the text balanced in its presentation of different peoples and cultures?
- is the information accurate? up to date? reliable?
- is the content relevant and accessible to pupils?

2. Looking closely at a sample page sentences

- how long are the sentences?
- how complex are the sentences?
- are sentences mainly 'active' or 'passive'?
- is the subject of the sentences often 'delayed'?

vocabulary

- is the choice of vocabulary and terminology appropriate?
- are difficult words made clear? e.g. re-phrased in the text?

cohesion

- is the text clearly organised? logical? easy to follow?

3. Asking students to comment

Choose students to represent the full range of ability with which the text might be used:

- what are their general impressions?
- can they use the index to find information?
- can they relate the illustrations to the text?
- can they read and understand the text? (Use a simple cloze test: copy a passage from the text and obscure every seventh word; if students cannot reconstruct the text to make reasonable sense, it is probably too difficult for independent use.)
- are there any words they don't know and can't deduce from the context?

4. Assessing overall suitability use

- how often will the text be used?
- which students would you use this text with?
- how would you use it with the students:
 - for background reading?
 - giving essential information?
 - stimulating interest and further enquiry?
 - enjoyment?
- how will different students need to be supported in using this text?

In 2010/2011 Saintfield High School has introduced reading as a whole school issue, concentrating on the following:

- motivating reluctant readers;
- the use of additional classroom support;
- the use of electronic communication technologies;
- the use of diagnostic tests;
- the development of comprehension skills;
- the development of active reading strategies;
- the issue of spelling and
- the appointment of school librarians to aid junior reading.

The whole school and the individual classroom should signal that reading is a worthwhile activity. The reading environment should reflect a school philosophy to promote reading in attractive surroundings where pupils may read independently or with others. Each classroom should be resourced to present pupils with an attractive range of reading experiences.

Writing

- We should draw attention to the purpose and intended readers of each piece of writing. Whilst the audience for students' writing is often teacher and peer group, students should be encouraged to write for a range of intended readers. For example, writing to explain a scientific principle to a younger audience, writing guidance for peers on an aspect of the subject, writing to agencies to elicit information or to express a viewpoint.

We should pay close attention to writing as a learning tool as well as a product of the learning.

- We should help students to appreciate the differences between standard English and non-standard forms of the language.
- We should help students to recognise the appropriate form for their written responses so that they know when to respond in note form and when more formal constructions are required.
- We should limit the use of pre-structured writing e.g. copying, sentence completion, sentence rearrangement.

We should provide planned opportunities across the curriculum for students to:

- make notes from a variety of sources - printed word, moving images and ICT texts;
- use writing to plan organise and record;
- write logs and journals in order to clarify thoughts and develop new understanding;
- plan, draft, discuss and reflect on their writing;
- learn the conventions of different forms of writing in different subject areas e.g. by using writing frames and providing clear models for writing;
- write at appropriate length, sometimes briefly;
- write collaboratively with other students;
- present some writing for display or publication.

We should:

- expect high standard of presentation in most of students' finished writing;
- provide good models of particular kinds of writing;
- provide dictionaries, glossaries and lists of appropriate subject vocabulary and encourage students to use them;
- help students to use a range of strategies to learn spellings, including:
 - look – say – cover – write – check;
 - making connections between words with the same visual spelling pattern;
 - exploring families of words.

Text Types and Writing Frames

The following outlines the characteristics of six different non-fiction genre – recount, report, explanation, instruction, persuasion and discussion. Saintfield High School is committed to implementing a variety of writing tasks in lessons that are relevant to the lives of our pupils at both Key Stage Three and Key Stage Four. As is highlighted in the tables which follow, a range of writing types is encouraged for *all* subjects.

The structures and language features of some important types of non-fiction texts.

<p>Recount Purpose: to retell events Text structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ orientation – ‘scene setting’ opening, e.g. I went to the shop... ▪ events – recount the events as they occurred, e.g. I saw a vase... ▪ reorientation – a closing statement, e.g. When I got back I told my mum. <p>Language features of recount</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ written in the past tense, e.g. I went ▪ in chronological order, using time connectives, e.g. then, next, after, that <p>focus on individual or group participants, e.g. we, I</p>	<p>Report Purpose: to describe the way things are Text structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ an opening, general classification, e.g. Sparrows are birds. ▪ more technical classification (optional), e.g. Their Latin name is... ▪ a description of the phenomena, including some or all of its: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> qualities, e.g. Birds have feathers. Parts and their function, e.g. The beak is... habits/behaviour or uses, e.g. They nest in... <p>Language features of report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ written in the present tense, e.g. they nest ▪ non-chronological <p>focus on generic participants (birds not a particular bird)</p>
<p>Explanation Purpose: to explain the processes involved in natural and social phenomena or to explain how something works Text structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ general statement to introduce the topic, e.g. In the autumn some birds migrate. ▪ a series of logical steps explaining how or why something occurs, e.g. Because the hours of daylight shorten... ▪ These steps continue until the final state is produced or the explanation is complete <p>Language features of explanation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ written in the simple present tense, e.g. go ▪ uses time connectives, e.g. then, next, and/or casual connectives, e.g. because, so, this causes 	<p>Instructions Purpose: to instruct how something should be done through a series of sequenced steps Text structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ goal – a statement of what is to be achieved, e.g. How to make a sponge cake ▪ materials/equipment needed, e.g. 2 eggs, flour ▪ sequenced steps to achieve the goal, e.g. Cream the sugar and butter. ▪ often there is a diagram or illustration. <p>Language features of instruction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ written in the imperative, e.g. “First you sift the flour”, or, “Sift the flour”. ▪ in chronological order, e.g. first, next, after that ▪ focus on generalised human agents rather than named individuals.

<p>Persuasion Purpose: to argue the case for a point of view Text structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ thesis – an opening statement, e.g. Vegetables are good for you ▪ arguments – often in the form of point + elaboration, e.g. They contain vitamins. Vitamin C is vital for... ▪ reiteration – summary and restatement of the opening position, e.g. We have seen that...so... <p>Language features of persuasion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the simple present tense ▪ focus mainly on generic participants (vegetables, not a particular vegetable) ▪ mainly logical rather than time connectives, e.g. this shows, however, because 	<p>Discussion Purpose: to present arguments and information from differing viewpoints Text structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ statement of the issue + a preview of the main arguments ▪ arguments for + supporting evidence ▪ arguments against + supporting evidence (alternatively, argument/counter argument, a point at a time) ▪ recommendation - summary and conclusion <p>Language features of discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the simple present tense ▪ generic human (or non-human) participant ▪ logical connectives, e.g. therefore, however
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Writing frames are templates consisting of starters, connectives and sentence modifiers which offer students a structure for communicating what they want to say. The use of a writing frame should always begin with discussion and teacher modelling before moving on to joint construction and the independent writing. Teachers are encouraged to adapt and develop writing frames for unique classroom contexts and purposes.

In 2010/2011 Saintfield High School has:

- implemented a standardised marking and annotation policy for writing;
- constantly displayed pupils' writing, showing varying degrees of ability;
- issued most departments with subject specific vocabulary books;
- issued each teacher with a writing strategies booklet to improve the standard of pupils' writing and
- concentrated on the processes of writing for pupils to include the following:
 - scaffolding pupils' writing;
 - providing models of good writing;
 - providing frameworks for writing;
 - widening the audience for pupils' writing;
 - widening the range of forms used for pupils' writing;
 - supporting the drafting process;
 - making pupils aware of the criteria for marking writing;
 - making writing a more collaborative process;

Resources

At Saintfield High School we provide:

- displays of reading material relevant to the topic, subject or Northern Ireland Curriculum and of relevant vocabulary;
- relevant material at appropriate levels of interest and difficulty and from a range of text types;
- reading material of high quality which is up to date, relevant, and balanced in its presentation of ethnicity, culture and gender;
- access to school library and to ICT sources of information;
- access to appropriate audio visual equipment;
- classroom environments which are conducive to good literacy practice.

Assessing Literacy Across the Curriculum

- When assessing students' work across the curriculum we should value their oral contributions and listening skills alongside their reading and writing.
- We should take into account students' performance in speaking and listening, reading and writing when assessing and reporting on students' progress in subject areas.
- When setting writing tasks we should make explicit to the students the key features of language which will be considered.

The Assessment of Communication at Key Stage Three:

Communication includes the modes of Talking and Listening, Reading and Writing in a range of contexts across the curriculum. Standards of pupil competence in literacy are measured through the cross-curricular skill of Communication.

Pupils should be provided with a range of learning opportunities to acquire and develop the cross-curricular skill of Communication for a variety of relevant and purposeful contexts.

The Department of Education Northern Ireland's strategy, 'Count, read: Succeed' states that, '**While recognising that Communication and using Mathematics are cross-curricular, the Mathematics and English (and, in Irish medium schools, Irish) departments should lead the assessment of numeracy and literacy...**' (DENI, 2011).

In addition, it asserts that, '**The cross-curricular nature of Communication and Using Mathematics should be reflected through the whole-school approach to planning for literacy and numeracy, with assessment supported by feedback to the English and Mathematics (and, in Irish medium schools, Irish) departments as appropriate**' (DENI, 2011).

Both extracts highlight the extent to which the English Department is responsible for the overall co-ordination of the assessment of Communication.

Saintfield High School currently reports on the assessment of Communication for Years 8, 9 and 10 with a teacher comment on pupils' end of year reports. From the academic year 2011/2012 onwards it will become statutory to also provide a level of progression in addition to a comment.

The following table sets out important implementation dates for the assessment of cross-curricular skills:

Academic Year	Year Group	Transitional Levels
2010/11	Year 10	
2011/12	Year 10	
2012/13	Year 10 (Year 8, 2010/11)	Incoming Levels of Progression for the assessment of Communication and Using Mathematics
2013/14	Year 10 (Year 8, 2011/12)	Incoming levels of Progression for the assessment of Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT

When responding to pupils' work we should:

- make comments which are positive and supportive;
- target specific areas for improvement (a selective and focused identification of errors);
- give guidance on how to achieve the short-term targets set. For example, whilst “improve your spelling” is unhelpful and vague, the identification of a particular spelling error e.g. doubling of letters before adding -ing is specific and presents the student with a target which can be addressed;
- give priority to content, ideas, organisation and meaning above secretarial features;
- create opportunities for students to reflect on the quality of their own work and for peer assessment.

Implementation of Policy

In order to ensure that the introduction of a whole school literacy policy is successful, the importance of the following activities should be recognised.

- Saintfield High School will ensure that the Board of Governors, staff, parents and pupils understand the implications of all strategies and policies issued by the Department of Education Northern Ireland and the South Eastern Education and Library Board.
- Saintfield High School will prioritise the place of promoting literacy in its Improvement Plan.
- Saintfield High School will raise the awareness of all staff (both teaching and non-teaching) about their responsibilities for the development of literacy at all levels.
- Saintfield High School will provide guidance for all teachers on how they can support students' literacy development across the curriculum.
- Saintfield High School will identify and make provision for the training needs of staff with regard to literacy.
- Saintfield High School will foster effective and sustained links between the Literacy Co-ordinator, Numeracy Co-ordinator and the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator so that literacy, numeracy and special educational needs provision is integrated.
- Saintfield High School will interpret and use the attainment levels of all pupils through teacher observation and interpretation of standardised tests to inform future literacy planning.
- Saintfield High School will identify those pupils underachieving in literacy across the curriculum, address their specific weaknesses with appropriate teaching strategies and raise their attainment.
- Saintfield High School will audit existing literacy provision and review current support for students with individual needs.
- Saintfield High School's Literacy Co-ordinator will continue to explore and review new literacy initiatives.
- Saintfield High School will undertake rigorous and thorough action planning and target setting with regard to literacy.
- Saintfield High School will inform parents and governors of the high priority the school places on literacy.
- Saintfield High School will, where appropriate, develop home support in the promotion of literacy.
- Saintfield High School will raise the profile of literacy across the curriculum at the start of Year 8.
- Saintfield High School will establish assessment procedures to monitor and evaluate students' progress; in particular, to inform the formal assessment of Communication at Key Stage Three from 2011 onwards.