

Mount Temple Comprehensive



Learning Policy

all different
all equal

LEARNING POLICY

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1. BACKGROUND

In 2006/2007 Mount Temple teaching staff began a process which culminated in the development of a learning policy. One of the first of its kind in Ireland, the Mount Temple Learning Policy links the schools ethos, vision and direction, to what is taught and learnt in the school. It combines values and aspirations, with a response to issues that are central to our school as a learning organisation. It provides a guide for subject planning and curriculum decisions.

In 2011/2012, the policy is being revised to take account of the changed context in which we operate. The growing recognition that global and local change are at the heart of the educational process, and that young people need to be equipped, during schooldays, with the skills and competencies necessary to engage in lifelong and life-wide learning, influence this policy. The policy also recognises that the rapid pace and nature of change, and that changing modes and models of learning will shape learning in the school.

2. BASIS AND PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

The Mount Temple Learning Policy is based firmly on the ethos of the school, its mission, vision and direction. It also reflects the reality of school life, and highlights what is best about learning in Mount Temple. It draws on good practice already going on in Mount Temple, and elsewhere in Ireland and abroad. While drawing on our strengths and traditions, it also seeks to address challenges, weaknesses and priorities for improvement.

It forms the basis for the Curriculum Section of the School Plan, and will be reflected in each Subject Department Plan. It will inform relevant whole school policies and plans in areas such as Transition Year, Special Educational Needs, etc. It will also inform the schools involvement in, and response to, various initiatives such as the reform of the Junior Cycle, the national strategy on literacy and numeracy, etc.

While the learning policy is somewhat aspirational, in that it is not yet achieved, it is based on existing good practice, and aims to be realistic and achievable.

3. SCHOOL ETHOS VISION AND DIRECTION

School Ethos

The school ethos reflects the original mission of Mount Temple. Based on this heritage of Protestant, Christian traditions, the school ethos statement states:

All of us are different, all of us are equal.

We respect this diversity. We work to create an environment in the school where all members of the school community feel safe and protected, and enjoy learning, teaching, working and extra-curricular activities. We expect tolerance, politeness, courtesy, co-operation and respect for others and their property.

School Vision and Direction

Mount Temple builds on past traditions, affirms current good practice, and will encourage innovation. We will provide an excellent education for all our students. Mount Temple is a school committed to education for sustainable development. Students of Mount Temple expect an education which is inclusive and tolerant, prepares them for further learning, and enables them to participate fruitfully in society. Learning in Mount Temple will play a part in how students' eyes are opened to the realities of the world. It will equip them to become the responsible, articulate, creative, committed, passionate citizens that the world needs. They will be prepared to take responsibility for the world and Ireland's part in changing it towards greater equity and justice.

OUR UNDERSTANDINGS OF EDUCATION AND LEARNING

While there are many ways of conceiving education, one way of looking at education suggests that there are four models of educational provision:

- Education as academic or personal development;
- Education preparing students for the world of work;
- Education providing students with the skills necessary to live fruitfully in society;
- Education enabling students to understand the world, in order to change it towards greater justice and equity.

Mount Temple has a reputation for being strong in regard to academic and personal development; in preparing students for the world of work; and in education for citizenship. It also has a strong reputation, in the field of education for social change, even though the provision in this field has not been as prominent as in the other three areas. The school community has strengthened provision in education for social change in recent years, and endeavors to move further in this direction in the coming years, without losing the strengths of other models and emphases.

4. LEARNING COMMITMENT

Learning is at the heart of what happens in Mount Temple:

- Mount Temple is a learning school. Student learning is our raison d'etre. The staff seek to learn from experience – both success and failure. We are a learning community.
- Learning is not value-neutral. What is learned here reflects the values outlined above.
- How learning and teaching takes place here seeks to reflect these values.
- Nothing is taught here which denies, denigrates or undermines these values.
- School life outside the classroom is also consistent with these values.
- The other policies of the school reflect these values.
- Staff and management attempt to embody these values.
- Exams are important tools for the assessment and improvement of learning; learning is primary, exams secondary.
- We strive to ensure that students achieve their best in terms of learning; and recognise and celebrate when they do their best to learn well.

5. LEARNING POLICY

What our Values Base means for Learning in Mount Temple

5.1 Mount Temple is Comprehensive

Mount Temple is inspired by the ideal of a Comprehensive Education. Learning - academic, practical and creative – is best achieved together rather than in segregation. A comprehensive education at its best equips young people for the diverse realities of the world today, and encourages a healthy balance of curricular learning with co- and extra-curricular activities. Comprehensive Education in Mount Temple encourages learning inside and outside classrooms, practical rooms, laboratories, theaters, game courts, playing fields and open spaces; inside and outside school; during the school years and beyond. Mount Temple will continue to provide a broad spectrum of subjects in line with its comprehensive nature.

Comprehensive Education in Mount Temple seeks to include all students equally, with their diverse needs – including those with special learning needs, and those with particular giftedness and specific talents. At the same time, Mount Temple will maintain the school's identity as an inclusive, mainstream Comprehensive school.

5.2 Mount Temple is Inclusive, Tolerant and Appreciating of Difference.

Mount Temple is recognised by parents, students, past pupils, and the wider community, as a place of inclusiveness, tolerance and the celebration of difference. Building on the tolerant, open-minded and independent spirits of its predecessor schools, Mount Temple is known as the place where prejudice and intolerance are left at the gate. However, the community of Mount Temple recognises together that the creation of tolerance, the challenge of inclusiveness, and the securing of a learning space where difference is embraced is not something accomplished once and for all, but is an educational path travelled every day.

*We also recognise that as global citizens, open to the world, we are also local learners, drawing on identities and traditions that are specifically Irish, specifically Dublin, and even specifically Northsider. We draw on our Irish, Dublin, Northside heritage, culture and traditions, including traditions of openness to others. We also recognise the richness provided to the school community by those who come from elsewhere, bringing with them different, new Irish and other identities, traditions, customs and cultures. As new challenges emerge Mount Temple will continue to be at the forefront of promoting inclusiveness, tolerance and the appreciation of difference, in line with the slogan – **All Different, All Equal.***

5.3 Mount Temple is Gender-Balanced

Since its establishment Mount Temple has been co-educational; and in the 1970s this was part of Mount Temple's innovative educational approach. Mount Temple has continued to be committed to gender balance as a principle. This is to be seen in

- intake policy and practice
- encouragement of participation of boys and girls in all subjects at all levels;
- teacher role-modeling, attitudes and teaching methods;
- encouragement of social interaction;
- extra-and co-curricular activities.

While an examination of current figures seems to suggest that Mount Temple is maintaining the balance of boys and girls – at between 50/50 and 60/40 – nevertheless, maintaining 50/50 challenges our intake policy. In the coming years Mount Temple will examine intake, curriculum, and positive behavior policies and “gender-proof” all policies in the light of the need to ensure gender equality and gender balance.

5.4 Mount Temple is Person-Centred

One of the defining characteristics of the type of education that is available in Mount Temple is that it is focused on the development of the person. As a caring school, Mount Temple is focused on the needs of the individual, and the personal development of each student is central to the learning that goes on within the school.

This person-centred approach is expressed in the informality that pervades Mount Temple. It is visible in the way in which teachers relate to students, and in which students relate to each other and to teachers. It is also clearly visible in the practice of teaching, and is expressed in curriculum decisions.

This person-centred approach is also clearly evident in the Guidance Plan, in the Pastoral Care programme of the school, and in the wide choice of sports and other extra-curricular activities available. The personal, caring approach can be seen in the way in which the sick bay, library and canteen services which are also part of a person-centred learning process.

While the priority of the school is the students under our care, the care and support of teachers, other staff, and parents, is also part of Mount Temple’s person-centred approach.

“How can a school be intellectually stimulating, creatively challenging and pastorally caring of students if it is not at the same time also that for teachers?”

Finnish National Board of Education “The Competencies of Global Citizens”

5.5 Mount Temple is Hard-Working towards Excellence

Mount Temple and its predecessor schools have a tradition of achievement in learning, and of hard work in the pursuit of excellence. Mount Temple strives to ensure that the learning that takes place in and outside the classroom equips students to be hard-working, and to achieve all that they can.

Mount Temple seeks to encourage joy and enjoyment in learning. Students should also expect to be pushed to the limits of what they can achieve. This principle of *hardworking towards excellence* will become more and more evident not only in curriculum decisions, but also in policies and practices in relation to punctuality and attendance, behavior, extra-curricular activities, social engagement, etc.

Mount Temple celebrates and rewards hard work, initiative and achievement.

5.6 Mount Temple is Spiritual

Mount Temple's spiritual dimension is based on the fact that Mount Temple has

- A Protestant, Christian heritage of mutual solidarity stretching back through its predecessor schools almost 250 years;
- A spirit of independence of thought and action; coupled with an appreciation of interdependence and mutuality.
- 40 years experience of learning for inclusiveness and appreciation of difference.

Learning in Mount Temple is devoted to developing the whole person, including the spiritual dimension, and to developing an informed conscience in people.

This means that learning in Mount Temple includes:

- Understanding and appreciating the Christian, particularly Protestant, traditions on which the school is founded; and encouraging an openness to understanding the beliefs of those of major and minority religious and non-religious traditions;
- Enabling students to explore, understand and appreciate the spiritual dimensions of life;
- Supporting the students in the development of their own spirituality;
- Providing space for quiet, reflection, prayer and formation.
- Learning for fullness of life, and experiencing joy in a learning environment.

5.7 Mount Temple is Innovative, Critical and Creative

Mount Temple has been renowned for being at the forefront of educational experimentation; encouraging innovation in teaching and learning, fostering critical faculties and enabling creativity. Evidence of this can be seen not only in the career paths and life choices of individual past pupils, but also in the ways in which the school operates. Innovation, creativity and the promotion of critique are still clearly evident in classrooms and corridors, and are also seen in co and extra-curricular activities as diverse as Seachtain na Gaeilge, Actiontrack, Drama, Musical education and recitals, initiatives in the Arts, Science, etc. .

However, Mount Temple grew rapidly the 1980 and 1990s. Meanwhile, the pressures of increasingly packed curricula, while providing training that may have promoted some innovations, may have also diminished space for creativity and innovation. The space for promoting these necessary dimensions of education and learning needs to be nurtured. Mount Temple will work in the coming years, to create greater space for innovation, creativity and critique within teaching and learning.

5.8 Mount Temple is Future-Oriented

Mount Temple is future-oriented. What this means for learning in Mount Temple is that

- Learning in Mount Temple encourages the self-directed, lifelong learning process of students;
- Learning in Mount Temple will prepare students to live in the complex, rapidly changing, and globalised world of the present and the future.
- Learning is directed to enabling students understand and engage with both the world as it is, and the world as it will become in the future.
- The subjects available, curricula chosen, textbooks and other teaching resources used, and educational methodologies, will take account of students understanding of, engagement with, and ability to change the world, into the future.
- Learning in Mount Temple will move towards a future-oriented, lifelong-learning approach that equips young people with the knowledge and competencies necessary for the world in which they will live.
- Mount Temple will embrace curriculum reforms that move in this direction, such as the new Junior Cycle. Mount Temple will be at the forefront of efforts to change the existing syllabi that are not fit for purpose and to provide alternatives.
- Learning through new technologies will be explored and encouraged.

5.9 Mount Temple is Committed to a World of Greater Justice, Dignity and Human Rights.

“ as a global community, we have the means to eradicate poverty and to overcome the deep inequalities that divide countries and people.” UNDP 2005

Education is not neutral in relation to the way the world is ordered. It either serves to maintain the status quo, i.e. prop up and contribute to a global situation of injustice and inequity; or to critique, undermine, and question such an unjust world order, to promote the imagining of alternatives, and to engage learners in education and educational action in favour of a more just and equitable world.

In Mount Temple, we are committed to providing an education which engages young people as global citizens, provides them with the ability to recognise all that is wonderful about the world; enables them to celebrate with joy the diversity of the worlds peoples; allows them to experience solidarity, fairness and justice in their dealings with others, and to expand that solidarity particularly to the worlds poorest in the developing world; opens their eyes to the realities of the world, including the realities of structural injustice; engages them in learning for change; broadens their vision of alternatives to current unjust systems; and empowers them to act effectively in favour of a more just, equitable and socially cohesive world. **In Mount Temple, therefore, learning is about understanding the world as it is. It is also about interpreting the world in order to change the world.**

5.10 Mount Temple is Committed to a World that is Sustainable

In Mount Temple teaching and learning is devoted to enabling students to learn for the world of today and for the world of tomorrow. The future is uncertain, the world is changing rapidly, knowledge is expanding, varieties of globalisation – social, economic, cultural, political – effect all. The possibility of a world of equity, human rights and justice for all peoples is tied up with the possibility of rescuing the world from environmental and ecological degradation. Biodiversity of ecosystems, and diversity of cultures, require protection. A commitment to sustainable development, and to education that opens students eyes to the realities of the world and to their part in changing it, is at the heart of learning and teaching in Mount Temple. Moving into the future Mount Temple will become a centre of excellence and a prototype of a school committed to Learning for Sustainable Development and Global Justice. Starting with the achievement of a Green Flag, Mount Temple will move to become an energy neutral, ecological school.

6. Developing and Implementing this Policy.

This policy will be kept under continual review. Its implementation can be seen in the curricular and other policy decisions taken by the school. In particular, during 2012-2015, this policy will inform the way in which junior cycle reform, transition year curricular decisions, and reform of the senior cycle, and the provision of Leaving Cert Applied and other programmes, will be approached. Furthermore, school approaches to learning and assessment will be directed by, and will in turn inform, the Learning policy.

7. Monitoring, Review and Evaluation.

This policy will be monitored by the Board, with input from teachers, students and parents. It will be reviewed every three years (i.e. next review 2015). Criteria for evaluating its effectiveness will be developed during the 2012-2015 period.