



NATIONAL PARENTS COUNCIL
Post Primary

COMHAIRLE NÁISIÚNTA TUISMITHEOIRÍ
Iarbhunoideachas

JUNIOR CYCLE SURVEY

A report of the NPCPP Junior Cycle Survey



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The National Parents Council Post Primary (NPCPP) is the national representative body for parents and guardians of young people in post-primary education in Ireland.

Inaugurated in 1985, the organisation assists parents and guardians, ensuring that they engage effectively within their school communities and with partners in education.

In order to ascertain the views, opinions, and experiences of parents and guardians of young people completing the Junior Cycle in Ireland, the NPCPP launched a survey in November 2019.

The following report contains the results of this survey.



CSSPA
Catholic secondary schools
parents associations 1975

CSSPA
Catholic Secondary
Schools Parent Associations

Representing Parents in the Catholic Voluntary School sector since 1975



PACCS



**Education & Training Board Schools
National Parents' Association**

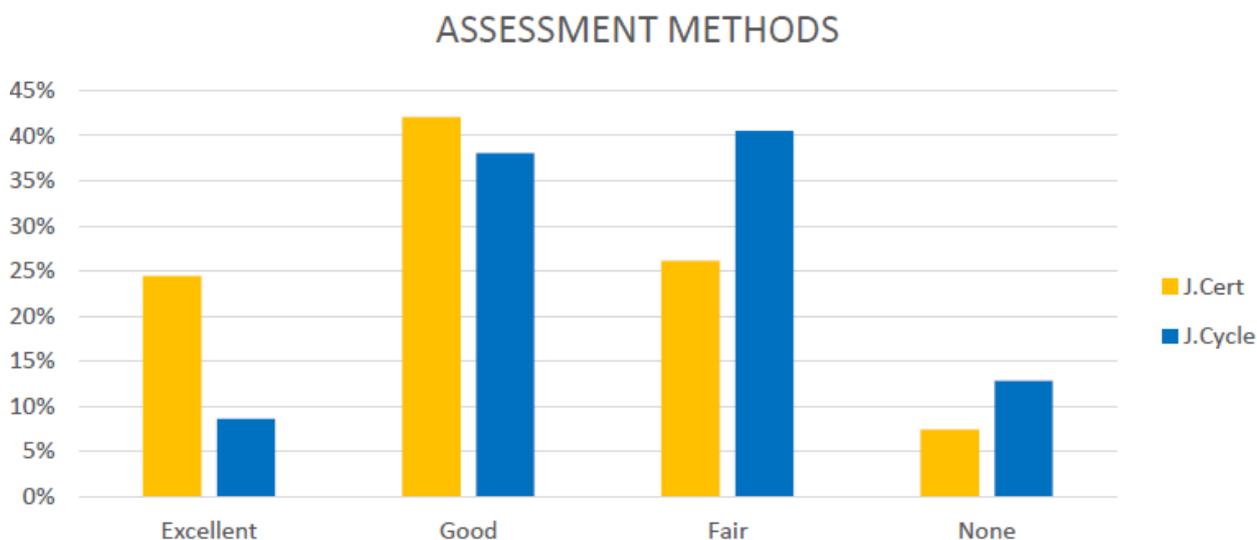
General Information

The Student and Their School

Over 61% of the respondents had students in the Junior Cycle years (1-3), 84% of who had either sat the Junior Cycle (2019) or due to sit it in 2020 and 2021. While this may skew some of the results, the layout allows parents/guardians whose student falls into this category answer a particular section while skipping others which are not relevant to them. For this reason, the survey was broken into 4 different sections.

This survey highlights the respondent's lived experience of what is happening in practice with the new reforms to this section of the Irish Post Primary education. The majority of respondents were either from the specified religious ethos Secondary School or a Community/Comprehensive sectors (67%).

A Parent/Guardian's Understanding of the Junior Certificate/Junior Cycle



Of the respondents, 18% were not aware of the structure of the Junior Certificate/Junior Cycle. Of those that felt they had an understanding of the Junior Certificate/Junior Cycle, the majority received their information via communication from the school (70%) while a further 26% were self-informed with many doing independent research via the internet.

“No information given until last week on parents request. Knew nothing about this when my son completed his junior cert earlier this year”

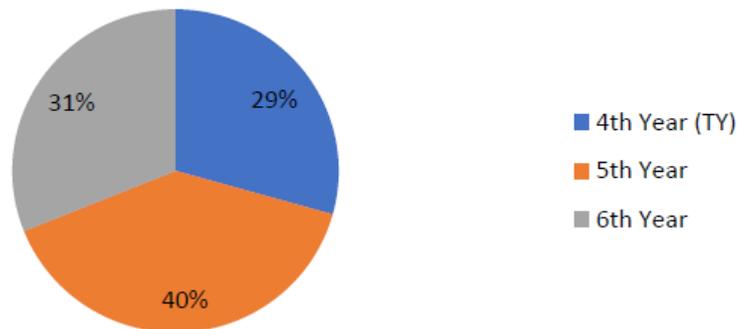
“Changes and updates are not always communicated in a practical manner: 1- the method of communication often means we know after the changes have taken place, sometimes with little time to review 2- teachers are themselves unsure 3- the information needs to be more pragmatically designed. Wording is often confusing plus you need to think of parents whose mother tongue is not English, regardless of their fluency.”

Knowledge of Assessment Methods

- Most parents/guardians have a greater knowledge of the assessment methods for the Junior Certificate
- 14% have no knowledge of the assessment methods for Junior Cycle
- 10% have an excellent one
- There were 654 additional comments in this section of which 41% related to a lack of knowledge and information and a request to receive more resources and/or information

Parents/Guardians of Students who Completed the Junior Certificate Before 2019

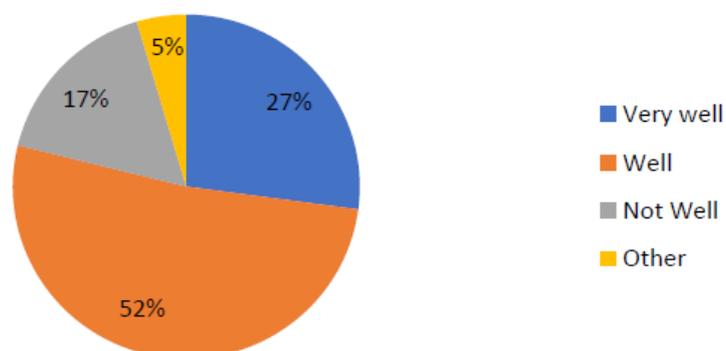
What year is your student currently in?



The above chart shows that most students are currently in 5th year. This is reflected in the heavily weighted 2018 year for sitting the Junior Cycle exams, 51%, and 55% completing 3 or more subjects in the new Junior Cycle format.

Changing from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle

How has your student managed the change from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle to date



When asked about the level of academic work, the increase from the Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle was noted by many as being much higher (54%) and 53% felt their student was adequately prepared for the Leaving Certificate.

While most of the respondents were happy with the way in which the changes between Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle assessment methods was highlighted, one third felt that this change was given insignificant focus.

Of the open ended responses in this section 9% of 153 comments were of a positive nature and 88% were negative (the balance were of a non-specific topic), with 30% of these comments relating to the comparison between the two differing styles of assessment.

Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA)

- 55% were not due to receive this
- Of the 45% who were due to receive the JCPA, over half did not receive it (55%)

There were over 100 comments on this particular question, out of these almost 70 were negative comments on the JCPA stating issues such as irrelevance, time lapse between JC results and the awarding of the JCPA. Many parents/guardians and students do not know what the JCPA is.

“Students have no value on it seems alot [sic] of work and stress descriptors mean nothing to them also the length of time student[sic] have to wait for it is crazy no wonder they dont [sic] value it”

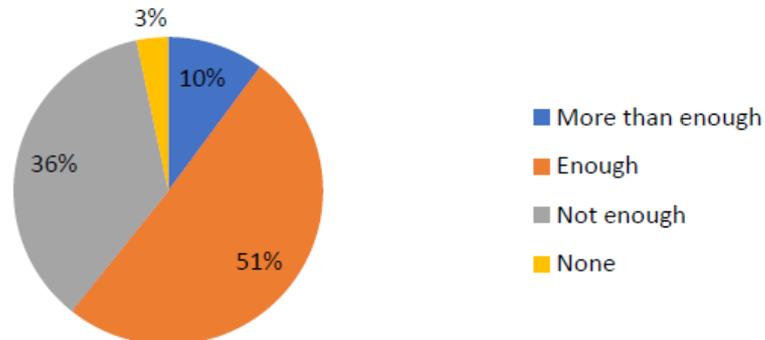
Junior Cycle 2019 and Later

This section focused on parents/guardians whose student had completed/was due to complete the Junior Cycle 2019 or later. Of those that responded:

- 15% felt that the Junior Cycle Programme was explained very well to them
- 39% felt it was not explained well
- 52% did not fully understand the rationale on which the Junior Cycle is based

Progression and Feedback

How much information do you feel you have received from the school about your student's progression

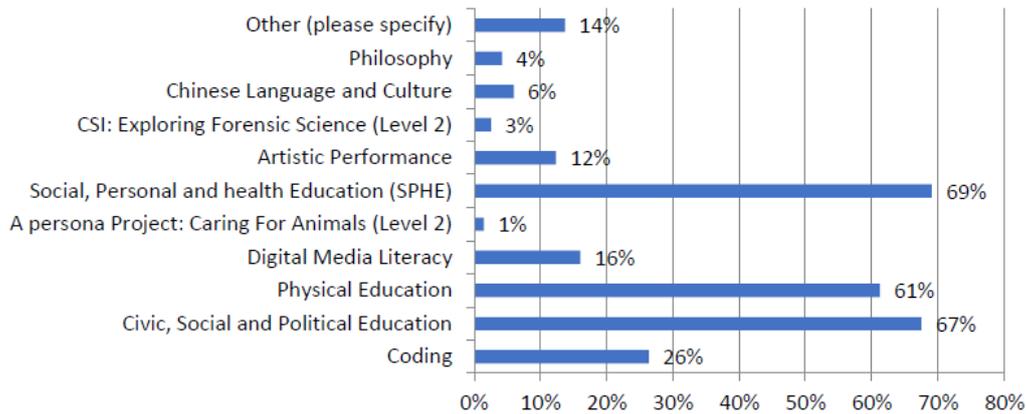


Where this feedback was given, the information was communicated through 'Face to Face meetings' (61%) while a further 37% was via a general meeting for all parents/guardians/students of the class/year.

Short Courses

62% of respondents responded that their school does not offer short courses.

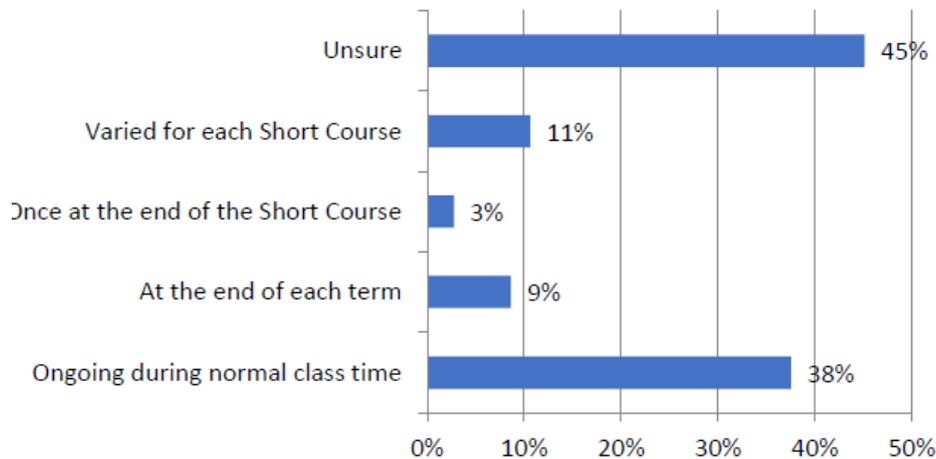
Of those that were aware of the Short Courses on offer, the most popular courses were: CSPE, PE and SPHE.



The majority of students completed 2-3 of these 'Short Courses'. More detailed information is required to see whether these are the short courses as prescribed by the NCCA or the regular curriculum subject.

Assessment Methods

Short Course Assessment



When asked how many assessments their student was given, English, Science, Business studies and Irish were the highest scoring.

Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs)

On average however there were approximately 2-3 CBAs per subject. Of these CBAs:

- 87% were graded
- 67% were added to the overall grade for the subject
- 80% of parent/guardians felt that these CBA grades should be added to the overall marks of a subject rather than as part of a statement on the results certificate

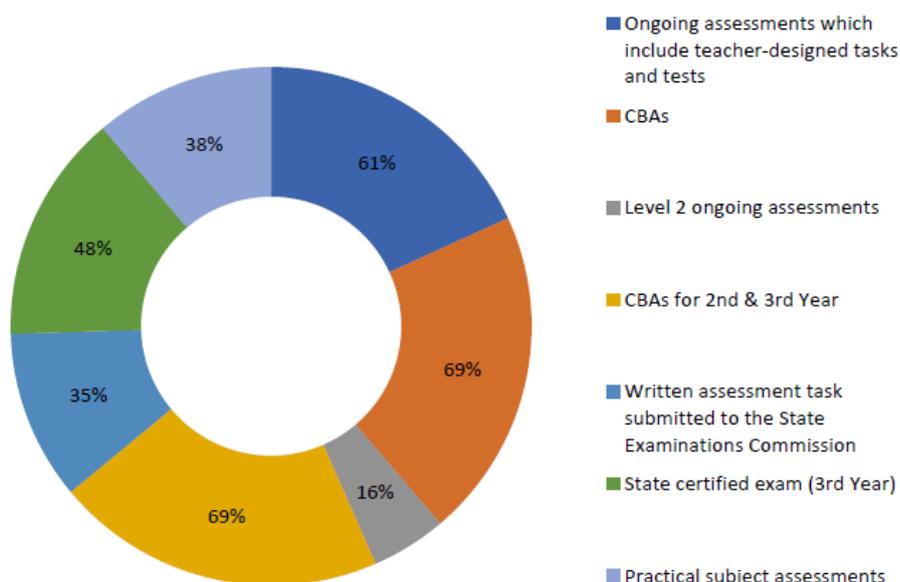
There did not seem to be a uniform number of CBAs throughout all respondents, with many not having any knowledge of what a CBA is or whether their student had undertaken such an assessment.

During the CBAs:

- 45% needed assistance and of these that required assistance
- 58% received this help

General on Assessments

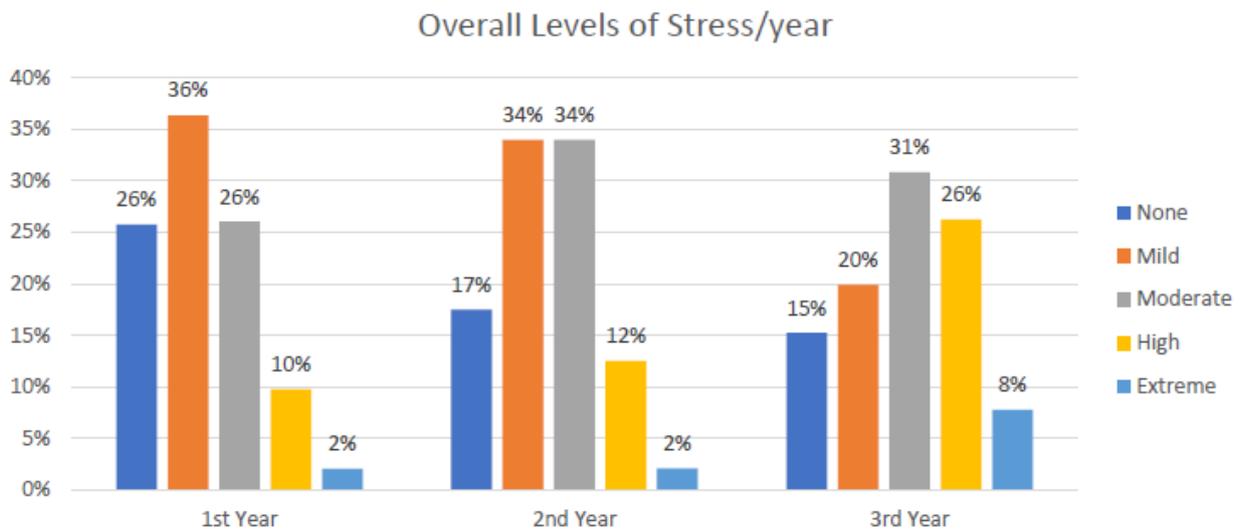
Of the types of assessments suggested the 'Ongoing assessments which include teacher-designed tasks and tests' were used most frequently. However there seemed to be a broad spectrum of variety in the use of all the assessment methods.



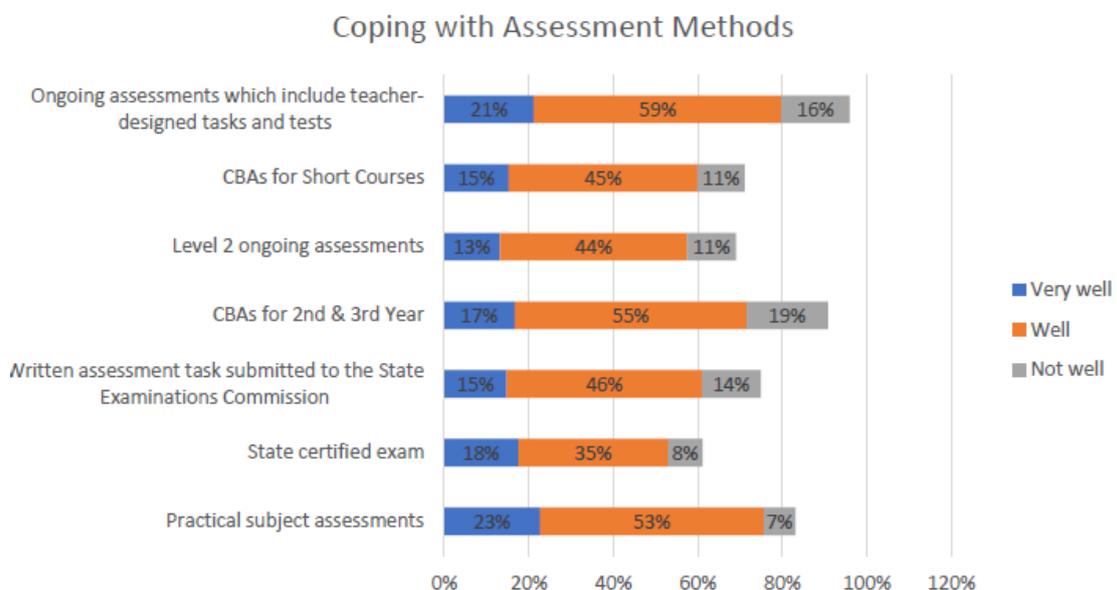
The Student at the Centre

“The junior cycle will place the student at the centre of the learning process.”

When asked to consider the stress levels of their student during the 3 years there was an increase in the ‘High’ stress levels in the 3rd year, going from 10% in 1st year to 26% in 3rd year. The ‘Extreme’ levels also rose significantly from 2% to 8%.



When asked about how the student ‘managed’ the whole 3-year cycle, specifically the assessment methods most students seemed to have managed well with all types. Of those that didn’t cope well, the CBAs seemed to give the biggest ‘not well’ response (19%), with the on-going assessments 16%.

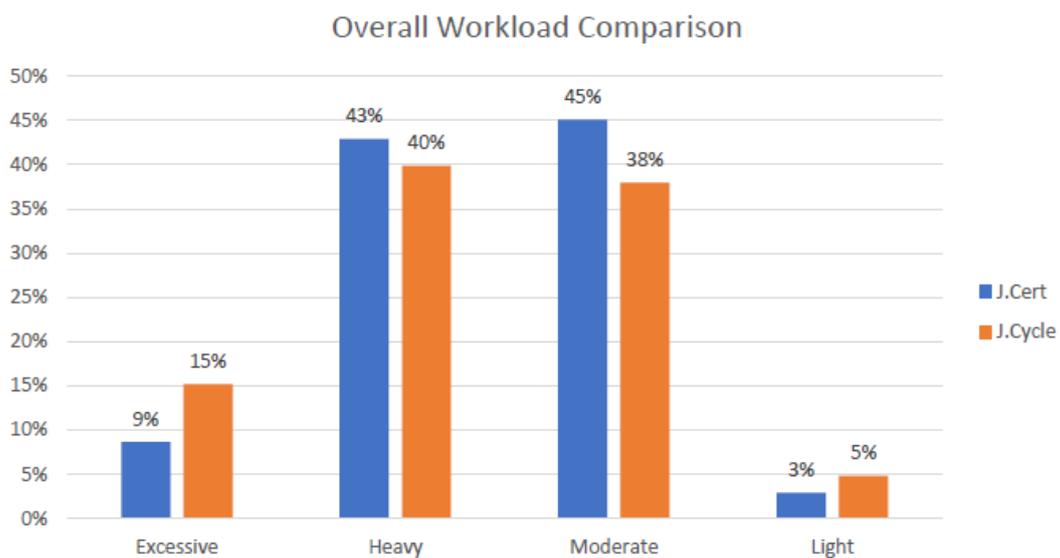


When asked about verbal performance feedback given directly to the student, only 48% were not aware that any such feedback was given.

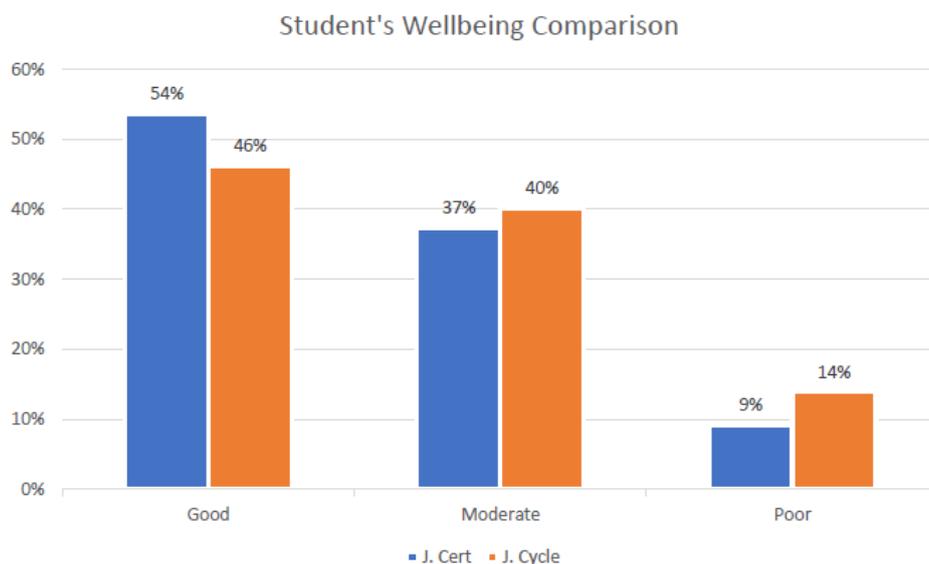
Almost half of the parents/guardians felt their student needed 'grinds' to prepare them for the JC however only 21% of parents/guardians actually arranged this extra help.

Junior Cycle vs. Junior Certificate: The Parent/Guardian Perspective

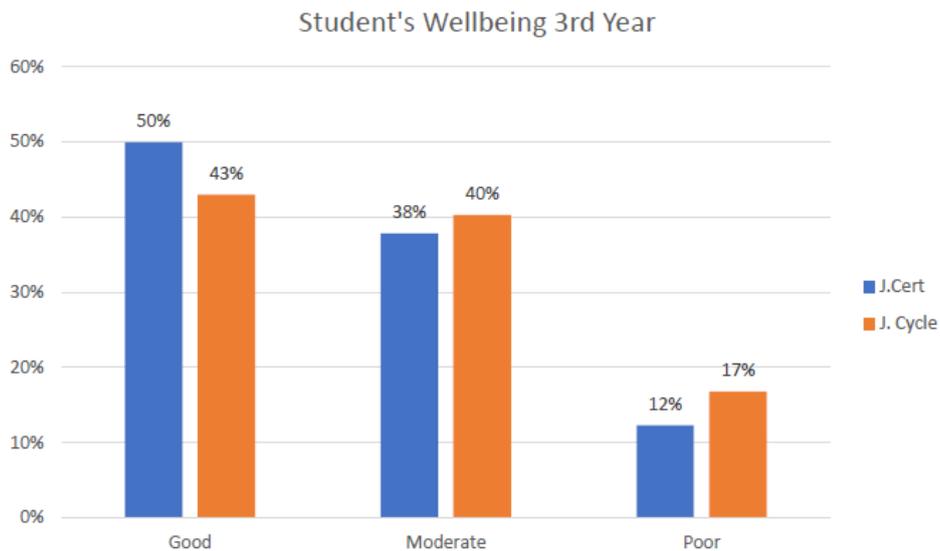
This section of the survey dealt with a direct comparison of both the Junior Certificate and the Junior Cycle as experienced by parents/guardians who had students completing/completed both.



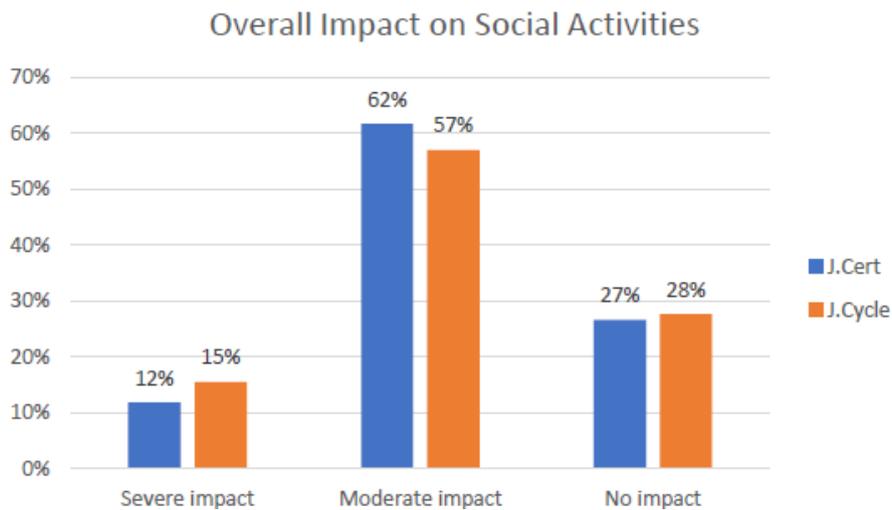
Overall, parents/guardians found that the workload was higher in Junior Cycle than Junior Certificate, most found that there was a moderate to heavy workload in both cycles.



From the above chart, parent/guardians felt that over the 3yrs, the wellbeing of their students was better during the Junior Certificate than the Junior Cycle.



As previously, the Junior Certificate seems to have had less of an impact on the wellbeing of students during the final year.



Both cycles impacted the students social activities, however the Junior Cycle had a larger number of parent/guardians reporting a 'severe' impact on their student.

An Overview of the Parent/Guardian Comments - What Parents/Guardians Said

There are many comments in all 'Comment' sections of this survey.

Junior Cycle 2019

- There were only 9 positive comments about the reformed Junior Cycle. 4 of these were about CBAs and only one gave a general positive comment on the reformed Junior Cycle
- 66% of the comments made were negative towards the reformed Junior Cycle, 162 of which concerned remarks on CBAs

Parent/Guardian Comments on CBAs:

- These are mainly negative and highlight that parents/guardians feel their students are stressed and feel an extra burden with this form of assessment. There is also a feeling that students are undergoing continuous assessments which some understand to be CBAs.

"I don't agree with the new junior cycle programme. One of my children managed cba [sic] work well. The other child is very anxious about them. As a mental health professional I have significant concerns about the tasks expected of children at the cognitive stage of development they are in during 2nd and 3rd year."

- Where parent/guardians were positive about the CBAs and what they are intended for, they are still hesitant that this form of assessment has been utilised correctly:

"CBA: while a very good learning experience are not awarded enough marks for the amount of work required, also there is not much point in developing this type of assessment if it is not continued on to senior cycle."

- Some of the comments included those that highlighted that the CBAs were used too frequently during the year and were creating too much pressure on the student

"Only as mentioned earlier. I think the CBA's increase the workload on kids instead of spreading the load as intended. I think the issue is only going to worsen as more subjects move to this model as teachers, students and the DOE [sic] are layering the new system on top of the others. In a nutshell the DOE and teachers expect kids to complete CBA's ON TOP OF completing the course. CBA's are a lot of work for the small amount of return at the end of the day. I do believe that the element of standing up and presenting to your class is a good life skill to develop with the kids."

- Comments on the number of CBAs their student has undertaken, 49% mentioned either unaware or did not know as a response and a further 42% were unable to say which subjects were assessed by this method
- As with comments on the methods of assessment, there were many comments on the amount of work that has been undertaken with the CBAs and continuous assessments.

"I did feel we could have done with a little more preparation as to what is involved in the new JC as regards assignments etc."

Parent/Guardian Comments on Short Courses

- When asked to comment on Short Courses the total number of comments was 133. Over 52% of these were unknown. Whether the parent/guardians were not aware of what short courses were offered or whether their student is doing a short course is not clear

Comments on the JC Before 2019

While this section is aimed at the Junior Cycle before reform, many of the comments related to the current form of the Junior Cycle.

- 153 comments in this section
- Only 9% of were of a positive nature
- 88% were negative
- The balance was of a non-specific topic

JCPA Comments

- 48% had an issue with the JCPA
- 19% did not know what a JCPA was
- 19% were negative comments

Transition from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle

- 54% referred to the transition as being difficult
- 3% commented that the transition did not present any problem for their student

"The whole Junior Cycle appears to be ill thought out with poor guidelines and help from the department. The CBA's are causing a lot of stress on students at a time when my 3rd year student should be focussed on exam prep and study.

She has often been up late into the night to complete a rushed CBA (not down to her but timeframe given by teacher and due to other deadlines) for little or no gain. From my reading of it (and this is the problem, I'm[sic] not even sure on this), it looks like they are only marked on their assessment of the CBA learning's and not the CBA itself. This is what I think, from trying to read the articles online. I'm now of the opinion they are trying to keep this secret, as students may not put much work into them if they knew this. CBA's are great in theory for developing project work and presentation but they should be completed in 2nd year and not in exam year. I do feel sorry for the teachers as it looks like the new Junior Cert was pushed in without adequate resourcing¹⁵ and documented syllabus."

Proposed Action to be Considered...

...regarding the availability and quality of information available to parents:

Through research a wealth of resources for parents are found to be available on the JCT website. However, these resources are not well promoted amongst parents, an area of partnership that could be explored. New documentation explaining the core of the Junior Cycle could be coupled with a series of Information Evenings for new parents run in conjunction with NPC, and NCCA, to include parents of 6th class students, may be suggested?

...regarding the pre 2019 Junior Cycle candidates:

Further follow up on this cohort of students is required, as it is weighted towards the 5th year of post primary education. With regards to being prepared for the Leaving Certificate exams the real test comes in the latter half of the 6th year when students realise the full impact of their learning at that stage.

For this reason, it would be good to see how the students and parents feel at this point of the process. There will also be need to follow up on the current 4th year of post primary as they are the first ones to take more subjects in the new Junior Cycle format and the change to the current standards of Leaving Certificate will have a broader impact on their overall workload.

"There is no one specific area for parents to get clear and concise information."

"There is a clear difference in academic standards between JC and LC. My children will likely need grinds."

"Their JC subject timetables were cut. I can't see any benefits of the new JC. It's sounds like nonsense to me."

...regarding educational inequalities and disadvantages:

It may be worth examining deeper the issue of inequality between parent/guardians who are literate and hold higher level education and those without. Already research indicates that students, whose parent/guardians who hold a higher level of education, achieve higher educational levels themselves. Is this new form of teaching/learning going to exasperate this inequality, or does it have the potential to do so?

As mentioned in several comments regarding the CBAs, there is no way of guaranteeing that students complete all the work themselves without outside help. Therefore, students whose parent/guardians already hold a higher-level education have a better understanding of the elements required for projects/essays and presentations, giving their students an advantage. Also those with better economic situations can pay for assistance for their student.

“CBAs in my opinion are unfair. I know of cases where deadlines were not met and the students were allowed to submit late after taking the assessment home and completing them with the help of family members. Also difficult to monitor and manage teacher input.”

...regarding issues with terminology in general, including that used in this survey:

What is not clear is whether the school has short courses on offer, and the parent/guardians didn't know about them. Further examination of this topic is perhaps necessary. Also, it was not clearly outlined in the survey that there are two types of SPHE/CSPE/PE classes, one of which is a short course, therefore the choice of these as 'Short Courses' needs to be questioned.



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