Student Council Policy

Coláiste Cholmcille



2023-2024

Mission Statement of our School

Coláiste Cholmcille is a community which respects the individual's rights and self-worth and aims to provide a happy and safe environment in which the individual may achieve her/his spiritual, academic and personal potential in order to develop all positive aspects of the individual and the community. Our Characteristic Spirit document states:

"The school is a caring and welcoming one, endeavouring to promote a culture of good relationships where people thrive and grow".

The core values of Coláiste Cholmcille are respect, fairness and personal growth. These values combine to provide and support an atmosphere which is conducive to excellence in teaching and learning. We endeavour to assist each student to reach their full potential in a calm, caring and creative environment.

Respect refers to the consideration shown towards a person or object based on their abilities, qualities, achievements, or inherent worth. It involves acknowledging and valuing the rights, feelings, and perspectives of others. Respect is crucial in CCBS because it nurtures a positive and inclusive environment, fosters healthy relationships, and contributes to the overall personal and social development of all stakeholders.

Fairness refers to the quality of making judgments that are free from discrimination, favoritism, and bias. It involves treating all individuals equitably, recognising their rights, and providing equal opportunities. It is grounded in principles of equality, transparency, and impartiality and is essential in CCBS because it builds trust, encourages positive behavior, enhances motivation, and develops ethical values. By fostering a fair environment, we can ensure that all stakeholders can succeed and thrive.

Personal Growth refers to the ongoing process of developing and improving oneself through experiences, learning, and self-reflection. It involves enhancing various aspects of one's life, including emotional, intellectual, and social capabilities. Personal growth is about striving to reach one's full potential, fostering self-awareness, and continually seeking to be a better version of oneself and is a core value at CCBS because it enhances self-awareness, encourages lifelong learning, builds resilience, improves emotional intelligence, fosters independence, boosts achievement, promotes positive relationships, supports a positive school culture, and prepares students for future success.

INTRODUCTION

The student council of the Coláiste Cholmcille has been in place for several years. We recognise the importance of the student voice in all areas of our school curriculum. As part of this process the following policy was prepared by the school after consultation with students, staff, parents and board of management hereby fulfilling the requirements of the 1998 Education Act, (Section 27).

SCOPE

A student council is a representative structure through which students in a post-primary school can become involved in the affairs of the school, working in partnership with school management and staff and parents for the benefit of the school and its students. The policy will apply to the establishment and operation of the student council in the school and to all students, teachers, board of management and other people involved in any way with the student council.

RATIONALE

• Students have a valuable contribution to make to the effectiveness of the school and active participation in an appropriate manner in the operation of the school is a valuable dimension of a student's educational experience; it provides preparation for citizenship and also fosters mature behaviour.

• A student council provides an opportunity for students to engage in a structured partnership with teachers, parents and school managers in the operation of their school. Research indicates that student councils can improve academic standards and reduce dropout rates in schools. Student councils can create a sense of ownership of the school and its activities among the student population.

• Section 27 of the Education Act, 1998 provides that students of a post-primary school may establish a student council and that Boards of Management shall encourage the establishment by students of a student council and shall facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to students who wish to establish a student council, and to student councils when they have been established.

• Section 27 also states that the rules for the establishment of a student council shall be drawn up by the board, in accordance with such guidelines as may be issued by the Minister from time to time, and such rules may provide for the election of members and the dissolution of a student council.

• The National Children's Strategy, published in 2000, emphasises the importance of student councils as a mechanism for giving young people a voice in schools.

• The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12

• Towards 2016 (Section 30 – Children) includes a commitment to promote "the establishment and operation of democratic student councils in schools, in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the National Children's Strategy".

OBJECTIVES

The policy is intended to support the establishment and operation of an effective student council in the school. The objectives of the student council may include:

• to represent the views of the students on matters of general concern to them;

• to support the management and staff in the development of the school;

• to enhance communication between students, management, staff and parents;

• to promote an environment conducive to educational and personal development;

• to promote friendship and respect among pupils;

• to contribute to the development of school policy;

• to nurture a range of important skills among students, such as participating in meetings, negotiating, responsible leadership and collaborative problem solving.

ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF STUDENT COUNCIL

Assisting the establishment and operation of a student council

- The Board of Management encourages and is obliged to assist students in the establishment of an operational student council; thus senior management are proactive and provide leadership to assist in getting the council underway. A student council liaison teacher will be responsible for the facilitation of the student council. This teacher is the link between the student council and management and will offer support and guidance to the council once it is established. If required, training will be provided for the student council liaison teacher.
- Minutes are kept of matters arising during council meetings and copies are issued to the Principal and school management, thus a conduit of communication is open at all times.
- The following publications will be useful in supporting student council members and in providing information to the student council liaison teacher and are made available to everyone associated with the student council.
  (a) Student Councils: A Voice for Students - includes information and support material on the operation of student councils
  (b) Student Council Resource Pack – includes information, support material and training modules on the operation of student councils
  (c) Student council members may also find it helpful to have a copy of the Student Council Diary, National Children's Office, 2006 (copies are available from the Office of the Minister for Children, Hawkins House, Dublin 2, Ph: (01) 6743219).

- Training/information will be provided as early as possible after the establishment of the council to help them understand and fulfil their role in the school.
- Other members of the school community will be informed of the work/progress of the student council by means of a dedicated notice board and regular updates at Board of Management, Parents' Association and staff meetings. Other media outlets may also be used to publicise the work of the council, e.g. newsletter, school magazine, school news in local newspapers, school website, school app etc.
- The student council may be consulted in the development/review of school policies (e.g. on bullying, substance use, relationships and sexuality education (RSE), internet

safety, school code of behaviour, uniform requirements etc.) and in the planning and organisation of school activities and events (e.g. sporting events, concerts, mentoring programmes for younger students, school newsletter/magazine, student award ceremonies, links with other schools etc.).

- The school actively encourages participation in the Co. Donegal Youth Council and these elected youth counsellors may offer advice and guidance to the newly elected school council.
- School management will facilitate all meetings and activities while remaining vigilant of causing as little disruption as possible to normal class activities.
- Minutes will be kept of the meeting and these will be circulated via email to all members.

Rules for the establishment of a student council

The rules for the establishment of a student council will have regard to the following basic principles:

- The student council shall promote the interests of the school and the involvement of students in the affairs of the school, in co-operation with the board of management, parents and teachers. The council should, as far as is practicable, be representative of each class or year group in the school.
- The board of management shall at all times retain the right to dissolve a council or remove a council member, in accordance with these guidelines.
- It should also be noted that the guidelines state that a student council should not through its activities interfere with, or detract from, the authority of school management or the teaching staff of the school. It is not a function of a student council to discuss or comment on matters relating to the employment or professional affairs of the principal, teachers and other staff of the school, or to become involved in any issues that fall within their professional competence.

The following rules will be followed when establishing a student council:

• There will be a minimum of 12 members on the council made up of two representatives from years 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and one representative each from the LCA. In addition there will be an automatic seat on the council for Head Boy and Head Girl.

• All students are entitled to put themselves forward for election, with the support of two nominees from their year. Each candidate will be given an opportunity to speak to his/her year group to express why they should be elected to the council.

• The Principal has the right to veto a nomination for the student council if he feels that a particular student may not be a suitable representative for the school due to a record of unsatisfactory behaviour.

• All students are allowed to vote for their chosen candidate from their year by secret ballot.

• Elections to be held as early as possible each school year during class time at the discretion of the principal.

• Students to hold office for one year, however to ensure continuity some members may serve a second consecutive term.

• Elected student council members are expected to attend all scheduled meetings. Students who miss three or more meetings will be asked to step down from the Council.

• If elected students do not attend 3 meetings in any one year then that student is removed from office and replaced by the nearest unsuccessful candidate from the initial elections.

• Any student council member who breaches the Code of Behaviour during their term of office may be dismissed from the student council.

• The student council will be guided by a student council liaison teacher and minutes and absenteeism will be duly recorded.

• The student council will be dissolved each June in preparation for new elections in the Autumn.

LINKS TO EXISTING SCHOOL POLICIES

This policy has close links with the following policies already in place

• Code of Behaviour

• Anti-Bullying

• Substance Use

• Child Protection

• Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

• Health and Safety

• Pastoral Care

• Guidance Plan

IMPLEMENTATION

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on….

.It will be implemented by the staff of Coláiste Cholmcille under the direction and guidance of the Principal. Senior management and the student council liaison teacher will oversee the implementation of the policy.

COMMUNICATION OF POLICY

This policy will be distributed to all staff, Parents and Board of Management via school website www.colaistecholmcille.ie

REVIEW/EVALUATION OF POLICY

When each student council reaches the end of their term they will be asked to fill in an evaluation for their year. This information will be used to guide the following student council.

This policy will be formally reviewed in May 2024.