

CARRIGTWOHILL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

STUDENT VOICE POLICY
BEARTAS GUTH NA MAC LÉINN

RATIFIED 15 APRIL 2021
REVIEWED AND RATIFIED 20 JANUARY 2022



In accordance with the terms of Section 27 of The Education Act 1998, the Board of Management of Carrigtwohill Community College has adopted the following Student Voice Policy. This policy fully complies with the guidelines published by the Department of Education and Science in 2002: Student Councils: A Voice for Students.

Relationship to School's Mission

Coláiste Pobail Charraig Thuathail is a post-primary school under the patronage of Cork Education and Training Board and under the trusteeship of the Diocese of Cloyne. The school's mission statement states that "Carrigtwohill Community College is a community of learning and teaching where all members have the opportunity and are encouraged to reach their potential, where talents are nurtured, and positive relationships fostered through mutual respect". A well-organised Student Council, combined with Class Councils, can facilitate & enable the achievement of the mission. Thus, the role of the Carrigtwohill Community College Comhairle is to help and assist the school community to live and fulfil the mission.

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 individual Year Group Council, comprising each class within each year group, aims to ensure student voice is heard on every level, and to ease the pressure off the school's Student Council.

This policy will apply to the establishment and operation of the Student Council and Year Group Councils in the school. It shall apply to students, teachers, Board of Management and others involved in any way with the Student Council.

Rationale

- Students can play a valuable role in enhancing the effectiveness of the school. Active participation, in an appropriate manner, in its operation is a valuable dimension of the student's educational experience providing preparation for citizenship while also fostering mature behaviour.
- Section 27 of the Education Act (1998) states that Boards of Management must encourage and give all reasonable assistance to students in the formation and running of student councils.
- The National Children's Strategy states that children and young people will have a voice in matters that affect their lives and will be provided with opportunities to participate in decision making.
- Every child shall have their voice heard, understood, and responded to.
- 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 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.

Goals & Objectives

Our Comhairle is an integral part of Carrigtwohill Community College. The policy is intended to support the establishment and operation of an effective Student Council in the school. The objectives of the Student Council are:

- To represent the views of the students on matters of general concern to them.
- To enhance communication between students, management, staff, and parents.
- To contribute to the development of school policy.
- To support the management and staff in the development of the school.
- Students involved in the running of the council should develop essential life skills, such as communication, co-operation, diplomacy amongst many others.
- To promote an environment conducive to educational and personal development.
- To promote friendship, respect and inclusion among pupils.
- To promote the use of Gaeilge across the school.
- To be involved with the planning and organising of school activities and events.
- To promote wellbeing and mental health within the college community.
- The students shall also make a positive contribution to every aspect of the school community.
- To nurture a range of important skills among students, such as participating in meetings, negotiating, responsible leadership and collaborative problem solving.

Our Year Group Councils are equally essential to the College and to the Comhairle to ensure no student's voice goes unheard.

The objectives of the Year Group Councils are:

- To represent the views of the students within their year (and otherwise) on matters of general concern to them.
- To promote an environment conducive to educational and personal development.
- To promote friendship and respect among pupils.
- To promote the use of Gaeilge across their year.
- To be involved with the planning and organising of class and year group specific activities and events.
- Students involved in the running of the council should develop essential life-skills, such as communication, co-operation, diplomacy amongst many others.
- To promote wellbeing and mental health within the college community.
- To inform the Student Council of their work and of motions relating to the whole student body on a monthly basis.
- To nurture a range of important skills among students, such as participating in meetings, negotiating, responsible leadership and collaborative problem solving.

Links to Other Policies and to Curriculum Delivery

This policy is consistent with Carrigtwohill Community College's Code of Behaviour and Anti Bullying Policy.

It links to the following Curriculum areas:

- Junior Cycle Civic Social Political Education (CSPE) Short Course: The short course in CSPE aims to inform, inspire, empower, and enable young people to participate as active citizens in contemporary society at local, national and global levels, based on an understanding of human rights and social responsibilities.
- Religious Education: The Religious Education curriculum teaches the important characteristics of Student Council members such as Roles & Responsibilities, Communication and Co-Operation.
- Junior Cycle SPHE/Senior Cycle RSE: Student's voice and interests are nurtured within this subject similarly to the Student Council.

Policy Content/Key Measures

Setting up a Student Council

Section 27 of the Education Act (1998) states that Boards of Management must encourage and give all reasonable assistance to students in the formation and running of student councils. As a result, in February 2017 the inaugural Student Council election was held and consequently the first Carrigtwohill Community College Student Council was formed.

Rules for the establishment of a Student Council

The rules for the establishment of a Comhairle and Year Group Councils will have regard to the following basic principles:

- The Comhairle shall promote the interests of the whole school and the involvement of students in the affairs of the school, in co-operation with the Board of Management, parents/guardians and teachers.
- Both councils shall, as far as is practicable, be representative of each 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.

N.B. 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, nor of any Year Group 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.

In accordance with the guidelines, the rules should cover the following areas:

1. Establishing the Student Council / Year Group Councils
2. Size and composition of the Student Council / Year Group Councils
3. Nominations and Elections
4. First Meeting
5. Constitution/Policy
6. Removal of a Member
7. Procedure for filling a vacancy in the councils
8. Dissolution of the Student Council / Year Group Council

Dissolution of the Student Council

- The dissolution of all councils shall take place early in the first school half-term annually.
- The Cathaoirleach and the Rúnaí shall summon the council within this time and call on the dissolution of the Comhairle.
- The Rúnaí shall write a formal letter to the Príomhoide (to the relevant Year Head in the case of Year Group Councils) seeking the dissolution of the council on the advice of the unanimous decision made by the members at the meeting referred to in the previous point.

Student Council Election Procedure

- The Student Council shall comprise of 10 students (2 students from 2nd to 6th year) with an advisory member from the 1st Year group council sitting with them on rotation.
- Elections shall take place in early autumn each year to allow for the Student Council to sit after the October Mid-Term Break.
- The outgoing representatives shall organise and run the ballot.
- 2nd – 6th years elect two students, 1 male & 1 female (in the event of no candidate of a gender then the two candidates with the highest number of votes are elected), to represent them on the Student Council.

- Each student interested in representing their year at Student Council must nominate themselves through their Class Teacher who will then email the Rúnaí with names of students who wish to run for election.
- Once names have been ratified by the Council, students can start their campaign, which would include an address to their year during SPHE/RSE class to outline the reasons they should be elected.
- Students will then be able to vote via confidential online voting platform for their chosen candidate. Each year shall have a day for when they will vote, e.g., Monday – 2nd Year, Tuesday – 3rd Year, etc. The Rúnaí, with assistance if required, collects and counts these votes and results are announced using a school-wide notification platform e.g. assembly, intercom, notice boards, etc.
- At the start of the year, Student Council members shall pair or 'buddy' with an incoming First Year Class to make them feel welcomed and also to explain the Student Council system and encourage them to put themselves up for election. (Student Council Members are assigned to one or more 1st Year class)

Year Group Council (YGC) Election procedure

- Each YGC is made up of 1 student from each class in that Year known as a Class Captain.
- Elections shall take place after the October Mid-Term Break each year to allow for the Incoming Student Council to organise and run the ballot for their year's YGC.
- A student may not be on both the Student Council and a YGC. However, students who are unsuccessful in their campaign for the Student Council may run for their year's YGC if they so wish.
- Each student interested in representing their class at the YGC must nominate themselves through their Class Teacher who will then email the incoming Rúnaí with names of students who wish to run for election.
- Once names have been ratified, students can start their campaign, which would include an address to their year group during SPHE/RSE class to outline the reasons they should be elected.
- Students will then be able to vote on official ballot paper or via confidential online voting system for their chosen candidate within their class.

The Student Council at Work

- The council shall be composed of 10 Members from 2nd – 6th year along with an advisory member from the 1st Year YGC on rotation and the Student Council Liaison Staff Member chosen by the staff at the start of the academic year to aid the council and to act as a link between the council and staff.
- Meetings shall be held fortnightly, one of which will be just the elected students and one with the Student Council Liaison Staff Member present.
- Internal positions shall be filled after the election by an internal council vote. Such positions shall include:
 - Cathaoirleach (Chairperson)
 - Rúnaí (Secretary)
 - Leas Cathaoirleach (Vice Chairperson)
 - Rúnaí Cúnta (Assistant Secretary)
 - Oifigeach na Gaeilge agus Cultúr
 - other roles deemed necessary at the time such as OCP (PRO), Cisteoir (Treasurer).
- Student Council Mission Statement and Constitution will be drawn up by the council, job descriptions will also be clarified.
- Attendance is essential and required unless valid explanation can be provided not less than two days prior to a meeting; any representatives who miss three consecutive meetings can be removed from the council and a replacement representative is then sought by way of a re-election.
- Feedback/summary shall be given from each meeting to class groups during SPHE or assembly.
- Feedback meetings shall be organised with the college's BoM on a regular basis throughout the school year.

The Year Group Council at Work

- Meetings shall be held fortnightly, one of which will be just the elected students and one with a class teacher from that year group and/or year head present on rotation.
- Internal positions shall be filled after the election by internal council vote. Such positions shall include:
 - Cathaoirleach (Chairperson)
 - Rúnaí (Secretary)
 - Leas Cathaoirleach (Vice Chairperson)
 - Rúnaí Cúnta (Assistant Secretary)
 - Oifigeach ISSU
 - Oifigeach na Gaeilge agus Cultúr
 - other roles deemed necessary at the time
- Attendance is essential and required unless valid explanation can be provided not less than two days prior to a meeting, any representatives who miss three consecutive meetings can be removed from the council and a replacement representative is then sought.
- Feedback/summary should be given from each meeting to class groups via Class Captain during SPHE or assembly.

Agenda Setting:

- Topics must come through the Student Council/YGC members and must then be submitted via email to the Rúnaí a week before the meeting so that an agenda can be formatted and forwarded to the relevant recipients.

Meetings

- Once the agenda has been set, minutes of the previous meeting are adopted (by being read out by the Rúnaí and being proposed and seconded by Council member) and signed. Then, items are discussed at the meeting.
- Cathaoirleach takes responsibility for the running of the meeting.
- Minutes are recorded by the Rúnaí and signed off at the beginning of the following meeting.
- Decisions are reached by a vote, carried by a simple majority. In case of a split vote, the Cathaoirleach shall take all the information and make a final decision. Sensitive matters should be kept confidential- a 'ballot' will be held in place of the usual "show of hands." Any council member can request that a vote take place via secret ballot at any time. In the case of the Student Council, 1st year Class Captain shall be advisory only and not take part in the voting process.
- The Student Council Liaison Teacher (Class Tutor/Year Head in the case of YGC) present at each meeting can clarify certain issues.
- Other issues are normally brought before the Principal through the medium of a typed letter from the Rúnaí describing the issue.

Responding to Issues

- In the case of issues brought from Year Group Councils to Student Council, a delegate from the YGC in question may attend the Student Council meeting in order to present/discuss issues with the Council.
- In the case of issues brought from the Year Group Council to designated Class Tutor/Year Head, a committee (organised by the Comhairle) comprised of all Class Tutors and Year Head for that year discuss issues in question.
- In the case of issues brought from Student Council to management, the Principal and Deputy Principal (and other members of teaching staff should management see fit) discuss issues brought before them by the Student Council and respond accordingly.
- Certain issues can be brought before the entire staff if deemed necessary.

Roles and Responsibilities

Students should:

- Participate fully in the Student Council and/or Year Group Council.
- Nominate suitable candidates to represent their year.
- Discuss genuine issues in a constructive manner.
- Support the work of council representatives.

Elected representatives shall:

- Represent their year in a mature and constructive manner.
- Attend all meetings.
- Make a genuine effort to improve the school for each other.
- Work to become positive role models for the rest of the student body.
- Provide feedback to stakeholders.

Parents/Guardians should:

- Encourage students to participate in the Student Council and/ or Year Group Council.

Teachers should:

- Facilitate students in participating fully in school planning and decision making.

Class Tutors should:

- Attend Year Group Council meetings in rotation.
- Encourage full class participation.
- Facilitate nominations.
- Sign off on prospective candidates.
- Allow elections to be held during SPHE class.
- Allocate time during SPHE class and to allow council representatives to inform students of council happenings and to take items for the agenda.
- Regularly publicise student council events and initiatives by reminding students of such events during assembly.

Year Heads should:

- Attend Year Group Council meetings on rotation or alongside of class teachers.
- Encourage full year participation.

Principal/Deputy Principal should:

- Respond to any queries or issues brought before them by the Student Council.
- Encourage and promote the student council and year group council.

Removal of a Member

The following is the procedure for the removal of a member should these situations unfold:

- A member doesn't comply with the roles and responsibilities (as outlined above) of the elected representatives.
- Persistent unexplained absence from meetings (where persistent absence is deemed as three meetings).

Where such criteria are met and a unanimous decision is made by fellow Council members in conjunction with the Student Liaison Staff Member (or Year Head in case of Year Group Council), then a member shall be removed from the council. Following this, and in agreement with the BoM, the Council shall organise a ballot for that year to elect a new representative. In the event of a unanimous decision not being met,

a letter shall be sent to the Board of Management (Committee of Class Tutors and Year Head in case of Year Group Council) highlighting the reasons for removal in which case the Board (or committee) shall decide.

Success Criteria

The success of this policy can be judged by student's involvement and attitude towards Student Voice. Improvements should be seen in relation to academic performance, the reduction of bullying and vandalism and an overall improvement in student-teacher relations. Also, students should feel that their voice is being heard & that the Student Council and the Year Group Council are having a positive effect on everyday school life and activities.

It is important for the effective operation of the Student Council and the Year Group Council that relevant training and information is provided to its members to ensure an understanding of the roles within the Council while providing information and support material on the operation of same. This could be provided by the Student Council liaison teacher, former senior members of the Student Council or from outside trainers. The Student Council Resource Pack and Student Council: A Voice for Students booklet are also pivotal in ensuring the understanding of the roles in the council while providing information and support material on the operation of Student Councils. These elements are essential in ensuring that the Student Council successfully fulfil their responsibilities.

Policy Review

The Board of Management shall undertake an annual review of the College's Student Voice Policy and its implementation in accordance with Section 27 of The Education Act 1998.


The Board of Management shall ensure that an action plan is put in place to address any areas for improvement identified by the annual review.


Written notification that the review has been completed shall be made available to school personnel, published on the school website, and provided to the Parents' Association.

Details of the review and its outcome shall be recorded in the minutes of the Board of Management meeting and made available, if requested, to the Patron and the DES. In the case of the DES, it is appreciated that the Inspectorate will place a strong focus on the actions the College takes to create a strong, engaging and committed Comhairle na nDaltaí.

Communication of Policy

A copy of this policy will be provided upon request from the secretary's office. It will also be published on the College's website.

Sínithe: 
(Cathaoirleach an Bord Bainistíochta)

Sínithe: 
(Príomhoide)

Dáta: 20/01/22

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This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on

15 April 2021

This policy was reviewed and ratified by the Board of Management on

20 January 2022

Dáta an chéad athbhreithnithe eile:

January 2023