



Coláiste Mhuire, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath

Student Council Policy 2023



Introductory Statement

The student council of Coláiste Mhuire was reinstated during the 2020-2021 school year. As part of this process the following policy was prepared by the school after consultation with staff, students, 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 of Management, 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 highlights the importance of the voice of the child and that this voice should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School

Mission Statement

Coláiste Mhuire is committed to excellence. We provide a caring and disciplined environment in which all students are challenged to reach their academic and personal potential.

School Mission

The Board of Management, parents, staff and students, working together as a school community within the resources available, aim to provide a Catholic education in the best possible environment to cater for the cultural, educational, moral, physical, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions of all its students.

Coláiste Mhuire is committed to excellence. The school provides a caring and disciplined environment in which all students are challenged to reach their academic and personal potential.

We show special concern for the disadvantaged and we make every effort to ensure that the uniqueness and dignity of each person is respected, and responded to, especially through the pastoral care system in the school.

We realise too that we must cater for the changing needs of today's world and, towards that end, we frequently review our various programmes.

Being keenly aware of the ever-increasing effect of outside influences on the lives of our students, we are even more concerned to maintain Catholic values and practices.

School Vision Statement

To foster the confidence in our students and teachers to develop their talents and abilities.

To pursue academic excellence.

To respect the diversity of our student body.

To encourage our students to be positive in their outlook on life and to make a positive contribution to their school and society.

To prepare students for further education and the world of work.

To develop in students a respect and appreciation of Christian values and other world religions and cultures.

To nurture the values of tolerance, inclusion and care within the school and wider community.

Characteristic Spirit

Coláiste Mhuire is a Catholic all boys voluntary secondary school with a Catholic ethos under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust.

‘Catholic Ethos’ in the context of a Catholic voluntary secondary school means the ethos and characteristic spirit of the Roman Catholic Church, which aims at promoting:

a) the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person of the pupil, including the intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual aspects; and

(b) a living relationship with God and with other people; and

(c) a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; and

(d) the formation of the pupils in the Catholic faith, and which school provides religious education in accordance with the doctrines, practices and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, and/or such ethos and/or characteristic spirit as may be determined or interpreted from time to time by the Irish Episcopal Conference.

In accordance with S.15 (2) (b) of the Education Act, 1998 the Board of Management of Coláiste Mhuire shall uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school.

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 include:

- to represent the views of the student body and to give them a voice 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 the Student Council

Assisting the establishment and operation of a student council

The Board of Management through the Principal 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.

- Student Councils: A Voice for Students - includes information and support material on the operation of student councils
- Student Council Resource Pack – includes information, support material and training modules on the operation of student councils
- 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 in the main assembly area 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. school newsletter, school yearbook, school news in local newspapers, social media platforms and school website.

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 Comhairle na nÓg which may provide the student council members advice and guidance.

School management will facilitate all meetings and activities while remaining vigilant of causing as little disruption as possible to normal class activities. Student council meetings will be held during lunch break.

Guidelines for the establishment of a student council

The guidelines 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 cooperation 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 guidelines will be followed when establishing a student council:

1. Democratic elections to be held in each class group/year, dependent on the number of members needed from a particular year group. The appropriateness for each prospective member may be assessed by Principal/Deputy Principal/student council liaison teacher/yearheads and/or tutor.
2. Students to hold office for one year, however to ensure continuity some members may serve a second consecutive term.
3. Elected student council members are expected to attend all scheduled meetings.
4. If elected students do not attend 3 meetings in any one year then that student may be removed from office..
5. Any student council member who breaches the Code of Behaviour during their term of office may be dismissed from the student council.
6. The student council will be guided by a student council liaison teacher and minutes and absenteeism will be duly recorded.
7. The student council will be dissolved each June in preparation for new elections in the Autumn.
 - a. All students are allowed to vote for their chosen candidate from their year by secret ballot.
 - b. Elections to be held as early as possible each school year during class time at the discretion of the Principal/Deputy Principal/student council liaison teacher.

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 Safeguarding Statement

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

Health and Safety

Guidance Plan

Communication on Policy

This policy will be distributed to all staff via the Shared Drive and to members of the Parents' Association and Board of Management via email. It will also be available to view online on our school website; www.cbsmullingar.ie

Review and evaluation of the 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 student council in its structure and operations.



Coláiste Mhuire An Muileann gCearr

Student Council Policy



The Board of Management formally adopted this policy on the 4th. May 2023.

Signed: _____

Ms. Moira Mahon
Chairperson of the Board of Management

Date: _____



Iontaobhas Scoileanna Éamainn Rís
Edmund Rice Schools Trust