COLÁISTE BHAILE CHLÁIR

STUDENT COUNCIL POLICY

ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

24 September 2018

Approved by Galway & Roscommon Education & Training Board

11 DECEMBER 2018

THIS POLICY HAS BEEN PREPARED IN CONSULTATION WITH PARENTS, STUDENT COUNCIL, STAFF, THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT AND GALWAY AND ROSCOMMON EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARD

1. Introduction and Scope of this Policy:

Coláiste Bhaile Chláir is a post-primary school providing post-primary education to pupils from First Year to Leaving Certificate Year.

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 Coláiste Bhaile Chláir. The policy will apply to students, teachers, board of management and others involved in any way with the student council in Coláiste Bhaile Chláir.

2. Rationale:

The following sets out the rationale for the establishment of a Student Council in Coláiste Bhaile Chláir.

- 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 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

- DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion specifies that all second-level schools participating in the School Support Programme (SSP) need to have a student council in operation to support engagement between school staff and students in the process of

planning for the effective implementation of SSP measures.

- 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".

- Looking at our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post Primary Schools states that leadership and management should "foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each student". With this in mind, the board of management and principal should "foster students' holistic development by providing a very broad range of curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular learning opportunities". The provision of a student council is one such learning opportunity.

3. Relationship to Coláiste Bhaile Chláir's Vision Statement:

The schools Vision statement "Together We Will Achieve" reflects the hopes for our school and students where each of us wishes to achieve to the best of our ability, while acknowledging that this can ultimately be better achieved through partnership.

The schools Mission statement reflects how we will achieve this vision by Caring, Developing, Praising and Believing in our students and by empowering them to also take personal responsibility for their growth and development.

The Student Council will embody this vision and mission through the help of the board of management, management and leadership team in Coláiste Bhaile Chláir and facilitating teachers.

4. Goals:

This policy will support the establishment and operation of an effective student council in Coláiste Bhaile Chláir. The objectives of the student council are:

- to represent the student voice on matters of general concern to student in Coláiste Bhaile Chláir;
- 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 policies;
- to nurture a range of important skills among students, such as participating in meetings, negotiating, responsible leadership and collaborative problem solving.
- To develop leadership and organisational skills through the research, planning, organisation and implementation of a whole school project to be decided upon by each individual student council at the beginning of each year. Projects may include, but are not limited to areas such as:

- Charity fundraisers
- Mental health awareness campaigns
- Physical improvement of the school
- Community improvement projects

5. Key Measures:

A. Assisting the establishment and operation of the student council in Coláiste Bhaile Chláir

The board of management will encourage and assist in the establishment of a student council in Coláiste Bhaile Chláir.

Where students notify the board of management that they wish to establish a student council, the board should provide them, in a timely manner, with the rules it has drawn up for the establishment of the council (see section B below).

Where students have not yet taken the initiative to establish a student council, the board of management, acting through the principal and teaching staff should encourage, facilitate and assist students in doing so by, for example, providing information on the role and potential benefits of a council. Management could also provide a room for students to organise the establishment of the council, or allow elections to take place in class time, where this does not seriously disrupt normal classroom work.

When a student council has been established, the board of management is obliged to facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to it. This may include the following:

- The appointment of a student council liaison teacher as a non-voting member of the student council to provide assistance to the council and to act as the link between the council and teachers and management.

- Providing information and training to student council members: It is important for the effective operation of the student council that relevant training and information is provided to its members. This could be provided by the student council liaison teacher and/or former senior members of the student council. The Student Council Resource Pack provides a useful sample training programme, divided into the following three modules:
  - Module 1: Setting up a new student council.
  - Module 2: Basic student council training.
  - Module 3: Advanced student council training.

- Providing information about the student council to other members of the school community: The provision of information about the student council is important for students not on the student council, teachers, principal, members of the board of management and parents e.g. CSPE teachers could provide training to students on different aspects of the student council as the need arises, such as before the election of the council.

- Supporting the activities of the student council and facilitating regular communication between the student council and the school community generally.

- Involving the student council in the development 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.).

- Consulting the student council and responding in a meaningful way to the concerns of the council.

The following two publications will be useful in supporting student council members and in providing information to the student council liaison teacher:

- 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

B. Rules for the establishment of a student council

The Education Act, 1998 provides that a board of management of a post-primary school shall draw up rules for the establishment of a student council and that these rules should be in accordance with the guidelines on student councils issued by the Minister for Education and Science, Student Councils: A Voice for Students.

In accordance with the guidelines, 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.

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

1. Establishing the student council:

- a new student council will be established every September.
- The term of office for any student council is from September to September the following year.

2. Size and composition of the student council:

- the student council will consist of one representative from each class, to include a representative from each LCA class and a representative from the ASD Unit.
- The executive committee of the student council will consist of a Chairperson, Vice-chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and P.R.O. and will consist of students from senior classes (please see Appendix 1 for description of roles of officers).
- The student council will strive for an appropriate gender balance on the council.
- The council will also have a non-voting Student Council Liaison Teacher. The liaison teacher will fulfil an advisory role and help facilitate the running of meetings.

3. Nominations and Elections:

- elections for student council members will take place by the end of September of any given year.
- Elections will take the form of a secret ballot.
- The voting system applied will be first past the post.
- Every student in the school will be entitled to run for election.
- Each class will have the opportunity to nominate and vote for one student to represent their class on the student council.
- In as far as possible, elections will take place in S.P.H.E. classes over the space of one week.
- The counting of votes will be carried out by the supervising teacher that carried out the vote. That teacher will fill in an election result returns form and promptly return it to the Student Council Liaison teacher.
- In exceptional circumstances, where a class representative has been nominated whose behaviour, or past behaviour, does not align with the goals of the student council the Board of Management, at its discretion, may make the provision for the Principal or Student Council Liaison Teacher to veto the nomination. Where a veto is exercised, those exercising the veto must explain clearly to students the basis for their decision, and students will be given an opportunity to respond.

4. First Meeting:

- the first meeting of the student council will take place the week after all representatives have been elected.

5. Constitution:

- in consultation with the Board of Management, the student council will devise a constitution to govern its meetings and affairs.
- the constitution will outline the role of officers of the executive committee
- The Principal and Board of Management will be required to ratify the constitution and approve any changes to the constitution.

6. Procedure for filling a vacancy in the council:

- should a vacancy arise in the council the class will be asked to elect a new representative via secret ballot.
- The vote will be carried out in S.P.H.E. classes, in as far as possible.
- The newly elected class representative will serve for the remainder of the term of office of the student council.

7. Removal of a Member:

- The student council may propose to remove any member for the following reasons:
    - after three unexplained absences from meetings
    - should they demonstrate a lack of commitment to the purposes of the student council
    - if their behaviour does not align with the goals of the student council policy, or if they break the rules of the student council constitution.
- The member in question will be given one week's notice of the proposal to remove them from the council, the reasons for and will be given opportunity to present their case at the prior to proposal for removal.
- The Board of Management, acting on the advice of the Principal, or acting on its' own

8. Dissolution of the student council:

- the current council will dissolve upon the election of a new council in September of each academic year.
- Should the Board of Management deem it necessary, they may decide to decide to dissolve the student council before the expiry of its term.
- Dissolution will only in specified circumstances and on grounds of a significantly serious nature, such as:
    - where a significant number of the Council members have been involved in a serious breach of the school's code of behaviour
    - where serious irregularities have occurred in the election of the Council
    - where the activities of the Council have endangered the welfare of staff or students of the school
    - where serious financial irregularities have occurred
- Where the Board is considering the dissolution of the Council before the due date, the Board should seek the views of the staff of the school and the Parents' Association prior to making a decision.

- Adequate notice will be given to the Council, and the reasons for the dissolution clearly explained.
- The Student Council will be given the opportunity to appeal the decision to the Board of Management or patron, in accordance with established local appeals procedures.
- If a student council has been dissolved a new council may be elected. However, if the Student Council is dissolved less than 6 school weeks prior to the end of the school year, the election of a new Council will be left until the following school year.

6. Links to School Policies and to Curriculum Delivery:

In reading this Student Council Policy the following policies of Coláiste Bhaile Chláir should be considered:

- Code of Behaviour
- Anti-Bullying
- Substance Use
- Child Safeguarding
- Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)
- Health and Safety
- Guidance Plan
- Attendance
- Dignity at Work
- Data Protection

This policy links the following curricular areas:

- CSPE
- SPHE
- History
- English
- Irish
- Geography

7. Implementation Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities:

This Policy will be implemented in _____ 2018.

The Board of Management, Senior Management and Student Council Liaison Teacher of Coláiste Bhaile Chláir will implement this policy when establishing ang supporting the Student Council.

Student's, student council members and parents/ guardians also have a responsibility to follow this policy.

8. Monitoring the implementation of the policy:

The implementation of Coláiste Bhaile Chláir's Student Council Policy will be carried out by the the Student Council itself, Student Council Liaison Teacher, Senior Management and the Board of Management.

9. Review and Evaluation of the Policy:

The policy will be review 1 year after implementation. Thereafter, it will be reviewed by the board of management once every four years. Any staff member who is unhappy with the content or the implementation of this school policy may request a review at any time and such a request will be dealt with as quickly as possible. The Student Council may request a formal review at any time and such a request will be dealt with as quickly as possible by the Board of Management. The Parents' Council may request a formal review at any time and such a request will be dealt with as quickly as possible by the Board of Management

The review and evaluation will take account of:

- the effectiveness of the student council as perceived by students, student council liaison teacher, other teachers, members of the board of management, principal, parents/guardians.
- the involvement of the student council in school affairs
- students' awareness of the activities of the student council
- principal, board of management, teachers' awareness of the activities of the student council
- the student council's achievement of its goals and objectives
- constructive feedback received from teachers, students, parents/guardians.

The review and evaluation of the student council may be carried out through:

- a confidential survey of students, staff and parents
- feedback from the student council itself
- suggestion box.

Appendix 1

(Extract from: Department of Education and Science (2002) *Student Council: A Voice for Students*)

THE WORK OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL

The work of the Student Council

The Student Council as a whole has responsibility for:

- Working with the staff, Board of Management and Parents' Association in the school
- Communicating and consulting with all of the students in the school
- Involving as many students as possible in the activities of the Council
- Planning and managing the Council's programme of activities for the year
- Managing and accounting for any funds raised by the Council

Planning and Managing the Work

While the Student Council members all have a part to play in the activities of the Council, not all can or need to be involved in organising the work. It is for this reason that the Council should appoint officers. It may also decide to establish subcommittees.

Officers

Every Student Council should appoint a Chairperson or President, a Treasurer and a Secretary. In some schools a President may be appointed by election. The Student Council may also choose to appoint a Deputy Chairperson and a Public Relations Officer. The role of each of these officers is outlined below, and each will normally hold office for the school year.

Subcommittees

Rather than trying to plan and organise every activity during the year, a Student Council may find that it is more effective to use subcommittees to plan and oversee specific Council activities. Subcommittees should be required to submit their plan to the Council for approval and should report back to the Council on their activities. One area where a subcommittee might be useful is a fundraising subcommittee. It is a matter for the Council to decide how many members of the Council will sit on a subcommittee and the Council may choose to dissolve a subcommittee at any time. The Student Council's constitution should provide a clear framework for the operation of subcommittees.

The role of the Officers

Chairperson
The Chairperson is responsible for presiding over meetings of the Council. The Chairperson, with the Secretary, prepares the agenda for each meeting and, where necessary, signs the minutes (see below) once they have been agreed by the Council.

Where a vote is held at a Council meeting, and the votes are divided equally, the Chairperson generally has the casting vote. The Chairperson may also be designated to represent the Council at meetings with school management.

Deputy Chairperson
The Deputy Chairperson is responsible for assisting the Chairperson, and when the Chairperson is absent from a meeting s/he assumes the role of the Chairperson for that meeting.

Secretary
The Secretary, with the Chairperson, prepares the agenda for each meeting and the Secretary then circulates it to all the members of the Council either in advance of the meeting or at the start of the meeting. This will involve consulting with the other Council officers in order to decide what will be included on the agenda. All agendas should include a provision for 'Any other business'; this allows Council members to raise a matter for discussion in the event that it has not been included on the agenda. The Secretary also keeps a record of Council meetings and any decisions taken by the Council (the minutes). If necessary these minutes can be circulated to all members of the Council either with the agenda for the next meeting or at the start of the next meeting. The Council can be given the opportunity to make any changes to the minutes before they are signed by the Chairperson.

Treasurer
The Treasurer is responsible for managing any funds raised by the Student Council and should keep a complete account of all income and expenditure of the Council. Advice and assistance in this regard may be provided by school management or a teacher acting on its behalf. The Treasurer should provide the Council with a complete financial report at the end of the school year. Given the responsibility of the post, a Student Council may reasonably require the Treasurer to be a Senior Cycle student. As a general rule any payments made by the Treasurer should be countersigned or endorsed by another member of the Council or a teacher designated for this purpose.

Public Relations Officer
A Student Council may wish to appoint a Public Relations or Communications Officer with responsibility for promoting good communications between the Council and the student body as well as consulting with teachers, parents and school management on issues affecting the student body.

Communication
Regular, effective communication is the key to success for any Student Council. This doesn't happen by itself and it is a good idea to develop ways of keeping the school community informed of and involved in the various activities planned by the Student Council. Some examples include:

- producing a student newsletter
- providing updates to the Board of Management, Principal, staff and Parents' Association on the Student Council's activities and plans
- keeping a student notice-board in the school where information on the Council's activities is posted

- announcing upcoming events at assembly/roll call
- providing an end of year report to the Board of Management

The Council may wish to appoint a Public Relations or Communications Officer to take on these responsibilities.

Communication between the Council and students

The Student Council represents all students in the school. It is very important that students receive regular information on the plans and activities of the Student Council and that as many students as possible participate in events organised by the Council. Each member of the Council has a special responsibility to the class or year group which elected him/her, and should ensure that their views are brought to the attention of the Council and that they remain fully informed of the Council's activities.

Procedures should be put in place to ensure that all students are fully informed about Council activities. One way of ensuring this would be to provide for regular meetings between individual members of the Student Council and the classes they represent. The Council could also carry out a survey of student views on particular issues, or on the role of the Council itself.

Communication between the Council and the School Community

Regular communication between the Student Council and school management, staff and parents provides the basis for building a good and lasting relationship, based on trust and respect, between students and the rest of the school community. Much can be achieved where all members of the school community work together towards common goals, and good communication is vital if a common understanding is to be reached on what those goals are, and how best to achieve them.

Good communication doesn't simply mean keeping the school management, teaching staff or Parents' Association informed of planned activities; it also involves seeking their views and suggestions. It means consulting with, and sharing ideas with the school management, staff and Parents' Association, listening to their suggestions and making sure that all sections of the school community understand the purpose and goals of the Student Council.

Having a teacher attend meetings of the Council on a regular basis also helps to improve communications and this may be provided for in the Board of Management rules. Also, the Principal may wish to address the Council from time to time on key issues affecting the school community.

Promotion of Gaeilge

The Student Council can help to promote the use of Irish in the school by conducting parts of its meetings through Irish, by using its Irish title or by including Irish language articles in its newsletter. It may wish to appoint an Irish officer to promote the development of Irish within the school.