



Ballyfin National School,
Knocknakearn,
Ballyfin,
County Laois.
R32 N920

Roll No.15537E
Charity No. 20126001

057 - 8755225
office@ballyfinns.ie

Student Council Policy

Introduction

This Student Council Policy was formulated by the following staff attendance at a Wellbeing seminar in November 2023, and following discussion by the whole staff at a Croke Park hour later that month. The policy was drafted with reference to *Student Councils: A Voice for Students* (2002) and in consultation with the staff and Board of Management of the school.

Definition of a student council:

A Student Council is a representative structure through which students in a 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.

Rationale for the establishment of a Student Council

- The establishment of a Student Council in Ballyfin National School will support and promote *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, e.g. Article 12 ‘I have the right to be listened to, and taken seriously.’
- 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 management in the operation of their school. Student Councils can create a sense of ownership of the school and its activities among the student population.
- 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.
- Section 27 of the *Education Act, 1998* provides for the establishment of Student Councils in second level schools. The spirit of this section will be applied to the primary school context as appropriate.

Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the school

The ultimate aspiration of Ballyfin NS is to prepare our students to live content and happy lives. Pupils are encouraged, affirmed, given responsibility and provided with opportunities to experience success. The Student Council will offer students opportunities to take responsibility and to work collaboratively with the whole school community for the benefit of the school and its students.

Ballyfin NS seeks to empower each child to contribute their talents and skills to their local community and to society in general. The Student Council will encourage, support and scaffold students into using and developing their talents and skills for the benefit of the school community.

The Student Council will provide a framework through which to promote and maintain a sense of fairness, mutual respect and genuine effort.

Objectives/Goals

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 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 democratic processes, meetings, negotiation, responsible leadership and collaborative problem solving.

Board of Management assistance and support for the Student Council

The Board of Management, acting through the principal, teaching staff and the Parents' Association will encourage, facilitate and assist students in establishing a Student Council by for example, providing information on the role and potential benefits of a Council.

Management will provide a space for students to organise the establishment of the Council, and elections will be allowed to take place in class time, as long as this does not seriously disrupt normal classroom work.

When a Student Council has been established, the Board of Management and Parents' Association will agree 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 members of the Student Council to provide assistance to the council and to act as a link between the Council and staff
- 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 Parents' Association representative. The [Student Council Resource Pack](#) is a second level programme, but might be adaptable in some parts for the primary school context. It is divided into three modules:
 - Module 1: Setting up a new Student Council.
 - Module 2: Basic Student Council training.
 - Module 3: Advanced Student Council training.
- 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. 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 consultation about school policies (e.g. anti-bullying, internet safety, healthy lunches, school code of behaviour, uniform etc.) as appropriate, and in the planning and organisation of school activities and events (e.g. sporting events, concerts, mentoring programmes for younger students, school newsletter, 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 may be useful in supporting Student Council members and in providing information to the Student Council liaison teacher/ Parents' Association representative:

- [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).*

Underlying principles of the Student Council

This document establishes the rules under which the Student Council shall operate, having regard to the following principles:

- The Student Council will promote the interests of the school and the involvement of students in the affairs of the school, in co-operation with the Board, parents and teachers.
- The Student Council should, as far as is practicable, be representative of each class group in the school.
- The Board of Management shall at all times retain the right to dissolve a Student Council or remove a Student Council member.
- The Student Council shall 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.
- It is not the function of a Student Council to become involved in individual complaints or disciplinary matters. Such matters are to be addressed through the agreed procedures as outlined in the Code of Behaviour/ Complaints Procedure.
- The Student Council cannot permit discussions of a personal or derogatory nature about school staff, pupils or others at its meetings.

If the rules under which the Student Council is to operate are amended, students will be provided with details of these amendments in a timely manner.

Rules of the Student Council:

Size and composition:

The Student Council will consist of at least eight student members (one from each class in the school), and a non-voting teacher liaison member.

Nominations and elections

The principal will set a date for the election of members to the Student Council for the forthcoming academic year, normally before the end of September.

The teacher liaison member is appointed by the principal.

Each member shall be elected for the duration of the school year only.

All students from 1st -6th class will normally be entitled to stand for election to the council. Pupils may self-nominate, but will be expected to make the case for their election to their classmates. Negative comments about other candidates will not be permitted.

Voting by secret ballot will take place during class time at a time decided by the class teacher. The counting of votes will take place under the supervision of a member of staff of the school or of the Parents' Association or a representative of the board of management.

Typically one member will be elected per class level, and in the case of a tie the winner will be drawn by lot. The teacher nominee and principal may decide, in some circumstances, to allow the second placed candidate from a particular class take an additional place on the council e.g. to ensure an adequate skill set etc.

A proposed nominee who has previously been removed from the Student Council shall not be eligible for re-election to it. The principal reserves the right to veto the nomination of a candidate where serious concerns exist about the capacity of that pupil to contribute effectively to the Student Council, or where negative campaigning has taken place.

Junior and Senior Infant members of the Student Council will be selected in consultation with their class teacher.

Meetings

The first meeting of a newly formed student council will take place as soon as possible after the conclusion of elections. Thereafter, meetings take place on a monthly basis, in so far as practicable.

A chairperson and secretary are appointed at the first meeting (usually the 5th and 6th class members). A formal agenda is to be prepared for each meeting by the chairperson and secretary, and the secretary records the minutes of each meeting. The minutes book of the Student Council is to be stored in the school.

Procedures for filling vacancies

Where a vacancy arises on the council the class group concerned should hold a further election for the election of a candidate who will serve for the remainder of the term of office of the council.

Constitution

At the first meeting of the Student Council the members will formulate a Student Council Constitution, which is in accordance with this policy and which briefly outlines, in child friendly terms, the rules under which the Student Council operates. This Constitution will be submitted to the Board of Management for approval.

The Constitution may be reviewed at the first meeting of the newly elected Student Council each year, or when an amendment is determined to be necessary in light of experience. Each reviewed Constitution is to be submitted to the Board of Management.

Removal of a member

The teacher liaison may, with the agreement of the principal, remove any member of the Student Council for continuing failure to attend meetings without valid excuse, for a demonstrated lack of commitment to the purposes of the Student Council, for refusing to comply with the rules laid down in the Student Council Constitution or for a breach of the School Code of Behaviour such that their continued membership of the Student Council is untenable.

In cases where a majority of members of the Student Council have been removed, or where the Student Council as a body has acted in breach of its own rules, the Student Council may be dissolved by the teacher liaison and the Parents' Association representative, with the agreement of the principal.

The principal and Board of Management reserve the right to ensure that the over-arching concerns of the school with regard to Health and Safety, Child Protection and the School Code of Behaviour are upheld and nothing in this Student Council policy supersedes those policies.

Financial arrangements

All monies raised in a school are the responsibility of the Board of Management and all fundraising activities take place with its consent. The Student Council may liaise with the Parents' Association with regard to funding proposed activities/items etc. once the permission of the principal has been received. The Student Council shall not itself hold funds.

School policies

The Student Council will operate within the broader context of the school. School policies that may affect and influence its work include, but are not limited to:

- Anti-Bullying
- Child Protection
- Code of Behaviour
- Curriculum plans
- Data Protection Policy
- Equality Policy
- Health and Safety Statement and Risk assessment
- Healthy Eating Policy
- Homework Policy
- Inter-culturalism Policy
- Internet Acceptable Use Policy
- Parental Involvement Policy
- Statements of practice with regard to school trips/supervision/uniform/ smart devices / dignity at work etc.

Curricular Links

The work of the Student Council links most obviously to the SPHE strand/strand unit 'Myself and the Wider World/Developing Citizenship', as well as to other curricular areas such as English, Art, and Religion.

Implementation

It is envisaged that the first Student Council will be operational during the school year 2023/24.

All in the school community have responsibility for the successful implementation of the policy, particularly the elected Student Council members, the teacher liaison member and the Parents' Association representative, as well as the principal, school staff and Board of Management.

Communication

The policy will be communicated to the pupils in an age-appropriate way to allow them to engage with the Council.

A copy of the policy will be provided to the Committee of the Parents' Association, and parents may obtain a copy on request.

Monitoring and review

The success of the Student Council will be monitored on an ongoing basis and the policy reviewed when circumstances dictate this to be necessary.

Ratification: This Student Council Policy was ratified by the Board of Management of Ballyfin NS on: