

ABBAY VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

Student Council Policy

INTRODUCTION

The student council of the Abbey Vocational School was reinstated during the 2011-2012 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, 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*”.

RELATIONSHIP TO CHARACTERISTIC SPIRIT OF SCHOOL

Mission Statement

Abbey Vocational School is dedicated to the holistic development of students in a caring environment where tolerance and respect are nurtured and valued.

School Ethos

- The aim of the School is to allow the students to develop their spiritual, moral, intellectual, emotional and physical potential and become fully mature human persons.
- While respecting and acknowledging the rights of the students, our school also seeks to promote a safe and harmonious working environment for all our staff members.
- This spirit of cherishing the personal welfare of each individual will not take from the social and community development of the students and the importance of their becoming caring and responsible citizens.
- As reflected in the Motto and Mission Statement of the School, the School acknowledges and undertakes to cherish the Religious, Cultural and Historical Heritage of its students.
- A special interest of our School is to make our students aware of ecological and environmental concerns and to encourage in them a love for nature in all its aspects.
- In acknowledging the primary rights and duties of parents as educators of their children, the school will always seek to work in close partnership with parents. We also see the School as an integral part of the local community and will follow the educational programmes of the Dept. of Education & Science under the direction of County Donegal Vocational Education Committee.

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.

- [*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. newsletter, school magazine, school news in local newspapers, school website, 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.

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:

- To ensure gender balance two students per year, one male, one female to be democratically elected via "simple majority".
- There will be a total of 12 members on the council made up of two representatives from years 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, and one representative each from the LCA and TY programmes.
- 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.
- 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 19th June 2012. It will be implemented by the staff of the Abbey Vocational School 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 via their handbooks 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.abbeyvs.com.

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 2014.