



Oatlands College Student Council Policy

Scope

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, staff, and parents/guardians for the benefit of the school and its students. The policy will apply to the establishment and operation of the Student Council in Oatlands College. The policy will apply to students, teachers, Board of Management, and all others involved in any way with the Student Council.

Rationale

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 support the student council when it has been established.

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/guardians, 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 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 for Education 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 also advocates student voice.

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 ethos and vision of Oatlands College

In Oatlands College we seek to enable each student to develop their full potential. We advocate a positive and caring school environment which is supportive and inclusive for all students. Having a Student Council has a beneficial impact on issues such as discipline, bullying and staff-student relations. As stated in our Vision Statement, we seek to create an atmosphere of Christian care and concern in which students grow to maturity. The skills that they learn in school, while participating with and in the Council, will foster their abilities to enable them to have a successful and positive future in their local communities.

Goals and objectives of the Student Council

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 students on matters of general concern to the students.
- To support the management and staff in the development of the school.
- To enhance communication between students, management, staff and parents/guardians.
- To promote an environment conducive to educational and personal development.
- To promote friendship and respect among students.
- To nurture a range of important skills among students, such as participating in meetings, negotiating, responsible leadership and collaborative problem solving.
- To contribute to the development of school policy.
- To assist with writing and reviewing school policies, where relevant.

Rules for the establishment of a Student Council

The Education Act, 1998 provides that a Board of Management of a school shall draw up rules for the establishment of a student council 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:

1. 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/guardians and teachers.
2. The council should, as far as is practicable, be representative of each class or year group in the school.
3. The Board of Management shall always retain the right to dissolve a council or remove a council member, in accordance with these guidelines and the Code of Behaviour.

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.

The Student Council has two representatives from each class elected to the council annually by the students, and agreed upon by school management, year heads and the staff. Students may nominate themselves for election. Each student may give a speech during the election giving reasons why they should be voted onto the council.

Student Council Meetings

An individual from management will meet with the Student Council regularly at which they will update the council on events in the school.

Student Council members will provide regular updates to their classmates on matters arising from these meetings. Events discussed at these meetings are presented during pastoral care and SPHE classes.

Students will remain on the council for the duration of the annual term unless they breach the rules of the Constitution of the Student Council.

A dissolution of the Student Council will only occur where activities of the council do not align with school policies. Further information on the rules of a student council is included in Part 2 of the National Guidelines.

Links to School Policies and Curriculum Delivery

All Student Council representatives will exhibit a positive behaviour in our school in accordance with the Code of Behaviour.

A Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) module covers many aspects of running an election and the work of the Student Council.

The Student Council and the staff liaison teacher co-ordinate the work of the council.

This policy will be implemented with immediate effect.

The review and evaluation of this policy will take account of the effectiveness of the Student Council as perceived by students, parents/guardians, and staff. The policy will be revised as necessary in line with national guidelines.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on 19th September 2023.