

IRIS School

STUDENT COUNCIL POLICY

The Student Council is a representative structure through which the students can become involved in the affairs of the school, working in partnership with school leadership, staff and parents for the benefits of the school and its students.

The Education Act, 1998 provides for the establishment of student councils, intending them to play an integral and important role in the school community. Student councils provide a representative structure through which students can debate issues of concern and undertake initiatives of benefit to the school and the wider community. Students have a voice and a contribution to make to their school. It is important that they be given the opportunity to express their views on issues of concern to them in the school. It is equally important that they are listened to and encouraged to take an active part in promoting the aims and objectives of the school.

Why have a Student Council?

- The Education Act, 1998 recognises that Student Councils have worked to the benefit of schools;
- At IRIS School we believe that students have a valuable contribution to make to the effectiveness of their school and their involvement in the operation of the school is itself a valuable part of the education process for the students;
- Our 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;
- The establishment of a Student Council gives students an opportunity to acquire the sort of communication, planning and organisational skills which will be of benefit to them in their future lives. It enables students to take responsibility for projects, and to demonstrate that they can manage and bring such projects to successful conclusion. Moreover, the contribution made by a Student Council to the development of school policy in a number of areas can have significant benefits for students and the school. School policies are far more likely to be successful where they are clearly understood and accepted by all partners within the school community;
- The Education Act recognises that students of a school will take the lead role in the establishment and operation of a Student Council
- although the Act also provides an important role for the Board of Management in supporting the establishment and ongoing development of the Student Council;
- At the end of the day, a Student Council will thrive only if students themselves are committed to the concept and to making it work.

The role of the Student Council

The main role of a Student Council as set out in the Education Act is "to promote the interests of the school and the involvement of students in the affairs of the school, in cooperation with the board, parents and teachers".

IRIS School Student Council will set its own objectives; however, some general objectives could include:

- To enhance communication between students, management, staff and parents,
- To promote an environment conducive to educational and personal development,
- To promote friendship and respect amongst students,
- To support the management and staff in the development of the school,
- To represent the views of the students on matters of general concern to them.

Student Council will identify activities that it would like to be involved in organising, although the final decision on the activities of a Student Council should be agreed with school management.

Students can at times play a valuable support role for school management, for example, by assisting in the running of the school shop and/or library or helping to maintain order in corridors between classes and during breaks. These arrangements will be discussed during the weekly meetings in order to see whether they are practical enough to carry out. School management should consider carefully which elements of their existing structures they will incorporate with a Student Council, and which may reasonably continue to run in parallel.

The Education Act provides that a Student Council shall act in co-operation with the Board of Management, parents and teachers. 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 therefore 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.

School Mission

IRIS School mission statement requires the school community "to encourage each child to grow in God consciousness and wisdom and be a self-confident, inquiring, respectful, positive and proactive citizen who will be of value to the whole of society".

Aims

The Student Council Aims:

- For each class to have two representatives on the council,
- For the views of students to be considered and included in the development of the school,

- For students to communicate their preferences,
- For students to develop their sense of belonging to the school community,
- For students to listen to others and recognise themselves as worthwhile individuals with the right to be heard,
- For students to learn about rights and responsibilities,
- For students to make a positive contribution to the school environment and ethos.

Student Council members are expected to wear the badges awarded to them at all times. The main representatives wear blue badges and the deputies wear green badges. They are also expected to attend all meetings unless there is an extenuating circumstance. Should any council member be present in school and fail to attend two meetings OR should any member behave inappropriately and need to be reprimanded more than once (e.g. detentions), a re-election shall be held and another elected classmate shall take their place.

Functions and Activities

The functions and activities of a Student Council should support the aims and objectives of the Council and promote the development of the school and the welfare of its students. In planning and undertaking activities during the course of the school year, the Council should:

- work closely with school management, teachers and parents,
- consult regularly with students in the school,
- involve as many students as possible in the activities of the Council.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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.

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 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.

Deputy Secretary

The Deputy Secretary 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.

Treasurers

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. Payments made by the Treasurer should be countersigned or endorsed by a member of the Board of Management.

Public Relations Officers

A Public Relations Officer's responsibility is to promote 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. Some useful tips for officers are included in the 'Support Materials' section in Appendix A.

Annex A; A GUIDE TO BETTER MEETINGS

Be prepared!

Read any information sent out before the meeting, such as the Agenda or the Minutes of the last meeting. Prepare any points you want to raise.

Listen!

Listen carefully to what others have to say, and be open to other people's opinions. One of the purposes of meetings is to exchange ideas and information and to learn from each other.

Participate!

It is much more constructive to raise matters of concern to you at the meeting, rather than afterwards.

Act!

If you undertake to follow up on a task, then do so, and be ready to report back at the next meeting.

Tips for the Chairperson

1. Be prepared for each meeting and try to ensure that the other members of the group have a written agenda beforehand, if possible, so that they can also be prepared for the meeting. It may be useful to meet with the Secretary to agree an agenda in advance of a meeting, and an agenda should always include a provision for 'Any other businesses'.
2. Start and close each meeting punctually.
3. At the beginning of any meeting allow some opportunity for group members to put matters on the agenda under 'Any Other Business'. Then, keep to the agenda/items for discussion.
4. It may be necessary to review and approve the minutes of the previous meeting at the beginning of a meeting and to sign the approved minutes.
5. Present each item for discussion, ensuring that everyone who wishes to do so gets an opportunity to speak, and that each person is listened to.
6. Give direction to meetings making sure that there is adequate time to deal with each item on the agenda.
7. Try to keep the meeting focused on the agenda.
8. Call the meeting to order, if necessary (for example, if more than one person speaks at the same time or if an argument breaks out).
9. Help the process of decision making by asking people to clarify what they are saying if it is not easily understood, by summing up what someone has said and by stating clearly the decision that is being taken before it is noted in the minutes.
10. In some instances, it may be necessary to hold a vote (for example, by a show of hands) on a particular issue.
11. At the end of each meeting, make sure to arrange a date/time/venue/possible agenda items for the next meeting.

Tips for the Secretary

1. Bring any correspondence received to the attention of the chairperson before the agenda is drawn up. Perhaps some element of correspondence needs inclusion on the agenda for discussion/response.
2. If necessary, read the minutes of the previous meeting at the beginning of each meeting and make any necessary corrections before the minutes are signed by the chairperson.
3. Record as accurately and as fairly as possible the minutes of each meeting.

4. Remember to record attendance, excuses, apologies and the time, date and venue of each meeting. Remember also to give a brief account of correspondence received/sent since the last meeting.
5. Remember that you also have a right to participate in discussions. don't allow your role to stop you from contributing to the discussion of the various matters on the agenda.
6. Remember to record decisions made, who is to implement them and when.
7. It's a good idea to use the same book at each meeting for the taking of the minutes.
8. After you've written them up, check the minutes with the chairperson before the next meeting.
9. Write up the minutes as soon as possible after each meeting.

Fundraising and the Student Council

The Treasurer has responsibility for ensuring that any money raised by the Council is used for the purposes for which it was collected. The constitution of the Student Council should specify that a financial report be provided to the Council at the end of each school year.

When planning fundraising activities:

- Be clear about why the money is needed and what will be done with it
- Get as many ideas as possible for activities
- Make sure your planned activity will suit your school and is practical
- Try to make sure that your event doesn't clash with another, or take advantage of other school events by planning yours around them (for example, a sale of work on the School Open Day)
- Make sure all students in the school are told about the event well in advance, and know what the Student Council plans to use the money for

Some examples of fundraising activities include:

- ✓ Art exhibition
- ✓ Cake sale
- ✓ Fashion show
- ✓ Holding a collection
- ✓ Jumble sale
- ✓ Raffle
- ✓ Non-uniform day
- ✓ Table Quiz
- ✓ Sponsored activities (for example, a sponsored walk)

School management should be consulted about activities planned by a Student Council, as some activities may require adult supervision.