SCOIL FIONNTÁIN NAOFA

Student Council Policy

Introduction

This '*Student Council Policy*' was formulated in October and November 2024 to formalise matters with regard to the operation of our Student Council at school level. A Student Council has been in existence in the school since the school year 2021-2022 . The policy was formulated with direct reference to *Student Councils: A Voice for Students* (2002) from the Department of Education, and in consultation with the different stakeholder groups in the school including the Board of Management, Staff, Pupils and Parents.

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 a Student Council in Scoil Fionntáin Naofa, Shanahoe

- The Student Council in **Scoil Fionntáin Naofa, Shanahoe** 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 leadership of the school is a valuable dimension of a student's holistic education, within the the context of a broad, balanced, relevant and stimulating curriculum;
- A Student Council fosters an awareness and appreciation of citizenship and the democratic values of our society;
- A Student Council provides a meaningful and purposeful opportunity for students to engage in a structured partnership with the different stakeholder groups in the school community;
- A Student Council fosters a strong vested interest in the school among the student body and therefore fosters a sense of pride in and for the work of the school (among the students);
- A Student Council develops the leadership capacity of students across the school in line with the provisions of the domain '*Developing Leadership Capacity*' as set out in '*Looking at Our School: A Quality Framework for Primary and Special Schools*' (2022);
- A Student Council encourages, fosters and promotes student voice in a meaningful and purposeful way across the student body of the school.

Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the School

In **Scoil Fionntáin Naofa, Shanhaoe** one of our primary aims is to encourage and enable all of the pupils in the school to strive to be the very best that they can be and to reach their full potential in all domains of their lives, including the intellectual, academic, spiritual, social, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, moral and physical. We set high expectations for pupil learning and achievement commensurate with individual ability levels. We capitalise on pupils' strengths and abilities and identify, monitor and address areas for improvement. In **Scoil Fionntáin Naofa, Shanahoe** we endeavour to be a school that will take all pupils from where they are at, to where they ought to be, in terms of ensuring that they are reaching their full potential in all areas of their lives: 'A *ship in harbour is safe but that's not what ships are built for*' (J.A Shedd).

Objectives/Goals

The policy is intended to support the operation of an effective Student Council in **Scoil Fionntáin Naofa, Shanahoe**. The objectives of our Student Council are as follows:

- To represent the views of our students;
- To develop the leadership capacity of our students;
- To encourage and promote student voice across the school;
- To enhance communication between the different stakeholder groups within the school;
- To develop citizenship and an awareness and appreciation of democratic values among our students;
- To promote an environment conducive to educational and personal development;
- To foster and promote respect and integrity across our student body, as espoused in our school's vision statement;
- To foster and promote the values of tolerance, compassion, forgiveness, justice, courtesy and honesty, among our students, as espoused in our school's vision statement;
- To enable our students to contribute to the development of school policy, where and when appropriate;
- To act as a naturally occurring focus group for '*gathering evidence*' in relation to different school matters i.e the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process;
- To develop important life and social skills such as negotiation, collaborative problem solving and effective listening among our student body;
- To represent the views of our students on matters of general concern to them.

Supporting the Work of the Student Council at School Level
The Board of Management, acting through the Principal and teaching staff will encourage, facilitate and assist students in establishing a Student Council. School management will provide space and time for the Student Council to operate in a meaningful and purposeful way in line with the goals/objectives of the Student Council as outlined above.

Underlying principles of the Student Council
Our Student Council shall operate, having regard to the following principles:

- The Student Council will promote the interests and values of the school as espoused in the school's Mission and Vision Statements;
- The Student Council, as far as practicable, will be representative of each class group in the school;
- 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 in any way;
- It is not the function of the Student Council to become involved in individual complaints or disciplinary matters. Such matters are to be addressed through the agreed procedures and protocols as outlined in relevant policy documents i.e Code of Behaviour, Anti-Bullying Policy etc.
- The Student Council cannot permit discussions of a personal or derogatory nature about other pupils, school staff or any other members of the school community at any time.

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.

Guidelines for the Operation of the Student Council in Scoil Fionntáin Naofa, Shanahoe

Composition
- The Student Council will consist of nine student members (one from each class in the school including our special class);
- The Principal will have overall responsibility for the Student Council at school level;

Nominations and Elections
- The principal will set a date for the election of members to the Student Council for the forthcoming year;
- Each Student Council member shall be elected for a duration of one year;
- All students from Junior Infants to 6th Class and those in our special class will be eligible to stand for election;

- Pupils self-nominate for the Student Council;
- Pupils who are going forward for election for the Student Council will be expected to prepare a personal manifesto outlining;
  (a) Why they think they would make a good Student Council member i.e specific personal traits and attributes;
  (b) Specific ideas that they have for the Student Council. These ideas must be sensible, relevant and achievable;
  (Manifestos will be class/age appropriate in length)
- Manifestos will then be forwarded to the Principal by a specified date;
- All pupils who put themselves forward for election to the Student Council will be required to present/deliver their aforementioned manifestos to the school community at a whole school assembly/ *'Teacht le Chéile';*
- It will be emphasised to the pupil body that they should vote for those who they think would make the best possible members of the Student Council, as opposed to voting for their friends;
- Voting will take place by way of a secret ballot;
- A member of the Board of Management and/or Parents' Association will take responsibility for the counting of the votes;
- The Principal will announce those that have been deemed to be elected to the Student Council;
- A proposed nominee who has previously been removed from the Student Council for whatever reason 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.

Meetings

- The first meeting of a newly formed Student Council will take place as soon as possible after the conclusion of elections;
- Thereafter, meetings will take place on a fortnightly basis;
- A Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer will be appointed at the first meeting (generally those from 4th to 6th Classes will assume these officer positions);
- A formal agenda is to be prepared for each meeting by the Chairperson and Secretary, in consultation with the Principal;
- The secretary records the minutes of each meeting;

Procedures for filling vacancies

- Where a vacancy arises on the Student Council, the class group concerned should hold a further by-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/ratification;

- 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 a particular experience or occurrence. Each reviewed Constitution is to be submitted to the Board of Management for approval/ratification.

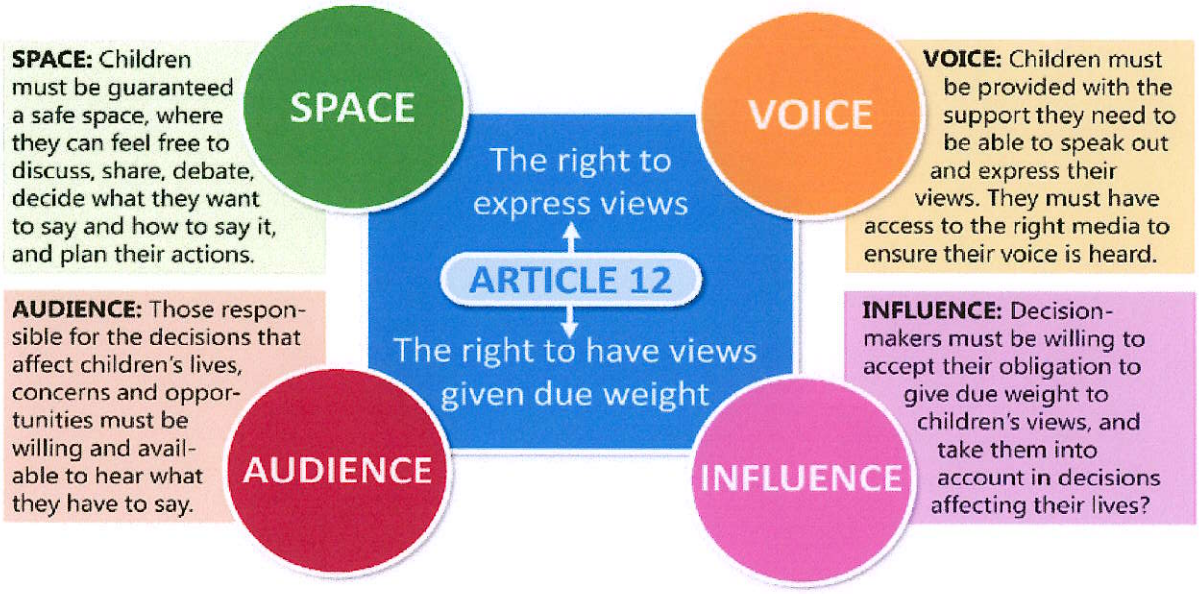
Removal of a member

- The Principal may 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's '*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 Principal;
- The Principal and Board of Management reserve the right to ensure that the overarching concerns of the school with regard to Child Safeguarding, Safety, Health & Welfare, Anti-Bullying and the school's *Code of Behaviour* are upheld at all times and nothing in this Student Council Policy supersedes those policies.

Promoting Student Voice and Participation in the Student Council

In terms of promoting student voice and participation, we subscribe to the '*Lundy Model of Child Participation' (2007)*. The Lundy Model provides a way of conceptualising a child's right to participation, as laid down in Article 12 of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. The model has four distinct elements namely:

1. **Space:** Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view;
2. **Voice:** Children must be facilitated to express their view;
3. **Audience**: The view must be listened to;
4. **Influence**: The view must be acted on, as appropriate.



Initiatives and Projects that Student Council will be involved in at school level

The Student Council will be involved in various different projects and initiatives at school level oliver the course of the year to include the following:

- Serving as the Amber Flag committee and the '*wellbeing warriors'* therein for promoting positive mental health and wellbeing across the school, as part of our engagement with and participation in the Amber Flag initiative;
- Policy review and development, where and when appropriate;
- Consultation regarding school matters i.e proposed changes to operational structures in the school i.e Healthy Eating, uniform changes, where and when appropriate;
- Focus groups for School Self-Evaluation (SSE) and in relation to policy review and development, as outlined above;
- Promoting and organising different events and initiatives across the school year to include the following:
    1. *Team Hope Christmas Shoebox Appeal;*
    2. *Goal Jersey Day;*
    3. *Trick or Treat for Temple Stree*t;
    4. Activities for Anti-Bullying Week each November;
    5. Christmas Jumper Day for the Children's Health Foundation;
    6. Safer Internet Day in February;
    7. *Rock Your Socks/Lots of Socks Fundraiser* for the Laois Branch of Down Syndrome Ireland;
    8. *Rainbow Day* for the LOFFA (*Laois Offaly Families for Autism);*
    9. Whole School Wellbeing Week in line with our participation in the Amber Flag initiative.

This is not an exhaustive list.

Financial Arrangements
The Student Council will be involved in fundraising for different charities, both local and national, as outlined above. All monies raised in a school are the responsibility of the Board of Management and to that end all fundraising activities take place with its consent. Therefore, approval will be sought from the Board of Management for the Student Council to fundraise on an annual basis. This approval will be sought at the first meeting of the Board of Management following the election of the new Student Council.

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:

- Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment;
- Anti-Bullying;
- Code of Behaviour;
- Data Protection Policy;
- Safety, Health and Welfare Statement and Risk Assessment;
- Healthy Eating Policy;
- Homework Policy;
- Acceptable Use Policy for ICT;
- Whole School Plan for S.P.H.E

Curricular Links
The work of the Student Council links most obviously to the SPHE curriculum and the strands and strand units therein, with specific emphasis on the following:

Strand	**Strand Units**
Myself and Others	1. My Friends and Other People; 2. Relating to Others
Myself and the Wider World	1. Developing Citizenship

Communication
- The policy will be communicated to the pupils in an age-appropriate way to allow them to engage in and with the Student Council in a meaningful and purposeful way;
- A copy of this Student Council policy will be made available to the wider school community on the school's website www.shanahoens.net ;

Ratification

This Student Council Policy was approved and ratified by the **Board of Management of Scoil Fionntáin Naofa, Shanahoe** at its meeting on

27 November 2024

Micheál Delaney

Chairperson of the Board of Management

Barry Whelan

Principal

Implementation

- This policy will apply from the date of ratification as outlined above;
- All of the different stakeholder groups in the school community including the Board of Management, Principal, Staff, Pupils and Parents and the Student Council members themselves, have responsibility for the successful implementation of this policy.

Monitoring and review

- This Student Council Policy will be reviewed on a **triennial basis** with the next review taking place in **November 2027.**

ENDS