

STUDENT SUPPORT POLICY

The school provides a range of supports for the students in its care. These include:

1. Year Head System
2. Guidance and Counselling Service
3. Chaplaincy
4. Buddy System
5. Student Support Team

1. Year Head System

The school places great emphasis on the pastoral care of its students. A Year Head system is in place where a Year Head is assigned to each year group in first year and continues to be the Year Head for that group for the following five years. The school presently operates on the view that it is beneficial for students to have the same Year Head for their time in the school. This practise will be monitored and reviewed regularly.

The role of the Year Head is a very significant one in the life of a student. The school is indebted to the personnel involved who work very closely with students on personal and educational issues.

Their duties include:

- Recording reasons for absences from year group
- Signing reasons given for absence notes in student's journal
- Taking weekly assembly and disseminating information relevant to the year group
- Dealing with pastoral issues
- Taking relevant action when a referral regarding a student
- Liaising with subject teachers and management on issues pertaining to students within year group
- Dealing with discipline issues as set out in Code of Behaviour
- Attending pastoral Care Team meetings when requested
- Checking journals as required
- Recording interactions as a Year Head with students, parents and others

All Year Heads have a weekly assembly time with their year groups. This is an opportune time for Year Heads to support, discipline, liaise with, discuss and get feedback from year groups on issues that are pertinent to students.

2. Guidance and Counselling Service

The aims of the Guidance and Counselling Department are to provide for the personal, social, educational and vocational development of the students in the school community.

The Guidance Counsellor, along with Subject Teachers, Year Heads and Management attempt to do this through educational guidance, career guidance and personal counselling.

Much guidance work is done in classroom-based activities across all subject areas and in particular, career guidance classes. Each senior student has one timetabled class of career guidance per week. Non-classroom based activities are a regular feature of school life. It is the policy of the Guidance and Counselling Department to organise groups to travel to open days, career exhibitions, seminars as well as to invite speakers into the school for presentations on a regular basis.

Counselling

Students are often troubled by issues pertaining to their personal or school lives. Students enlist the help of subject teachers, Year Heads and/or the Guidance Counsellor in these instances.

The Guidance Counsellor provides a confidential service to students who access their service. However, students are informed at the beginning of each school year of occasions when that confidentiality needs to be broken i.e. when the student or another person made known to the Guidance Counsellor is considered to be at personal risk.

The Guidance Counsellor's work involves liaising with many different personnel including - parents/guardians, subject teachers, Year Heads, Learning Support Department, Deputy Principal and Principal.

The following are also consulted: psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, social care workers and other professionals.

The Guidance Counsellor attends a professional counselling supervisor regularly and is a member of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors.

If additional help is needed outside the school, the services of the National Educational Psychologists Service (NEPS) is enlisted. Professional counselling from private practitioners is also arranged if needed. The school provides financial support from time to time for this service when the situation warrants it.

3. Chaplaincy

Fr. Manning works as a part time Catholic chaplain in the school.

In his role, he ministers to both staff and students. He also works closely with the Religious Education Department in organising liturgies, Masses etc.

As Chaplain, Fr. Manning has a very significant role when an emergency event happens e.g. death of a member of the school community. St. Mary's Secondary school, Macroom is very appreciative of the generosity of the Macroom parish in allowing Fr. Manning to act as chaplain.

4. Buddy System

The school acknowledges the difficulties inherent in the transition from primary to secondary school for its students. It is widely known that students who receive a lot of support in the

initial stage of the transition adjust more quickly to their new school environment. The school operates a mentoring system known as the “Buddy System”

In April of each year, students from third and fourth year are invited to apply to act as a “buddy” to the incoming students in the next academic year. Students are interviewed by an interview panel and training in mentoring is provided for those who are successful. These students are expected to be role model students and sign a contract to that effect. Each buddy is responsible for 7-8 students.

The school also sees the system as an opportunity to develop leadership qualities among its senior students. Beginning with an orientation session in May and continuing right through the first term of the new school year, the buddies mentor the first year students through formal and informal contact with them.

The school is keen to give the buddies as much responsibility as is possible, while at the same time not overburdening them. Students take class groups to explain classroom layout, timetables etc. during orientation sessions.

A teacher in the school liaises with, and supports the buddies on a regular basis with their pastoral duties. Buddies are formally recognised at the Catherine McAuley awards ceremony and are deemed to have a significant leadership role in the school.

5. Student Support Team

To consolidate and augment the work done by Year Heads, the school has a Student Support Team who meet on a weekly basis.

The purpose of the Student Support team is to:

1. Identify individual students who may need a specific intervention
2. Identify individual class groups/year groups that may need attention
3. Allocate time to whole school issues i.e. bullying.

The Student Support team is made up of the Guidance Counsellor, Learning Support Teacher, Deputy Principal and Principal. Year Heads are invited to the meeting as the need arises.

The team liaises with Year Heads and other relevant school personnel on the work carried out.

**Ratified by the Board of Management of St. Mary’s Secondary School
November, 2008**