

# Pastoral Care – Towards a Policy

## Guidelines

### 1. Policy Statement

In the context of these guidelines around a pastoral care policy a clear understanding of the term is required. To this end the work of the *Irish Association of Pastoral Care in Education (IAPCE)* is useful as it has worked in a very large number of Irish schools over the last ten years and its pastoral framework is embedded in the Irish experience – visit their website for further details – [www.iapce.ie](http://www.iapce.ie)

#### *1.1 A Pastoral Framework.*

*School Pastoral Care is an approach to education which endeavours to value and develop each member of the school community. It promotes learning at every level of the student.*

*A pastoral approach seeks to respect and nurture the quality of all relationships. It promotes effective and caring leadership and partnership in the school community. It influences all aspects of the life of the school, in particular policies, curriculum, roles and structures in order to sustain and enrich the educational experience of each student and consequently that of every person in relationship to the school. **The Year Head, Monahan L., 1998***

The policy on pastoral care as with other key policies need to be put into the context of ethos and characteristic spirit of the school. Reference needs to be made to the network of schools to which the school is attached – community school, congregational, diocesan, VEC. It is also vital that attention be given to the guidelines produced by the School Development Planning Initiative in the area of policy – visit [www.sdpi.ie](http://www.sdpi.ie) for details.

### 2. Policy rationale

The school recognises the importance of its pastoral approach as evidenced in its pastoral policies, structures, procedures and practices. This pastoral approach will be infused by the guiding ethos of the school. It is a core dimension in the life of the school as it is such a crucial expression of the characteristic spirit of the school. It will be a key aspect as parents and others assess the school. Such an important aspect of the school will require on going attention in the area of policy development, professional development, review of outcomes etc. In the past so much of the pastoral activity of the school was carried on in an unconscious manner. No longer is this sustainable as schools now face greater challenges to support students at every level, to provide appropriate training to staff, to put in place effective structures to address particular issues such as bereavement, special needs, crisis response, pastoral roles. Therefore a formal policy in the area of pastoral care is essential.

### **3. School Development Planning (SDP)**

SDP is an ongoing collaborative process undertaken by the whole school community to provide direction to the work of the school. The focus of SDP is on ensuring that all students receive a quality education appropriate to their needs in a changing world. The SDP process is predicated on three key factors:

- (i) The quality of education provided at a school is the result of a complex interaction of factors that must be planned for in a coordinated way.
- (ii) Education is a partnership enterprise, which means that quality planning should involve input from all the partners in the school community—staff, students, parents, and board of management.
- (iii) The quality of the school's education provision is rooted in the expertise and commitment of the principal and teaching staff, which makes them key agents of the process and means that a key focus of the process is supporting and empowering them in their work.

These three factors should inform the shape and process of all policy development, including a formal policy on Pastoral Care.

It is also vital to be aware of the legislative requirements in particular of:

The Education Act (1998)  
Education Welfare Act (2000)  
Equal Status Act (2000)

The role of the Board of Management is to ensure its policies and practices are compliant with both the spirit and letter of the above Acts.

#### ***3.1 Policy Formation Process***

The SDP guidelines offer very helpful direction in putting together any policy – in summary the following steps may be helpful taken together with the overall guidance suggested below in respect of this particular policy area of Pastoral Care:

- A task group is appointed to draw up a draft policy for Pastoral Care – it is done in the context of overall school planning. The task group will liaise with the School Planning Steering Group
- The task group carry out some research on the policy area to decide what areas need to be addressed, what is already being done, what areas are in need of support, what are the reactions to present pastoral provision, what are the priorities for action, how will the characteristic spirit influence the policy, what is best practice in the field...
- At a second or at least no later than a third meeting a draft policy is tabled for discussion. On amendment it is then given to the appropriate partners for discussion. In particular in relation to Pastoral Care the Pastoral Care team are consulted, the parents council, the students council and as appropriate the Board of Management.

- Following collation of the comments from the partners the policy is brought for agreement by the staff and then on to the Board of Management for ratification.

#### **4. Policy Goals**

A pastoral approach clearly involves a particular blend of values. This is not to suggest that all pastoral schools are clones of one another - each context will express their pastoral values in a unique fashion. The pastoral framework outlined above articulates basic values and goals that might benefit from further development and elaboration. There is no exhaustive or definitive list of such values and goals, but it is hoped that the following, drawn from many sources, will help explicate the pastoral stance and provide the goals that need to animate the Pastoral Care Policy:

##### ***Pastoral Goals for the School***

- **Personal attention to value and develop every student.**
- **Acknowledgement of, and support for, each person's role in the school community.**
- **Promoting an environment which meets students' needs.**
- **Priority given to the nurturing of teaching and learning relationships.**
- **Recognition of talents and abilities.**
- **Clear values that animate the school.**
- **Strong collaborative leadership.**
- **Clarity of policies, roles, responsibilities and tasks.**
- **Support for an engaging curriculum - content & methodologies.**
- **On-going monitoring of progress at every level for the student.**
- **Accountability, support and evaluation at every level.**
- **Involving all concerned in the life of the school.**

The Pastoral Care policy needs to take account of the above in its aims, objectives and implementation plan.

#### **4. Policy Content**

There are a wide range of areas that potentially fit into the Pastoral Care policy of any school – each context will need to decide what is appropriate. Areas for consideration beginning with the core areas:

- Pastoral approach in our school
- Pastoral role: definitions and responsibilities
- Pastoral programmes
- Pastoral procedures
- Linking with guidance counselling, home-school, chaplaincy, learning support

- Linking with Social, Personal and Health Education.

## **5. Policy Scope**

Following the descriptive elements of the policy it is then appropriate to outline the implementation plan in relation to each relevant area for example:

- When will the definitions of Class Tutor, Year Head be agreed?
- When will consequent and ongoing professional development of these roles occur?
- Who will be members of the Pastoral Care team, when will they meet, to what purpose, will there be a pastoral care co-ordinator?
- How will the parents, Board, students, staff be involved in drawing up and reviewing this policy?
- What monitoring and evaluation procedures will be put in place?
- What resources are required in each area?

## **6. Policy Criteria**

The Marino Policy Website fully support the guidelines issued by the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) and highly recommend that schools follow their criteria in their policy development. In particular we bring the following criteria to your attention:

### Policy Content

State the provisions of the policy, indicating the school's approach to this policy area. The policy content comprises general guidelines. It should be followed by a detailed implementation programme. In terms of this Pastoral Care Policy – what are the elements that need to be put in place to ensure its effectiveness, what steps need to be taken, what resources are in place, what resources are needed?

### Roles and Responsibilities

What are the responsibilities of the various parties in the school community in the development, implementation and evaluation of this policy?

### Success Criteria

What indicators will be used to gauge the effectiveness of the policy?

### Monitoring Procedures

Who will do what, when, to see how the policy is working?

### Review Procedures

Who will do what, when, to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy and to ascertain what changes, if any, are necessary?

### Timeframe

When will the completed policy be circulated, when will it come into force, when will it be subject to review?

### Implementation Programme

What detailed procedures are necessary to implement the provisions of this policy? Who will devise the procedures? When? How will details be circulated to all concerned? Who will carry out the procedures when they have been devised?

## **7. Policy Outline**

There follows a brief outline of the major points to make under each of the following headings in the Pastoral Care policy. The text needs to be detailed in treating responsibilities and tasks, as well as containing clear references to training, supporting, resourcing and a full school review of the role.

### **7.2 Pastoral approach in our school**

This opening section of the policy links the pastoral activities of the school within the characteristic spirit of the school. It defines the core goals of the school and how the pastoral approach serves these goals.

### **7.3 Pastoral role: definitions and responsibilities**

Having set the context for the key pastoral roles, outlined the core values driving the definition of these roles, it is then appropriate to outline briefly the understanding of the role and then detail the responsibilities. In terms of the roles of Class Tutor and Year Head in particular a consultative process is essential to build ownership and effectiveness. The process of developing a role definition is at least as important as the finished product. This point cannot be over emphasised. Ideally, work on the specifics of the role, defining the responsibilities and tasks should take place in the context of whole school planning.

Whatever the planning context, it is vital that all the involved parties be included in drawing up the role definition. This will significantly increase the numbers of those willing to both support and take on the role. Below is a sample process that could be adopted in defining the role of Year Head and could be adapted for other roles. (c.f. *The Year Head*, Monahan 1998 p.21)

#### ***7.3.1 Elements of a Possible Process.***

##### **I. REVIEW OF PRESENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE YEAR HEAD ROLE**

Simple questionnaires for staff, parents and students. The aim is to gather information on the views of these groups concerning the present experience of the Year Head role, or to assess the desirability of introducing this role where it is not already in existence.

##### **II. MEETING OF TEACHING STAFF**

Staff reflect on the findings of any survey carried out. Also time is given to take account of the experience of other schools in the area of the Year Head.

It may be helpful to have this meeting facilitated and at least a half day is needed to cover the issue appropriately.

Staff begin drawing up a draft role definition - fed back to parents and students.

A staff sub-group is selected to work on progressing the draft incorporating the input of parents and students.

### **III. TOWARDS A FINAL DRAFT**

The staff sub-group presents the final draft to the staff for discussion and adoption and finally passed for ratification to the Board.

In terms of outlining responsibilities, the following is a list to reflect upon from the context of your own school.

- ❑ Facilitating regular meetings of the team of tutors to review and plan.
- ❑ Co-ordinating all information given to and received from Year Heads and tutors, and checking action has been taken.
- ❑ Reporting to, and liaising with, the principal and pastoral team regarding the year group.
- ❑ To know personally each student in the year group.
- ❑ To have a watching brief over the academic and other indicators of students' progress and taking appropriate action in consultation with others.
- ❑ Keeping and overseeing records concerning students.
- ❑ Co-ordinating the completion of reports for parents.
- ❑ Checking and dealing with lates and absenteeism.
- ❑ Communicating with parents, in particular those experiencing difficulties in relation to their children's progress in school.
- ❑ Liaising with support agencies and services within and without the school.
- ❑ Facilitating a weekly/forthrightly or monthly assembly of the year group.
- ❑ Liaising with the subject faculties of the school.
- ❑ Contribution to, and awareness of, the personal development programmes being followed by students.
- ❑ Liaising with student representatives in the year group.
- ❑ Teaching as many of the classes in the year group as possible.
- ❑ Significant role in implementing the Behaviour Code.
- ❑ Facilitation of, and participation in, extra-curricular activities in the year group.

#### **7.4 Pastoral procedures: information, communication, collaboration**

This section in particular outlines the procedures in relation to how information is received, shared, stored and accessed. For a more detailed treatment of issues around information refer to the Record Keeping Policy also on this policy website. The Pastoral

Policy also needs to address the procedures for working with parents in the context of pastoral roles. Treatment should also be made of relating to other key pastoral personnel. In terms of the example of the Year Head:

The Year Head, though at a different level to that of the tutor, seeks to collaborate constructively with parents, particularly in such areas as:

- ❑ addressing the needs of vulnerable students
- ❑ follow-through on the Behaviour Code
- ❑ reviewing academic and other progress of students
- ❑ extra-curricular activities
- ❑ absenteeism and consistent late arrival at school
- ❑ subject and exam level options
- ❑ support of families in difficulties
- ❑ liaising with outside agencies
- ❑ parent/teacher meetings

All this reflects the reality summed up by Marland and Rogers:

Schools are increasingly looking for ways to form positive and active partnerships with parents. They are also becoming more involved with those other social and health service agencies, both statutory and voluntary, which engage with families in the welfare interests of children and young people. (Marland and Rogers, *The Art of the Tutor*, 1997)

### **8 Linking with guidance counselling, home-school, chaplaincy, learning support.**

A Pastoral Care Policy needs to refer significantly to the important roles of guidance counsellor, home-school liaison co-ordinator, chaplaincy, learning support personnel. Each of these roles may well have their own policy but the linkages between them needs to be reflected in the overall Pastoral Care policy. Therefore this policy should:

- briefly outline the role description and key responsibilities of these pastoral personnel
- describe the structure for liaison between these roles and Year Heads, Class Tutors, teachers, parents
- detail linked policies such as anti-bullying, substance misuse etc and the role of the pastoral personnel in relation to these in the context of this policy
- outline the roles and responsibilities of the Pastoral Care Team

### **9. Pastoral programmes and linking with Social, Personal and Health Education**

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a core area of school life and its link to pastoral care is clear. Therefore a section dealing with SPHE would be relevant addressing how the SPHE programme supports the pastoral care approach in the school. It needs to outline how the inter-relationship is managed in terms of teaching a programme, resources, and a whole school approach for SPHE and Pastoral Care. Many

schools have a pastoral care programme in addition to, but in synch with, the SPHE programme. This pastoral programme usually deals with such areas as: *induction to the school and its ethos; class and year group spirit; study skills and approaches; justice and voluntary projects; school procedures.*

### **10. Professional Development**

Pastoral roles are becoming increasingly significant in the life of the school. The aim is that all involved will be enhanced in the experience of holding a pastoral role. An important support in this is the professional development that teachers in pastoral roles will avail of during their careers. The policy needs to address the provision of such professional development. There is an increasing number of opportunities being provided for Class Tutors and Year Heads to be resourced through training and up-dating courses, and it is vital that these resources are made available to ensure these teachers are adequately prepared and supported for the role. Such courses and training are being offered by the *Irish Association of Pastoral Care in Education (IAPCE)*, the education departments of universities, and teacher unions to name but some.

### **11. Policy Implementation**

It is essential to accompany the policy with an implementation plan for the life of the policy – this should be as specific as possible to aid actioning the key points of policy. For example:

- When will the definitions of Class Tutor, Year Head be agreed?
- When will consequent and ongoing professional development of these roles occur?
- Who will be members of the Pastoral Care team, when will they meet, to what purpose, will there be a pastoral care co-ordinator?
- How will the parents, Board, students, staff be involved in drawing up and reviewing this policy?
- What monitoring and evaluation procedures will be put in place?
- When are the new procedures coming into practice?
- What is the communication strategy around the various items of the policy?
- What resources are required in each area?

With each major point of the policy an implementation element is required – timing for implementation and who is responsible.

### **12. Policy Monitoring and Evaluation**

Effective policy requires constant monitoring and evaluation to ensure successful implementation and to review what adjustments may be necessary from time to time. In order that the tasks of monitoring and evaluation are effective consideration of the following may be helpful:

#### ***12.1 Monitoring:***

Assign a particular person to monitor policy implementation – for example the pastoral care co-ordinator – outline some brief terms of reference for the task. Such terms may

include – prepare a short written report for the Board of Management and staff on the implementation of the policy at key stages – in addition be prepared to give an oral report. The report should examine the meeting of specific targets and timelines, it should also gather some qualitative reactions to the policy during implementation. At the reporting stage the Board and in its turn the staff should discuss any reactions, concerns, suggestions that may arise during the course of implementation. A procedure for follow up on reactions to the interim reports needs to be established – one form may be that the Pastoral Care Team with school management will set time aside to discuss the feedback and propose any adjustments required. Apart from the usual on-going informal monitoring that would occur with every area of policy, formal monitoring would be appropriate at least twice in the first year and at least once during each subsequent year.

### ***12.2 Evaluation:***

At a specified times during the life of the policy an evaluation of its effectiveness is required. Those responsible should be identified with a clear brief given. It may have the following elements:

- The Pastoral Care Team are charged with leading the evaluation of the Pastoral Care Policy
- Reviewing the monitoring reports that were gathered during the life of the policy.
- Surveying staff, students and parents as to its effectiveness in meeting its stated aims
- Collating these responses and presenting, following consultations with school management, a report to Board and staff with recommendations for further phases of the Pastoral Care policy.
- Leading a process to articulate and implement new developments in the pastoral care area with particular reference to the Pastoral Care policy.

Such a review would be appropriate at least every two years.

***The Marino Policy Website acknowledges the support of the Irish Association of Pastoral Care in preparing these guidelines.***

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