

Extra Curricular Activities Policy

Policy Statement

St. Ailbe's school strive to be welcoming place, inclusive in intake, comprehensive in curriculum, fair and just in its structures and behaviour management strategies, and consultative in decision-making. St. Ailbe's are taking positive steps to fulfil its mission in partnership with parents, staff, students, trustees, and the local community.

Within this holistic approach to the provision of education, an important element in a comprehensive curriculum is the provision of a wide range of Extra Curricular Activities (ECA), including sporting, artistic, musical, cultural, literary (debating etc), social and leisure, and spiritual activities. These activities are a *sine qua non* for the school's objective of full development of students based on the core principles of self-respect and respect for others.

Policy Rationale

The school recognises that ECA represent a valuable aspect of the learning process and contribute to the development of a rounded individual. ECA supplement and complement in-school learning and activities and provide opportunities for students to broaden their horizons in ways that would not be possible with the confines of the school premises alone. This is particularly important for all pupils as ECA provide them with opportunities to explore and expand their gifts and talents in other areas.

Policy Goals

Within the remit of SDP and modern regulatory and legislative developments in education, the ECA policy should have the following goals:

- Ensure consistent approaches to the planning and implementation of ECA in the school.
- Provide the school community with a clear understanding of the role of ECA in the school.
- Enable students to take full advantage of ECA with a view to achieving a rounded education.
- Encourage parents to take an interest in and share responsibility for their children's overall development through support of the school's ECA.
- Provide teachers and other staff members with assurance and guidelines to help them with what is effectively voluntary work for the benefit of the students and the whole school community.

Policy Content

The content section must address the various specific issues that need to be considered when developing a formal policy for ECA. Although many of the issues will be the same as those affecting other aspects of school activity, the fact that ECA, by definition, take place either outside of school or off the school premises, or both, means that there are certain unique issues that need to be addressed. The major issues that require attention include (in no particular order):

Proposing ECA

Parental Involvement and Consent

Insurance

Transport

Health and Safety

Behaviour and Discipline

Supervision

Coordination and Planning

Overnight Stays

Community Use of School Facilities

Legal Issues

Child Protection

Proposing ECA

As ECA is a dynamic program, there will be times when teachers and others have ideas for new activities that should be added. To facilitate consideration of these in a formal manner, the ECA policy should contain an ECA proposal form. Such a form would provide details of the following for a proposed activity:

- Proposed date, time of departure, and time of return for the activity
- Proposed itinerary
- Aims and objectives of the activity
- How these aims and objectives will be met
- Possible follow-up activities
- Breakdown of the various costs associated with the activity, and a total cost
- Any special funding available for the activity
- Cost to the students
- Provision for those who cannot afford the cost
- Supervision levels required for the activity
- A note that the activity is covered by the school's insurance

Parental Involvement and Consent

As holistic education is dependent on a cooperative approach between parents and the school, it is vital that parents are fully aware of and committed to the success of the school's ECA and ECA policy.

In relation to individual ECA, it is important that any policy mandate the delivery of a letter or form to the parents of students that might include the following:

- A description of the activity, including date, place, time, duration, and means of transport.
- The purpose of the activity and how it relates to the overall curriculum.
- The total cost per student and cost to parents after the school's contribution is subtracted.
- A permission and release form that allows the student to participate in the activity and must be returned to the school in order for a student to participate.
- Levels of adult supervision
- A medical form highlighting any illnesses that a pupil may have or medication that he is taking and granting authority to the school to act in an emergency medical situation in the event that a parent cannot be contacted (a separate form for the latter covering the whole year might be an alternative solution).

Insurance

In the modern, increasingly litigious society, it is important that all organizations have adequate insurance coverage, including schools. Given that ECA take place outside of school hours or/and school premises, it is important that any policy puts in place a system of ensuring that the school's insurance coverage meets any potential liabilities that may arise from ECA. At a minimum, adequate insurance, from the school's perspective should include:

- Public liability insurance to protect the school if the school's actions result in bodily injury to others, including students.
- Employer's liability insurance to cover the school from claims by employees who suffer bodily injury in the course of employment by the school for ECA.
- Group personal accident insurance to cover the school for situations where accidents occur for which the school cannot be deemed negligent.
- Travel insurance, if the activity involves overseas travel

Although the above insurance requirements are almost certainly part of every school's insurance program, schools should ensure that they apply to all ECA. In addition to these, the ECA policy should mandate that the school verifies that the host of a particular off-campus ECA has adequate insurance, along with any company or individual transporting groups to and from ECA.

Transport

As ECA often requires travel, transportation issues arise that should be dealt with by any ECA policy. Among the major issues here are that the form of transport chosen is appropriate for the number of people traveling and for the distance being traveled and that the transportation supplier accept certain conditions of hiring. Such conditions might include:

- Transport supplied must be suitable and well maintained, with teachers having the right to refuse any vehicle that they deem unsuitable for the outing in favour of a suitable replacement vehicle or a refund.
- The driver should be used to dealing with students and have a full knowledge of and follow the itinerary and timetable for the activity, subject to changes by the teachers.
- The driver is responsible for the safety of the students while traveling, but teachers have the right to intervene in cases where they feel that student safety is being compromised.
- The students should have access to the vehicle all day for such purposes as changing clothes, eating packed lunches, and shelter where necessary.
- Vehicles to be left in the same condition of tidiness as they were found.

Health & Safety

For any school, the wellbeing of the students in its care is a top priority, and ECA create unique situations in which the health and safety issues that are part of the everyday education process take on added significance due to such factors as location and the type of activity in question. It should be noted that approaches to health and safety are not intended to “wrap students in cotton wool” but rather to minimise the risk of serious harm befalling a student. It is clear that bumps, bruises, and even injuries are inevitable in some physical activities and are in fact part of the maturation and development process for children. However, there are also health and safety precautions that those responsible for children during ECA might include, including perhaps the following:

- A medical questionnaire for parents to complete that would indicate whether a pupil suffers from any condition that would create undue risk by participating in a certain activity or that teachers should be aware of so that they can address if the condition’s symptoms occur.
- The availability of basic First Aid boxes at appropriate ECA to have at hand to deal with minor injuries.
- Training in First Aid for teachers involved in ECA.
- A health and safety leaflet or talk to students taking part in ECA
- Good knowledge of an ECA venue from a health and safety perspective. This would cover such things as the adequacy of any equipment being supplied, the health and safety qualifications of any outside supervisors of ECA, the location of and distance to the nearest hospital, the availability of a local doctor, and emergency evacuation procedures for indoor activities.
- A thorough inspection of any accommodation that student might be staying in during ECA for proper hygiene and safety standards.
- Close supervision of students that are known to be at a higher health risk than normal (e.g. asthmatics or epileptics).
- Clear procedures for teachers on handling emergency medical situations.
- The provision by the school of reliable mobile phones to all teachers taking part in ECA
- Adequate levels of adult supervision

Behaviour and Discipline

The success of the school's ECA program is dependent on the good behaviour of the students involved. As a general rule, the school's existing policy on student behaviour should apply to ECA, as the students are representative of the school at such activities. However, given the nature of ECA settings, including being off school grounds and in the public view, there are certain behavioural issues that should be emphasised. The reason for this is that off-campus activities have a tendency to see pupil's feel less inhibited about indiscipline and to see teachers relax somewhat in their approach to discipline. The behavioural issues that should be highlighted might include

- Wearing of full school uniform unless instructed otherwise by the school.
- No smoking or alcohol consumption during ECA.
- Compliance with all instructions of bus drivers and other outside authorities with responsibility for ECA, such as instructors or guides.
- No leaving the tour group, for any reason, without permission.
- Strict adherence to any safety and health precautions associated with a particular activity.
- Agreement to take a prescribed action, such as waiting at a particular location or contacting a teacher by phone, if a student becomes separated from a group.
- The utmost respect to be shown to the public, ECA organizers, and property of others when on ECA.
- Remaining in assigned accommodation and rooms during overnight, or longer, trips

Again, as regards disciplinary procedures for transgressions of the code of behaviour while involved in ECA, the standards used within the school proper can be generally applied. However, it should be noted that many activities have a fun and/or excitement factor associated with them perhaps not found in the classroom environment and that the teacher/pupil relationship is often best served by being somewhat less formal during ECA than in the classroom. Nonetheless, among the disciplinary options available to teachers should be exclusion from further ECA for cases where a student is overly disruptive or constitutes a danger to himself or others.

Supervision

Recognising that teachers and other staff members give up a large portion of their own time voluntarily to ensure the success of ECA, any ECA Policy should strive to provide teachers with assistance and guidance in their supervisory duties associated with activities. Clearly, teachers have to be extra vigilant when taking children out of the school, having to pay attention to such things as road safety, behaviour on the bus, risks posed by particular venues, and the health and safety of the students at all times. To this end, the policy might address:

- Setting levels for supervisor/student ratios. These levels will vary according to the activity being undertaken, its duration, and the ages to the students taking part (for example, a group of 6th years attending a theatre may require much less supervision than a group of 2nd years on a hiking trip), but minimum ratios should be established.
- Providing teachers with such equipment as mobile phones, First-Aid kits, and emergency contact details.
- Making First Aid and safety courses available to teachers.
- Facilitating teachers in becoming “au fait” with ECA venues.

Coordination and Planning

Coordination and planning can contribute greatly to the smooth running of ECA, so an ECA Policy should establish procedures and parameters for effective planning of activities. To this end, it could make provision for an ECA Coordinator or ECA Committee. The Coordinator/Committee (C/C) would take primary responsibility for organizing the ECA of the school by helping arrange and coordinate inter-school activities and major school outings and functions. The C/C would participate in establishing goals, directions, and policies for ECA implementation and guide students toward proper concepts, encouraging them to participate in ECA. In such a role, the C/C would be responsible for the following:

- Recruiting and organising the necessary personnel for the implementation of ECA.
- Drawing up a yearly plan for ECA in the school (this may require amendment as the year progresses).
- Providing suggestions to the school management regarding the use of finances, allocation of resources, and equipment required for the operation of ECA.
- Promotion of the ECA program inside and outside the school.
- Promotion of behaviour and safety guidelines among teachers and students.
- Development of an evaluation and appraisal system to assess various ECA and thereby help improve planning of future activities.

Overnight Stays

When ECA events require that a group of students spend one or more nights away from home, there are added issues that the school must address from a supervisory perspective above those associated with a day-trip. These include, among other things:

- Ensuring that the accommodation is clean, safe, and appropriate for the students.
- Establishing a list of the items that students should bring with them for such a trip.
- Being aware of whether students are prone to any problems that may have particular relevance to overnight stays (e.g., sleepwalking, bedwetting, or nightmares).

- Having an evacuation plan in the event of a fire and ensuring that the students are familiar with this.
- Establishing and policing a curfew for students.
- Conducting a headcount every evening and morning to ensure that all students are accounted for.
- In cases of overseas trips, making provision for medical care if it should be required.
- Providing students with a mobile phone contact number of a teacher that they can use if needed.

Community Use of School Facilities

In cases where the school's facilities are made available for use by the community, it is important that the ECA Policy addresses the conditions under which such availability is facilitated. In allowing access to the school premises, the school has a potential liability to those that use the facilities. As such, an ECA Policy should make clear the school's position supporting community involvement and outline guidelines that the school should use in contracting out its facilities, taking special heed of such issues as health and safety, condition of equipment and other facilities, supervision, and limitations regarding what activities are/aren't permissible on the premises. A standard application form should be created and all groups must complete this form when applying to the Board of Management for use of the school premises. All applications must be agreed on by the the Board in advance of a group using the school. All external groups using the school must produce, in hard copy, proof of their own Public Liability Insurance.

Legal Issues

In relation to the ECA Policy, perhaps the most important legal issue is the duty of care that the school and its staff have to the pupils. Case law highlights the importance of planning in the ECA process. It shows that reasonable care must be exercised in the following:

- The nature of the activity chosen.
- The venue.
- The means of transportation.
- The demands on the physical resources of the pupils, having regard to their age and capacity.
- The dangers to which pupils may be exposed.

The other major area where legal issues are paramount relates to supervision.

Child Protection

A school policy on ECA must refer to and be based on the school's/Trustees/DES issued Child Protection Guidelines. All of the earlier issues will, in various ways, be influenced by the aforementioned guidelines. The ECA Policy, in particular,

should remind participants that as many ECA's involve locations and people external to the school premises/community there is an additional onus on the school personnel to ensure that good practice prevails at all times. At the same time this issue should be dealt with in a sensitive manner so as to avoid teachers becoming over concerned and declining to organize ECA's. Areas to note include:

- What do the Trustee/DES Guidelines on Child Protection say about ECA's
- Does the school's Child Protection Policy refer to the area of ECA's? If not, why not?
- Are the organizers aware of the status of external personnel with whom the students will be involved during the ECA away from the school I.e. transport staff, hostel/hotel staff, activity centre staff etc?
- Are the levels of supervision adequate?
- Are the students aware of reporting mechanisms?
- Has a sense of cooperation and trust been emphasized between the teachers and students participating in the ECA?

Roles and Responsibilities

The school should address the roles and responsibilities of the various parties that make up the school community regarding the ECA policy. These might include the following:

Board of Management

- To ensure that the policy is developed and evaluated going forward.
- To approve the policy.
- To consider reports from the Principal/Deputy Principal on implementation of the policy
- To support and affirm teachers involved in ECA

Principal/Deputy Principal

- To put in place the structures and procedures for the implementation of the policy.
- To monitor policy implementation.
- To support and affirm teachers involved in ECA

ECA Teachers

- To implement the policy and provide feedback on its application.
- To keep records of ECA incidents and report these to the Principal/Deputy Principal.
- To ensure student awareness and acceptance of the policy.

Parents

- To read, understand, and support the policy.

- To provide any relevant information requested by the school regarding their children and ECA.
- To encourage their children to participate in ECA.
- To support and affirm teachers involved in ECA

Students

- To obey all instructions of supervisors of ECA.
- To always act in a safe manner when involved in ECA.
- To acknowledge the work being done through ECA on their behalf by being always respectful.
- To gain enjoyment and fulfillment from their involvement

Success Criteria

The school needs to determine criteria against which the success of the ECA Policy can be measured. These might include:

- Increased pupil participation in ECA.
- More teachers willing to supervise ECA.
- A reduction in the number of ECA injury events.
- A reduction in disciplinary incidents arising from ECA.
- More and varied activities for students to participate in.
- Reduced insurance premiums.
- Smoother running of the ECA process.

Monitoring Procedures

Monitoring of the ECA Policy implementation should involve teachers reporting to the ECA Coordinator/Committee (C/C) on individual activities; the C/C coordinating this material and working with the Principal/Deputy Principal on developments and issues to be addressed; and the Principal/Deputy Principal reporting to the Board of Management on implementation success and suggestions for the future.

Review Procedures

The policy should be reviewed after a set period of time, say two years, with the review team comprising the ECA Coordinator/Committee, the Principal, and the Deputy Principal. This review should survey the views and experiences of teachers, students, and parents in relation to the success of the policy, analyse the ECA records to examine the impact of the policy on the ECA program, and address any policy areas that need amendment or improvement.