

ATHY COLLEGE

CARE TEAM

Draft Proposal

October 2011

What is Pastoral Care in the School Setting?

School Pastoral Care is an approach to education which seeks to value and develop the young person at every level. It implies caring for the quality of relationships between all the partners in the school community. It involves the engagement of all school policies, processes and programmes in the development of the appropriate structures, roles and resources to support the development of the emerging adult.

Pastoral Teams / Care Team / Support Team

Who is involved?

Some schools call them care teams or support teams. In general terms this is the team that brings together all the support services of the school to review how the school community is responding to overall needs of each member of the school community but in particular the student and even more specifically those students with particular challenges. In that context a number of roles might suggest themselves to this team – guidance counsellor, co-ordinator of SPHE, resource teacher, home-school liaison, year heads, chaplain, principal and/or deputy...the list is not exhaustive as each school needs to decide who is best fitted for this team – often the answer to this question is best considered in light of the next...

What is a Pastoral Team for?

The pastoral team is there as a resource to the school community around how the school is caring for the wholistic needs of its students particularly through an integration of all the support services on offer. The team is a concrete expression of the school's ethos of care for the whole development of the student. It is a coming together of a circle of key personnel who in their turn have a team supporting them – such as the SPHE team, the chaplaincy team, etc. The pastoral team provides a forum for all these personnel to share information, consider issues of common concern, provide concrete support for each other, make proposals for action in agreed areas. It has been our experience that a well functioning pastoral care team can significantly support these core personnel.

How does a Pastoral Team function well?

The first aspect that this and any team needs to consider is the following question: what specifically is our role? In answering this question clearly time and energy will be saved down the line. The answer will ensure that the purpose is around integrating the roles of those on the team, about sharing relevant information, discussing and making concrete proposals around common issues of concern, about communicating simply and frequently to all who will have an interest in their work.

Can it be more than a talking shop...?

There is nothing more frustrating than a team that just talks and there is no action. While discussing issues is vital, it is just as important that concrete action results from such talking that offer support in practical ways to the team, the students, parents, staff and others. Therefore it can be helpful for the pastoral team after it has clarified its role, to set itself three or four major goals for the year to guide its work, such as putting in place training and practical resources for the Class Tutor team; arranging three short inservice sessions for the full staff on particular areas of identified need.

Care Team Checklist

- Vision and practical purpose for the team clarified and approved by all key stakeholders
- Membership to include all relevant service roles in the school but not exclusive to these, rather open to new and occasional membership in line with the agreed vision and purpose of the group
- Management support expressed practically for the functioning of the group time, resources, communication, presence at meetings
- An action plan in place that guides the work of the team from term to term
- Clarity regarding the operation of the group convening meetings, setting agendas, process of meetings themselves, actioning agreed proposals, on-going communication with relevant stakeholders
- Providing means so that the needs of parents, staff and students are heard in the work of the team
- Acknowledgement of the work of the team in an appropriate form
- Meeting time put aside for the team both regular meetings and occasional longer meetings for specific purposes such as at the beginning and end of each year
- Annual review of the working of the team
- Have time for some fun and relaxing as a team!

Case study A Pastoral Care Team in action

One school I recently worked with had the following structure:

- Care Team met every fortnight for a class period which had been timetabled so that most of the key personnel would be free and others could be released as necessary.

- The Chair role rotated every three meetings.
- The first item on the agenda was always a review of the agreed actions of the last meeting.
- An agenda was always put on the staff noticeboard at least two days ahead and invited other items or staff to share their views on the agenda with any of the participants
- A very brief bullet point agreed summary was posted on the staff noticeboard within two days of the meeting
- Occasionally the Pastoral Team would give an input and hold a discussion with staff, parents, Board of Management and Student's Council
- The membership of the Team varied a bit from year to year but in general the Pastoral Care Co-ordinator, Guidance Counsellor, Home- School Liaison, Learning Support, Chaplain, SPHE Co-ordinator, at least one Year Head and Tutor and the Deputy Principal were the fixed membership with others attending from time to time.
- This school also had a voluntary system of 'Pastoral Assistants' where a teacher was available to students as a pastoral support to augment the role of Tutor and Year Head. These assistants have had some training in their role and primarily act as 'gateway' personnel to talk with students who need some brief intervention around a specific difficulty or to be facilitated to receive more specialised support.