



St. Columba's College

Exclusions Policy

Reviewed September 2024. Date of next review, September 2025.

Person Responsible for updating policy: Warden

Introduction

This policy should be read in conjunction with the procedures laid out out by the Department of Education:

Rationale

All pupils have a right to learn in an orderly and caring environment. All members of the school community have a right to be treated fairly and with dignity in an environment free from disruption, intimidation, harassment and discrimination. The Code of Behaviour aims to provide a safe, secure learning environment free from disruption for all our pupils by promoting a sense of respect for oneself, for others and for our environment. By enrolling in this school, each pupil and his/her parents agree to uphold the Code of Behaviour in detail and in spirit. There will from time to time be serious breaches of the Code of Behaviour where it will be in the best interests of the school community that the pupil(s) involved are removed from the school for a period of time or permanently.

Part A.

In formulating this policy, every effort has been made to do so in accordance with the provisions of education and equality legislation. It should be read alongside the College's Code of Behaviour and the College Rules.

Part B.

There are times when, despite the best efforts of the College, it is necessary to implement the exclusion procedure. The Warden is empowered to exercise his professional judgement in the use of exclusion. In the absence of the Warden, the Sub-Warden may exclude a pupil for a fixed term.

Part C.

Before deciding to exclude a pupil, either permanently or for a fixed period, the Warden will:

- ensure that an appropriate investigation has been carried out
- consider all the evidence available
- take into account the College's written policies on behaviour/discipline/anti-bullying
- ensure that all legislation, including that relating to equality, has been considered
- allow the pupil to give his/her version of events
- bear in mind the previous disciplinary record of the pupil
- take care that questioning techniques are not oppressive, based on leading questions or conditioned by threats of punishment
- ensure that someone acts in loco parentis during questioning
- check whether the incident may have been provoked, for example by bullying
- consult others, especially House staff, but not anyone who may later have a role in reviewing his decision

N.B Suspension may be immediate, as in the case of a proven and admitted drinking offence or smoking in College buildings. In such cases the punishment is best carried out at once. For more complicated matters the suspension may be delayed until a full and thorough investigation has been completed and a full hearing process has taken place.

Part D.

The Warden will exclude a pupil if he is satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that a pupil has done what s/he is alleged to have done and considers that a temporary or permanent exclusion is the correct sanction.

Part E.

The Warden, in his deliberations, will consider two other factors:

- the strategies adopted by the school to prevent the pupil from getting into this trouble
- the alternatives available to avoid having to exclude

The Warden may therefore ask:

- Was the misdemeanour a one-off mistake?
- Was the negative action a cry for help?
- Does exclusion offer the best way forward?
- Was the poor behaviour a reaction or a lashing out after constant teasing, bullying or provocation?
- Were there signs that the pupil was struggling with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties? Did the College respond in the best manner?

Part F.

Where an exclusion is for a fixed period, the Warden may specify some expected outcomes that will lead to a full reintegration of the pupil. These expectations and the time-span will be fair and reasonable. The proposals will offer the most appropriate balance between punishment and efforts to encourage improvement.

After the expiry of a fixed-term exclusion, the Warden will normally arrange a meeting with the pupil to make explicit his expectations about future conduct.

Part G.

There may be occasions when 'a managed move of schools' is in the pupil's best interests. This will not be carried out under threat of exclusion and will be in consultation with parents.

Part H

Where a preliminary assessment of the facts confirms serious misbehaviour that could warrant permanent exclusion, the procedural steps will include:

1. A detailed investigation carried out under the direction of the Warden.
2. A decision taken by the Warden, who will inform the Board of Management.
3. Consideration by the Board of Management of the Warden's recommendation.
4. Confirmation of the decision to permanently exclude.
5. The offer of an appeal, according to the procedures of the Department of Education.

Permanent exclusion is seen as a final step after all available strategies have been considered. It may follow persistent, defiant misbehaviour. However, the Warden also reserves the right to exclude a pupil solely on a one-off event that is serious enough to warrant a permanent exclusion. Instances where a person is embarrassed or humiliated on the internet or through social media fall into this category. The following exceptional circumstances are a guideline to offences considered serious enough to warrant a permanent exclusion:

- serious actual or threatened violence against another pupil or a member of staff
- sexual abuse or assault
- supplying an illegal drug or possession or use of an illegal drug on College premises

- carrying an offensive weapon
- persistent and defiant misbehaviour, including bullying in all its forms

The above list is a guide only and is not exhaustive.

Part I.

Parents will normally be informed, by telephone initially, of any serious offence committed by their son/daughter and involving exclusion. A follow-up letter will be sent subsequently.

Part J.

Parents have the right to appeal against a decision to exclude made by the Warden. This appeal will be heard by a group of people convened by the Board of Management (see complaints/grievances procedure).

N.B. Appeals against a school for exclusion or suspension are made under section 29 of the Education Act 1998.

Signatures & Declarations

This policy was reviewed by the Board of Management in September 2024. Next date for review is September 2025.

Chairperson of the Board of Management

The Warden