

Blackwater Community School Wellbeing Plan/Policy 2025-2026



Introduction

Blackwater Community School is a co-educational, multi-denominational school which caters for students of all abilities, preparing them for life. Blackwater Community School is a state-of-the-art educational establishment that boasts a modern school building on a greenfield site. The school is an amalgamation of 3 Catholic Voluntary Schools with Mercy, Presentation and CBS traditions and our enrolment list currently totals 960 students.

What is Wellbeing?

The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) provides for a new area of learning at junior cycle called Wellbeing. Wellbeing will cross the three years of junior cycle and build on substantial work already taking place in schools in support of students' wellbeing. This area of learning will make the school's culture and ethos and commitment to wellbeing visible to students. It will include learning opportunities to enhance the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of students. It will enable students to build life skills and develop a strong sense of connectedness to their school and to their community.

Why does Wellbeing matter?

Wellbeing matters not simply because it leads to better educational outcomes or can influence young people's outcomes as adults. Wellbeing matters in the here and now. It is important because all students have a right to feel cared for in school. We also know that students who have higher levels of wellbeing tend to have better cognitive outcomes in school. ESRI research found that 'children with higher levels of emotional, behavioural, social and school wellbeing had higher levels of academic achievement subsequently (at ages 11, 14, and 16)'.² Therefore wellbeing and learning are inextricably connected. There is also a large body of international research showing an association between the quality of relationships between teachers and students and a number of student outcomes, including socio-emotional wellbeing, engagement in schoolwork, feeling a sense of belonging in school, levels of disciplinary problems, and academic achievement. Research has found that the most powerful predictor of good mental health was the presence in their lives of at least 'one good adult'— someone who knew them personally, believed in them, and was available to them. Those who could identify such an adult were found to have stronger self-esteem, optimism that they could cope with life's challenges, and a sense of wellbeing. Those who could not identify any such figure in their lives were found to be at high risk for anxiety, depression, acting out and self-harm. For most of the adolescents surveyed, their 'Good Adult' was identified as a parent (most likely their mother), but for many it was a grandparent, older relative or teacher.

An Understanding of Student Wellbeing at Junior Cycle

It is important that the whole school community builds and shares a common understanding of wellbeing, especially of what we mean when we talk about student wellbeing. Wellbeing can mean different things to different people.

Teachers

At Blackwater Community School, staff are asked about Wellbeing issues in the Staff Survey. They are asked:

1. What are the major Wellbeing issues facing students in BCS?

2. What activities/talks/events etc. would you like to see included in BCS for the coming school year?

This feedback along with student surveys informs the overall Wellbeing plan and initiatives in the school.

Parents

The Wellbeing Coordinator sat down with the Parents Association early in the 2019/2020 year and explained to them about Wellbeing, what is happening in the school and what issues they have come across as parents and would like to see addressed. Parents feedback then also informed the Wellbeing Plan in our school.

Students

The Coordinator surveys all students each year, usually towards the end of the academic year. The coordinator then sits down with management to go through the findings and see what we can do as a school to improve the experience for our students. Students will also be asked to give feedback on the measures the school have taken to date. The coordinator has also met with the Student Voice Committee to get input on these surveys as well as discussing results with them.

Wellbeing Definition

The NCCA have come up with the following definition for Wellbeing: *Student wellbeing is present when students realise their abilities, take care of their physical wellbeing, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and have a sense of purpose and belonging to a wider community.* This multi-dimensional definition has been adapted from the *World Health Organisation* 2001 definition.

Wellbeing and the Framework for Junior Cycle

Student wellbeing is at the heart of the vision of a new junior cycle and The Framework for Junior Cycle provides an excellent basis for planning a junior cycle Wellbeing programme.

The Framework for Junior Cycle is underpinned by eight principles that inform the development and implementation of junior cycle programmes in all schools. All of these principles are important in supporting the student experience of wellbeing in junior cycle. It is worth noting that wellbeing is both a principle of junior cycle education and also a curricular area.

Principles of Junior Cycle Education



Statements of Learning

The 24 statements of learning (SOLs) included in the Framework, along with the eight principles, are central to planning for the students' experience of the school's junior cycle programme. A number of the statements of learning relate explicitly to wellbeing, including:

- The student has an awareness of personal values and an understanding of the process of moral decision-making (SOL 5).
- The student values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts (SOL 7).
- The student has the awareness, knowledge, skills, values and motivation to live sustainably (SOL 10).
- The student takes action to safeguard and promote her/his wellbeing and that of others (SOL 11).
- The student is a confident and competent participant in physical activity and is motivated to be physically active (SOL 12).
- The student understands the importance of food and diet in making healthy lifestyle choices (SOL 13).

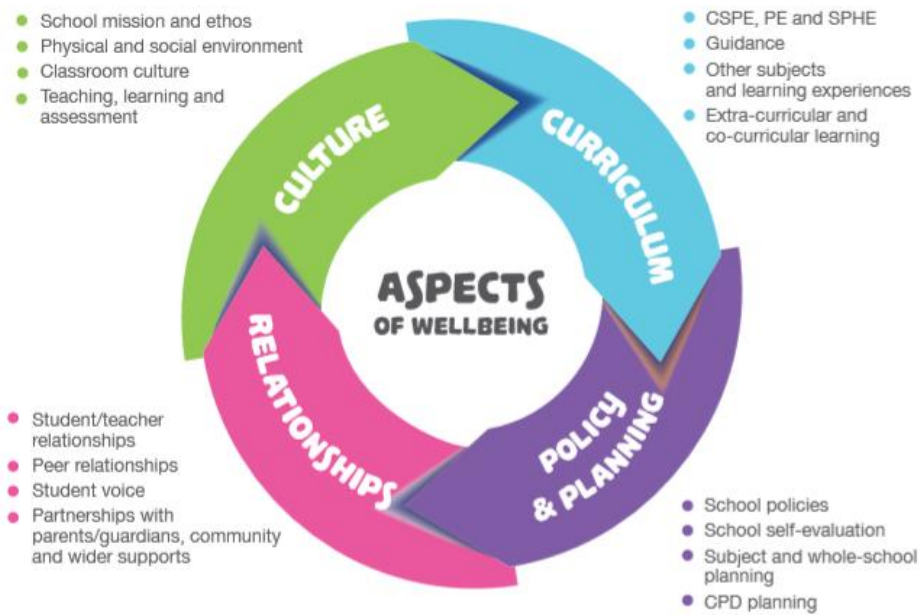
Key Skills

The promotion of key skills within teaching and learning also has an important part to play in supporting student wellbeing. When teachers plan skills-rich lessons, students are more actively engaged in their learning, feel more positive about learning and take more responsibility for their learning. While the key skill of Staying Well focuses specifically on wellbeing, many of the positive dispositions associated with student wellbeing are fostered through the conscious development of all the key skills in the classroom.



Four Aspects of Wellbeing in School

Planning for wellbeing involves consideration of these aspects: culture, relationships, policy and planning and the curriculum. These four aspects coincide well with the four areas of action recommended in the Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013) and with Schools for Health in Ireland: Framework for Developing a Health Promoting School.



Culture

The Wellbeing of the whole school community at BCS is at the heart of the school's mission statement and aims.

Mission Statement

All of us at Blackwater Community School are committed to Quality Education.

Mission Aims of Blackwater Community School

- To foster the Christian values of truth, honesty and integrity.
- To enable students to develop their academic, physical, emotional and spiritual potential to the fullest extent.
- To create a safe environment where students and staff feel cherished, secure and happy.
- To give students access to a broad and balanced education.
- To equip students with a strong sense of self-belief and self-motivation.

- To create a caring, co-operative and friendly community in an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- To enhance student's sense of their role within the local and wider community.
- To provide a welcoming atmosphere for parents and the wider community.

Physical Environment

The physical environment of the school matters to students' experience of wellbeing. The cleanliness and orderliness and general character of school buildings have been shown to influence student behaviour and engagement with their learning. At BCS, the school caretakers keep the school in a clean and well-maintained manner. The school is well ventilated and well-lit through both natural and artificial lighting. Lunchtime training, leagues and other outdoor areas provide students with the opportunity to be physically active during break times. Each year group has their own designated areas where they can meet socially.

Teaching and Learning

Teachers can play a particularly important role in raising children's self-esteem, motivation and confidence by the way they organise teaching and learning. How teaching happens matters! Given that students spend most of their day in class, the day-to-day experience of teaching and learning within the classroom probably provides the greatest opportunity to contribute to student wellbeing. Wellbeing is supported through learning and teaching that helps students feel confident, connected and actively engaged in their learning. Research with teachers has found that learning and teaching methodologies associated with developing key skills can help students feel more confident, connected and actively engaged in their learning. At BCS, school management provide opportunities for teachers to share their practices to the whole staff. This initiative has proved hugely successful and is an example of collaboration that has positively influenced the Wellbeing of staff. Staff are also encouraged to be part of their subject associations and attend CPD, with costs being covered by management.

Assessment

Assessment change is an important feature of the junior cycle developments. This change reflects a substantial body of research showing that the greatest benefits for student learning occur when they receive quality feedback that helps them to understand how their learning can be improved. This helps students feel more engaged in the learning process, more in control of their learning and confident in their ability to improve. Teachers at BCS provide feedback to students on tests and work in the form of comments. This would take the form of what students have done well, what needs to improve and how students can improve.

Teachers have also been encouraged to engage in a wider variety of assessment practices as a result of in-service received from JCT, other bodies and the sharing of practice that occurs in the school. During the 2024-2025 school year a new Assessment and Reporting initiative was introduced – ARC's. They happen 3 times a year. Typically in November, February and May. These ARC's were introduced to not 'over-assess' the students academically. The general feeling amongst the student body is that they welcome this new assessment and reporting cycles at BCS.

Curriculum

At BCS, Well-being is covered through the core subjects of :

Physical Education

SPHE

CSPE

Guidance

Policy and Planning

School Policies

Schools' policies provide the compass by which BCS navigates its way. Many of the school policies in BCS relate directly to student Wellbeing. These include:

- Behaviour Policy

- Homework Policy
- SPHE Policy
- Internet Safety Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Mobile phone Policy
- Dignity in the Workplace Policy

Research has shown that where a supportive approach is adopted to behaviour, student wellbeing is optimised. At BCS, a positive discipline approach is taken, where students are awarded for behaving, rather than punished for misbehaving.

School policies are developed in a collaborative fashion, easily accessible by all, with student voice playing an important role in their formation and review.

Relationships

Research has concluded that positive relationships between teachers and students, and students and their peers, along with a sense of connectedness, are the key influences on a student's sense of wellbeing while in school. A sense of belonging to the school environment is an established protective factor for child and adolescent health, education, and social wellbeing. Connectedness is realised and promoted through the quality of relationships experienced within the school environment and through the values and school culture experienced on a day-to-day basis. In this context, wellbeing can not only be taught through explicit curriculum components but can be modelled by those working in the school as they show care, respect and consideration in their interactions with students. The 'Health Promoting Schools' programme and research emphasise the significance of holistic educational experiences for students so that it is not sufficient to teach 'about' good relationships and respect; this needs to be modelled and experienced in the school community.'

At BCS, many visitors comment on the positive relationships that exist between staff and students, and the 'atmosphere' that exists around the school. These relationships are facilitated by staffs' endeavour to always place students at the centre and structures that exist such as:

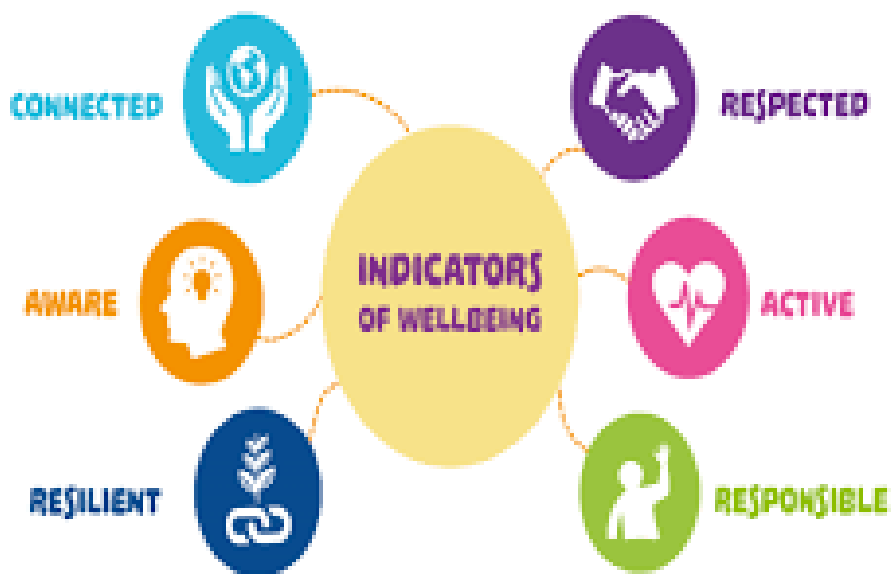
- Year Head & Tutors

- Mentoring
- Parents Mentoring Information Night
- Cairde
- Student Voice
- Student Wellbeing Committee
- Wellbeing Committee/ Amber Flag
- Head Boy & Head Girl
- Guidance Counsellor
- Chaplain
- Parents Council
- Positive Discipline
- Year Group Trips
- Awards Day/Night
- Retreats
- Whole School Events
- Sports Day
- Extracurricular/Co-curricular
- Lunchtime Leagues
- Induction Programmes
- First Year Mass
- Annual Whole School Mass
- Wellbeing Week
- Anti Bullying Week
- Guest Speakers
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer appointment

The wellbeing of young people is enhanced by appropriate experiences of freedom, choice, participation and decision-making. Structures, relationships and democratic participation across the school as a whole can encourage students' sense of their own agency and allow them to find and develop their voices. Authentic listening by the school is central to these experiences; this happens when the views and suggestions of young people are sought and acknowledged, and there is a meaningful response to them. At a whole school level, the

principal runs any policies that are being reviewed or developed by the Student Voice. Some teachers give students an opportunity by surveying and seeking feedback from students on the learning in their classroom in order to improve standards for everyone. This engagement with students leads to a sense of empowerment, encourages learning and improves teacher-student

There are 6 key indicators of Wellbeing.



Wellbeing contributes directly to students' physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing and resilience. Student wellbeing is present when students realise their abilities, take care of their physical wellbeing, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and have a sense of purpose and belonging to a wider community. There is overwhelming evidence that students learn more effectively, including their academic subjects, if they are happy in their work, believe in themselves, their teachers and feel school is supporting them.

Wellbeing Allocation

1st Year

2 x 1-hour RE

1 x 1-hour PE

1 x 1-hour CSPE

1 x 1-hour SPHE

1 x 1-hour Digital Media Literacy

2nd Year

2 x 1-hour RE

1 x 1-hour PE

1 x 1-hour SPHE

1 x 1-hour CSPE

3rd Year

2 x 1-hour RE

1 x 1-hour PE

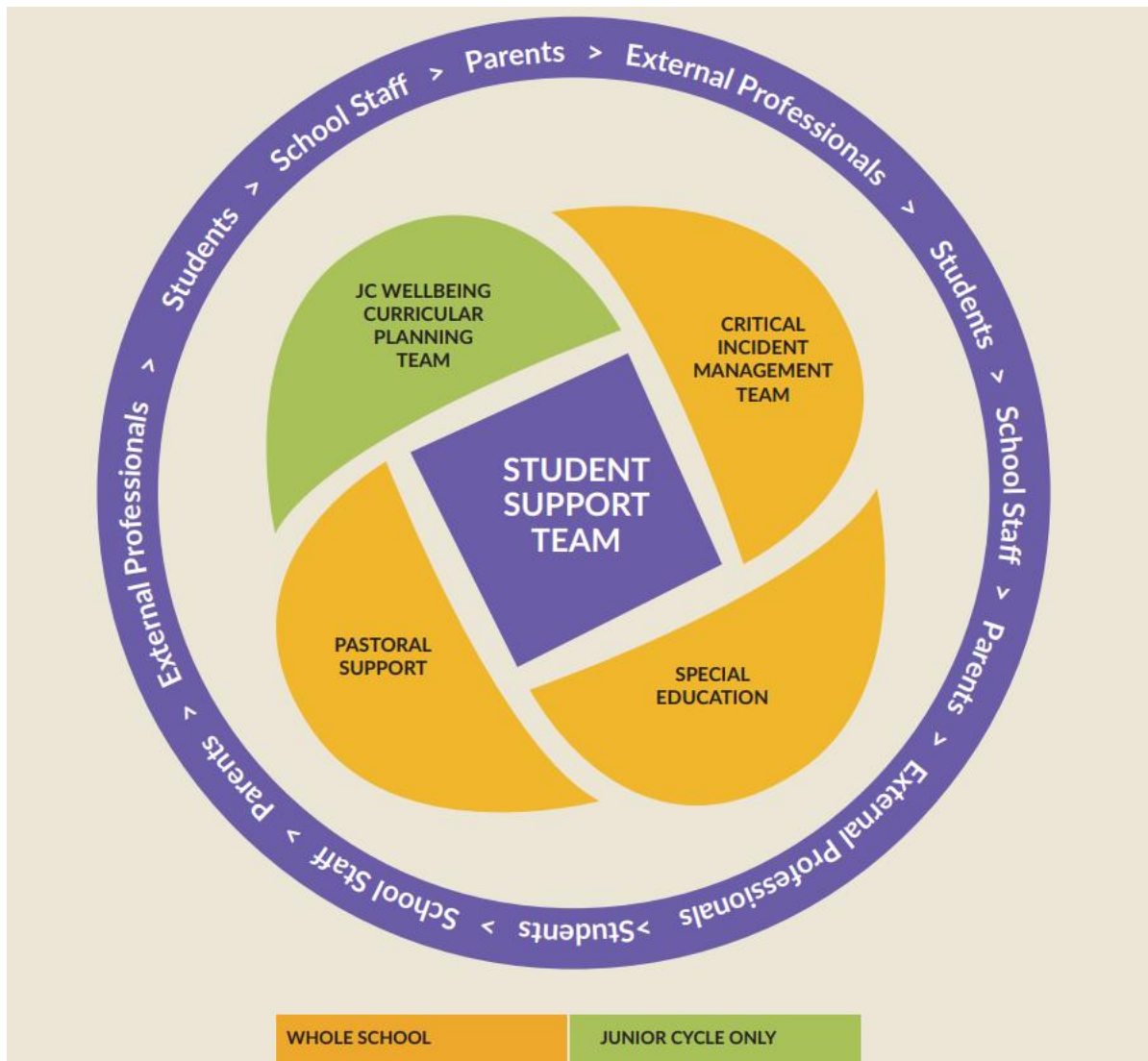
1 x 1-hour SPHE

1 x 1-hour CSPE

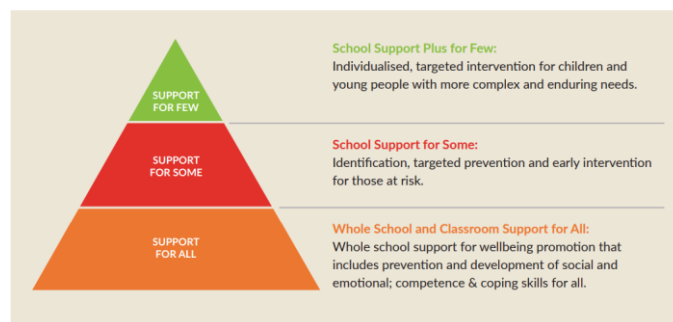
1 x 1-hour Digital Media Literacy

Pastoral Care Update/Student Support Team 2025-2026

This year at BCS a team has been established to incorporate all areas of Wellbeing. The Department of Education has published a Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2019-2025) for all schools which informs how schools can best promote whole school wellbeing.



We are in the process of unifying all areas of Wellbeing into a ‘Student Support Team’. Through implementing a continuum of support, the student support team can provide for the educational, social, emotional, behavioural and learning needs of All, Some and Few students to ensure their ongoing wellbeing. The school Guidance Plan sets out the components of this system which includes for example, the SPHE and RSE curriculum; the behaviour support system the role of year heads and the various school policies that apply.



The core membership of the student support team should include:

- A Principal or Deputy Principal
- Guidance Counsellors
- SEN Coordinators
- Rep from the CIMT
- Whole School Wellbeing coordinator
- Year Head-tutor input

Others that have been invited at BCS are:

- ASD unit coordinator
- Chaplain

Training for members of the SST will run throughout the academic year of 2025-2026.