

New Beginnings

Pastoral Activities for First Year Students

The Pastoral Care Team in Donabate Community College is made up of the Principal, Deputy Principal, Dean of Studies, Guidance Counsellors, Class Tutors and class teachers. Students are encouraged at all times to talk to any member of the Pastoral care team if they need a friend or a confidant.

We at Donabate Community College recognise that the transition from primary to secondary education can be a daunting experience for many pupils. Students can be a little uncertain adapting from:

One teacher, to that of many teachers.

One classroom, to that of many classes.

Meeting new friends from different schools.

We therefore plan to make this transition as smooth as possible and work to establish this move in a very positive light as a ‘new beginning’ a “new journey”

The beginning starts not in Donabate Community College but in the Primary School where prospective pupils are introduced to life in Donabate Community College by the Guidance Counsellor.

Prospective pupils are also invited to attend an open day in September. At this time 6th class pupils are invited to engage in all activities organised for their benefit. They are first welcomed at the gate by Ms. Laffoy the Principal. They are then divided up into groups with an Altor at the head of each group.

In October all students and their parents are invited to an information night where the various policies and procedures are discussed to enable a smooth transition for all 6th class students. Here it is emphasised by the Principal Ms Laffoy, that Donabate Community College is a school that does not tolerate any form of Bullying and the Bullying policy is explained in great detail.

During the second half of the information evening class teachers who are the experts in their own subjects offer advice to assist pupils with subject choices.

The Guidance Counsellor meets individual parents who have specific learning or behaviour concerns in relation to their individual children. Meetings between the Guidance Counsellor and all Parents are organised for the day of the entrance exam which is held normally at the end of January or beginning of February.

It is important to us in Donabate Community College that when our new 1st year pupils arrive that they feel secure and know that there are personnel available that they can turn to for help.

On their first day new pupil are assigned to a Form Class and each class has a dedicated Form Tutor, who is in turn supported by the Principal and the School Guidance Counsellor.

Induction Programme.

Another strategy to facilitate the smooth running of pupil transition from primary to secondary education is a very innovative and structured induction programme. All 1st year pupils participate in this programme which gives them the opportunity to find their way around the school, learn about procedures, the curriculum, pastoral care and most importantly meet their new subject teachers.

The first day in school all 1st year students stay in their class group with their Form teacher. The form teacher explains the school Journal, the various subject options, school policies, especially the Anti Bullying code. (This will form part of their lessons plans in Religion studies and SPHE throughout the month of September and October. Where the dangers of bullying are discussed further.)The form teacher will introduce their class to their various subject teachers.

This Induction programme also contains specific activities which are scheduled during the months of September/October. These ‘in school’ and ‘out of school’ activities seek to strengthen new friendships, build confidence and above all allow the boys and girls to have fun.

The events within this programme are:

- **1st year trip to Newbridge House where all the first year students walk from D.C.C. to the grounds of Newsbridge House for an afternoon. This is a class building exercise where a group photograph is taken on the steps of the famous house.**
- **This is followed by an organised picnic on the grounds of the Newbridge estate. All the students enjoy their picnic with their new class colleagues. This helps to foster and develop new relationships.**
- **During the month of September all first year students organise a ‘Parents’ morning for each of their individual classes. The 1st years organise this with the help of their form tutors. It is a wonderful chance for 1st years to show their parents their new school and the new friends they have made. In the past parents have also enjoyed the experience of meeting other parents from the college and use the event to foster and develop relationships.**
- **During the first term the School organises a charity day for 1st years which involves a sponsored walk to Portrane. This is a class building exercise where all the students from the various classes organise the day as a team exercise.**
- **During the second term all first year history classes’ complete projects on the Crest of the college. This helps all first years to understand the Crest and its connections to the community.**

The Altor Programme

The Altor Programme is a new mentoring programme set up in Donabate Community College. Where senior pupils will help and assist 1st pupils in finding their way in a new school, and a new environment.

This mentoring initiative aims to help children cope better with the transition from primary to secondary school when young people feel particularly vulnerable.

The programme runs throughout the school year. The Altors meet with the 1st years for on a regular basis. It is envisaged that this mentoring support will develop confidence and self-esteem for first year students, helping them to deal with new situations and challenges.

An evaluation at the end of the programme comparing the 1st year's attitudes, fears and apprehensions at the start of the programme and at its completion of the project will help to gauge the impact of the Altor programme and improvements will be adopted based on these evaluation.

Initial responses from the mentors and first year students indicate that the project has been very successful and the 1st years look forward to continuing their work with the Altors.