

Frequently Asked Questions

Do we have to buy books?

You have a choice in this matter. Parents are welcome to buy schoolbooks for their child if they so wish. However, a more prudent option may be to participate in our Book Rental Scheme. Under this initiative, parents pay a set sum per year and we provide the books for the student. The sum for all students is €125. (€8 per student contributes towards the cost of 24hr insurance for every student). It is important to realise that this is an annual charge and that, without full co-operation of parents, the continuation of the scheme will be in jeopardy.

The Book Rental Scheme/School Levy presents parents with value for money; when you consider that a full complement of books for a first year student may cost a minimum of €330. It certainly makes sense for parents to join the programme. Furthermore, there are reductions for those families with two of more children in the school. It must be stressed too that the **Book Rental Scheme/School Levy covers not only books, but also pays for buses, photocopying, referees, subscriptions, printing, etc.**

Please Note: Transition Year students may not receive a full complement of books, however they receive subsidised events throughout the year as well as paying for buses, photocopying, competition entries, guest speakers, and additional materials for Drama etc.

How is the school day organised?

The timetable will change back to its previous format providing there are no COVID-19 restrictions at the start of the new school year. There are nine class periods per day, organised into blocks of three from Monday-Thursday with six classes on Friday. School starts at 9.00a.m. and first break is at 11.00a.m for 15 minutes. The second, longer break lasts for 30 minutes between 1.15pm and 1.45pm and school finishes at 3.45pm (Mon.-Thurs). All class periods are 40 mins long. On Fridays there are three classes before break (11:00-11:15a.m.) and three classes after break with school finishing at 1:15p.m.

What subjects are available to my child?

Coláiste Pobail Acla offers the following core and optional subjects:

At present, Junior Cert. students take the following **core subjects**:

- | | | |
|-----------|---------------|----------------------|
| ✓ CSPE | ✓ History | ✓ Physical-Education |
| ✓ English | ✓ French | ✓ Science |
| ✓ Gaeilge | ✓ Mathematics | ✓ SPHE |

There are also a number of **optional subjects**.

- ✓ Art
- ✓ Geography
- ✓ Home Economics
- ✓ Engineering
- ✓ Music
- ✓ Graphics
- ✓ Wood Technology
- ✓ Business Studies

**Subject may only be provided if there is sufficient demand for that subject.*

This subject choice is reviewed annually and amended to deliver the combinations of subjects that suit the majority. Therefore care consideration of feedback given to the school is advised in this respect.

Please be aware that we are committed to giving each student every opportunity to try out different subjects. To this end, we intend to offer all first years a taster programme in September.

Furthermore, we encourage our students to think more progressively about their choices; we try to move away from guiding boys or girls towards the traditional gender defined subject areas.

Is sport important in the school?

Yes, our mission statement outlines that we strive to help our students achieve their potential academically, spiritually, physically and emotionally. Sport, therefore, has an important role to play in this process. We provide as broad a range of sporting pursuits for our students as possible and we encourage participation. Even if your child is not particularly interested in playing, it is important as part of the socialisation process they be involved in teams and extra-curricular events in some way.

How are the students assessed?

The students are assessed on a continuous basis by their teachers. At Christmas and in late May, there are more formal 'house' exams and these are followed by reports which are sent home.

Each year group has one parent-teacher meeting per year and this gives parents a valuable opportunity to meet with teachers and discuss their child's progress (3rd and 6th Year students have 2 Parent-Teacher meetings per year). Through appointment, however, parents are always welcome to discuss any issues with the Principal during the school year.

It is vitally important for pupils to learn to work independently; therefore, it is policy in Coláiste Pobail Acla to set homework on a regular basis, even though the type of work may vary according to each pupil's age and ability. Homework is a part of our

assessment procedure; it also helps to consolidate learning in class and it gives the pupil the opportunity to complete their work without teacher supervision and it teaches them how to organise their time effectively.

We have found that those students who tend to perform best in school are those who are encouraged to study at home. Parental involvement is vital. This encouragement may range from regular checking of work completed to the provision of comfortable and quiet work areas in the home.

Will my child be bullied?

One of the most common comments passed by people who visit Coláiste Pobail Acla is that our school seems like a happy school. We are proud of this and we want to keep it that way. We believe that respect and dignity are the cornerstones of any educational institution and we treat our students accordingly.

As with any large group, however, bullying can and does happen from time to time. We take this very seriously and we have developed a school policy to deal with such instances when they occur. Our track record of dealing sensitively yet effectively with both the victim and the perpetrator is excellent. The bottom line for you as parents is communication. If we in the school community are not alerted to the fact that your child is being bullied, there is very little we can do to stop it. If you communicate any issues to us, we can then put our procedures in place and address the problem immediately.

First and foremost we want your child to be both safe and happy. We believe that we have an excellent staffing structure to deal with any problems, bullying or otherwise, which may arise. Each class group has a tutor who is dedicated to the welfare of those students. There is a guidance counsellor and chaplain who deal with personal issues and offer counselling to certain students during the school year. We also have a Pastoral Care Team which monitors those students who may be showing signs of fragility or risk.

Furthermore, we have a Home School Community Liaison officer Nic Ryan and we endeavour to create closer ties between the school and parents through this position. Mrs Lisa Shannon, our chaplain and Ms Margaret Ebbs, our guidance counsellor, are other important points of contact should you have any questions regarding your child's progress in Coláiste Pobail Acla.

Why does my child have to sit an assessment/test before entering CPA?

Your child will be asked to come to the school for three hours to sit an entrance exam and participate in an induction and orientation workshop at the start of 1st year in CPA. The rationale behind this test is to get an idea of where the students are at with regard to reading, spelling, numeracy and perceptual ability. The test, therefore, gives us an idea of the child's potential and we can use it as a guideline to measure their educational progress during their first couple of years in second level.

What is the uniform and where can I buy it?

The school uniform is black jumper, grey trousers/grey double pleated skirt, white shirt and black shoes/runners and are available in Fahey's Castlebar. It is very important that students present neatly and appropriately for school and we ask for parental co-operation in this regard. There is no designated uniform for P.E. but students are expected to dress in tracksuits and runners for this class. *Supplier of School uniform is subject to change and Parents/Guardians will be notified if additional suppliers become available.*

What are ticks?

All students are presented with a school journal at the start of the school year. The main function of this journal is to record homework; it can also be used as a form of communication between school and home. Occasionally, where homework is not completed or if there is a case of misbehaviour, the teacher may put a comment in the journal. These have become known colloquially as 'ticks'. The incidence of such ticks is rare and the vast majority of our students go through the school year without amassing any such marks.

Will my child settle?

The transition from Primary to Second level can be a very traumatic one for students. They are no longer the big girls or boys in the school and there are a lot more teachers, subjects and other students to think about. We are very aware of this difficult time for young first years; therefore we aim to provide a graduated induction programme for students who come to Coláiste Pobail Acla. This programme will

begin before the end of the current school year; students will be visited in their Primary Schools and given a clear picture of what life will be like in their new school.

On entering Coláiste Pobail Acla in late August, the first years will be given a further introductory day in order to settle in. During their first week they will be provided with another full day of induction by personnel from the School Completion Programme.

We also work with Foróige to run a Big Brother/Big Sister Programme. This pairs a Transition Year or Fifth Year student with a First Year and the aim is that the senior students will act as mentors for the new pupils. This has been very successful so far and has helped our first years to feel more at home in their new surroundings.

What is a Pastoral Care Team?

The Pastoral Care Team consists of the following members of staff:

Paul Fahy	Principal (Acting)
Susie Farrell	Deputy Principal (Acting)
Lisa Shannon	Chaplain
Nic Ryan	Home School Community Liaison Officer
Avril Dempsey	School Completion Project Worker
Margaret Ebbs	Career Guidance Counsellor
Michelle Scully	SEN Co-ordinator

The role of the Pastoral Care Team is to identify those students who may be experiencing challenge or difficulty and to put in place supports that may best suit those individual students. Members of the Pastoral Care Team, particularly Nic Ryan and Lisa Shannon may work closely or be in regular contact with parents in supporting students through times of difficulty. There is no stigma attached to the care team being involved with your son/daughter. As is the case in most post-primary

schools in these current times; it is a particular service that we could not be without in our school.

I hear people talking about Transition Year. What is it?

Transition Year is a gap year which is undertaken after the Junior Cert: it is a programme which is run in approx. 84% of second level schools in Ireland and it has proved very successful in the social, personal and educational development of young people. We feel that our students were, in many cases, too young on leaving school and in some cases may not have made mature career choices. Transition Year offers the student an extra year in which to mature and develop and studies have shown that the programme also leads to improved exam results.

An important point to note is that Transition Year is not a year off or a 'doss year'. Students will be given the opportunity to experience many out of class learning experiences; trips away, entry into a variety of competitions, along with developing new skills and talents. Our students will sample a range of new subjects in fourth year along with continuing with their core subjects. They will be expected to maintain high academic standards throughout.

The school strongly recommends that students opt for Transition Year. Indeed it is most likely that by the time your son/daughter reaches the end of third year; Transition Year will be a compulsory programme in our school. This is for a number of reasons. Firstly to address the number of students who share some disappointment in not gaining access to the programme. Secondly, it would enhance the management of resources in the school to achieve the maximum return for students. Thus far, the programme has been successful in marrying the academic with the extra-curricular. Within increasingly tight budgets, the staff members have been able to offer the TY students a wide range of learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom.

Is there a Parent Association/Council?

Parental involvement is crucial for the running of any successful school. We encourage parents to communicate with the school and indeed, to become involved in the Parents' Council. This is a useful forum which allows parents to meet (usually once a month) and discuss matters relevant to the running of the school. This parental involvement is vital if we are to continue to improve and offer an excellent education to our students. The current contact persons of the council are:

Chairperson: Ciara O'Malley

What is a Board of Management?

Our school is run by a Board of Management. The current members are:

Chairman: Patrick Kilbane

Secretary: Paul Fahy

E.T.B. Representatives: Sabina Munnelly

Gerard Murphy

Parents Representative:

Martin O'Reilly

Teacher Representatives: Adrian Lally

Clodagh Hanley

Patron Representatives: Máire Sweeney

Angela McGlynn

Breege O'Brien

Can my student leave the school whenever he/she wishes?

We do not allow students outside the school gate after they come in each morning, without permission. If a parent/guardian wishes to withdraw their child from the school during the school day, that adult must present at the secretary's office and sign out the student.

If a child is feeling unwell during the school day they should speak to the principal or deputy principal who will give the permission to contact home. Students should make contact using the phone in the secretary's office as no mobile phones are allowed in our school.

We ask parents to please remember the close correlation between regular school attendance and academic achievement. In other words, if your child is in, they will be more likely to succeed.