

First Year Parents' Information Booklet



2026/2027

Welcome

On behalf of the entire school community, we would like to take this opportunity to welcome you and your child to Coláiste Mhuire. We hope that they will be happy in secondary school and that on the completion of their studies your child will be well prepared for the next major step in life, be it employment or further education.

The transition from primary to secondary school offers exciting opportunities and challenges for your child. We hope that through the spirit of partnership, we can work together to ensure they will be happy here while achieving their full potential in academic and extra-curricular endeavours.

As a school founded by the local community and under the trusteeship of the local community, we are guided by the following core values:

- Respect for self
- Respect for others
- Respect for school property

Our core values support and nourish the lives of the people at the heart of our school community; students, staff, and parents.

It is necessary that parents/guardians know how our school operates, and this handbook will provide you with information that will be essential for your child's educational journey with us. As well as outlining important information on procedures, it also offers valuable tips and advice about how you can support your child in their new learning environment.

We know that the transition to second-level school can differ for each child, depending on their personality. The move will happen easily for some, but a few children may struggle. This is expected and should not cause alarm unless difficulties persist beyond the first few weeks. To help your child, we offer a variety of supports, including our Induction Days, and have an excellent support service that includes a Student Support Team meeting weekly to discuss any issues of concern that students might have.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at the school to discuss any problems or issues that may arise during the school year. We look forward to working together during this exciting next step in your child's educational journey and welcoming your child here in August.



School Information:

Principal:	Ms Emma O' Malley
Deputy Principal:	Ms Helen Hannon
Year Head:	Ms Mary Higgins
Guidance Counsellor:	Ms Sinéad Flanagan
Special Education Needs Co-ordinator:	Ms Laura Murray
Secretary:	Ms Anna Burke
Caretaker	Mr Tom Hannon
Telephone:	090 6624740
Email:	info@cmballygar.ie
Website:	https://colaistemhuire.org
Compass:	colaistemhuireballygar-ie.compass.education or download the Compass School Manager App. in the App Store
Twitter:	@ColaisteM
Facebook:	@colaistemhuireballygar
Instagram:	@cmballygar

Junior Cycle 2025-2028:

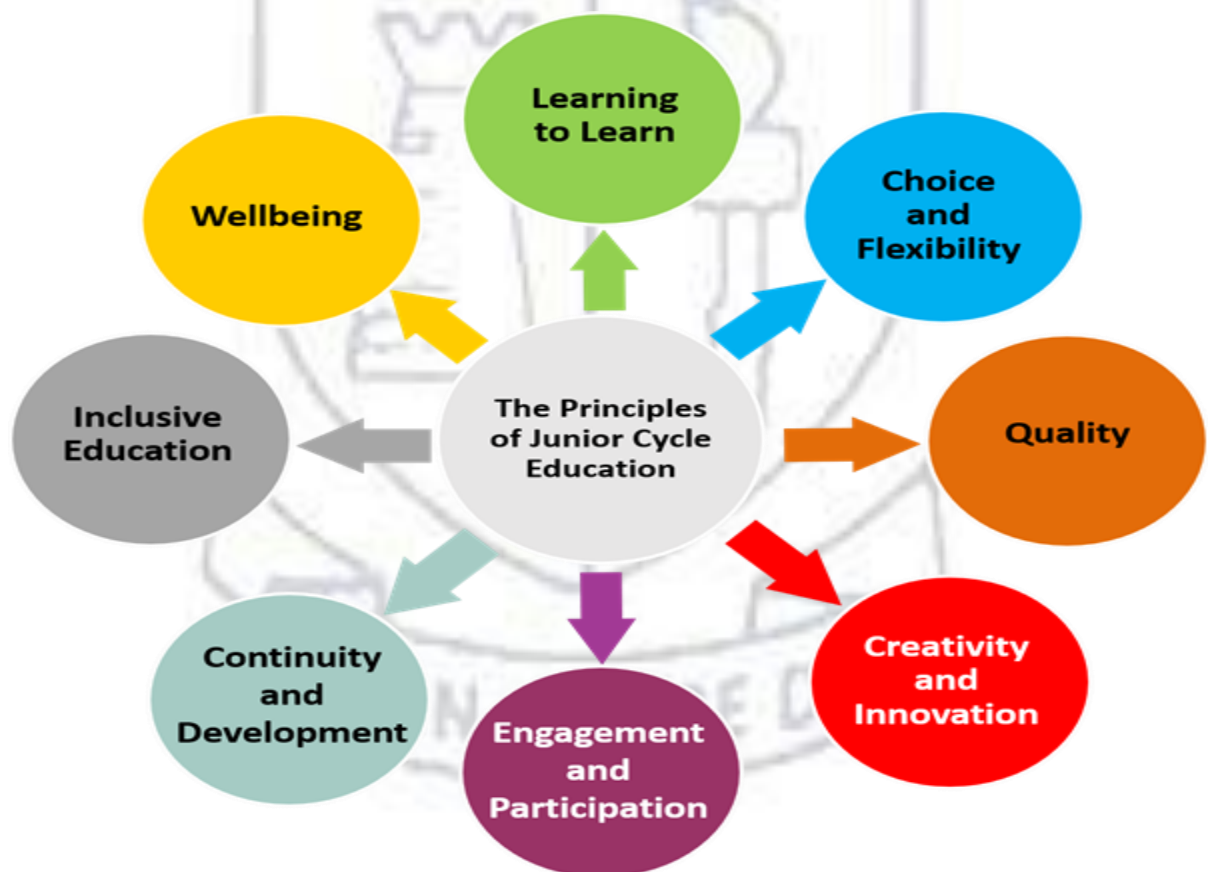
The subjects on offer are as follows:

Core Subjects:	Optional Subjects:
English	Business
Irish	Geography
Maths	Graphics
History	Home Economics
Science	Music
French/German (MFL)	Visual Art
Physical Education (PE)	Wood Technology
Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE)	
Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE)	
Wellbeing	
Religion	

A set of principles, key skills, and statements of learning underpin the Junior Cycle. These will ensure that your child receives a rich educational experience with both breadth and depth. Your child will have access to a varied curriculum of knowledge, understanding, skills, and values. Eight principles underpin the framework for the Junior Cycle. These inform the planning, development, and implementation of Junior Cycle programmes in all schools.

The eight principles of the Junior Cycle are:

- Learning to Learn
- Choice and Flexibility
- Quality
- Creativity and Innovation
- Engagement and Participation
- Continuity and Development
- Inclusive Education
- Wellbeing



Eight key skills permeate across the entire curriculum subjects:



Through engaging with the key skills students will:

- be more actively engaged with learning
- take greater ownership of their learning
- have a critical engagement with digital technology
- be encouraged to problem solve and think critically and creatively

Wellbeing:

The Junior Cycle provides for an area of learning called Wellbeing. Wellbeing will cross the three years of Junior Cycle and will include learning opportunities to enhance students' physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing.



There is a requirement for all schools to provide First-Year students with 400 hours of timetabled Wellbeing classes over the three years of their Junior Cycle.

In Coláiste Mhuire, Wellbeing comprises of:

- 2 classes of Physical Education (PE) each week,
- 1-2 class(es) of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
- 1-2 class(es) of Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) ○ 1 class of Wellbeing

First Year Base Classes:

All First-Year base classes in Coláiste Mhuire are of mixed ability. The classes are divided up to ensure that within each class, there is a broad mix of students by ability. We do not stream or set classes as national and international educational research has found that all students benefit more from a

mixed-ability setting. Students will stay with their base class for most subjects except for their optional subjects.

Assessment in Coláiste Mhuire:

Students are continually assessed by teachers in class in a variety of ways, including homework, oral questioning, assignments, projects and class tests. In addition, all students sit formal house exams every ten weeks. (in November, February and May). Reports of these test results can be accessed on the Compass App.

Assessment in Junior Cycle:

There is a dual approach to assessment:

- (i) Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs) in 2nd and 3rd Year/Assessment Task
- (ii) A final externally assessed, state-certified examination enables the appropriate balance between preparing students for examinations and facilitates creative thinking, engaged learning, and better student outcomes.

What is a Classroom Based Assessment (CBA)?

Classroom Based Assessments will allow students to demonstrate their understanding and skills. It is a task that will cover a broad range of activities, including oral presentations, written work of different types, practical or designing and making activities, artistic performance, scientific experiments, projects or other suitable tasks.

Each subject will have two CBAs, usually at the end of 2nd Year and before Christmas in 3rd Year.

Grading of CBAs:

Each CBA will be followed by a Subject Learning and Review (SLAR) meeting. This is where teachers will compare their assessments of students' work and ensure a common approach across the school that aligns with a national standard. From this meeting, they will then grade the projects into:

Exceptional
Above Expectations
In Line with Expectations
Yet to meet Expectations
Not Reported

The results of the CBAs will be communicated to students and parents, and a record will be kept in the school. The results of the CBAs will not form part of their final grade in a subject, but they will appear on your child's Junior Cycle certificate. This certificate is called the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

Assessment Task (AT):

This is a written assessment that assesses what students have learned and asks about skills they have developed from their experience of completing the second Classroom Based Assessment. The Assessment Task will be completed during class time under the teacher's supervision and will take place over two lesson periods. The AT script is sent, along with the final assessment at the end of Third Year, to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) to be marked. It will account for up to 10% of the state-certified examination and will be incorporated into the grade a student receives for their final examination.

State Examinations Commission (SEC) Final Examination:

The final examination will be:

- no longer than two hours in duration
- taken in a maximum of ten subjects only
- available at a Common Level apart from English, Mathematics and Irish, where there will be two levels (Higher and Ordinary)
- assessed by SEC using the following set of grades:

Distinction	90 to 100%
Higher Merit	75 to 89%
Merit	55 to 74%
Achieved	40 to 54%
Partially Achieved	20 to 39%

In Second Year, students will choose Higher or Ordinary level in English, Irish, and Maths. All other subjects in Junior Cycle are at Common level.

Support for Students...



Class Tutor System:

The school operates a Class Tutor system as part of our support structure. Each class is assigned a Class Tutor who, on behalf of the school community, undertakes the role of caring for a class group to maximise the learning opportunities for each student.

The Class Tutor is usually the person who knows a particular class group best, and they meet their class regularly. They will build a relationship with each student and monitor and sign the School Journal weekly. They will support students experiencing difficulties impacting school life and performance and consult with subject teachers to alleviate any source of difficulty. If the Class Tutor has any particular concerns, they will bring those concerns to the Year Head, Deputy Principal, Principal, or Guidance Counsellor.

Year Head System:

The school has two Year Heads: Ms Mary Higgins (Junior Year Head) and Ms Rosemary McAndrew (Senior Year Head). Year Heads hold regular assemblies with students, liaise with Class Tutors and staff regarding attendance, students' welfare, and monitor academic progress. In addition, they deal with serious issues of indiscipline at the appropriate stage of the ladder of referral, and refer to the Deputy Principal and Principal, if necessary.

The Student Support Team:

The Student Support Team meets weekly. This team consists of The Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor, Junior and Senior Year Heads, the Special Education Needs, Co-ordinator (SENCO), and other staff members where necessary. The Student Support Team discusses issues relating to our students' wellbeing and implements interventions as needed.

The Student Support Team liaises closely with the SEN team and relevant Year Heads, reporting on its work at staff meetings. Furthermore, the Student Support Team is the primary body in Coláiste Mhuire for determining the school community's prompt, caring and supportive response to any critical incident that may occur.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) Team:

Our special education program aims to recognise all students' needs and meet them through inclusive practices underpinned by differentiated approaches to learning and teaching. All staff form an integral part of the learning support team. There is a growing awareness of the importance of encouraging maximum participation and involvement by all students in their subject areas. The SEN Team invites teachers and parents to help identify students that may benefit from supports available. Our approach consists of one-to-one targeted support, group withdrawal, team teaching and SNA support. It must be emphasised that accessing support without a diagnosis is possible.

The SEN Team meets weekly to review the support structures and identify students who may need support. Students are initially identified by their parents and primary school and following this by their subject teachers, the Student Support Team and the SEN Team.

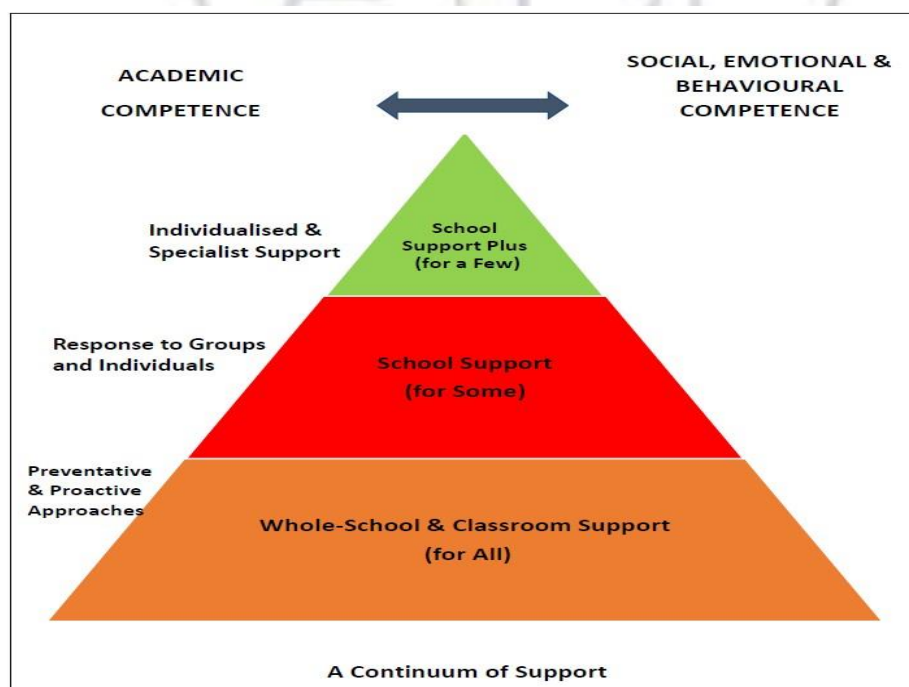
In Coláiste Mhuire, students with the greatest level of need are given the greatest level of support, be it academic, behavioural, social, or emotional. Students have access to support on three levels.

School Support for All – represents the structures and policies across the school to support all students and promote positive student learning and behaviour.

School Support for Some – caters to students who may require additional academic, behavioural, social or emotional support. Depending on the student's needs, this support can be short-term or long-term.

Support for Few – for those students granted access to SNA support.

Please refer to our SEN policy on our school website for further information.



Irish Exemptions:

Students exempt from Irish will receive timetabled support classes during Irish class times.

Reasonable Accommodations for Certified Examinations (RACE):

All teachers are aware of any student with additional needs at the beginning of the school year. Teachers will differentiate homework and assessments for these students as the need arises.

The school makes an application to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) for students who wish to receive accommodations for their Junior Cycle or Leaving Certificate. This application is made during the first term of third/sixth year. To qualify for such accommodations, students must meet criteria from the SEC. Students are tested in school to ascertain whether they meet these criteria. Applications for the RACE Scheme are made on one of the following grounds:

- Learning difficulty
- Hearing difficulty
- Visual difficulty
- Physical difficulty

Students do not need a diagnosis to qualify for these accommodations.



Other Information...

Attendance & Punctuality:

Attendance and punctuality are recorded online through Compass. We make attendance returns to Tusla throughout the year. *We are obliged, by law, to keep accurate records.* Therefore, a notification will be sent home each day notifying you if your child has been marked absent on the morning roll call.

- Students are expected to be in school before the first bell at 8.55 am.
- **Notes:** The school must be informed if your child is absent from school late in the morning or after lunch. Notes can be filled in online on the Compass app or use the detachable notes in the back of the journal. Students are required to swipe their card at the school office if they are late. Three lates will incur morning detention in a single term without a note.
- **Signing in/out:** Students are also required to swipe in/out at the school office if they are leaving or returning to school for an appointment. Parents should use their Compass app or provide a note for students to sign in/out.
- **Student Card:** Each student will be given a student card, which they can use to sign in/out of school for appointments or if they are late.

School Uniform:

- **Uniform Requirements:**
 - **Girls:**
 - School skirt or navy trousers
 - Crested school jumper
 - Light blue shirt
 - All-black or all-navy runners/shoes (no coloured logos or coloured soles)
 - **Boys:**
 - Grey trousers
 - Crested school jumper
 - Light blue shirt
 - All-black or all-navy runners/shoes (no coloured logos or coloured soles)
 - The **crested jumper and school skirt** are available from Donnellan's, Roscommon.



School Jacket

- Students must wear a **Coláiste Mhuire school jacket.**

- Both the **new and older versions** of the school jacket are acceptable.
- Available to purchase at:
- <https://playr-fit.com/collections/cm-ballygar-students>



PE Gear

Compass:

The school uses the Compass App. to communicate with parents and students. Please download the Compass School Manager App. on your smartphone. If you do not have a smartphone, you can access the site on: colaistemhuireballygar-ie.compass.education. Information notifications will be routinely sent to the App. Please ensure you have your notifications switched on.



Office 365:

To support teaching and learning, all students are provided with a Microsoft Office 365 account. This is accessed using the email address provided by the school. Office 365 supports blended learning through Microsoft Teams and OneNote. Our Microsoft Office 365 subscription allows students to install Office, including Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel, on up to 5 devices (PC, Mac, tablet or smartphone.) Students are responsible and accountable for any communications or activities associated with their school email addresses. Students are expected to follow the same rules for good behaviour and respectful conduct online as offline. These rules are found in Coláiste Mhuire's Code of Behaviour and our Acceptable Use Policy.



School Journal:

Each student will be given a journal. This is our means to communicate with you directly. Look at your child's journal and sign it each week. Our tutors will monitor each child's journal weekly.

Books:

As part of the Department of Education and Youth Free School Books scheme, Coláiste Mhuire will provide schoolbooks, exam papers, journals, and essential stationery to all students for the upcoming academic year.

What's Included:

Books and Exam Papers: The school books remain the school's property and must be returned in good condition after 3rd and 6th Year.

Stationery:

- Copies
- 1 A4 ring binder
- Calculator (for 1st Years only)
- Maths set (for 1st Years only)

Note: Pens, pencils, pencil cases, and similar items are not included. Certain subjects will get extra stationery.

To help students stay organised, we recommend purchasing A4 mesh zip pockets.

School Locker:

A locker will be allocated to each student. Each student will be provided with a key; should they lose it, a replacement key will cost €5.

Pupil Insurance:

School insurance will be purchased for each student. This is a 24-hour insurance and covers your child 365 days of the year.

Student Services Fee:

The cost of the locker/box, journal, pupil insurance, and student card are included in the school Student Services Fee which is €60. **This applies to each student and should be paid by October 2026** online, through Compass or the school office.

Voluntary Contribution:

This voluntary payment can be paid in full or in instalments. For 2026/27, it is €100 for one student, €130 for two or more students.

Anti-Bullying Programme:

At Coláiste Mhuire, we recognise that creating and maintaining a safe, respectful and inclusive school environment is a shared responsibility of the entire school community. We are committed to fostering positive relationships and ensuring that bullying behaviour is neither accepted nor tolerated. As a learning community, we actively promote the values of respect, empathy, inclusion and accountability.

Bullying is defined as repeated, intentional behaviour, whether physical, verbal, written, online or psychological, carried out by an individual or group against another person or persons. We acknowledge that the nature of bullying continues to evolve, particularly with developments in technology and social media, and therefore our approaches to prevention, education and intervention must also continue to develop.

Coláiste Mhuire has a comprehensive Anti-Bullying Policy which is regularly reviewed to reflect best practice, legislative requirements and the changing needs of our students. Since 2013, the school has promoted a proactive anti-bullying programme focused on building a positive school culture, encouraging student voice and empowering students to recognise, reject and report bullying behaviour.

Our approach is underpinned by restorative practice, which seeks to build, maintain and repair relationships when difficulties arise. Through restorative conversations and interventions, students are supported to understand the impact of their actions, take responsibility for their behaviour and work towards repairing harm where appropriate. While bullying behaviour is addressed promptly and firmly, our focus is on helping all members of the school community learn

from incidents, restore relationships and contribute positively to a culture of respect and belonging.

Through this evolving and restorative approach, we continue to promote a school environment where every student feels safe, valued and supported to achieve their full potential.

Use of Mobile Phones and Electronic Devices:

To support a focused and respectful learning environment, **mobile phones and electronic devices are not permitted during the school day or during school activities**, unless **expressly permitted by a teacher**.

Phone Pouch System



- Each student will be provided with a **lockable phone pouch**.
- Phones must be **locked into the pouch during the first class of the day**.
- The pouch must remain **sealed and stored in the student's bag for the entire school day**, including break and lunch times.
- Unlocking stations will be available at school exits, where students can unlock their pouches at the end of the school day.

** If your child uses their phone for contactless payments, we recommend they carry a physical bank card instead.*

Phones at School Activities

Students will not be permitted to bring phones to:

- Matches
- School outings
- Any school-related activities during the school day

Phones may be brought to school activities that take place outside the school day, unless otherwise directed by staff.

*** If your child's phone pouch is lost or damaged, a replacement must be purchased at a cost of €20.**

If a student does not intend to bring a phone to school, a signed note from a parent/guardian must be provided. Otherwise, the phone pouch system must be used.

Failure to comply with the school's rules regarding the use of phone pouches will be addressed in accordance with the school's Code of Behaviour.

Evening Study:

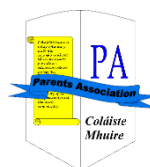
Evening Study runs from 4:15 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. Monday to Thursday and from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Friday. This is an opportunity for students to have a quiet, supervised environment to complete homework or prepare for upcoming tests and examinations. Generally, First Year students do not attend Evening Study.

Extra-Curricular Activities:

Extra-curricular activities play an important part in the holistic development of each student. They are especially important at the First-Year level in establishing friendships and a good team spirit. You should encourage your child to get involved. Activities are organised on a voluntary basis by school staff and mainly take place after school. These activities may include athletics, choir, Gaelic football, hurling, and rugby.

Parents Association:

Our school has a supportive Parents' Association, and new members are welcome. All parents/guardians are invited to attend the first meeting of the Parents' Association, which will take place in September 2026.



Settling In — What you can do to help at home:

- Set a regular pattern for homework time.
- Show interest in work done.
- Provide a quiet, well-lit place to work.
- Turn off the TV or devices during homework time.
- Remove access to mobile phones when doing homework and study.
- Actively help your child to revise.
- In the first few weeks in particular, each evening, help your child to check their timetable regarding homework, books, equipment or notes required for school the next day.
- Fill in the absence, late or permission to leave notes on the Compass App. or in the Homework Journal.
- Check and sign the Homework Journal each week.
- Agree an appropriate time for going to bed and getting up in the morning.

- Ensure your child has a good breakfast each morning.
- Encourage your child to talk to teachers if in difficulty.
- Ring and/or make an appointment to see the Teacher or Year Head if needed.
- Phone Anna in the Front Office if you need to message your child.
- Encourage your child to take part in extra-curricular activities.



Starting Secondary School

Parental/Guardian Responsibility:

There are high expectations of parental/guardian involvement in their child's education.

The school expects that all parents/guardians will:

- Check and sign the Student Journal weekly
- Phone/email the school, if your child is absent for more than one day
- Record absences on the Compass App or using the notes provided in the journal
- Sign any notes in the journal from the staff
- Attend annual parent/teacher meeting for their child

It is vitally important that the Board of Management, Parents, Staff, and Students work together as a team to maintain the high standards that Coláiste Mhuire strives for.

In doing so, we request that parents/guardians support the school and its management team in the following ways:

- Consistent and regular attendance at school is vital. If a student has been absent for 20 days, we are obliged to inform Tusla
- Ensuring that all students are in school no later than 8:55 a.m. each morning
- Full school uniform is worn daily – navy jumper with school crest, light-blue shirt, dark grey trousers (boys), knee-length plaid skirt/navy blue trousers (girls), black shoes and the official Coláiste Mhuire jacket with crest.
- Encouraging and supporting their child to do their best in all areas of school life, including homework, study, extra-curricular and co-curricular
- **Respect for all** – self, others, property and environment
- Mobile phones should be powered off before entering the school grounds • Use of illegal substances of any kind is strictly forbidden

