



07 September 2026

Transition Year Classes

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s) of Transition Year students,

I am writing to you as staff have received some queries regarding the Transition Year (TY) base classes and how they are structured. The purpose of this letter is to set out the educational and practical reasons that lead to students in TY being in different base classes to the base classes that were used from First to Third Year in Junior Cycle.

Transition Year Numbers

From first to third year, this group of students required four base classes to accommodate all students. As a number of students opted to progress directly into Fifth Year this year, it was necessary to reduce the base classes from four to three.

Social Concern

The social concern programme is an important aspect of TY. Students are grouped in base classes by age as most social concern projects require students to be garda vetted. The Garda Vetting Bureau cannot garda vet any young person until they have turned sixteen years of age. By grouping students on the basis of age in each base class, it allows the staff to plan for each student to be able to complete social concern once they have turned sixteen and have been garda vetted. This means that some classes complete it later in the year, after they have turned sixteen.

Progression through the school

It is important to note that the reorganisation of classes is not new for this group. At the beginning of Second Year students were divided into their option subjects based on their own individual choices, and students divided into Higher and Ordinary level classes in Irish and Maths on the basis of their preferred level. This is part of a planned and phased change that takes effect at different stages through each student's time in secondary school. The change in Second Year happens first, followed by this change in TY and the final change that happens for all students at the beginning of Fifth Year, due to subject choice.

Purpose of Transition Year

Transition Year is a one-year programme that is designed to be a bridge between the Junior and Senior cycles, and it is intentionally designed to help students become more independent, self-confident and to develop critical life skills. Reorganising the base classes assists with developing independence and self-confidence throughout the school year, and prepares students for some of the activities that they will experience during the year.

Work Experience

Our TY programme includes three weeks of work experience, where each student will spend time in a workplace, working with new people and in a new environment. Our experience is that students will most likely work as part of a group or team and learn to become part of that workplace during their placement. Stepping into an adult working environment requires high levels of independence,

communication skills, and social flexibility. Developing the ability to connect with new class groups and people early in the school year builds the confidence that student needs to gain the maximum benefit during their external work placements.

National Policy

The re-grouping also reflects the core philosophy set out in the Department of Education's Transition Year Guidelines for Schools, referred to as the TY Programme Statement and which has been in place in all schools in Ireland since September 2025. A key focus area of the new Programme Statement is on developing student's Personal Growth, which page 12 of the TY Programme Statement sets out as follows:

Personal Growth

Students mature socially and emotionally over the course of the year, developing in areas that include health and wellbeing, autonomy, identity, empathy and leadership.

Developmental indicators

- Becoming more assured and confident about themselves as a person.
- Taking greater care of the health and wellbeing of themselves and others.
- Setting and reviewing goals for personal development and achievement.
- Having greater capacity to negotiate ethical dilemmas and reflect on personal values.
- Knowing how to make more informed decisions.
- Persevering longer with tasks, especially when challenging.
- Coming to see challenges as further opportunities for growth.
- Adapting better to groups and new social environments.
- Interacting with others with more empathy, both in person and online.
- Increasingly taking ownership of their own behaviours and decisions.
- Showing more initiative and leadership in school, at home and in the community.

Student experiences

- Collaborative projects, competitions, activities over the year to achieve collective goals.
- Individual tasks and projects, involving digital and non-digital skills to enable self-expression.
- Guided creation of a portfolio that captures their personal growth.
- Education and guidance in personal and emotional development and social awareness.
- Activities and experiences promoting lifelong physical and emotional health.
- Opportunities for guided reflection and review of personal goals.
- Formal and informal opportunities to speak and present in class, in public and in interviews.
- Recognition of personal growth and personal challenges in all aspects of school life during the year.

Image taken from Pg. 12 of the Transition Year Programme Statement, 2025

Preparing for Leaving Certificate or Leaving Certificate Applied

Another important aspect of reorganising the base classes is preparing students for their final two years in school. Whether students choose to do either the Leaving Certificate or Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) in Fifth Year, individual subject choices will naturally reorganise class groups. Each student will be in classes with students whom have chosen the same subjects as them, and their core group of friends will likely choose different subject combinations. Experiencing the reorganising of groups during TY ensures students have time to develop the independence and confidence that will make this transition easier in Fifth Year.

Collaborating on project work

The introduction of Senior Cycle Redevelopment means that students who commence Fifth Year in September 2027, which will be the current TY class, will have new subject specifications in the following subjects: Biology, Business, Chemistry, Drama, Film and Theatre Studies, Physics, Geography, Life Community and Work (LCW and formerly LCVP), Physical Education, Accounting, Agricultural Science, Design and Communication Graphics (DCG), English, History, Home Economics, Maths and Music.

This means that all of these subjects will have an Additional Assessment Component (AAC) worth a minimum of 40% of the grade in that subject with some subjects having an AAC worth 50%. While all AAC's are submitted by each student individually, they require collaboration amongst students at different stages. This includes collaboration on research, conducting experiments/field studies, preparing and undertaking performances and planning specific aspects of the AAC. As students will be working with new groups in these subjects, the Transition Year experience is of immense value in preparing students to learn how to work with different groups of classmates, some of whom will be new.

These skills will also serve students well as they progress to the next stage of their lives and careers after they conclude their time in St. Mary's.

Structure of the Week and Year

While each week in Transition Year varies due to different activities, it is also important to point out that many activities are facilitated as a full year group. This includes many trips to places in Ireland, as well as many guest speakers. Furthermore, all three base classes work together on Music Production and TY Activities each week. Students continue to experience option subjects to enable them to sample subjects for Fifth Year, and these option subjects rotate throughout the year, similar to how this was managed in First Year. French and German are year long modules with students continuing their studies of the language that they studied in Junior Cycle.

Support

It is understandable that students often feel a natural comfort with their close peer groups, and changes can initially bring a mix of anticipation, hesitation and nervousness. It is completely natural for students to feel nervous about moving into a class without all of their primary friend group. It is important to point out that all of the three class groups have students in the class from all four of the base groups in Junior Cycle.

As a staff group, we fully appreciate that the new changes can be challenging for some students, particularly at this early stage in the school year and we know that these first few weeks can be

challenging. As new routines and friendships form and students begin to develop self-confidence and more independence, these challenges will begin to lessen.

Our primary goal throughout Transition Year is to support your child in becoming a well-rounded, resilient individual. Our focus is on supporting all of our students to develop individually, but also to support them to work together as part of the wider year group, which will be essential for the activities that will take place throughout the year and to help each student, and the full year group, to get the most out of Transition Year.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Cullinane', written in a cursive style.

John Cullinane
Principal