



## ST MARY'S COLLEGE FITNESS TO STUDY PROCEDURE

### ***Introduction – What is meant by Fitness to Study?***

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St Mary's College is committed to enabling all students to complete their studies successfully and achieve their potential. There are occasions, however, when physical or mental health issues are so complex or significant that this is not possible. We are committed to being a supportive institution as reflected in our vision, aims and objectives.

Our Fitness to Study Procedure is intended to be used by staff when a student's health and well-being is having a detrimental impact on their ability to progress academically and function at College.

We are committed to treating our students equally and fairly, and strive to make any reasonable adjustments to support them. We recognise the importance of a student's health and well-being in relation to his/her academic progression and wider College experience.

This procedure outlines the steps that the College will follow when concerns are raised about the fitness to study of one of its students. Actions taken under this procedure are not of a disciplinary nature. Where a student's conduct is considered to merit disciplinary action, taking into account all of the circumstances including any declared disability, then the Student Disciplinary Policy and Procedures will apply.

These procedures aim to provide a:

- framework to guide decision making in complex student welfare cases;
- set of parameters for the minimum acceptable level of academic progress;
- series of stages for reviewing a student's place at the College.

These have been developed to work in conjunction with other key College procedures and policies including:

1. Safeguarding Policies and Procedures.
2. Equality Policy.
3. Health and Safety Policy.
4. Student Disciplinary Policy and Procedures.
5. College Vision, aims and objectives.

### ***Identification of those needing support and support offered by College***

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Students are encouraged to declare any health issues during their application and/or enrolment so support can be put in place at the start of term. If a student does not disclose a significant health condition on application, then it is unlikely that they will receive support immediately, or until the condition comes to the attention of a member of staff. Early disclosure and identification of issues is therefore vital to allow the College to assess how best to support students and also to avoid embarrassment or exaggeration of the issue through a lack of knowledge on the part of staff.

The College will of course always seek to provide appropriate support to any student with ill health, whether the condition was pre-existing or commences during study at the College. Students are made aware of the range of support available during their induction and as part of the on-going Tutorial programme. All staff have a duty of care to students and can be approached with any concern however small, and if they are unable to help, staff will refer students to the Well-being Team. The Well-being Team are the Head of Safeguarding and Student Discipline and the Safeguarding & Disciplinary Officer.

Students can directly consult with the:

- Progress Tutors
- Head of Safeguarding and Student Discipline/DSL
- Safeguarding and Disciplinary Officer
- Director of Curriculum

Before sharing health information, staff will seek consent from a student to share key relevant information so that appropriate adjustments can be made. In exceptional circumstances, confidentiality may need to be broken without the student's consent. In these circumstances the student will always be informed.

We understand that health conditions may be temporary or permanent, short or long term, stable or prone to remission. The following procedure aims to clarify the Fitness to Study Procedures applied by the College when reaching judgements and offering support.

### ***Pastoral Support***

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St. Mary's has a robust academic monitoring system which applies to all students. We have an effective pastoral system whereby, if a member of staff has concerns about a student, they can report these concerns to the Well-being Team. A member of the Team will liaise in the first instance with the student and offer support. If no improvement is made, parents/carers will be consulted to agree a holistic approach to benefit the student with support both in College and at home and to help get them back on track if needed.

It is reasonable for Teachers, on a short-term temporary basis, to liaise with students via email, MS Teams and Pearltrees. This cannot continue long-term. St Mary's is not a distance-learning College and does not have the resources to support this long-term.

The Well-being Team and Personal tutors can all provide pastoral support as appropriate within certain parameters and can/will refer to external services where appropriate.

St Mary's cannot provide complex medical or psychiatric support. This would be usually sought externally through the students GP or other services.

Pastoral Support is finite and needs to be available for other students also.

In all cases the support must be **on site and available to all students**.

However, if pastoral support and referrals do not help the student then the formal Fitness to Study Procedure will need to be instigated.

## ***Academic Progress***

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Each case will be unique with its own particular set of circumstances and issues, but a minimum level of attendance needs to be maintained that will allow a student to realistically achieve. Academic success depends on engagement in classroom activity, so excessively long periods of complete absence (two weeks) or very poor attendance (less than 85%) will make a student's studies less tenable, this can be at individual subject level as well as across all subjects.

In regards to coursework and homework, if a student falls significantly behind with their deadlines, despite extensions being offered, then there comes a point at which catching up is not feasible. The specific expectations regarding attendance and assessment will be set in each case depending on the circumstances.

## ***Limits to Support***

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Whether health conditions are disclosed before a student joins the College or whilst at College, there needs to be reasonable limits set to the support that can be offered. These include both the flexibility the College should show around academic progress e.g. attendance and meeting assessment expectations and the type, location and frequency of support needed for a student to remain at College. Clearly it is difficult to set non-negotiable limits for academic progression and support and there needs to be careful consideration and an informed professional judgement in each individual case.

## ***Fitness to study***

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Each student needs to be considered on a case by case basis. Ideally, a clear consensus would always emerge regarding the best way to progress; however, this will not always be the case. There will be occasions where the College believes that it has exhausted the support options available, it has made reasonable adjustments, but the student is unable to maintain his/her fitness to study. These situations impact negatively on both the student and the College, since the student's health, welfare and education may suffer and there will be an excessive demand on College resources.

For the student, who has struggled to maintain their academic progress beyond expectations and for whom trying to maintain the structure of College life has been a positive factor in their rehabilitation, there comes a time at which endeavouring to catch up after a lengthy absence with significantly overdue deadlines is more stressful and therefore more of a negative impact on their health than withdrawing from studies.

The time required to work with individual students to complete missed work, liaising remotely via email, MS Teams and Pearltrees and arranging meetings and support for students is a finite resource, and cannot unreasonably impact on the learning of other students at the College.

If all avenues of support have been explored and exhausted, the College may, in consultation with the student, parents/carers (if applicable), suggest that a student should withdraw from their studies at St. Mary's. In these situations, St Mary's would always assure students and their parents/carers that the best interests of the student and their welfare are at the core of all decision making.

In the event of significant concerns regarding health and fitness to study or if a student's attendance or level of work is affected by their health issues to a point where their progress is a cause for concern, the Well-being Team will arrange a meeting with the student and parent/carer.

Where there is no consensus that withdrawal is the most appropriate outcome, then the stages below will be followed:

- **Stage 1**

A Stage 1 letter is sent home outlining concerns and setting targets. The situation is reviewed 10 working days later.

- **Stage 2**

A Stage 2 letter is sent home firmly outlining concerns and resetting targets. The situation is reviewed 10 working days later.

- **Stage 3**

The Well-being team along with subject teachers will review the situation and provide guidance to the Head of Safeguarding and Student Discipline who will adjudicate on the feasibility of the student's continued place at College. The student will then be notified of the decision.

At this point the student may choose to leave College.

Note:

It is crucial to recognise that, on occasions, the College is advised by medical specialists, that it is unsafe for students to attend. This advice will always supersede the College Fitness to Study Procedure and the student will not be able to attend until we are notified of their fitness to do so by the relevant authority.

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