



# VicSRC

## FIRST ANNUAL VicSRC CONGRESS

*Held: Thursday 4 August 2005  
At: Kingston City Hall, Moorabbin*

A decorative graphic consisting of numerous small blue dots arranged in a pattern that resembles a stylized 'V' or a similar shape. The dots are arranged in vertical columns that curve inward towards the center, creating a sense of depth and movement. The word 'REPORT' is centered over this graphic.

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**REPORT**

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## **Background**

### ***The VicSRC***

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is a statewide network of Victorian secondary school students. It has developed from the Victorian Secondary Student Network, set up at a state conference of students in 2001. The VicSRC is formally auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic).

The VicSRC aims to:

- Strengthen SRCs;
- Be a representative body for Victorian secondary school students;
- Facilitate and co-ordinate action by secondary students at all levels;
- Be democratic and participatory.

The full aims of the VicSRC are attached as Appendix 1.

### ***Organising the Congress***

Information about the Congress was sent to SRCs and support staff in all Victorian secondary schools. SRCs were each invited to nominate two student representatives to attend the Congress, to discuss the nature of issues they wished to raise, and to return the registration forms.

The suggestions from SRCs (and other student groups) about topics of interest formed the agenda for the Congress. It was suggested that these topics for discussion would fall within three areas:

- individual skill development;
- operation of SRCs; and
- wider issues of concern to students.

### ***Aims of the Congress***

The Congress aimed to provide “a formal representative tool for secondary students across Victoria”.

In addition, it would offer:

- wide ranging discussions on how to improve student councils;
- networking opportunities; and
- workshops on personal skill development.

The VicSRC undertook to work towards achievement of Congress decisions and to report back to participants.

## **Description**

The Congress was attended by 170 participants from 58 Victorian schools. The schools represented are listed in Appendix 2 to this report.

In the morning session, discussion groups were held around the following issues that were identified by students before the Congress:

- **The State of Toilets in Schools**
- **School Grounds**
- **Getting Student Participation Happening and Activities Organised**
- **Student Rights**
- **Overcoming obstacles faced by the SRC.**
- **Student behaviour and values**
- **Brainstorming new and creative ideas.**
- **Canteen – Food and Prices.**
- **Bullying**
- **Fundraising – is it worthwhile?**
- **Improving the image of the SRC**
- **How can the SRC make and impact and get heard within the school?**
- **Litter and the Environment**
- **Meeting procedures and structures for the SRC**
- **Students, mobile phones, schools and phone companies – are students getting ripped off and discriminated against?**

Following these discussions, students then met in preparatory groups to consider any proposals for decisions and action around the issues.

In the afternoon, a formal Congress was convened along Parliamentary lines, with students representing the 'seats' of their schools. Motions from the preparatory groups had been submitted and grouped and these formed the agenda for the Congress.

The Congress was chaired by Georgie Ferrari, Executive Officer of the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. Movers of motions were allowed two minutes to speak to the proposals, and this was followed by questions of clarification, and discussion on the proposals. Finally, each motion was formally put to a vote.

Proposals that couldn't be considered within the time limits have been referred to the VicSRC for consideration and action.

## Outcomes

### a) *Discussion Groups*

Many of the discussion groups took notes. The following is a sample of these in dot point form as supplied by the student recorder in these groups:

#### *School Spirit*

- Activities should be organised to get other students involved.
- Students as a whole are responsible for school spirit, not just the SRC.
- The ideal spirit is often reflected through house system sport days.
- Student morale can be raised through competitions, more house events, debates, and battle of the bands.
- All students should be made aware of participation possibilities through a means of communication that the SRC deems ideal.
- It is estimated that 2/3 of students are content with the level of participation that is available to them, but this can be improved.

#### *Litter*

- Litter exists in schools because of student laziness, lack of bins, disrespect for the school and canteens.
- Public schools are more prone to litter due to the differing values in each type of school.
- Ways to cut back the amount of litter include discipline policies, reward systems, Visy Bins.
- The SRC should set an example for the students.
- The SRC should aid in the implementation of reward systems on clean up days and when rostering students on each day. The money raised by the SRC could benefit the students for work they carry out.
- The litter problem needs student involvement.
- Students listen to peers more so than teachers. Hence, the SRC should have an active role, as it will involve leadership. Once the policies are instituted, it is up to the SRC to implement it with the students.

#### *The State of Toilets in Schools*

- Nothing really good about toilets except for the toilets being used appropriately, although the smokers use them.
- Maintenance of the toilets – coming from students. Students/teachers don't see it as a major issue.
- Posters around the toilets.
- Fire alarms in the toilets.
- Everyone uses the toilets and the minority who damage it affects everyone.
- Everyone complains about it – the state of it should be improved – it's unhygienic.
- The whole school community should be involved in improving the toilets – the SRC represents students – but not fund it.
  
- No-one can find positives.
- Locks don't work.
- Smoking in toilets.
- Hygiene needs to be improved.
- Regular upkeep with toilet paper.

- Lighting in toilets.
- Never enough soap.
- Uncomfortable to use.
- Why hasn't anything been done? Not enough money; students don't respect them enough.
- Why toilets need to be improved: because everyone uses them.
- What needs to be done? Cleaning regularly, with actual cleaning products; maintaining.
- School toilets need to be maintained daily in order to ensure hygiene and personal comfort.
- This isn't the job of the SRC – it's the job of the school to keep it safe, clean and respected by the student body.

## *Canteens*

- Canteens need to have healthier options at cheaper prices.
- Canteens should:
  - Still sell deep fried food. It should not be an either/or option.
  - Provide healthier chicken.
  - Have a smoothie machine.
  - Be more visible.
  - In regard to incentives: students should be provided with incentives and be made aware of what the canteen is getting out of it.
  - Have a healthy food menu.
- Everyone's needs should be provided for at the canteen.
- It's not realistic to say "if you don't like the canteen prices, don't buy there".
- Canteens' main aims should not be making a profit.
- Coupons
- If the schools canteen was governed by a committee of five people, those people would be:
  - Student member
  - Parent
  - Canteen representative
  - Staff member
  - Principal
- Canteens should engage in promotions and opinion poll and surveys to provide better service.
- Banners and posters are the most effective means of advertising to students.

## *Lunchtime Activities*

- What should exist for us to do? Is it true that secondary schools need to play?
- In primary school, they run competitions for sport. Are our needs different?
- Keeps people out of trouble.
- Talk more. Social status.
- Most people find something to do themselves.
- Nice to have during class. Not necessary at recess or lunch.
- Should allow music to an extent in class – should allow at recess.
- Most schools already have the facilities.
- Pride of school – having a clean school. School has to be presentable.
- Most schools have a cleaning roster. Some kind of duty roster.
- Every school needs some kind of shelter.
- Most have enough shelter.
- Should we have air-conditioning?
- Need to have a teacher patrol.
- Staff at lunchtime to un-wind.
- Boundaries need to be marked so people are safe, leave easily.
- Toilets are of concern.

- Bullying in the canteen.
- Need a line system at canteen.
- Locker safety.
- Consistency of teachers.
- How much should we care?
- Majority not really concerned.

### *Student Rights*

- With rights in general, there needs to be some kind of lenience.
- Start general, then specific: Students need to know what their rights are. Students should be informed about their student rights in secondary college.
- Students should also be informed about legal rights that occur outside school.
- There should be some sort of published document that all students can read to promote or inform students about their rights.
- Is there an official document that holds student rights and responsibilities?
- Students need to seek help if they feel their rights have been invaded.
- It's not only teachers who disrupt student rights, but also students.
- Overseas students should be further educated about student or human rights to enable them to have a brief understanding about what people can do or can't do.
- There needs to be more communication with students, teachers and parents about student rights and responsibilities.

### *Role of SRCs*

- Can't be role models, given generalisation that we're 'nerds'.
- Give awareness to teachers.
- SRC shouldn't over-control students.
- Reverse psychology.
- Hard to impose values when the students don't take the SRC seriously.

### *Issues Faced by the SRC*

- Not being able to do things that have too much responsibility because teachers are 'stingy'.
- Teachers only involve themselves when it is something that they want to believe in.
- Catering to specific friendship groupings' wants and needs.
- Difficult to organise ideas when the older year levels use their power to overthrow ideas.
- Supervising teacher for the SRC may not be as committed to decisions as previous teachers.
- Students who are in the SRC who are not committed to meetings etc.
- Losing motivation whilst organising ideas at school.
- Questioning school policy.

### *Effective SRCs*

- Every SRC should have a constitution and an annual review of it.
- Boot camps with rewards.
- 3 strikes and you're out policy.
- Victorian SRC website – with topic-specific areas.
- Perks and rewards for being a part of the SRC: food!
- Themes.
- Forums – where everyone in the school gets a chance to talk about it.

### *Fundraising*

- The primary sources of fundraising for SRCs are casual days and socials/discos.
- Separate committees/sports groups run chocolate drives and film festivals.

### *How can the SRC make an impact and get heard?*

- Students and parents together – links with Parents Association and School Council.
- Letter writing
- School Council: gain seats – numbers on School Council.
- Not willing to pressure school.

### *Overcoming Obstacles*

#### Obstacles:

- Lack of Principal support.
- Students in the school don't care about the SRC and think it's irrelevant.
- Lack of money and resources.
- Teachers mean well, but keep interfering.
- SRC members don't turn up to meetings.
- People find it hard to organise their time effectively during SRC meetings.

#### Strategies:

- Important that monitoring teacher or SRC coordinator is present during meetings.
- Voting process needs to be taken into account either through staff or PTA.
- Writing letters to Principals to pass ideas may not work because human interaction may be more effective.
- Lack of money and resources may not be such a large problem.
- Teachers have the right to interfere if an idea or action may not be as effective as possible.

### *Meetings*

- Formal committees work well.
- Meetings in lunchtime are more effective.
- Teachers should be available to help with meetings when necessary.
- Half hour of lunchtime is a reasonable amount; most effective in getting students there.
- The structure of the meetings requires:
  - Set topics to discuss.
  - Points to discuss written down.
  - A meeting for executives
  - Run by students with teachers overseeing it.
  - Topics for the meeting to be chosen at the meeting before.

**b) Congress Resolutions**

The following resolutions were considered by the Congress:

*Part A: SRC Networks*

Motion 1:

**That all SRCs from each school, should come together to inform and collect ideas from one another, to form a working network.**

Moved by: Monique, Chrysa, Mirsada

Discussion: The VicSRC provides a community of SRCs to share ideas and to contribute to each other; we need more ideas and more solutions; there should be regular meetings; we'll achieve more as a group.

Decision: **Agreed overwhelmingly.**

Motion 2:

**That SRCs should have twice-yearly cluster forums, involving local schools, to discuss issues relevant to students.**

Moved by: Delta Omega Group

Discussion:

- Schools from local areas share ideas, discuss relevant ideas. Similar to previous motion but on smaller scale.
- Responsibility of schools to run it – no cost for venue or catering. Take turns in hosting.
- Widespread clusters (eg rural areas) could have less frequent (eg annual) meetings.
- Include all schools – we're all students, all parts of SRCs – include all systems.
- Students get to know each other better – more productive
- Share issues that are relevant in YOUR area
- Easier for schools and communities with smaller groups

Decision: **Agreed overwhelmingly.**

Motion 3:

**That the VicSRC organise an annual social/recreational event.**

Moved by: Robert M for Delta Omega Group

Discussion:

- Get to know each other and mingle with other schools
- Recreational activities through meetings or after
- Transport – work out own.
- Could occur also at other meetings of the VicSRC
- Central place such as city – where it is shouldn't be an issue
- Who will organise: VicSRC or board of students?

- Venue at school and fundraising

Amendment: Add: **at other meetings/events of the VicSRC.**

- Regarding the transport issue, people should and would be dedicated enough to make the effort to reach meetings and events.

Decision: **Amendment accepted by mover; amended motion agreed overwhelmingly.**

Motion 4:

**That the VicSRC establish a website inclusive of a forum, to enable the exchange of SRC related issues and advice, and to provide for inter-school support when taking issues to decision-making bodies.**

Moved by: David G for Delta Omega Group and Paolo (Gladstone Park SC)

(Similar motions incorporated: "That a VicSRC website be created, run and moderated by the students of SRCs. The website should include a forum section and a section for particular schools.": Delta Omega Group; "That an internet group or website be set up in order to keep in contact with fellow leaders on the progress of our SRCs and today's motions.": Paolo)

Discussion:

- Website to be under the control of the VicSRC
- Allow network of school SRCs
- Forum and email list to allow ease of communication
- Gain support from other schools
- To show decision making bodies of the school that things have been done in other areas/schools
- Offer from Paolo and group of students work on it as a working party
- Possibly too broad a net for whole school – job of the SRC to report back to school

Decision: **Motion agreed overwhelmingly.**

*Part B: SRC Operations*

Motion 5:

**That each SRC inform the student body of its rules and intentions through regular communications by the means of assemblies and notice-boards.**

Moved by: Meagan and Avrom

(Similar motion included: That all SRCs have a noticeboard in a visible place that displays to students what they are doing – to showcase an active SRC and allow others to see what their representatives are doing": Rachel)

Discussion:

- Objection raised to the motion: It is too broad, and this happens in some form or other in schools already. Matter for their own schools not a congress

- Not all schools have this policy, and need to.
- SRCs take it upon themselves to inform students what's going on and what they're there for. Split – some don't know, some have high expectations.
- Get positive and negative feedback.
- Need an explanation of what the SRC is there for.

Decision: **Motion NOT accepted.**

Motion 6:

**That a forum be held in each school for all students to come and suggest ideas to the SRC. These should be held at the discretion of the SRC, but it is recommended that two be held each year.**

Moved by: Elizabeth M

Discussion:

- Perhaps to be held twice a year, or when it is thought suitable, but at least twice a year.
- Get school community to suggest things
- One way of getting ideas instead of survey
- Is it feasible to disrupt whole school to get a few ideas? – at lunchtime
- Some people might not want to give up their lunchtimes, but if it's only once or twice a year it might be worth it
- Very few people attend lunchtime SRC meetings. This would be a different forum to these meetings, and may as a result be more successful.
- Suggestion boxes are problematic
- Using school intranet instead is another possibility
- Microphone and video and projector set up in canteen area as another idea
- 'Have a Say' day – 2 students per year level, first 2 periods, principal, council in attendance.

Decision: **Motion NOT accepted.**

But noted that this motion raises larger issues of consulting with students for ideas.

*Part C: School Councils*

Motion 7:

**That students be represented on School Councils.**

Moved by: Braden L

Discussion:

- Students have a say on big issues such as uniform
- SRCs as link between school policy and how students feel about it
- Students are too lazy sometimes to go
- Such a system works well at some schools. There seems to be no reason why it would not work at others.
- Objection: There is usually an option for students to informally attend School Council meetings, so there is no need for formal rules. Response: Formal rules are necessary for some schools, whose rules are quite strict.

- Does the motion mean that students should be allowed to attend meetings, or that students should have formal representation? The motion's sponsor advocated formal representation.

Decision: **Motion agreed overwhelmingly.**

Motion 8:

**That the student body should receive a 50% representation on School Councils in schools across the state. No exceptions.**

Moved by: Joseph L

Discussion:

- Parents and teachers have too much say in what goes on in school, but they don't necessarily know what's going on in school.
- 50% is a suggested optimal, negotiable, figure - rather than have 10% and have schools bargain it down.
- Students vote worth 50%, not necessarily be 50%: students should have 50% voting power, not necessarily numbers.
- Adults have more life experience. Students could break out into chaos.
- Adults grew up in different era.
- Parents and teachers still often see the students' point of view and come up with what we need and want.
- Two students on School Council is adequate and fair. School Council should be a balance of students, parents, and teachers.
- Students must have say in what is rational and irrational
- Balance of parents, student and teachers
- Students likely to be on school council are mature enough to make rational decisions.
- We already have SRCs, so why should students take over School Councils as well? Students are needed on School Council to keep involved in the decision-making process.

Decision: **Motion NOT agreed.**

*Part D: Constitution*

Motion 9:

**That SRCs operate on the basis of a constitution that states their rights, purpose, and responsibilities. The constitution should be reviewed on a yearly basis.**

Moved by: Delta Omega Group

(Similar motion included: "That all SRCs have a constitution of some form to help them function year to year.": Fabiano)

Discussion:

- A lot of schools said that everything has to be passed through other means – a constitution makes things easier with structure.
- Something left for the next year

- A constitution is seen as a set of guidelines agreed on by the SRC in order to speed up the decision-making process. It is quick and efficient and would speed up processes
- Review – to make changes and keep up to date with what’s happening in the school
- Should we apply this to the whole state? Shouldn’t we simply have individual constitutions for each school? Different schools have different rules – we can’t do a universal one
- The motion does not propose a universal constitution, instead it urges each school to write their own constitution: Statements for an SRC to follow

Amendment: Add the word ‘**codified**’ before ‘constitution’.

- Not accepted by mover or meeting – lapses.

Decision: **Motion agreed overwhelmingly.**

### *Part E: Rights and Responsibilities*

#### Motion 10:

**That teachers should follow school policy. SRCs demand a stop to the hypocritical double standards for students and teachers when it comes to school rules.**

Moved by: Kat

(Similar motion included: “That teachers should follow school policy eg on smoking.”: ‘The Non-Smokers’)

Discussion:

- There’s a double standard where teachers punish students for doing something (examples: smoking; school dress code; canteen lines; drinking in front of students) and teachers turn around and do it.
- Is this a genuine problem of rule-breaking, or simply a problem of different rules applying to different communities within the school? Response: In many cases, it is a problem of rule-breaking. Smoking at school is a notable example.
- Objection: Teachers are there to enforce the rules; it is not hypocritical to do so.
- Students and teachers are on two different levels. It is important to remember that some rules only apply to students, and not to teachers, especially in legal matters, for example matters of smoking.
- The motion is not about smoking per se, but about hypocrisy, of which smoking is only one example.
- Objection to the motion: Students are seen as the face of the school, and so there is more onus on them to obey school rules than there is on teachers. Students set an example for the school to the community – teachers protect own jobs by making good image for school through students
- Does teachers breaking rules affect students very much? Are teachers really role models in this way?

Decision: **Motion NOT agreed.**

The following resolutions were **not** considered by the Congress but have been referred to the VicSRC for consideration.

*Part E: Rights and Responsibilities*

Motion 11:

**That child deportation should be eradicated.**

Moved by: Patrick, Thornbury HS

Motion 12:

**That, if an electronic device is brought to school, it is the owner's responsibility. If it is stolen, it immediately becomes a police matter, not a school matter.**

Moved by: Scott

Motion 13:

**That mobile phones are allowed at school only by contract and for legitimate emergency purposes only.**

Moved by: Jess

Motion 14:

**That students should be issued with a booklet outlining students' rights within school and out of school.**

Moved by: Akshay, St Helena SC

Motion 15:

**That school rules should primarily cater for students rights such as religion.**

Moved by: Akshay, St Helena SC

Motion 16:

**That there should be a privacy agreement between students and teachers.**

Moved by: (unknown)

Motion 17:

**That student rights should be written and reviewed by the SRC once a year and alterations made as needed.**

Moved by: (unknown)

*Part F: Canteens*

Motion 18:

**That enough healthy food should be available so that everyone who wants it can buy sufficient quantities and at fair prices.**

Moved by: Christiana and Ascha

(Similar motion: "that there be healthier foods at fair prices": Ascha)

Motion 19:

**That limitations be set out on private contractors in school canteens. Schools and the SRC should have a say about what food is sold in their canteens.**

Moved by: Mary

*Part G: Health*

Motion 20:

**That the VicSRC recommend an amendment to the Health and Welfare Act to change its wording to include schools; that the Government be encouraged to do this through rallies, letters and MP involvement.**

Moved by: Madeleine.

*Part H: SRC Activities*

Motion 20:

**That SRCs focus on ensuring that they maintain a student voice and provide services for students and leadership development, rather than focusing just on fundraising for community charities.**

Moved by: Rachel F

Motion 21:

**That fundraising should be a part-time activity for SRCs with a separate fundraising committee rather than it being the full time role of the SRC and all we achieve.**

Moved by: Fundraising Ideas Group

Motion 22:

**That, at SRC events, SRC representatives should be held responsible for upholding student behaviour and school values.**

Moved by: Mike

Motion 23:

**That SRCs should implement a peer support system where two year 11/12 students are assigned to each junior (7-10) levels. Students can go to these representatives for support and guidance rather than teachers who can be harder to talk to.**

Moved by: Tiffane, Clonard College

Motion 24:

**That SRCs should make it a priority to organise regular school events/activities to encourage student motivation and participation within the school.**

Moved by: Avrom and Megan

*Part H: SRC Procedures*

Motion 25:

**That any SRC member who doesn't officially respect their position within the council be awarded up to three strikes and, after this, may have their position reviewed by a person of higher authority and may be evicted from the SRC.**

Moved by: Delta Omega Group

Motion 26:

**That SRCs should have a leadership camp at the start of the year to discuss issues through the SRC from different schools and to get motivation to get involved and learn what SRC is about.**

Moved by: Delta Omega Group

Motion 27:

**That fundraising should be fun.**

Moved by: Fundraising/Ideas Group

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## **Follow-Up**

At the end of the Congress, approximately 20 students indicated a strong interest in continued active involvement at a local or central level as part of the VicSRC.

These students are being contacted separately and a follow-up meeting will be held to consider action around the above resolutions and the on-going work of the VicSRC.

## **Appendix 1:**

# **AIMS of the VicSRC:**

### **To strengthen SRCs:**

- By improving the operation of student representative bodies within secondary schools in Victoria.
- By supporting networks between schools at a local level.
- By increasing the profile of student representative bodies in the community.

### **To be a representative body for Victoria secondary school students:**

- By providing a network linking students and student representative bodies across Victoria.
- By providing a recognised and student based structure to speak on behalf of secondary students.

### **To facilitate and co-ordinate action by secondary students at all levels:**

- By supporting projects, initiatives, and any related activity that secondary students could participate in, and which would be more effective on a larger scale.
- By co-ordinating appropriate activities at a state wide level.

### **To be democratic and participatory:**

- By encouraging students to understand, practice and experience democracy, by being included in decision making at all levels.

**Appendix 2:**

**Schools Represented at the VicSRC Congress 2005**

<b>Alphington Grammar School</b>	<b>North Geelong Secondary College</b>
<b>Antonine College - Trinity Campus</b>	<b>Northcote High School</b>
<b>Aquinas College</b>	<b>Norwood Secondary College</b>
<b>Beaconhills College</b>	<b>Our Lady of Mercy College</b>
<b>Beechworth Secondary College</b>	<b>Our Lady of Sacred Heart College</b>
<b>Belmont High School</b>	<b>Parkdale Secondary College</b>
<b>Berendale School</b>	<b>Scoresby Secondary College</b>
<b>Bright P-12 College</b>	<b>Siena College</b>
<b>Brighton Secondary College</b>	<b>Simonds Catholic College</b>
<b>Brunswick Secondary College</b>	<b>St Bernards College Essendon</b>
<b>Carwatha College</b>	<b>St Catherines School</b>
<b>Cheltenham Secondary College</b>	<b>St Columba's College</b>
<b>Clonard College</b>	<b>St Helena Secondary College</b>
<b>Copperfield College</b>	<b>Swinburne Senior Secondary College</b>
<b>East Doncaster Secondary College</b>	<b>Taylors College</b>
<b>East Preston Islamic College</b>	<b>The Geelong College</b>
<b>Echuca Secondary College</b>	<b>Thornbury High School</b>
<b>Epping Secondary College</b>	<b>Upwey High School</b>
<b>Eumemmerring College - Gleneagles Campus</b>	<b>Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School</b>
<b>Frankston High School</b>	<b>Wantirna Secondary College</b>
<b>Genazzano</b>	<b>Wellington Secondary College</b>
<b>Gisborne Secondary College</b>	<b>Wheelers Hill Secondary College</b>
<b>Gladstone Park Secondary College</b>	
<b>Glen Eira College</b>	
<b>Glen Waverley Secondary College</b>	
<b>Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar</b>	
<b>Kangaroo Flat Secondary College</b>	
<b>King Khalid</b>	
<b>Lilydale Heights College</b>	
<b>MacLeod College</b>	
<b>Maribyrnong College</b>	
<b>Melbourne Girls College</b>	
<b>Mentone Girls Secondary College</b>	
<b>Mill Park Secondary College</b>	
<b>Mordialloc College</b>	
<b>Mullauna Secondary College</b>	