



Attendance Policy

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Introduction

Various factors necessitated the updating of the schools attendance policy.

1. It is a priority area identified by staff.
2. It is a mandatory requirement under the Education Welfare Act 2000.
3. As our school is part of both the Rural DEIS Scheme and the School Completion Programme, we are obliged to monitor attendance figures and identify trends/at risk pupils on an ongoing basis.

The redrafting was a collaborative school process involving Staff, Students, Parents and Board of Management, following initial drafting by the Principal.

Rationale

The main factors contributing to the formulation of a revised policy can be summarised as follows:

- To promote and encourage regular attendance as an essential factor in our pupils' learning.
- Legislative requirements such as the Education Welfare Act 2000 and the Education Act, 1998.
- The role of the NEWB.
- Levels of disadvantage.
- Changing attitudes to Education.

Aims and Objectives

The revised policy is geared towards:

- Continuing a move to improvement on morning punctuality.
- Ensuring that pupils are registered accurately and efficiently.
- Ensuring that pupil attendance is recorded daily.
- Encouraging full attendance where possible.
- Identifying pupils at risk.
- Promoting a positive learning environment.
- Enabling learning opportunities to be availed of.
- Raising awareness of the importance of school attendance amongst pupils and parents.
- Fostering an appreciation of learning.
- Identifying pupils at risk of leaving school early.
- Ensuring compliance with the requirements of the relevant legislation.
- Developing, subject to available resources, links between the school and the families of children who may be at risk of developing attendance problems.
- Identifying and removing, insofar as is practicable, obstacles to school attendance.
- Maintaining the current attendance rate, whilst also endeavouring to increase it.

Compliance with School Ethos

This policy complements the schools ethos of nurturing each child's individual strengths, talents and potential in a caring environment where the welfare of children is paramount.

Roles and Responsibilities

All staff have an input into the implementation of the policy. Class teachers and the school secretary record individual patterns of attendance and the Principal makes returns to NEWB. The Secretary also has responsibility for maintaining the Leabhair Tinreamh.

It is the responsibility of the Principal and staff to implement this policy under the guidance of the school's Board of Management.

Punctuality

School opens at 9.20am daily with formal lessons commencing at 9.30am. All pupils and teachers are expected to be on time. The school will contact parents/guardians in the event of pupils being consistently late. The Principal is obliged under the Education Welfare Act, to report children who are persistently late, to the Education Welfare Board.

Recording and Reporting Attendance

The school attendance of individual pupils is recorded in the Leabhar Rolla (Roll Book) of each class on a daily basis. Class attendance data is also recorded daily on Databiz Solutions. The annual attendance of each individual pupil is recorded in the Clár Leabhar (Register), together with information provided in enrolment forms (Pupil's Name, Date of Birth, Address, Religion, Parents' Names and Parents' Occupations).

If a pupil does not attend on a day when the school is open for instruction, his/her non-attendance will be recorded by the class teacher. The roll call is taken at 10am each morning. Any pupil not present will be marked absent for the day. The roll book may not be altered once it has been filled in. A note from parents/guardians is required to explain each absence. Such notes will be retained by the class teacher. Parents/guardians must also provide a note if a child departs early during the school day. A sign out sheet has to be signed by the parent before any child leaves the school premises early. The sign out register and all notes instructing of early collection are dated and kept in the secretary's office.

Parents/guardians are made aware of the requirements of the NEWB particularly the by-law relating to absences of more than 20 days per school year. They are notified in writing on the end of year report of the total number of absences during the school year. Pupils whose non-attendance is a concern are invited to meet with the Principal during Parent/Teacher meetings and are informed of the school's concerns.

When a child has accumulated 12 days of absence, the teacher/secretary informs the Principal in writing. The Principal will then in turn send a notification letter to the parent flagging the amount of days absent from school to date and may request a meeting (if necessary).

The school must inform the Education Welfare Officer in writing, where a child has missed 20 or more days in a school year, where attendance is irregular, where a pupil is removed from the school register and where a child is suspended or expelled for 6 days or more. That said, from

2017/2018 onwards, when a student exceeds 20 days absence but the school has been provided with a medical certificate explaining some or all of these absences, then the school can use its discretion in determining whether the student's attendance warrants referral.

Promoting Attendance

The school promotes good attendance by:

- Creating a safe and welcoming environment.
- Ensuring children are happy.
- Displaying kindness, compassion and understanding.
- Being vigilant so that risks to good attendance such as disadvantage, bullying etc. are identified early.
- Awarding monthly prizes to the classes with the highest average attendance at assembly. Similarly, percentages will be given for the attendance of boys/girls across the whole school over the same time period (friendly competition who had better attendance – girls in general have better attendance).
- Awarding attendance certificates for improved and unbroken attendance three times annually (at Christmas, Easter & Summer), with the recipients' photographs being posted on Facebook/School website.
- HERO Initiative: Here, Every day, Ready, On time.
- Reinforcing the importance of good school attendance regularly at assemblies and in the school's newsletters.
- Monitoring attendance patterns and statistics regularly.
- Implementing target setting for individual pupils (if necessary).
- Providing high interest activities for pupils (Art/Sport/Music/Cookery/Drama/Technology Projects) during school hours and timetabling activities during at risk periods i.e. Christmas Concert and rehearsals.
- Tailoring/differentiating curriculum requirements to the needs of particular groups or individuals.
- Providing extra curricular activities and after school clubs for targeted groups within the school community.
- Providing lunch daily to all pupils (as part of the School Meals Programme).

National Education Welfare Board

The NEWB is furnished with the total attendances in the school year through the Annual Report Form which is completed on-line. From 2017/2018 onwards, the school is only required to make returns to TUSLA at the end of December and June each school year.

Whole School Strategies to Promote Attendance

Research findings are clear that the overall school climate - where there is a welcoming atmosphere, positive teacher-student relationships and a supportive teaching and learning environment – is at the core of success in every aspect of school life and work, including attendance. The quality of the whole school ethos and culture is the most important school influence on students' attendance and engagement in learning. St. Mary's N.S endeavours to create a safe, welcoming environment for our pupils and their parents/guardians. Parents/guardians are consulted in drafting and reviewing policies with the aim of promoting a

high-level of co-operation among the school community. The teaching staff collaborates in the planning and implementation of the primary school curriculum, so as to provide a stimulating learning environment for all pupils.

School attendance is very good in our school (Aggregate attendance total for 2018/2019 was 96%). However, the staff remains vigilant so that 'risk' students are identified early. Risk students can be categorised as those who miss more than 5 days in a 20-day period without an accompanying note of explanation from parents/guardians. Appropriate contact takes place between the school and parents/guardians either via a letter or a note in the homework diary when this occurs. A meeting between parents and the Principal may be set up if deemed necessary. Absences of more than 20 days are automatically referred to the Education Welfare Officer (except for instances in which a medical certificate has been provided and school discretion can be executed).

New entrants and their parents/guardians are invited to engage in an induction process, through which the school's policies and procedures in relation to attendance are explained. There is a focus on the value of regular attendance and on the importance of developing good attendance habits from Junior Infants onwards. **That said, it is important to note that all children can become sick/unwell and that a child who is sick should remain at home.**

Our homework policy, drawn up in consultation with parents/guardians, clearly outlines the school's expectations in terms of the quantity of homework assigned and in the quality of homework presented. There is a consistent approach to homework throughout the school.

The calendar for the coming school year is published annually in June and it is also published on the school website. It is hoped that this approach will enable parents/guardians to plan family events around school closures, thus minimising the chances of non-attendance related to family holidays during the school term.

The Board of Management awards certificates to pupils who have full attendance during the school year. A representative from the Board will visit the school annually to present the certificates (generally at Prize Giving in June). Certificates are also available to pupils who improve their attendance over a short period of time, and to pupils who improve their overall attendance.

The question of equality of access is addressed through the school's policy on Equal Opportunity and Gender Equity.

Strategies in the Event of Non-Attendance

Section 17 of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), states that 'the parent of a child shall cause the child concerned to attend a recognised school on each school day'.

Section 21 of the Act obliges schools to inform the Education Welfare Officer if a child is absent on more than 20 days in any school year, or if a child does not attend school on a regular basis.

In such cases the Education Welfare Officer (following all reasonable efforts by the Education Board to consult with the child's parents and the Principal of the school) may serve a 'School Attendance Notice' on any parent who he/she concludes is failing or neglecting to cause the child to attend the school. A successful case taken against the parent may result in a fine and/or imprisonment.

Reasons for absence are recorded and reported to the EWB twice during the school year through an online system. These returns to TUSLA are made at the end of December and June each school year.

Transfer to another School

Under Section 20 of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), the Principal of a child's current school must notify the Principal of the child's previous school that the child is now registered in their school.

When a Principal receives notification that a child has been registered elsewhere he/she must notify the Principal of the pupil's new school of any problems in relation to attendance at the pupil's former school and of such matters relating to the child's educational progress as he or she considers appropriate. This applies to pupils who transfer between primary schools and to pupils who transfer from primary to second-level education.

Communication

The school has developed a good relationship with the local Education Welfare Board (EWB) personnel and there is ongoing communication in relation to children who are at risk.

The school works closely with the local Stranorlar School Completion Programme Co-Ordinator and Committee in developing programmes to promote school attendance. These programmes aim to minimise the risks of irregular or non-attendance and to maximise the opportunities provided to all pupils.

The school maintains communication with local pre-schools and second-level schools in order to make the transition for pupils as easy as possible.

Communication with other Schools

- When a child transfers from St. Mary's N.S to another school, the schools records on attendance, academic progress etc will be forwarded on receipt of written notification of the transfer.
- When a child transfers into St. Mary's N.S, confirmation of transfer will be communicated to the child's previous school, and appropriate records sought.
- Pupils transferring from St. Mary's N.S to a post primary school will have their records forwarded on receipt of confirmation of enrolment.

Communication with Parents

The school will circulate the NEWB information booklet *Don't Let Your Child Miss Out* to all parents in September. The school will also inform all parents of the implications of non-attendance as per the *Education Welfare Act 2000*. This information is disseminated by regular school circulars. Parents of new children are informed on enrolment.

Parents/guardians can promote good school attendance by:

- Ensuring regular and punctual school attendance.
- Notifying the school if their children cannot attend for any reason.
- Working with the School and education welfare service to resolve any attendance problems.
- Making sure their children understand that parents support good school attendance.
- Discussing planned absences with the school.
- Refraining, if at all possible, from taking holidays during school time.
- Showing an interest in their children's school day and their children's homework.
- Encouraging them to participate in school activities.
- Praising and encouraging their children's achievements.
- Instilling in their children a positive self-concept and a positive sense of self-worth.
- Informing the school in writing of the reasons for absence from school.
- Ensuring, insofar as is possible, that children's appointments (with dentists etc), are arranged for times outside of school hours.
- Contacting the school immediately, if they have concerns about absence or other related school matters.
- Notifying, in writing, the school if their child/children, particularly children in junior classes, are to be collected by someone not known to the teacher.

Evaluation

The success of any Attendance Policy is measured through:

- Improved attendance levels as measured through Leabhar Rolla records and statistical returns.
- Happy confident well-adjusted children.
- Positive parental feedback.
- Teacher vigilance.

Implementation/Ratification and Review

This policy was reviewed in January 2020. It will be reviewed again in October 2020.

References

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection & Welfare of Children (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011)

Circular 11/95

Circular 0034/2011

Circular 0039/2012

Circular 0028/2013

Data Protection Acts

Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools (NEWB, 2008)

Don't let your Child Miss Out (NEWB, 2004)

Education Welfare Act 2000 (Specifically Sections 17/20/21/22/25)

Education Act 1998 (Specifically Sections 26/27/29)

Empty Desks (CDU Mary Immaculate)

Date of Ratification: _____

Chairperson Signature: _____