

St. Joseph's National School

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Attendance Policy

Introduction

This policy was drawn up to help change social habits and patterns of our school community in relation to school attendance. The redrafting was a collaborative school process involving staff and Board of Management, following initial drafting by the ISM team. Establishing good attendance habits from the very beginning of a child's time at school is very important

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:

- 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
- Fostering an appreciation of learning

- Identify 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.

Compliance with School Ethos

This policy complements the school ethos of nurturing 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 teacher's record individual patterns of attendance and the school secretarial staff make returns to NEWB.

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 begins at 9.20 am. All pupils and staff are expected to be on time. Children are strongly encouraged to come to school however late comers will not be punished

- It is the responsibility of the class teacher to keep a record of children who arrive late to school, leave early or are collected late. This can be recorded on Aladdin
- A child will be recorded as being late to school if they arrive after 9.30am
- Parents/Guardians must provide a note if a child departs early during the school day. These notes can be left in pupils' journals or kept in pupil's files as appropriate
- Where teachers see a pattern of poor punctuality emerging, they should bring this to the attention of Home School Community Liaison at an early stage

- If there is still no improvement in punctuality then a letter should be sent home notifying parents/guardians of the issue (Template letters on the school server)
- If punctuality continues to be an issue then teachers should bring the issue to the attention of the Principal

Procedures for Ongoing Monitoring of Attendance

Class teachers are required to call and mark the DES Electronic Roll Book (Aladdin system) on a daily basis.

An electronic copy of the Leabhar Tinrimh (Attendance Book) is maintained on the Aladdin system.

The school secretary records the annual attendance of each individual pupil on the Primary Online Database (POD), together with information provided in enrolment forms (Pupil's name, Date of Birth, Address and Religion)

Keeping records of Absences

The roll is taken each morning before 10.45am. Any pupil not present at this time will be marked absent for the day.

Parents will be informed of their responsibilities in relation to school attendance, and will be requested to provide explanations for all absences from school, regardless of the length or nature of the absence.

A note or phone call from parents/guardians is required to explain each absence. For pupils in 1st to 6th class there is a specific section in the School Homework Journal, Explanation of Absence, which parents are asked to use or contact school with reason.

For pupils in Junior and Senior Infants parents are asked to contact school on the first day of absent with an explanation.

All notes and other written communication around attendance, such as Medical Certificates and other explanations for student absences should be kept in the pupil files. These will be retained for possible inspection by the National Educational Welfare Officer.

When a child is marked absent on Aladdin, teachers should ensure that they enter the reasons for the absence in the appropriate section, (i.e. under Edit Absence Reasons tab) as soon as that information becomes available. This allows teachers

to categorise the absence, such as Unexplained, Illness, Urgent family reasons etc. This information will form part of the reporting procedure to the Educational Welfare Services section of Tusla - Child and Family Agency.

Parents/guardians must sign the child out at the office if a child departs early during the school.

Letters will be sent home, drawing parents' attention to poor attendance, after 10+ day's absence.

If a child misses school and an explanation hasn't been received, the parent will receive a text message asking them to contact school with an explanation.

Each class teacher has a responsibility to monitor the attendance of the children in their care. Teachers should be aware of emerging patterns in relation to poor attendance.

What to do when a child reaches 10 days absence:

It is school policy that when a child has been absent for 10 days the Home School Community Liaison teacher writes to his/her parents notifying them of the absence. A sample letter is attached and is saved on the school server

What to do when a child reaches 20 days absence:

When a child has been absent for 20 days we notify the Education Welfare Services section of Tusla - Child and Family Agency

The school has no discretion over handing this information on to Tusla - Child and Family Agency, regardless of the reason for absence.

However, Tusla - Child and Family Agency will take account of absences due illness, bereavement or other such circumstances

There are two periods during the year when we are obliged to report information to Tusla - Child and Family Agency. Class teachers will be responsible for providing information on these absences. Additionally, Tusla - Child and Family Agency request an Annual Report at the end of each school year.

Procedures for Serious Absences

Where teachers see a pattern of poor attendance emerging, they should bring to the attention of parents at an early stage: poor attendance patterns are more easily changed if attention is drawn to them at an early stage.

The Educational Welfare Act, 2000 requires schools to notify the Educational Welfare Services section of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) of pupils who have been absent for 20 days and who are aged over 6 years of age.

However, in this school, we will be monitoring the attendance patterns of children from when they start school in Junior Infants, and we will inform Tusla - Child and Family Agency of such absences, in order to seek to address the matter and deal with it as early as possible in the child's school career.

The class teacher in conjunction with the school will follow a series of progressive steps, as per EWS Pre- Referral Checklist, when they are concerned about a pupil's attendance (A PDF copy of the checklist is saved to the school server).

Reporting

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 poor attendance is a concern are invited to meet with the Principal, Education Welfare Officer and Home School Liaison Officer regularly throughout the school year and are informed of the school's concerns.

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.

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
- Rewarding good attendance with monthly, termly and yearly prizes. .

National Education Welfare Board

The Education Welfare Officer is informed if:

- A child is expelled
- A child is suspended
- A child has missed more than 20 days.

The NEWB is furnished with the total attendances in the school year through the Annual Report Form which is completed on-line.

Whole School Strategies to Promote Attendance

As already stated, there is a need for regular review of school attendance in each class. The primary responsibility for this lies with the class teacher. Teachers should therefore actively review the attendance patterns of all children in their care.

The school will continue to encourage full or near full attendance through the following strategies and approaches

St. Josephs National School endeavours to create a safe, welcoming environment for our pupils and their parents/guardians.

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.

Each child is given a monthly reward chart at the beginning of each year and awarded a sticker for full monthly attendance.

School will run a November attendance drive promoting attendance for 20 consecutive days.

Classes that have achieved highest attendance and runner up class will receive a trophy or shield each month.

Rewarding pupils with full attendance each quarter, by giving them a medal and/or a certificate

By acknowledging excellent attendance at the end of the school year, with certificates and trophies for excellent attendance

Identifying "at risk" pupils

Traditionally, school attendance is a vital aspect of school life and we as a school endeavour to do our very best to promote and reward good attendance. However, the staff remains vigilant so that 'risk' students are identified early. Risk students can be categorised as those who miss more than 3 days without an accompanying note of explanation from parents/guardians.

"At risk" students who continue to have unexplained absences will be referred to the School Completion Programme by the Home School Community Liaison Officer

Communication with Parents/Guardians

When a child has been absent for 5/10/15/20 days a text message is automatically sent to the parents informing them of same.

On a bi-monthly basis, children with more than 10 days absent will receive a letter informing parents of same. Home School Liaison Officer may will also contact the parents.

Regular meetings take place between the Education Welfare Officer, Home School Liaison Officer and Principal in regards to absenteeism. Appropriate contact takes place between the school and parents/guardians via a letter and a meeting between parents, and Education Welfare Officer, Home School Liaison Officer and Principal will be set up if deemed necessary to speak to the parents with regards to absenteeism.

Absences of more than 20 days are automatically referred to the Education Welfare Officer.

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.

The calendar for the coming school year is published annually in June and a reminder is published in September. 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.

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. An annual report is submitted - not more than six weeks following the end of the school year - detailing the overall level of attendance at the school during that 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 with other Schools

- When a child transfers from *St. Joseph's National School* 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. Joseph's National School* confirmation of transfer will be communicated to the child's previous school, and appropriate records sought
- Pupils transferring from *St. Joseph's National School* to a post primary school will have their records forwarded on receipt of confirmation of enrolment.

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 with the local Foróige group, the local area partnership, the local sports partnership and other bodies 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.

Partnership with Parents

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.

Success Criteria

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 has been in operation in *St. Joseph's National School* since September 2020 and was updated in March 2021.

Ratification of Policy

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on

24 / 3 / 21

Signed: Rzemb Gecsy
Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed: Orla Egan
Principal

Date: 24 / 3 / 2021.

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