

St. Catherine's Special School

Attendance Policy

Introduction

This policy document was drawn up to ensure and maintain a high level of attendance at school by all students. We believe that our students can learn most effectively if they attend school regularly. It is also important that all students arrive to school punctually. It is equally important that students should not attend school if they are unwell.

Rationale

The policy was drafted for the following reasons:

- The Board of Management wishes to comply with legislation, such as: The Education Act 1998 and The Education (Welfare) Act 2000
- The Board of Management wishes to promote and encourage regular attendance as an essential factor in our students' learning.

Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the School

St Catherine's Special School endeavours to enable every pupil to actively participate in all school activities. Regular attendance helps to create a stable learning environment for all students and the school hopes to promote co-operation among students, parents/guardians and staff in maintaining a high level of regular attendance through the school year. St Catherine's Special School aims to build and maintain a culture of high expectations amongst all staff and students for the students' learning, participation and attendance.

Aims and Objectives

This policy aims to:

- ensure that students are registered accurately and efficiently
- ensure that pupil attendance is recorded daily
- encourage full attendance where possible
- identify students at risk
- promote a positive learning environment
- enable learning opportunities to be availed of
- raise awareness of the importance of school attendance
- foster an appreciation of learning
- develop, subject to available resources, links between the school and the families of children who may be at risk of developing attendance problems
- identify and remove, insofar as is practicable, obstacles to school attendance.

Roles and Responsibilities

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

School Principal/Deputy Principal

The school principal will:

- Ensure that the school register of students is maintained in accordance with regulations
- Inform the Education Welfare Officer (EWO)
 - If a pupil is not attending school regularly
 - When a pupil has been absent for 20 or more days during the course of a school year
 - When a pupil's name is removed from the school register
 - When a pupil has been expelled or is suspended for more than six days
- Inform parents of a decision to contact the Education Welfare Officer of concerns regarding a pupil
- Insofar as is practicable, promote the importance of good school attendance among students, parents and staff.

Class Teacher

The class teacher will:

- Maintain the class "roll-book" electronically using Aladdin
- Keep a record of explained and unexplained absences on Aladdin
- Contact parents if a child has been absent for three days without explanation
- Promote a reward system for students with exceptional attendance
- Encourage students to attend regularly and punctually.
- Inform the Principal of concerns s/he may have regarding the attendance of any students.

Recording and Reporting of Attendance and Non-Attendance

The attendance of individual students is recorded daily on Aladdin. The annual attendance of each individual pupil is also recorded on Aladdin. For the purpose of Section 20 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 all students are registered electronically and their enrolment details are recorded on the Department of Education and Skills' Primary Online Database (POD). POD is an electronic live database of primary school students which collects individual information on each pupil, and which will track students through their primary education. The information stored on POD includes the pupil's, Name, Address, Date of Birth, Religion, PPS Number, Parents' Names and Parent' 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 by 10.30am each morning on Aladdin. Any pupil not present will be marked absent for the day. The online roll may not be altered once it has been filled in. A phone call, note or Reason for Absence slip is required from parents/guardians to explain each absence. Parents/guardians must also phone the school or provide a note if a child leaves early during the school day.

Parents/guardians are informed of the total number of absences during the school year on the end of year school report.

Students whose non-attendance is a concern are invited to meet with the Principal/Teacher and are informed of the school's concerns.

Punctuality

School begins at 9.15 am. All students and teachers are expected to be on time. The school will contact parents/guardians in the event of students being consistently late.

The Principal is obliged under the Education Welfare Act, to report children who are persistently late, to the Education Welfare Board.

Whole School Strategy for Promoting Attendance

The school promotes good attendance by:

- creating a safe, caring and welcoming environment
- ensuring children are happy
- displaying kindness, compassion and understanding
- ensuring that the individual's medical and care needs are attended to
- providing the necessary resources to ensure that students who have high medical needs are enabled to attend school
- being vigilant so that risks to good attendance such as, bullying, disadvantage etc. are identified early
- rewarding good attendance
- identifying "risk" students early (those who miss more than 5 days in a 20-day period without an accompanying note of explanation from parents/guardians)
- circulating the calendar for the coming school year in June and sending a reminder again 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 used in the Event of Poor Attendance

- Contacting parents on an informal basis when a child is absent regularly
- Discussing school attendance with the student (where appropriate), with a view to finding an explanation for the absence and thereby a solution
- Supporting students through the school Care Team (Principal, Deputy Principal, Class Teacher)
- In the event of prolonged absence/irregular attendance the school will request a meeting with parents/guardians to try to identify and resolve any barriers to attendance
- Weekly or fortnightly contact with parents if a child has a long term absence because of sickness or hospitalization
- Contacting the EWO.

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 on Tusla's 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. This information will be communicated to the school community through the school's newsletter.

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 students who transfer between primary schools and to students 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.

Communication with Parents

The school informs all parents of the implications of non-attendance as per the *Education Welfare Act 2000*. This information is disseminated at the start of every year and parents of new children are informed during the enrollment process.

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
- 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 school work
- 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, if at all possible, that children's appointments (medical, dental etc), are arranged for times outside of school hours
- contacting the school immediately, if they have concerns about any school matters

Evaluation

The success of the Attendance Policy is measured by:

- Improved attendance levels as measured on Aladdin's records and statistical returns
- Happy confident well-adjusted children
- Positive parental feedback
- Teacher vigilance.

Monitoring and Review

The policy will be monitored by the Principal, Teaching staff and Board of Management and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Ratified by the Board of Management on: March 2018

Forwarded to TUSLA on: 12th March 2018