

Attendance Policy [Final- Jan 2018]

Introduction

As part of the School Plan, Loreto Secondary School, Bray has developed a School Attendance Policy. The policy sets out the school's overall goals and objectives in relation to attendance in line with its vision and mission. It sets out clearly for students, parents and staff the values, goals and objectives of the school in relation to attendance.

The School Attendance Policy also sets out the strategies that the school uses to promote high levels of attendance in the school, to prevent poor attendance, to intervene where attendance difficulties emerge and to provide support to students whose attendance is a cause for concern. The Statement of Strategy for School Attendance is the written account of the School Attendance Policy and the various actions that the Board of Management has adopted to support school attendance

Rationale

Under Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the Board of Management of each school must prepare and submit to Tusla – Child and Family Agency a Statement of Strategy for School Attendance. Section 22(1) of the Act states that: 'The board of management of a recognised school shall, after consultation with the principal of, teachers teaching at, parents of students registered at, and the educational welfare officer assigned functions in relation to, that school, prepare and submit to the Board a statement of the strategies and measures it proposes to adopt for the purposes of fostering an appreciation of learning among students attending that school and encouraging regular attendance at school on the part of such students (hereafter in this section referred to as a "statement of strategy")'.

Aims

This policy aims to:

- Highlight the importance of regular attendance
- Encourage regular attendance and participation in school life
- Encourage good communication between parents and the school
- Establish procedures for the monitoring of attendance and absence
- Establish procedures for the attendance record-keeping for the school, students, parents and the Educational Welfare Services of Tusla (The Child and Family agency)
- Support students and parents where there are attendance problems through positive interventions
- Emphasise the importance to all students and parents of high attendance at school as an essential pre-requisite for making full use of all educational opportunities and to maximising individual achievement;
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of all parties with respect to attendance;

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Legal Requirement

Education (Welfare) Act 2000

The purpose of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 is to encourage regular school attendance and participation in education for as long as possible.

The Educational Welfare Services of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, operate under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. The statutory and school support services of Tusla's Educational Welfare Services work collaboratively with schools and other relevant services to secure better educational outcomes for students.

As a school, we are obliged by law under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 to submit reports on school attendance to the Educational Welfare Services of Tusla.

Concerns regarding Student Absenteeism

Should a subject teacher have concerns regarding the absenteeism of a student, the subject teacher will, in the first instance, discuss the matter in a pastoral manner with the student.

Procedures for dealing with concerns about an individual student's attendance

- Step 1 The subject teacher talks to the individual student to outline concern about the student's attendance. The subject teacher encourages the student to improve attendance.
- Step 2 If no improvement is observed, the subject teacher records the concern in the student's journal, specifying details of the number of absences and the number of class activities missed e.g. Has missed 3 class tests between date 1 and present date Or Has failed to present 3 assignments between date 1 and present date etc. (It is essential that these details are included in the note in the journal (a) to allow the parent to see the seriousness of the absence and (b) for inclusion in the formal letter which the Year Head may need to send at a future date.)

The subject teacher will also request that the parent/guardian reads and signs the note and it is the responsibility of the student to show this signature to the subject teacher at the next class.

The Concern about Attendance note written by the subject teacher is not a behavioural complaint.

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Step 3 If no significant improvement is observed, the subject teacher will write a second note in the student's journal, again specifying the details of the absences. The subject teacher will clearly indicate that this is the second note.

Upon seeing a second note from the subject teacher, the Year Head will send a formal letter to the parents/guardians outlining the concerns about the student's attendance (giving the details specified by the subject teacher). (A template of this formal letter will be available to Year Heads.)

The letter will request a reply from the parent/guardian.

Step 4 If there is still no significant improvement, the subject teacher will communicate this to the Year Head and the parent/guardian **and** the student will be requested to attend a meeting with the Year Head. The purpose of this meeting will be to formally outline the concerns, ascertain the nature of any problem, explain the school's reporting obligations to TUSLA (where the student is under 16) and to put strategies in place to assist the student. This may include the student being given an attendance journal for a specified period of time, which will be monitored by the Year Head.

Step 5 Should problems persist, the Year Head will refer the matter to the designated Deputy Principal who will take over the case. At this point, another meeting with parents will be necessary and contact with outside agencies may be initiated e.g. EWO

Ongoing Attendance Monitoring

Student attendance is monitored on an ongoing basis. Procedures include:

- Regular spot checks are conducted by Year Heads to monitor attendance.
- Year Heads and Form Teachers meet formally 3 times a year to compile an attendance report. This report highlights achievement and improvement in attendance and notes areas of concern in relation to full day attendance, half day attendance and students 'signing out' (leaving school during class time with parental and school permission). A list is compiled of students whose absenteeism is of concern. Form Teachers/Year Heads will meet with these students to discuss their attendance and agree an action plan for improvement. Parents will also be involved in the action plan to support the student's attendance.

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Mitching

The serious issue of any student leaving the building without permission and without signing out or any student who is absent from class without permission in the school will be addressed in accordance with the school's Code of Behaviour.

Students who report feeling unwell

If a student reports to a teacher that they feel unwell, they will be referred to the School General Office. The parent/guardian of the student will be contacted so that they come to collect the student. If a parent cannot be contacted, the student will return to class. In the event of the student not being well enough to return to class, the student will remain at the office.

Suspension and Expulsion

The School's Code of Behaviour is our vision, practice and procedures that together help students in the school to behave well and learn well. The aim of our code of behaviour is to promote good behaviour and prevent unacceptable behaviour.

Most students behave appropriately, with the help of consistent and clear rules and routines in class and in school. However, there are times when inappropriate student behaviour will merit the application of sanctions. The school's policies on sanctions which necessitate a student's withdrawal from class i.e. , Suspension and Expulsion are fully outlined in the School's Code of Behaviour.

Extra-curricular or Co-Curricular out of class activity

Where students are absent from school for school-related extra-curricular or co-curricular activities, this is entered into ePortal by the office staff as 'school activity'. The teacher who co-ordinates the activity prepares a list of the names and, prior to departure, submits the list of students to one of the Deputy Principals and posts a copy of the list on the staff notice board. If a student listed is absent from the trip, the teacher will notify the Admin Staff of same.

Learning and Teaching

The school recognises the importance of active learning and teaching methodologies to enhance learning and engagement in the classroom. The school supports and promotes the use of a variety of methodologies in the classroom which encourage and facilitate the participation of all students, individually and collaboratively. The school management provides and supports professional development of teachers by facilitating their attendance on in-service courses and by offering staff training sessions.

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Reintegration

The school recognises the key role it can play in ensuring successful reintegration of students returning after a long period of absence. We will provide support to assist a smooth reintegration back into school. The process of reintegration involves:

- A 'Welcome' meeting with the Form Teacher/Year Head. At this meeting the Form Teacher/Year Head ensures that the student has their timetable and all necessary books and equipment for classes that day and throughout the week. The student will also be able to express any anxieties they may have in relation to their immediate class participation and will be reassured of the school personnel and programmes that are there for support.
- Working in partnership with parents/guardians to ensure a flexible approach to meeting the student's needs.
- Involving the student's peers, where appropriate, to ensure they support the student's reintegration.
- Ongoing monitoring of attendance with feedback and affirmation provided to the student and parents/guardians
- Rewarding the student for improved attendance
- A weekly 'Check-in' between the student and Form Teacher.
- Consideration will be given to exempting students, where appropriate, from specific subject requirements on a temporary basis whilst they readjust to normal school life.

Student and Parent Focus Groups

Occasionally the school will invite students and parents to participate in focus groups to discuss issues related to attendance and participation. This proves valuable in helping to inform our attendance and Participation policy and strategy and evaluate the effectiveness of support interventions.

Student Supports

A number of provisions exist in the school to support student attendance and participation. These Supports will be offered and used as positive interventions to assist identified students in need to engage more fully in school.

These supports include:

- Meetings with the subject teacher
- Meetings with the Form Teacher
- Meetings with the Year Head
- Year Group Assemblies
- Meetings and engagement with the Pastoral Care team
- Parent and student meetings with school personnel

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Programmes and Initiatives

- Support for first year students from the Student Leadership programme
- Student Council
- Merits system
- Attendance Awards
- Literacy and Numeracy Support programmes
- Extra-Curricular Activities (Lunch time and after school)

Short-term interim timetabling measures (In exceptional circumstances, subject to resources available)

- Reduced Timetable arrangements
- One to One teaching and learning
- Change of mind/class facility

Links to other agencies

- Alternative Learning Programme
- Lucena Clinic

Roles and Responsibilities

Parent/Guardian Responsibility

Written explanation for all absences

Parents/Guardians are responsible for providing a written explanation for all absences.

It is school policy that reasons must be given in writing for all student absence in the student's journal. If a parent/guardian telephones the school in advance to state that the student will be absent, a note giving the reason for absence must still be provided in the student journal on the student's return to school.

In accordance with its statutory obligations, the school will notify TUSLA if a student (under 16) is absent for 20 days or more **or** where the absence gives rise to concern.

If Parents/Guardians are aware in advance that a student will be absent for any part of the school day they should notify the school beforehand.

Work assigned to students during extended absence due to illness

If a student is out of school for an extended period of time due to illness but would be capable of continuing some of their learning at home, the parent/guardian may contact the student's Year Head regarding the possibility of providing direction to the student in

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continuing learning. While the school will make all reasonable attempts to support the student in these exceptional circumstances, it must be emphasised that these arrangements are no substitute for the student working with peers and the subject teacher in the normal class context.

Student leaving school during school hours

Parents/Guardians should be mindful of the educational importance of full attendance when scheduling appointments or family events which may necessitate the withdrawal of a student from school. Parents/guardians and students are requested not to make medical or dental appointments for students during school hours.

Where this is not possible, students will not be allowed leave the school for appointments without written parental notification. Notes to excuse students for appointments etc., during the school day must be signed by the Form Teacher during Form Class. Certificates of attendance at these appointments are also required and these will be stapled into the student's journal.

Students with signed (by the Form Teacher) permission to leave the school for any reason must sign the 'sign out' book at the main office before they leave.

Family Holidays

Parents are reminded that students should not be taken out of school for holidays during term time.

Meetings

Parents and students are asked to attend meetings in the school when required to discuss attendance concerns. The school also invites parents to a range of information sessions, evening meetings etc. in the school throughout the year. The main purpose of these gatherings differ but encouraging good attendance is a consistent feature. Parents (and students, where relevant) are strongly encouraged to attend.

Student Responsibility

The school expects all students registered in the school to attend all timetabled classes every day. Students should present to class on time fully equipped for work.

It is the responsibility of students who are absent from class/school for any reason, including extra-curricular activities to find out details of work missed.

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Student Participation

Students are expected to attend all classes and to participate to the best of their ability. Students are required to complete all assigned homework and all necessary aspects of subject course work.

The school provides opportunities in both curricular and extra-curricular areas to maximise student participation in all aspects of school life. The active engagement of students in these opportunities enhances learning, promotes personal and social development, develops friendships and enhances a positive experience of school. Student participation is encouraged, recognised, affirmed, publicised and rewarded.

Students who are assigned detention are required to complete the detention at the appointed time. Details of the detention will be advised to parents in advance in the student's journal

School Responsibility

The school wants to work in partnership with parents to ensure that an environment is created where children look forward to coming to school and participating in school life. The school wants to create conditions where children see that it is in their own interest to come to school regularly.

In keeping with the values and principles of our Mission Statement, we want to make school and school attendance a pleasant and positive experience. We offer a range of subjects, extracurricular and social activities to make our school as inclusive as possible, and to enable all students to participate fully and to benefit from their time at school.

School Calendar

The school calendar contains details of the opening and closing times of the school and the school holidays. These are published on the school website.

Unexpected School Closure

In the event of the school having to close unexpectedly due to extreme weather conditions etc., parents will be notified by text or phone call on the telephone number they have provided to the school. Details will also be posted on the school website.

Board of Management Responsibility

The Board of Management shall adhere to the statutory obligations of the school with regard to school attendance and participation. The Board of Management shall ensure that an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Attendance strategy and policy is carried out annually. They shall also ensure that all information regarding student attendance is collected and issued in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1988).

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Principal's Responsibility

A Register of all students who have been admitted to the school will be maintained by the Principal of the school. The Principal may at her discretion, delegate duties regarding school attendance to other staff in the school.

The school maintains a record of attendance and non-attendance on each school day or part thereof of each student registered at the school, which specifies the fact of attendance or failure to attend and the reasons for absence.

A student's name will not be removed from the Register, except

1. For inter-school transfer and then only after all details regarding attendance and education progress have been issued to the new school.
2. Where for whatever reason a student is removed from the school under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 Section 20 (4).

The Principal shall, after admitting a student from another second level school, notify the Principal of the school that he/she has registered the student.

The Principal will notify the Educational Welfare Services of Tusla when:

1. A student is suspended for a period of not less than 6 days.
2. A student is absent (for whatever reason) during a school year for 20 days or more
3. When, for whatever reason, a student's name is removed from the register in accordance with the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 Section 20 (4)
4. When there are concerns about the absenteeism of a student

How the policy will be monitored

The Attendance Policy will be monitored on an ongoing basis by all staff. Issues relating to the policy will be discussed at the weekly Year Heads meeting, as required.

Review Process and Date for Review

The Principal will provide an Attendance Report to the Board of Management at the end of each academic year at which point, the policy will be reviewed and any agreed amendments will be adopted.

Date the policy was approved by the Board of Management and Implementation date