

# **ST. JOSEPH'S N.S. - Attendance Policy**

## **Introduction**

Changing social habits and patterns necessitated the updating of the schools attendance policy. The redrafting was a collaborative school process involving staff and Board of Management, following initial drafting by a representative group. The HSCL teacher, Ms O'Brien, Assistant Principal, Ms Buckley and Principal were involved in drawing up initial draft policy.

## **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 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 teachers record individual patterns of attendance and the school secretary makes returns to NEWB. The Assistant Principal has responsibility for maintaining the Leabhair Tinreamh. The HSCL and the Assistant Principal are responsible for developing strategies to encourage good attendance.

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 9.20am. 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 on line and at present manually as well. Class attendance data is recorded daily in the Leabhar Tinrimh (Attendance Book). 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'/Guardians Names).

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 10.30 am 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. These notes are dated and kept by the class teacher or secretary). Late arrivals and early departures are recorded by the class teacher.

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 class teacher or Principal 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**

Regular attendance at school will be encouraged by:

- creating a safe and welcoming environment for all children
- ensuring children are happy and putting support systems in place for families in need.
- displaying kindness, compassion and understanding of all family situations.
- The identification at an early stage of students who are at risk of developing school attendance problems. Regular Care Team meetings will seek to identify families at risk and endeavour to put support systems in place.
- The establishment of close contact between the school and the families of students described above. The HSCL teacher will visit and assist families in developing positive practice in relation to attendance. The school will foster and promote relationships with bodies engaged in the provision of youth support programmes. E.G Barnadoes.
- The school will seek to identify aspects of operation, management or curriculum that may contribute to problems relating to school attendance. The school will review policies relating to assessment regularly in order to ensure that pupils needs are met.

Supports and procedures are in place in order to ensure that students concerns are addressed. The support of all partners in education is encouraged so that the wellbeing of each child is prioritized, with due regard for the educational needs of pupils.

### **National Education Welfare Board**

The Education Welfare Officer is informed if:

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

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**

St Joseph'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.

Traditionally, school attendance is strong in our school. However, the staff remains vigilant so that 'at 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 phone call. 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.

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.

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 is available on the school web site. 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.

St Joseph's N.S awards certificates to pupils who have good attendance during the school year. Certificates are also issued each term to children who have good attendance during that term. The following scale is used when commenting on childrens' attendance on end of year report - 0 - 3 - Excellent; 3 - 6 Very Good; 7 - 15 Fair; 16+ poor.

Parents will be contacted if there are any concerns re attendance/patterns of absence.

### **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 five times 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. 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 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.

St Joseph's N.S with support from the School Completion Programme and DEIS funding run a number of initiatives to encourage attendance. E.G Pottery classes, art classes, music, workshops, Reality Therapy, Play Therapy.

The school has an Open Door policy and regular contact with parents is encouraged. Home/school links are fostered through HSCL visits, classes and classroom activities.

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

### **Communication with other Schools**

- When a child transfers from *AN Other 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 *AN Other School* confirmation of transfer will be communicated to the child's previous school, and appropriate records sought

- Pupils transferring from *AN Other School* to a post primary school will have their records forwarded on receipt of confirmation of enrolment.

### **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 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.
- 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 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 has been in operation in *St Josephs N.S* since 2009 and was updated in March, 2014. It will be reviewed again in 2016

### **References:**

Education Welfare Act 2000  
 Education Act 1998  
 Section 29 Education Act