



Attendance Policy (containing the Statement of Strategy)

Reviewed in September 2017

Vision and values in relation to attendance:

Our Mission Statement states that:

- We strive to create a happy, safe, inclusive and nurturing environment where the uniqueness of each child is celebrated
- We aim to provide a space where children are educated and where all members of the school community can grow, develop and achieve their full potential.
- We aspire to excellence in an atmosphere of respect, openness and joy.

Introduction

There is a very strong tradition of good attendance in Monkstown Educate Together N. S. However, the changing social fabric of the nation is altering attitudes to school and we are anxious that parents/guardians be aware of the absolute necessity for regular punctual attendance at school. Quite simply, children cannot learn if they are not in school.

This policy document was drawn up:

- To ensure and maintain a high level of attendance at school by all pupils.
- The Board of Management wishes to comply with legislation, such as:
 - The Education Act, 1998
 - The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

Developing the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance: Guidelines for Schools is provided under statutory instrument of Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. Section 22(1) of the Act, states:

‘the board of management of a recognised school shall, after consultation with the principal of, teachers teaching at, parents of students recognised at, and the educational welfare officer assigned functions in relation to, that school, prepare and submit to the Board [of TUSLA] a statement of 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’

The aims of our attendance policy are:

- to ensure that pupils are registered accurately and efficiently
- to record and report attendance
- to identify pupils at risk of poor school attendance
- to raise awareness of the importance of school attendance
- to ensure compliance with the requirements of the relevant legislation
- to ensure that the school has strategies in place to promote attendance
- to develop, subject to available resources, links between the school and the families of children who may be at risk of developing attendance problems
- to identify and remove, insofar as is practicable, obstacles to school attendance.
- to develop strategies in the event of non-attendance

Statement of Strategies

The following strategies are employed to help achieve these aims:

- The target for the school is that every child is in school every day.
- The school attendance of individual pupils is recorded on the Aladdin System on a daily basis. This is the responsibility of the class teacher and is monitored by the principal.
- 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 before 9.40am each morning. Any pupil not present will be marked absent for the day. 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 in the child's file.
- The school 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. A safe, warm environment is created in the school and the happiness and safety of the children is a priority.
- This attendance policy is closely linked to the anti-bullying policy since it is imperative that a child feels safe and happy in school and this will promote a high level of attendance.
- The school principal informally monitors attendance and general pupil welfare by admitting the children into the school in the mornings.

- Traditionally, school attendance is strong in our school. 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 or regular unexplained absences. Appropriate contact takes place between the school and parents/guardians either via a letter, a phone call or a note in the homework diary when this occurs. A meeting between parents/guardians and the Principal may be set up if deemed necessary. In any given academic year, absences of more than 20 days are automatically referred to TUSLA.
- 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 the start of the placement.
- 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. Homework is a strong link between home and school.
- The calendar for the coming school year is published annually before the end of June and a reminder is published in September. The parents/guardians also receive a more detailed calendar which is updated regularly during the year. Our calendar and events are also on our website, and parents/guardians receive regular email and text reminders. 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 school promotes the development of good self-worth in the children; they are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and their learning and to buy into an ethos of respect, equity and fairness in the school.
- The children are encouraged to take an active role in school decisions through the Student Council, Assembly and informal discussions.
- The school curriculum caters for the individual needs of each child
- Children are appropriately supported through any difficulties that may arise at home.
- Vulnerable parents/guardians are supported, as much as is possible and in an appropriate manner, to get their children in to school.
- Parents/guardians get a record of their child’s attendance for the year.

- The Child Protection Policy checklist is completed annually by the BoM and each staff member has a hard copy to hand. Staff are obliged, by law, to bring any concerns to the Designated Liaison person (the principal) or the Deputy Designated Liaison person (Deputy Principal) in the school.
- Parents/guardians are informed if a child has no lunch, and if one cannot be provided for him/her, the school will provide a drink and some healthy snacks if available.
- The school has a strong, positive relationship with the various HSE centres in our catchment area and local social workers, including the family support teams.
- The advice of the designated NEPS psychologist is sought when deemed to be necessary.
- It was decided not to provide certificates of attendance or prizes to children with excellent attendance since school attendance is deemed to be the responsibility of the parent/guardian and not the child. We did not want to undermine a child who was missing school through no fault of their own.
- 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.
- The Education Welfare Officer is also informed if;
 - A child is expelled
 - A child is suspended
- In such cases Tusla (following all reasonable efforts by the Education Board to consult with the child’s parents/guardians and the Principal of the school) may serve a ‘School Attendance Notice’ on any parent/guardian who he/she concludes is failing or neglecting to cause the child to attend the school. A successful case taken against the parent/guardian may result in a fine and/or imprisonment.
- Reasons for absence are recorded and reported to TUSLA four 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.

- School achievements are celebrated at assembly and on the school achievement noticeboard.
- A sense of school ownership is fostered at regular school student council meetings.
- The importance of school attendance is promoted throughout the school. It is included in the school information booklet, spoken about at enrolment time, spoken about at the general parent meeting in September, and promoted at every opportunity.
- It is school policy is to speak to the parent/guardian about attendance, not the child.
- Pupils are registered accurately and efficiently by each class teacher, before 10.00am, on the Aladdin system.
- Parents/guardians are required to submit a note explaining each absence and will be contacted if this note is not forthcoming. This note is kept in the child's individual file.
- TUSLA is furnished with the total attendances in the school year through the Annual Report Form which is completed on-line.
- Parents/guardians will be reminded of persistent absences and lateness. (See letter in Appendix 1). We rarely have to send this letter since issues are usually resolved in an informal manner.

Monitoring and evaluation of the above strategies

1. Individual children who are causing concern will be discussed as the concerns arise.
2. General attendance is discussed, by staff, in June of each school year and the effectiveness of the above strategies are debated. A short report will be created and discussed by the BOM. This report will then be communicated to the parent body through the website.
3. It is envisaged that targets for attendance may also focus on individual children and concentrate on raising their attendance levels.

Guidance for Parents/Guardians

Punctuality

School begins at 8.30 am. All pupils and staff 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 Tusla.

Parents/Guardians have a legal duty to ensure that their child is in attendance in the school that they are enrolled in. (Section 17 Education Act 2000)

Section [(21) (9)] of the Education Act states that: “a pupil’s absence can only be authorised by the Principal when the child is involved in activities organised by the school or in which the school is involved”. **The school principal cannot authorise a child’s absence for holidays during school time.**

The reasons for pupils’ absences must be communicated in writing by parents/guardians to the school and will be retained on file. When the child returns to school s/he should give a written note to the class teacher which contains the name, the dates of absence and the reason for the absence. These notes will form a record which may be inspected by the Education Welfare Officer on a visit to the school.

The school will contact parents/guardians when a written explanation for the child’s absence is not received by the school. This contact can be by email or by telephone.

In the event of a prolonged illness, a doctor’s note must be provided. A prolonged illness is generally agreed to be one which is 5 days or longer.

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 TUSLA to resolve any attendance problems;
- making sure their children understand that parents/guardians 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.

Communication with other Schools

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

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

References:

'Developing the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance'- Guidelines for Schools- TULSA
 Education (Welfare) Act 2000: III;22.1
 Education (Welfare) Act 2000: III;21.4
 Education (Welfare) Act 2000: III;20.5
 Education (Welfare) Act 2000: III;20.5
 Education (Welfare) Act 2000: III;20.3
 Education (Welfare) Act 2000: III;22.5
 DES Circular 28/2013
 "Empty Desks", C.D.U. Mary Immaculate College

Review

This policy was reviewed because of a change in procedures for the recording of attendance, changes in the communication with parents/guardians and changes in the requirements of schools to develop a clear strategy for attendance.

Evaluation

It has been agreed by the staff and board of Management that overall attendance will be analysed towards the end of each school year and, if necessary, clear targets will be put in place, to improve attendance, for the following school year. This data will inform school planning on an ongoing basis.

Signed: Rosario Kealy, Principal _____

Noelita Lane, Chairperson _____

Date: _____

Reviewed September 2017

Appendix 1 (sample letter)



Merikstown Educate Together
National School

Date _____

Dear _____

It has come to my attention that _____ has poor attendance lately. Please remember that any absences of over 20 days have to be reported to Tusla. Please contact the school so that we can discuss this.

Please sign this letter and return it to the school.

Rosario Kealy
Principal

Signed _____