

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY

Rationale:

This policy complements the school ethos of nurturing potential in a caring environment where the welfare of children is paramount. This policy was developed in accordance with legislative requirements such as the Education Welfare Act 2000 and the Education Act, 1998. It also identifies the supportive role of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and outlines the school's legal obligations to report absences.

Aims of Policy:

The aim of the Attendance policy of Convent of Mercy N.S. is to encourage attendance as an essential factor in pupils' learning. The policy aims to:

- Ensure that pupils are registered accurately and efficiently
- Ensure that pupil attendance is recorded daily
- Encourage full attendance where possible
- Identify pupils 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
- Identify pupils at risk of leaving school early
- Ensure compliance with the requirements of the relevant legislation
- Develop, subject to available resources, links between the school and the families of children who may be at risk of developing attendance difficulties
- Identify and remove, insofar as is practicable, obstacles to school attendance.

School's Vision in relation to attendance:

- Our school aims to provide an environment that will encourage all children to attend punctually and regularly with the aim of achieving full attendance each year whenever possible.
- We endeavour to provide a safe, caring place where all children will be helped to reach their full potential.

Punctuality:-

School gates are open from 9.10 a.m. and children are encouraged to be in their classrooms at 9.20 a.m. but not later than 9.30 a.m. School gates are closed at 9.30am for security reasons. 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 school defines consistently late as five days over a ten-day period. The principal is obliged under The Education Welfare Act 2000 to report children who are persistently late, to the Education Welfare Board

Attendance and Roll Call:

Recording and Reporting Attendance:

The school attendance of individual pupils is recorded on the school's online administrative system, Aladdin. 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.

There are seven categories of absence to be recorded as follows:

- A = Illness
- B = Urgent Family Reason
- C = Expelled
- D = Suspended
- E = Other
- F = Unexplained
- G = Transfer to another school
- H = Holiday

Parents/Guardians are asked to contact the class teacher by email/letter to explain a child's absence from school. Parents who ring the office to inform the secretary will be asked to follow the phone call up with an email to the class teacher. A record of this will be kept and it will be noted on Aladdin.

The roll call is taken at 10.00 am using the online administrative system, Aladdin. Any pupil not present will be marked absent for the day. If a child is late to school, this will be recorded on Aladdin. Late arrivals are recorded by the class teacher.

Late arrivals/Early Departures:

Parents/Guardians are asked to inform the class teacher by email/note to explain late arrivals or early departures of their children.

This communication is recorded as evidence for filling in the attendance records of the school. It is used when communicating to the Education Welfare Officer and/or TUSLA (NEWB section) if a child's attendance figure exceeds 20 days as these records are proof that, while a child may have been absent at the time of Roll call, they may have attended for part of the school day.

Permission to Leave School Early:

Written parental permission is required in advance via email/letter for a child to leave the school early, unless the parent/guardian collects the child him/herself. It is the responsibility of the class teacher to ensure that the nominated person or parent/guardian is collecting the child.

Guidance for Parents:

Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their child who is attending a recognised school is at school on every day that the school is open, unless there is a genuine reason for him or her not to attend (Section 17 of Education (Welfare) Act 2000). **Only absences relating to activities organised by the school or in which the school is involved can be authorised by the principal (Section 21(9) of Education (Welfare) Act 2000).** Therefore, the school cannot give 'permission' for holiday absences during term time. We strongly discourage parents from taking students on holidays during term time. If a parent decides to take a child out of school for holidays, the parent must provide a letter to the school to say they are doing so and are aware of the implications. Where there are regular holiday absences, we remind parents of the educational and potential legal impact of removing students from school for periods of time.

How Parents should report absences to Convent of Mercy N.S.:

Reasons for pupils' absences must be communicated in writing, by parents/guardians to the school and will be retained by the school. To facilitate this, such communications should be sent by email to the class teacher with the child's name, the dates of absence and the reason for the absence and sign it.

These notes will form a record which may be inspected by the Education Welfare Officer on a visit to the school. The class teacher will contact parents by email when a written explanation for the child's absence is not received by the school. This will be followed up by a phone call from the class teacher if an email is not received by the teacher to explain the absence.

Parents/Guardians can promote good school attendance by:

- Ensuring regular and punctual school attendance.
- Notifying the school in advance, 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 value education and school and support the policy of full 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. Teacher will record as 'unexplained' on Aladdin if an absence is not explained
- 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

Mainstream/SEN Teachers will:

- Provide an inclusive classroom climate and classroom management that support participation and engagement, especially with students who may be at risk of poor attendance;
- Actively use the school's Attendance Strategy to promote attendance;
- Set high expectations for punctuality and attendance in their classrooms;
- Agree punctuality and attendance standards with students as part of classroom rules;
- Set example by their own punctuality;
- Ensure attendance data are recorded accurately and reviewed in line with school procedures;
- Alert relevant staff if there are concerns about student absences
- Support the attendance plan for students who have difficulty in attending school on a regular basis;
- Support students on return when they have missed periods of schooling

Pupils:

- Pupils have the clear responsibility to attend school regularly and punctually.
- Pupils should inform staff if there is a problem that may lead to their absence.
- Pupils are responsible for promptly passing on handwritten absence notes from parents to their class teacher
- Pupils are responsible for passing school correspondence to their parents, on the specified day.

A strategy for promoting good school attendance:

The Board of Management is committed to providing a positive school atmosphere which is conducive to promoting good school attendance. In this regard:

- The school curriculum, insofar as is practicable, is flexible and relevant to the needs of the individual child.
- The school will promote development of good self-concept and self-worth in the children.
- Support for pupils, who have special educational needs, are in place in accordance with Department of Education & Science guidelines.
- Internal communication procedures are in place to inform teachers of the special needs of pupils.

- Principal will highlight good attendance at assembly each term
- Specific incentives may be offered to particular children to encourage attendance
- At the initial meeting of parents of any new pupils, the 'Don't Let your Child Miss Out' leaflet will be distributed
- The assistance of the Education Welfare Officer will be utilised.
- The attendance rates of pupils will be monitored by the class teacher in the first instance, and the class teacher will notify the Principal of any concerns regarding the attendance of any child.

Pupils with a poor attendance record will, insofar as is practicable, be supported in an effort to improve their attendance e.g. meet with parents/guardians. This will involve meeting with the parents/guardians to ascertain reasons for absences and how the school can support them.

School Factors that affect attendance:

- School climate and classroom climate: Students who experience positive interaction, in the form of praise or being asked questions, are less likely to be absent from school on a regular basis than those who have not experienced such interaction or feel ignored.
- Student-teacher relationships: A positive climate of student-teacher relationships, of mutual trust and respect, and where students have a voice in school matters are known in most educational research to have a strong influence on student engagement and attendance.
- Teacher expectations: Attendance is significantly higher when teachers have high expectations of students - an effect that operates over and above the students' own expectations of themselves.

Identifying 'at risk' pupils:

- While actively reviewing attendance patterns of children in their care, teachers should be vigilant so that 'at risk' pupils are identified early
- 'At risk' pupils can be categorised as those who miss more than 5 days in a 20-day period without an accompanying email/note of explanation from parents/guardians.
- When this occurs, teachers should follow the appropriate contact steps outlined underneath.

Appropriate contact will take place between the school and parents/guardians

of these children in the following format:

- Parents will receive an email from their child's class teacher after 5 days in a 20-day period if the teacher feels a poor pattern of attendance is emerging without a written explanation.
- Parents will receive a letter when their child has missed 12 days (Appendix 1 Sample letter 12 days)
- Parents will receive a further letter if their child reaches 20 days absence (Appendix 1 Sample Letter 20 days)
- Where deemed appropriate by the Principal, letters/emails will be followed up by a phone call/meeting either by class teacher/Principal

Responsibilities:

The Principal and Deputy Principal have overall responsibility for school attendance.

The Staff and Management of our school are committed to working with parents to encourage regular and punctual attendance.

Record/Communication:

Attendance is recorded daily at 10.00am on Aladdin

Tusla (Child and Family Agency)

The Education Welfare Officer is informed if:

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

Tusla is furnished with the total attendances in the school year through the Annual Attendance Report, which is completed on-line by the principal/secretary.

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 Tusla 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 Tusla at least two times during the school year through an online system at the end of December and at the end of June. 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.

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

Communication with other Schools

- When a child transfers from Convent of Mercy N.S. to another school, the school's records on attendance and academic progress will be forwarded on receipt of written notification of the transfer
- When a child transfers into Convent of Mercy N.S. confirmation of transfer will be communicated to the child's previous school, and appropriate records sought

- Pupils transferring from Convent of Mercy N.S. to post primary school will have their records forwarded on receipt of confirmation of enrolment via the NCCA's Education Passport materials.

Success Criteria:

The success of any Attendance Policy is measured through:

- Improved attendance levels as measured through attendance records and statistical returns
- Happy confident well-adjusted children
- Positive parental feedback
- Teacher vigilance

Ratified by Board of Management on: - 13th February 2023

Signed:- Alan Traynor
Chairperson, Board of Management

Signed:- Celine Clarke
Principal

Appendix 1

Sample Letter template for Pupils missing 12 and 20 days

12 Days Absence

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Under the terms of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the school is obliged to notify Tusla if a child is absent for 20 days or more, or where a child's absence gives rise for concern.

It is the school's policy to inform parents by letter of a child's absence when he/she reaches 12 days or more. While we understand that children may be absent due to illness or bereavement, we are just bringing the number of absent days to your attention.

This letter is to inform you that our records show that _____
has been absent from school on _____ days.

One of the factors ensuring success in education is regular school attendance and habits of attendance are set in the early years of schooling. It is a policy of Convent of Mercy N.S. to encourage children to attend school every day. Parents/Guardians can help to develop a positive attitude to school attendance by encouraging children to come to school every day and by ensuring that all absences are explained in writing. Our Attendance policy is available to view on our www.comns.ie

We thank you for your cooperation in this.

Yours sincerely,

Yours sincerely,

Celine Clarke
Principal

Karen Gilroy
Deputy Principal

20 Days Absence

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Under the terms of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the school is obliged to notify Tusla if a child is absent for 20 days or more, or where a child's absence gives rise for concern.

It is the school's policy to inform parents by letter of children's absences. You will have already received a letter when your child reached 12 days or more.

While we understand that children may be absent due to illness or bereavement, we are legally obliged to report all absences of 20 days or more to Tusla. Following your notes, the categories of absence have also been recorded and Tusla may examine this data further.

This letter is to inform you that our records show that _____

has been absent from school on _____ days.

One of the factors ensuring success in education is regular school attendance and habits of attendance are set in the early years of schooling. It is a policy of Convent of Mercy N.S. to encourage children to attend school every day. Parents can help to develop a positive attitude to school attendance by encouraging children to come to school every day and by ensuring that all absences are explained in writing. Our Attendance policy is available to view on our school website www.comns.ie

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Yours sincerely,

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