



# *School Attendance Strategy and Attendance Policy*

April 20<sup>th</sup>2021



## **Statement of Strategy for School Attendance**

### **Introduction**

Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 requires that the Board of Management prepare and submit to Tusla, Child and Family Agency, a Statement of Strategy for School Attendance.

St Mary's CBS is committed to providing a safe and caring environment which allows each student to reach their full potential. The school is committed to providing a holistic education to each student and aims to be a welcoming and inclusive environment for all members of its community. This community includes teachers, students and parents. The school wishes to promote co-operation among students, parents/guardians and staff in maintaining a high level of attendance throughout the school year.

### **Aims**

- To raise awareness of the importance of regular school attendance
- To identify students at risk of leaving school early
- To promote and foster positive attitudes to learning
- To enhance the learning environment
- To ensure compliance with the relevant legislation

### **Our Expectations around Attendance**

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 not to attend (Section 17 of Education (Welfare) Act 2000). A substantial amount of research demonstrates that there are significant benefits for students with good school attendance while poor school attendance has a negative impact.

Students' attendance is recorded every morning during the first class and again every afternoon during the first class after the lunch break. VSware is used to record and monitor attendance. It is at these times that students will be marked present or absent for the day. Roll calls are taken throughout the school day by subject teachers.

When a student is absent from school during part of the school day or for a school day or for more than a school day, Section 18 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 places legal duty on parents to notify the principal about the reasons for the student's absence.

The school day begins at 8.55am and ends at 4.00pm (1.15pm on Friday).

Parents/guardians are required to ring the office before 10 am if their son is going to be absent. This is then marked as *Absent Explained* on VShare. If a parent/guardian does not notify the office before 10am, the student is marked *Absent*. A text is sent out during the morning from VShare, informing parents that their son is not present.

A student who is absent from school must, on his return, provide a written explanation from parent or guardian in his journal for the school office.

Medical and dental appointment cards should be presented in advance.

In the likelihood of a prolonged absence, a parent or guardian should (after three days at most) notify the school.

### **Lateness**

If a student arrives late to school, he must have a written explanation from parent or guardian in his journal. He will receive a 'Late' stamp in his journal. If he does not have a written explanation for being late he will receive a sanction. The sanctions are included in the school's Code of Behaviour and are the responsibility of the Home School Liaison officer to enforce.

If a student needs to leave school early he must have a written explanation from parent or guardian on the day that he has to leave early. He must show this to his Year Head. He then proceeds to the school office at the time he has to leave to await his parents and sign out.

If regular absences are unexplained the Year Head/Home School Liaison Coordinator will make contact with parents to discuss this. If a student's absence becomes an issue for concern, the Care Team, Deputy Principal/Principal will be informed and contact with home through phone call or home visit will ensue.

The school must inform Tusla's Educational Support Service (TESS) 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 for six days or more or expelled. This report must be made irrespective of the reason for the student's absence. If the school is very concerned about the pattern of a student's absences, then the school is obliged by law to inform TESS. The school will always inform parents if a report is being made to TESS.

The school cannot give 'permission' for holiday absences during term time. If a parent decides to take a child out of school for holidays the school requires a letter to the principal saying they are doing so. Taking a student out of school during term time has a potential risk to his education and the student will need to take action to catch up on what he has missed.

The School Attendance Policy contains more detailed information on the systems in place in the school that deal with attendance.

## Whole School Strategies to promote attendance

The school is committed to improving students' attendance. This can be done through reinvigorating systems that are in use and improving communication between teachers, tutors and year heads and parents/guardians on this issue and by monitoring the Annual Attendance Report submitted by the school each year to Tusla.

- St Mary's CBS endeavours to create a safe, welcoming environment for students and their parents/guardians.
- At the induction meeting for parents/guardians of new students the Principal/Deputy Principal emphasises the importance and value of regular attendance.
- The calendar for the academic year is published annually on the school app and website and given to parents in the school information pack. It is hoped that this will enable parents to plan family events around school closures, thus minimising the chances of non-attendance related to family holidays during the school term.
- Parents/guardians are contacted by phone/ in person as soon as the Year Head has a concern around their son's attendance. Support and advice is given to parents and students through the Tutor/Year Head/ Guidance Counsellor/ Deputy Principal/ Principal in order to help improve the student's attendance. The issue is addressed with parents/guardians at Parent-teacher Meetings and on the Christmas and Summer reports by teachers.
- The importance of attendance is highlighted at assemblies by Year Heads.
- The number of days missed is written clearly on students' reports at Christmas and Summer.
- Student attendance records are made available to their parents through VShare.
- Parents can register their son's absences via the School App, phone or email.
- Class Tutors acknowledge good attendance during Tutor Class.
- 'Homework Club', which is run for First Years, benefits students who may be struggling academically and provide space to complete homework where it may be challenging at home. Having all work complete for the following day encourages attendance.
- The school offers a very wide range of extra-curricular activities and encourages all students to get involved in these activities. Involvement in these types of activities in school can encourage students to attend. Students are encouraged to become involved in the Student Council.
- In extreme cases where poor attendance is linked with poor behaviour and social and emotional challenges, Behavioural Support programmes are offered to an individual student to support their relationship with school and therefore their attendance. Also a mentor (usually a teacher or senior student) can offer support and encouragement to a student in these more extreme cases. The decision to ask a teacher to mentor (*Check and Connect Programme*) a student will usually come through the Care Team.
- The school has developed close links with the main feeder primary schools, social services, the Block Project (a Garda Youth Diversion Project in Portlaoise) and with the EWO (Education Welfare Officer).

## **Responding to Poor Attendance**

In order to improve poor attendance, the following strategies are implemented:

- Contacting parents/guardians (usually carried out by a teacher, tutor, Year Head or school management) on an informal basis when a student is absent regularly in order to begin a dialogue about attendance
- Reporting to parents/guardians when students are absent without their permission
- Making attendance records available to parents/guardians via VShare
- Tracking of students through the Care Team
- Following up on junior students by the Home School Liaison Coordinator (HSLC)
- Clinics with parents, the Deputy Principal, EWO and HSLC are conducted as an early intervention to improve attendance.
- Contacting the Education Welfare Officer
- *Check and Connect Programme* with marginalised students
- Positive reinforcement of good or improving attendance as outlined above. Every effort is made to re-engage students who are working to improve their attendance
- Regular messaging on the app and website reinforcing the benefits of good attendance.
- Awarding of certificates of good attendance at Christmas and Summer with a draw for prizes
- Poster campaign throughout the school
- Re-invigorating current systems in order to focus on a particular group or individual
- Providing teachers with information as to which students are particularly at risk of developing attendance problems through appropriate updates from the Care Team and information meetings at the beginning of the school year.
- When the school has exhausted all efforts and there is no improvement in attendance a referral will be made to Tusla's Education Support Service (TESS).

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

The importance of regular school attendance is such that all members of our school community have roles to play in ensuring that all possible strategies are utilised to ensure that students attend school on a regular basis. Overall responsibility for the co-ordination and monitoring of the various implementation strategies rests with the Principal, but every member of the school community is involved in the implementation of the policy under the guidance of the Board of Management.

## **Monitoring and evaluation of the Statement of Strategy**

Teachers, Parents Council and Students Council will be central to the monitoring and evaluation of the Statement of Strategy. This will be done by investigating attendance rates throughout and at the end of the school year and comparing those to previous years.

This School Attendance Strategy will then be reviewed and this review will be brought to the attention of the Board of Management.

This School Attendance Strategy was reviewed by the Board of Management on:

Signed:  (Chairperson)

Date: 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021



## Appendix 1:

# Attendance Policy

St Marys CBS believes that regular and punctual attendance is an essential requirement for all students seeking to attain their full potential at the school.

- The school day at St Marys CBS begins at 9am and ends at 4pm Monday to Thursday. On Friday school begins at 9am and ends at 1.15pm
- Students are expected to be at school before 8.55am at the latest, to ensure that students are ready with all the required books and equipment for classes.
- Attendance at all timetabled classes is mandatory and requests for any exemption from class/classes must be made in advance, in writing, by parent/guardian and will be duly considered by the school management.
- Attendance is checked and recorded on the school VSware system during the first class of the morning and again during the first class of the afternoon. Teachers keep a record of attendance for each class during the day.
- Students, who are absent, are marked absent on the VSware system, to provide the basis for information transfer to Tusla's Educational Support Service (TESS) as required by the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. A text will be sent home to the parents/guardians of the students whose absence has not been explained.
- Parents can notify our school either by phone, email or via the School App.
- Students who have 20 absences or more will be reported to TESS in accordance with their reporting provisions.
- Students who have reached the age of 16 years and completed 3 years post primary education will not be reported to TESS unless the student has been suspended or expelled.
- Students must, at all times, supply the school authorities with an explanation provided by the parent/guardian for the absence. Parents/guardians should contact the school office by phone, email or School App. to explain the absence and write a note in the student's journal when they return to school to explain the absence to teachers.
- On occasions where students need to leave the school, during the day, for appointments, family reasons, illness or such reason, the student is required to sign out in the general office. Students will not be allowed to leave without prior communication with the parent/guardian. Where students return to the school following a brief absence on the day they are also required to sign in.
- Students who arrive late for class at the start of the school day must attend the general office where they will receive a late stamp before being admitted to class.
- Students who attain full attendance during the school year will be awarded with certification.



## Appendix 2:

# Correlation between Attendance and Academic Attainment

