



ST MARY'S HIGH SCHOOL, NEWRY

Attendance Policy **Revised November 2024**

MISSION STATEMENT

OPTIMUM SEMPER FACERE 'ALWAYS TO DO ONES BEST'

'We will work in collaboration with other educational institutions and in partnership with parents and students to maximise the academic and creative potential of students, enabling them to achieve the highest educational standards, thereby enriching their lives, the community and the economy.'

Rationale:

The Governors and staff of St. Mary's are committed to providing a full and effective education for all our students to ensure they achieve their full potential in all that they do.

'Attendance at school is not only linked to academic achievement, but it is connected to pupils' emotional health and wellbeing and supports them to thrive within their community.'

DE Attendance Matters Document August 2024

As a Catholic and Rights Respecting School, we work together to engender in our students, positive attitudes and behaviours, based on respect for self and others. We will strive to promote an ethos and culture which encourages good attendance and where each student will feel valued and secure. Academic success in school is interdependent with good attendance and students are more likely to achieve their full potential and be happy members of the school community if they attend school each day. Students, parents, carers and teachers work together to maintain high standards of attendance. Our school aims to achieve good attendance and to encourage students to maintain a pattern of good attendance throughout their school career, by operating an Attendance Policy within which staff, students, parents, carers and the Education Welfare Service can work together in partnership. All staff will encourage punctuality and good attendance.

DE's Policy for School Improvement **'Every School a Good School' April 2009**; states that every school should ensure that **'...a culture of achievement, improvement and ambition exists – with clear expectations that all students can and will achieve to the very best of their ability'**. This policy emphasises the important link between good attendance and academic success. All staff have responsibility for student attendance in school. The Pastoral Leader, Mr. M. Fitzpatrick, the Attendance Coordinator, Mrs. S. Fearon, Year Tutors, Form Teachers and Subject Teachers, liaise with home and other agencies about students' attendance when appropriate.

Aims:

Through the establishment of a caring framework as a Rights Respecting School we aim to foster positive attitudes towards education and encourage students to value the importance of good attendance and punctuality in line with Article 29 of UNCRC *'The role of education is to encourage children to reach their potential'*;

- To improve the overall attendance of students in St. Mary's;
- To promote good attendance through positive home school relationships;
- To recognise good attendance with awards, postcards of congratulation and certificates;
- To provide advice, support and guidance to parents/carers and students;
- To promote and develop effective working relationships with the Education Welfare Service.

The School's Expectations on Attendance:

To ensure regular attendance and punctuality, St. Mary's has the following expectations from students and their parents/carers.

Role of Pupil

Every student has a duty to ensure that she attends school every day and is punctual.

- To be in school each day and to be on time – 08:55
- To attend all classes required by her timetable
- To never leave school during the day without permission
- To keep a record of attendance in her Homework Diary
- To bring in a note from her parent/carer on the day of her return explaining the period of absence
- To catch up on all work missed during her absence
- To undertake detention if she neglects any of these responsibilities.

Role of Parent/Carer

Parents and carers have a legal duty to ensure:

'Every child of compulsory school age shall receive efficient full time education suitable to age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs she may have, either by regular school attendance or otherwise'.

(Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986)

- To value the importance of a good education
- To attend parent evenings and school events
- To support the school's policy regarding attendance, non-attendance, punctuality and mitching
- To ensure that their daughter(s) is/are in school every day and is/are on time
- To contact the school if their daughter(s) is/are going to be absent
- To provide a signed note explaining any absence on the day of their daughter's return
- To inform the school if their daughter(s) will be absent for a prolonged period of time
- To collect work from the school if their daughter is off for a prolonged period of time
- To take holidays during holiday time and not to book family holidays during the school term
- To arrange dental/medical appointments outside of school hours when possible
- To discuss any problems or difficulties with the school – staff are there to help and will be supportive
- To contact the Year Head, Vice Principal or Principal if their daughter is reluctant to attend school

Role of the School

- The Board of Governors provides support by reviewing school attendance and targets
- Record and monitor attendance and punctuality in a consistent way in line with DE guidance (Department of Education Circular 2019/14)
- To develop strategies to encourage good attendance
- To use sanctions which will deter absences and truancy
- To check attendance every lesson
- To operate the School's Truancy Call service (IRIS Reach) for unauthorised absences;
- To contact parents/carers to discuss any attendance concerns (Form Teacher, Year Tutor, Attendance Coordinator, Vice Principal, Principal)
- To alert the Education Welfare Officer in the case of on-going absences

Year Tutors use the 5 stages on an Exceptional Attendance Record Sheet to outline the process they have followed prior to referring a pupil to EWO

Stage 1 Year Tutor contacts the parent/carer initially by phone, to inform them of the low level of attendance (90% or below) and to find out the reason for this poor attendance and/or to provide support

Stage 2 Year Tutor monitors the student's attendance

Stage 3 Referral to the Vice Principal if there is no improvement in the student's attendance.

Stage 4 Year Tutor continues to monitor the student's attendance

Stage 5 The pupil is referred to EWO

- To issue a detention for missing from school
- To maintain a record of requests for time out of school for appointments and to make frequent checks
- To provide work for the student if she will be off for a prolonged period of time – the parents/carers must inform the school of the reason for this absence and be in a position to collect the work from school
- To provide information on request for a student's attendance record to employers and other educational establishments.

Attendance Co-ordinator Role (Mrs S Fearon)

- Consult with SLT in relation to new attendance initiatives and guidance from DE and review the attendance policy when necessary.
- Monitor attendance and punctuality
- Use positive incentives to encourage pupils to improve/maintain good attendance
- Work closely with Parents/Carers, Mrs. G. Morgan (Education Welfare Officer), Form Teachers, Year Tutors and the Vice Principal
- Interview individual students /parents regarding attendance when and where necessary.

Education Welfare Service

Education Authorities through the Education Welfare Service have a legal responsibility to make sure that parents/carers meet their responsibility towards their daughter's education. Regular attendance is an essential requirement for educational results and where attendance difficulties exist or a student's attendance falls below 85%, the Education Welfare Service (EWS) will support staff and parents in developing and implementing strategies to address or improve school attendance.

Monitoring Student Attendance - Lesson Monitor

Teachers monitor lesson attendance through the use of the computerised SIMS system 'Lesson Monitor'. This programme allows each Subject Teacher to mark the attendance register at the beginning of each lesson using the following Coding System:

Code	Reason	Statistical Meaning
/ \	Present: / = A.M. \ = P.M.	Present
A	Artistic Endeavour	Authorised Absence
B	Bereavement	Authorised Absence
C	Suspended	Authorised Absence
G	Family Holiday (not agreed)	Unauthorised Absence
H	Other Absence	Unauthorised Absence
I	Illness (not medical or dental appointments)	Authorised Absence
J	Extended Leave	Attendance Not Required
L	Late	Present
M	Medical/Dental Appointments	Authorised Absence
N	Absent from Class without a Valid Reason - Mitching	Unauthorised Absence
O	Other Exceptional Circumstances	Authorised Absence
P	Approved Activity	Approved Educational Activity
R	Religious Observation	Authorised Absence
S	Study Leave	Approved Educational Activity
V	Educational Visit/Examination	Approved Educational Activity
W	Work Experience	Approved Educational Activity
X	Only Staff Should Attend	Attendance Not Required
Y	Exceptional Closure	Attendance Not Required
#	Holiday For All	Attendance Not Required
!	No Attendance Required	Attendance Not Required
1	Community Providers/EOTAS (organised by the EA)	Approved Educational Activity
2	Exceptional Teaching Arrangement - Home/Hospital Tuition (organised by the EA)	Approved Educational Activity
4	Pupil Referral Unit	Attendance Not Required
5	Another Mainstream School under the entitlement framework - EF (St Colman's or St Mark's)	Approved Educational Activity
6	Training Organisation (under EF)	Approved Educational Activity
7	FE College (SRC – under EF)	Approved Educational Activity
8	Intensive Support Learning Unit	Approved Educational Activity
9	CAMHS / Mental Health Support	Approved Educational Activity

Lesson Monitor enables teachers to check students' attendance from the previous lessons. If a student is absent from the current lesson, without a valid reason, the teacher will contact the main office and may also contact the student's Form Teacher and/or Year Tutor. The Subject Teacher will record a comment and use an N code in Lesson Monitor. The Year Tutor or Vice Principal will follow up on the absence.

A student should only be absent from class if the reason is authorised. An authorised absence will be indicated by a comment on Lesson Monitor.

Authorised absences are recorded as a morning or afternoon away from school for an acceptable reason such as illness, bereavement, attendance at a medical or dental appointment.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no permission has been given. These include:

Mitching

Shopping

Baby Sitting

Absences which have not been properly explained

Form Teachers will record an S code (Study Leave) in Lesson Monitor for pupils who are doing Public Examinations in Years 12, 13 and 14 during the examination period. Study Leave (Code S) will not be used for internal examinations or in advance of the commencement of the examination timetable.

Positive Measures to Encourage Good Attendance

- Class registers will be completed accurately by staff at the beginning of each lesson
- Form Teachers and Subject Teachers will monitor students' attendance through Lesson Monitor
- Attendance will be closely monitored by Year Tutors and Form Teachers
- Termly draws take place for very good attendance in each Year Group – £20 Gift Vouchers and Certificates
- Termly postcards of congratulations are sent to the parents/carers of student's who have achieved 100% Term 1 and/or 100% Term 2 attendance
- Full attendance for the academic year is celebrated at Presentation Night
- A letter from the Vice Principal is sent to parents/carers if a student's attendance falls between 85% and 90% without a valid reason to explain this low level of attendance
- A review meeting may be carried out with Attendance Co-ordinator, EWO and student, if their attendance falls between 85% and 90% without a valid reason to explain this low level
- Regular reviews are carried out and meetings with parents/carers are arranged where necessary
- A very good attendance record will merit a positive and supportive reference to future employers and other educational establishments.

Punctuality/Lateness

St. Mary's places a great deal of importance on the need for all students to be punctual and to arrive in school on time. It makes for a good start to the school day and does not interrupt the learning and teaching in the classroom. Any student who arrives late to school **must** immediately go to Mrs. M. Cunningham to get registered as late. This will be recorded as a code L in Lesson Monitor.

Students who come to school late on a regular basis in any one week (without a valid reason) will be given a lunchtime detention by their Form Teacher or Year Tutor. If the lateness continues the student's Form Teacher or Year Tutor will contact her parent/carer, to alert them to this lateness and if the late coming continues the parent/carer will be invited for a meeting with the Form Teacher or Year Tutor.

Responding To Non-Attendance and Lateness

- If no phone call or letter is received from a parent/carer explaining an absence the automated Truancy Call service (IRIS Reach) will be activated and will continue contacting the parents/carers until the call is answered or a parent/carer phones the school.
- **In cases of continued non-attendance or lateness the Education Welfare Officer will be alerted by the Year Tutor and home visits will follow.**

Leaving School During the Day

If a student needs to leave school during the day due to illness or other genuine reason, she must report to her Year Tutor. Her Year Tutor will then decide whether permission to go home should be granted. If permission is granted, then a member of the school's administrative staff will phone a parent/carer requesting that she is collected from school. All students who are going home during the day **must** be collected from school by a parent/carer or other relative. **The parent/carer must enter the school and sign their name and details in the Signing Out Register.**

Any student who leaves the school premises without carrying out the above procedures will be deemed to be 'mitching' school. The Subject Teacher will record a code N on Lesson Monitor and will make a phone call to the main office. The following procedures will follow:

- Parents/Carers will be informed that their daughter is out of school without permission
- The student will have a follow-up meeting with their Year Tutor and/or Vice Principal
- The student will receive a detention
- If this is a regular occurrence, the Education Welfare Officer will be involved.

Students are **NOT** allowed to text parents/carers to come and collect them during the day. The Year Tutor, Vice Principal or Principal are the only people authorised to give a student permission to leave school during the school day.

Appointments

Advance notice of appointments should be provided and appointment cards must be presented.

For safety and security reasons a pupil must:

- During Registration, present a note from her parent/carer to her Form Teacher and show her appointment card if she has a medical/dental/other appointment which cannot be arranged after school. The Year Tutor and Form Teacher will sign the note. The Form Teacher will record a short comment in Lesson Monitor.
- The note should contain:
 - The date and time of appointment
 - The student's full name
 - Her class
 - A contact telephone number
 - Students should keep a record of these requests in their Homework Diary
- The parent/carer must collect their daughter from Reception and sign their name and details in the 'Signing Out Register'. Students are encouraged to return to school after the medical or dental appointment.

Telephone requests – In an emergency a parent/carer may phone the school requesting that their daughter be allowed out of school. Such calls will be checked before permission is given and the parent/carer will be asked to collect their daughter from Reception and to complete the Signing Out Register.

Anxiety Based School Avoidance

Recent studies indicate that anxiety and depression affect just over 12% of children and young people in Northern Ireland. This has a negative impact on their school attendance and for some, **this** results in school avoidance. In St. Mary's, we work hard to support all our students, creating safe, compassionate and inclusive spaces where they feel understood, supported and benefit from trusted relationships.

Emotionally or Anxiety-Based School Avoidance, commonly referred to as EBSA or ABSA, refers to a pattern where students are unable to attend school due to emotional distress or anxiety. Identifying the key drivers behind school anxiety and distress is critical to developing effective responses. The school environment can have a profound impact on a student's experience of anxiety. While some students flourish in structured, lively school settings, others may find certain aspects overwhelming including:

- Noise Levels
- Crowded Spaces
- Unpredictability
- Social Pressures
- Visual Clutter

Early intervention in addition to working with the students, their parents/carers and support agencies, is crucial for effectively supporting students who maybe experiencing school based anxiety or distress. Building resilience and emotional regulation skills is essential if we are to empower students to manage difficult emotions and cope with challenges effectively.

The school may use the following reasonable adjustments to support students:

- Provision of an Exit Pass
- Dedicated Time Out Space
- Temporary Modified Timetables
- Temporary Part-Time Attendance
- Flexible Start or Finish Times
- Scheduled Breaks during the School Day
- Reduced Workload
- Reduced or Suspended Homework
- Alternative Assessments and Arrangements For Assessment
- Modified School Uniform

For students who have been absent due to school anxiety, a gradual reintegration plan containing some of the above reasonable adjustments maybe put into place. This will help to ensure the student can return to school in a supported and manageable way. This plan may include an assigned mentor (normally the student's Year Tutor or Form Teacher). The school acknowledges that a student may have to stop attending school on a temporary basis in order to manage their anxiety and distress. This is particularly relevant for neurodivergent students who are at risk of experiencing 'autistic burnout'. This can be a profound and debilitating experience that can lead to reduced functioning, heightened sensory sensitivities and even withdrawal from activities or situations that were previously manageable. The Reintegration Plan actually begins with a break from school (an agreement between Parents/Carers, Student, Principal and Education Welfare Officer) allowing the student to 'recharge' and regain a sense of stability. During this period it is important that the student still feels connected to their learning with provision of learning material for home use.

Parental Request for a Family Holiday During Term-Time

Missing school at any time is detrimental to a child's education, therefore parents/carers are requested **NOT** to book a family holiday during term-time. It is recognised that the student's learning will be disrupted and this can undoubtedly result in her falling behind in her studies.

Family holidays during term-time can only be granted in exceptional circumstances:

- The holiday is important for the well-being and cohesion of the family unit following a serious or terminal illness, bereavement or other traumatic event (Code **F** will be recorded on Lesson Monitor)

All requests for a holiday during term-time must be submitted in writing to the Principal.

It is our policy that it is not possible to provide the student with work during the period she will be on holiday. However, on the student's return to school, teachers will provide them with the work that they have missed. The student will be encouraged to work hard and to complete the additional work at home.

We adopt an 'Every Day Counts' Policy in school. A summary of the policy is provided below:

'EVERY DAY COUNTS'

Every single day a student is absent from school equates to a day of lost learning.

Excellent attendance at school is important to allow a child or young person to fulfil their potential.

We reinforce 'Every Day Counts' to promote good attendance.

If a student fails to attend school regularly, the following steps will be taken:

Step One: An absence generates a daily automated phone call from the school's Truancy Call service (IRIS Reach).

Step Two: Form Teachers/Year Tutors will contact parents/carers to enquire about any prolonged/irregular unexplained absences.

Step Three: Parents/Carers of students with an attendance of 90% or below, will be contacted by the Vice Principal, Mr Fitzpatrick.

Step Four: If a student's attendance is 85% or below, her Year Tutor will liaise with the Education Welfare Officer, Mrs. G. Morgan to organise interviews with the student and/or their parents/carers.
The Education Welfare Service may ensue Legal action for poor attendance at school.

90% attendance may seem like an acceptable level of attendance and most parents/carers would be very pleased if their daughter achieved this in a test.

However, 90% attendance means missing one whole day of school every fortnight or 19 days of a school year – that's nearly 4 school weeks.

Use of External/Support Agencies:









We acknowledge the importance of a range of external support agencies in promoting and supporting Good Attendance within the school but also the importance of ensuring that such agencies adhere to the values and ethos of our school.

Current external / support agencies include:

- EWO Service
- Social Services
- School Counsellors
- School Age Mums (SAM)
- PSNI
- EOTAS
- Training for Business Programme (STEPS and VEP)
- Behaviour Support Team
- CAPS and YPP

Related School Policies:

This policy is set within the broader school context of Pastoral Care and as such should be implemented in conjunction with the following school policies:

-  Pastoral Care Policy
-  Child Protection Policy
-  Behaviour Policy
-  Preventative Curriculum Policy
-  Learning and Teaching Policy
-  Students with SBEW Policy
-  CRED Policy
-  SEN Policy

Dissemination of the Policy:

Pastoral Policies are shared annually with Year 8 parents/carers and are available on the school's website and on the school app. A Pastoral Policies overview is sent to all parents/carers at the start of each academic year.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review:

The Pastoral Leader, Mr. M. Fitzpatrick and the Attendance Coordinator, Mrs. S. Fearon are responsible for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the implementation of The Attendance Policy. Mr. Fitzpatrick will revise the policy and procedures in light of any further DE guidance and legislation as necessary and review it annually. This will be done in consultation with governors, staff, students, parents, carers and the Education Welfare Service. On-going evaluation will ensure the effectiveness of this policy.

Signed by Chair of Governors: _____

Date: _____

Signed by Principal: _____

Date: _____

Date of Review: __November 2027_____