



ST MARY'S HIGH SCHOOL, NEWRY

Attendance Policy **Revised September 2021**

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 pupils to maximise the academic and creative potential of pupils, 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 pupils to ensure they achieve their full potential in all that they do.

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

Young people who regularly miss school without good reason are more likely to become isolated from their friends, to underachieve in examinations and/or become involved in anti-social behaviour'.

DE Attendance Leaflet for Parents June 16

As a Catholic and Rights Respecting School, we work together to engender in our pupils 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 pupil will feel valued and secure. Academic success in school is interdependent with good attendance and pupils are more likely to achieve their full potential and be happy members of the school community if they attend school each day. Pupils, parents and teachers work together to maintain high standards of attendance. Our school aims to achieve good attendance and to encourage pupils to maintain a pattern of good attendance throughout their school career, by operating an Attendance Policy within which staff, pupils, parents 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 pupils 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 pupil attendance in school. The Pastoral Leader, Mr M Fitzpatrick, the Attendance Coordinator, Mrs S Fearon, Year Tutors, Form Teachers and Class Teachers liaise with home and other agencies about pupils' 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 pupils 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 pupils 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/guardians and pupils;
- 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 pupils and parents

Role of Pupil

Every pupil 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 – 8.55 a.m.
- 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/guardian 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/Guardian

Parents 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 for unauthorized absences;
- To contact parents/guardians to discuss any attendance concerns (Form Teacher, Year Head, 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/guardian 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 pupil's attendance

Stage 3 Referral to the Vice Principal if there is no improvement in the pupil's attendance. The Vice Principal meets with the pupil's parent/guardian

Stage 4 Year Tutor continues to monitor the pupil'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 pupil if she will be off for a prolonged period of time – the parents 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 pupil'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, Mrs G Morgan (Education Welfare Officer), Form Teachers, Year Tutors and the Vice Principal
- Interview individual pupils/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 meet their responsibility towards their daughter's education. Regular attendance is an essential requirement for educational results and where attendance difficulties exist or a pupil's attendance falls below 85%, Education Welfare Service (EWS) will support staff and parents in developing and implementing strategies to address or improve school attendance.

Monitoring Pupil Attendance - Lesson Monitor

Teachers monitor lesson attendance through the use of the computerised SIMS system 'Lesson Monitor'. This programme allows each class 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
F	Family Holiday (agreed)	Authorised Absence
G	Family Holiday (not agreed)	Unauthorised Absence
I	Illness (not medical or dental appointments)	Authorised Absence
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 Sporting 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 / Shielding Due To Covid - 19	Approved Educational Activity
9	CAMHS / Mental Health Support	Approved Educational Activity

Lesson Monitor enables teachers to check pupils' attendance from the previous lessons. If a pupil is absent from the current lesson, without a valid reason, the teacher will contact the main office and email the pupil's Form Teacher or Year Tutor. The class teacher will record an **N** code in Lesson Monitor. The Year Tutor or Vice Principal will follow up on the absence.

A pupil 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 pupil's attendance through Lesson Monitor
- Attendance will be closely monitored by Year Tutors and Form Teachers
- Monthly draws take place for very good attendance in each Form Class – £10 Gift Vouchers and Certificates
- Termly draws take place for 100% attendance in each Year Group - £20 Gift Voucher
- Postcards of congratulations are sent to the parents/guardians of pupil's who have 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/guardians if a pupil'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 pupil, if attendance falls between 85% and 90% without a valid reason to explain this low level
- Regular reviews are carried out and meetings with parents 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 pupils 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 pupil who arrives late to school **must** immediately go to their Form Teacher to get registered as late. If their Form Teacher is unavailable, the pupil must go to their Year Tutor. This will be recorded as a code **L** in Lesson Monitor.

Pupils 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 pupil's Form Teacher or Year Head will contact her parent/guardian to alert them to lateness and if the late coming continues the parent/guardian 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/guardian explaining an absence the automated 'Truancy Call' will be activated and will continue contacting the parents/guardians until the call is answered or a parent/guardian 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 pupil 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 the pupil may then phone a parent/guardian from the Reception Desk requesting that she is collected from school. All pupils who are going home during the day **must** be collected from school by a parent/guardian or other relative. **The parent/guardian must enter the school and sign their name and details in the Signing Out Register.**

Any pupil who leaves the school premises without carrying out the above procedures will be deemed to be 'mitching' school. The Class 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 will be informed that their daughter is out of school without permission
- The pupil will have a follow-up meeting with their Year Tutor and/or Vice Principal
- The pupil will receive a detention
- If this is a regular occurrence, the Education Welfare Officer will be involved.

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

Appointments

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

For safety and security reasons a pupil must:

- During Registration, present a note from her Parent/Guardian to her Form Teacher or Year Tutor 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 code **M** in Lesson Monitor.
- The note should contain:
 - The date and time of appointment
 - The pupil's full name
 - Her class
 - A contact telephone number
 - Pupils should keep a record of these requests in their Homework Diary
- The parent/guardian must collect their daughter from Reception and sign their name and details in the 'Signing Out Register'. Pupils are encouraged to return to school after the medical or dental appointment.

Telephone requests – In an emergency a parent/guardian 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/guardian will be asked to collect their daughter from Reception and to complete the Signing Out Register.

Parental Request for a Family Holiday During Term-Time

Missing school at any time is detrimental to a child's education, therefore parents/guardians are requested **NOT** to book a family holiday during term-time. It is recognised that the pupil'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 pupil with work during the period she will be on holiday. However, on the pupil's return to school, teachers will provide them with the work that they have missed. The pupil 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 pupil 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 pupil fails to attend school regularly, the following steps will be taken:

Step One: An absence generates a daily automated phone call from 'Truancy Call'.

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

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

Step Four: If a pupil's attendance is 85% or below, the school's Attendance Co-ordinator, Mrs S Fearon will liaise with the Education Welfare Officer, Mrs G Morgan to organise interviews with pupils and/or parents.

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 would be very pleased if their daughter achieved this in a test.

However, in reality it 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
- ✚ Personal Development Policy
- ✚ Learning and Teaching Policy
- ✚ CRED Policy
- ✚ SEN Policy

Dissemination of the Policy:

Pastoral Policies are shared annually with Year 8 parents/guardians and are available on the school's website and on the school app. A Pastoral Policies overview is sent to all parents/guardians 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, pupils, parents 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: __September 2024_____

Appendix 1: Managing Pupil Attendance In The Context Of Covid-19

Circular Number 2020/08 was issued on 14th August 2020 and updated on 18th September 2020 to provide guidance to schools on managing pupil attendance in the context of Covid-19.

The circular was updated to reflect the changing circumstances encountered within schools as a result of the unprecedented Covid-19 situation. Several amendments were made to the existing guidance and largely relate to the use of Code P and Code 8.

Use of Code ‘P’ – Approved Activity

In addition to its existing purpose, this code should now also be used in situations where:

- Pupils are not required to attend physically at school due to social distancing rules, imposed by DE or school, for example pupils required to attend on certain days or for a certain number of hours per day.
- If a pupil’s arranged transport fails to materialize, a school may use Code P if they are content that this is appropriate and the pupil is able to learn at home for that particular day.

Use of Code ‘8’ – Intensive Support Learning Unit / Shielding due to Covid-19

This code can also be used in situations where:

- A pupil chooses not to attend school or a parent chooses not to send their child to school on the advice of a medical professional as the child is self-isolating due to a significant underlying medical condition.
- Only in extreme circumstances and on the advice of a medical professional should this code be used where the parent has a significant underlying medical condition which would warrant the child having to learn from home.
- A pupil is advised not to attend school following advice from PHA Contact Tracing Service.
- Ideally, Code 8 should not be used for any longer than three weeks at a time.
- If the child is displaying symptoms of Covid-19 or is unwell for any reason, Code I – Illness must be used.