



Pupil Attendance Policy

Ratified	Review Date
October 2022	

Rationale

We begin with an understanding that a high level of pupil attendance is crucial for the effective work of the school. To manage attendance reflects the school's commitment to pupils' pastoral care as well as their academic success. It is, therefore, an area of strategic importance for our school.

As a school we aim for a minimum of 95% attendance. This is in line with the Department of Education's guidelines. This is defined as satisfactory attendance only. We aspire to achieve 96%+ levels of attendance. This is a demanding standard when we benchmark ourselves against schools across Northern Ireland.

We feel it is important to target poor attendance for a number of reasons:

- A pupil with attendance issues may have **pastoral needs** that must be addressed.
- Poor attendance is likely to have a negative impact upon **pupils' learning**.
- If unchallenged poor attendance may create and then perpetuate a '**vicious circle**'.
- The **families involved may require advice and support**.
- The low attendance of an individual/individuals in the class **affects other pupils**.
- Low attendance impacts negatively upon **teachers' workload**.
- **Education is an expensive resource** so waste must be challenged.
- Our **society and economy** requires an educated and focused future work force.

It must be stressed that when we describe good attendance we define it as follows:

- We expect that our pupils will achieve an attendance level of a minimum of 95%.
- Good attendance also involves good punctuality.

Pupil Attendance Management

The Principal is responsible for the overall management of the school's attendance policy and procedures. This work is supported via the work of the school office.

It must be stressed, however, that classroom teachers have a pivotal role to play in this aspect of the school's work. The teachers are working with pupils and have a more holistic view of the issues facing each pupil in their care. There must be clear communication and cooperation between the administrative staff and the teachers.

Parents, however, must accept their responsibilities to ensure pupils' attendance is high. Parents have a pastoral and legal duty to make sure their children attend school. If parents fail to meet their obligations, it will have a profound impact on their children's education and

future opportunities.

If a parent is failing to meet their responsibilities the school is obliged to intervene. To not send a pupil to school regularly is a reason for the involvement of outside agencies, possible legal action and, in the most extreme situations, an investigation into potential neglect or/and abuse.

What is expected of parents?

All parents should:

- Communicate to their children how important school is and the need to attend.
- Have good routines in place to encourage punctuality.
- Avoid appointments during the school day.
- Not plan holidays during the school year.
- Only keep pupils off when necessary and return them as soon as possible.
- Send in notes when a pupil is off sick on the first day after their return to school.
- Cooperate fully when a pupil is placed on an attendance intervention e.g. ringing in when requested and returning letters promptly.

What is expected of the teachers?

All teachers should:

- Mark absences and lateness accurately.
- Request, follow-up and store notes from parents concerning attendance.
- Communicate any concerns about attendance to the office staff.
- If requested by the office staff, maintain and support interventions for targeted pupils.
- Assess and share information with parents related to attendance and punctuality.
- Collaborate with outside agencies when required e.g. the E.W.O. etc.
- Support whole school approaches to promote high attendance e.g. 100% certificates.

What is expected of the office staff?

The office staff should:

- Record pupils' attendance accurately on the school's electronic system.
- Produce a monthly list of pupils with attendance below 90%.
- In consultation with the teacher and the principal decide if an intervention is required for pupils with attendance below 90%. There may be very genuine reasons why a pupil is off and no intervention is required e.g. an extended period in hospital or an ongoing illness. In these cases the pupil will be awarded an exemption.
- If an exemption is awarded parents may be contacted for pastoral support.
- If deemed necessary help administer and record the attendance protocols. This may involve writing letters and phoning parents, arranging interviews with parents, liaising with the Educational Welfare Officer (E.W.O.) and securely storing all this information.

- Maintain a database of pupils with low attendance to track their progress.
- Respond to teachers' requests to ring parents to check why they are not in school.
- Record and communicate parents' messages to teachers concerning attendance.
- Keep accurate records of pupils who arrive late to school.

What is expected of the principal?

The Principal should:

- Set high standards and expectations for attendance.
- Implement and monitor the school's attendance policy and procedures.
- Update and review the policy and procedures as required.
- Provide training and support for staff to implement the policy and procedures.
- Carry out a monthly evaluation of attendance patterns and decide upon actions required.
- Liaise with parents, staff and outside agencies as required.
- Report to the Governors a minimum of once per term on pupils' attendance.
- Meet with the attendance governors a minimum of once per year to review progress.

Our Values & Mission Statement

This policy document and the associated procedures are not written in isolation. They were developed in the context the school's values and the resulting mission statement.

Values	Contribution of the Attendance Policy
To be a Happy & Healthy Environment	By promoting attendance we help pupils succeed. This is a way to increase their happiness. By being proactive in attendance management we may be able to support pastoral issues that may have been undiscovered.
To develop Skilled Learners & Flexible Thinkers	School is a valuable opportunity for all pupils. To miss school means children lose out on key learning. By promoting attendance we will help all our pupils develop as learners and thinkers.
To value Partnerships both Locally & Globally	Parents are seen as partners in our efforts to maximise attendance. This policy reflects our aim to be proactive and work with our parents. We recognise our need to work with other key professional when families require support.
To inspire High Aspirations and Achievements	At the heart of this policy is a belief that school makes a difference. We believe all pupils can and will progress if they are in lessons. This policy tries to reinforce to our whole community that when we invest in education there are benefits for all.

Mission Statement	Attendance Policy
Care & Wellbeing Central	High Level of Compliance - This policy reflects our pastoral aims for pupils.
Health & Sport Promoted	High Level of Compliance - The link between education and a healthy lifestyle are well proven. High attendance is essential.
Involving Parents & Community	High Level of Compliance - The policy seeks to inform and empower parents.
Learning & Teaching Focused	High Level of Compliance - Pupils' achievement is maximised by high attendance.
Developing Technology & Creativity	High Level of Compliance - Staff use of ICT to track attendance and communicate with parents e.g. texts.
Raising Expectations & Standards	High Level of Compliance - The policy sets high levels of attendance for parents and stresses its link to pupil achievement.
Excellence & Innovation Pursued	High Level of Compliance - We believe our approach is very proactive and reflects some element of best practice across the country.
Networking Locally & Globally	High Level of Compliance - This approach has been developed after research of work that has been successful in our system and across the world.

Aims



We hope that through our approach to pupil attendance to achieve the following aims:

1. Pupils, parents and staff will strive for high attendance.
2. Our overall pupil attendance will be a minimum of 95%.
3. Punctuality, in particular, will be of a high standard.
4. Pupils being removed from school for appointments during the school will be minimal.
5. Parents will not plan holidays for their families during periods when school is in session.
6. Pupils' attainment will be increased.
7. Pupils being tracked for poor attendance will show prolonged improvement.
8. Referrals to outside agencies will be extremely low.

Methodology

Proactive Promotion of Attendance

Our approach is first positive and proactive. Our aim is to create a culture of high expectations in which all pupils are aspiring for 100% attendance. How do we strive to achieve this type of ethos?

- The school newsletter is used to stress the need for high performance and let parents know of our targets/achievements in attendance.
- School holidays are published well in advance and circulated regularly to help to reduce holidays being taken during the school year.
- The pupils' annual reports are used to stress the high level of attendance required for success. The school's reports grades on attendance are based on guidance from the Department of Education.
- Each June we reward those who achieve 100% attendance with a 'Golden Certificate' (postponed June 2022 due to COVID). This is presented in a special assembly and is stressed as a great achievement.

Protocols to Support Low Attendance

We do, however, also have a rigorous four-stage protocol to support pupils with attendance below 90%. The 90% level was decided upon to balance our limited resourcing with the need to focus on only a core group of parents who require support. We feel it is important to offer quality help to a smaller group of parents rather than spreading our support too widely. It has proven to be a sensible and effective level to maximise our effectiveness.

Attendance statistics are only assessed each month from early November. Otherwise pupils with very genuine illness or other very genuine situations, such as bereavements, early in the school year could be unfairly be brought into our protocols.

There are three clear exceptions when pupils' attendance will or can be supported before November.

- If a pupil at the end of the previous academic year was being tracked this will continue from the September of the new academic year.
- If a member of staff believes there is a pastoral need that needs to be addressed urgently.
- If a pupils' attendance is extremely poor and there is limited or unclear explanations from parents.

Our four-stage protocol has a clear progression if increased intervention is required. The principal has some freedom to make a professional judgment if a pupil needs to move up a stage. For example, if a pupil has had a poor period of attendance but for the following two

months make steady progress. In the third month the pupil has a very genuine illness. The principal may decide not to move them up a stage. To do so has the potential to be demotivating for a family who are trying to improve their child's attendance. It may also discredit the working of the policy.

If a pupil is being tracked and their attendance is improving (but still below 90%) their progress through the stages will be halted. example, if a pupil at 'Stage 1' of the process has 87% attendance and in the following month it increases to 88% they do not move to 'Stage 2'. Their progress will be tracked, however, to ensure the progress is maintained.

Pupils will only 'exit' the procedure if their attendance rises to 90% and remains there for a minimum of two months. After two consecutive months above 90% attendance parents will receive a letter congratulating parents on the improvement. Parents will be told their child is no longer being formally tracked. Their file, however, will be placed in storage to be available if in the future the pupil's attendance becomes an issue.

Stage	Details	Actions
'Exemption'	A pupil has attendance below 90% but there is a significant medical or/and pastoral reason.	The pupil's attendance will be tracked*. Under 'Stage' it will be recorded as 'Exempt'. The parent may be called. The purpose of the call will be to offer support and provide them with an update of their child's attendance. * An electronic workbook will be maintained of every class. It will only include pupils who have attendance below 90% during the present school year or were being tracked at the end of the previous academic year.
Stage 1	For the first month the pupil's attendance has fallen below 90%.	A letter will be sent to the parent. It will inform them that their child's attendance has fallen for the first time during the school year below 90%. The letter will ask the parents to send back a letter acknowledging the letter. It will encourage them to try to increase their child's attendance. It will also indicate that their child's attendance will be monitored until it goes above 90%. The parent will be asked to return the form to make any comments or add any additional relevant information. The office staff will create a file for the pupil being tracked. Into this file all the correspondence related to this pupil will be maintained. This file will be stored in a secure filing cabinet of pupils being currently tracked for low attendance.
Stage 2	For the second month during the school year the pupil's	A second letter will be sent to the parent. It will inform them that their child's attendance has been for the second time during the school year below 90%. The letter will

	attendance has been below 90%.	<p>ask the parents to ring the school office to discuss their child's attendance.</p> <p>During this conversation that will be asked to explain their child's pattern of behaviour. They will be placed on a tracking process. If the pupil is off parents are required to ring by 10am to explain why. If by 10am no explanation has been received by the school office it will be explained that they will be contacted by phone or text.</p> <p>The teacher will be provided with a tracking folder to record absences to detect patterns, reasons given for the pupil not being in school</p> <p>The office staff will create a file for the pupil being tracked. Into this file all the correspondence related to this pupil will be maintained. This file will be stored in a secure filing cabinet of pupils being currently tracked for low attendance.</p>
Stage 3	For the third month during the school year the pupil's attendance has been below 90%.	<p>A third letter will be sent to the parent. It will inform them that their child's attendance has been for the third time during the school year below 90%. The letter will ask the parent to ring the office to arrange an interview with the principal.</p> <p>During the interview the principal will stress the very serious situation that the pupil's attendance is presenting. The principal will give the parents time to respond to the concerns and to provide other information that may be relevant. It will be explained that if attendance does not improve in the coming month then an educational welfare referral will be submitted. The purpose of this referral will be to support the pupil and the family to improve the situation.</p> <p>The tracking and recording processes will continue as outlined in Stage 2.</p>
Stage 4	On the fourth month during the school year the pupil's attendance has been below 90%.	<p>A fourth letter will be sent to the parent. It will inform them that their child's attendance has been for the fourth time during the school year below 90%. The letter will explain that a referral will be made to educational welfare.</p> <p>The tracking and recording processes will continue as outlined in Stage 3.</p>

Punctuality

Pupils enter via their various playgrounds until 9am. After 9am pupils must enter the school via the reception area. A member of the office staff will record pupils who arrive in school after 9am.

If a pupil arrives five or more times late each half-term they will be identified as having unsatisfactory punctuality.

The following protocols will be implemented:

Stage	Details	Actions
1	After the first half-term of five or more late starts.	A letter will be sent to the pupil's parent detailing the amount of late starts in the previous half-term. It will stress the need for punctuality and ask that in the coming half-term that every effort be made to address the issue. The parent will be asked to return a reply slip and add any relevant information.
2	After the second half-term of five or more late starts.	A letter will be sent to the pupil's parent detailing the amount of late starts in the previous half-term. The parent will be asked to contact the office to discuss their child's punctuality. It will be explained that their child's punctuality is being tracked.
3	After the third half-term of five or more late starts.	A letter will be sent to the pupil's parent detailing the amount of late starts in the previous half-term. The parent will be asked to contact the office to arrange an interview with the principal. At this interview the impact of poor punctuality will be explained. The parent will discuss why the issue is still persisting. It will be explained that if the issue is not addressed in the coming half-term that a referral to educational welfare will be considered.
4	After the fourth half-term of five or more late starts.	An letter will be issued to the parent asking for an additional interview or/and in the most worrying case a referral will be made to the educational welfare officer.



EVERY SCHOOL DAY COUNTS –

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

Attendance percentages can be misleading.

100% Attendance	0 Days Missed	Excellent
95% Attendance	9 Days of Absence 1 Week and 4 Days of Learning Missed	Satisfactory
90% Attendance	19 Days of Absence 3 Weeks and 4 Days of Learning Missed	Poor
85% Attendance	28 Days of Absence 5 Weeks and 3 Days of Learning Missed	Very Poor
80% Attendance	38 Days of Absence 7 Weeks and 3 Days of Learning Missed	Unacceptable
75% Attendance	46 Days of Absence 9 Weeks and 1 Day of Learning Missed	Unacceptable

For some parents, 90% may seem like an acceptable level of attendance, but the reality is that 90% attendance means that your child will miss half a school day each week or 19 days of school during the school year – that's nearly 4 school weeks.



Give your child the best start in life – every school day counts.

Source:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-attendance-matters-parents-guide>

Assessment & Reporting

Punctuality and attendance will be reported on as part of each pupil's annual report. The grading is based on guidelines issued by the Department of Education.

Professional development

Every August as part of the staff's pastoral care training update the attendance policy will be revisited. This will involve any training required by staff, especially new teachers.

The Monitoring and Evaluation of the Attendance Policy

The Board of Governors has selected Mrs Culleton as our nominated Attendance Governor. Termly, the governors will be given an update on the impact of the school's attendance policy strategies. A minimum of once per year Mrs Culleton as will meet with the principal to discuss the school's attendance protocols.

Review cycle of policy

The Attendance Policy will be reviewed and if required updated every two years. This process will involve a staff and governor consultation.



Mrs Irene Culleton
Chairperson of the Board of Governors



Mrs J Baxter
Acting Principal