

St. Joseph's Secondary School

Newfoundwell, Drogheda, Co. Louth

Policy on School Attendance



Review Dates: This policy will be reviewed annually.

Staff		Consultation
Parents' Council		Consultation
Student Council		Consultation
Board Of Management		Ratified

School Details: St. Joseph's Secondary School is a Voluntary Roman Catholic Secondary School under the Trusteeship and the Patronage of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust. The School is grant aided by the Department of Education & Skills and is a single sex (boys) school.

School Management: The Board of Management of St. Joseph's Secondary School is a statutory Board appointed pursuant to the provisions of the Education Act 1998.

Mission Statement

St. Joseph's Secondary school recognises that each pupil who enrolls in our school is unique and has different gifts as well as different needs. It is our wish that our pupils will leave us with enhanced self-confidence and with life skills and attitudes which will enable them to lead lives satisfying to themselves and which may contribute to the betterment of society.

We recognise that a pupil's development is closely linked to a good self-image and so we strive to present the school's total curriculum in such a manner as to allow all to realise their full potential.

We see ourselves as working in partnership with parents to develop the gifts and to meet the needs of all. We regard our school as an educational establishment with a Christian community characterised by care and justice.

Through the implementation of this policy we strive to enact the stated mission and vision of St. Joseph's Secondary School. We value all in the school community and endeavour to develop each member of the school community.

The Policy in Context

The school Attendance Policy is directed by:

1. The School Mission Statement
2. The Pastoral Care Policy
3. The Admission Policy
4. The Education (Welfare) Act 2000

Aim of the Policy

It is anticipated that by constantly monitoring and tracking students' attendance records, absenteeism will decrease and students will have a positive school experience.

To reflect our obligations relating to school attendance as outlined in the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000.

Introduction

As a school community, the staff at St. Joseph's Secondary School, Drogheda believe

- That there is a direct relationship between a student's success in school and regular attendance.
- That students who have good attendance records enjoy their school experience more than students who do not attend regularly.

The Education Welfare Act 2000 provides a comprehensive new framework for promoting regular school attendance and attending to problems of absenteeism. It was signed into law on July 5th, 2000. The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) was set up under this Act to support regular attendance and the education of children and young people. This State body is now known as Tusla and it has appointed Educational Welfare Officers (E.W.O) to provide advice and support to parents and schools and to follow up absences from school. Under the Act parents must notify the school when a child is absent and it is recommended that the explanation be in writing. It is incumbent on schools to notify the National Educational Welfare Board if a child has missed a total of twenty days in the school year.

The number of students attending the school (as per the school roll) is reported twice yearly to Tusla Education Support Services using the online portal in the months of December and May. The Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) for St. Joseph's Secondary School, Drogheda is Ms. Sinead Donnelly (2020).

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 safeguards every child's entitlement to an appropriate minimum education by:

- Developing a national Framework to promote regular attendance at school.
- Promoting a positive appreciation among students of the benefits to be derived from education and attendance at school.
- Identifying the causes of absenteeism and early school leaving and developing measures for its prevention.
- Providing support to children at risk and those who experience difficulties in school in

order to resolve any difficulties or impediments to their regular attendance at school.

Tusla has been given the lead role in implementing the provisions of the Act:

- The principal function of Tusla is to ensure that every child in the State attends a recognised school or otherwise receives an appropriate minimum education.
- Tusla also has an advisory and research role in the formulation of Government policy on school attendance and education provision.
- Tusla will deploy educational welfare officers at local level throughout the country. These officers will work in close co-operation with parents, teachers, school managers, community bodies and other relevant agencies to promote regular school attendance and prevent absenteeism and early school leaving.

Education Welfare Officer

The Education Welfare Officers appointed by Tusla will focus in particular on children at risk and those who are experiencing difficulties in school in order to resolve any impediments to their regular attendance at school. Alternative schooling will be sought for students who have been expelled, suspended or refused admittance to a school.

The School Day

- All students must attend at the scheduled times every day except when otherwise agreed with parents for exceptional reasons: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. LCA students attend work placement on Fridays. In the event that students are unable to obtain work experience it is the responsibility of parents to inform the Programme Coordinator (bmccole@droghedacbs.ie) and alternative arrangements will be put in place. This also applies to T.Y. students engaging with work experience as part of their course work.
- Students are expected to be present each day.
- Students are expected to maintain high standards of punctuality throughout the day.

Procedures for Monitoring Attendance

- Subject teachers take registration/attendance using VS Ware at the start of each lesson.
- Vsware will issue a push-notification at 10.30 each day to parents/guardians alerting them to their son's absence and this will be followed by an SMS text message to their phone in the event that the initial notification has not been read.

- The Year Head of each year group will track the attendance records of the students on a weekly basis in order to identify and at an early stage, students who are at risk of developing school attendance problems.
- The Year Head will meet with the students who may be at risk to encourage them to attend. The Year Head may, at this early stage, invite the parents/guardians to the school, to discuss and attempt to resolve any difficulties or impediments to their regular attendance at school.
- After 10 days absence, a letter is sent to the parents/guardians by the Year Head, signed by the Principal (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2) inviting them to the school to discuss the situation.
- The Year Head communicates the names of students of concern to the Pastoral Care Team at their Care Team meeting. The Pastoral Care Team may make recommendations to support the student e.g. referral to the Guidance Counsellor, Learning Support team or outside agency as appropriate.
- After 20 days absence, a letter is sent by the Year Head, signed by the Principal, to the parents/guardians of students under 16 years old to inform them of the school's obligation to inform the EWO and inviting them to the school to discuss the situation if they wish. (Appendix 3)

Procedure for recording explanation of absences

Please note: Parents are encouraged to use Vsware but if unable to do so they may report an absence manually.

VSware

Using Vsware parents/guardians select the reason for their child's absence from a drop-down menu.

- The reason for the student's absence is entered by the administration staff on the student's database on VS Ware.

Manually (if not using VSware)

- Counterfoil absence notes are provided to students in the back of the Student Homework Journal (Appendix 4).
- If a student is absent, an absent note must be completed and placed in the letter box in the front foyer of the school on the day of return.
- A counterfoil of the absent note must be shown to each subject teacher.
- The Year Head of each year group tracks the attendance records of the students on a weekly basis and if he/she notices that a student has a number of unexplained absences, a letter signed by the Principal (Appendix 1 or 2) is sent to parents informing them of the unexplained absences and requesting an explanation in writing.

School Activities/Work Experience

- Absences from class due to participation in a school activity or work experience are recorded as school activity (SA) or work experience (WE).
- Teachers organising the school activity must provide the administration staff with the list of students involved the day prior to the event. The administration staff pre-enter the students' absence under the category school activity (SA) or work experience (WE).
- The staff member accompanying or organising the event informs the administration staff on the morning of the activity to confirm the presence/absence of the students.

Late Policy

Students are requested to embrace the routine of being at school on time.

- Students who arrive late disrupt the class and miss important instruction time.
- When a student is late, the reason for his lateness must be clearly stated on one of the Late Notes from Parent/Guardian (Blue colour) provided at the back of the Student Homework Journal and presented to the office on entry to the school.
- The late note must be shown to the subject teacher on arrival to class.
- The subject teacher will enter the code *Late with note* on the VS Ware system.

Truancy

- Truancy is considered an extreme violation of the School Code of Behaviour and incurs a Saturday morning detention. Due to the current Covid-19 restrictions in this academic year, students will be required to complete detention work at home which equates to two hours worth of work. This work will be set by the Deputy Principal through Google Classroom and can be submitted as an assignment on GC or dropped into the office by 8.45am on Monday morning.
- In-school Truancy (where a student remains in the school building but does not attend a timetabled class) incurs a Saturday morning detention/Google Classroom detention material.
- Saturday detention starts at 10 am and finishes at 12 am. Students must attend in school uniform and bring appropriate school text books to study.
- Amendment for 2020/21 academic year: students will be sanctioned with two hours of detention work to be completed at home over the weekend. This work is distributed via a Google Classroom named 'Detention' and students are expected to submit the work via GC or in person to the Deputy Principal by 8.45am the following Monday morning, Parents are contacted on Friday via text message informing them

of the truancy sanction.

Medical/Dental Appointments

Where Parents/guardians make medical or dental appointments during school hours, permission to leave the school note (Blue colour in student Homework Journal) must be completed and handed into the office before 9.00am on the day in question.

- The administration staff will record the students name on the VS Ware system.
- When a parent/guardian arrives to collect his son he/she must call to the office and indicate whether or not the student is expected to return.
- The administration staff will record the student's departure from the school on VS Ware.
- The student is required to sign in on his return.

Communication with Parents

- A text message alerting parents to the fact that their son has not scanned in will be sent automatically to parents at 10.30 am. It is the student's responsibility to scan in.
- Parents are routinely informed of their son's attendance and punctuality record at parent/teacher meetings and through the term and mock examination reports.
- A letter and a copy of the attendance record are sent to parents/guardians once a student has been absent in excess of 10 days (Appendix 1 and 2) and again when a student is absent in excess of 20 days (Appendix 3).
- Individual subject teachers can track a student's attendance for their given subject using VS Ware and are encouraged to contact the relevant Year Head if concern arises about absenteeism for a particular subject.
- When a Year Head has a specific concern about an individual student he/she may arrange a meeting with the Education Welfare Office and parents/guardians to discuss improvement strategies.
- When a Year Head notes that a parent has not reported absences either manually or via Vsware , the Year Head will write to the parents/guardians bringing their attention to the matter and requesting that a written explanation be presented (Appendix 1 and 2).

Communication with teachers

- Teachers have access to the attendance records of all students through the use of VS Ware.

- Teachers can access the specific attendance record for each of their teaching groups using VS Ware.
- If specific information is received from parents in relation to a student's absence, teachers are notified of this by the Care Team (google doc). Teachers will be asked to speak to the relevant year head to obtain this specific information.
- In the case of a prolonged absence and if requested by parents, teachers are encouraged to assign classwork to the absent student and may do so by using Google Classroom, email or the school office.

Rewarding students for good attendance

As part of our annual school awards students who have achieved full attendance in any given year are presented with a Certificate of Attendance at the end of the school year.

Monitoring, Reviewing and Evaluating

The Board of Management and senior school management will ensure that this policy is under regular review and evaluation.

Approval

This policy has been approved by the Board of Management of St. Joseph's Secondary School.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Chairperson, Board of Management

Appendix 1.

Letter for sending to parents/guardians after 10 days of absence.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am writing regarding <Insert name> attendance at school.

<Insert name> has been absent on the following days < insert days>. The school has not received any letter or contact from you. You are asked to contact the school as soon as possible to arrange an appointment to discuss the matter with <name of teacher>.

Under the law, every child must attend school regularly up to sixteen years of age or complete at least three years post primary whichever comes later. When your child is absent, you as parent must let the school know the reason for this absence every time. It is school policy that you do this in writing.

Thanking you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Savage.

Principal.

Appendix 2.

Letter for sending to parents/guardians if they do not respond to letter in Appendix 1.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am writing to you regarding <Insert name> attendance at school.

<Insert name> has been absent on the following days <insert days>.

The school has written to you about this matter but has not received a written explanation from you. The school is now very concerned that < Insert name> is not receiving an education and we will be writing to the Educational Welfare Service of Tusla - Child and Family Agency to pass on our concern. An Educational Welfare Officer may therefore be in contact with you shortly to discuss the matter further.

Under the law, every child must attend school regularly up to sixteen years of age or complete at least three years post primary education whichever comes later.

When a child is absent, you as parent must let the school know the reason for the absence every time. It is school policy that you do this in writing.

If you wish to discuss < Insert name> attendance, please contact the school to arrange an appointment to meet with <name of teacher> as soon as possible.

Thanking you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Savage

Principal

Letter to parents/guardians who son has been absent for 20 school days.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am writing to you regarding <Insert name> attendance at school who has been absent on the following days <insert days>.

Because <insert name> has now been absent for 20 days, the school must pass the information to the Educational Welfare Service of Tusla - Child and Family Agency. An Educational Welfare Officer may therefore be in contact with you to discuss the matter further.

OR

Because <insert name> has been absent through illness, the school will be reporting the absence in the normal way but will not be informing Tusla – Child and family Agency that it is concerned about your child's educational welfare.

Under the law, every child must attend school regularly up to sixteen years of age or complete at least three years post primary education whichever comes later. When a child is absent, you as parent must let the school know the reason for the absence every time. It is school policy that you do this in writing.

If you wish to discuss < Insert name> attendance, please contact the school to arrange an appointment to meet with <name of teacher> as soon as possible

Thanking you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Savage

Principal.

Appendix 3.

Student absent notes reproduced from the Student Homework Journal.

Student Name:

Class:

Absent from: // to // No. of days:

Unable to attend school due to:

Signed by Parent/Guardian:

Date: / /

Signed by Teacher:

Date: / /

Student Name:

Class:

Absent from: // to // No. of days:

Unable to attend school due to:

Signed by Parent/Guardian:

Date: / /

Signed by Teacher:

Date: / /

Appendix 4.

Student Name:	Class:
Absent from: // to / / No. of days:	
Unable to attend school due to:	
Signed by Parent/Guardian:	Date: / /
Signed by Teacher:	Date: / /

Student Name:	Class:
Absent from: // to / / No. of days:	
Unable to attend school due to:	
Signed by Parent/Guardian:	Date: / /
Signed by Teacher:	Date: / /

Appendix 5: Covid19 Arrangements as per DoES guidelines :

Management has engaged with all DoES /HSE guidelines to prioritize the wellbeing of students.

- **Student absences due to Covid19 issues will not be reported to Tusla Education Support Services (TESS).**

DoES Letter to schools 27/09/20-Key points to note:

- When the GP of the child or staff member has assessed the symptoms to be consistent with Covid-19 infection, e.g. fever OR a new cough, shortness of breath, deterioration of existing respiratory condition OR symptoms of aguesia or dysgeusia (essentially loss of or changes to the sense of taste) and the person is referred for a test, at this point the person becomes a suspected Covid 19 case and household members including siblings should be withdrawn from school by their parent or guardian.
- Where no evidence of Covid-19 is detected by the test, the child or staff member should remain at home only until he or she is clinically well enough to return to school (unless specifically requested by HSE to do otherwise). In particular, all diarrhoea symptoms need to have been resolved for 48 hours prior to return to school. Household members can return to school immediately following the receipt by the parent or guardian or staff member of a “not detected” result.
- When a case has been confirmed, the Medical Officer of Health and teams will liaise directly with the school and inform them of the confirmed case as necessary and will undertake a Public Health Risk Assessment to inform any further actions and recommendations.
- Core to this assessment will be the likelihood of onward transmission from the confirmed case and will be informed by an urgent discussion with the school to establish any appropriate isolation for identified staff or pupils. Every school setting is unique and therefore the risks will be unique too, for example they will vary according to whether they are e.g. Special educational needs settings, primary or secondary or boarding schools and other factors specific to each school. This may include the effectiveness of the implementation of recommended HPSC risk mitigation measures and a range of other considerations.
- The definition of close contacts within a school will be variable and determined by a risk assessment that will take account of individual factors within each school or class. It will not be automatically assumed that a whole class will be deemed as close contacts. Close contacts will be directly notified by the HSE

and advised to restrict their movements and present for testing on day zero and day seven. Close contacts will restrict their movements for 14 days even in the event that Covid 19 is not detected in both of these tests.

Continuity of schooling: Supporting post-primary students who are at very high risk to COVID-19/Adapted learning.

Management has implemented teaching and learning support for students absent due to Covid19 illness/isolation. The main feature of this support will be engagement with teaching and learning via Google Classroom.

Parents/guardians should note the following:

In order to support connectedness with the school and their child's peers, and to ensure that their child is not unduly disadvantaged by being at very high risk from contracting COVID-19, parents/guardians are requested to obtain medical certification as early as possible which states specifically that their child is assessed as being at very high risk from contracting COVID-19 and must remain at home and cannot return to school. This information should be furnished to the school. Parents/guardians and schools should work together to establish reasonable and practicable expectations related to the level of support that is necessary from parents/guardians and the supports the student's school can put in place to facilitate continued learning for them. Regular review meetings/check-ins with parents/guardians and students will be essential to establish how the students are experiencing the adapted education provision. The conduct and frequency of these review meetings/check-ins will be clearly communicated to parents/ guardians.

