

ATTENDANCE POLICY

The Education Welfare Act stipulates that the names of students who are absent for twenty days or more in any one school year have to be reported to the Educational Welfare Board. The Act also stipulates that parents will be held responsible for explaining their daughter's absence. The school is obliged to provide the Welfare Board with reasons for absences.

The National Education Welfare Board (N.E.W.B.) is responsible, by law, to make sure that pupils are attending school regularly. The National Education Welfare Board employs Education Welfare Officers (E.W.O.) to oversee this duty.

St. Marys has an Education Welfare Officer (Ms. Fidelma Collins) who visits the school and will

- Inspect the school registers
- Write to or visit parents where there are concerns about attendance.
- With parental co-operation offer help where there are genuine difficulties.

The legal situation is:-

The minimum school leaving age is sixteen or the completion of three years of post primary education, whichever is the latter.

Parental Responsibilities:-

- Must ensure that their children attend school punctually every day unless ill
- Must send their children to school until they are sixteen years of age or the completion of three years of post-primary education, whichever is the latter.
- Must inform the school of their daughter's absence and the reason why.
- Must avoid unnecessary absences or withdrawals from school, e.g. holidays during term time, to discourage girls from taking part-time jobs that could affect attendance.
- To inform the school in writing of absences and the reason for them.
- To cooperate with the school and the Educational Welfare Officer (E.W.O.) in relation to attendance.
- When withdrawing students during school hours, parents / guardians must collect Junior Cycle Students at school and sign them out.

School Responsibilities:-

- Must keep a school register, attendance records and codes of behaviour.
- Must put a school attendance strategy in place
- Must inform the education welfare officer when
 1. Students have missed more than twenty days.
 2. Students have been suspended for more than six days
 3. A student's name is removed from the school register.

Student Responsibilities:-

- Must make every effort to attend school punctually on all school days.
- Must communicate all absences to the Year Head, Principal or Deputy Principal.
- Must never leave the school premises during the school day without making the Principal or Deputy Principal aware of the reason for the absence from class.

Why we promote good attendance

At St. Mary's, we wish to see that our pupils get the best chance in life and education is one of these chances.

Good school attendance is one of the main factors in determining a child's future and life opportunities:

- A good education gives a student the best possible start in life.
- With good attendance a student will be better able to keep up with schoolwork and school will be more enjoyable.
- Good attendance habits developed in school makes one more reliable for employers in the future.
- Students who attend school are less likely to be drawn into anti-social behaviour.
- Good attendance is fundamental to all future learning.

Effects of poor attendance:-

- Students miss work particularly if their teacher begins something new.
- Students have difficulty in making and keeping reliable friends.
- Students can develop behavioural problems in and out of school.
- Students will have difficulty with schoolwork and homework.
- Poor attendance will result in a student missing out on foundational aspects of a subject which leads to problems later.
- Poor attendance leads to early school leaving.
- We remember that by missing out on school a student is missing out on a lot.

Monitoring Procedure

- If a student is to be absent from school on a particular day, it is essential that this information be communicated to the school through the main office (026)41544 before 9.00am by a parent/guardian.
- Absences are recorded twice daily at 9am and 2pm.
- A report of absent students is posted daily in the staff room usually during Period 1 or 2. Staff use this list to monitor attendance in their classes. All staff are expected to keep

their own attendance rolls in class and to report any deviations between these and those in the posted list to the main office as soon as possible for early investigations.

- The school sends a text message to a parent's mobile phone by 10am stating that his/her daughter has failed to register attendance in school that morning. An exception to this will be when the school has been informed in advance and in a written note from a parent that a student will be absent on a given day. Additionally, communication may be made with home by phone to ascertain the whereabouts of a student if this is deemed appropriate.
- If absent from school, an explanation written in full by parent/guardian in the special forms in the students' school diary must be presented to each teacher and Year Head concerned, and to the Principal or Deputy Principal if requested, stating the reason for the student's absence and bearing parent's/guardian's telephone number and the date in question.
- Spot checks of attendance will be carried out at any time by the Principal and Deputy Principal.

Procedure to be followed by students who are leaving school during the day:-

- No pupil has permission to leave the school premises during school hours without express permission from the Principal/Deputy Principal. This permission requires a written, dated explanation from parent/guardian written in the pupil's student diary in advance i.e. before 8.55am on the day of proposed absence. Parents of 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students are required to sign out and collect their daughters at the main office.
- It is recommended that medical and dental appointments be made outside school hours if at all possible.
- 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years will not be granted permission to leave the school grounds during lunch hour unless their Parent/Guardian sign a form stating that they are going home for lunch.
- Senior students may be allowed to leave the school for lunchtime only when they present a disclaimer form signed by Parent/Guardian.
- If late for first class in the morning, a student is required to report to the Principal or Deputy Principal's office to sign in.
- If not studying a particular subject, a pupil must remain in the classroom and study privately.
- The Deputy Principal may impose disciplinary sanctions as outlined in our Code of Behaviour on any student who fails to comply with these procedures.

Attendance Strategy

What are we doing at St. Marys.

1. We reward good attendance by:-

- Recognition of full attendance on Catherine McAuley awards night.
- The school will avail of every opportunity e.g. student assemblies, meetings of parents, written communication with home to emphasise in a positive way the benefits to students of regular school attendance.
- Parents are strongly advised to arrange medical and dental appointments for students for outside school hours, where this is possible.
- Attendance reports given by Deputy Principal to Principal, Year Heads and Class Teachers prior to Parent Teacher meetings.

2. Identifying and dealing with attendance problems:-

Based on monitoring the absence figures for recent years are as follows:

2006/2007	6.1% absence
2007/2008	6.0% absence
2008/2009	6.3% absence
2009/2010	7.0% absence

The school seeks to reduce these figures and to deal with attendance challenges in the following ways:-

- When a student is absent on consecutive days the Deputy Principal will telephone the student's home in a spirit of pastoral care. Any information obtained from this telephone call will be shared with (a) members of the pastoral care team (Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor and Learning Support Teacher) and (b) specific Year Head and Subject Teachers if deemed appropriate.

In the event of poor attendance:-

- When a student's cumulative absences in any given school year gives cause for concern, the Deputy Principal will phone or write to the student's parents/guardians to inform them of this and to seek an opportunity to discuss the matter with parents.
- When a student's cumulative absences in any given school year exceed 20 days, the Deputy Principal will notify the Education Welfare Officer, as requested by law, and will continue to liaise with parents and the student in an attempt to encourage more regular attendance.

Other initiatives used to promote good attendance:-

- Supervised study for students after school.
- Lunch time activities.
- Weekly pastoral care/tutorial time for all year groups – 10.45 to 11am on Wednesdays.
- Pastoral Care Team – weekly meeting to discuss issues pertaining to specific students e.g. those with high absenteeism.
- SPHE class for 1st and 2nd year groups once a week.
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.
- St. Mary's advises parents via newsletters, regarding practical steps they may take to make attending school easier. (Appendix 1)
- We also advise parents on 'our stance' on issues such as holidays during school term and part-time work. (Appendix 11)

Appendix 1

What can Parents do?

- Ensure your daughter attends school regularly.
- If your daughter is absent/sick for any reason, please contact the school by 9am and give a written note in the school diary when they return. This note should be shown to each class teacher.
- Encourage and praise your children
- When possible, get involved in activities at the school.
- Talk to your daughter about the value of good attendance and the value of school.
- The longer you stay in school, the better the choice of career you will have.
- Ensure that your children have enough rest and a definite bedtime.
- It is essential to have a set time for homework each evening.
- Eating a healthy breakfast and lunch and cutting down on fizzy drinks and junk food.
- Be organised – make sure your children get their books, bags and uniforms ready the night before.
- Attend parent/teacher meetings and if possible phone in advance to make an appointment at any other time.
- Make sure your daughter understands that you do not agree with them missing school.
- Get your children to school on time.
- Do not take holidays during the school year.
- Know the school rules and Code of Behaviour.

Appendix 11

Holidays during School Term:-

Family holidays should be taken during school holidays. You may be tempted by cheaper offers during school term, however, absences like this, whatever you may think, are disruptive to your daughter's education. It is not fair on them to miss this time.

Remember:- If your child misses school, your child misses out.

Part-time work:-

While this can be beneficial remember that :-

- A tired teenager will not be able to concentrate and so will not do well in school. This will lead to lack of interest and absenteeism.
- Please ensure that monies earned are not spent on inappropriate socialising.
- Part time work may eat into homework time leading to a decline in interest and performance.
- During the school term, a child under 15 years is not allowed to work at all. At 15, she must not do more than 8 hours per week. It is also against the law for her to work before 8am or later than 8pm. At 16/17 years, she must not work later than 10pm.

Current Policy on Absenteeism

The existing Code of Behaviour outlines procedures employed by the school in the event of student absenteeism.

It states, initially, that no pupil has permission to leave the school premises during school hours without permission from the Principal or Deputy Principal. The granting of this permission is based on the production of a written, dated explanation from the Parent/Guardian written in the pupil's diary in advance. The School diary is seen as one of the main channels of communication between school and home. This procedure is triangulated by the requirement on parents to sign out and collect their daughters at the main office.

If a student is absent on a given day, a written explanation must be presented to each teacher at the beginning of class. (Date and telephone number required)

Under school policy, juniors are not allowed to vacate school premises at lunchtime. Exceptions to this rule are those who 'go home' for lunch.

Monitoring of Absenteeism

A roll call is taken in each class at 9am and 2pm. Absence slips are taken to the main office and individual absences entered into the student database. The daily absence report is displayed on the staffroom notice board as soon as it is completed. Individual teachers may check this list with their own records and discrepancies reported to the office.

Parental Role

Parents are required to phone the school prior to the start of first class to inform the school of intending absence of their daughter on a particular day. Text messages or calls are made to parents (by Deputy Principal or other) who fail to fulfil this obligation. This ensures that any student who is absent from school unknown to their parents do not fall through the net.

Adopted by Board of Management: 01/Feb/2011