

# **Statement of Strategy for School Attendance**

**St Mary's Secondary School, Macroom, Co. Cork**

**Roll No. : 62320R**

## **Vision and Values in relation to Attendance**

St. Mary's Secondary School's vision is to provide each student with the greatest number of opportunities while in school to develop her full potential holistically (ie academically, socially, physically, emotionally and spiritually). Full school attendance is seen as essential element in achieving this potential.

Wellbeing is an integral part of the school's curriculum for every student. Being present in school every day allows the student to actively engage in school activities in her class/year group and whole school community. The sense of belonging arising from being an important member of the school community where her contribution is valued, contributes significantly to the wellbeing of the student.

Full school attendance teaches the student discipline, needed for self directed learning, thereby building on the resilience needed for adult life.

## **School's Expectations around Attendance**

### **Expectations of students**

The school expects all students to present for school on a daily basis. Students are to be punctual and prepare for classes. Work assigned to a class grouping during an unavoidable absence by a student is expected to be completed.

Senior students are allowed to leave the school during lunchtime. (Disclaimer form signed by parent/guardian), while junior students are not allowed to leave the school grounds during lunch time.

If a student is late for first class, they are required to report to the Principal/ Deputy Principal's office when they arrive into school. Being late will be recorded in the appropriate section of the student's school diary. A sanction may be incurred for lack of punctuality on the part of the student on a continual basis, if it is deemed appropriate.

### **Expectations of parents/guardians**

Parents/guardians are expected to cooperate with the school's expectations that all students would have full school attendance.

If however, there is occasion for a student to be absent, parents/guardians are expected to provide a reason for a student's absence on a given day to the school office before 9.00am. In addition, a written explanation by a parent/guardian is expected to be inserted into the appropriate section of the student's school diary. This explanation 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.

Parents are strongly advised to arrange medical and dental appointments for students outside school hours, where this is possible. No pupil has permission to leave the school premises during school hours without express permission from the Principal/Deputy Principal. If it is necessary for a student to leave the school, permission must be requested in person or in writing with a dated explanation from parent/guardian written in the student's school diary in advance (i.e. before 8.55am on the day of proposed absence). This procedure is triangulated by the requirement on parents to collect their daughters at the main office.

Parents are expected to cooperate with the school's policy with regard to family holidays. Family holidays should be taken during school holidays. Absences due to holidays are deemed to be undesirable because of their disruptive nature to their daughter's education.

While part time work can be beneficial for students on occasions, it is not favoured by school authorities. Students working part time may find it difficult to concentrate and work to their full potential when attending classes, doing class work and homework. The only exception to this may be in Transition Year when the demands of the programme are less academic and the emphasis is on social and personal development.

### **How attendance is monitored**

The school authorities have responsibility for monitoring the school attendance of every student by :

1. Keeping a school register, attendance records and codes of behaviour.

Attendance is recorded twice daily ie 9am and 2pm. Unexplained absences recorded at these times are communicated to parents/guardians via text message.

A record of student absences is communicated to parents/ guardians on the students' reports home twice a year ie. Christmas and Summer.

Written reasons for absences must be presented to the Principal/Deputy Principal and Class Teacher/Year Head on the student's return to school. The explanations for absences are recorded on the school's computer system

Class Teachers/Year Heads are continually monitoring the attendance rates of their class/year group and bring a student's name with poor attendance to the attention of the Year Heads at their meetings.

Subject teachers are also continually monitoring the attendance of their class groups. Rolls are taken in each class on a daily basis. If there is a concern regarding the attendance of an individual student, this is brought to the attention of the Year Head and/or Pastoral Care team who make the appropriate intervention.

- Informing the Education Welfare Officer

Tusla is responsible, by law, to make sure that pupils are attending school regularly. The minimum school leaving age is sixteen years or the completion of three years of post primary education, whichever is the latter. Tusla employs Education Welfare Officers (E.W.O.) to oversee this duty. Ms Fidelma Collins is the school's Education Welfare Officer who provides assistance to the school with individual cases.

Where students have an unresolved attendance pattern which gives rise to concern, the school may engage the services of Tusla by making a referral.

The school is aware that 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 Tusla. The Act also stipulates that parents will be held responsible for explaining their daughter's absence and the school is aware of its responsibilities to provide Tusla with those reasons for absences.

The school will also report to Tusla if a student has been suspended for more than six days or if a student's name is removed from the school register.

### **Summary of the main elements of the school's approach to Attendance:**

#### **Target setting and targets:**

Class teachers/Year Heads monitor the attendance rates of class groups. These are discussed at Year Head Meetings and the necessary intervention is made.

(A record is kept of students leaving the school during the school day. The school has set a target of less than 10% of its student population should leave the school in any one week for any reason)

#### **Whole school approach:**

The expectation of the school is that all students have full school attendance. This expectation is communicated to students at assemblies, on the intercom, in individual discussions with students and parents/guardians, by teachers, Class teachers/Year Heads and Senior Management. (Stats)

#### **Promoting good attendance:**

Students who have a full school attendance record up to May 1<sup>st</sup> each year are awarded a Full School Attendance Certificate and are recognised at the Catherine McAuley Awards ceremony at the end of year (which is attended by their parents/guardians and invited guests). These students are also publicly congratulated at an event organised for the whole school.

The school will avail of every opportunity (e.g. student assemblies, meetings with parents/guardians, written communication with home in the Student's School Diary) to emphasise in a positive way the benefits to students of having full school attendance.

Other initiatives used to promote good attendance include:

- supervised study for students after school,
- lunch time activities,

- wellbeing for first year students five times a week.
- wellbeing for second and third year students four times a week,
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.
- Assembly time/pastoral care for all year groups from 10.45 to 11am on Wednesday mornings

### **Responding to poor attendance**

Students who have poor attendance are identified by Subject teachers, Class teachers/Year Heads who bring the necessary information to the Year Head and Pastoral Care Meetings.

Communication is made with the student and/or with parents/guardians. The appropriate intervention is decided upon for each individual student. On some occasions, targets are set with individual students and they are supported with follow up meetings.

When a student's cumulative absences in any given school year exceeds 20 days, the Principal will notify the TUSLA, as requested by law, and will continue to liaise with parents and the student in an attempt to encourage more regular attendance.

### **School roles in relation to attendance**

The Subject Teacher's role is to identify students with poor attendance and communicate it to Class Teacher/Year Head.

The Year Head's role is to monitor the attendance rate of her respective group, bring it to the attention of the Year Head meeting and engage actively with the student.

Senior Management's role is to work closely with the Year Head to actively engage with student and parent to achieve full attendance.

### **Partnership arrangements ( partners, students, other groups, youth and community groups)**

Every effort is made with parents/guardians to achieve full attendance. Parents/Guardians have responsibilities to ensure their daughter has full school attendance. These include:

- Must ensure that their daughter attend school punctually every day unless ill.
- Must send their daughter to school until they are sixteen years of age or the completion of three years of post-primary education, whichever is the latter.
- 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 cooperate with the school and the Educational Welfare Officer (E.W.O.) in relation to poor attendance.
- Advice given to parents/guardians to help promote full attendance is given in Appendix 1

### **How the Statement of Strategy will be monitored**

The Statement of Strategy will be monitored on an ongoing basis by the Principal, Deputy Principal and Senior Management team. A procedural review will be initiated if there is a need identified.

### **Review process and date of review**

A review process will take place in February 2020 which will involve teachers, parents and pupils.

**Date the Statement of Strategy was approved by BOM** February 2018

**Date the Statement of Strategy submitted to Tusla** January 2018

## Appendix 1 – Advice and Guidance on School Attendance

**The following advice is given to parents/guardians to help promote full school attendance:**

- 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.
- Where 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 daughter has enough rest and a definite bedtime, with a set time for homework each evening, a healthy breakfast and lunch.
- Encouraging daughters to be organised with homework books, bags and uniforms ready for school 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.
- Family holidays should be taken during school holidays.
- Know the school rules and Code of Behaviour.

### **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
- Students are not allowed to leave the school premises during the school day without asking for permission from the Principal/Deputy Principal. Written absences
- 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.
- 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

2010/2011	6.2% absence	2011/2012	6.1% absence
2012/2013	7.2% absence	2013/2014	6.9% absence
2015/2016	6.6% absence	2016/2017	6.2% 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.
- 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.

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.

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.