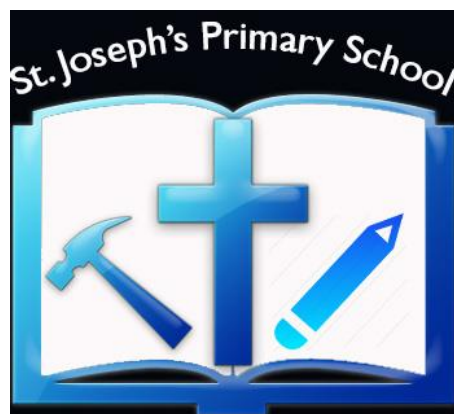


St. Joseph's Primary School, Meigh



Pupil Attendance Policy

Agreed by Governing Body	October 2019
Review Date	October 2021
Review Schedule	Biennial
Person(s) Responsible	Principal/Safeguarding Team
Signed (Chair of Governing Body)	

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, or preferably phone the school office in the first instance.
- Cooperate fully when a pupil is placed on an attendance intervention e.g. ringing in when requested and returning letters promptly.

What the Law says;

Under Article 45 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 ("the 1986 Order"), it is the duty of parents who have a child of compulsory school age¹ to ensure their child receives efficient, full time education suitable to their age, aptitude, ability and to any special educational needs they may have. Such education may be provided by regular attendance at school or otherwise, for example home education. Paragraph 3 (1) of Schedule 13 to the 1986 Order states that it is the duty of a parent of a registered pupil of a school to secure their regular attendance at school. This applies to all children of compulsory school age who are on the roll of a school. As a parent you are legally responsible for making this happen. Under Part III of Schedule 13 to the 1986 Order, if a child or young person who is registered at a school does not attend regularly, a parent can receive a fine not exceeding £1,000 in court (for each child). An Education Supervision Order (ESO) could also be made by a court under Article 55 Key Point of the Children (NI) Order 1995.

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 half-termly list of pupils with attendance below 85%.
- 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 record of pupils with very low attendance (<85%) 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 or leave school early.

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.

Our Vision, Mission & Values Statement

This policy document and the associated procedures are not written in isolation. They were developed in the context of the school's values and the resulting mission statement. Guidance and advice from DENI strategy 'Attendance Matters' was also followed.

Vision

'Let Your Light Shine'

Mission

In our school we aim to create a safe and caring environment where everyone feels happy and valued. Through our Catholic ethos we encourage respect for self and others. We ensure each child is motivated and provided with the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

Core Values and Aspirations for all

L SHOW LOVE

E HAVE EMPATHY

T TELL THE TRUTH; BE HONEST

Y BE YOURSELF

O BE ORGANISED

U SHOW UNDERSTANDING & TOLERANCE

R RESPECT FOR SELF, OTHERS, ENVIRONMENT & PROPERTY

L HAVE A LAUGH

I BE INQUISITIVE

G SHOW GENEROSITY

H BE HUMBLE

T SHOW YOUR TALENTS

S SPEAK OUT – USE YOUR VOICE

H BE HAPPY

I HAVE AN 'I CAN' ATTITUDE

N NEVER GIVE UP

E ENJOY YOUR TIME AT SCHOOL

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 term we reward those who achieve 100% attendance with a 'Special Attendance Certificate'. This is presented in a special assembly and is stressed as a great achievement.
- If a pupil achieves 100% attendance for their full school year they receive a 'Full Attendance Certificate' and a prize.
- At the end of Primary 7, if a pupil has a 100% full school career attendance they receive a special cup at the annual school prize giving ceremony.
- All attendance award recipients are celebrated and promoted via assembly, website, social media and newsletters.

Protocols to Support Low Attendance

We do, however, also have a rigorous four-stage protocol to support pupils with attendance below 85%. The 85% level was decided upon in conjunction with EWO consultation.

Attendance statistics are only assessed each month from early November. Otherwise pupils with very genuine illness or other significant pastoral issues 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 half term makes steady progress. In the

next term 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 period 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 minimum of a half term.

Note: Where a pupil finds themselves at Stage 3, the monitoring period will reduce to monthly tracking as opposed to half termly.

Stage	Details	Actions
'Monitor'	A pupil has attendance below 85% but there is a significant medical or/and pastoral reason.	The pupil's attendance will be tracked*. Under 'Stage' it will be recorded as 'Monitor'. 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. * A data file will be maintained of every class. It will only include pupils who have attendance below 85% during the present school year or were being tracked at the end of the previous academic year.
Stage 1	For the first half term the pupil's attendance has fallen below 85%.	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 85%. 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 half term during the school year the pupil's attendance has been below 85%.	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 85%. The letter will ask the parents to ring the school office to discuss their child's attendance. During this conversation they will be asked to explain their child's pattern of attendance. 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.
Stage 3	For the third occurrence during the school year the pupil's attendance has been below 85%.	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 85%. The letter will ask the parent to ring the office to arrange an interview with the principal. 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 may be submitted. The purpose of this referral will be to support the pupil and the family to improve the situation.
Stage 4	On the fourth occurrence during the school year the pupil's attendance has been below 85%.	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 85%. The letter will explain that a referral has been made to educational welfare. The tracking and recording processes will continue as outlined in Stage 3.

Non-compliance by those with parental responsibility **at stage 1 - 3**, will result in the school making a referral to Educational Welfare.

Assessment & Reporting attendance to Parents

Punctuality and attendance will be reported on as part of each pupil's annual report. Attendance information pertaining to individual pupils will be reported to the parents at the end of the academic year within their child's report. In order to give parents/carers a benchmark to their child's attendance to other children in the school and nationally the following grades will be used:

100%	- Excellent
97%	- 999% - Very Good
94o -96.9%	-Good
90% -93.9%	- Satisfactory
Under 90%	- Unsatisfactory

To be used in conjunction with DENI Attendance Matters – A Guide for Parents (pg5)

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 Mr. Garvey as the nominated Attendance Governor. A minimum of once per term the governors will be given an update on the impact of the school's attendance policy strategies. A minimum of once per year Mr. Garvey 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.

Staff will be issued with a hard copy of the new policy and scheme after its approval. An electronic version will be stored at Staff/Policies/Pastoral Care/Attendance on the C2k system.

A summary version will be issued to parents after every review. A full version will be available from the school office for reference or/and a paper copy issued if required. A full copy is available for download on the school website – www.stjosephspsmeigh.org



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.