

Attendance Policy

Introduction

This policy has been drawn up in consultation with the Board of Management, the principal, teachers, parents and education welfare officer, with the aim of enabling our pupils to maximize their attendance at school.

Rationale

Factors contributing to the formulation of a revised policy are

- To promote and encourage regular attendance as an essential factor in our pupils' learning
- Legislative requirements such as the Education Welfare Act 2000 and the Education Act, 1998

Aims and Objectives

The revised policy is geared towards:

- ensuring that pupil attendance is recorded daily
- encouraging full attendance where possible
- identifying pupils at risk of developing school attendance problems
- promoting a positive learning environment
- enabling learning opportunities to be availed of
- raising awareness of the importance of school attendance amongst all in the school community
- fostering an appreciation of learning
- ensuring compliance with the requirements of the relevant legislation
- developing, subject to available resources, links between the school and the families of children who may be at risk of developing attendance problems
- identifying and removing, insofar as is practicable, obstacles to school attendance.

Compliance with School Ethos

This policy complements the school ethos of nurturing potential in a caring environment where the welfare of children is paramount. St. Thomas Senior National School is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin. While it is a school with a Catholic ethos it has due recognition for pupils of all other faiths or of no faith. Our school motto "Every Child is Valued" is inherent in everything we do. We are committed to creating a caring, supportive and respectful atmosphere at school where every pupil can achieve their full potential.

Roles and Responsibilities

All staff have an input into the implementation of the policy. Class teachers record attendance on a daily basis. Returns to NEWB are the responsibility of the Teacher with the post of Attendance. The school attendance committee meets on a monthly basis, prior to standard assemblies. The committee prepares items relating to Attendance for assemblies and maintains the promotion of good attendance. Parents or guardians are contacted when reasons for absences are unknown or have not been communicated. *“Parents/Guardians are obliged, by the Education Welfare Act 2000, to explain their child’s absence from school”*. Parents and guardians can promote good school attendance by ensuring regular and punctual school attendance. It is the responsibility of the Principal and staff to implement this policy under the guidance of the school’s Board of Management.

Punctuality

School begins at 9.00 am. All pupils are expected to be on time. Class teachers record the time of pupils arriving late.

Recording and Reporting Attendance

The school attendance of individual pupils is recorded in the Leabhar Rolla (Roll Book) of each class and is also recorded on the On-line Attendance System on a daily basis. Class attendance data is recorded daily in the Leabhar Tinrimh (Attendance Book). The annual attendance of each individual pupil is recorded in the Clár Leabhar (Register), together with information provided in enrolment forms (Pupil’s Name, Date of Birth, Address, Religion, Parents’ Names and Parents’ Occupations).

If a pupil does not attend on a day when the school is open for instruction, his/her non-attendance will be recorded by the class teacher. The roll call is taken at 10.50 each morning. Any pupil not present will be marked absent for the day. An explanation from parents/guardians is required to explain each absence. Notes will be retained by the class teacher. Parents/guardians are required to sign their child out of school if he/she must depart early during the school day. The log book for signing children out is in the office at the front door.

Parents/guardians are made aware of the requirements of the NEWB* particularly the by-law relating to absences of more than 20 days per school year. They are notified in writing on the end of year report of the total number of absences during the school year.

The school must inform the Education Welfare Officer in writing, where a child has missed 20 or more days in a school year, where attendance is irregular, and where a child is suspended or expelled for 6 days or more.

Promoting Attendance

St Thomas' SNS is committed to providing a positive school atmosphere which is conducive to promoting good school attendance. In this regard the school will endeavor to ensure that

- the school curriculum, insofar as is practicable, is flexible and relevant to the needs of the individual child
- the promotion of school attendance is shared amongst all in the school community
- the school will promote the development of positive self-concept and self-worth in the children
- parents and guardians are informed of their role and responsibility as outlined in the Education (Welfare) Act
- pupils who may be at risk of developing school attendance problems are identified and support
- the school has procedures in place to promote attendance/participation
- positive and supportive contact is established between the school and the families of children who may be at risk of developing attendance problem
- pupils are registered accurately and efficiently
- pupil attendance is recorded daily
- parents or guardians are contacted when reasons for absences are unknown or have not been communicated
- pupil attendance and punctuality is monitored
- school attendance statistics are reported as appropriate to:
 - the National Education Welfare Board*
 - the Education Welfare Officer
 - the Board of Management

National Education Welfare Board*

The Education Welfare Officer is informed if:

- A child is expelled
- A child is suspended
- A child has missed more than 20 days.

The NEWB is furnished with the total attendances in the school year through the Annual Report Form which is completed on-line.

Whole School Strategies to Promote Attendance

St Thomas' SNS endeavors to create a safe, welcoming environment for our pupils and their parents/guardians. Parents/guardians are consulted in drafting and reviewing policies with the aim of promoting a high-level of co-operation among the school community. The teaching staff collaborates in the planning and implementation of the primary school curriculum, so as to provide a stimulating learning environment for all pupils.

Strategies to promote attendance include

School Calendar is notified to parents/guardians at the beginning of each school year and it is also available on the school website.

- **Daily**
 - Attendance of each pupil is recorded.
- **Monthly**
 - Attendance is addressed at our Standard Assemblies.
 - Class Trophy is awarded to the class with the Best Attendance on each corridor (attendance figures transferred into percentages).
 - Photos of the winning classes, along with written 'Tips for Attendance' from the pupils, are displayed on the Attendance Notice Board in the hall following Standard Assemblies.
 - Classes with best attendance are highlighted in the Parents Newsletter
- **Termly**
 - Pupils who have missed 0, 1 or 2 days in a particular term will be invited to write their names on a Gold, Silver or Bronze leaf and stick their leaves on our Attendance Tree, displayed in the hall.
 - Pupils who have missed 0 days are rewarded with a DVD and a Treat Party during the school day.
- **End of Year**
 - Certificates and medals are awarded to pupils with the best attendance.
- **Other**
 - Good attendance is promoted in our weekly Newsletter, at Parent/Teacher meetings and in written reports to parents.
- The question of equality of access is addressed through the school's policy on Equal Opportunity and Gender Equity.

Strategies in the Event of Non-Attendance

Section 17 of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), states that ‘the parent of a child shall cause the child concerned to attend a recognised school on each school day’.

Section 21 of the Act obliges schools to inform the Education Welfare Officer if a child is absent on more than 20 days in any school year, or if a child does not attend school on a regular basis.

In such cases the Education Welfare Officer (following all reasonable efforts by the Education Board to consult with the child’s parents and the Principal of the school) may serve a ‘School Attendance Notice’ on any parent who he/she concludes is failing or neglecting to cause the child to attend the school. A successful case taken against the parent may result in a fine and/or imprisonment.

Reasons for absence are recorded and reported to the NEWB* five times during the school year through an online system. An annual report is submitted – not more than six weeks following the end of the school year - detailing the overall level of attendance at the school during that school year. This information will be communicated to the school community through the school’s newsletter.

An explanation for absence can be relayed to the school by

- A phone-call to the school
- A letter to the class teacher in the pupil’s School Journal when the child returns to school
- An appointment card for the doctor/dentist/hospital etc. or a medical certificate

Non-attendance without an explanation is followed up with

- A request by class teacher for a note in the journal
- A written request by the class teacher in the journal for a note
- A phone call home to parents

For persistent Non-attendance

- The HSCL co-coordinator will make a home visit to support the parent in bringing the pupil back to school

A record is kept of all calls or visits made.

Each term, parents of pupils who are absent for 10 days (or more), are sent a letter notifying them of the absences to date and of the school’s statutory obligation to inform the National Education Welfare Board once a pupil has reached 20 days.

Strategies to promote Improved Attendance (pupils identified as ‘at risk’ of non-attendance)

Pupils identified as ‘at risk’ of non-attendance are targeted with support where the Schools Completion Project worker links in on a daily basis with each pupil and monitors attendance.

The parent/guardian of each pupil in the target group is notified and requested to cooperate.

Attendance of each pupil in the target group is checked as soon as possible after 9.00.

In the case of non-attendance of a pupil, the SCP Project worker phones the parent/guardian to confirm that the parent is aware of the pupil’s non-attendance. Daily records are kept of attendance and/or contact made with parent/guardian.

- Full weekly attendance is rewarded.
- Full monthly attendance is rewarded.

All pupils in the target group for attendance are invited to attend breakfast club.

An explanation from the parent/guardian is required for any school absence.

Non-attendance without an explanation is followed up with

- A phone call home by the SCP worker and maybe
- A home visit by the HSCL co-ordinator or
- A request for a meeting with the Principal, if non-attendance persists

Transfer to another School

Under Section 20 of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), the Principal of a child’s current school must notify the Principal of the child’s previous school that the child is now registered in their school.

When a Principal receives notification that a child has been registered elsewhere he/she must notify the Principal of the pupil’s new school of any problems in relation to attendance at the pupil’s former school and of such matters relating to the child’s educational progress as he or she considers appropriate. This applies to pupils who transfer between primary schools and to pupils who transfer from primary to second-level education.

St Thomas’ SNS runs a Transfer programme throughout the year for 6th Class pupils. A transfer programme for 2nd class to 3rd class pupils is run in the June prior to their entrance to the senior school.

Communication

Our school has developed a good relationship with the local Education Welfare Board (EWB) personnel and there is ongoing communication in relation to children who are at risk.

Communication with Parents: The school informs all parents of the implications of non-attendance as per the *Education Welfare Act 2000*. This information is disseminated by regular school circulars. Parents of new children are informed of this on enrolment.

Parents/guardians can promote good school attendance by:

- ensuring regular and punctual school attendance.
- notifying the school if their child cannot attend for any reason.
- working with the school and education welfare service to resolve any attendance problems;
- making sure their child understands that parents support good school attendance;
- discussing planned absences with the school.
- refraining, if at all possible, from taking holidays during school time
- showing an interest in their child's school day and their child's homework.
- encouraging them to participate in school activities.
- praising and encouraging their child's achievements.
- instilling in their child a positive self-concept and a positive sense of self-worth.
- informing the school in writing of the reasons for absence from school.
- ensuring, insofar as is possible, that their child's appointments (with dentists etc), are arranged for times outside of school hours.
- contacting the school immediately, if they have concerns about absence or other related school matters.
- notifying, in writing, the school if their child is to be collected by someone not known to the teacher.

Evaluation

The success of any Attendance Policy is measured through:

- Improved attendance levels as measured through Leabhar rolla records and statistical returns
- Happy confident well adjusted children
- Positive parental feedback
- Teacher vigilance.

Implementation/Ratification and Review

An attendance policy has been in operation in St Thomas' SNS since 1998 and was updated in 2014 and ratified by the Board of Management on 7th Feb 2014. It will be reviewed as necessary but not later than 2017.

Signed: Mary Dale -
Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed Eileen O'Shea
Principal

Date: 7/2/14

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*The functions of the former National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) and the services previously provided by the NEWB are now part of TUSLA the Child and Family Agency which was established by law on 1 January 2014.

References:

Don't let your child miss out - NEWB 2004

Education Welfare Act 2000

Education Act 1998

Section 29 Education Act

Empty Desks - CDU Mary Immaculate