

St. Patrick's De La Salle Boys' National School

School Attendance Strategy

Rationale

Under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 parents are responsible for making sure their child receives an education. The law also says that every child between the ages of 6 and 16 must attend school or otherwise receive an education. As per the school's Enrolment and Admissions Policy pupils enrolling St. Patrick's must have reached their fourth birthday on or before 31st August of the year of enrolment.

Context of the School

St. Patrick's is located in the town centre of Castlebar at the junction of Upper Chapel Street and Rathbawn Road. It is an all-boys school founded in 1888 by the De La Salle Brothers and has a long tradition of providing an excellent educational service to the people of Castlebar town and its environs. The school has a Catholic, Lasallian ethos yet has pupils from many other faith traditions attending. The school is within walking distance of the Church of the Holy Rosary, the Linenhall Arts Centre, Lough Lannagh and St. Gerald's De La Salle College. St. Patrick's has pupils with heritage connections to many different nations and is very welcoming of pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds. The school celebrates this cultural diversity in keeping with its inclusive philosophy. Consequently, a number of pupils are learning English as an additional language. The school also has a number of pupils from the traveller community.

Key Principles of our Attendance Strategy

1. Teacher-pupil relations are crucial to pupils' sense of belonging and attendance.
2. Teacher expectation – all staff project the belief that all pupils can succeed academically with a view to influencing pupil engagement and attendance.
3. The curriculum offered seeks to ensure that it suits the needs of all pupils. It encompasses pastoral education in keeping with the school's ethos.
4. Registration and ongoing analysis of attendance data and historic statistics allows us to track current attendance and review archived data to establish patterns, if any, of non-attendance. We use Aladdin pupil management software to assist us, not only in recording attendance, but also the reasons for non-attendance and those who arrive late for school (or leave early) as this may be an indication of the beginning of an attendance problem.
5. Early engagement with parents by telephone on matters relation to non-attendance is vital. The principal adopts this approach where necessary.

6. The school operates sensitively in cases where the pupil has on-going health issues impacting adversely on attendance.
7. We participate with outside agencies such as TUSLA (Educational Welfare Officer / Ms. Siobhain O'Brien), the HSE Social Work Department and the Castlebar Traveller Support Programme on attendance issues in order to bring about a resolution to matters of concern. We acknowledge that whole-school and community responses are needed to tackle significant non-attendance.

Practice

1. Attendance is recorded on the Aladdin by teachers each day at the agreed time of 12p.m.
2. Good, Very Good and Excellent attendance by pupils is acknowledged yearly by presenting pupils with certificates as merited. Bronze, Silver and Gold certificates are issued to these pupils. There are also certificates to acknowledge a sustained period of attendance and for improved attendance. Ms. Siobhain O'Brien, EWO TUSLA, or the principal presents these certificates. Pictures of the pupils awarded with these certificates are featured on our school website and on our weekly PowerPoint presentations on the school's digital noticeboards.
3. Each September the principal and staff prioritise positive messages about the importance of good attendance in classrooms and we continue this practice at our monthly assemblies.
4. If attendance is unsatisfactory reaching 20 days and there is no medical or other acceptable reason for this significant level of absence and, furthermore, if the teacher / principal have attempted to resolve the matters without a satisfactory outcome, pre-referral and referral forms will be forwarded to TUSLA. (Note: We engage at an early point with families to see if matters can be resolved without reaching the twenty-day threshold i.e. if non-attendance is past 12 days)
5. Pupils' attendance figure for the past year and an associated comment is recorded on end-of-year reports received by parents
6. We include positive messages and information concerning school attendance on our school website e.g. "Every Day Counts" [www.stpatsbns.eu]

Appendix 1 TUSLA - School Attendance – “What every parent needs to know...”

Here is what parents need to know about your child’s school attendance.

What should I do if my child cannot go to school?

You must tell the school that your child cannot attend and say why. Write a short note to the school to explain why your child was out of school and send it in with your child when they go back to school. Generally, there are good reasons why a child is missing school (e.g. illness).

Keep in regular contact with your child’s school to explain why your child is absent and, where appropriate, provide medical certificates.

What will the school do if my child misses a lot of school?

The school must tell the statutory Educational Welfare Services of the Child and Family Agency if your child has missed 20 days or more in the school year, or if it is concerned that your child is missing too much school.

What we must do if your child misses a lot of school?

If a school tells us that your child is missing too much school, an Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) will work with the school and may visit you to see how we can help to make sure that your child attends school more often.

Can I take my child on holidays during term time?

Taking a holiday during term time means that children miss important school time. It will be difficult for them to catch up on work later on. As a result, they may fall behind with school work and lose confidence in their abilities. We strongly advise parents do not take their children out of school for holidays during term time.

Can I be taken to court if my child doesn’t attend school?

If you are a parent or guardian of a child aged between 6 and 16 you have a central role to play in ensuring that your child does not miss out on his or her education. Under Irish law you must ensure that your child attends school or otherwise receives an education.

We will help parents in whatever way we can to ensure your child gets an education. However, parents who refuse to co-operate with the EWO regarding their child’s school attendance (or fail to register with the Educational Welfare Services of the Child and Family Agency if they are being home educated or in receipt of an education in a ‘non-recognised school’) can be taken to court and fined or imprisoned. Legal action of this kind only takes place in exceptional circumstances and forms a very small part of the Board’s work.

At what age can my child leave school?

The minimum school leaving age is 16 or after three years of post-primary education, whichever is later.

My child is refusing to go to school. Where can I get help?

Sometimes young people refuse to attend school despite the best wishes of their parents. There are often underlying reasons behind the young person’s decision not to attend school and parents often

feel powerless to help their child. If your child is refusing to attend school and you need support, contact us and our Educational Welfare Officer (Mr. Terry Grego) will get in touch with you.

If a school has refused to enrol my child – what can I do?

If a school refuses to enrol a child, for whatever reason, you have the right to appeal the decision to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998. You can do this by filling in an Appeals Form, which you can get from the school or from the Department of Education and Skill's website www.education.ie

My child has been suspended or expelled from school. What can I do?

If a school decides to suspend or expel your child and if you are not happy with the school's decision, you can appeal it to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998. You can do this by filling in an Appeals Form, which you can get from the school or from the Department of Education and Skill's website www.education.ie

Other decisions taken by the school about your child:

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 allows parents to appeal certain decisions made by a school's Board of Management. Appeals may be made about a decision to:

1. refuse to enrol a pupil
2. suspend a pupil from the school for more than a certain number of school days in any one school year
3. permanently exclude (expel) a pupil

You can get more information about appealing decisions on enrolment in Primary Circular 22/02 Appeals Procedures under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 and in the Appeal Procedures document. See the parents' section of the Department of Education and Skills' site www.education.ie for further information. You can also contact TUSLA and an Educational Welfare Officer will offer you support and assistance. Your appeal is heard by an appeals committee set up by the Department of Education and Skills. In most cases, appeals are dealt with within 30 days. The Department may give directions to the Board of Management of the school to resolve the matter. The appeals committee will issue a decision in all cases heard.

Appendix 2- Education (Welfare) Act 2000, Section 22

22. (1) The board of management of a recognised school shall, after consultation with the principal of, teachers teaching at, parents of pupils registered at, and the educational welfare officer assigned functions in relation to, that school, prepare and submit to the Board a statement of the strategies and measures it proposes to adopt for the purposes of fostering an appreciation of learning among pupils attending that school and encouraging regular attendance at school on the part of such pupils (hereafter in this section referred to as a “statement of strategy”).

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), a statement of strategy shall provide for –

- (a) the rewarding of pupils who have good school attendance records;
 - (b) the identification at an early stage of pupils who are at risk of developing school attendance problems;
 - (c) the establishment of closer contacts between the school concerned and the families of pupils to which paragraph (b) applies;
 - (d) the fostering, promoting and establishing of contacts by the school with –
 - (i) other schools that provide primary or post-primary education,
 - (ii) bodies engaged in the provision of youth work programmes or services related thereto, or engaged in the organising of sporting or cultural activities, and
 - (iii) such other bodies within the area in which the school concerned is situated as the board of management considers appropriate;
 - (e) in so far as is practicable, the development, following consultation with the bodies referred to in paragraph (d), of programmes of activities designed to encourage the full participation of pupils in the life of the school;
 - (f) in so far as is practicable, the coordination with other schools of programmes aimed at promoting good behaviour among pupils and encouraging regular attendance at school by pupils, and the exchanging of information relating to matters of behaviour and school attendance with such schools;
 - (g) the identification of –
 - (i) aspects of the operation and management of the school and of the teaching of the school curriculum that may contribute to problems relating to school attendance on the part of certain pupils, and
 - (ii) strategies –
 - (I) for the removal of those aspects as far as they are not necessary or expedient for the proper and effective running of the school having regard, in particular, to the educational needs of pupils, and
 - (II) that will encourage more regular attendance at school on the part of such pupils.
- (3) The board of management of a recognised school shall, in preparing a statement of strategy, have regard to such guidelines issued by the Board regarding the preparation and carrying into effect of statements of strategy.
- (4) A statement of strategy prepared and submitted by the board of management of a recognised school, in accordance with subsection (1), shall be carried out by that board of management in accordance with its terms.

(5) The board of management of a recognised school may, with the consent of the Minister, and for the purpose of giving effect to a statement of strategy prepared and submitted by it in accordance with this section, appoint such and so many teachers employed by it, as it considers appropriate, to liaise with the parents of pupils registered at the school concerned and to give such assistance to the families of those pupils as the board of management concerned considers appropriate.

(6) Two or more boards of management of recognised schools may, if they consider it appropriate, coordinate, and cooperate in, the carrying out of statements of strategies prepared and submitted by them in accordance with subsection (1).

(7) The Board shall issue guidelines to boards of management of recognised schools for the purposes of this section.

(8) The statement of strategy prepared by the board of management of a recognised school shall be included in the plan prepared by it under section 21 of the Act of 1998.

Resources / Personnel

1. “Don’t Let Your Child Miss Out” Leaflet (TUSLA)
2. Code of Behaviour & Anti-Bullying Policy of St. Patrick’s
3. Contact details below for TUSLA West / North West section:

<p>West/North-West</p> <p>Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Galway, Roscommon, Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois</p>	<p>Educational Welfare Service</p> <p>Child and Family Agency, Unit 19 Sandyfort Business Centre</p> <p>Grealishtown, Bohermore</p> <p>Galway</p>	<p>091-385302</p>
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