

St Declan’s College,

Nephin Road,

Dublin 7.

*Roll No: 60491L*

**Statement of Strategy for School Attendance**

**Introduction**

Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 requires that the Board of Management prepare and submit to Tusla – Child and Family Agency a Statement of Strategy for School Attendance.

St Declan’s College is committed to providing a safe and caring environment which allows each student to reach their full potential. The school is committed to providing a holistic education to each student and aims to be a welcoming and inclusive environment for all members of its community. This community includes teachers, students and parents. The school wishes to promote co-operation among students, parents/guardians and staff in maintaining a high level of attendance throughout the school year.

**Aims**

* To raise awareness of the importance of regular school attendance
* To identify students at risk of leaving school early
* To promote and foster positive attitudes to learning
* To enhance the learning environment
* To ensure compliance with the relevant legislation

**Our Expectations around Attendance**

Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their child who is attending a recognised school is at school on every day that the school is open, unless there is a genuine reason for him or hernot to attend (Section 17 of Education (Welfare) Act 2000). A substantial amount of research demonstrates that there are significant benefits for students with good school attendance while poor school attendance has a negative impact.

Students’ attendance is recorded every morning in Tutor Class at 8.50 and every afternoon during the first class after the lunch break. VSWare is used to record and monitor attendance. It is at these times that students will be marked present or absent for the day. Roll calls are taken throughout the school day by subject teachers.

When a student is absent from school during part of the school day or for a school day or for more than a school day, Section 18 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 places legal duty on parents to notify the principal about the reasons for the student’s absence.

The school day begins at 8.50am and ends at 4.00pm (1.00pm on Wednesday & 3.40pm on Friday).

A student who is absent from school must, on his return, provide a written explanation from parent or guardian in his journal for his class tutor.

Medical and dental appointment cards should be presented at least one day in advance.

In the likelihood of a prolonged absence, a parent or guardian should (after three days at most) notify the relevant Form Tutor in writing or by phone.

If a student arrives late to school he must have a written explanation from parent or guardian in his journal. He will receive a stamp in the ‘Lates’ section of his journal. If he does not have a written explanation for being late he will receive a sanction.

If a student needs to leave school early he must have a written explanation from parent or guardian on the day that he has to leave early. He must show this to his class tutor during tutor class. He then proceeds to the school office at the time he has to leave and sign out.

If a student is absent the school will send a text to parents on the morning of the absence. If an absence remains unexplained the Tutor or Year Head will make contact with parents to discuss this. If a student’s absence becomes an issue for concern the Attendance Officer, Deputy Principal/Principal will be informed and possibly the Care Team.

The school must inform the NEWB in writing, where a child has missed 20 or more days in a school year, where attendance is irregular, where a pupil is removed from the school register and where a child is suspended or expelled for six days or more. This report must be made irrespective of the reason for the student’s absence. If the school is very concerned about the pattern of a student’s absences, then the school is obliged by law to inform the NEWB. The school will always inform parents if a report is being made to the NEWB.

The school cannot give ‘permission’ for holiday absences during term time. If a parent decides to take a child out of school for holidays the school requires a letter to the principal saying they are doing so. Taking a student out of school during term time has a potential risk to his education and the student will need to take action to catch up on what he has missed.

The School Attendance Policy contains more detailed information on the systems in place in the school that deal with attendance.

**Recording and Monitoring School Attendance**

As stated above students’ attendance is recorded every morning in Tutor Class at 8.50 and every afternoon during the first class after the lunch break using VSWare. Roll calls are taken throughout the school day by class teachers.

The school is committed to improving students’ attendance. This can be done through reinvigorating systems that are in use and improving communication between teachers, tutors and year heads and parents on this issue and by monitoring the Annual Attendance Report submitted by the school each year to Tusla.

**Whole School Strategies to promote attendance**

* St Declan’s College endeavours to create a safe, welcoming environment for students and their parents/guardians.
* At the induction meeting for parents/guardians of new students the principal emphasises the importance and value of regular attendance.
* The calendar for the academic year is published annually in the school journal and on the school app and website. It is hoped that this will enable parents to plan family events around school closures, thus minimising the chances of non-attendance related to family holidays during the school term.
* Parents/guardians are contacted by phone/ in person as soon as the Class Tutor/ Year Head has a concern around their son’s attendance. Support and advice is given to parents and students through the Tutor/ Year Head/ Guidance Counsellor/ Deputy Principal/ Principal in order to help improve the student’s attendance. The issue is addressed with parents/guardians at Parent-teacher Meetings and on the Christmas and Summer reports by teachers and tutors.
* The importance of attendance is highlighted at assemblies by Year Heads.
* The number of days missed is written clearly on students’ reports at Christmas and Summer.
* Class Tutors acknowledge good attendance during tutor class and in the journal. During the Christmas Awards Ceremony certificates are presented to students to acknowledge excellent attendance.
* oHomework Club for First’Homework Club’ which is run for First Years benefits students who may be struggling academically and provide space to complete homework where it may not be challenging at home. Having all work complete for the following day encourages attendance.
* TherThe school offers a very wide range of extra-curricular activities and encourages all students to get involved in these activities. Involvement in these types of activities in school can encourage students to attend. Students are encouraged to become involved in the Student Council.
* In extreme cases where poor attendance is linked with poor behaviour and social and emotional challenges programmes are offered to an individual student to support their relationship with school and therefore their attendance. Also a mentor (usually a teacher) can offer support and encouragement to a student in these more extreme cases. The decision to ask a teacher to mentor a student will usually come through the Care Team.
* The school has developed close links with the main feeder primary schools and with Cabra Youth Service and with the EWO (Education Welfare Officer).

**Responding to Poor Attendance**

In order to improve poor attendance the following strategies are implemented:

* Contacting parents (usually teacher or tutor) on an informal basis when a student is absent regularly in order to begin a dialogue about attendance
* Reporting to parents when students are absent without their permission
* Tracking of students through the Care Team
* Contacting the EWO
* Positive reinforcement of good or improving attendance as outlined above. Every effort is made to re-engage students who are working to improve their attendance
* Re-invigorating current systems in order to focus on a particular group or individual
* Providing teachers with information as to which students are particularly at risk of developing attendance problems through appropriate updates from the Care Team and information meetings at the beginning of the school year.
* When the school has exhausted all efforts and there is no improvement in attendance a referral will be made to Tusla’s Education Welfare Services

**Roles and Responsibilities**

The importance of regular school attendance is such that all members of our school community have roles to play in ensuring that all possible strategies are utilised to ensure that students attend school on a regular basis. Overall responsibility for the co-ordination and monitoring of the various implementation strategies rests with the Principal, but every member of the school community is involved in the implementation of the policy under the guidance of the Board of Management.

**Monitoring and evaluation of the Statement of Strategy**

Teachers, Parents Council and Students’ Council will be central to the monitoring and evaluation of the Statement of Strategy. This will be done by investigating attendance rates at the end of the school year and comparing them to previous years.

This Statement of Strategy will then be reviewed and this review will be brought to the attention of the Board of Management.

This Statement of Strategy was ratified by the Board of Management on:

Date: *13 September 2016*

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Ken Duggan

(*Chairperson)*

Review Date: May 2017