



Attendance Policy

For

St. Mary's PS

Cabragh

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| Review of Policy | September 2025 |
| Ratification of Policy by the Board of Governors | November 2025 |
| Next Review Date | September 2029 |

Introduction

Regular school attendance is crucial in raising standards in education and ensuring that every child can have full access to the school curriculum and reach their potential.

St. Mary's PS, Cabragh will strive to promote an ethos and culture which encourages good attendance and where each child will feel valued and secure.

School Mission

Our mission is to provide a supportive and inclusive learning environment where every child is encouraged to achieve their best, both academically and personally. We place a child's happiness and excellent standards of teaching, learning and leadership at the heart of all we do.

We are committed to fostering curiosity, resilience and respect while promoting strong connections with our local community.

Through collaboration with families, staff, and the wider community, we aim to inspire our pupils to become responsible, caring, and active citizens who contribute positively to society.

Definition

It is a legal requirement that schools will:

- be open to all pupils for 185 days each school year
- maintain attendance registers in accordance with the relevant regulations
- accurately record and monitor all absenteeism and lateness
- clearly distinguish between absence which is authorised and absence which is unauthorised according to criteria laid down by the Department of Education (it is the decision of the Principal as to whether or not an absence will be authorised)
- submit termly absence returns through School Census and publish information relating to levels of attendance and absence and include details of these in the school's annual report
- set annual targets to reduce absence and submit these targets in accordance with the relevant regulations.

Background and Principles

There are strong and proven links between pupil attendance and educational achievement. Attendance of less than 95% i.e. absences of 9.5 days or more out of the 185 days in the school year has been shown to compromise pupil attainment. At 90% attendance pupils miss the equivalent of almost 4 weeks' education (18.5 days).

Taking holidays during term time has become an increasing problem as families take holidays during term time in order to take advantage of cheaper prices or because of work commitments.

The school acknowledges that for some families extended visits to the country of family origin provide important opportunities to reaffirm family, linguistic and cultural identities and recognises that these can be positive personal and educational experiences. However, there is strong evidence to indicate that where such visits result in significant absences from school during term time, the disruption to the child's education can have a negative impact on his/her educational attainment. For this reason, parents should organise such holidays during school holiday periods.

Consequently, planned absences during term time are not allowed and are to be discouraged.

If parents/guardians do seek a leave of absence from the Principal due to holiday arrangements, they will be advised that the child/children will be marked absent (G family holiday not agreed). Parents/guardians will be asked to try and limit absence as much as possible by:

- I. wrapping days of absence around existing school holidays (but trying to avoid particularly the beginning of the academic year, if possible).
- II. Considering if it is necessary for child/children to accompany the adults in all circumstances.
- III. Weighing up the benefits to the family against the detrimental impact on the child's/children's educational progress and attainment.

Aims and Objectives

This policy aims to ensure that there is an efficient system, known to all, for ensuring that children attending St. Mary's PS are noted on the school's electronic register and that any absences are recorded in accordance with the school policy.

The policy will:

- give a high priority and value to attendance and punctuality and ensure that specific strategies are in place in order to achieve this
- ensure compliance with all relevant statutory requirements (particularly with regard to the maintenance of attendance registers)
- ensure that clear attendance information is regularly communicated to parents through newsletters, parents' meetings or other means (parents should be specifically reminded of their legal responsibilities for ensuring their children's regular and punctual attendance)
- collect and make effective use of attendance data to monitor progress/trends and set targets for improvement
- provide clear guidance to staff on the practice of registration and on such connected issues as the appropriate categorisation of absence
- recognise the crucial importance of early intervention and provide appropriate strategies
- identify a range of both proactive and reactive strategies to promote attendance and address absenteeism, especially persistent absenteeism
- set up effective networks for liaising with other involved agencies and services.

Procedures

Holiday

Parent/guardians are encouraged not to take holidays during term time. If a pupil goes on a holiday during term time the absence will be recorded as unauthorised.

Appointments

Dental and medical appointments should be made outside school hours or during the school holidays. In the event of such an appointment having to be made during the school day it will constitute an authorised absence. Notice must be given of the appointment in writing.

Approved Educational Activities

The register must record whether the pupil is present, absent or attending an approved educational activity. Attendance and all forms of absence, i.e. education elsewhere etc., should be recorded using the Absence and Attendance codes (Appendix I).

Education Welfare Officer (EWO) referrals

Referrals to EWOs are usually made by schools. There are, however, occasions when other agencies/services or parents may make a referral.

Before accepting a referral from a school an EWO will expect the school to have first undertaken a number of steps to address the pupil's non-attendance. These would include:

- ✓ action by the class teacher
- ✓ action by the Principal
- ✓ contact with parents; initially by telephone. If no improvement a letter will be sent. A second letter will be sent stating referral has been made.

The overwhelming majority of referrals to EWOs are made on the basis of non-attendance (referrals are occasionally taken in relation to child protection concerns, transport or school age employment issues).

Referrals will usually only be accepted in relation to absence which has not been authorised by the school. (Only in exceptional circumstances will referrals in relation to authorised absences be accepted).

Referrals may be made when:

- a pattern of irregular attendance has developed
- a period of entrenched non-attendance has begun
- communication by the school to the parents has met with little or no response
- there is evidence of a lack of parental co-operation in ensuring a child's regular attendance
- a parent withdraws a pupil from school having expressed an intention to educate him/her otherwise than at school (Elective Home Education)
- a pupil is withdrawn from school by the parents who are moving to another area and the school does not have a confirmed destination school/provider where the child will resume his or her education (such pupils will be treated as "children missing in education")
- a pattern of persistent lateness has developed
- there are child protection concerns
- there are specific and identifiable welfare issues which are preventing a pupil from accessing education.

Procedures for Lateness

St. Mary's school day begins at 8.45am. Children who arrive after registers have been marked and sent to the office must report directly to the school office. Any child arriving after 9:00am for any reason other than medical will be marked with an 'L'. Any child arriving after 9:30am without an acceptable explanation from parents will be marked unauthorised absence for that session 'U' by staff.

Parents, or a responsible person over the age of 16, must sign out children if they have to leave during the school day.

Summary of Responsibilities

Role of the School

The Principal at St. Mary's P.S. has overall responsibility for school attendance; class teachers should bring any concerns regarding school attendance to his attention.

The Board of Governors provide support by reviewing school attendance figures and targets and ensuring it is placed as an agenda item at meetings on a regular basis.

Teaching staff regularly monitor the attendance and punctuality of pupils by ensuring that attendance is recorded at the beginning of morning and afternoon registration using Sims attendance.

To enable our school to record and monitor attendance in a consistent way we will adhere to the guidance provided in the Department of Education Circular 2015/02.

St. Mary's P.S. is committed to working with parents to encourage regular and punctual attendance.

Role of Parent/Guardian

Parents have a legal duty to ensure:

Every child of compulsory school age shall receive efficient full time education suitable to age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular school attendance or otherwise.

(Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986)

It is a parent/guardian's responsibility to inform the school secretary by phone of the reason for a pupil's absence on the first day of absence when possible. This should be confirmed with a written note when the pupil returns to school. If the absence is likely to be prolonged, this information should be provided to enable the school to assist with homework or any other necessary arrangements which may be required.

Pupils are expected to be in school at 8.45am for assembly and the beginning of classes. It is the responsibility of parents to ensure that their child is punctual. Lateness is recorded at registration and recorded on each child's attendance record.

If a child appears reluctant to attend school, the parent should discuss the matter promptly with the class teacher or Principal to ensure that both parent and child receive maximum support.

Appendix I

DENI ABSENCE CODES: GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

| <i>CODE</i> | DESCRIPTION | STATISTICAL MEANING |
|-------------|--|----------------------------------|
| / | Present: / = (AM): \ = (PM) | Present |
| <i>A</i> | Artistic Endeavour | Authorised Absence |
| <i>B</i> | Bereavement | Authorised Absence |
| <i>C</i> | Suspended | Authorised Absence |
| <i>D</i> | No reason provided for absence | Unauthorised Absence |
| <i>F</i> | Family Holiday (agreed) | Authorised Absence |
| <i>G</i> | Family Holiday (not agreed) | Unauthorised Absence |
| <i>H</i> | Other Absence | Unauthorised Absence |
| <i>I</i> | Illness (not medical or dental appointments) | Authorised Absence |
| <i>L</i> | Late (before registration closed) | Present |
| <i>M</i> | Medical/Dental Appointments | Authorised Absence |
| <i>N</i> | No reason yet provided for absence (temporary code only) | Unauthorised Absence |
| <i>O</i> | Other Exceptional Circumstances | Authorised Absence |
| <i>P</i> | Approved Sporting Activity | Approved Educational Activity |
| <i>R</i> | Religious Observance | Authorised Absence |
| <i>S</i> | Study Leave | Approved Educational Activity |
| <i>U</i> | Late (after registration closed) | Unauthorised Absence |
| <i>V</i> | Educational Visit | Approved Educational Activity |
| <i>W</i> | Work Experience | Approved Educational Activity |
| <i>X</i> | Only staff should attend | Attendance not required |
| <i>Y</i> | Exceptional Closure | Attendance not required |
| <i>*</i> | Not on roll | Attendance not required |

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| <i>#</i> | Holiday for all | Attendance not required |
| <i>!</i> | No attendance required | Attendance not required |
| <i>1</i> | Alternative Education Provision (organised by the ELB) | Approved Educational Activity |
| <i>2</i> | Home/hospital tuition (organised by the ELB) | Approved Educational Activity |
| <i>3</i> | Elective Home Education | Attendance not Required |
| <i>4</i> | Pupil Referral Unit | Approved Educational Activity |
| <i>5</i> | Another mainstream school (under Entitlement Framework - EF) | Approved Educational Activity |
| <i>6</i> | Training Organisation (under EF) | Approved Educational Activity |
| <i>7</i> | FE College (under EF) | Approved Educational Activity |
| <i>8</i> | Intensive Support Learning Unit | Approved Educational Activity |
| <i>9</i> | CAMHS | Approved Educational Activity |