



Holy Cross Boys' Primary School

PUPIL ATTENDANCE POLICY

1. Rationale:

Holy Cross Boys' PS is committed to a positive policy of encouraging pupils to attend school regularly. The school will work with parents, pupils and outside agencies to secure this aim.

Parents or guardians of pupils of compulsory school age have a legal duty to ensure that their children receive efficient, full-time education at school or otherwise.

Holy Cross Boys' PS is responsible for supporting the attendance of pupils and for responding to difficulties and issues which might lead to non-attendance.

We believe that schools which adopt a positive and proactive approach towards attendance matters and encourage parents to take an active role in the schooling of their children, can play a major role in improving levels of attendance and punctuality and in reducing absenteeism.

2. Definition:

It is a legal requirement that schools will:-

- be open to all pupils for 380 sessions each school year;
- maintain attendance registers (either manual or computerised) 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 (schools should remind parents that 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 prospectus and annual report;
- set annual targets to reduce absence and submit these targets in accordance with the relevant regulations.

3. Aims and Objectives:

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

This 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 and the setting of targets);
- 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 – for individuals, classes, year groups and the whole school;
- 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;
- make provision for first-day of absence notification to Vice Principal of pupils who are known to be poor attenders (90% or below) or who might otherwise be considered to be at risk;
- identify a range of both proactive and reactive strategies to promote attendance and address absenteeism, especially persistent absenteeism;
- develop informal attendance incentive schemes which recognise pupils' attendance achievements;
- set up effective networks for liaising with other involved agencies and services;

- establish procedures for reintegrating long-term absentees and pupils who may, for specific reasons, have been on a reduced timetable;
- help create an ethos and culture which encourages good attendance, addressing school-based causes of poor attendance such as bullying, racism, etc.

4. Procedures:

Holiday

Pupils 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 to the Principal 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.

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 Vice Principal/ Principal
- contact with parents; initially by telephone. If no improvement letter 1 will be sent (see Appendix A). Letter 2 (see Appendix B) will be sent stating referral has been made. It is envisaged that this process will take 4 to 6 weeks maximum.

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 absence 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 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 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.

All referrals to EWO are recorded on SIMS.

Religious Observance

The Principal will review each application reasonably and in consultation with the Vice Principal. The school expects advance notice, since religious festivities are likely to be fixed well ahead.

Taking a Pupil off the Register

The Principal will authorise the taking of a pupil's name off the register in accordance with the current Regulations.

5. Roles and Responsibilities:

Governors:

The Board of Governors will:

- approve the policy and any proposed changes;
- receive reports on attendance from the Principal.

Senior Management Team

The Principal, in consultation with the Senior Management Team and Pastoral Team leaders, will:

- set attendance targets in accordance with the School Development Plan and target-setting process;
- monitor progress;
- ensure that strategies are in place to promote and implement the policy throughout the School;
- determine whether to authorise any proposed absences requested by parents, or absences that have taken place for which no request was made;
- notify parents as appropriate that if a pupil of compulsory school age fails to attend regularly his/her parents commit an offence;
- initiate with appropriate staff strategies to improve attendance;
- liaise with Education Authority over persistent absentees;
- liaise with Education Authority and PSNI when they wish to exercise their powers to enforce truants to return to school;
- make an annual report with statistics to the Board of Governors.

The Vice Principal will:

- authorise referrals to the EWO when appropriate;
- meet regularly with the EWO;
- ensure targets are being monitored.
- oversee the attendance arrangements;
- work with teachers to ensure the efficient running of the system;
- make periodic checks of the registers to monitor pupil absence;
- make regular checks on absence notes and the reasons for absence;
- ensure that unaccounted for absences are followed up;
- deal with issues of inadequate registering;
- arrange appropriate training for staff;
- keep the Principal informed of the progress of the policy;
- advise the Principal on any strategies that could be initiated or improved.

Pastoral Team

The Pastoral Care team will:

- in collaboration with teachers identify poor attenders (90% or below) or who might otherwise be considered to be at risk;
- supply the Office staff with a list of pupils(see above)
- monitor teachers to ensure that all pupil absences are noted and absence notes received from parents;
- ensure that all registers are completed and up-to-date at the end of each term;
- make regular checks on the efficiency of the registering;
- make regular checks on absence notes;
- ensure that all suspected truancy is followed up and dealt with;
- contact parents over pupil absences where appropriate;
- make reports to the appropriate Vice Principal on the efficiency of the system;
- liaise with the appropriate Vice Principal over any perceived training needs.
- identify ad hoc absences or unusual trends and inform the Principal. These absences may or may not be unauthorised.

Teachers

Teachers will:

- ensure that pupils are registered accurately;
- ensure that pupils bring absence notes;
- use unauthorised code if absence notes not brought in within two weeks;
- ensure that every absence is accounted for with a note from parent;
- follow up cases of unaccounted for absence or unacceptable notes;
- keep the Vice Principal informed of any signs of suspected truancy;
- inform the Vice Principal of any possible underlying problems which might account for absences.

Parents

Parents are responsible in law for ensuring that their children attend the school at which they are registered regularly, on time, properly dressed and in a fit condition to learn. Parents are also responsible for ensuring that their children stay at school once they have registered.

Parents can do a great deal to support the regular and punctual attendance of their children. They should:-

- take an active interest in their child's school life and work;
- attend parents' evenings and other school events;
- ensure that their child completes his homework and goes to bed at an appropriate time;

- ensure that their child arrives at school on time each day;
- ensure that their child only misses school for reasons which are unavoidable or justified, such as illness or days of religious observance;
- always notify the school as soon as possible - preferably on the first morning - of any absence;
- confirm this in writing when the child returns to school;
- avoid booking family holidays during term-time;
- talk to the school if they are concerned that their child may be reluctant to attend.

6. Review and Evaluation:

The policy will be reviewed at least once every three years by the Board of Governors. The policy will be kept under review by senior members of staff who will keep Governors informed of any difficulties that may arise.