

# Attendance Policy



Sacred Heart Primary School

Dundrum

(Updated 2016)

## **Introduction**

Regular and punctual school attendance is important. Pupils need to attend school regularly if they are to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them by law. Sacred Heart Primary School fully recognises its responsibilities to ensure pupils are in school and on time, therefore having access to learning for the maximum number of days and hours.

Our policy applies to all children registered at this school and this policy is made available to all parents/carers of pupils who are registered at our school on our school website.

This policy has been written to adhere to the relevant Regulations and Guidance from the Department for Education in addition to guidance from the South Eastern Region of the Education Authority.

Although parents/guardians have the legal responsibility for ensuring their child's good attendance, the Principal, Staff and Governors of Sacred Heart Primary School work together with other professionals and agencies to ensure that all pupils are encouraged and supported to develop good attendance habits. Procedures in this policy are followed to ensure this happens.

Children who are persistently late or absent soon fall behind with their learning. Children who are absent from school frequently develop large gaps in their learning which will impact on their progress and their ability to meet age related learning expectations. A child whose attendance drops to 90% each year will, over their time at primary school, have missed two whole terms of learning.

## **Aims and Objectives**

This attendance policy ensures that all staff and governors in our school are fully aware of and clear about the actions necessary to promote good attendance.

### **Through this policy we aim to:**

- Improve pupils' achievement by ensuring high levels of attendance and punctuality.
- Achieve a minimum of 96% attendance for all children, apart from those with chronic health issues.

- Create an ethos in which good attendance and punctuality are recognised as the norm and seen to be valued by the school.
- Raise awareness of parents, carers and pupils of the importance of uninterrupted attendance and punctuality at every stage of a child's education.
- Work in partnership with pupils, parents, staff and the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) so that all pupils realise their potential, unhindered by unnecessary absence.
- Promote a positive and welcoming atmosphere in which pupils feel safe, secure, and valued, and encourage in pupils a sense of their own responsibility.
- Establish a pattern of monitoring attendance and ensure consistency in recognising achievement and dealing with difficulties.
- Recognise the key role of all staff, but especially class teachers, in promoting good attendance.

**We maintain and promote good attendance and punctuality through:**

- Raising awareness of attendance and punctuality issues among all staff, parents and pupils.
- Ensuring that parents have an understanding of the responsibility placed on them for making sure their child attends regularly and punctually.
- Equipping children with the life skills needed to take responsibility for good school attendance and punctuality appropriate to the child's age and development.
- Maintaining effective means of communication with parents, pupils, staff and governors on school attendance matters.
- Developing and implementing procedures for identifying, reporting and reviewing cases of poor attendance and persistent lateness.
- Supporting pupils who have been experiencing any difficulties at home or at school which are preventing good attendance.
- Developing and implementing procedures to follow up non-attendance at school.

## **Definitions**

### **Authorised absence**

- An absence is classified as authorised when a child has been away from school for a legitimate reason and the school has received notification from a parent or guardian. For example, if a child has been unwell and the parent telephones the school to explain the absence.
- Only the school can make an absence authorised. Parents do not have this authority. Consequently not all absences supported by parents will be classified as authorised.

### **Unauthorised absence**

- An absence is classified as unauthorised when a child is away from school without the permission of the school
- Therefore the absence is unauthorised if a child is away from school without good reason, even with the support of a parent.

## **Procedures**

### **Our school will undertake to follow the following procedures to support good attendance:**

- To maintain appropriate registration processes.
- To maintain appropriate attendance data.
- To communicate clearly the attendance procedures and expectations to all staff, Governors, parents and pupils.
- To have consistent and systematic daily records which give detail of any absence and lateness.
- To follow up absences and persistent lateness if parents/guardians have not communicated with the school.
- To inform parents/guardians what constitutes authorised and unauthorised absence.
- To strongly discourage unnecessary absence through holidays taken during term time.
- To work with parents to improve individual pupils attendance and punctuality.
- To refer to the Educational Welfare Service any child whose attendance causes concern and where parents/guardians have not responded to school initiatives to improve.

- To report attendance statistics to the Education Authority, Department of Education and CCMS.
- All staff should be aware that they must raise any attendance or punctuality concerns to the SLT.

### **Responsibilities**

All members of school staff have a responsibility for identifying trends in attendance and punctuality. The following includes a more specific list of the kinds of responsibilities which individuals might have.

#### **Class teacher**

##### **Class teachers are responsible for:**

- Keeping an overview of class and individual attendance looking particularly for either poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and/ or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents/guardians.
- Informing the Principal where there are concerns and acting upon them.
- Providing background information to support referrals.
- Monitoring follow-up once actions have been taken to correct attendance concerns.
- Emphasising with their class the importance of good attendance and promptness.
- Following up absences with immediate requests for explanation which should be noted inside the register.
- Discussing attendance issues at consultation evenings where necessary.

#### **Principal**

##### **They are responsible for:**

- Overall monitoring of school attendance.
- Trends in authorised and unauthorised absence.
- Collating and recording registration and attendance information.
- Contacting families where concerns are raised about absence including arranging meetings to discuss attendance issues.
- Monitoring individual attendance where concerns have been raised.
- Making referrals to the Education Welfare Service.
- Sending out standard letters regarding attendance.
- Providing reports and background information to inform discussion with the school's EWO.

- Liaising with other professionals to determine potential sources of difficulties and reasons for absence.

### **Administration staff**

#### **The Secretary is responsible for:**

- Taking and recording messages from parents regarding absence.
- Ensuring the Absence/Late Book is completed.
- Contacting parents of absent children where no contact has been made.
- Recording details of children who arrive late or go home early.
- Keeping an overview of class and individual attendance looking particularly for either poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and/ or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents/ carers and reporting concerns to the SLT.
- Sending out standard letters regarding attendance if instructed by the Principal.

### **Parents**

#### **Parents/Carers are responsible for:**

- Ensuring that their child attends school regularly and punctually unless prevented from doing so by illness or attendance at a medical appointment.
- Contacting the school office on the first morning of absence.
- Informing the school in advance of any medical appointments in school time. For the absence to be recorded as a medical absence we do require evidence from the doctor or dentist (Appointment card/letter).
- Making requests for authorised absence in term time, only if absolutely necessary as these are not automatically authorised.
- Talking to the school as soon as possible about any child's reluctance to come to school so that problems can be quickly identified and dealt with.

### **Registration**

All the school doors open at 9am unless the children are attending the school's breakfast club whereby they can attend school from 8.00am and are supervised in the dinner hall until 8.55am. This time is sufficient for all pupils to come into their classroom.

Each class teacher has the responsibility for keeping an accurate record of attendance. Any pupil who is absent must be recorded at the beginning of the morning and afternoon session. The attendance register must be completed by the class teacher by 9.20am.

All attendance records are documented using SIMs software, which is supported by the Education Authority. Attendance registers are legal documents and these must be kept secure and preserved for a period of three years after the date they were last used.

### **Lateness**

Once the doors are closed at 9.10am the only way to get into school is via the main reception. Any pupil who comes into school this way from 9.20am will be marked as late in the attendance record. Records are kept of those pupils who are late; this is documented on the electronic register for each pupil. Any child who arrives for school later than 9.30am will be marked as having an unauthorised absence for the morning.

Children who have attended a dentist or doctor's appointment and subsequently come to school later than 9.20am will have the absence recorded as a medical absence.

Children who are persistently late miss a significant amount of learning, often the most important aspect, as the beginning of the day is where the teacher explains the learning and what each child is expected to achieve.

Where there have been persistent incidents of lateness parents/guardians will receive a phone call advising them of the concerns and the school will provide opportunities for parents/guardians to seek support and advice to address these issues.

### **Absences**

Parents/guardians should contact the school on the first day of their child's absence. When parents/guardians notify us of their child's absence it is important that they provide us with details of the reason for their absence.

All absences are recorded as either authorised or unauthorised absences on the computer. It is important that we receive accurate information from parents with reasons for the child's absence. This information is used to determine whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised. The Principal has the responsibility to determine whether absences are authorised or unauthorised.

Where we have not received reasons for a child's absence using the 'Absence Return Slips' then the school would phone the parents/guardians to ascertain the extent of the absence.

### **First Day Contact**

Where a child is absent from school and we have not received any verbal or written communication from the parent, then we initiate a first day contact process. The Secretary will check all of the registers from 9.20am to 9.30am on a daily basis, to identify those pupils who are absent. There are occasions when we are unaware why the child is absent and we will contact the parent to check the reasons for the child's absence.

### **Illness**

When children have an illness that means they will be away from school long term, the school will do all it can to send material home, so that they can keep up with their school work.

If the absence is likely to continue for an extended period, or be a repetitive absence, the school will contact Education Authority support services to see if arrangements can be made for the child to be given some home tuition outside school.

Where over the course of an academic year, a child has repeated periods of illness, the school will write to parents to ask them to provide medical evidence for each future period of illness related absence. This evidence could be a Doctor's note, appointment card or copy of a prescription. We may seek written permission from you for the school to make their own enquiries.

### **Parental Request for Absence from School for Holiday**

With effect from September 2013 the government abolished the right of Principals to authorise absence specifically for holidays of up to 10 days per year if special circumstances exist. Instead, Principals will only be allowed to grant leave of absence for any reason if they are satisfied exceptional circumstances exists.

### **Addressing Attendance Concerns**

The school expects attendance of at least 96%.

It is important for children to establish good attendance habits early on in their primary school education. It is the responsibility of the Principal and the Governors to support good attendance and to identify and address attendance concerns promptly. In primary school we rely upon parents to ensure their child attends school regularly and punctually and therefore where there are concerns regarding attendance parents are always informed of our concerns. Initially

concerns about attendance are raised with parents via letters which are sent home. There will be opportunities for the parent/guardian to discuss reasons for absence and support to be given by the school with the aim to improve attendance. Where a child's attendance record does not improve over a period of time then the school has a responsibility to make a referral to the Educational Welfare Officer.

The Education Welfare Officer (EWO) will issue notices to parents where there has been a referral from the school as part of the school's processes to address poor attendance patterns.

The Education Welfare Officer visits once a month to check and monitor attendance. She carries out regular register checks to identify children with low attendance (usually below 88%). She works with the school to improve attendance and may issue letters directly to parents/guardians and follow these up with phone calls.

### **Monitoring Attendance**

The Principal has overall responsibility for ensuring that all of the attendance data is accurately recorded on the SIMs attendance software. Regular meetings are held with the teaching staff to discuss all attendance concerns and appropriate actions are taken following these meetings such as letters sent to parents or meetings arranged to discuss attendance concerns with parents.

**This policy will be reviewed annually.**