

# Statement of Strategy for School Attendance



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## Introduction and Rationale

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This policy was formulated in order to provide information, guidelines and good practice regarding child attendance at St. Mary's Boys' National School (St. Mary's BNS). This policy was drawn up in consultation with staff, Board of Management and the parent body. It follows the template for the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance as set out in Tusla – Child and Family Agency's guidelines for schools (2015, p. 42).<sup>1</sup>

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## Our school's vision and values in relation to attendance

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The Board of Management of St. Mary's BNS recognises the clear and direct relationship between regular school attendance and child progress. We recognise that high attendance is linked to children staying at school to complete and do well in the Leaving Certificate and further studies. Overall, good attendance engenders a positive attitude to school and to learning (McCoy et al, 2007)<sup>2</sup>. The Board also recognises the impact of poor attendance on wider aspects of a student's life, such as weak peer relationships, risks of engagement in anti-social activity and poor family relationships (Hibbett and Fogelman, 1990)<sup>3</sup>.

The Board of Management agrees with the reported literature (Hibbett and Fogelman, 1990) that absenteeism is often a complex matter for each child in the context of his/her family and a holistic approach to improving attendance will be followed. The Board of Management is committed to striving for greater understanding of the barriers faced by students, and the supports and interventions that can be of help in ensuring students engage in, participate in and attend school.

School starts at 9am for all children and ends at 1.40pm for Infant classes and 2.40pm for 1<sup>st</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> class. St. Mary's BNS follows the standardised school year as laid out by the Department of Education and Skills<sup>4</sup>, and is open for 183 days of the year.

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## Our school's high expectations around attendance

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Under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000<sup>5</sup>, parents are responsible for making sure their child receives an education. In this regard, the Board of Management of St. Mary's BNS has a high expects high level of pupil attendance. Children are encouraged to come to school every day and the school's approach to, and promotion of, attendance is outlined below. Tusla and the Board of Management of St. Mary's BNS strongly advise that parents do not take their children out of school for holidays during term time. Holidays should be taken during the allocated holiday time as outlined in the school calendar.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see [http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/FINAL\\_SAS\\_strategy\\_eng\\_2jun.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/FINAL_SAS_strategy_eng_2jun.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> McCoy, S., Kelly, E. and Watson, D. (2007). *School Leavers Survey Report 2006*. Dublin: ESRI and Department of Education and Science.

<sup>3</sup> Hibbett, A. And Fogelman, K. (1990). *Future Lives of Truants: Family Formation and Health – Related Behaviour*. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 60: 171-179.

<sup>4</sup> Please see [https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0009\\_2017.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0009_2017.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Please see <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/22/enacted/en/print.html>

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The Board of Management acknowledges that there are cases where a child has a genuine reason for absenteeism, including; illness, urgent family reasons, expulsion, suspension, or transfer to another school.

## How attendance will be monitored

All class teachers take a daily roll call which is recorded on the school's data software programme 'Aladdin'. If a child does not attend on a day when the school is open, their absence will be recorded by the class teacher on the Aladdin system. If the teacher has been made aware of the reason for absence, this is also recorded on the Aladdin system. If a teacher is concerned about student absences, they alert relevant staff; i.e. the Deputy Principal or Principal. The roll call is taken at 9.20am each morning. The annual attendance of each child is recorded by Aladdin and is printed in the end of year school reports.

Late arrivals and early departures are discouraged unless absolutely necessary. All late arrivals will be recorded on the Aladdin system. For early departures, a parent/carer must sign their child out of school at the early departures record book at school reception.

## How punctuality will be monitored

School begins at 9am for all children. All children and staff members are expected to be on time. All children arriving late to school (anytime after 10.30am) will be recorded on the Aladdin system. This will be inputted by the class teacher on their respective Aladdin system. The school will contact parents/carers in the event of children being consistently late. The school principal is obliged, under the Education Welfare Act, to report children who are persistently late to TUSLA Child and Family Agency.

## Our school's approach to attendance

### • Targets

The average attendance in the 2015-2016 school year was 94.9%. The average attendance in the 2016-2017 school year was 95.3%

Upon reflection on these statistics, we have set the following targets:

1. To improve student attendance by 2% in 2017-2018 and 3% in 2018-2019.
2. To reduce absenteeism in the month of June (data from Aladdin shows a significant drop in student attendance for this month in 2015-2016 and 2016-2017).

### • Our whole-school approach

At St. Mary's BNS, children, parents, staff and the Board of Management work in partnership to provide the best education for our children, and believe that consistent attendance is necessary to facilitate the education of the children. The whole-school approach to attendance is as follows;

- promoting a positive learning environment
- child attendance is inputted daily by each class teacher before 10.30am
- promoting a school culture where every child feels valued, trusted and respected
- facilitating children to have a voice in school matters
- encouraging full attendance where possible
- encouraging punctuality
- fostering an appreciation of learning
- raising awareness of the importance of school attendance
- raising everyone's expectations of our school attendance

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- ensuring that child attendance is recorded daily
  - ensuring that children are registered accurately and efficiently
  - ensuring awareness of and compliance with the requirements of the relevant legislation
  - identifying children at risk
  - develop, subject to available resources, links between the school and the families of children who may be at risk of attendance problems. Letters are sent home to parents if their child has missed 15 days. Another letter is sent home if a child has missed 20 day or more informing parents that social services will be notified.
  - identifying and removing, insofar as is practicable, obstacles to school attendance
  - rewarding good attendance and improvements in attendance
- **Promoting good attendance**

The following are strategies employed by the school to promote good school attendance;

- Promoting a positive learning environment
  - A dedicated school notice board for punctuality and attendance awards
  - Full attendance plaques donated by the Parents' Association
  - Staff meet and greet with families in the yard every morning (Principal and Deputy Principal)
  - Discussion about attendance at Parents' Association meetings, annual parent-teacher meetings, class meetings at the start of the year and information evenings with new parents.
  - Regular updates on the school's attendance in the school newsletter/other mediums of communication
  - Positive affirmation of attendance when the roll is being taken
  - Highlight the importance of attendance during school assemblies
  - End of year "Attendance Assembly" where children with full attendance for that term are awarded certificates and a prize
  - Record of attendance in child's annual school report
  - Distribution of Tusla's Educational Welfare Services' leaflet entitled '*Don't Let Your Child Miss Out*' at new parents' information evening.
  - Provision of after school care (Sherpa Kids)
  - Provision of extra-curricular activities after school
  - Sporting activities throughout the school year, e.g. GAA training with Games Development Officer from Lucan Sarsfields and Westmanstown Gaels GAA club, tin whistle classes .
  - Pastoral care team meetings to support children with attendance difficulties
  - The school calendar for each academic year is distributed the previous June to make parents/carers aware of school holidays, to avoid holidays being taken during term time.
- **Responding to poor attendance**

The Board of Management acknowledges that despite the best efforts of the school and of families, some children will need extra support to prevent patterns of poor attendance developing. The following are strategies employed by the school to respond to poor attendance;

- Working with groups or individuals who may need additional support (Guidelines for Schools, p.30)<sup>6</sup>
- Tailoring whole-school approaches to group or individual needs
- Engaging in early dialogue with parents and students
- Using school-led, multi-agency support processes
- Referral to Tusla's Educational Welfare Services

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<sup>6</sup> Tusla – Child and Family Agency (2015). *Developing the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance: Guidelines for Schools*. Please see [http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/FINAL\\_SAS\\_strategy\\_eng\\_2jun.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/FINAL_SAS_strategy_eng_2jun.pdf)

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- **Approach to attendance concerns – School-based**

Where there is a concern regarding a child's level of attendance or pattern of absenteeism, the Deputy Principal or Principal will speak to the parents/carers. A letter will be sent to parents/carers informing them of when their child has reached 15 days and 20 days of absenteeism. Parents/carers will also be informed when the school has made a referral to Tusla regarding attendance.

- **Approach to attendance concerns – Tusla**

The school must notify Tusla if a child is absent for 20 days or more, or where absences/patterns of absence give rise to concern. If a child is sick or is absent for another explained reason, no action is likely to be taken by Tusla. However if there is a concern about a child's attendance at school or about the reasons given for absenteeism, families may be visited by an Education Welfare Officer (EWO) to discuss the situation. Unexplained absences are of particular concern to the school and to Tusla.

The school is obliged to report regularly to Tusla regarding attendance. There are four reporting periods each year. The report is generated by the school, based on the guidelines provided by Tusla. Any child who has missed 20 days or more, or any children about whom there are absenteeism concerns, must be reported to Tusla in these periodic reports.

Tusla Child and Family Agency is also informed if a child is suspended for 6 days or more, or in the case of the expulsion of a child.

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## School roles in relation to attendance

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The Board of Management acknowledges a collective responsibility for the promotion of attendance. The following outlines the roles and responsibilities of people within the school community regarding attendance:

### Principal

The school principal will provide leadership for the creation of a school ethos and climate that is supportive of high levels of engagement and attendance. It is the responsibility of the Principal to lead the development and implementation of this policy, under the guidance of the Board of Management.

The Principal will undertake the following responsibilities in relation to this plan;

- Engage with parents/carers regarding attendance concerns.
- Prepare a report on attendance for the Board of Management on a yearly basis, or as the need arises.
- Maintain the Leabhar Tinreamh (Daily Attendance Book) and print hard copies of this monthly.
- Provide opportunities for staff to engage actively with the development and monitoring of the school's Attendance Strategy. Each teacher inputs their daily class attendance on the Aladdin system before 10.30am.
- View the attendance statistics on the Aladdin system each week (the Principal and the school secretary have access to all classes on the Aladdin system).
- Initiate links with other schools and relevant bodies on school attendance issues.

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- Furnish pertinent attendance documentation to officers of relevant government departments. At the end of each school year the Principal forwards the attendance information to Tusla.

## Deputy Principal

The Deputy Principal has responsibility for making the periodic returns to Tusla, and for notifying Tusla's Educational Welfare Services and the relevant EWO of particular problems in relation to attendance and ensure support for the work of the EWO with students who have chronic attendance difficulties. The Deputy Principal has responsibility for attendance assemblies, including certificates and prizes where relevant.

## Secretary

The school secretary is responsible for student sign-in/early collection books. He/ she will view the attendance statistics on the Aladdin system each week (the Principal and the school secretary have access to all classes on the Aladdin system).

## Staff

All staff have input into the implementation of this attendance policy.

## Teachers

Class teachers (and substitute teachers where relevant) have responsibility for recording daily attendance and for inputting reasons of absenteeism on the Aladdin system. Class teachers must also record absences on the fire drill list. It is the responsibility of teachers to;

- Provide a classroom climate and classroom management that support participation and engagement, especially with students who may be at risk of poor attendance.
- Actively use the school's Attendance Strategy to promote attendance
- Set high expectations for attendance and punctuality in their classrooms
- Use their own punctuality to lead by example
- Ensure attendance data are recorded accurately and reviewed in line with school procedures, as set out above
- Alert relevant staff (i.e. Principal/Deputy Principal) if there are concerns about student absences
- Support the attendance plan for students who have difficulty in attending school on a regular basis
- Support students on return when they have missed periods of schooling.

## Parents/Carers

The Board of Management acknowledges the important role of parents/carers in the attendance of their children at school. In line with Tusla's guidelines for school (p.44)<sup>7</sup>, parents/carers are expected to;

- Set high standards for their child in relation to attendance and punctuality
- Engage with the school if there is a problem about their child's attendance and support plans to address the problem
- Ensure that their child regularly attends and arrives at school on time.

<sup>7</sup> Tusla – Child and Family Agency (2015). *Developing the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance: Guidelines for Schools*. Please see [http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/FINAL\\_SAS\\_strategy\\_eng\\_2jun.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/FINAL_SAS_strategy_eng_2jun.pdf)

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- Avoid taking their child out of class unless there is a serious reason
- Avoid taking their child on holidays during term time.

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## Partnership arrangements

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The Board of Management acknowledges the importance of partnership arrangements and a multi-disciplinary approach, where relevant, in supporting the attendance and punctuality of children at school. In relation to attendance, the school community may involve staff members, parents/carers, students, other school, community groups and Tusla, among others.

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## Monitoring the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance

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The Board of Management and the principal will monitor the implementation of the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance on an ongoing basis by doing the following:

- Opportunities will be provided for staff to share experiences about how the strategy is working and to review progress towards attendance targets (in the form of monthly staff meetings)
- The principal will update on attendance levels at each Board of Management meeting, with reference to the school's attendance targets.

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## Review Process

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A formal end-of-year review of the Statement of Strategy will be conducted annually as part of the preparation of the Board of Management's annual report on attendance (as per Section 21(6)(a)(b) of Education (Welfare) Act 2000) to Tusla's Educational Welfare Services.

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Date the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance was approved by the Board of Management

23<sup>rd</sup> October 2017

Date the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance was submitted to Tusla

24<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Signature of Chairperson:

Philip Curran  
(Fr. Philip Curran)

Signature of Principal:

Dara Burke  
(Dara Burke)