

Introduction

Athy College is committed to ensuring that all students benefit fully from the education provided in our school. To achieve this, regular and punctual attendance and participation is essential. Put simply, absence means missed learning; without it the learning process becomes fragmented and unsatisfactory. Irregular attendance leads to students missing important lessons and therefore not fulfilling their true potential

This policy sets out the basic principles upon which the School Attendance Strategy is implemented, sustained and evaluated in our school.

Rationale

Attendance at school and full participation in school life is extremely important in a child's development. Regular attendance and participation in school life enhances the quality of education.

Parents are the primary educators and the school wants to work in partnership with parents to ensure that the environment is created where children look forward to coming to school and participating in school life.

The school and parents have certain obligations under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 regarding attendance and participation.

Aims

This policy aims to:

- Assist towards maintaining a school environment where all students feel welcome and where their educational and personal needs are met
- Highlight the importance of regular attendance
- Encourage regular attendance and participation in school life
- Encourage good communication between parents and the school
- Establish procedures for the monitoring of attendance and absence
- Establish procedures for the attendance record-keeping for the school, students, parents and the Educational Welfare Services of Tusla (The Child and Family agency)
- Develop good working partnerships between the school and other relevant agencies

- Support students and parents where there are attendance problems through positive interventions
- Emphasise the importance to all students and parents of high attendance at school as an essential pre-requisite for making full use of all educational opportunities and to maximising individual achievement;
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of all parties with respect to attendance;

Legal Requirements

Education (Welfare) Act 2000

The purpose of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 is to encourage regular school attendance and participation in education for as long as possible.

The Educational Welfare Services of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, operate under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. The statutory and school support services of Tusla's Educational Welfare Services work collaboratively with schools and other relevant services to secure better educational outcomes for students.

As a school, we are obliged by law under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 to submit reports on school attendance to the Educational Welfare Services of Tusla.

Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs)

Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) work with young people and their families who are experiencing difficulty with school attendance. The main priority of their work is around the welfare of children and young people and on ensuring that concerns and problems around attendance are addressed before attendance becomes a crisis issue.

Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) are employed throughout the country to offer advice, support and guidance to parents who need support in ensuring that their child attends schools regularly.

If the school contacts an EWO with concerns in relation to a student's attendance, the EWO will talk to the Principal or her nominee and find out what efforts have been made to date to help the child. The EWO may then decide to contact the family and meet with them.

The main work of an Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) is around the welfare of the child and the family and on ensuring that concerns and problems are dealt with before school attendance becomes a crisis issue.

However, if a parent fails in his or her duty to ensure that their child attends school, then the EWO has the power to take legal action against the parent under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000.

Parent/Guardian Responsibility

Under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 parents/guardians are responsible for making sure their child receives an education. The law also states that every child between the ages of 6 and 16 must attend school or otherwise receive an education.

The school recognises the parents/guardians as the primary educators and the school as facilitators of the learning process.

Parents/guardians are asked to note the incremental nature of learning and the long-term implications for students of irregular attendance.

There is a direct relationship between a student's success in school and regular attendance. Accordingly, parents are asked to co-operate in the following:

Written explanation for all absences

Parents/Guardians are responsible for providing a written explanation for all absences.

It is school policy that reasons must be given in writing in the relevant section of the student's journal. The school will notify the National Educational Welfare Board if a child is absent for 20 days or more or where the absence gives rise to concern.

If Parents/Guardians are aware in advance that a student will be absent for any part of the school day they should notify the school.

Extended absences

In the event of long term absence of a student, parents /guardians are asked to maintain contact with the student's Year Head.

Work assigned to students while absent due to illness

If a student is out of school for a period of time due to illness but would be capable of continuing their learning, parents are encouraged to contact the student's year head so that work from various subject teachers may be sent home to assist the student.

This is particularly important in relation to formal course work assessment and exam preparation.

Written explanation for all lateness

Parents/Guardians must provide written notes in the student's journal explaining reasons for lateness.

Student leaving school during school hours

Parents/Guardians should be mindful of the educational importance of full attendance when scheduling appointments or family events which may necessitate the withdrawal of a student from school. Parents/guardians and students are requested not to make medical or dental appointments for students during school hours.

Where this is not possible, students will not be allowed leave the school for appointments without written parental notification. Notes to excuse students for appointments etc., during the school day must be signed by the Tutor, Year Head, Deputy Principal/Principal.

Students with signed permission to leave the school for any reason must sign the 'sign out' book at the main office before they leave.

Family Holidays

Parents are reminded that students should not to be taken out of school for holidays during term time.

Meetings

Parents and students are asked to attend meetings in the school when required to discuss attendance concerns. The school also invites parents to a range of information sessions, coffee mornings etc. in the school throughout the year. The main purpose of these gatherings differ but encouraging good attendance is a consistent feature. Parents (and students, where relevant) are strongly encouraged to attend.

Student Responsibility

The school expects all students registered in the school to attend all timetabled classes every day. Students should present to class on time fully equipped for work.

It is the responsibility of students who are absent from class/school for any reason, including extra-curricular activities to find out details of work missed.

Student Participation

Students are expected to attend all classes and to participate to the best of their ability. Students are required to complete all assigned homework and all necessary aspects of subject course work.

The school provides opportunities in both curricular and extra-curricular areas to maximise student participation in all aspects of school life. The active engagement of students in these opportunities enhances learning, promotes personal and social development, develops friendships and enhances a positive experience of school. Student participation is encouraged, recognised, affirmed, publicised and rewarded.

Work Experience

Work experience involves spending time as part of a school course learning first-hand about life in a real work place. It provides students with insight into the reality of the world of work. An employer agrees to work with the school in taking on a student for a work experience placement.

In the school, work experience is an essential component in Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

Students enrolled in these courses are required to fully attend their work experience placement and complete all aspects of the work experience programme.

Leaving Certificate Applied Requirements

The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) demands strict requirements in relation to student attendance. In order to be awarded credit, students must complete each module by:

- Attending the classes and out - of - school activities related to the module and
- Completing the Key Assignments related to the module.

A minimum attendance of 90% is required. Where there is absence due to illness, a medical certificate must be submitted to the tutor.

School Responsibility

The school wants to work in partnership with parents to ensure that an environment is created where children look forward to coming to school and participating in school life.

The school wants to create conditions where children see that it is in their own interest to come to school regularly.

In keeping with the values and principles of our Mission Statement, we want to make school and school attendance a pleasant and positive experience. We offer a range of subjects, extracurricular and social activities to make our school as inclusive as possible, and to enable all students to participate fully and to benefit from their time at school.

School Calendar

The school calendar contains details of the opening and closing times of the school and the school holidays. These are published in the student's journal and on the school website.

Unexpected School Closure

In the event of the school having to close unexpectedly due to extreme weather conditions etc., parents will be notified by text or phone call on the telephone number they have provided to the school. Details will also be posted on the school website.

Board of Management

The Board of Management shall adhere to the statutory obligations of the school with regard to school attendance and participation. The Board of Management shall ensure that an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Attendance strategy and policy is carried out annually. They shall also ensure that all information regarding student attendance is collected and issued in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1988).

Principal's Responsibility

A Register of all students who have been admitted to the school will be maintained by the Principal of the school. The Principal may at her discretion, delegate duties regarding school attendance to other staff in the school.

The school maintains a record of attendance and non-attendance on each school day or part thereof of each student registered at the school, which specifies the fact of attendance or failure to attend and the reasons for absence.

A student's name will not be removed from the Register, except

- For inter-school transfer and then only after all details regarding attendance and education progress have been issued to the new school.
- Where for whatever reason a student is removed from the school under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 Section 20 (4).

The Principal shall, after admitting a student from another second level school, notify the Principal of the school that he/she has registered the student.

The Principal will notify the Educational Welfare Services of Tusla when:

- A student is suspended for a period of not less than 6 days.
- A student is absent (for whatever reason) during a school year for 20 days or more
- When, for whatever reason, a student's name is removed from the register in accordance with the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 Section 20 (4)
- When there are concerns about the absenteeism of a student