

## **INTRODUCTION:**

In Virgin Mary G.N.S., it is recognised that regular evaluation of attendance is necessary, given the changing conditions in schools. Our attendance policy stemmed from the drawing up of our DEIS plan in 2006. The redrafting of our attendance policy was a collaborative school process involving staff, Board of Management, School Completion Programme (SCP), Education Welfare Officer (EWO) and Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Co-ordinator. It is essential that all parents are aware of the necessity for regular attendance and reminders are given regularly in School Newsletters.

## **RATIONALE:**

Factors contributing to the formulation of the policy are:

- The changing nature of society
- The arrival of international / newcomer students who return to the home country of their parents on holiday or family visits, during school term
- DEIS Band 1 School
- Legislative requirements e.g. The Education Act 1998 and the Education Welfare Act 2000.

## **AIMS:**

- To increase awareness of the importance of school attendance.
- To identify pupils at risk of becoming early school leavers.
- To promote a positive learning environment.
- To ensure compliance with relevant legislation.

## **SCHOOL ETHOS:**

Virgin Mary G.N.S. wants every pupil to participate fully in all aspects of school life. Regular attendance is central to this. In Virgin Mary G.N.S., we aim to care holistically for every child and to promote cooperation between pupils, parents and staff. Attendance is also a part of the School's DEIS Plan. A whole school approach to attendance is essential. Weekly meetings (Wednesdays at 9:30) between the School Completion /BEST key worker the principal and HSCL are held.

## **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES:**

**There are many people who can play a significant (or very significant) role in School Attendance**

- Parents, Class Teacher, Principal, HSCL Coordinator, School Completion BEST worker, Attendance School Secretary, EWO.

## **POLICY CONTENT**

### **RECORDING:**

In Virgin Mary G.N.S., the teachers and Sarah use the Aladdin system to record attendance and late arrivals and early leavers. End of year School Reports are sent to parents every June, which record the number of days present/absent in the current school year.

When a child does not attend, the class teacher records this each morning at 10:00a.m. It may not be altered once filled. Parents are required to write a note explaining the absence or use the Aladdin app. Parents can also communicate the absence by phoning the school office.

If a child leaves the school during the school day, the parents MUST sign out the child in the school office. When School Attendance becomes an issue, a parent may receive a visit by the SCP worker and/or HSCL Coordinator to see what support may be provided or encouragement offered.

The school will inform the EWO / TUSLA, where a child has:

- missed 20 or more days in a school year
- when attendance is irregular
- where a pupil is removed from the school register
- where a child is suspended or expelled for 6 days or more.

### **STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE ATTENDANCE:**

Virgin Mary G.N.S. endeavours to create a safe, welcoming environment for our pupils and their parents/guardians with the aim of promoting a high-level of co-operation among the school community. The teaching staff collaborate in the planning and implementation of the primary school curriculum, so as to provide a stimulating learning environment for all pupils. Due to a variety of factors, there are always some pupils who miss a significant number of valuable school days.

Early identification of children at risk is essential, so a team approach by SCP worker, HSCL Coordinator, class teachers and principal is adopted, as previously indicated. Those at risk are the children who miss more than 5 days in a 20 day period and those without an explanatory note or phone call. Contact is first made by the class teacher in the home work journal. Appropriate contact may then need to be established by the SCP worker, HSCL Coordinator or Principal. A good pattern of attendance needs to be established in Junior and Senior Infants to ensure that a pattern has been established by First Class.

The calendar for the coming school year is published annually in June and a reminder is published in September. It is hoped that this approach will enable parents/guardians to plan family events around school closures, thus minimizing the chances of non-attendance related to family holidays during the school term.

- Children with 'Most Improved Attendance' are also acknowledged.

### **STRATEGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE:**

Section 17 of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), states that 'the parent of a child shall cause the child concerned to attend a recognised school on each school day'.

Section 21 of the act obliges schools to inform the Education Welfare Officer if a child is absent on more than 20 days in any school year, or if a child does not attend school on a regular basis.

In such cases the Education Welfare Officer (following all reasonable efforts by the Education Board to consult with the child's parents and the Principal of the school) may serve a 'School Attendance Notice' on any parent who he/she concludes is failing or neglecting to cause the child to attend the school. A successful case taken against the parent may result in a fine and/or imprisonment.

After all reasonable efforts have been made by TUSLA to consult with the child's parents and the Principal, the EWO may serve a 'School Attendance Notice' on any parent whom it is concluded is failing or neglecting to cause the child to attend school.

Two annual Reports are sent by the school to The Child and Family Agency's service (formerly the NEWB) with reasons for absence of pupils with poor attendance.

Parents are notified/reminded by the school after the child has reached 10, 15, 20 days absence (See sample letter – Appendix 1).

### **TRANSFER TO ANOTHER SCHOOL:**

Under Section 20 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the Principal of the child's current school must notify the Principal of the child's previous school that the child is now registered in their school.

When the principal of this school receives notification that a child has registered elsewhere, he will inform the principal of any difficulties or issues in relation to that child's attendance. This will also apply to second level transfers.

### **COMMUNICATION:**

**Communication with the following about school attendance is essential:**

General Parent Body.

All Pupils.

All Staff.

HSCL Co-Ordinator.

School Completion Worker.

Education Welfare Officer.

Board of Management.

As with all school policies, staff will be aware that the use of positive language when dealing with parents, adults and children is extremely important.

**Review:**

A review of the policy will take place as required. Any changes will be notified to the Board of Management for ratification. This School Attendance Policy was last reviewed in 2023, in consultation with staff, parents, pupils and the Board of Management of Virgin Mary G.N.S. It was subsequently ratified by the Board of Management.

Signed:



(Chairperson Board of Management)



(Acting Principal) 5/10/2023

## **Appendix 1**

### **Standard Reminder Letter**

Re: School Attendance 2014 – 2015.

Dear Parents,

Since the implementation of the Education Welfare Act, we are all very conscious of the checks that are carried out on school attendance by Education Welfare staff. Many absences are due to unavoidable illnesses and are completely understandable.

In the event of a pupil missing 20 days in a school year, however, it is our duty to remind all parents that there is the possibility of being contacted by Education Welfare. Until now, we have been doing this, on a regular basis, through our school newsletters.

It can be difficult for parents to keep track of school absences so, in an effort to support and keep parents informed, we have decided to send out a reminder letter to all parents of pupils who have missed 10, 15 or more school days. In this way, parents can be alerted/given an update.

If there is anything further we can do to support or encourage school attendance, we are always happy to do so. Please be assured of our ongoing support and understanding.

Every good wish,

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Oisín O'Donovan

(Acting Principal).

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of days missed to date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 2**

### **Education Act (2000)**

“Parents/Guardians are obliged, by the Education Welfare Act 2000, to explain their child’s absence from school”. Section [(21) (9)] of the Act states that: “a pupil’s absence can only be authorised by the Principal when the child is involved in activities organised by the school or in which the school is involved”. The Principal cannot authorise a child’s absence for holidays during school time. However, it is essential that parents inform the school of such arrangements.

Reasons for pupils’ absences must be communicated in writing, by parents/guardians to the school and will be retained by the school.

When the child returns to school after an absence, parents/guardians should give/send a written note to the class teacher which contains the child’s name, the dates of absence and the reason for the absence.

These notes will form a record which may be inspected by the Education Welfare Officer on a visit to the school.

The school will contact parents when a written explanation for the child’s absence is not received by the school.

Teachers will not assign work for children who are absent from school because of holidays.

### **TUSLA National Education Welfare Board Codes for Category of Absence**

A Illness

B Urgent Family Reasons (eg: Bereavement)

C Expelled

D Suspended

E Other (eg: Holidays, Religious Observance, Emigration)

F Unexplained

G Transfer to another school (written confirmation received from other school)