

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Rationale:

This statement was prepared in consultation with the staff, parents and Board of Management in order to highlight the strategies and measures in place in Ratoath Senior National School to foster an appreciation of learning among pupils and encourage regular attendance at school.

It was decided to work on this policy for the following reasons:

- To promote and encourage regular attendance as an essential factor in our pupils' learning
- Legislative requirements such as the Education Welfare Act 2000 and the Education Act, 1998
- The role of Tusla
- Levels of disadvantage
- Changing attitudes to education
- School recording of strategies in relation to attendance.

Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School

Attendance at school is a requirement under law. Our strategy aims to continue to promote attendance and to encourage parents and children to see that good attendance helps children to become fully involved in school life. This also supports the holistic development of the child.

Compliance with School Ethos

This policy complements the school ethos of nurturing potential in a caring environment where the welfare of children is paramount.

Aims

In Ratoath Senior National School we aim

- To foster an appreciation of learning in the school community
- To raise awareness of the importance of school attendance and also an awareness of forming good patterns of attendance in early years
- To identify pupils at risk of leaving school early and reporting this to Tusla
- To enhance the learning environment where children can make progress in all aspects of their development
- To promote positive attitudes to learning
- To ensure that the system of rules, rewards, and sanctions are implemented in a fair and consistent manner that encourage pupils to attend school
- To make parents aware of their responsibilities, around attendance, under the Education Welfare Act
- To comply with requirements under Education Welfare Act 2000/Guidelines from Tusla

Roles and Responsibilities

- All staff have an input into the implementation of this policy. Class teachers record individual patterns of attendance on Aladdin (Aladdin is the administrative software used by the school) and the Principal makes the returns to the Educational Welfare Services at Tusla four times a year. The annual school

attendance report is sent to Tusla at the end of each school year. The Principal has responsibility for maintaining the Leabhar Tinreamh and keeps up to date records of registrations within the school.

- It is the responsibility of the Principal and staff to implement this policy under the guidance of the school's Board of Management.

Punctuality

School begins at 9.20 a.m. All pupils and teachers are expected to be on time. The school will contact parents/guardians in the event of pupils being consistently late. The Principal is obliged under the Education Welfare Act, to report children who are persistently late, to the Education Welfare Board. A record is kept of the children who are late. This information is forwarded to parents in the child's annual report.

Recording and Reporting Attendance

The school attendance of individual pupils is recorded on Aladdin daily. The annual attendance of each individual pupil is also on Aladdin, together with information provided in enrolment forms (Pupils name, Date of Birth, Address, Religion and parents' names). This information is also recorded in the Primary Online Database.

If a pupil does not attend on a day when the school is open for instruction, his/her absence will be recorded by the class teacher on Aladdin. The roll call is taken between 9.30a.m. and 10.00a.m. each morning. Any pupil not present will be marked absent for the day (if not otherwise informed by parents). This will not be altered once it has been filled in. A note from parents/guardians is required to explain each absence. Such notes will be retained by the class teacher and kept in the child's class file. These notes are dated and kept until the end of the school year. If a child is absent for more than twenty days in a year, that child will be reported to Tusla during that school year. The absent notes for these children will be collected at the end of the year and stored by the Principal. These notes will be kept for five years as required. Late arrivals and early departures are recorded by school personnel on Aladdin.

Parents/guardians are made aware of the requirements of Tusla particularly the by-law relating to absences of more than twenty days per school year. The school informs parents/guardians when their child is approaching being absent for twenty days and again when they exceed twenty days absence (This is done by letter forwarded to the parents by the class teacher.) The class teacher also records in the class file that these letters have been distributed. Parents/guardians are also notified in writing on the end of year report of the total number of absences during the school year. Pupils whose non-attendance is a concern are invited to meet with the Principal and are informed of the school's concerns.

The school must inform the Education Welfare Officer/Tusla, where a child has missed twenty or more days in a school year, where attendance is irregular, where a pupil is removed from the school register and where a child is suspended or expelled for six days or more.

Whole School Strategies to Promote Attendance

- Ratoath Senior National School endeavours to create a safe, welcoming environment for our pupils and their parents/guardians. The teaching staff collaborate in the planning and implementation of the primary school curriculum, to provide a stimulating learning environment for all pupils. Where it is applicable parents/guardians are consulted in the drafting and reviewing of policies with the aim of promoting a high-level of co-operation among the school community.
- Traditionally, school attendance is very strong in our school. However, the staff remain vigilant so that 'risk' students are identified early. Risk students can be categorized as those who miss more than five days in a twenty day period without any accompanying note of explanation from parents/guardians. Appropriate contact takes place between the school and the parents/guardians either via a letter or a note in the homework diary when this occurs. A meeting between parents and the Principal may be set up if deemed necessary. Absences of more than twenty days are automatically referred on to Tusla.
- New enrolments and their parents/guardians are invited to engage in an induction process through which the school's policies and procedures in relation to attendance are explained.
- The calendar for the coming year is forwarded to parents annually and updates are sent at regular intervals throughout the school year. 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.
- The question of equality of access is addressed through the school's policy on Equal Opportunity and Gender Equity.

Encouraging Good Attendance

- **Communication with parents:** When a difficulty regarding attendance arises parents are reminded of the importance of attendance and punctuality and of the obligation on schools to report non-attendance. Parents are also informed, of their responsibility, to send a note explaining absences to the teachers
- **Phone Communication:** If a child's attendance is of concern (even before the child has reached twenty days absence) the Principal will contact parents to ascertain a reason for the child's absence and if further school support is needed. Parents are asked to supply medical certificates from their General Practitioner. A reminder is given to parents that the school is legally obliged to report absences of twenty days or more.
- **School Records of Attendance:** Staff keep daily, monthly and annual records of attendance. Teachers to keep notes received from parents with regard to all absences.
- **School Reports:** Children's individual attendances are recorded in the annual school report which is forwarded to parents. When children are transferring to Post Primary schools and/or other primary schools attendance records are also forwarded.
- **TUSLA:** Attendance reports are forwarded to Tusla on a quarterly and annual basis.
- **Promotion of Good Attendance:** Certificates are presented at the end of the year to children who have had full attendance and to children who have only missed one day.
- **SPHE:** As part of our Social Personal and Health Education Programme each class teacher teaches SPHE. This promotes self-esteem and encourages attendance through areas such as "Making choices".
- **Homework:** Ratoath Senior National School has a Homework Policy. Homework creates a good link between school and home and also helps to nurture lifelong learning. Parents are encouraged to approach the teacher if their child is experiencing difficulties with homework so that a more differentiated level of homework can be arranged.
- **Lunches:** If a child comes to school with no lunch efforts are made to contact the child's parents/guardians. If this happens regularly records are kept by the class teacher and this matter is

brought to the attention of Tusla. Every effort is made to ensure that a child is not hungry while attending school.

- **Assessment:** Individual teachers make arrangements for their own class tests. If lack of attendance is due to fear of tests parents are encouraged to talk to the class teacher. Tests generally reflect class work and homework. Encouraging children to do homework helps alleviate their fear of tests. In the case of children with special learning needs the teacher makes professional decisions in differentiating the teaching, learning and testing for those children.
- **Equality of Participation:** In Ratoath Senior National School we strive to make education available to all. School book lists are kept to a minimum with many books being part of a book rental scheme.
- **Equality issues:** Our school is an equal opportunities employer and while being a school with Catholic ethos we welcome children of all faiths and nationalities.
- **Learning Needs:** At present, Ratoath Senior National School has a Special Education Needs team of teachers who work with many of the children in our school, providing support for those children, to enable them reach their potential. Staff meet regularly to discuss pupils progress and to prioritise children who may be in need of learning support.
- **Learning Needs and absences:** Extra support is offered to children who are long term absent due to illness or hospitalisation. Support is offered to children to encourage them to attend school more regularly or to allow them to catch up on work due to unavoidable absences.

The Role of Parents/Guardians

- Ensuring regular and punctual school attendance
- Working with the School and Tusla Child and Family Agency to resolve any attendance problems
- Making sure their children understand that parents support good school attendance by discussing planned absences with the school
- Refraining from taking holidays during school time
- Showing an interest in their children's school day and their children's homework
- Encouraging their children to participate in school activities
- Praising and encouraging their children's achievements
- Instilling in their children a positive self-concept and a positive sense of self-worth
- Informing the school in writing of the reasons for their children's absence from school
- Ensuring, insofar as is possible, that children's appointments are arranged for times outside of school hours
- Responsible for informing the teacher/school in advance of an absence, where possible, if the parent/guardian knows that the child will be absent e.g. medical appointment
- Contacting the school immediately, if they have concerns about their children's absence or other matters related to school
- Notifying, the school, if their child is to be collected by someone not known to the teacher

Communication with Parents

The school informs all parents of the implications of non-attendance as per the *Education Welfare Act 2000*. This information is given on the policy section of the school website and distributed to parents of the new Third Classes at their induction meeting in September at the start of the new academic year.

The Role of Tusla

Tusla Child and Family Agency is informed if;

- A child is expelled for six days or more
- A child is suspended for six days or more
- A child has missed more than twenty days

TUSLA Child and Family Agency is furnished with the total attendances in the school year through the Annual Report Form which is completed on-line.

Communication with other Schools

- Under Section 20 of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), the Principal of a child's current school must notify the Principal of the child's previous school via transfer form. The child is then officially transferred via P.O.D. (Primary Online Database) that the child is now registered in their school.
- When a Principal receives notification that a child has been registered elsewhere he/she must notify the Principal of the pupil's new school of any problems in relation to attendance at the pupil's former school and of such matters relating to the child's educational progress as he or she considers relevant. This applies to pupils who transfer between primary schools and to pupils who transfer from primary to second-level education.
- When a child transfers into Ratoath Senior National School, confirmation of transfer will be communicated to the child's previous school via transfer form and the child will then be transferred from the previous school on P.O.D. and relevant records sought relating to attendance and educational progress.

Evaluation

The success of any Attendance Policy is measured through:

- Improved attendance levels as measured through attendance records and statistical returns
- Happy confident well-adjusted children
- Positive parental feedback
- Teacher vigilance

Implementation/Ratification and Review

This policy has been in operation in Ratoath Senior National School since September 2017 and will be reviewed again in September 2020.