

OUR LADYS SECONDARY SCHOOL



Statement of Strategy for School Attendance

Our Lady's Mission Statement

Our Lady's Secondary School is a holistic centre of development and learning where each person is special and treated as such. We, the staff and students, enjoy working together to realize our full potential in a healthy, safe, stimulating and friendly environment where the atmosphere is one of mutual respect, cooperation and challenge. Christian community is our heritage and goal, the Good News of the Gospel is our story.

School Context

Our Lady's Secondary School is a Voluntary Catholic School under the trusteeship of CEIST. The school is Co-Educational and currently has approximately 730 students and over 60 teachers as well as a range of ancillary and support staff. The school has a Board of Management comprised of Trustee Nominees, Teacher Nominees and Parent Nominees. The Board of Management delegates the day-to-day running of the school to the Principal. The school supports the principles of inclusiveness, equality of access and parental choice in relation to enrolment. In supporting these principles it also recognizes the rights of the Trustees CEIST, the Religious and Educational Philosophy of the Sisters of Mercy and the funding and resources available.

Mercy Philosophy of Education

Inspired by the vision of Catherine McAuley, Mercy Education is committed to holistic development and to the achievement of the full potential of each student, particularly those who are disadvantaged or marginalised. It is a process informed and influenced by the teaching and example of Jesus Christ and is conducted in an atmosphere of care, respect and joy. Mercy Education is committed to ongoing whole school development in collaboration and partnership with the Board of Management, Staff, Students, Parents/Guardians and the wider community.

CEIST Core Values

The Core Values of CEIST are:

- Promoting Spiritual & Human Development
- Achieving Quality in Teaching and Learning
- Showing Respect for Every Person
- Creating Community
- Being Just and Responsible

Scope: This strategy is applicable to the students, staff and parents of Our Lady's Secondary School and relates to all aspects of school attendance and punctuality. This strategy was drawn up in consultation with all school partners, including the Board of Management, staff, parents and students.

Relationship of Attendance Strategy with School Mission Statement:

To further the aims of our Mission Statement this strategy aims to support students and staff in working together to achieve our full potential. To realise this full attendance is not only desirable but essential. This strategy aims to promote, encourage and foster full attendance through its approach, procedures, strategies and supports.

Our Mission Statement envisions an atmosphere of mutual respect, co-operation and challenge. Being on time for school and for class is a fundamental aspect of respect and co-operation and may in certain instances be a challenge. This strategy through its approach, procedures and supports aims to inculcate a culture of punctuality in all members of the school community, students and staff.

It is envisaged that a school community exists wherein:

- Student and staff members are valued and their talents and abilities are nurtured to prepare for a positive contribution to society.
- Each person recognises his/her own responsibility for their behaviour including attendance and the implications of that behaviour.
- Good communication is maintained between all members of the school community and the importance of regular communication with parents is recognised.

Rationale for an Attendance Strategy:

The Board of Management of Our Lady's Secondary School recognises that significant learning occurs in the classroom. One criterion of a student's success in school is regular and punctual attendance. Frequent absences may lead to poor academic work, lack of social development and possible academic failure. Regular attendance is of utmost importance for school involvement, social interaction and academic achievement. No single factor may interfere with a student's progress more quickly than frequent tardiness or absence. It is the expectation of the Board that students attend school on a regular basis. Unauthorized absence of students will be considered truancy and will be subject to disciplinary action outlined in this strategy and in the school's Code of Behaviour. Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 requires that the Board of Management prepare and submit to Tusla – Child and Family Agency a Statement of Strategy for School Attendance.

Aims in relation to student attendance:

- To improve student attendance and punctuality.
- To improve student achievement and welfare through improved attendance.
- To make parents aware of the importance of attendance and punctuality and their responsibilities in this area.
- To encourage, promote, recognise and reward full attendance.
- To develop within our students an awareness of the importance of attendance and punctuality.
- To instil in our students a sense of personal responsibility in relation to attendance and punctuality.
- To foster a culture where full attendance and punctuality are the norm.
- To identify students, at an early stage, who are developing attendance or punctuality issues.
- To discourage absenteeism, tardiness and unwarranted withdrawal of students during the school day or school term.
- To identify students at risk of leaving school early.
- To support students facing challenges in relation to attendance and punctuality.
- To maintain accurate records of school attendance.:
- To ensure compliance with Education Act (Welfare) 2000.

A positive approach to attendance and punctuality:

- Each year the Board of Management establishes the school attendance period by adopting a school calendar. Parents are furnished with a copy of this calendar before the start of each school year. The calendar is also posted on the school's website www.olss.ie
- Good attendance is promoted in the school through a culture of high expectations, encouraging each student to take responsibility for his or her own learning and achieve full potential through regular presence in class.
- Throughout the curriculum, students are made aware of the incremental nature of learning and the implications for them of irregular attendance.
- Accurate records are kept of student attendance and punctuality through the e-Portal System.
- The Principal; Deputy Principal or Year Head meet with students for whom attendance or punctuality has been identified as an issue.
- The provision of an extensive Pastoral Care Structure including Year Heads, Tutors, Guidance Counsellor, an outside School Counsellor, and the availability of the SMT to meet with parents and students to discuss attendance issues.
- Contact is established with parents / guardians of these students and situation is kept under review.
- Reports to Parents/Guardians include a record of attendance for the relevant period.

- School staff can give Achievement cards to students whose attendance is excellent or has improved.
- Identifying specific activities and initiatives that may motivate and encourage student engagement and attendance.
- End of year assemblies recognise students with an excellent attendance record.
- A sense of student connectedness to the school community is cultivated through participation in school life and extra-curricular activities.

Procedures for monitoring attendance:

- The Deputy Principal will email the Year Heads with a copy of attendance records for each year group each day.
- A copy of the daily absentee list is available to the Principal, Deputy Principal, and Year Heads each morning.
- Subject teachers take registration using Facility E-Portal at the start of each lesson. Period 1 and Period 6 each day are designated roll call classes and attendance or absence at these classes is recorded in the students' official records.
- At the discretion of the Deputy Principal, a text message alerting parents to a student's absence will be sent each day via the Komeer app. Parents then tick 'Yes' or 'No' to explain their child's absence and this report is then given to Year Heads.
- The Deputy Principal tracks the attendance records of the students on a weekly basis and this information is brought to Year Head meetings and is also updated on the shared google drive for the Year Heads to view.
- The Deputy Principal will discuss attendance with the Year Head on a regular basis and depending on the issues involved and reason for absence discuss appropriate action to be taken.
- This helps to identify, at an early stage, students who are at risk of developing school attendance problems. Such students may be referred to the Student Support Team if appropriate. The Student Support Team may make recommendations to support the student e.g. referral to the Principal, Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain, Learning Support Coordinator or outside agency as appropriate.
- The Deputy Principal/Year Head meets with the students who may be at risk to encourage them to attend. The Deputy Principapl/Year Head may, at this early stage, invite the parents/guardians to the school, to discuss and attempt to resolve any difficulties or impediments to their regular attendance at school.
- After 8 days absence the Deputy Principal will, unless previously spoken to, speak to the student to ascertain the reason(s) for absences and if there are any supports the school can put in place to improve the situation.
- After a minimum 10 days absence, the Deputy Principal will, unless there is a genuine reason for the absence, send a letter and a copy of the attendance record to the parents/guardians informing them of the number of days absence that their son\daughter has reached and of the school's statutory obligation to report to TUSLA

once 20 days absence have been recorded and inviting them to the school to discuss the situation. The Deputy Principal may be accompanied by one or more of Principal and Year Head at this meeting. At this meeting possible supports to improve the situation should be discussed.

- After 20 days absence, a letter and a copy of the attendance record is sent by the Deputy Principal to the parents/guardians of students to inform them that the school is fulfilling its obligation to inform TUSLA and inviting them to the school to discuss the situation.
- Principal informs EWO of any student who has been suspended for 6 days cumulatively.
- Principal informs EWO of any student suspended pending BoM Meeting.
- The Principal informs EWO of any student who is likely to be expelled.
- At end of academic year the Deputy Principal will write to parents of students who had reached a specific number of absences expressing concern & encouraging full attendance the following academic year.
- Relevant returns compiled and submitted to TUSLA by Deputy Principal.

Procedure for recording explanations for absences:

- Explanations for absence notes are provided to students in the back of their Student Journal.
- Where an absence can be anticipated an absence note should be furnished to school office/Year Head in advance.
- If a student is absent, a text message will be sent via the Komeer app. If the parent ticks 'Yes' then this is seen as a valid note. If there is no reply to the message then an absent note must be completed and handed to Year Head on the day of return.
- The absent note is handed into school office where it is stamped with the school stamp and filed.
- The Deputy Principal and Year Head of each year group tracks the attendance records of the students on a weekly basis.

School activity/work experience:

- Absences from class due to participation in a school activity or work experience are recorded as school activity (SA) or work experience (WE). It is the student's responsibility to make up for time lost and source any work missed.
- Teachers organising a school activity provide the administration staff with the list of students involved the day prior to the event. The administration staff pre-enters the students' absence under the category school activity (SA) or work experience (WE).
- The staff member accompanying or organising the event phones the school on the morning of the activity to confirm the presence/absence of the students.

Late Policy:

The school day runs from 8.55am until 3.55pm (Wednesday 8.55am-1.10pm) Students are expected to be in attendance and ready to begin class at 8:50am. Lunch break is from 12:16pm until 13:01 for senior students and 13.10pm until 1.55pm. Students are expected to be in attendance and ready to begin class at 1.55pm.

- Students who arrive late disrupt class and miss important instruction time.
- When students arrive late they must present themselves at Reception and sign the Late Book.
- The Deputy Principal meets each student who arrives late in the morning at the front office and will issue a sanction where required.
- When a student arrives to school after the commencement of Periods 2 he/she must furnish an explanatory note and present this to the office on arrival at school.
- The Student Journal is stamped with the school stamp and must be shown to the subject teacher.
- The subject teacher will enter the code Late Valid on the ePortal system.
- Students who sign the Late Book are entered by the administration staff on the student's database on Facility Administration as Late.

Truancy:

- Truancy is considered a serious violation of the School Code of Behavior and will result in an appropriate sanction.
- In school truancy (where a student remains in the school building but does not attend a timetabled class) is an extremely serious matter and will incur appropriate sanctions.

Medical/Dental Appointments:

- Parents/guardians and students are requested not to make medical or dental appointments during school hours.
- Where this is not possible, a permission to leave the school note must be completed and signed by any member of the SMT then handed into the office before leaving school. The school may make a confirmation telephone call.
- The student must sign the Signing out Book.
- When a parent/guardian arrives to collect his/her son/daughter the student must sign the Signing out Book and indicate the reason for leaving and whether or not the student is expected to return.
- In the event of a student becoming ill or getting injured during the day he / she should inform the class teacher who may send them to the Principal or Deputy Principals to obtain permission to go home.
- If such permission is granted contact with their parents/guardians should be through the school office.
- If the students displays symptoms relating to covid-19 then the procedures outlined in the appendix to the Health and Safety policy will be followed.
- For Health & Safety reasons students should never contact home via a mobile phone or prior to getting permission to leave the school premises. Parents/guardians are expected to make arrangements for the collection of their son/daughter at the school

office in the event of a student being ill or injured. When a student returns to school after such an absence a note of explanation should be presented.

- The administration staff will record the student's departure from the school on Facility Administration.
- In the event of a senior student not returning after lunch the parent\guardian should notify school and an explanatory note should be given to Year Head on his\her return.

Family Holidays-Lengthy Absences:

Parents are strongly discouraged from taking their sons\daughters on holiday during school term or from allowing lengthy absences from school for non-medical reasons. Such absences seriously impact on the student's progress and undermine his / her ability to reach his\her full potential.

Where such absences are completely unavoidable parents should:

- Inform school Principal at earliest opportunity.
- Obtain work / assignments to be covered during absence.
- Ensure that work\assignments are completed to a satisfactory standard during absence.
- Ensure that when son / daughter returns that he\she catches up on all material covered during absence.

Communication with parents:

- At the discretion of the Deputy Principal, a text message alerting parents to a student's absence is sent daily unless the school is otherwise informed.
- Parents are routinely informed of their child's attendance and punctuality record through examination reports.
- A letter and a copy of the attendance record are sent, where deemed necessary, to parents/guardians once a student has been absent in excess of 10 days and again when a student is absent in excess of 20 days.
- Individual subject teachers can track a student's attendance for their given subject using Facility e-Portal and are encouraged to contact a parent/guardian if concern arises about absenteeism for a particular subject.
- When a Year Head has a specific concern about an individual student he/she may, through the Deputy Principal, arrange a meeting with the Education Welfare Officer and parents/guardians to discuss strategies re same.
- When a Year Head notes that a student has not presented signed notes explaining absences, the Year Head will make contact to the parents/guardians bringing their attention to the matter and requesting that explanations be presented.
- Parents can track the recorded attendance of their son/daughter via e-Portal.

Communication with teachers:

- Teachers have access to the attendance records of all students through the use of Facility e-Portal Teachers can access the specific attendance record for each of their teaching groups using Facility e-Portal.
- If information is received from parents in relation to a student's absence, teachers are notified of this by the Deputy Principal or by the relevant Year Head through postings on e-Portal or via email
- In the case of a prolonged absence and if requested by parents, teachers are encouraged to place class work and notes into an envelope in the staffroom for forwarding to the absent student or alternatively place work online in a shared platform that is being used by the class group so that the student who is absent can access it.

Whole School Strategies to promote attendance:

- Our Lady's Secondary School endeavours to create a safe, welcoming environment for students and their parents/guardians.
- At the induction meeting for parents/guardians of new students the Principal emphasises the importance and value of regular attendance.
- Providing a Pastoral Care structure which involves weekly meetings with the Student Support Teams attended by SMT, SEN Co-ordinator and Year Heads.
- The calendar for the academic year is published on the school website. It is hoped that this will enable parents to plan family events around school closures, thus minimising the chances of non-attendance related to family holidays during the school term.
- Parents/guardians are contacted by phone/ in person as soon as the Class Tutor/ Year Head has a concern around their child's attendance. Support and advice is given to parents and students through the Tutor/ Year Head/ Guidance Counsellor/ Deputy Principal/ Principal in order to help improve the student's attendance. The issue is addressed with parents/guardians at Parent-Teacher Meetings and on the Christmas and summer reports by teachers and tutors.
- The importance of attendance is highlighted at assemblies by Year Heads.
- The number of days missed is written clearly on students' reports at Christmas and Summer.
- 'Homework Club' which is run for First Year students benefits those students who may be struggling academically and provides space to complete homework which may not be possible at home. Having all work completed for the following day encourages attendance.
- The school offers a very wide range of extra-curricular activities and encourages all students to get involved in these activities. Involvement in these types of activities in school can encourage students to attend. Students are encouraged to become involved in the Student Council.
- In extreme cases where poor attendance is linked with poor behaviour and social and emotional challenges appropriate programmes may be offered to an individual student to support his\her relationship with school and therefore attendance.

Responding to Poor Attendance:

In order to improve poor attendance the following strategies are implemented:

- Contacting parents either by phone or letter when a student is absent regularly in order to begin a dialogue about attendance.
- Reporting to parents when students are absent without their permission.
- Tracking of students through the Year Heads, Deputy Principal and Principal.
- Discussions with individual students re. Their attendance.
- Having a 'go to person' that the student must report to each morning.
- Setting short term attendance targets for students with unsatisfactory attendance.
- Organise meetings with parents to discuss student attendance.
- Contacting the EWO
- When the school has exhausted all efforts and there is no improvement in attendance a referral will be made to Tusla's Education Welfare Services.
- After 20 days absences a referral will be made to Tusla's Education Welfare Services

Roles and Responsibilities:

Student:

- To punctually attend all scheduled classes unless there is a valid reason for not doing so.
- Present the Year Head with a written note of explanation, using notes in journal, for all absences on day of return to school.
- Produce a written note of explanation, signed by a member of the SMT when signing out at the school office prior to leaving the school premises before the end of the school day.
- If arriving after the start of the school day to sign in at the school office prior to going to class.

Parent/Guardian:

Educational achievements and personal development are enhanced by parent engagement and support for the school. Under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the school is required to retain all written explanations for all absences. Therefore, all absences must be explained in writing stating the reason for the absence. We ask parents/guardians to use the green and yellow notes in the school journal to explain all absences. Parents/Guardians may inform the school office of their son/daughters absences by telephone however, the school is required to retain written explanations for all absences.

Parents are asked:

- To support the school's Attendance Strategy and protocols in accordance with their legal responsibilities as outlined in the Education Welfare Act 2000.
- To ensure the regular and punctual attendance of their children and the avoidance of unwarranted absences.
- To provide an appropriate note of explanation for all student absences.
- To ensure that the school has current contact telephone numbers and alternative emergency numbers so that the school may contact parents/ guardians or other authorised individuals if necessary.
- To acknowledge and where necessary, reply to communications from the school in relation to attendance issues.
- To arrange, where possible, all elective student appointments for after school or during school holidays.
- To set high standards for their child in relation to attendance and punctuality.
- To engage with the school if there is a problem about their child's attendance.

Principal:

- To provide leadership for the creation of a school ethos and climate that is supportive of high levels of engagement and attendance.
- To ensure adequate systems are in place to record attendances and absences of students.
- To monitor attendance records.
- To liaise with Deputy Principals and Year Heads in relation to attendance issues.
- To inform parents/ guardians and students of procedures in relation to student absences or the withdrawal of students from the school.
- To remind students and parents/guardians of the importance of regular attendance and the negative impact of frequent absences on student progress.

Deputy Principal:

- To work in cooperation with the Principal, Year Heads, Class Teachers, Tutors and Administrative Staff to implement the schools Strategy for Attendance.
- To monitor student attendance on a weekly basis.
- To send out a daily text to the parent/guardians of the student who is absent. To collate the responses and send it to the relevant Year Head.
- To be present at the front office each morning to meet students who are late to school and issue sanctions where necessary.
- To liaise with Principal and Year Heads in relation to attendance issues and record all issues on the shared google drive.
- To contact parents outlining concerns re. Student attendance.
- To talk to students re. Attendance.
- Make regular reports re. Student attendance at Year Head meetings.

- To liaise with the Year Heads to reward students who have excellent attendance/punctuality or who have made significant improvements regarding their attendance.
- To make reports to Tusla, as required by statute, re. Student absence.
- To organise meetings and liaise with the E.W.O.

Year Head:

- To monitor on an ongoing basis the attendance record of the students in their year group.
- To collect notes/check the excel sheet sent by the Deputy Principal in relation to students in their year group explaining absence from school.
- To sign notes from parents requesting that students leave school early.
- To liaise with the Principal and Deputy Principal in relation to attendance issues.
- To talk to students in their year group re. Attendance.
- To contact parents, as appropriate, re. The attendance of students in their year group.

Subject Teachers:

- To accurately record attendance at the start of each class period on the ePortal System.
- To amend records where necessary to ensure accuracy.
- To bring concerns in relation to attendance / punctuality to the attention of Year Head, Deputy Principals or Principal.
- Where absenteeism and/or tardiness is impacting on student's academic progress to bring this to the attention of the student and parents\guardians.
- To set high expectations for punctuality and attendance in their classrooms and to impress on students the importance of regular attendance, insist on punctuality and record those who are late for class.
- To acknowledge and greet students when entering the classroom, welcome them back and support them on their return to school.
- To support students on return when they have difficulty attending school

Secretarial Staff:

- To administer the signing in and out of students.
- To produce a weekly attendance report for Principal; Deputy Principals and Year Heads.
- To monitor attendance data inputted by teachers and correct any errors.
- To email teachers with queries re attendance
- To store safely all attendance notes
- To bring any concerns relating to the recording of attendance to the attention of the school Principal/Deputy Principal.

- To record calls from Parents/Guardians with regard to inaccurate recording of attendance and change the students attendance in consultation with the class teacher if required

How the Statement of Strategy will be monitored

- An Annual Report prepared by the Deputy Principal will be presented Board of Management
- A annual review of the Statement of Strategy as part of 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 and the Parent Association.

Success criteria will include:

- Improved attendance rates
- Improved explanations for absence
- Improved punctuality
- Improved communication with parents
- Improved engagement and appreciation of learning

This policy should be read in conjunction with all the schools policies and in particular with:

- The Code of Behaviour Policy
- The Child Protection Statement
- The Anti-Bullying Policy

Policy Ratified by the Board of Management on December 15th 2020

Chairperson of the Board of Management: *Gary Carville*

Review Date: June 202