

Attendance Strategy: Gorey Educate Together N.S., updated 8th October 2014

Introduction

This policy document was drawn up to ensure and maintain a high level of attendance at school by all pupils.

The Board of Management, in consultation with staff and the Parent-Teacher Association, prepared this policy on attendance during the school year 2011/2012. The Board updated the policy during September 2014, taking account of administrative changes (ICT development) within the school.

Rationale

The policy was drafted for the following reasons:

- The Board of Management wishes to comply with legislation, such as:
 - The Education Act, 1998
 - The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000
- The Board of Management wishes to promote and encourage regular attendance as an essential factor in our pupils' learning.

Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the School

Gorey Educate Together endeavours to enable every pupil to actively participate in all school activities. Regular attendance helps to create a stable learning environment for all pupils, and the school hopes to promote co-operation amongst pupils, parents/guardians and staff in maintaining a high level of regular attendance throughout the school year.

Aims

- Raise awareness of the importance of school attendance
- Encourage full attendance where possible
- Identify pupils at risk
- Promote a positive learning environment
- Enable learning opportunities to be availed of

Compliance with School Ethos

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

Recording and Reporting of Attendance and Non-Attendance

All children enrolled (and parent information) are recorded in the Clár Leabhar (Register). The annual attendance of each pupil is also recorded in the Clár Leabhar (Register).

The school attendance of individual pupils is recorded on a daily basis using the 'Aladdin Schools' online software service. Individual, class & whole-school attendance data is also generated by this software service. (Hard copies of data, in traditional Leabhar Rolla/Leabhar Tinrimh, etc. format can also be generated.)

If a pupil does not attend on a day when the school is open for instruction, his/her non-attendance will be recorded by the class teacher. The roll call is taken at 10.20am each morning. Any pupil not present when the roll is called may be marked absent for the day. A note from parents/guardians is required to explain each absence. Such notes will be retained by the class teacher until the end of the school year. At the end of each year, the Deputy Principal will arrange to dispose of these notes.

Parents/guardians are informed in writing (in their child's end-of-year School Report) of the total number of absences during the school year.

The school calculates the attendance of each child four times a year. (Dates provided by the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB.))

At these times, parents/guardians of pupils who have missed 15 – 19 days are informed by letter, detailing number of days missed and the fact that the NEWB may be informed of these absences.

Also at these times, parents/guardians of pupils who have missed 20+ days are informed by letter, detailing number of days missed and the fact that the NEWB will be informed of these absences. (The Deputy Principal will also contact parents by phone to see if the school can be of any assistance in enabling the child to attend. Parents will be reminded of the community support services that are listed in the school's Guide for Parents & Guardians, should they need any additional support.)

Once a child has missed 21+ days, parents will receive the following text message from the school for each additional absence: 'Your child has missed more than 20 days of school. This is of concern to us. Contact the Deputy Principal for info or assistance regarding School Attendance.'

The above letters are updated at each NEWB cut-off date (and if a pupil has missed 3 more days since a previous letter, another letter is sent.)

The school must inform the NEWB where a child has missed 20 or more days in a school year, where attendance is irregular and/or where a child is suspended or expelled.

After submitting the NEWB returns, if there is a concern about a child's serious non-attendance or if a child has missed 25+ days, the Deputy Principal will inform the local Educational Welfare Officer.

Roles and Responsibilities

All members of staff have a responsibility to implement this policy. Class teachers record individual patterns of attendance, and the school's Deputy Principal makes returns to the NEWB.

After submitting the NEWB returns, if there is a concern about a child's serious non-attendance, the Deputy Principal will contact the local Educational Welfare Officer regarding this attendance. If a child's non-attendance is thought to be linked to Child Protection issues, the Designated Liaison Person will be informed and the school's Child Protection Policy will be implemented.

Whole School Strategies to Promote Attendance

Gorey Educate Together NS endeavours to create a safe, welcoming environment for our pupils and their parents/guardians. Parents/guardians are consulted in drafting and reviewing policies, with the aim of promoting a high-level of co-operation amongst the school community. The teaching staff collaborates in the planning and implementation of the Primary School Curriculum, so as to provide a stimulating learning environment for all pupils.

New entrants 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. There is a focus on the value of regular attendance and on the importance of developing good attendance habits from Junior Infants onwards.

School Strategies

A) Communication with Parents

The school circulates the NEWB information booklet "*Don't Let Your Child Miss Out*" to all new parents during an induction meeting. The school also informs all parents of the implications of non-attendance as per the *Education Welfare Act 2000*. (This information is disseminated at least once a year in a school newsletter.) Specific reference is made to the consequences of long absences on children's progress in language acquisition and general academic progress, and also to the fact that children can become unsettled and find it difficult to readapt to their class situation after a long absence.

B) Early identification of children at risk

The Deputy Principal will be vigilant, so that risk students are identified early. These pupils will be identified on receiving information from class teachers on the dates before the NEWB submissions are required. The actions to be taken are described above.

Absences of more than 20 days are automatically referred to Educational Welfare Officers, (through the NEWB Quarterly Absence Returns.)

Reasons for absence are recorded and reported to the NEWB five times during the school year through an online system. An annual report is submitted – not more than six weeks following the end of the school year - detailing the overall level of attendance at the school during that school year. This information may be communicated to the school community through the school newsletter.

School Reports: Guidelines for teachers

Teachers are aware of the following attendance patterns when writing pupils' end of year School Reports, (see NEWB statistics.)

0-4 days absent: *Well above average*

5-10 days absent: *Above average*

11-13 days absent: *Average*

14-19 days absent: *Below average*

20+ days absent: *Well below average*

Transfer to Another School

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 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 and of such matters relating to the child's educational progress as he or she considers appropriate. (This applies to pupils who transfer between primary schools and to pupils who transfer from primary to second-level education.)

Success Criteria

The following will provide some indicators of the success of this policy:

- An increase in annual attendance rates
- Increased Board of Management, staff and parent/guardian awareness of legal obligations under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000

Implementation:

This policy will be implemented immediately following ratification by the Board of Management, and communicated to the Parent-Teacher Association and wider school community.

Ratification and Review:

This document was ratified by the Board of Management as school policy on 8th October 2014.

Review Date: to be confirmed.