

Attendance and Participation Policy

Introduction:

Through its mission statement Our Lady's is committed to providing a caring, safe and disciplined environment in which all students are challenged and supported to reach their educational and personal potential. The first requirement for students to gain the maximum benefit from their secondary education is that they attend regularly and participate fully in school life.

Research has shown that poor attendance and participation are directly linked to low educational achievement, early school leaving and poor employment prospects. While the primary responsibility for ensuring that children attend school regularly lies with parents, the staff of Our Lady's wants to work in partnership with parents to ensure that an environment is created where students look forward to coming to school and participating in school life. In particular, we wish to create conditions where students see that it is in their own interest to attend school regularly.

Where cases of poor attendance and participation arise, research has shown that truancy itself is not the problem but is usually a symptom of other difficulties or obstacles that arise for students. For this reason we are committed to working in a spirit of co-operation with students, parents, and other relevant agencies to help students who have a poor attendance record or who are in danger of developing poor attendance patterns.

This policy is drawn up in fulfilment of the requirements of the Education Welfare Act (2000) which became law in July 2002 and should be read in conjunction with the School's policies on Pastoral Care, Discipline, Admission, Special Educational Needs, Homework and Assessment, and Guidance. It sets out the roles and responsibilities of all the educational partners, the strategies used to improve attendance and participation, the review dates and review mechanisms for the policy.

Role of Parents/Guardians:

- Once a student is enrolled at Our Lady's it is the responsibility of Parents/Guardians to ensure that he/she attends school on each school day.
- A student may not leave school before reaching the age of sixteen or completing three years of post-primary education, whichever is later.
- When a student is absent from school on a school day, parents/guardians must notify the principal, as soon as possible of the reasons for such absence. On a student's return to school after an absence, the school must be provided with a written explanation for the absence. This note must be signed by a parent or guardian only.
- Parents/guardians are asked to co-operate with the school in developing strategies to deal with individual cases of poor attendance or participation involving a student in their care.

- Through the Parents' Association, parents/guardians are part of a whole school approach to the development and review of policies in relation to school attendance and participation.
- Parents are expected to co-operate with the National Education Welfare Board when the Board becomes involved in cases of poor attendance. This is a legal requirement under the Education Welfare Act (2000).

Role of Students

- To attend school for the full day on each day of term
- To be in class and ready to begin work at 9.05am each school morning, to be punctual and to remain in school for the full school day
- To have the correct text books, materials and other equipment for each class.
- To participate fully in each class and to refrain from interfering with other students' learning
- To provide a written explanation (signed by a parent or guardian) in the school journal for each absence. This must be available for inspection by the Class Teacher, Class Tutor, Yearhead, Principal or Deputy Principal.
- Where a student has to leave school for a dental, medical or other appointment, a note signed by a parent or guardian must be provided to the school authorities before the student can be allowed to leave the school. In exceptional circumstances, a parent may contact the school and request permission for a student to be allowed to leave school. Normally a parent/guardian is expected to meet the Principal, Deputy Principal, or Yearhead before a student is allowed to leave. Before a student leaves the school, he/she must sign the book in the secretary's office
- Where a student arrives late on a school day he/she must sign the late book and have the journal stamped by the Principal or Deputy Principal. A written explanation for each instance of lateness must be supplied to the school.
- Where a student arrives back late after lunch a note, signed by a parent or guardian must be provided to the Principal or Deputy Principal.
- Students are strongly discouraged from being involved in part-time employment during the school year as this has been shown to have a serious impact on attendance, participation and exam performance
- Students are reminded that a busy social life during school term combined with inadequate time for sleep lead to poor attention in school and poor exam performance
- Further responsibilities of students in relation to participation are set out in other school policies.

Role of Teachers

- To be part of a whole school approach to promoting good attendance and participation among all students in the school and to co-operate in the

development on an effective policy to improve standards of attendance and participation at Our Lady's

- To foster a classroom atmosphere conducive to positive relationships between teachers and students.
- To develop lesson plans and teaching strategies which, as far as possible, cater for the range of abilities and learning styles in a particular teaching group
- To take and maintain a roll at the beginning of each lesson and to notify the Yearhead, Principal or Deputy at the earliest possible opportunity of any student whose absence from class cannot be explained.
- To communicate concerns in relation to attendance, participation or student welfare to the Principal or Deputy
- To co-operate in the development of strategies to deal with individual cases of poor participation in classes taught by that teacher
- To co-operate in the implementation of strategies outlined in other school policies which have an indirect impact on attendance and participation.

Role of Yearheads

- To Monitor lateness and absenteeism
- To Oversee the academic progress of students
- To Ensure the Year group follow the code of behaviour
- To acknowledge students' achievements informally and through the Award System
- To encourage students to participate in extra curricular activities
- To contact parents/guardians on matters concerning attendance and participation
- In co-operation with the Principal, Deputy and pastoral care team, to support students at risk and address the needs of vulnerable students
- To meet weekly with Principal and Deputy Principal of the school to discuss and review issues concerning the year group
- To meet with tutors on a regular basis
- Additional responsibilities of Yearheads are set out in other school policies.

Role of Class Tutors

- To encourage good attendance and participation among all students in the Tutor group
- To sign and collect notes in relation to student absences during SED time
- To convey concerns in relation to attendance and participation to class teachers, the Yearhead, the Guidance Counsellor and School Management as the need arises.

Role of Attendance Officer (Special Duties Post)

- To ensure that new roll books are ordered and ready for use on the first day of term
- To organise the room rota for distribution of books for each year group in the morning and afternoon of each school day
- To organise students to distribute books both morning and afternoon
- To check that roll books have been distributed each day.

Role of the School

- To maintain a register of students attending the school
- To maintain a record of attendance and non-attendance on each school day or part of a school day of each student registered at the school, which specifies the fact of attendance or failure to attend and the reasons for such failure.
- To support students with difficulties in attending school on a regular basis
- To prepare and implement a school attendance strategy to encourage regular school attendance and an appreciation of learning within the school.
- To liaise with other schools and educational authorities on school attendance issues.
- To prepare and implement a code of behaviour, setting standards of behaviour and disciplinary procedures in the school.
- A student who has not reached the age of 16 years or who has not completed three years of post primary education, cannot be removed from the register except for (a) inter-school transfer and then only after all details regarding attendance and educational progress have been issued to the new school, and (b) where for whatever reason a student is removed from the school under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 (4).
- After admitting a student from another second level school, the Principal will notify the Principal of that school that she/he has registered the student
- The Principal of Our Lady's will notify the NEWB when any of the following occurs:
 - A student has been suspended for a period of not less than 6 days
 - The aggregate number of school days on which a student is absent (for whatever reason during the school year is not less than 20 days
 - Where, for whatever reason a student's name is removed from the register in accordance with the Education (Welfare) Act, Section 20 (4)
 - Where, in the opinion of the Principal, a student is not attending school regularly and there is deemed to be need for remedial action.

Role of the Board of Management

- To ensure that the statutory obligations of the school with regard to attendance and participation are adhered to
- To ensure that a report on attendance levels is submitted annually by the Principal to the Board
- To ensure that all information is collected and issued in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003 and that the information on file should be used only for the purpose for which it was intended.
- To ensure that an evaluation of the effectiveness of the process, strategy and policy regarding attendance is carried out regularly.

The School's Attendance and Participation Strategy.

In keeping with the school's Mission Statement , Our Lady's employs a range of strategies to improve student attendance and participation.

General Strategies

- The development and implementation of policies including Pastoral Care, Code of Behaviour, Anti-Bullying, and Special Educational Needs policies which aim to make the school a safe, caring and welcoming environment for all students
- The development of a broad curriculum to cater for the diversity of interests, abilities and learning styles among our student population. The most recent development has been the introduction of the Leaving Cert Applied course in 2006
- The promotion and development of student centred and active learning approaches to curriculum delivery
- The Pastoral Care, Class Tutor, and Yearhead systems work very effectively to promote a caring environment in the school where each student feels valued and is seen as an important member of the school community
- In keeping with international evidence that students who participate in sport have better attendance rates than other students, the school supports a wide range of sporting and extra-curricular activities

- Early intervention is seen as central to preventing the development of poor attendance and participation habits. The school works closely with parents/guardians once concerns are identified about poor attendance. Individual strategies involving various members of school personnel are employed to address problems as they arise. This is in keeping with research findings that there is no one strategy that will solve all cases of poor attendance and “needs must” strategies can be most effective in many cases.
- The school’s Award System rewards good attendance and participation in all areas of school life.

Specific Actions

- The school works closely with Principals from feeder Primary Schools to ensure that teachers and management at Our Lady’s have good quality information concerning all students who transfer to the school each September. This is of particular importance in relation to students with interests and talents outside those catered for in the mainstream curriculum and students with Special Educational Needs.
- Once concerns about attendance and participation arise in relation to a particular student, the Yearhead, Principal, or Deputy Principal contacts parents/guardians by phone to discuss the issue. Arising from this conversation a strategy is agreed, where possible, to address the issues raised.
- Students who are identified as having difficulties which lead to poor attendance receive counselling from the Guidance Counsellor or the Pastoral Care teacher.
- When a student misses 10 days a letter is sent by the Yearhead to Parents/Guardians expressing concern about the issue.
- When a student has missed 20 days, a letter is sent to Parents and to the NEWB to inform them of the situation.
- School Reports sent home include details of each student’s absences to date.
- Students who arrive late for school repeatedly without explanation or who miss class time without reason may be required to make up the time lost during lunch time or after-school detention.
- Parents or Guardians of students who miss school frequently without explanation may be asked to meet the Board of Management to discuss the reasons for these absences.

Targets for the Policy

At present the average daily absentee rate for the school is 11 %. The school aims to reduce this absentee rate by 2% per year over the next three years.

The Policy will be reviewed in February 2012.