

St. Mary's College Dundalk



School Attendance Policy

Reviewed by Board of Management 6th February 2025.

Mission Statement

St Mary's College is a Catholic secondary school under the patronage of the Marist Fathers. The primary aim of the College through its spiritual and humanistic endeavours is to promote and develop a sense of community where those entrusted to its care can be brought to the fullness of their human potential in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel.

The College, through its academic, pastoral and spiritual undertakings strives to provide for the holistic development and welfare of each of the students in its care.

Introduction

A meaningful education provides every student with the best possible start in life, and it helps them to mature and develop into conscientious young adults.

The purpose of this policy on attendance, punctuality and participation is to encourage regular school attendance, full participation in the education system and gives students good preparation for the responsibilities of third level and employment. Moreover, it endeavours to promote self-discipline, commitment and responsibility and therefore provide for the holistic development of the person.

Rationale

The policy is considered necessary because:

1. There are several legislative requirements arising from the Education Welfare Act 2002.
2. The changing fabric of our society.
3. The role of the National Education Welfare Board.
4. The requirements of the Department of Education and Skills.
5. The educational interests of the students.

Aims

This school policy sets out to:

1. Encourage full attendance where possible.
2. Identify pupils at risk.
3. Raise awareness of the importance of school attendance.
4. Foster an appreciation of learning.
5. Improve communication with parents/guardians.

Expectations

St Mary's College has high expectations regarding attendance and punctuality. Poor attendance and punctuality negatively affects the teaching and learning of all students, i.e. students arriving late and therefore hindering the progression of the class. The College is aware of its responsibilities to those who experience difficulties and through encouragement and support will assist those students to reach their full potential.

Board of Management

The Board of Management of the College recognises that punctual and regular school attendance is an essential precondition of social inclusion and a prerequisite to effective learning. It believes that children should attend school regularly and punctually because school is where they learn and school is where they are safe.

The Board of Management is committed to improving levels of school attendance and punctuality. It aims to do this by:

- a) Promoting the value and importance of regular school attendance.
- b) Reducing all forms of unexplained absenteeism, especially levels of persistent absenteeism (*a child is classified as being a persistent absentee if he/she has an absence rate of 20 or more days in a school year*).

The Board of Management is obliged under the Education Act to make written reports to the Educational Welfare Services of TUSLA during the school year regarding school absences.

Positive Approach to Attendance

- St Mary's College promotes good attendance via a culture of high expectations, encouraging each student to take responsibility for her own learning and achieve her full potential through regular presence in class.
- Students are made aware of the incremental nature of learning and the implications for them of irregular attendance during assemblies, general classes and in SPHE.
- The Year Team/ Senior Management/ Attendance Officer meet with students for whom attendance or punctuality has been identified as an issue. Reports to parents/guardians include a detailed breakdown of attendance and punctuality for the period in question.
- Records of attendance and punctuality are available to view on Compass by logging in using the password for that student.
- The school's reward system acknowledges excellent attendance and punctuality and recognises students who show significant improvement in attendance and punctuality.

The Whole School Approach

- The importance of good attendance and punctuality is stressed to students by Year Teams at assemblies, in class, at school events, sport outings etc.
- Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own attendance by signing St Mary's College Code of Behaviour.
- Parents and Guardians are made aware of their role in relation to their child's attendance and punctuality through the Compass system, college report system, Parents and Guardians information evenings, parent-teacher meetings and via the college journal.
- Parents and Guardians of students whose attendance is problematic will be informed of the number of days missed by their child.
- Parents and Guardians may be invited to the school at any stage if poor unexplained attendance becomes an issue.

Tracking and Responding to Attendance

To track and improve attendance the following strategies are implemented:

- Tracking and meeting of students through the Attendance Officer (where applicable), Year Team and/or Senior Management – the aforementioned will speak with the student regarding their attendance and discuss how the student may catch up on work missed. Parents and Guardians will be contacted when a student has both explained and unexplained absences to begin dialogue about attendance. This can include - Attendance Officer (where applicable), Year Team and/or Senior Management contacting parents / guardians after 10 days, after 20 days.
- Reporting to parents/ guardians by Senior Management and/or Year Head when a student is absent without permission.
- Every effort is made to re-engage and support students who are working to improve their attendance. This can include, but is not limited to: speaking with student, with parents and guardians and with class teachers regarding concerns or to acknowledge improvements. Informing staff of agreed strategies. Offering continued support from Year Team and/or outside agencies.
- Providing subject teachers with information as to which students are particularly at risk of developing or have attendance problems through appropriate updates from the Year Team and information meetings when required. When aware of ongoing issues teachers can adapt lesson content to meet student needs, notice and positively reinforce the benefits of improved attendance.
- 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.
- Contacting the Education Welfare Service following a cumulative absence of 20 days or more.

Monitoring Procedures

Principal, Deputy Principal(s), Attendance Officer, Year Heads, Year Teams and Subject teachers will monitor the implementation of this policy. The principal will report to the Board of Management regarding Attendance.

Success Criteria

- Improved attendance over a sustained period.
- Reduced disruption to classes.
- Compass will provide statistics on late arrivals and absences regularly.

St Mary's College Attendance Policy

- 1. Roles and Responsibilities.*
- 2. How attendance is monitored.*
- 3. Participation.*
- 4. Target setting and targets.*
- 5. Strategies to achieve targets.*
- 6. Sanctions.*
- 7. Legislation.*

1. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

St Mary's College has a positive and proactive approach towards attendance matters and encourages parents/guardians to take an active role in the schooling of their children.

ROLES OF STAKEHOLDERS

A. Responsibilities of Board of Management.

St Mary's College has a positive and proactive approach towards attendance matters and encourages parents/guardians to take an active role in the schooling of their children. The roles and responsibilities of students, parents, teachers and the board of management are explained fully in this Attendance Policy.

It is a legal requirement that schools will:

- *Be open for 166 sessions each school year.*
- *Maintain attendance registers.*
- *Accurately record and monitor all absenteeism and lateness.*
- *Clearly distinguish between absence, which is authorised, and absence that is unauthorised.*
- *Submit, absence returns to the National Educational Welfare Board.*
- *Liaise with the National Educational Welfare Officer regarding absence issues and meet with relevant families.*
- *Inform the National Educational Welfare Board of students who are suspended from school for six days or more.*

B. Senior Leadership Team

- The Principal has overall responsibility for students, including attendance.
- The Deputy Principals liaise with Principal on all issues regarding students, including attendance.

- To ensure the operation of the attendance system effectively and efficiently using Compass and ensuring the respective attendance alerts are issued to Parents/Guardians.
- To monitor attendance and participation and to support students who have poor attendance or participation.
- To co-ordinate the identification of students who may need assistance to fully participate or attend school regularly.
- To report to the board of management regarding attendance levels and set targets for attendance and participation.

C. Year Head

- Monitor attendance in Year Group and make students aware of importance of regular attendance.
- Make contact with parents/guardians in an effort to improve attendance and ascertain reasons for non-attendance.
- When necessary make referrals to Student Support Team
- Encourage parents/guardians to adopt a positive attitude to school attendance.

D. Year Team Member

- Ensure that students are aware of the importance of good attendance and the procedures involved in recording partial and full day absences.

E. Subject Teacher

- To operate the attendance system effectively using Compass.
- To mark students doing extra-curricular work or sport appropriately and where necessary.
- To regularly remind students about the importance of full and punctual attendance for effective learning to occur in the classroom.

F. Student Support Team

- Take referrals from Year Heads and advise Principal on further action which may need to be taken. These include intervention by Student Support Team or referral to E.W.O.
- Monitor students referred on an ongoing basis.

G. School Attendance Officer

- To track attendance on an ongoing basis.
- To monitor absence, including full and half-day absences.
- Early identification of “at risk” students.
- To meet with poor attending students to ascertain reasons for non-attendance and advise on how to improve.
- Notify home when 10 and 15 absences have been reached.
- Notify E.W.O. when 20 absences or 6 days (cumulative) suspension have been reached.
- Inform Principal, Deputy Principal or Year Head of serious/chronic late coming.
- Be available to meet with senior leadership team and E.W.O. regarding attendance related at risk students.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF STUDENTS

- Students are expected to be in school by 08:40 and remain for all class periods. No student is permitted to leave the school grounds during the school day, unless on specific College outings.
- All students are expected to comply with this policy.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS

- Parents/Guardians are responsible in law for ensuring that their children attend the school at which they are registered.
- Under the Education Welfare Act 2000, parents/guardians must inform the school if their children will be absent from school on a school day and the reason for the absence, for example, illness; in St Mary's College parents/guardians are required to use Compass for this purpose.
- Parents/Guardians must inform the school in writing by way of uploading an Attendance Note via the online platform Compass. If further explanation is deemed necessary by the parent/guardian, they may telephone the college or send an email to the appropriate person = S.L.T. member, Attendance Officer, Year Head, Year Team member and/or Subject Teacher.
- A notification is issued to Parents/Guardians by 9.35am daily via email notifying them of a student's absence from school. Weekly reminder emails shall also be circulated to Parents / Guardians via Compass by the Attendance Officer; parents/guardians must take note of these correspondences.
- Where students have an appointment e.g. medical/dental, during the school day, Parents/Guardians must upload a 'Permission to Leave' note onto Compass, authorising the student to leave school for the appointment window. Students must be collected and signed out by the parent/guardian on these occasions.
- The College and the Educational Welfare Services of TUSLA **strongly** advises against taking children out of school to go on holiday during term-time.
- Parents/guardians have a legal obligation to ensure that their child attends a school or otherwise receives an education. If the Educational Welfare Services of TUSLA considers that a parent/guardian is failing in his or her obligation, it must send the parent/guardian a '*School Attendance Notice*' warning that legal action will follow if the child does not attend school regularly. Before doing this, it must make reasonable efforts to consult with the parents/guardians and the child. If the parent/guardian fails to comply, he or she may be prosecuted. If convicted, the parent/guardian may be fined and/or imprisoned for a month and fined for each subsequent day that he or she fails to send the child to school. If the parent/guardian claims that suitable alternative education is being provided, he or she must prove this. It will be a defence for the parents/guardian to show that they have made all reasonable efforts to send the child to school - in such cases, the Health Service Executive (HSE) must be informed.
- Parents/guardians can do a great deal to support the regular and punctual attendance of their children. Parents/guardians should:
 - Ensure that all contact details are up to date.
 - Take an active interest in their child's school life and work.
 - Check and sign the school journal each week.
 - Attend parents' evenings and other school events.
 - Ensure that their child completes their homework and goes to bed at an appropriate time.
 - Be aware of letters from school that their child brings home.

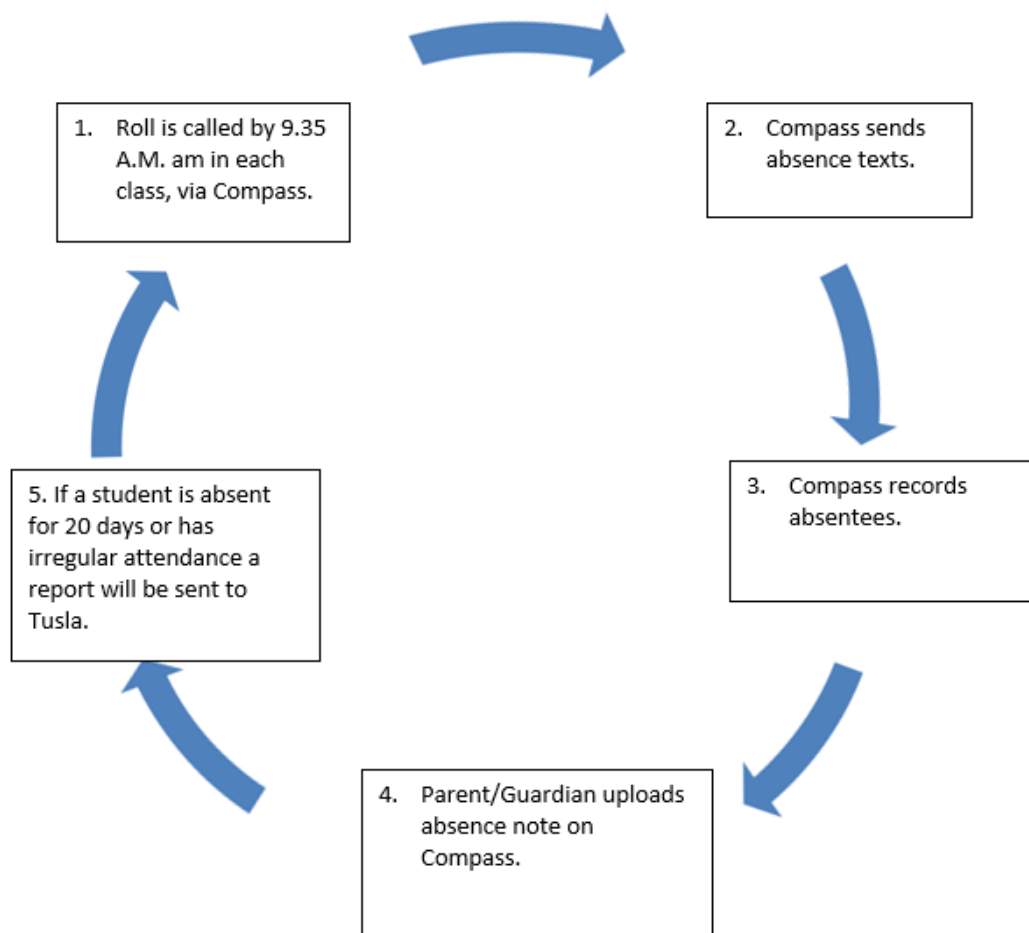
- Ensure that their child arrives at school on time each day, dressed in school uniform and fit to learn.
- Make all appointments for their children outside of school time where possible.
- Ensure that their child only misses school for reasons that are unavoidable or justified, such as illness.
- Always notify the school early on the morning of any absence, via Compass.
- Avoid booking family holidays during the school term – examinations will not be rescheduled for students who are on holidays.
- Talk to the school if they are concerned that their child seems reluctant to attend.
- Avoid collecting their child unexpectedly from the College as this causes significant disruption to teaching and learning.

2. HOW ATTENDANCE IS MOITORED

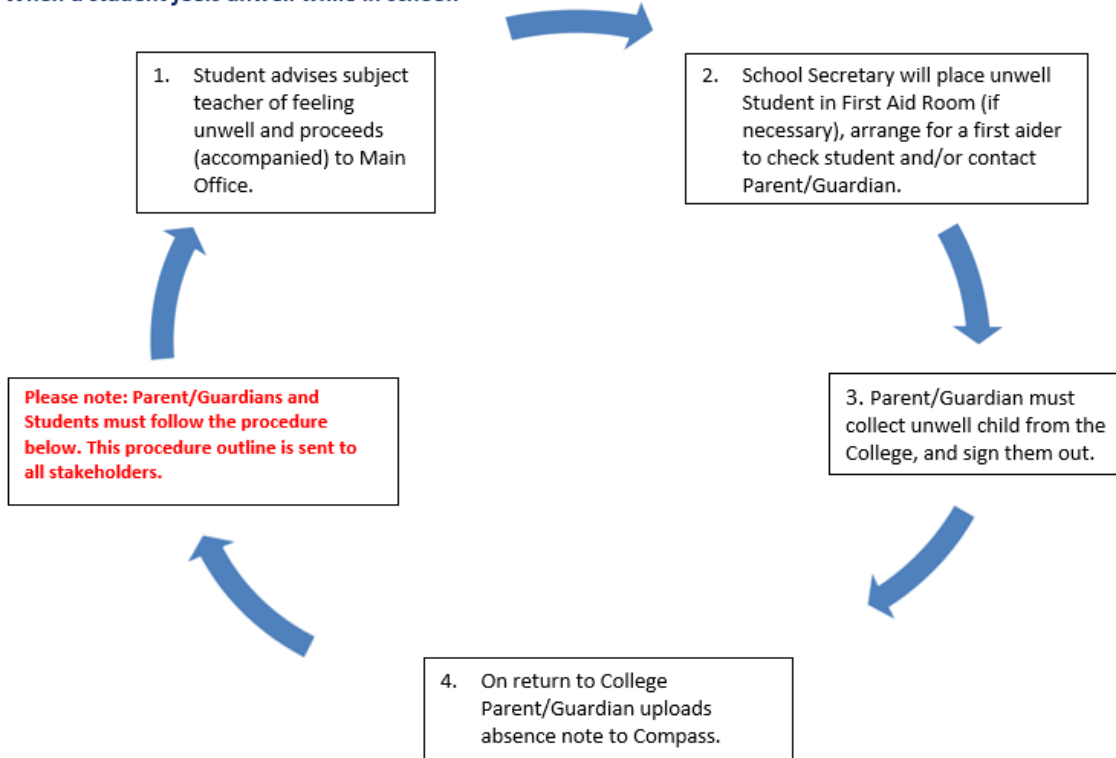
GENERAL PROCEEDURES

Summary of the main elements of the school's approach to attendance:

When student is absent from the College:



When a student feels unwell while in school:



When a Student feels unwell.... Correct College procedure.

Please be aware when a student is unwell or wishes to contact home, St Mary's College has procedures in place to ensure each child's welfare:

- 1. Students must contact their Year Head/a Member of Year Team/a Teacher/an SNA.*
- 2. Following this, the Year Head/Member of Year Team/Teacher/SNA will take the student to the College First Aid room/Main Office, where appropriate/necessary. Here they will be assessed further by a qualified First Aider, when/where available.*
- 3. It is at this point the student will use the Main Office telephone to contact home if necessary.*

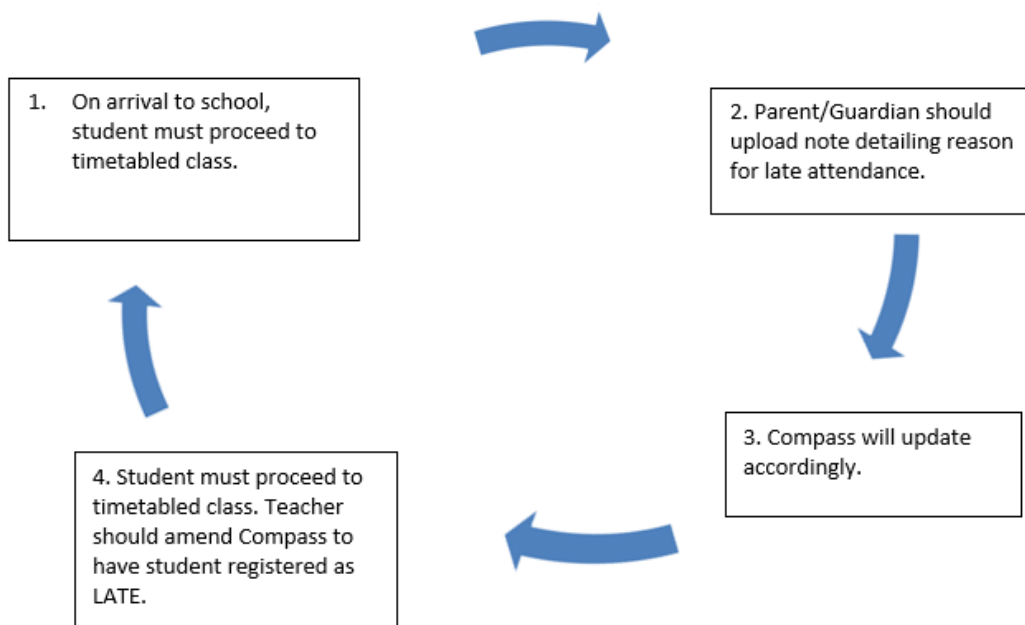
We have the above procedure in place to ensure the safety of all our students and to ensure all students are properly cared for and supervised.

There have been isolated incidents of some students contacting home via their mobile phones in bathrooms etc. In such instances, Parents and Guardians often arrive in reception to collect their child and we are uninformed of any situation. This is not acceptable and compromises our Acceptable Use Policy, which is designed to protect the welfare of all our students. In such cases where mobile phones have been used improperly, the college reserves the right (in line with our Code of Behaviour) to temporarily confiscate such phones.

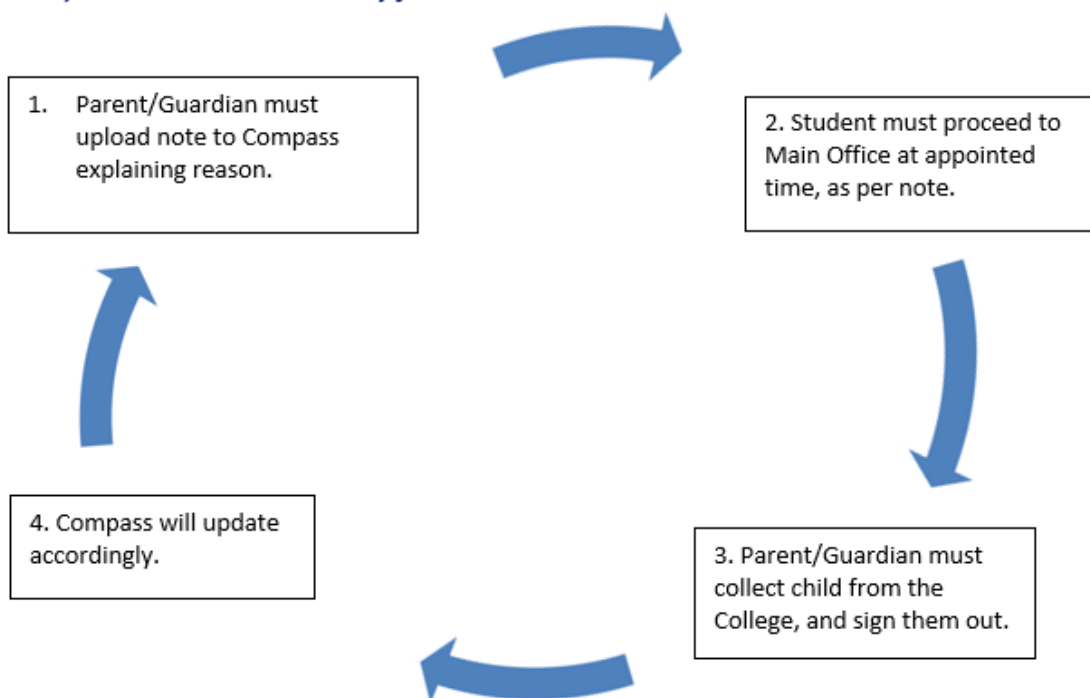
PLEASE NOTE, IN ST MARY'S COLLEGE THE USE OF THE MAIN OFFICE TELEPHONE WILL ALWAYS BE AVAILABLE TO ANY STUDENT TO CALL HOME WHEN NECESSARY.

We ask for our Parents and Guardians cooperation in advising students of the correct procedure to follow when they are feeling unwell while in school.

If a student is late for class:



If a student, needs to be excused early from school:



2.1 PROCEDURE - DAILY MORNING REGISTRATION

- Students are required to be in class at 08:50 sharp, following this, the register is taken in each class group using Compass.
- Compass registers are taken for all class periods by the subject teacher.
- It is the student's responsibility to ensure that their name is marked in every register.
- Discretion may be allowed regarding traffic conditions, the weather and other unforeseen circumstances, provided there is notification from parents.

2.2 PROCEDURE – REGISTRATION FOLLOWING ABSENCE FOR ALL STUDENTS

- In the event of an absence, the Parent/Guardian must upload a note of explanation on Compass detailing reason for the absence.

2.3 PROCEDURE – REGISTRATION FOR STUDENTS ATTENDING APPOINTMENTS DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

- If students who wish to leave the school early for an appointment (e.g. Doctor, Dentist etc.), Parents/Guardians must upload a note on Compass detailing reason for the absence.

2.4 PROCEDURE – REGISTRATION FOR STUDENTS WHO LEAVE SCHOOL DUE TO ILLNESS DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

- In the event of a student becoming genuinely ill while at school, their parents/guardians will be contacted for further instruction. The student should remain in First Aid room or another designated place during this time. Please see '*Where a Student is feeling unwell...Correct College Procedure*' notice above.

2.5 PROCEDURE – REGISTRATION FOR STUDENTS WHO MISS REGISTRATION OR CLASS REGISTER DUE TO EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

- Teachers taking groups for extra-curricular activities must first create an '*Event Roll*' on Compass, so that these groups can be registered and excused correctly. Subject teachers are advised to take note of these Event registers.

3. PARTICIPATION

3.1 Participation helps to develop friendships and enhances the experience of school. St Mary's College actively encourages every student to participate in school life.

- Students are expected to attend all classes and to participate to the best of their ability.
- A wide range of extra-curricular activities are undertaken.
- Activities take place during lunch time as well as after school.
- Participation is recognised, praised, publicised and rewarded.

3.2 Full attendance and participation in timetabled P.E. classes is required. Students who are unable to participate fully in P.E. classes due to medical circumstances will be asked to furnish their PE teacher with a parental/guardian note or medical certificate.

3.3.1 It is the responsibility of students who are absent from class/school for any reason to find out details of work missed. This applies also to students who miss class due to sporting or other extra-curricular activities.

4. TARGET SETTING

The Board of Management, Senior Management, and Year-Heads/Attendance Officers will set targets regarding attendance, punctuality and participation.

Students are consulted on the attendance and punctuality rules through their participation on the Student Council. *Please see Attendance Strategy in appendix.*

5. STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE TARGETS

- The whole-school focus on wellbeing.
- Building a warm, caring, respectful and compassionate atmosphere in which every person feels accepted and valued.
- The provision of an excellent extra-curricular activity package that has something for everyone and encourages the participation of all students.
- A modern, meaningful curriculum, which is inclusive of all students.
- Well-structured Student Support Team, Year Team, Guidance and Student Care system.
- Transition Year Programme, Leaving Certificate Applied, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.
- A comprehensive registration attendance system.
- Supervised Senior and Junior Evening Study.
- Supervised Sixth Year Academic Study.
- The promotion of involvement by students in extra-curricular activities and other areas of school life.
- The maintenance of close links between the Senior Management, St Mary's College Student Council and St Mary's College Parents Association.
- The identification of students who are 'at risk' of dropping out at an early stage.
- The establishment of closer contacts between the College and the families concerned.
- The co-ordination with the Educational Welfare Services of TUSLA aimed at promoting and encouraging attendance.

6. SANCTIONS FOR STUDENTS IN BREACH OF ATTENDANCE POLICY

Five lates – Student receives 'After school detention'.

Ten lates – Student receives 'Saturday Detention'.

Every subsequent five lates – Student receives another 'Saturday Detention'.

- The student may be placed on 'Lates Detention'.
- Persistent latecomers may be placed on 'Friday Evening Detention'.

- Un-authorised absence during the school day (truancy/internal truancy) may result in Evening Detention or Suspension or the student may be required to attend school on certain date(s) when the other student cohort are not required to be in attendance, e.g. Saturday.
- Absences will be notified to the E.W.B., as per the Education Welfare Act 2002.

7. LEGISLATION

The Education Welfare Act 2000

The main provisions of the Education Welfare Act are as follows:

- 1) Schools are required to establish and maintain a school register, showing attendance or non-attendance for each student.
- 2) Every child must attend school regularly up to sixteen years of age or complete at least three years of education in post primary, whichever comes later.
- 3) The act established a National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), now Educational Welfare Services of TUSLA. The NEWB/ Educational Welfare Services of TUSLA has appointed Education Welfare Officers to work with schools to encourage school attendance.
- 4) The Act stipulates that the school is obliged to report to the Educational Welfare Services of TUSLA (formerly to NEWB) every time:
 - It decides to expel a student
 - A student has been absent for 20 days or more cumulatively
 - A student's attendance causes concern for the school
 - A student's name is removed from the school's register
 - A student has been suspended for six days consecutively.
- 5) Schools must prepare a student absence report. This information must be submitted as per Educational Welfare Services of TUSLA's schedule in summary format for all students.
- 6) Absences must be categorised under six headings:

• Illness	• Holiday
• Urgent Family Reasons	• Suspended
• Appointment	• Expelled
• Other (Religion etc.)	• Transfer to another school
• Unexplained	

Signed: 

Chairperson, Board of Management, St. Mary's College

Date: 6th February 2025

APPENDIX

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE STRATEGY 2019-2020:



Template for the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance

Name of school	St Mary's College
Address	St. Mary's Road, Dundalk, Co. Louth.
Roll Number	63890R
The school's vision and values in relation to attendance	St Mary's College recognises the importance of school attendance. We aim to develop an environment where students can reach their full potential. Students are actively encouraged to attend school and participate fully in school life.
The school's high expectations around attendance	It is expected that students will attend school regularly and will be absent only when necessary.
How attendance will be monitored	• Roll is taken in each class by teacher. • Register is taken electronically by Class Teacher each class period on e-Portal. This is collated by the office administrator and a daily copy of morning and afternoon attendance is provided to the Senior Cycle Attendance Officer (AO) /Year Head. • A student who attends school after registration must be signed in as late by the classroom teacher. • All student sign-outs are recorded. No student may leave the school campus without a record of being collected and signed out by a parent/guardian. • Twice-yearly reports to TUSLA. • Annual absence rates calculated.
Summary of the main elements of the school's approach to attendance: • Target setting and targets • The whole-school approach • Promoting good attendance • Responding to poor attendance	1. 2016-2017 attendance rate is 93%. <u>Would like to improve this to >94%.</u> 2017-2018 attendance rate is 94.1%. 2018-2019 attendance rate is 94.9% 2. 2016-2017 chronic absence is 15% <u>Reduce chronic absence (>20 days) <14%</u> 2017-2018 chronic absence is 11.5% 2018-2019 chronic absence is 10.5% 3. <u>Reduce sign-outs (partial attendance) by 10%</u> <u>Sign-outs (partial attendance) has reduced by 21%</u> Strategies to promote good attendance: • Attendance prizes at award ceremonies/whole class attendance initiatives. • Parents informed of days absent on school reports at Christmas & Summer.

	- On-going attendance is viewable by parents on Compass. - School Completion Programme. - Breakfast club-available to all students. - After School Study/First Year Homework Club. - Whole-class attendance and punctuality competitions. Response to poor attendance: Role of Senior Cycle A.O.: - When a student reaches 5 days absence the parent is web-texted that 5 days of absence have been noted and recorded. - When a student reaches 10 days absence the A.O. phones the parent to discuss the attendance issue and standard letter which includes a record of absences is sent to the parent. - When a student reaches 15 days absence, the A.O. arranges for a meeting with the parent to discuss the attendance issue. - When a student reaches 20 days absence, the A.O. consults with the Year Head. If under 16, a record of absences is forwarded to the NEWB using the standard form. - Friday / detention for lack of punctuality - Role of Year Team (Junior Cycle): Year-Head, Academic Monitors track attendance. Tiered interventions. - Webtext / Letters home to inform parents. - Meeting with parents if problem persists. - Referral to Student Support Team - Referral to EWS.
School roles in relation to attendance	Class teacher- takes class roll Year Head/Academic Monitor oversee, and promote good attendance. Attendance Officer: Responsible for senior attendance. Year Head Meeting - weekly meeting where attendance. Student Support Team Meeting – weekly meeting where attendance is on the agenda. - Strategies to promote attendance and participation. Principal-overview of attendance/EWS, reports/analysis of data.
Partnership arrangements (parents, students, other schools, youth and community groups)	Principal, Deputy Principals connect to JLO to promote attendance awareness.
How the Statement of Strategy will be monitored	Statement of Strategy for School Attendance will be evaluated annually.
Review process and date for review	Statement of Strategy for School Attendance will be evaluated in June of each year and a review of plan will take place at the beginning of the school year from September 2018.

Date the Statement of Strategy was approved by the Board of Management	
Date the Statement of Strategy submitted to Tusla	21.01.2020

Principal: *Alan Caven*

Date: 21.01.2020.