

Scoil Thomais, Laurel Lodge, Castleknock, Dublin 15

School Attendance Policy - updated 2017

1. Rationale for the Policy

Whilst there is a very strong tradition of good attendance at school in Scoil Thomáis it is important that parents/guardians are fully aware of their obligations to ensure that their children have consistent and punctual attendance at school. Regular attendance and punctuality at school is essential in order for each child to fulfil his/her educational potential. The Board of Management and school staff promote and support regular attendance and punctuality at school and consider it as an essential factor in maximizing pupil progress at school.

Scoil Thomáis School Attendance Policy is based on the obligations arising from the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 (section 22) and on the guidance provided in *Developing the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance: Guidelines for Schools* - Tusla 2016. The policy also takes into account the updated DES requirements for recording and reporting on school attendance as per Circular 33/2015. This updated policy was drawn up by the Principal & Deputy Principal in consultation with the Assistant Principals/Pastoral Care team. It was circulated to schools staff and representatives of parents and to the BOM for comment in advance of its ratification.

2. Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the School

Scoil Thomáis seeks to enable every pupil to actively participate in all areas of school life both curricular and extra curricular. Regular attendance and punctuality at school helps to create a stable learning environment for all pupils. The school management and staff expect the co-operation of pupils, parents/guardians and staff in encouraging and maintaining a high level of regular attendance by pupils throughout the school year.

3. Aims and Objectives of this policy are as follows:

- To support and encourage high rates of school attendance and punctuality at all class levels
- To raise awareness amongst parents and guardians about the importance of school attendance and punctuality
- To ensure that pupils are registered as enrolled in the school and that pupil's attendance is recorded daily and that attendance records are monitored regularly by the school.
- To identify pupils at risk of poor attendance and those at risk of underperformance at school due to attendance and punctuality issues
- To promote a positive learning environment to enable all pupils to avail fully of learning opportunities
- To comply with the requirements of the relevant legislation in relation to school attendance
- To develop supportive links between the school and families at risk of attendance and punctuality issues.

4. Roles and Responsibilities in relation to School Attendance

The Principal, Deputy Principal, Teachers and other School Staff, in consultation with Parents, and the BOM, are responsible for the implementation of this policy. It will be the responsibility of the Principal Teacher/Deputy Principal monitor overall school attendance levels in the school. Assistant Principals and Class teachers are responsible for monitoring individual pupil's attendance and for identifying and reporting on concerns for 'at risk' pupils.

Parents/ Guardians are strongly discouraged from taking children out of school for holidays during the school term. All such absences will be noted and teachers are not obliged to assign school work for such pupils whilst on holidays.

The Education Welfare Act 2000 (amended by the Child and Family Agency Act 2013) obligates schools to undertake the following actions in respect of school attendance matters:

- Maintain a record of students attending the school
- Record school attendance and notify the relevant Educational Welfare Officer of issues relating to attendance
- Support students with difficulties in attending school on a regular basis
- Prepare and implement a school attendance strategy to encourage, in a positive way, regular school attendance and an appreciation of learning within the school
- Prepare and implement a code of behaviour, standards of behaviour and disciplinary procedures for the school.
- Liaise with other schools and relevant bodies on school attendance issues

IMPORTANT NOTE: Scoil Thomáis uses the Aladdin Student Management System as approved by the BOM to manage pupil information and to record pupil daily attendance. As and from 2017/18 school year, Scoil Thomáis no longer records pupil attendance in the Leabhar Rolla. All previous Leabhair Rolla are kept on the school premises as valuable school records and may be accessed as necessary by school personnel.

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5. PUNCTUALITY - BEING AT SCHOOL ON TIME AND FOR THE FULL SCHOOL DAY

School begins at 9am and ends at 1.40pm (Infants) and 2.40pm (1st - 6th Classes). All pupils and staff are expected to be in school on time and to remain at school for the full school day. School gates open at 8.50am to allow for the orderly assembly of pupils in the yard - younger pupils should be accompanied by a parent/guardian/responsible adult coming to school. Pupils should line up in their class lines and await collection by teacher at the start of the school day. It is the responsibility of the school to maintain a record of children who arrive late to school, leave school early or are collected late. This can be recorded on the Aladdin system by the class teacher or by the school office.

- ***Pupils who are in class for Roll Call (normally 9.10am) are marked as present for the school day.***
- A pupil will be recorded as being **late** to school if they arrive after 9.10am Roll Call. Teacher may access the attendance record to update the Aladdin system to note a pupil's late arrival to school and will note the time of arrival and the reason for being late if applicable.
- Parents/guardians must contact the school office if their child needs to leave class early during the school day. Parents should refrain from collecting pupils early from school unless it is for good reason.
- Class Teachers will monitor patterns of attendance and punctuality and will bring concerns to the attention of parents/guardians at an early stage if necessary
- If punctuality continues to be an issue then teachers should bring the issue to the attention of the Assistant Principal/ Pastoral Care teacher for the class level who will alert the Principal/Deputy Principal.
- In cases of concern about school attendance the Education Welfare Officer/TUSLA will be contacted.

6. SCHOOL ATTENDANCE - MEANS BEING IN SCHOOL EVERY DAY (UNLESS FOR A GOOD REASON)

- **Recording and Reporting of Attendance and Non-Attendance**

Pupils are expected to be at school in time each day. In Scoil Thomáis the attendance of each pupil is recorded electronically on the ***Aladdin School Management System*** on a daily basis in accordance with Circular 33/2015. Attendance data for each class is recorded automatically, by the same system replacing the Leabhar Tinrimh (Attendance Book). A monthly hard copy is printed, signed by the Deputy Principal and filed for school records. The Deputy Principal ensures that the obligatory school returns in relation to pupil attendance are made on a regular basis as directed by Education Welfare Service/TUSLA.

The ***Primary Online Database*** (POD) of the Dept of Education and Skills holds relevant data in respect of each pupil such as PPSN, name, Mother's Maiden Name, Address, Date of Birth, Gender, Nationality, Religion, Ethnic background whether in receipt of learning support or Irish exemption. School Attendance Data may be recorded on POD also.

Parents/guardians are informed in writing in the end of year (June) report of the total number of absences during the school year. The school is obliged to inform the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) in writing; where a child has missed 20 or more days in a school year, attendance is irregular, a pupil is removed from the school register and a child is suspended or expelled for 6 days or more.

The following strategies are in place in Scoil Thomáis to help foster an appreciation of learning and good attendance:

- The **school calendar** is publicised to parents (via the school website, school journal and monthly newsletters) in advance of the beginning of each school year to ensure parents are aware of the school terms and closures.
- Class teachers record a pupil's absence, category of absence and reason - if any - on the school's Aladdin system. **Attendance is called in all classes at 9.10am each morning.** Pupils who come to school after Roll Call are marked Absent - however the teacher can record that the pupil arrived late and note the time and the reason for the late as necessary. The absence will be recorded as a LATE.
- **Parents must provide Class Teacher with a written note of explanation of their child's absence on return to school** (such as illness, family event, appointments etc). All notes are retained for the school year by class teacher.. Parents/guardians should also inform teacher in writing if their child needs to leave class early during the school day. **Parents should call in person to the school office and inform the secretary when seeking to collect children early and the reason for the early withdrawal.**
- The Pastoral Care Team of Principal, Deputy & Assistant Principals **regularly review pupil attendance and punctuality records** with particular focus on unexplained absences and pupils who are regularly late. Parents/guardians are contacted to discuss the matter and an improvement plan may be put in place.
- The school office will **contact parents/guardians of target pupils who are presenting with persistent school absences** on a daily basis to check if the absence is warranted.

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7. Attendance Rewards: The school is looking at initiating an attendance awards system with certificates to be presented to (i) junior pupils to encourage the development of good attendance patterns and (ii) to reward excellent attendance records at senior classes.

8. Identification of students who are at risk of developing school attendance problems - categorised as follows:

- a) Irregular Absences: 5 days absent in a 20-day period without a valid reason.
- b) Seriously Irregular Absences: 10 days absent in a 20-day period without a valid reason.
- c) Chronic Absences: 15+ days absent in a 20-day period without a valid reason.

For Irregular and Seriously Irregular Absences the Class Teacher will make contact with parents to discuss the attendance matter and to ensure that improvement strategies are put in place by parents.

For Chronic Absentees the Pastoral Care Teacher and/or Class Teacher will inform the Principal. In such cases parents will be required to meet with the Pastoral Care Teacher and/or Principal to discuss the matter.

School Attendance rates and absence reasons are recorded and reported to TUSLA in accordance with the current reporting requirements during the school year through the TUSLA online system. An Annual Report is submitted to TUSLA at the end of the school year - detailing the overall levels of attendance at the school during that school year.

Where deemed necessary the Principal will refer cases of ongoing and chronic absences and poor punctuality to the Educational Welfare Officer/TUSLA. In such cases the Education Welfare Officer (following all reasonable efforts by TUSLA to consult with the child's parents and with the Principal of the school) may serve a 'School Attendance Notice' on any parent who he/she concludes is failing or neglecting to cause the child to attend the school. A successful case taken against the parent/guardian may result in a monetary fine and/or imprisonment.

9. Required Notification for Pupils Transferring between Primary Schools & to Secondary Schools.

- **Pupils Transferring TO SCOIL THOMÁIS from another School**

Under Section 20 of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), the Principal of Scoil Thomáis must notify the Principal of the child's previous school that the child is now registered in this school. (Confirmation of Enrolment Letter)

- **Pupils Transferring FROM SCOIL THOMÁIS to Another School**

The Principal of the receiving school is required to notify Scoil Thomáis that an incoming child is a registered pupil in the new school. A copy of the pupil's latest school report (detailing academic progress, school attendance etc) may be sent to the new school by request with the permission of parents.

- **Pupils Transferring FROM SCOIL THOMÁIS to Secondary School**

Upon receipt of written verification of enrolment and a written request for school reports for named pupils the Principal/Deputy Principal will ensure that all relevant school reports regarding attendance, behaviour and academic records of pupils are forwarded to secondary schools in the format of the NCCA Education Passport as necessary.

10. Success Criteria

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

- Continued high rates of school attendance and punctuality in Scoil Thomáis
- Increased Parent/guardian awareness of their legal obligations in relation to school attendance and punctuality under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.
- Positive reinforcement of 'very good school attendance' and 'improved school attendance' at all class levels
- Monitoring and tracking of pupils who are 'at risk of ongoing patterns of poor school attendance' by Class Teachers and by the Pastoral Care Team with emphasis on early intervention to address identified concerns.
- Good practice and procedures in relation to electronic recording of daily pupil attendance (Aladdin System).
- Ongoing liaison with the Educational Welfare Officer /TUSLA to address cases of concern at an early stage.

The policy will be implemented for the 2017/18 school year and will be reviewed as necessary thereafter.

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management at its meeting on 7th November 2017.