



Statement of Strategy for School Attendance

Milford National School, Castletroy, Co Limerick.

Our Vision and Values in Relation to Attendance

The mission of Milford National School is to promote the fullest possible development of every child as a whole person. To help achieve this ideal, Milford School provides a broad education in line with the curriculum guidelines for Primary Schools, including coherent and practical planning for the inclusion of children with special needs, allowing each child to reach the highest level of academic attainment consistent with his or her abilities or talents, so that the school community is enriched by the unique gifts and talents of all its students.

Milford School recognises that the parents/guardians are the primary educators and that it is only through co-operation between them and the school that our ideal can be realised. It also recognises that there is a clear and direct relationship between regular school attendance and pupil progress. Milford N.S. is aware of its responsibilities to those pupils who experience difficulties and through encouragement and support will assist those pupils to reach their full potential.

School starts at 8:55am for all children and ends at 1.40pm for Infant classes and 2.40pm for pupils in First to Sixth Class. Milford N.S. follows the standardised school year as laid out by the Department of Education and Skills.

Expectations

Under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000^s, parents are responsible for making sure their child receives an education. In this regard, the Board of Management of Milford N.S. has high expectations regarding attendance and punctuality. Children are encouraged to come to school every day and the school's approach to, and promotion of, attendance is outlined below. Tusla and the Board of Management of Milford N.S. strongly advise that parents do not take their children out of school for holidays during term time. Holidays should be taken during the allocated holiday time as outlined in the school calendar.

The Board of Management acknowledges that there are cases where a child has a genuine reason for absenteeism, including; illness, urgent family reasons, expulsion, suspension, or transfer to another school.

How Attendance is Monitored

All class teachers take a daily roll call which is recorded on the school's data software programme 'Aladdin'. If a pupil does not attend on a day when the school is open, their absence will be recorded by the class teacher on the Aladdin system. If the teacher has been made aware of the reason for absence, this is also recorded on the Aladdin system. If a teacher is concerned about pupil absences, they alert relevant staff; i.e. the Deputy Principal or Principal. The roll call is taken at 9.50am each morning. The annual attendance of each pupil is recorded on Aladdin and is printed in the end of year school reports.

Late arrivals and early departures are discouraged unless absolutely necessary. All late arrivals will be recorded on the Aladdin system. For early departures, a parent/carer must sign their child out of school at the early departures record book at school reception.

How Punctuality is Monitored

School begins at 8:55am. All pupils and staff members are expected to be on time. All pupils arriving late to school will be recorded on the Aladdin system. This will be inputted by the class teacher on their respective Aladdin system. The school will contact parents/carers in the event of children being consistently late. The school principal is obliged, under the Education Welfare Act, to report children who are persistently late to TUSLA Child and Family Agency. The annual punctuality of each pupil is printed in the end of year school reports.

Our School's Approach to Attendance

Whole School Approach

At Milford National School, children, parents, staff and the Board of Management work in partnership to provide the best education for our pupils. We believe that consistent attendance is necessary to facilitate the education of the children. The whole-school approach to attendance is as follows:

- promoting a positive learning environment
- child attendance is inputted daily by each class teacher before 9.50am
- promoting a school culture where every child feels valued, trusted and respected facilitating children to have a voice in school matters
- encouraging full attendance where possible
- encouraging punctuality
- fostering an appreciation of learning
- raising awareness of the importance of school attendance
- raising everyone's expectations of our school attendance
- ensuring that child attendance is recorded daily
- ensuring that children are registered accurately and efficiently
- ensuring awareness of and compliance with the requirements of the relevant legislation
- identifying children at risk
- develop, subject to available resources, links between the school and the families of children who may be at risk of attendance problems. Letters are sent home to parents if their child has missed 15 days. Another letter is sent home if a pupil has missed 20 day or more informing parents that social services will be notified.
- identifying and removing, insofar as is practicable, obstacles to school attendance
- rewarding good attendance and improvements in attendance

School Attendance Statistics & Targets

The following data was collected from a review of the attendance figures for the previous three school years:

- The average attendance in the 2014-2015 school year was 95.1%. 8.5% of pupils missed more than 20 days in the school year. The month with the lowest attendance was June (92.8%).
- The average attendance in the 2015-2016 school year was 94.7%. 8.8% of pupils missed more than 20 days in the school year. The month with the lowest attendance was June (91.9%).
- The average attendance in the 2016-2017 school year was 95.4%. 6.6% of pupils missed more than 20 days in the school year. The month with the lowest attendance was June (92.2%).

Upon reflection on these statistics, we have set the following targets:

1. To maintain the the current average attendance (95%)
2. To reduce the percentage of pupils who miss 20 or more days in a school year. Less than 6% in 2017-2018, less than 5.5% in 2018-2019 and less than 5% in 2019-2020.
3. To increase attendance in June to 93% in 2017-2018, to 93.5% in 2018-2019 and to 94% in 2019-2020.

Promoting Good Attendance

The following are strategies employed by the school to promote good school attendance:

- Promoting a positive learning environment
- Staff meet and greet with families in the yard every morning (Principal and Deputy Principal)
- Discussion about attendance at Parents' Association meetings, annual parent-teacher meetings, class meetings at the start of the year and information evenings with new parents.
- Regular updates on the school's attendance in the school newsletter/other mediums of communication
- Positive affirmation of attendance when the roll is being taken

- Highlight the importance of attendance during school assemblies
- End of year “Attendance Assembly” where children with full attendance for that term are awarded certificates and a prize
- Record of attendance in child’s annual school report
- Distribution of Tusla’s Educational Welfare Services’ leaflet entitled ‘Don’t Let Your Child Miss Out’ at new parents’ information evening.
- After School Facility on school site
- Provision of extra-curricular activities after school
- Sporting activities throughout the school year
- The school calendar for each academic year is distributed the previous April to make parents/carers aware of school holidays, to avoid holidays being taken during term time.

Responding to Poor Attendance

The Board of Management of Milford N.S. acknowledges that despite the best efforts of the school and of families, some children will need extra support to prevent patterns of poor attendance developing. The following are strategies employed by the school to respond to poor attendance:

- Working with groups or individuals who may need additional support (Guidelines for Schools, p.30)
- Tailoring whole-school approaches to group or individual needs
- Engaging in early dialogue with parents and students
- Using school-led, multi-agency support processes
- Referral to Tusla’s Educational Welfare Services

Approach to Attendance Concerns - School Based

Where there is a concern regarding a child’s level of attendance or pattern of absenteeism, the Deputy Principal or Principal will speak to the parents/carers. A letter will be sent to parents/carers informing them of when their child has reached 15 days and 20 days of absenteeism. Parents/carers will also be informed when the school has made a referral to Tusla regarding attendance.

Approach to attendance concerns – Tusla

The school must notify Tusla if a child is absent for 20 days or more, or where absences/patterns of absence give rise to concern. If a child is sick or is absent for another explained reason, no action is likely to be taken by Tusla. However if there is a concern about a child’s attendance at school or about the reasons given for absenteeism, families may be visited by an Education Welfare Officer (EWO) to discuss the situation. Unexplained absences are of particular concern to the school and to Tusla.

The school is obliged to report regularly to Tusla regarding attendance. There are four reporting periods each year. The report is generated by the school, based on the guidelines provided by Tusla. Any child who has missed 20 days or more, or any children about whom there are absenteeism concerns, must be reported to Tusla in these periodic reports.

Tusla Child and Family Agency is also informed if a child is suspended for 6 days or more, or in the case of the expulsion of a child.

School Roles in relation to Attendance

The Board of Management acknowledges a collective responsibility for the promotion of attendance. The following outlines the roles and responsibilities of people within the school community regarding attendance:

Principal

The school principal will provide leadership for the creation of a school ethos and climate that is supportive of high levels of engagement and attendance. It is the responsibility of the Principal to lead the development and implementation of

this policy, under the guidance of the Board of Management.

The Principal will undertake the following responsibilities in relation to this plan:

- Engage with parents/carers regarding attendance concerns.
- Prepare a report on attendance for the Board of Management on a yearly basis, or as the need arises.
- Maintain the Leabhar Tinrimh Laethúil (Daily Attendance Book) and print hard copies of this monthly.
- Provide opportunities for staff to engage actively with the development and monitoring of the school's Attendance Strategy. Each teacher inputs their daily class attendance on the Aladdin system before 9:50am.
- View the attendance statistics on the Aladdin system each week (the Principal has access to all classes on the Aladdin system).
- Initiate links with other schools and relevant bodies on school attendance issues.
- Make periodic returns to Tusla and notify Tusla's Educational Welfare Services and the relevant EWO of particular problems in relation to attendance and ensure support for the work of the EWO with students who have chronic attendance difficulties.
- Responsibility for attendance assemblies, including certificates and prizes where relevant.
- Furnish pertinent attendance documentation to officers of relevant government departments. At the end of each school year the Principal forwards the attendance information to Tusla.

Secretary

- The school secretary is responsible for the pupil early collection book.

Staff

- All staff have input into the implementation of this attendance policy.

Teachers

Class teachers have responsibility for recording daily attendance and for inputting reasons of absenteeism on the Aladdin system. It is the responsibility of teachers to:

- Provide a classroom climate and classroom management that support participation and engagement, especially with students who may be at risk of poor attendance.
- Actively use the school's Attendance Strategy to promote attendance
- Set high expectations for attendance and punctuality in their classrooms
- Use their own attendance and punctuality to lead by example
- Ensure attendance data is recorded accurately and reviewed in line with school procedures, as set out above
- Alert relevant staff (i.e. Principal/Deputy Principal) if there are concerns about student absences
- Support the attendance plan for students who have difficulty in attending school on a regular basis
- Support students on return when they have missed periods of schooling.

Parents/Carers

The Board of Management acknowledges the important role of parents/carers in the attendance of their children at school. In line with Tusla's guidelines for school (p.44), parents/carers are expected to:

- Set high standards for their child in relation to attendance and punctuality
- Engage with the school if there is a problem about their child's attendance and support plans to address the problem
- Ensure that their child regularly attends and arrives at school on time.
- Avoid taking their child out of class unless there is a serious reason
- Avoid taking their child on holidays during term time.

Partnership Arrangements

The Board of Management acknowledges the importance of partnership arrangements and a multi-disciplinary

approach, where relevant, in supporting the attendance and punctuality of children at school. In relation to attendance, the school community may involve staff members, parents/carers, students, other school, community groups and Tusla, among others.

Monitoring the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance

The Board of Management and the principal will monitor the implementation of the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance on an ongoing basis by doing the following:

- Opportunities will be provided for staff to share experiences about how the strategy is working and to review progress towards attendance targets (in the form of monthly staff meetings)
- The principal will update on attendance levels at each Board of Management meeting, with reference to the school's attendance targets.

Communication

This policy will be communicated to staff and the school community as appropriate and will be subjected to regular review. In accordance with the systematic cycle of review of policies adopted in Milford National School, it will be reviewed initially after one year and then every three years, unless there is a compelling reason to review it earlier.

Review Process

A formal end-of-year review of the Statement of Strategy will be conducted annually as part of the 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.

Reviewed & Ratified by the Board of Management, Milford National School, Castletroy, Co. Limerick

Scheduled for review _____

Signed _____
Chairperson

Date _____