
Hollybank Primary School

ATTENDANCE POLICY



Engage, Empower, Excel

This policy has been produced in collaboration with other schools in the Rathcoole and Monkstown area involved in the THRiVE project

Date of next policy review	August 2024
Name of person responsible for this policy	L Brett
Issued to	Staff, Governors, Parents
Date of issue	August 2023



Rationale

Schools in this area are committed to ensuring that children and young people achieve in school and thrive as individuals.

Encouraging regular school attendance will help prepare children and young people for success—both in school and in life. When everyone makes school attendance a priority, children achieve in school, develop healthy life habits, avoid dangerous behaviour and have a better chance of leaving school able to find work.

A high level of pupil attendance at school is crucial for the success and well-being of pupils. To manage attendance reflects the school's commitment to pupils' pastoral care and their academic success. It is, therefore, an area of strategic importance for all schools in this area. Hollybank Primary School will strive to promote an ethos and culture which encourages good attendance and where each pupil feels valued, safe and secure.

Department of Education NI Circular 2015/02 entitled Attendance Guidance and Absence Recording By School highlights the responsibilities of Boards of Governors of all schools regarding pupil attendance. Department of Education NI Circular 2021/16 provides guidance on managing pupil attendance in the continued context of Covid-19.

As a group of schools we are all aiming for a minimum of 95% attendance.

The Department of Education's guidelines define 95% attendance as satisfactory attendance only.

100% Attendance	0 Days Missed
95% Attendance	9 Days of Absence 1 Week and 4 Days of Learning Missed
90% Attendance	19 Days of Absence 3 Weeks and 4 Days of Learning Missed
85% Attendance	28 Days of Absence 5 Weeks and 3 Days of Learning Missed

Benefits of consistent attendance at school

- Consistent learning and development of key skills
- Consistent development of social skills and maintaining friendships
- Forming regular habits and routines
- Developing the life skill of punctuality and good time management
- Reducing the risk of dangerous behaviour
- Improving readiness for employment

Aims

We hope that through our approach to pupil attendance to achieve the following aims:

1. Pupils, parents and staff will strive for high attendance.
2. Our overall pupil attendance will be a minimum of 95%.

3. Punctuality, in particular, will be of a high standard.
4. Pupils being removed from school for appointments during the school will be minimal.
5. Parents will not plan holidays for their families during periods when school is in session.
6. Pupils' attainment will be increased.
7. Pupils being tracked for poor attendance will show prolonged improvement.
8. Referrals to outside agencies will be extremely low.

Values and Mission Statement

Consistent attendance helps...

- Children and young people to succeed in school
- Children and young people to be learners and thinkers
- Nurture children and young people's well-being

Schools will...

- Work with parents and support healthy families
- Recognise our need to work with other key professionals when families require support.
- Work together to invest in education for the good of the whole community.

Attendance expectations

Consistent attendance at school for the benefit of all pupils requires everyone working together.

School

The Principal is responsible for the overall management of the school's attendance policy and procedures. Teachers should bring concerns regarding attendance to his/her attention. This work is supported via the work of the school office.

Classroom teachers have a pivotal role to play in this aspect of the school's work. The teachers are working with pupils and have a more holistic view of the issues facing each pupil in their care. There must be clear communication and cooperation between the administrative staff and the teachers.

The Board of Governors provide support by reviewing attendance figures and targets, via the Principal's report, as an agenda item at BOG meetings.

Parents

Parents must accept their responsibilities to ensure pupils' attendance is high. Parents have a pastoral and legal duty to make sure their children attend school. If parents fail to meet their obligations it will have a profound impact on their children's education and future opportunities.

Parents should communicate with the school if there are reasons why it becomes difficult for their child to consistently attend school. This enables the school to meet the pastoral care needs of the pupil and help families' access external support if required.

School recognises that there are often demands on families which present challenges to punctuality and attendance. We want to work with parents to ensure families access support available, to help with these demands as relevant.

If a parent is failing to meet their responsibilities the school is obliged to intervene. To not send a pupil to school regularly is a reason for the involvement of outside agencies, possible legal action and, in the most extreme situations, an investigation into potential neglect or/and abuse.

What is expected of parents?

All parents should:

- Communicate to their children how important school is and the need to attend.
- Contact school before 9.15 on first day of absence.
- Have good routines in place to encourage punctuality.
- Make dental or medical appointments outside of the school day.
- Not plan holidays during the school year.
- Only keep pupils off when necessary and return them as soon as possible.
- Send in written, signed and dated notes when a pupil is off sick on the first day after their return to school, or complete in pupil planner or Seesaw.
- Cooperate fully when a pupil is placed on an attendance intervention e.g. ringing in when requested and returning letters promptly.

What is expected of pupils?

- Each pupil must attend school regularly and punctually. Pupils must bring their pupil planner to school daily which contains absence notes for completion, by parents.

What is expected of the teachers?

All teachers should:

- Mark absences and lateness accurately morning and afternoon using C2K codes.
- Request, follow-up and store notes from parents concerning attendance.
- Communicate any concerns about attendance to the office staff/ Principal.
- If requested by the office staff, maintain and support interventions for targeted pupils.
- Assess and share information with parents related to attendance and punctuality.
- Collaborate with outside agencies when required e.g. the E.W.O. etc.
- Support whole school approaches to promote high attendance e.g. 100% certificates.

What is expected of the office staff?

The office staff should:

- Record pupils' attendance accurately on the school's electronic system.
- Produce a 6 weekly list of pupils with attendance below 90%.
- In consultation with the teacher and the Principal decide if an intervention is required for pupils with attendance below 90%. There may be very genuine reasons why a pupil is off and no intervention is required e.g. an extended period in hospital or an ongoing illness. In these cases the pupil will be awarded an exemption.
- If an exemption is awarded parents may be contacted for pastoral support.
- If deemed necessary help administer and record the attendance protocols. This may involve writing letters and phoning parents, arranging interviews with parents, liaising with the

Educational Welfare Officer (E.W.O.) and securely storing all this information.

- Maintain a database of pupils with low attendance to track their progress.
- Respond to teachers' requests to ring parents to check why they are not in school.
- Record and communicate parents' messages to teachers concerning attendance.
- Keep accurate records of pupils who arrive late to school.

What is expected of the Principal and Senior Teachers?

The Principal should:

- Set high standards and expectations for attendance.
- Implement and monitor the school's attendance policy and procedures.
- Update and review the policy and procedures as required.
- Provide training and support for staff to implement the policy and procedures.
- Carry out a monthly evaluation of attendance patterns and decide upon actions required.
- Liaise with parents, staff and outside agencies as required.
- Report to the Governors a minimum of once per term on pupils' attendance.

Authorised Absences

Absences can only be authorised if judged to be reasonable at the discretion of the Principal.

Proactive Promotion of Attendance

Our approach is first positive and proactive. Our aim is to create a culture of high expectations in which all pupils are aspiring for 100% attendance. How do we strive to achieve this type of ethos?

- The school newsletter is used to stress the need for high performance and let parents know of our targets/achievements in attendance.
- School holidays are published well in advance and are placed in the Pupil Planner. They are also circulated regularly to help to reduce holidays being taken during the school year.
- Class teachers will create an expectation of punctuality and attendance.
- The pupils' annual reports are used to stress the high level of attendance required for success. The school reports percentages on attendance which are based on guidance from the Department of Education.
- Each June we reward those who achieve 100% attendance with a 'Golden Certificate'. This is presented in a special assembly and is stressed as a great achievement.

- If a pupil achieves 100% attendance for their full school career they receive a 'Platinum Certificate.'
- Schools will use a variety of positive approaches to praise attendance and punctuality and reward success when improved. For example, monthly league tables, trophies for individuals or whole classes, attendance certificates, recognition of 100% attendance at regular intervals.

Protocols to Support improvements in Attendance

If pupil attendance is not consistent, we have a rigorous four-stage protocol to support pupils to improve.

This protocol applies to pupils with attendance below 90%.

The 90% level was decided upon to balance our limited resourcing with the need to focus on only a core group of parents who require support. We feel it is important to offer quality help to a smaller group of parents rather than spreading our support too widely. It has proven to be a sensible and effective level to maximise our effectiveness.

Our four-stage protocol has a clear progression if increased intervention is required. The Principal or Senior Teachers have some freedom to make a professional judgment if a pupil needs to move up a stage. For example, if a pupil has had a poor period of attendance but for the following two reviews makes steady progress. In the third review the pupil has a very genuine illness. The principal may decide not to move them up a stage. To do so has the potential to be demotivating for a family who are trying to improve their child's attendance. It may also discredit the working of the policy.

If a pupil is being tracked and their attendance is improving (but still below 90%) their progress through the stages will be halted. A letter of support and encouragement will be sent to acknowledge the improvement in attendance. For example, if a pupil at 'Stage 1' of the process has 87% attendance and in the following month it increases to 88% they do not move to 'Stage 2'. Their progress will be tracked, however, to ensure the progress is maintained.

Pupils will only 'exit' the procedure if their attendance rises to 90% and remains there for a minimum of two reviews.

Should concerns arise during the attendance audits, and a child's attendance is well below target, stages 1-3 may be skipped, in order for a referral to made immediately to the Educational Welfare Service.

Stage	Details	Actions
'Exemption'	A pupil has attendance below 90% but there is a significant medical or/and pastoral reason.	The pupil's attendance will be tracked*. Under 'Stage' it will be recorded as 'Exempt'. The parent may be called. The purpose of the call will be to offer support and provide them with an update of their child's attendance. * An electronic workbook will be maintained of every class. It will only include pupils who have attendance below 90% during the present school year or were being tracked at the end of the previous academic year.
Stage 1	For the first 6 weekly review the pupil's attendance has fallen below 90%.	A letter will be sent to the parent. It will inform them that their child's attendance has fallen for the first time during the school year below 90%. The letter will ask the parents to send back a letter acknowledging the letter. It will encourage them to try to increase their child's attendance. It will also indicate that their child's attendance will be monitored until it goes above 90%. The parent will be asked to return the form to make any comments or add any additional relevant information. The office staff will create a file for the pupil being tracked. Into this file all the correspondence related to this pupil will be maintained. This file will be stored in a secure filing cabinet of pupils being currently tracked for low attendance.
Stage 2	For the second 6 weekly review during the school year the pupil's attendance has been below 90% with no improvement	A second letter will be sent to the parent. It will inform them that their child's attendance has been for the second time during the school year below 90%. The letter will ask the parents to ring the school office to discuss their child's attendance. During this conversation they will be asked to explain their child's pattern of behaviour. They will be placed on a tracking process. If the pupil is off parents are required to ring on the day of absence. If no explanation has been received by the school office, it will be explained that they will be contacted by phone or text. The teacher will be provided with a tracking folder to record absences to detect patterns and reasons given for the pupil not being in school
Stage 3	For the third 6 weekly review during the school year the pupil's attendance has been below 90%.	A third letter will be sent to the parent. It will inform them that their child's attendance has been for the third time during the school year below 90%. The letter will ask the parent to ring the office to arrange an interview with the principal, and if no contact is made an appointment will be arranged. During the interview the principal will stress the very serious situation that the pupil's attendance is presenting. The principal will give the parents time to respond to the concerns and to provide other information that may be relevant. It will be explained that if attendance does not improve in the coming month then an educational welfare referral may be submitted. The purpose of this referral will be to support the pupil and the family to improve the situation. The tracking and recording processes will continue as outlined in Stage 2.
Stage 4	On the fourth review during the school year the pupil's attendance has been below 90%.	A fourth letter will be sent to the parent. It will inform them that their child's attendance has been for the fourth time during the school year below 90%. The letter will explain that a referral has been made to educational welfare. The tracking and recording processes will continue as outlined in Stage 3.

Education Welfare Service

The Education Authority through the Education Welfare Service (EWS) have a legal duty to make sure that parents/guardians meet their responsibility towards their children's education. If a pupil's absence causes concern, or if their attendance falls below 85% and there is also a concern, they will be referred to the EWS, if appropriate. EWS will support staff and parents in developing and implementing strategies to address or improve school attendance.

Parents will be notified of the referral in advance.

Assessment & Reporting

Attendance will be reported on as part of each pupil's annual report. The percentage is based on guidelines issued by the Department of Education.

Attendance will be included in staff induction.

Governors will be updated about attendance levels regularly.

Review cycle of policy

The Attendance Policy will be reviewed and if required updated every two years. This process will involve a Staff and Governor consultation.

Staff will be issued with a hard copy of the new policy and scheme after its approval. An electronic version will be stored at Staff/Policies/Pastoral Care/Attendance. Previous versions will be stored in an archive folder in the Attendance folder on the c2k system.

A summary version will be issued to parents after every review. A full version will be available from the school office and website for reference or/and a paper copy issued if required.

Appendix 1 Term Time Holiday letter

Date:

Term Time Holiday Letter

Dear Parent,

Every 6 weeks we review pupils' attendance across the school. We are obliged to monitor attendance by the Department of Education due to the strong link between pupils' attainment and academic success.

One particular issue of concern is holidays during term time. Please note we publish school holidays at the beginning of each new school year begins to give parents excellent notice to avoid holidays being booked during term time.

After reviewing the circumstances of your child's holiday absence we would like to provide you with the following feedback (option in red):

- We have approved your child's holiday due to exceptional pastoral needs;
- We understand that you felt there was a valid reason for a term time holiday e.g. a family wedding in another country etc. We also appreciate that you engaged with the school to explain your dilemma. We are, however, unable to authorise this absence*;
- We understand that you have chosen to take a holiday during term time due to a leave issue or due to economic factors. Whilst we understand your position this absence will be recorded as an unauthorised absence*.

* There are very few situations in which the school has the ability to authorise a term time holiday.

In addition to this feedback we would like to add the following comment (option in red):

- Your child's attendance is generally good or better;

- During the last two years we have had concerns about your child's attendance. Therefore, taking a term time holiday is more concerning.

For your records: Total days lost due to term time holidays since Sept. 2021: insert number of days

We would like to ask you, respectfully, to avoid term time holidays in the future. In particular, however, holidays in September (when we are settling classes) and in May (when we are completing assessments) are very disruptive.

Your understanding of our position and support is appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

Appendix 2 Stage 1 Letter

Date:

Attendance Letter: Stage 1

Pupil's name: _____

Class: _____

Dear Parent,

As a school we seek to maximise the learning of every child. Good attendance is vital to a pupil making the required progress.

At present your child's attendance is _____. When a child's attendance drops below 90% we are committed to inform parents. This information is useful for parents and can help them support their children's progress. We are aware that some children may have very genuine reasons for such absences e.g. a serious illness.

I hope as a parent you recognise that this focus on attendance is to keep you informed and help us work as a strong partnership to improve your child's learning and happiness. ***Please return the slip below to your child's teacher/s as soon as possible.***

Yours sincerely,

Principal or Attendance Co-ordinator

Date:

Attendance Letter: Stage 1

Pupil's name: _____

Class: _____

I have received my child's attendance report for the school year so far.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 3 Stage 2 Letter

Attendance Letter: Stage 2

Date:

Pupil's name: _____

Class: _____

Dear Parent,

As a school we seek to maximise the learning of every child. Good attendance is vital to a pupil making the required progress.

At present your child's attendance is ____%. This is considered by the school as an issue for concern.

We are aware that some children may have very genuine reasons for such absences e.g. a serious illness.

Please now contact school on 02890 864944 to discuss the reasons for absence and to identify strategies to improve attendance. _____ (Principal or Attendance Coordinator.)

I hope as a parent you recognise that this focus on attendance is to keep you informed and help us work as a strong partnership to improve your child's learning and happiness. We would like to see how best we can support you to make improvements in your child's attendance.

Please return the slip below to your child's teachers as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

Date: _____

Attendance Alert Letter: Stage 2

I have received my child's attendance report for the school year so far.

I will contact school to set up a meeting / telephone conversation with the school within 5 school days.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 4 Stage 3 Letter

Date:

Attendance Alert Letter: Stage 3

Pupil's name:

Dear Parent,

As a school we seek to maximise the learning of every child. Good attendance is vital to a pupil making the required progress. We, therefore, have adopted a robust approach to tackling poor attendance. Here is our 4-stage strategy:

Stage	School's Action	Parent's Response
Stage 1	When a child's attendance falls below 90% we send home a letter informing the parent.	Fill in the response form and in the coming months make every effort to improve attendance.
Stage 2	If there has been no improvement in the coming month/s the parent/s will be contacted to discuss reasons for absence and strategies for improvement. Pupils will be put on our Attendance Tracking List – When they are not in school their parents will be phoned by 9:30am.	The parent will respond to the invitation to make an appointment to discuss the attendance.
Stage 3	If there has been no improvement in the coming month/s the parent/s will be invited to an interview with the principal. Pupils will remain on our Attendance Tracking List – When they are not in school their parents will be contacted.	The parent will respond to the invitation to make an appointment with the principal.
Stage 4	If there has been no improvement in the coming month/s the parent/s will be informed by letter that they have been referred to the Education and Welfare Officer for support.	Work closely with the Educational Welfare officer and the school to improve their child's attendance.

At present your child's attendance is _____. This is considered by the school as an issue for concern.

We are aware that some children may have very genuine reasons for such absences e.g. a serious illness. Please now contact school to arrange an **interview time with myself as Principal**.

I hope as a parent you recognise that this focus on attendance is to keep you informed and help us work as a strong partnership to improve your child's learning and happiness. Please return the slip below to your child's teachers as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

Attendance Alert Letter: Stage 3

Pupil's name:

I have received my child's attendance report for the school year to date.

I will contact school to set up an interview with _____ (Principal) within 5 school days.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 5 Stage 4 Letter

Date:

Attendance Letter: Stage 4

Pupil's name:

Dear Parent,

As a school we seek to maximise the learning of every child. Good attendance is vital to a pupil making the required progress. We, therefore, have adopted a robust approach to tackling poor attendance. Here is our 4-stage strategy:

Stage	School's Action	Parent's Response
Stage 1	When a child's attendance falls below 90% we send home a letter informing the parent.	Fill in the response form and in the coming months make every effort to improve attendance.
Stage 2	If there has been no improvement in the coming month/s the parent/s will be contacted to discuss reasons for absence and strategies for improvement. Pupils will be put on our Attendance Tracking List – When they are not in school their parents will be phoned by 9:30am.	The parent will respond to the invitation to make an appointment to discuss the attendance.
Stage 3	If there has been no improvement in the coming month/s the parent/s will be invited to an interview with the principal. Pupils will remain on our Attendance Tracking List – When they are not in school their parents will be contacted.	The parent will respond to the invitation to make an appointment with the principal.
Stage 4	If there has been no improvement in the coming month/s the parent/s will be informed by letter that they have been referred to the Education and Welfare Officer for support.	Work closely with the Educational Welfare officer and the school to improve their child's attendance.

At present your child's attendance is _____. This is considered by the school as an issue for concern.

We have referred your case to the Education Welfare Officer in our school who will meet with you and offer your family some additional support and /or advice.

I hope as a parent you recognise that this focus on attendance is to keep you informed and help us work as a strong partnership to improve your child's learning and happiness. Please return the slip below to your child's teachers as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

(Principal)

Attendance Alert Letter: Stage 4

Pupil's name: _____

I have received my child's attendance report for the school year so far.

I am aware that the school has referred an E.W.O. to my family to offer support and/or advice.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Education Welfare Service

The Education Authority through the Education Welfare Service (EWO) have a legal duty to make sure the parents/guardians meet their responsibility towards their children's education.

If a pupil's absence causes concern, or if their attendance falls below 85%, and there is also a concern, they will be referred to the EWS, if appropriate. EWS will support staff and parents in developing and implementing strategies to address or improve school attendance.

APPENDIX 5: COVID 19

Recording absence where there is a positive Covid-19 Test / Learning Remotely

1. In cases where a pupil has tested positive for Covid-19 the school must record this absence as Code ' (' irrespective of whether the pupil is symptomatic or asymptomatic.)
2. In cases where the pupil is asymptomatic schools and parents should discuss the provision of school work which the pupil can complete at home during the period when they are unable to attend school to ensure that there is continuity in learning and to prevent the pupil from falling behind with their school work (or in their studies). Given teachers will be continuing to teach classes during the day expectations regarding this must be realistic.