

Coachford College

Attendance Strategy



1. General

1.1 Scope

The policy applies to all students of Coachford College (70960D), their parents/guardians and the school's staff.

1.2 Relationship to the school's mission and characteristic spirit

Coachford College is a community in which mutual respect is shared in a positive environment. Individual potential is developed in all fields, and student wellbeing is at the core of all we pursue. In order to achieve such goals, it is expected that all students registered at the school attend all classes and events organised for them, both in and out of school.

Education plays a vital part in ensuring that children grow to independence and derive maximum benefits from life's opportunities. In Ireland, education is a right that is prescribed and protected in Article 42 of Bunreacht na hÉireann. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out a number of statements including a state's role to 'take measures to encourage regular attendance at school'. This Attendance Strategy seeks to assist students, parents/guardians and adult students as relevant, in reaching the best educational outcomes. It has been drawn up by the Board of Management in consultation with all the school partners, and in keeping with the requirements of Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 and the Tusla Guidelines (2017) with a view to fostering an appreciation of learning among students attending Coachford College, and in so doing, encourage excellent attendance on the part of each student.

1.3 Context

This policy has been devised in consultation with all members of the school community and in keeping with the school's mission and characteristic spirit. It should be read in conjunction with the school's Health and Safety Statement, Pastoral Care Policy, Appropriate Behaviour Policy, Extra-Curricular Activities Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy, Child Safeguarding Statement/Risk Assessment, Blended Learning Policy, Covid-19 Response Plan and Data Protection Policy (CETB). Coachford College encourages the pursuit of excellence and strives to create an environment conducive to the highest standards of achievement with the well-being of every student at its core.

1.4 Rationale

This Strategy was devised to

- Seek to protect, in conjunction with all other aspects of school life, the care and wellbeing of students;
- Facilitate continuity and progression in the learning process;
- Ensure that students benefit fully from opportunities that this school offers them;
- Ensure that students, parents/guardians and teachers are aware of their responsibilities in ensuring full attendance;
- Ensure that students attend school remotely via the school's approved online platform when there is an agreement in place with the school to do so;
- Ensure the school fulfils its legal obligations in accordance with the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 and other relevant Acts. Under the Act, Education Welfare Boards have been established to oversee school attendance nationwide and each school has been assigned an Education Welfare Officer whose duty it is to liaise with the school in relation to any attendance problems which may emerge. The Principal must inform the Educational Welfare Officer where any of the following occur:
 - a) A student is suspended from school for a period of not less than six days;
 - b) The aggregate number of school days on which a student is absent from school during a school year is not less than twenty;
 - c) A student is, in the opinion of the Principal of the school in which he/she is registered, not attending school regularly.

2. Objectives

The Objectives of this Strategy are

- To maintain accurate records of students' whereabouts at all times during school hours and in so doing protect the health, safety and wellbeing of all students in the care of Coachford College and to maximize their learning opportunities;
- To encourage students to learn to take responsibility for their own punctuality and attendance;
- To encourage students and parents/guardians to appreciate the vital link between attendance and achievement;
- To encourage good communication between adult students/parents/guardians and school;
- To ensure minimum rates of absenteeism;
- To detect and correct patterns of poor attendance;
- To support and nurture a school environment which has student wellbeing at its core;
- To highlight, encourage and acknowledge regular attendance;
- To establish and maintain procedures for monitoring attendance and good record keeping;
- To develop working relationships with relevant agencies such as the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB);

3. Strategies to encourage good attendance

- Good attendance is promoted in the school by a culture of high expectations, encouraging each student to take responsibility for his or her own learning and achieve their full potential through regular presence in class.

- Throughout the curriculum, students are made aware of the incremental nature of learning and the implications for them of irregular attendance. This is also promoted through the school's Wellbeing programme.
- The Year Head and/or member(s) of the Wellbeing Team meet with students for whom attendance or punctuality has been identified as an issue.
- Evidence may be sought by the school in the event of concerns regarding absenteeism.
- Reports to parents/guardians and to adult students who have not consented to share their personal data, include a detailed breakdown of attendance for the period in question.
- The school has assigned staff members to support the implementation of the Attendance Strategy.
- Through the promotion and nurturing of a friendly, caring environment in which all students can flourish, and by encouraging all students to realise their potential, it is hoped that students will attend regularly.
- Through monitoring and effective recording of non-attendance, students with attendance issues will be identified, and support offered to parents/guardians and students through teachers, Tutors, Year Heads and/or NEWB.
- Through the provision of a wide range of subjects, the school aims to cater for the diverse needs of all its students.
- Through the provision of an extensive co-curricular and extra-curricular programme, students are strongly encouraged to participate and thus, attend school regularly.
- Cases of regular non-attendance will be addressed in a fair and sensitive manner.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1. The student

- Punctually attends all scheduled classes every day unless there is a valid reason for not doing so;
- Following an absence from school, presents an explanation to teachers, in keeping with school protocol, on return to school;
- If arriving late for school, students should sign in in accordance with the school's procedures.
- If arriving late for school, adult students who have not consented to share access to their personal data, should have sent an email prior to arrival, providing an explanation for the late arrival, and sign in in accordance with the school's procedures.
- Students who wish to leave the school during the day due to illness must follow the school's protocol.
- As significant learning takes place outside the classroom, students are expected to participate in all aspects of school life through the full school day, and/or in activities to which they have been assigned.
- Students who travel on special school buses shall not dismount their bus prior to arrival on the school grounds.
- Students remain on the school site for the full duration of morning and lunch break.

4.2. The Parent/Guardian

- Supports the school's Attendance Strategy in compliance with their legal responsibilities (Education Welfare Act 2000);
- Ensures regular and punctual attendance of students and avoid unwarranted absences;

- Provides an explanation for the student's absence prior to his/her return to school;
- Provides the school with reliable contact telephone numbers and alternative 'emergency' numbers so that the school may contact parents/guardians or other authorised parties if necessary;
- Adheres to the procedures set out in this Strategy for the withdrawal of students from school during the school day;
- Acknowledges and, where necessary, replies to communications from the school in relation to attendance issues;
- If arriving late for school, provides an email in advance, explaining the reason for the late arrival.

4.3. The Principal

- Promotes the importance of full attendance and participation;
- Ensures that adequate systems are in place to record attendances and absences of students;
- Monitor attendance records regularly;
- Ensures that reports are made to the Education Welfare Officer as required by the Education (Welfare) Act 2000;
- Reminds all school partners of the importance of regular attendance and the negative impact of frequent absences on student progress.

4.4. The Deputy Principals

- Promote the importance of full attendance and participation;
- Work in co-operation with the Principal, Year Heads, Class Teachers, and administration staff and Attendance Officer to implement this Strategy;
- Liaise with Year Heads and the Student Support Team to address the difficulties surrounding a particular student's attendance.

4.5. The Subject Teacher

- Records attendance in every class and ensures that accurate attendance records are entered on VS Ware. Whether teaching or substituting, the teacher will take attendance records;
- Impresses on students the importance of full attendance and punctuality;
- Liaises with the Year Head in the event of absences not being explained or where any other problems may arise in relation to attendance;
- May check absence notes from parents/guardians.

4.6. The Class Tutor

- Impresses on students the importance of full attendance and punctuality;
- Checks that absence are explained;
- Liaises with Year Heads in the event of absences not being explained or where any other problems may arise in relation to attendance.

4.7. The Year Head

- Promotes the importance of full attendance and participation;
- Monitors regularly the attendance records;
- Liaises with the Student Support team to address the challenges surrounding a particular student's attendance;
- Meets with those students for whom attendance or punctuality is a problem in order to discuss the issue;

- Contacts parents/guardians or adult students as relevant, where unauthorised absences occur or are suspected and/ or when patterns of absences are developing and notifies the Deputy Principal/Principal of same;
- Reminds students of the importance of regular attendance and punctuality.

4.8. The Attendance Officer

- Promotes the importance of full attendance and participation;
- Liaises with students and parents/guardians as relevant to support students and families where attendance is deemed to be a concern;
- Works in conjunction with the Administrator in the School Office in submitting reports to the NEWB;
- Supports new staff with regard to recording attendance;
- Attends meetings with the Principal, Deputy Principal and Year Heads, to discuss matters relating to attendance.

4.9. The Administrative Staff:

- Input attendance data from Class Teachers when required;
- Amend records on VShare in cases of partial absence;
- Work in conjunction with the Attendance Officer to submit reports to the NEWB;
- Administer the signing in and out of students;
- Provide attendance reports to Year Heads.

5. Procedures

5.1. General

- a) The roll is recorded at the start of each class and recorded on VShare at assigned times. Data is collected from VShare at the end of the first class period daily.
- b) Where students are absent from school for co-curricular or extra-curricular activities, the teacher in charge of the activity prepares a list of the names of all those travelling. (S)he posts this to staff and provides a copy of the list to the Deputy Principals and/or Principal a minimum of a school day ahead of the scheduled event. If a student listed is absent from the trip, the teacher will notify the school office of same.
- c) The school will provide a calendar for the opening and closing times of the school, the school holidays and information about Parent/Student Teacher meetings and staff meetings.
- d) The practice of taking school holidays during school term is strongly discouraged. A signed application should be made to the Principal should such an absence be unavoidable.

5.2. Medical Appointments/Illness

If a student has permission to leave school early e.g. in advance for a medical appointment, parents/guardians ensure that they have contacted the school in advance. He/she should be signed out at the school office and collected by his/her parent/guardian.

If a student becomes unwell at school he/she should follow the procedure laid out in 5c) above. If he/she needs to leave school as a consequence, he/she must be signed out at the school office by his/her parent/guardian.

If an adult student who has not consented to share access to his/her personal data, becomes unwell at the school, the procedure set out in 4.1. above should be followed.

When possible, elective appointments should be scheduled for after school or during school holidays.

5.3. Contacting the School in cases of absence

Parents/guardians or adult students as relevant, should keep the school informed in the case of extended absences. If the extended absence is for medical reasons a doctor's note should be sent to the school.

6. Recording of non-attendance

6.1. Recording of extended absences

When a student is absent for a prolonged period, parents/guardians or adult students as relevant, may be contacted by the school. The primary concern of Coachford College is the welfare of the student, and regular contact and communication is vital. End of term reports will also contain Attendance Records.

6.2. Sanction

Issues of non-attendance and/or associated behaviour which may impede the student's progress and/or undermine the core values and structures of the school, shall be addressed through the school's Appropriate Behaviour Policy. School authorities shall be the final arbiters of what constitutes acceptable patterns of attendance.

6.3. Suspension

On rare occasions a student may be absent from school due to suspension for breach of discipline. In such instances parents/guardians or adult students as relevant, will be informed in advance and students are expected to use their time productively by applying themselves to their studies remotely. In such instances, where a student is suspended, they should not be on the school premises or engaged in any school activity.

6.4. Partnership arrangements:

The school will liaise with relevant bodies and engage with services where there is a concern regarding attendance.

7. Success Criteria

Success criteria may include:

- Improved attendance rates;
- Improved communication with parents/guardians and/or explanations for absences;
- Improved work input/homework;
- Reduced number of reports to the National Educational Welfare Board.

This Strategy was adopted by the Board of Management on October 25th 2017, and reviewed, following consultation with all school partners, on December 17th 2020.

It has been made available to all members of the school community.

It will be reviewed on an annual basis and/or as deemed necessary.

Signed by:

Chairperson of the Board: *Fr. Peadar Murphy*

Date: 17/12/2020

Principal: *Aine-Maire Ni Fhaoláin*

Date: 17/12/2020