



## **Attendance Policy**

### **The school's vision and values in relation to attendance:**

Inspired by the vision of Catherine McAuley, Sancta Maria College is committed to the holistic development of each student. As a Catholic school we pursue excellence in an inclusive, caring and respectful environment.

Sancta Maria College is an all-girls Catholic School under the trusteeship of CEIST:

- Within the context and parameters of Department of Education and Skills regulations and resources and the ethos of Catherine McAuley, Sancta Maria College supports the principles of inclusiveness, equality of access and participation; parental choice in respect of enrolment and a respect for diversity of traditions, values, beliefs, languages and ways of life.
- Sancta Maria College is a voluntary secondary school and as such the financial and teaching resources of the school are provided by a combination of Department of Education and Skills' grants, fund raising and voluntary contributions. School Policy is implemented with due regard to resources and funding available.
- Sancta Maria College operates within the regulations laid down from time to time by the Department of Education and Skills. The College follows the curricular programme prescribed by the Department, which may be amended from time to time, in accordance with sections 9 and 30 of the Education Act 1998.
- In keeping with our Mission Statement, which is committed to the achievement of the full potential of each student, we recognise in realisation of this goal, the importance of full attendance throughout the school.
- The Attendance Strategy of Sancta Maria College informs its Attendance Policy.

### **The school's high expectations around attendance:**

- There is an established link between attendance and achievement. As an integral part of the holistic development of the individual, a student must be in school to achieve.
- The school affirms that parent(s)/guardian(s) have a primary responsibility to ensure that children of school going age attend school once enrolled. They are obliged to complete three years of post-primary education and attend school to their sixteenth birthday: both conditions must be satisfied.
- The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 Section 22(1) and 22(2) requires all schools to draw up a Statement of Strategy with regard to attendance/participation, and subject to the functions of Minister pursuant to Section 7 (1) of the Education Act 1998.

- This policy clarifies the role and responsibility of each partner in education in relation to attendance.

**How attendance will be monitored:**

- A register of all students who have been admitted to the school will be maintained
- Students swipe in on the ANSEO system daily
- VSWare is used to record and monitor attendance and punctuality in every class throughout the day.
- A text message indicating absence is sent to parent(s)/guardian(s) of students absent for the first class.
- Students who arrive late to school are required to sign in and swipe in at the office. They must get a late stamp in their journal and proceed immediately to their first class. The class teacher will enter that student as Late on VSWare. If they have previously been marked as UNEXPLAINED this is to be changed to LATE.
- Each teacher also takes their own roll at the beginning of every individual classes
- Students who leave school during the day due illness or appointments can only do so with the permission of a parent/guardian. A note available in the Student Journal must be countersigned by the Year Head or, in his/her absence, by the Deputy Principal/Principal. The student must then sign out and swipe out and the VSWare will be amended accordingly.
- Where students are absent from school from school-related extra-curricular activities, this is entered in the system by the teacher leading the school activity. The teacher who oversees the activity prepares a list of names and prior to departure post a copy on the staffroom noticeboard and provides a copy of the list to reception. If a student is absent from the trip, the teacher will notify the administrative staff of same who will then amend the record on VSWare.
- The Year Head / Deputy Principal/ Principal contacts home if a pattern of absence is causing concern

**Students are responsible for being in full attendance, at all classes, throughout the school year.**

If, for any reason, a student has been absent from class, for all or part of a school day, she will be required to:

- return to school in possession of a written note from her parent(s)/guardian(s) explaining the reason for her absence
- place this detachable note in the relevant box outside the Deputy Principal's office
- present the signed stub to all of her subject teachers

**Students requesting permission to leave school during the school day must:**

- if for an appointment or an activity where it is known well in advance they must get a note signed by their Year Head

- receive permission to leave school from their Year Head, Deputy Principal/Principal
- only make arrangements to leave through the main office
- sign, and record the time of leaving and the reason for doing so in the 'Sign Out' book, prior to leaving
- swipe out using their student I.D. card
- If a student returns to school, they must swipe in and sign back in

**It is expected that in all cases of absence, students will make every effort to catch up with work missed at the earliest opportunity.**

**School roles in relation to attendance:**

**Subject Teachers are responsible for:**

- keeping an accurate attendance record for all students in their class
- recording attendance on the VSWare system and also in their teacher diary
- recording late arrivals to class on VSWare and in their teacher diary
- ensuring that students who arrive late to class have received a 'Late Stamp' in their journal
- ensuring that the record is changed from UNE to LATE on VSWare and changed in the teacher's own records
- checking notes/stubs in student journals for absences from previous classes
- applying appropriate interventions as outlined in the Positive Behaviour Code
- informing Year Heads, using the Year Head Referral Form, if patterns of absence/ lateness emerge for any student in their class

The subject teacher may communicate any such concern regarding punctuality and/or attendance to the parent/guardian through the student journal.

The subject teacher's written records can be requested by Year Heads, Deputy Principal or Principal should any issue regarding a student's whereabouts at a given time arise.

**The Class Tutor**

The Class Tutor plays a key role in nurturing a warm and caring atmosphere amongst her/his tutor group where students experience a sense of belonging that encourages good attendance and punctuality.

**The Class Tutor is responsible for:**

- following up on absences, accepting and checking outstanding notes from parents/guardians for non-attendance
- making a referral to Year Heads, on the Year Head Referral Form, when a student persistently fails to present a written explanation for absence
- ensuring that they are satisfied that the reasons given are genuine and, if in doubt, referring the matter to the Year Head
- updating the VSWare record of student's attendance
- amending the computerised registration system so that the records are maintained accurately

- at opening of new school year and regularly throughout the school year reminding students of the content of the Code of Positive Behaviour as it applies to punctuality and attendance.

### **The Role of the Year Head**

**The Year Head supported by her/his tutors has overall responsibility for monitoring patterns of attendance and punctuality of the students in their year group.**

#### **The Year Head will:**

- monitor attendance and punctuality and liaise with class tutors and subject teachers
- liaise with and meet parents/guardians where a pattern of absence or lateness to school emerges
- meet with students for whom attendance and/or punctuality is a problem
- record students for detention in the detention book and place a note in the student's journal
- notify parents/guardians when a student fails to turn up for detention and/or is given a conduct book entry
- supports tutors in ensuring that all absences are explained by a note from parents/guardians
- supply the Deputy Principal, in writing, with the names of students who have been absent for ten school days and again for fifteen school days

In some instances, the Year Head may feel that a referral to a member of the Care Team is an appropriate strategy in improving attendance. Following discussion with the Principal/Deputy Principal, Parent(s)/Guardian(s) and Student the Year Head will make this referral.

The school is sensitive to the individual needs and circumstances of its students and is aware that some students need encouragement to attend school regularly.

The Year Head plays a key role in supporting students in overcoming difficulties relating to punctuality and attendance. This can be done by:

- Liaising with staff
- Referring to Care Team
- Working closely with Parent(s)/Guardian(s)
- Reviewing strategy in place on a regular basis

The Year Head is responsible for ensuring that standards of attendance and punctuality are a priority within the Year Group. This can be done through meetings with individual students, parents, tutors, student assemblies and end of year awards ceremonies etc.

### **The Role of the Administrative Staff**

The administrative staff prepare the tutor folders in advance of the beginning of the academic year. The administrative staff prepare, set out and collect the 'Sign-In' and 'Sign Out' Books on a daily basis.

Students arriving late to school must report to the main office where they are issued with a 'Late Stamp'. They must also sign in in the 'Sign In' book and swipe in using their Student I.D. card.

The administrative staff monitor the completion of the morning and afternoon roll call.

They collect any notes placed in boxes outside the Deputy Principal's office and amend on the computerised system.

They place the processed notes in a white envelope which they then place in the appropriate Tutor Folder in the Staffroom. If they receive an unsigned note, they place the note in a white envelope and place it in the Year Heads post box for the Year Heads attention.

### **The Role of the Deputy Principal**

#### **The Deputy Principal will:**

- ensure that the appropriate attendance returns are made to TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency
- give permission to students to make arrangements through the school office to go home when they become ill throughout the school day
- ensure that they sign out in the 'Sign Out' book and verifies the entry
- sign notes presented by students which indicates they need to leave school in order to attend medical appointments etc
- send a text message via VSWare, at 9:30 a.m., to parents/guardians of students who have not presented for class
- patrol the corridors to ensure students punctually attend class by 8:30 a.m. and 1:45 p.m.
- check for afternoon absences on VSWare which present as 'unexplained', liaises with the main office to determine if there is a record of 'early leavers' and checks if the 'Sign Out Book' has a record of the student's departure
- in liaison with Year Heads, the Deputy Principal will monitor attendance and ensure quick and early intervention if a problem is identified

### **The Role of the Principal**

- The Principal is responsible for the effective implementation of the school's Attendance and Punctuality Policy
- The Principal ensures that the statutory obligations of the school with regard to attendance and punctuality are adhered to
- In liaison with Year Heads and with the Deputy Principal the Principal will monitor attendance and ensure quick and early intervention if a problem is identified

### **Board of Management**

#### **The Board of Management must:**

- Ensure that the statutory obligations of the school with regard to attendance and participation are adhered to
- Ensure that all information is collected and issued in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998
- Ensure that an evaluation of the effectiveness of the process, strategy and policy regarding attendance is carried out regularly

**Whole school strategies in place at Sancta Maria College to promote good attendance include the following:**

- A welcoming friendly environment created and maintained through our Transition Programme for new students, Cara Programme, Positive Behaviour Code etc
- Early intervention: Parents are informed that a high standard of punctuality and attendance are expected and alerted at an early stage when concerns become apparent. This can be done via the school app, text messaging, information evenings etc
- Uniform: We implement a strict uniform policy to avoid financial or social labelling.
- Rewards: It is an integral part of the Positive Behaviour Code to reward rather than sanction students for attendance. Students receive certificates and merits for good attendance and full attendance at our Award Ceremony.
- Equality of Participation: Children are not excluded from participating in activities because of inability to pay e.g. school tours
- Equity issues: Every effort is made to make the same opportunities available to all the children in the school regardless of ability, background or social setting.
- Curriculum: Understanding and support are given to children who have difficulty with or who are reluctant to engage in certain aspects of the curriculum
- Parents: We communicate the requirements of schools and of parents under the Education Welfare Act to parents when they have enrolled their children and it is clearly outlined in the school's Positive Behaviour Code.
- Staff development issues – Teaching staff in the school are encouraged to and supported in continuous development of their professional skills particularly in the area of differentiation and inclusion.
- Positive awards system for behaviour and attendance (twice during the school year)
- Tutor system to support students
- Structured accountable system in place for students signing out of school early, to reduce students missing class time unnecessarily
- Parents receive a daily text alert for absenteeism
- Establishment of a care team for the purpose of identifying and supporting "at risk" students
- Parent information session stressing, amongst other matters, the importance of attendance with first years
- Reports: Information on the number the days which the Student has been absent is given to parents in school reports.

- Written warning issued to parents when a child has exceeded 10 days regarding actions that take place at 20 days of absenteeism.
- Letter sent to parents after 20 days absent and report filed (twice per year) with TUSLA as appropriate.

### **Partnership arrangements (parent(s)/guardian(s), students)**

- **Parent(s)/guardian(s):**
- Consistent stream of information on attendance, behaviour and pastoral care issues are maintained with parents via direct contact from year Head/Deputy Principal/Principal
- Strong links with Parents Association to maintain strong links with parents
- Parental involvement to support school policies are strongly encouraged
- Policy development and review includes input from parents via the Parents Association as part of the collaborative process
- We include a variety of Parent/guardian Information Evenings over the school year e.g. 1<sup>st</sup> Year Information session for parent(s)/guardian(s), Senior Cycle information evening, CAO evening etc. to enhance the role of parents in their child's education
- A newsletter will be produced four times per year to showcase and celebrate school events and achievements.
- There is a defined system in place to meet with parent(s)/guardian(s) where an issue has emerged in relation to a child's attendance, attainment or progression as part of the schools Positive Behaviour Code. This can include telephone conversations or face to face meetings.

- **Students:**

Students are central partners in education.

- Student opinion and attitudes are sought for policy development and school planning via the student council.

### **Responsibilities**

Each participant outlined above (Principal/ Deputy Principal, Tutors, Class Teachers, Parents, Student) has responsibility to carry out their assigned roles as described.

The Principal has responsibility to co-ordinate and monitor the Attendance Strategy and present data as outlined below to the management team to facilitate annual purposes.

The school may request advice from TUSLA or from the NEPS psychologist if deemed appropriate.

The Strategy will be evaluated annually by the Management Team (Principal/ Deputy Principal/ Assistant Principals), to establish its success in achieving the following indicators of the success:

- Increase in attendance levels. This can be assessed by checking attendance rolls, registers, VSWare, ANSEO etc
- Positive feedback from teachers, parents, pupils. This can be assessed by a variety of methods including surveys, questionnaires etc.
- Improvement in individual cases where issues had been present. This can be assessed via liaison with individual student, parent(s)/guardian(s), class teachers, tutors, Year Heads, Deputy Principal, Principal .

**Review process and date for review**

Senior Management, in conjunction with, Middle Management teams will initiate the review process. Each participant outlined above (Principal/ Deputy Principal, Year Heads, Tutors, Class Teachers, Parent(s)/guardian(s), Students) will be consulted when this statement of strategy is due for renewal.

**Date the Statement of Strategy was approved by the Board of Management: 25 June 2018**

Signed: PJ Gannon  
Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed: Gerardine Kennedy  
Principal

Date: June 28<sup>th</sup> 2019

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