



Attendance Policy

Introduction

Attendance is crucial to effective learning and the continuity of learning experiences. Therefore, Holy Cross Mercy School places great emphasis on regular attendance. The Board of Management wishes to promote and encourage regular attendance as an essential factor in our pupils' learning.

We expect children to have full attendance at school unless they are ill or have medical appointments. We fully understand that there may also be urgent family reasons why a child cannot attend school, especially in the case of a bereavement and we will always endeavour to offer our support in these instances.

Rationale

In Holy Cross Mercy School we hope to nurture each child to develop their potential in a caring environment where the talents of each child are valued. Regular school attendance and punctuality help to give children the best possible start and are essential factors in a child's learning. The purpose of this policy is to promote and encourage regular school attendance and to foster an appreciation of the importance of arriving to school on time every day.

The main factors contributing to the formulation of a revised policy can be summarised as follows:

- To promote and encourage regular attendance as an essential factor in our pupils' learning
- Legislative requirements such as the Education Welfare Act 2000 and the Education Act, 1998. The role of parents is recognised in ensuring regular attendance and punctuality of their child. Schools are also required to establish and maintain a school register and school attendance records, to monitor the attendance of all students enrolled and to report on student attendance in certain circumstances, to Tusla Education Support Services (TESS).
- The role of Educational Welfare Referrals

Aims and Objectives

The revised policy is geared towards:

- ensuring that pupil attendance is recorded daily
- supporting and sustaining the positive attitudes to learning already evident in our

- school and to highlight their importance for all pupils
- promoting children's positive dispositions toward attendance and punctuality
- promoting a positive learning environment
- identifying pupils who may be at risk of poor attendance
- developing links between the school and the families of children who may be at risk of developing attendance problems
- identifying and removing, insofar as is practicable, obstacles to school attendance.
- ensuring compliance with the requirements of the relevant legislation

Compliance with School Ethos

This policy seeks to promote and support all aspects of the children's wellbeing as a core value of our ethos. We strive to ensure that all our students can flourish in an environment that is nurturing, supportive and progressive. We are guided by our mission statement, the aim of which is to ensure that each child, through confidence and self-belief may achieve their full potential. We believe that there is a clear and direct link between regular school attendance and pupil progress. We recognise that it is of paramount importance that parents/guardians and school staff work together to achieve optimal attendance for each child in our care.

Roles and Responsibilities

All members of staff have an input into the implementation of the policy. Class teachers record individual patterns of attendance and the school secretarial staff make returns to Tusla Education Support Services (TESS). An Assistant Principal has responsibility for promoting attendance and liaising with TESS.

It is the responsibility of the Principal and staff to implement this policy under the guidance of the school's Board of Management.

Punctuality

Punctuality is very important to ensure that every pupil gets the best possible start to the school day. Children are welcome to arrive at school from 8.30 a.m. Supervision is not available before this time. Therefore, in the interests of personal safety, we respectfully ask that children not be dropped to school before this time.

Late Arrivals

- Children are received by members of the School Leadership Team and SNAs at the school gate **from 8:30 a.m. to 8:45 a.m.**
- Class lessons begin at **8.45 a.m. sharp**. Pupils must be in their class by this time.
- In the interests of health and safety the school entrance doors will be closed after this time.
- Pupils who arrive after **8.45 a.m.** are deemed *late for school*.
- This will also be recorded as 'late' after **8.50 a.m.** on the daily online Aladdin attendance system.
- Parents/guardians must provide an explanation for their child's late arrival using a Seesaw message.
- Children arriving late must report to the School Office to gain access to the school corridors.

- A record is kept on Aladdin of late arrivals and the reasons given for same.
- All pupils are expected to be on time. The school will contact parents/guardians in the event of pupils being consistently late.

Early Departures

If a pupil needs to be collected early from school (e.g. for a medical appointment that cannot be facilitated outside of school hours), a parent/guardian must sign the Early Collection Book at the main office, stating the reason for the pupil's early departure. This will then be recorded by the School Secretary using Aladdin, our online recording system. The School Secretary will go to the child's class and bring the pupil to the reception area to be released early into his/her parent/guardian's care. Pupils may not be collected by anyone other than a parent/guardian without prior written permission by the parent/guardian. Pupils may not be collected by a person under the age of eighteen. **All parents are strongly advised against early collection of pupils except in urgent cases.**

The School's Policy for Absences due to Term-Time Holidays

Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their child who is attending a recognised school is at school on every day that the school is open, unless there is a genuine reason for him/her not to attend (Section 17 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000). Therefore, the school cannot give 'permission' for holiday absences during term time.

Holy Cross Mercy School strongly discourages parents from taking pupils on holidays during term time. If a parent decides to take his/her child out of school for holidays, the parent must provide a letter to the school to say that they are doing so and that they are aware of the educational and potential legal implications of doing so.

Recording and Reporting Attendance

The school attendance of individual pupils is recorded on a daily class roll sheet and the online Aladdin system in each class on a daily basis.

- If a pupil does not attend school on a day when the school is open for instruction, his/her non-attendance will be recorded by the class teacher. The roll call is taken at 9:30 a.m. each morning. A message from parents/guardians is required to explain each absence. Such explanations should be sent to the class teacher using the Seesaw message facility. Late arrivals are recorded by the class teacher.
- **Early Intervention:** There is a special focus on attendance in September when attendance patterns are established. Staff remain vigilant so that 'risk' students are identified early. Risk students can be categorised as those who are absent for 5 days without an explanation for absence being provided. In these cases, the parent/guardian will be telephoned by the class teacher/S.E.T. The call will be made to establish the reason for the child's absence and if the School can offer any support or assistance to help remediate the issue. A record of the phone call will be kept in the Aladdin Log of Actions.
- Attendance patterns are reviewed at the end of every month by the SET associated with each class to identify any pupils with high levels of absenteeism. Attendance patterns will also be reviewed e.g; are there frequent absences on Monday's and Friday's? A check-in phone call will be made to parents/guardians of children from the class teacher or SET when deemed necessary.

- The class teacher notifies the Principal/Assistant Principal with responsibility for attendance of concern regarding the attendance of any child, and in all cases when the pupil reaches 15 days absence.
- The parents of pupils whose attendance is of concern are contacted by a member of the school Leadership Team, who informs them of the concern and support is offered.
- Absences of more than 20 days are automatically referred to TESS using Student Absence Reports (SAR) which are submitted twice each school year.
- When a child has been absent for 17 days within a school year, parents/guardians will receive a notification via Aladdin alerting them to the fact and that their child is approaching 20 days absence.
- Class teachers and the Principal/Assistant Principal have responsibility for promoting attendance communicate directly regarding absence rates of concern.
- Parents/guardians are made aware of the requirements of TESS, particularly the by-law relating to absences of more than 20 days per school year. TESS are notified twice yearly of the total number of absences during the school year. Pupils whose non-attendance is a concern are contacted by a member of the School Leadership Team and are informed of the school's concerns.

The School liaises with TESS in the following cases:

- **School Returns:** Schools report all pupils who have been absent 20 days or more by submitting Student Absence Reports (SAR) twice each year.
- **Annual Attendance Report (AAR):** Schools report the total number of days lost through absence by submitting an Annual Attendance Report (AAR) at the end of the academic year.
- **Educational Welfare Referrals:** Where the School Principal/Assistant Principal with responsibility for promoting school attendance has a concern in relation to the attendance of a pupil and having exhausted in-school interventions, an Educational Welfare Referral can be made to TESS in relation to these individual pupils.
- **Reduced School Day Notifications:** All students who are on a reduced school day must be notified to TESS.
- **Expulsions and suspensions:** Schools are obliged to notify TESS where there is an intention to expel a pupil and also must notify TESS where the expulsion has been confirmed. Where a student has been suspended for a period of six consecutive days or a cumulative total of 20 school days a notification must be sent to TESS.

Promoting Attendance

The Board of Management, staff, students, parent body and wider community of Holy Cross Mercy School work in partnership to create a school culture that is welcoming, nurturing and inclusive.

The BOM directs available resources towards maintaining and improving our school building and the general school environment. This in turn creates a positive backdrop for school attendance.

The Parents' Association support the work of the school throughout the year and provide additional funding and opportunities for students which enhance their wellbeing e.g. the funding of celebration parties for First Holy Communion and Confirmation, organising bake sales and parent social events etc. As a staff we strive to provide a supportive learning environment in which all students are respected and valued.

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Students in Holy Cross Mercy School enjoy a broad and balanced curriculum. Provision is made for a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The Student Council offers opportunities for students to express their views regarding enhancing the school climate. These opportunities impact positively on pupil engagement and can in turn have a positive effect on attendance.

Supportive parish and community links further enhance the experience of Holy Cross Mercy School students and their families which is a positive factor in school attendance. We recognise the link between regular, punctual attendance and the wellbeing of our students and engage in positive strategies such as:

- providing a safe, secure, welcoming and enriching learning environment for all pupils
- identifying early and responding to differing learning needs sensitively
- resourcing additional learning materials and supports for some children
- communicating openly and sensitively with parents if there are areas of concern
- staff members are present at each entrance to meet and greet students by name each morning and to facilitate any students experiencing anxiety leaving a parent/guardian in a sensitive and needs-based manner.
- class teachers facilitate a calm and welcoming reception time by setting up play, reading or other activities and chatting informally to the children until formal teaching time begins.

The school promotes good attendance through Class Teachers (supported by SET and SNAs where applicable), who are responsible for daily recording of attendance on the Aladdin system.

It is also the responsibility of class teachers to:

- establish a positive class environment that supports participation and engagement, being particularly mindful of pupils who may be at risk of poor attendance
- actively use the school's Attendance Strategy
- set high expectations around attendance and punctuality using supportive, inclusive and encouraging language
- ensure attendance and punctuality data is recorded accurately and reviewed in line with school procedures
- alert relevant staff (Principal/ Deputy Principal/Assistant Principal with responsibility for attendance) if there are concerns around pupil absences
- support the attendance plan for pupils who have difficulty attending school on a regular basis
- support pupils on their return to school when they have missed periods of schooling.

The School Secretaries facilitate and monitor the Aladdin attendance record system.

The Principal, Deputy Principal and Assistant Principal with responsibility for promoting attendance:

- liaise with class teachers and parents/ guardians when issues around attendance arise and introduce attendance support strategies on a case by case basis
- monitor attendance through the Aladdin system
- are responsible for making returns to TESS
- lead the creation of a safe and welcoming environment
- display kindness, compassion and understanding are vigilant so that risks to good attendance such as disadvantage, bullying etc. are identified early
- reward good attendance with whole-school reward systems e.g; reward systems to encourage improved attendance amongst children whose attendance is in need of improvement and acknowledging outstanding attendance.

Whole School Strategies to Promote Attendance

Holy Cross Mercy School endeavours to create a safe, welcoming environment for our pupils and their parents/guardians. Parents/guardians are consulted in drafting and reviewing policies with the aim of promoting a high-level of co-operation among the school community. The teaching staff collaborates in the planning and implementation of the primary school curriculum, so as to provide a stimulating learning environment for all pupils.

New entrants and their parents/guardians are invited to engage in an induction process, through which the school's policies and procedures in relation to attendance are explained. There is a focus on the value of regular attendance and on the importance of developing good attendance habits from Junior Infants onwards.

Our homework policy, drawn up in consultation with parents/guardians, clearly outlines the school's expectations in terms of the quantity of homework assigned and in the quality of homework presented. There is a consistent approach to homework throughout the school.

The calendar for the coming school year is published annually in June. It is hoped that this approach will enable parents/guardians to plan family events around school closures, thus minimising the chances of non-attendance related to family holidays during the school term.

Strategies in the Event of Non-Attendance

Section 17 of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), states that 'the parent of a child shall cause the child concerned to attend a recognised school on each school day'.

Section 21 of the Act obliges schools to inform the Education Welfare Officer if a child is absent on more than 20 days in any school year, or if a child does not attend school on a regular basis.

In such cases TESS (following all reasonable efforts made to consult with the child's parents and 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.

Communication

The school has developed a good relationship with the local Education Welfare Officer personnel and there is ongoing communication in relation to children who are at risk.

The school maintains communication with local pre-schools and second-level schools in order to make the transition for pupils as easy as possible.

Communication with other Schools

Under Section 20 of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), the Principal of a child's current school must notify the Principal of the child's previous school that the child is now registered in their school.

When a Principal receives notification that a child has been registered elsewhere he/she must notify the Principal of the pupil's new school of any problems in relation to attendance at the pupil's former school and of such matters relating to the child's educational progress as he or she considers appropriate. This applies to pupils who transfer between primary schools and to pupils who transfer from primary to second-level education.

When a pupil transfers into Holy Cross Mercy School, confirmation of transfer will be communicated to their previous school, and appropriate records sought.

Communication with Parents

The school informs parents/guardians on an annual basis that further information regarding school attendance may be sought from Education Welfare ServiceTusla - Child and Family Agency.

The school circulated the NEWB information booklet *Don't Let Your Child Miss Out* to all parents in November 2024. The school also informs all parents of the implications of non-attendance as per the *Education Welfare Act 2000*. This information is disseminated by regular school communication. Parents of new children are informed on enrolment.

Parents/guardians can promote good school attendance by:

- ensuring regular and punctual school attendance.
- notifying the school if their children cannot attend for any reason.
- working with the school and education welfare service to resolve any attendance problems.
- making sure their children understand that parents support good school attendance.
- discussing planned absences with the school.
- refraining, if at all possible, from taking holidays during school time.
- showing an interest in their children's school day and their children's homework.
- encouraging them to participate in school activities.
- praising and encouraging their children's achievements.
- instilling in their children a positive self-concept and a positive sense of self-worth.
- informing the school in writing of the reasons for absence from school.
- ensuring, insofar as is possible, that children's appointments (with dentists etc), are arranged for times outside of school hours where possible.
- contacting the school immediately, if they have concerns about absence or other related school matters.
- notifying, in writing, the school if their child/children, particularly children in junior classes, are to be collected by someone not known to the teacher.

Evaluation

We would be
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The success of any Attendance Policy is measured through:

- improved attendance levels as measured through Aladdin records and statistical returns
- children's positive dispositions toward attendance and punctuality
- positive working relationships between home and school in finding solutions to problems around attendance and punctuality
- teacher observations and reports.

Implementation/Ratification and Review

This policy was reviewed and updated in consultation with parents, pupils, staff and Board of Management in November 2024. It will be reviewed again in 2026, or sooner should the need arise.

Chairperson
Board of Management Holy Cross Mercy School
Date: 28/11/2024

References:

- Don't let your Child Miss Out* - NEWB 2004
- Education Welfare Act 2000
- Education Act 1998
- Section 29 Education Act
- Empty Desks* - CDU Mary Immaculate

Appendix

Attendance Reminder

Date: _____

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),
Your child _____ was absent from school on _____.

Statistical

We would be most obliged if you would please reply to this message with an explanation for his/her absence as our school Attendance Policy requires that you provide a written explanation for all absences.

Yours faithfully,



Statement of Strategy for School Attendance

Name of school	Holy Cross Mercy School
Address	New Road, Killarney, Co. Kerry.
Roll Number	19487M
The school's vision and values in relation to attendance	<p>Holy Cross Mercy School seeks to promote and support all aspects of the children's wellbeing as a core value of our ethos. We strive to ensure that all our students can flourish in an environment that is nurturing, supportive and progressive.</p> <p>We are guided by our mission statement, the aim of which is to ensure that each child, through confidence and self-belief, may achieve their full potential.</p> <p>In Holy Cross Mercy School, we hope to nurture each child to develop their potential in a caring environment where the talents of each child are valued. Regular school attendance and punctuality help to give children the best possible start and are essential factors in a child's education.</p>
The school's high expectations around attendance	<p>Consistent attendance is crucial to effective learning and the continuity of learning experiences. Therefore, Holy Cross Mercy School places great emphasis on regular attendance. The Board of Management wishes to promote and encourage regular school attendance and to foster an appreciation of the importance of arriving to school on time every day as an essential factor in our pupils' learning.</p> <p>We believe that there is a clear and direct link between regular school attendance and pupil progress. We recognise that it is of paramount importance that parents/guardians and school staff work together to achieve optimal attendance for each child in our care.</p>

Every child in our school, to whom the School Attendance Act applies, is obliged by law to attend school every day on which the school is in operation, unless there is a reasonable excuse for not attending. (Section 17 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000).

We believe that it is of vital importance to have full attendance at school unless the child is ill or has medical appointments that cannot be scheduled at a time outside of school hours.

We fully understand that there may also be urgent family reasons why a child cannot attend school, especially in the case of bereavement and endeavour to offer our support in these instances.

Holy Cross Mercy School strongly discourages parents from taking pupils on holidays during term time as parents/guardians have a legal duty to ensure that their child who is attending a recognised school is at school every day that the school is open, unless there is a genuine reason for him/her not to attend.

How attendance will be monitored

- **Daily Records:** The school attendance of individual pupils is recorded daily on a weekly class roll sheet and the online Aladdin system in each class on a daily basis. If a pupil does not attend on a day when the school is open for instruction, his/her non-attendance will be recorded by the class teacher. The explanation provided for the pupil's absence is also recorded.
- **Early Intervention:** There is a special focus on attendance in September when attendance patterns are established. If a child is absent for 5 days without an explanation for absence being provided, the parent/guardian will be telephoned by the class teacher/S.E.T. The call will be made to establish the reason for the child's absence and if the school can offer any support or assistance to help remediate the issue. A record of the phone call will be kept in the Aladdin 'Log

	<p>of Actions’.</p> <p>Attendance patterns are reviewed at the end of every month by the SET associated with each class to identify any pupils with high levels of absenteeism. Attendance patterns will also be reviewed e.g. are there frequent absences on Mondays and Fridays. Some families may require a check-in phone call from the class teacher or SET.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Board of Management: The class teacher notifies the Principal/Assistant Principal with responsibility for attendance of concerns regarding the attendance of any child and/or when the pupil reaches 15 days absence. ● The parents of pupils whose attendance is a concern are contacted by a member of the School Leadership Team and are informed of the school’s concerns and support is offered. ● Board of Management: School attendance is discussed at Board of Management meetings. ● School Returns: The school reports all pupils who have been absent 20 days or more by submitting Student Absence Reports (SAR) twice each school year. ● Annual Attendance Report (AAR). Schools report the total number of days lost through absence by submitting an Annual Attendance Report (AAR) at the end of the academic year. ● Educational Welfare Referrals. Where the School Principal/Assistant Principal with responsibility for promoting school attendance has a concern in relation to the attendance of a pupil and having exhausted in-school interventions, an Educational Welfare Referral can be made to TESS in relation to these individual pupils.
<p>Summary of the main elements of the school’s approach to attendance:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Holy Cross Mercy School endeavours to create a safe, welcoming environment for our pupils and their parents/guardians. Parents/guardians are consulted in drafting and reviewing policies with the aim of promoting a high-level of co-operation among the school community. ● New entrants and their parents/guardians are invited to engage in an induction process, through which the school’s policies and procedures in relation to attendance are explained. There is a focus on the value of regular attendance and on the importance of developing good attendance habits from Junior Infants onwards.

- The teaching staff collaborates in the planning and implementation of the primary school curriculum, that is differentiated to meet individual learning needs, so as to provide a stimulating learning environment for all pupils.
- Support for pupils who have special educational needs is provided in accordance with DoE guidelines.
- Positive working relationships between home and school in finding solutions to problems around attendance and punctuality.
- Teacher observations and reports.
- Staff members at each entrance to meet and greet students by name each morning and to facilitate any students experiencing anxiety leaving a parent/guardian in a sensitive and needs-based manner.
- Class teachers facilitate a calm and welcoming reception time by setting up play, reading or other activities and chatting informally to the children until formal teaching time begins.
- The Principal and Assistant Principal with responsibility for promoting attendance will promote the importance of good school attendance among pupils, parents and staff.
- Our homework policy, drawn up in consultation with parents/guardians, clearly outlines the school's expectations in terms of the quantity of homework assigned and in the quality of homework presented. There is a consistent approach to homework throughout the school.
- Holy Cross Mercy School will promote the development of good self-esteem and self-worth in its pupils (see Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying/Bí Cineálta Policy).
- The school will use the School Newsletter to promote attendance and punctuality.
- The school has developed a good relationship with the local Education Welfare Officer personnel and there is ongoing communication in relation to children who are at risk.
- The school maintains communication with local pre-schools and second-level schools in order to make the transition for pupils as easy as possible.
- The calendar for the coming school year is published annually in June. It is hoped that this approach will enable parents/guardians to plan family events around school closures, thus minimising the chances of non-attendance

	<p>related to family holidays during the school term. Holy Cross Mercy School strongly discourages parents from taking pupils on holidays during term time. If a parent decides to take his/her child out of school for holidays, the parent must provide a letter to the school to say that they are doing so and that they are aware of the educational and potential legal implications of doing so.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A reminder message will be sent to parents/guardians in instances where absences are not explained. ● Staff remain vigilant so that 'at risk' pupils are identified early. 'At risk' pupils can be categorised as those who are absent for more than 5 days in a 20-day period without an accompanying note of explanation from parents/guardians. ● Appropriate contact takes place between the school and parents/guardians when this occurs. A meeting between parents and the Principal may be set up if deemed necessary. ● Parents of children who are absent for 17 days receive a text from the school informing them of this fact and highlighting the legal requirement of the school to report to TUSLA when the child reaches 20 days absent. ● Absences of more than 20 days are automatically referred to TESS. ● In such cases TESS (following all reasonable efforts made to consult with the child's parents and 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 may result in a fine and/or imprisonment.
<p>School roles in relation to attendance</p>	<p>All staff have an input into the implementation of the policy. Class teachers record individual patterns of attendance and the school secretarial staff make returns to Tusla Education Support Services (TESS). The Principal and an Assistant Principal have responsibility for promoting attendance and liaising with TESS.</p> <p>It is the responsibility of the Principal and staff to implement this policy under the guidance of the school's Board of Management.</p>
<p>Partnership arrangements (parents, students, other schools, youth and</p>	<p>Closer home/school relations will be fostered through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ongoing communication with the Parents'

community groups)	<p>Association</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● attendance at meetings (Parent/Teacher, etc) ● parent Courses in Torc Family and Community Resource Centre ● attendance at graduation ceremonies ● attendance at school events (e.g. Concerts, Masses, etc.) ● regular newsletters to families ● school website/social media platforms <p>Contact with the following bodies will be fostered and developed in order to promote the good attendance of students in the school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● TUSLA ● NEPS
How the Statement of Strategy will be monitored	<p>The success of the Strategy for School Attendance will be measured through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● accurate data including absence reasons ● children's positive dispositions toward attendance and punctuality ● positive working relationships between home and school in finding solutions to problems around attendance and punctuality ● teacher observations and reports.
Review process and date for review	<p>The Statement of Strategy for School Attendance will be evaluated on an on-going basis by representatives from the relevant sections of the school community and will be reviewed every two years by the Board of Management of Holy Cross Mercy School.</p>
Date the Statement of Strategy was approved by the Board of Management	28 th November 2024
Date the Statement of Strategy submitted to Tusla	