



St. Mary's Secondary School

Attendance Strategy



School Ethos

St. Mary's is a Mercy school which is concerned with developing the whole person within a Christian atmosphere. By providing a balance of educational activities, we foster growth in self-esteem and respect for others. We take pride in encouraging high standards of teaching and learning.

In line with the CEIST Charter, our approach to education is rooted in a commitment to the holistic development of each student, recognising the importance of their spiritual, personal, social and academic growth. We promote a strong sense of community, belonging and participation, and, consistent with CEIST values of respect, care and justice, we seek to support all students in a compassionate and inclusive manner, recognising the unique circumstances of each individual.

Attendance

Regular attendance at school is essential for all students so that they may reach their potential. Our school aims to foster a culture of regular attendance at school for all pupils. In addition, we seek to identify and support those pupils who are experiencing problems with attendance at school. The provisions of the Education Welfare Act 2002 inform and support this policy.

Rationale

1. Legislative requirements arising from the Education Welfare Act 2002.
2. The changing fabric of our society.
3. The role of TUSLA Education Support Services (TESS).
4. The requirements of the Department of Education [DE].
5. The educational interests of the students.

St. Mary's Secondary School has taken cognisance of both global and national research in relation to attendance and student outcomes. A significant 2026 study conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), in partnership with the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS), found that:

- Even 1–2 days of absence at age 13 is associated with lower Leaving Certificate achievement.
- Students who are chronically absent (20+ days per year) experience a substantial drop in exam performance, equivalent to 80+ Leaving Certificate points.
- The negative impact of absence is consistent across all social groups, indicating that no group can fully compensate for missed school time.

This research clearly demonstrates that even small amounts of absence can have a measurable and lasting impact on student achievement. It reinforces the school's commitment to promoting excellent attendance as a key factor in enabling all students to reach their full potential.

Aims and Objectives

1. Encourage full attendance where possible.
2. Identify pupils at risk.
3. Raise awareness of the importance of school attendance.
4. Foster an appreciation of learning.
5. Improve communication with parent(s)/guardian(s).
6. Application of Policy

This policy applies to all students of St. Mary's Secondary School regardless of age.



The school's high expectations for attendance

At St. Mary's Secondary School, we hold high expectations for attendance because we know that being present is essential for learning and success.

All students are expected to:

- Attend school every day, on time and ready to learn.
- Have an attendance rate of 95% or higher (i.e. be absent no more than 8 days per year).
- Only be absent due to genuine illness or unavoidable circumstances.
- Arrive at school each morning with enough time to prepare for class and be in class by 9:00 a.m.
- Arrive on time for all classes during the school day and remain in class for the duration of the class period.
- Fully engage — this means being both physically present and mentally engaged in their learning.
- Schedule medical and other appointments outside school hours in so far as is possible.

As a school, we are committed to creating an environment where every student understands the importance of good attendance and punctuality to their learning, achievement, and personal growth. We set high expectations for ourselves to ensure every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential. To do this we:

- Meet with every year group to reinforce the critical importance of regular and consistent attendance. During these assemblies, students are encouraged to understand that their presence in class is fundamental to achieving their full potential, and that taking personal responsibility for their attendance is a key indicator of maturity and commitment to their education.
- Develop a positive and proactive approach to attendance and punctuality, promoting them as key aspects of school life, success, and wellbeing.
- Maintain accurate and up-to-date records of student attendance and punctuality, ensuring that every student's whereabouts is known at all times during the school day.
- Empower students to take ownership of their attendance and punctuality, encouraging self-management, personal responsibility, and pride in meeting expectations.
- Aim to actively reduce absenteeism and encourage full attendance using supportive and restorative approaches that address underlying causes and remove barriers to participation.
- Identify, monitor, and respond early to patterns of poor attendance or punctuality, using data and staff insights to provide timely interventions and consistent support.
- Foster strong partnerships with parents, guardians, and external agencies to promote shared responsibility and consistent messaging around attendance.

How attendance will be monitored

- Every student is expected to be in attendance each school day from 9.00 a.m. until 3.50 p.m. on Monday and Tuesday, and from 9.00 a.m. until 3.10 p.m. on other school days.
- Class teachers are required to record student class attendance on Compass for all classes.
- Students may not be absent from school except when the absence is unavoidable due to illness, urgent family reasons, or other legitimate and unavoidable reasons.
- It is the responsibility of the parent(s)/guardian(s) to furnish the school with a note on Compass outlining the date and reason for every recorded absence. Such notes will be collected and filed electronically and used in returns to Tusla Education Support Services (TESS) as outlined in the Education Welfare Act 2002. If a parent/guardian emails or phones the office to explain an absence, an absence note must still be submitted on Compass.



- Parent(s)/Guardian(s) are requested to ensure all discretionary absences occur outside term time. School management furnishes parent(s)/guardian(s) with a calendar of the school year to assist in this regard.
- In the event of a student arriving late for school (i.e. arriving any time after 9.00 a.m.), she must present at the main office to sign in. Students are required to scan their Student ID Card and the student's late arrival will be recorded on Compass. The student will receive a printed "Late Slip" documenting the date and time of arrival at school, which she must bring to the relevant class teacher. Parent(s)/Guardian(s) may receive a notification/text message informing them that their daughter has arrived at school and reminding parents to submit a note via Compass and provide a reason for the late arrival.
- Late arrival to school on a repeated basis may be viewed as a breach of discipline and appropriate sanctions may apply. Parents/Guardians must have all explanation notes submitted on Compass, including the reason for the late arrival, no later than 9.00 a.m. on the following Monday morning. Students will receive a lunchtime detention if they are late to school on three occasions where no parental explanation/note has been recorded on Compass.
- In the event of a student becoming ill or getting injured during the day, she should inform her class teacher or supervisor who will send her to the Principal or Deputy Principal to obtain permission to go home. If such permission is granted, parent(s)/guardian(s) will be contacted by the school office. In line with the school's Mobile Phone Policy, students are not permitted to contact parent(s)/guardian(s) using their mobile phone during the school day without the express permission of the school Principal/Deputy Principal. **In the event of illness/emergency it is essential that a parent/guardian can be contacted. Parent(s)/Guardian(s) are asked to ensure that the school always has their current phone number on record. If a parent/guardian changes their number or email address, they should notify the school office promptly.**
- In the event of a student being ill or injured, parent(s)/guardian(s) are expected to make arrangements for the collection of their daughter at the main office. When collecting a Junior Student (1st – 3rd Year) before the end of the school day, parent(s)/guardian(s) or a nominated person are requested to present at the school reception and to sign the printed "Departure Note" indicating the reason for the early departure from school.
- During the school day every student must attend every class according to her timetable unless prior permission has been received from the Principal, Deputy Principal, Year Head or Teacher. The unauthorised absence of a student from any class during the school day will be viewed as a breach of the Code of Positive Behaviour and appropriate sanctions may apply.
- On occasion, students may be absent from class due to school-related activities. Such absences are sanctioned on the understanding that students ensure all classwork and homework is sourced and carried out to a satisfactory standard. A student may be removed from such activities if they are having an adverse effect on her academic progress. Where a teacher is organising an approved activity which necessitates the absence of students from class, a *School Event* or a *School Activity* must be created on Compass with a list of such students and staff attending, together with the date and time of the event. The organising teacher should take the roll at the start of the event/activity and record it on Compass.
- A student wishing to leave the school premises for a legitimate reason during the school day must have a signed note from her parent(s)/guardian(s). This note should include the reason for the absence and the time the student is leaving. The student must provide this note to her Year Head in the morning between 8.45 and 8.55 a.m. The Year Head will give the student a 'Permission to Leave' slip which must be presented at the school office at the time stated in the note. If a 'Permission to Leave' slip is not provided and signed by the relevant Year Head, the note must be presented to the Principal/Deputy Principal for signing. The Principal or Deputy Principal may contact the parent or guardian to confirm that they are aware of, and have granted, permission for the student to leave.



Students will be required to scan their Student ID Card and a Departure Note will be entered on Compass. Parents/Guardians may receive a notification/text message informing them that their daughter has left the school. Parent(s)/Guardian(s) of Junior Students (1st – 3rd Year) are requested to present at the school reception and to sign the printed 'Departure Note'.

- A student who signs out for an appointment and who wishes to return to school after the appointment must sign in at the main office on her return to school. Students will be required to scan their Student ID Card and an Arrival Note will be entered on Compass. The student will be given a printed arrival slip documenting her arrival time which she must bring to the relevant class teacher. Parent(s)/Guardian(s) may receive a notification/text message informing them that their daughter has arrived back at school.
- Any student who leaves the school premises without such authorisation will be deemed to have breached the school Code of Positive Behaviour and appropriate sanctions may be applied.
- The school does not accept liability for students who are permitted to leave the school grounds in accordance with this procedure for the period during which the student is absent from school, i.e. the period between the time at which the student signs out and signs back in at reception.
- On rare occasions a student may be absent from school due to suspension for breach of discipline. In such instances, parents/guardians will be consulted in advance, and the student is expected to use this time productively by applying herself to her studies. In such instances, if the student attends the school during a period of suspension without the express consent of the school, the school shall not be responsible or liable for any loss or injury suffered by the student on the school campus.

Communication

- Teachers must record on Compass all students in attendance and those absent for each class period on a daily basis.
- Parent(s)/Guardian(s) may be informed by text message if their daughter is absent after the morning and/or afternoon roll call. Parent(s)/Guardian(s) must provide an explanation on Compass for same.
If a parent/guardian receives a text message stating that their daughter is absent from school, but he/she believes that their daughter is in attendance, they must contact the school office immediately. This is a matter of urgency to allow the situation to be investigated without delay to ensure the student's safety and wellbeing.
- Parent(s)/Guardian(s) may receive a notification/text message informing them when their daughter arrives to school late or leaves school early. Parent(s)/Guardian(s) must provide an explanation on Compass for same.
- Parent(s)/Guardian(s) may be notified via phone call or text message if the school has a concern about a particular absence at any time on any given date.
- The Year Head will contact the parent(s)/guardian(s) if there is a concern about a particular absence or absences as they come to our attention.
- The parent(s)/guardian(s) may be requested to make an appointment to discuss the matter.
- The school will inform parent(s)/guardian(s) by letter when a student accumulates 20 absences. This letter will outline the school's responsibility under the Education Welfare Act 2002. The parent(s)/guardian(s) will be invited to contact the school to discuss the matter should they wish to do so.
- In line with TESS guidelines, the school will make a referral to TESS once a student accumulates 20+ days' absence. The school may provide updates on attendance to the Education Welfare Services (EWS) if requested to do so.
- An up-to-date attendance report is available for parent(s)/guardian(s) to access via their daughter's Compass profile. This includes details of each student's class-by-class attendance.



Summary of the main elements of the school's approach to attendance

As part of our commitment to promoting positive attendance, St. Mary's Secondary School participates in the TUSLA Anseo Attendance Promotion Campaign, which supports schools in strengthening attendance systems and working collaboratively with families to improve student outcomes.

The school operates a clear tiered attendance framework, enabling us to monitor attendance effectively, identify concerns early, and provide appropriate supports where needed.

TUSLA's attendance categories are as follows:

Tier	Attendance Percentage	Category	Description
Tier 1	Greater than 95%	Very Good Attendance	Students with attendance above 95% have the best chance of success.
Tier 2	90% – 95%	Worrying Attendance	Attendance in this range is classified as worrying. It is important that students strive to improve their attendance to prevent further decline.
Tier 3	Below 90%	Very Concerning Attendance	Attendance below 90% is considered very concerning and places a student at risk of chronic absenteeism.

Tier 1 – Universal (Whole-School Level)

(For all students)

At this level, the focus is on promotion, prevention, and early identification.

- The school sets and communicates whole-school attendance targets.
- Attendance is promoted as a shared responsibility across the school community.
- Attendance data is regularly monitored to identify patterns and trends.
- A positive school environment supports engagement and belonging.
- Awareness initiatives highlight the link between attendance, wellbeing, and achievement.
- Clear procedures ensure consistent monitoring and early follow-up of concerns.

Tier 2 – Targeted (Early Intervention)

(Students with attendance between 90–95%)

- At this level, the focus is on early intervention and targeted support.
- 'At Risk Students' are identified through attendance monitoring systems.
- Improvement targets are agreed and progress is monitored.
- Year Heads and tutors track and respond to patterns.
- The Attendance Monitoring Team meets regularly to coordinate supports.
- Parental /Guardian engagement is prioritised at an early stage.
- Parent(s)/Guardian(s) may be invited to attend an 'In School Supportive Attendance Clinic'.
- Targeted strategies (e.g. mentoring, check-ins, communication) are used to prevent further decline.



Tier 3 – Intensive (Individualised Support)

(Students with attendance below 90%)

At this level, the focus is on individualised and multi-agency intervention.

- Students are supported through individual attendance plans with clear targets.
- A collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach is adopted within the school.
- Barriers to attendance are identified and addressed.
- Ongoing monitoring, review, and adaptation of supports takes place.
- The school works in partnership with parent(s)/guardian(s) and external agencies, including TESS/Education Welfare Officer (EWO), where appropriate.
- Intensive supports aim to re-engage students and sustain improved attendance.

Roles and Responsibilities

Principal

Overall responsibility for students, including attendance and referral of students to TUSLA as required.

Deputy Principal

Liaise with the Principal on all issues regarding students, including attendance and referral of students to TESS as required.

Year Head

- Monitor attendance in assigned Year Groups and make students aware of the importance of regular attendance.
- Establish contact with students and nurture confidence and trust.
- Make and maintain contact with parent(s)/guardian(s) in an effort to improve attendance, ascertain reasons for non-attendance and document same on Compass.
- In conjunction with the HSCL, encourage parent(s)/guardian(s) to adopt a positive attitude to school attendance.
- Check irregular student absences on Compass on a daily basis.
- When necessary, make referrals to the Student Support Team and/or HSCL.
- Year Heads will organise attendance clinics when deemed necessary and will attend Education Welfare Conferences where required.
- Year Heads will work with Parent(s)/Guardian(s)/Students regarding absenteeism as follows:
 - Meet with and discuss absenteeism with the student.
 - A text message will be sent when a student reaches 5 days' absence regardless of whether the absences are explained or unexplained.
 - A phone call will be made to Parent(s)/Guardian(s) when a student reaches 10 days' absence regardless of whether the absences are explained or unexplained.
 - A letter will be sent to Parent(s)/Guardian(s) when a student reaches 15 days' absence regardless of whether the absences are explained or unexplained. This letter will outline the requirement on the school to notify TESS if 20 days' absence is reached. Parent(s)/Guardian(s) may be invited to attend an 'In School Supportive Attendance Clinic'.
 - Year Heads will make referrals to TESS as required. The school will follow the mandatory reporting requirements to TESS for students with 20 days' absence. Following this mandatory report to TESS, the Educational Welfare Officer may open a case on the student once a referral is received.
- Year Heads will exercise their discretion in situations involving the bereavement of a close family member.



Home School Community Liaison Coordinator (HSCL) - in a non-DEIS setting

The primary role of the HSCL Coordinator is to work in partnership with and empower parents and guardians to support students' attendance and engagement in school, enabling them to experience a full and positive school life.

This work is prioritised as follows:

- Priority 1: Parent(s)/Guardian(s) of Traveller and Roma students attending the school.
 - Priority 2: Parent(s)/Guardian(s) of other students identified as being at high risk of absenteeism.
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- Through this targeted approach, the HSCL works with parents, the school, and the community to support priority families to strengthen engagement with the school and improve student attendance outcomes.
 - Build strong relationships with parents to promote the importance of regular school attendance.
 - Engage with priority families including home visits to address barriers to attendance.
 - Support and encourage priority parents to take an active role in improving their child's attendance.
 - Work with the school and Attendance Team to identify and support students at risk of poor attendance.
 - Collaborate with TESS, EWS, and other agencies to respond to attendance concerns.
 - Provide priority parents with information and supports to improve attendance and engagement.
 - Support transitions as the student moves through the education system to ensure continuity of attendance.
 - Monitor and review the impact of attendance interventions with priority families.

School Attendance Team

The school operates a dedicated Attendance Monitoring Team, which plays a central role in promoting and sustaining good attendance across all year groups. The team is led by the Principal and Deputy Principal and includes the Student Attendance Coordinators. The team meets every second week to review attendance trends and patterns, monitor tiered attendance data, and plan targeted interventions to improve attendance across all Tier groups.

Class Tutor

- Ensure that students are aware of the importance of good attendance and encourage good attendance.
- Bring any concerns regarding student attendance to the attention of the appropriate Year Head.

Class Teacher

- Responsible for recording student attendance on Compass for each class period of the school day.
- Record on Compass students who are unexplained late to class.
- Encourage positive student attendance.
- Bring any concerns regarding student attendance to the attention of the appropriate Year Head.
- Notify all staff in advance of planned absences from class e.g. school trips, sporting activities etc. by creating a School Event on Compass as far in advance as possible.
- Record school-sanctioned student absences from class on Compass for all school events/school activities.



Student Support Team

- Take referrals from Year Heads, liaise with HSCL and advise the Principal/Deputy Principal on further courses of action which may be taken (these include interventions by the Student Support Team or referral to TESS).
- Monitor students referred on an ongoing basis.

AEN Co-Ordinator

Where attendance concerns arise for students with additional educational needs, due regard is given to individual needs and circumstances, including medical needs, appointments, anxiety, sensory difficulties, or disability-related barriers. The AEN Coordinator liaises with the Student Support Team to coordinate appropriate interventions in line with the student's Student Support Plan and guidance from relevant external agencies, including NEPS and Túsla Educational Welfare Services, where appropriate. The AEN Coordinator ensures that communication with parents/guardians is appropriate, timely, and sensitive to the attendance challenges the student may be experiencing.

Admin Staff

Facilitate sign-in and sign-out procedures, update attendance records, and assist in preparing reports for monitoring purposes.

Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

- As the primary educators, parent(s)/guardian(s) have a responsibility to ensure that their children attend school unless there is an unavoidable and legitimate reason for their absence.
- Ensure that their child is punctual in attending school each day.
- Provide the school with a note explaining student absence. Absence notes should be submitted on Compass.
- Provide a written note in the student's school journal if the student needs to leave school early, indicating the reason for the early departure.
- If it is necessary to collect a Junior Student (1st – 3rd Year) before the end of the school day, parent(s)/guardian(s) are requested to present at the school reception and to sign the 'Departure Note' indicating the reason for the early departure from school.
- In the event of illness/emergency it is essential that a parent/guardian can be contacted. Parent(s)/Guardian(s) are asked to ensure that the school always has their current phone number on record. If a parent/guardian changes their number, they should notify the school office promptly.
- In the event of a student being ill or injured, parent(s)/guardian(s) are expected to make arrangements for the collection of their daughter at the main office.
- If a parent/guardian receives a text message stating that their daughter is absent from school, but he/she believes that their daughter is in attendance, they must contact the school office immediately. This is a matter of urgency to allow the situation to be investigated without delay to ensure the student's safety and wellbeing.
- Engage with the school to promote school attendance including with the school's HSCL.

Students

Every student has a personal responsibility to attend school on time each day and to attend and be punctual for all classes during the day.



Rewards

- As part of our positive points system, points are calculated for a period of 11 weeks approx. Students who have attendance of >95% for that period of time will be awarded +12 points.
- As part of the TUSLA Anseo Attendance Programme, prizes may be provided to students with the highest attendance and those students with the most improved attendance.
- At the school's annual Recognitions Day ceremony, certificates for attendance are awarded to students in three categories:
 1. Gold – no absences
 2. Silver – 1 day absence
 3. Bronze – less than 3 days' absence
 4. Other rewards/incentives to promote attendance may be offered.

Sanctions for Breaches of School Attendance Policy

- Each time a student accumulates 3 unexplained late arrivals to school, the student will be placed on Lunchtime Detention.
- Students that are late to class unexplained during the school day will receive a negative 2 points.
- Unauthorised absence during the school day may result in Evening Detention or a further sanction as per our School Code of Positive Behaviour.

Ratification

This Policy was ratified by the Board of Management on: 16th June 2026

Signed: Fionnuala King
Chairperson of BoM

Signed: David O'Reilly
Secretary of BoM