



# **PASTORAL CARE**

## **PUPIL ATTENDANCE POLICY**

## **Introduction**

This policy has been reviewed with reference to the Covid-19 Northern Ireland Re-opening Schools Guidance, DE., 13<sup>th</sup> August 2020. (See Covid-19 Annex to Attendance Policy document for details on Pupil Attendance.)

Regular school attendance is crucial in raising standards in education and ensuring that every child can have full access to the school curriculum and reach their potential. This concurs fully with Article 28 of the UNCRC – Every child has the right to an education.



Sion Mills Primary School will strive to promote an ethos and culture which encourages good attendance and where each pupil will feel valued and secure.

## **School Mission Statement**

At Sion Mills Primary School we aim to provide a caring, stimulating, learning community where all are respected and valued. Building up self-esteem is at the core of all we do and together we celebrate all successes within our school community.

## **Aims**

1. To improve the overall attendance of pupils at Sion Mills Primary School.
2. To develop a framework that defines roles and responsibilities in relation to attendance.
3. To provide advice, support and guidance to parents/guardians and pupils.
4. To promote good relationships with the Education Welfare Service.

## **Role of the School**

The Principal at Sion Mills PS has overall responsibility for school attendance; teachers should bring any concerns regarding school attendance to her attention.

The Board of Governors provide support by reviewing school attendance figures and targets and ensuring it is placed as a termly agenda item.

Teaching staff regularly monitor the attendance and punctuality of pupils by ensuring that attendance is recorded at the beginning of morning and afternoon registration sessions. This shows whether the pupil is present, engaged in an approved activity off site, or absent.

If a pupil is absent, every half-day absence has to be classified by the school as either authorised or unauthorised. Only the school can authorise the absence, not

parents/ carers. This is why information about the cause of each absence is required.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like illness, hospital appointment or other unavoidable cause.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave' has been given. This includes:

- parents/carers keeping pupils off school unnecessarily;
- truancy before or during the school day;
- absences which have never been properly explained;
- children who arrive at school too late to get a registration mark.

It is hoped that parents/carers, school staff and statutory authorities can work closely to overcome any problems which may affect a pupil's attendance. If a pupil is reluctant to attend, it is never a good idea to cover up their absence or to give in to pressure to excuse them from attending. This will only give the impression that attendance does not matter, and may make matters worse.

To enable our school to accurately record and monitor attendance in a consistent way we will adhere to the guidance provided in the Department of Education Circular 2015/02, which can be found at the following link:

<http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/support-and-development-2/school-attendance/recording-pupil-absences.htm>

Sion Mills PS is committed to working with parents to encourage regular and punctual attendance. Extracts from "School Attendance Matters – A Parent's Guide" are sent home annually to parents. A link to the document is available on the school website.

Attendance is monitored on a monthly basis. Pupils' attendance will be discussed at monthly staff meetings using the DENI % measures as terms of reference. Parents requiring a telephone call or letter from the class teacher or principal will be identified at that meeting.

### **Rewarding good attendance**

Sion Mills Primary School firmly believes in recognising and rewarding all achievements, and attendance is no exception. All children who achieve a year's full attendance receive a school certificate and we also present bronze, silver and gold certificates (as issued by EA WR) in a celebration assembly each year.

### **Role of Parent**

Parents have a legal duty<sup>1</sup> to ensure their child of compulsory school age shall receive efficient full time education suitable to age, ability and aptitude and to any



special educational needs they may have, either by regular school attendance or otherwise.

<sup>1</sup>If a child is registered in school, their parent has a legal duty to ensure that they regularly attend that school.

**It is a parent's responsibility to inform the school of the reason for a pupil's absence on the first day of absence. This should be confirmed with a written note when the pupil returns to school. If the absence is likely to be prolonged, this information should be provided to enable the school to assist with homework or any other necessary arrangements which may be required.**

Playgrounds are supervised from 8.45a.m. and pupils are expected to be in school at 9.00a.m. for registration and the beginning of classes. It is the responsibility of parents to ensure that their child is punctual. Lateness (after 9.20a.m.) is recorded at registration and on your child's attendance record. Teachers will record the number of minutes late from 9.00am.

If your child appears reluctant to attend school please discuss the matter promptly with the class teacher or Principal to ensure that both you and your child receive maximum support.

### **Role of Pupils**

Each pupil at Sion Mills Primary School must attend school punctually and regularly. If you have been absent from school, a written note from a parent/guardian must be provided to your teacher when you return.

### **Absence Procedures**

In accordance with the Sion Mills Child Protection Policy parents are requested to inform the school office if their child is not attending. Upon return of the child all parents/guardians are required to submit a written note which provides a clear reason for any absence. If no written note is provided the class teacher will send home a note (Appendix 1) requesting this information.

### **Family holidays during Term Time**

Sion Mills Primary School strongly discourages holidays during term time due to the impact they have on pupils' learning. Parents/carers must contact the school, prior to booking any holiday to explain the need to remove a pupil from school during term time. The contact should be in the form of a letter addressed to the Principal.

Currently there is no legislation in Northern Ireland with regard to holidays in term time (as there is in the rest of the United Kingdom). However, if a pupil's attendance falls below 85% in a school year, the school concerned is obliged to contact the Educational Welfare Officer.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 45(1) of The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986

## **Procedures for Managing Non-attendance**

When attendance falls below 90% and the school is unaware of a medical reason the family home will receive a telephone call from the class teacher or the principal to ascertain the reason for absence or if there are any issues the school can support. If attendance does not improve a letter will be sent out (See Appendix 2) to the child's home address.

## **Education Welfare Service**

The Education Authority (EA) through the Education Welfare Service (EWS) has a legal duty to make sure that parents meet their responsibility towards their children's education.

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

Signature – Principal

Signature – Chair, Board of Governors

Date



## ANNEX TO ATTENDANCE POLICY – COVID-19 2020/21

During the reopening period it is vitally important that parents/carers following the guidance set out by the school in respect of illness and absence. Please refer to Reopening Guidance for Schools 13.8.20 below.

### Section 7 - Pupil Attendance

#### Pupil Attendance

- We will follow the guidance on attendance for pupils who have health conditions and those who live with people with health conditions or are pregnant. It is the parents' responsibility to contact the school and inform them of any medical needs /shielding and seek advice from their medical consultants to ensure it is safe to return to school.

Schools should follow latest guidance on attendance for children and young people who have health conditions, who live with people with health conditions or who are pregnant.

- Pupils who are clinically vulnerable are those with pre-existing conditions who have been advised to stringently follow the social distancing guidelines and should learn from home where possible. A small minority of pupils will fall into this category. **Parents should contact the school to discuss.**
- Pupils who live with someone who is clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable), including those who are pregnant, can attend their education or childcare setting. **No risk assessment necessary.**
- Pupils who were previously shielding (clinically extremely vulnerable people). These restrictions eased over time and as of 1 August 2020 'shielding' has been paused. Pupils should follow the guidance of their hospital consultant or General Practitioner (GP) if in doubt and **should have an individual risk assessment** conducted.
- Pupils living with someone who was previously shielding. These restrictions eased over time and as if 1 August 2020 'shielding' has been paused. Such pupils **should have an individual risk assessment conducted.**

#### Pupils Who Are Clinically Vulnerable

- All schools should follow the latest guidance on attendance for children and young people who have health conditions or who live with individuals who have health conditions or are pregnant. Current guidance on these categories is published on NI Direct and by PHA here. If in doubt, specific advice should be sought from a Hospital Consultant or GP.
- In light of the Minister's statement 6th August, clarifying "that having taken account of the scientific and medical evidence, it is now appropriate for all pupils to return to school during the week commencing 31 August" we would consider attendance to be mandatory.

- There will be a small number of children where medical guidance would be to refrain from school. The school should satisfy themselves, through evidence provided by the family that the pupil is shielding due to underlying medical conditions. If evidence is not received then an unauthorised absence should be recorded.

### **Pupils Who Live with Someone Who is Clinically Vulnerable**

- If a child or young person lives with someone who is clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable as above), including those who are pregnant, they can attend their education or childcare setting. If in doubt, advice should be sought from the Hospital Consultant or GP of the clinically vulnerable person.

### **Pupils Who Were Shielding (clinically extremely vulnerable people)**

- Advice with regard to shielding eased over time and as of 1 August 2020 'shielding' has been paused. Pupil should follow the guidance of their hospital consultant or GP if in doubt about school attendance.
- When planning for the return of pupils, education settings should consider the distance learning and support the needs of any pupils who are unable to return to school either all or some of the time.
- The most up-to-date guidance and list of underlying health conditions that necessitate shielding should be checked on the NI Direct website under the shielding section.

### **Pupils Who Are Living with Someone Who Was Shielding**

- Pupils who have household members who were considered clinically extremely vulnerable (at high risk of severe illness and requiring 'shielding'). These restrictions eased over time and from 1 August 2020 'shielding' has been paused. Such children should have an individual **risk assessment conducted before the most appropriate place of care is determined.**

### **Pupil Who Develop Symptoms on Site**

- If a pupil develops symptoms of COVID-19 while at school follow the procedures set out in the flow chart in appendix 1.
- Enhanced cleaning should be carried out within any classroom in which an individual who has developed COVID-19 has been to minimise risk of the spread of the virus. This should be clearly communicated to staff, parents and pupils to provide assurance that the environment is safe.
- It is essential that all staff follow this guidance, as by doing so staff will not only protect themselves but limit the spread of the virus to educational settings and the wider population.



## Recording Attendance

- Specific guidance in respect of pupil attendance whether at school or at home will be issued separately see Circular DE2020/08 on the DE website.
- Decisions regarding the recording of pupil attendance will be down to schools and the individual circumstances of each child. It may be possible for some children to continue to learn from home due to being clinically vulnerable if they are able to provide evidence of an underlying medical condition as well as learning at home. If evidence cannot be provided in terms of either the specific medical condition or that learning is not being completed then school should record attendance as an unauthorised absence (Codes D, H or N) where appropriate.
- We would suggest that registration of pupils working from home would happen once a day (rather than twice a day) for example provided that work was being completed as required. We appreciate that for some schools, this may be very challenging therefore schools may have to rely on a combination of their professional judgement and pupil's work on whether or not pupils have engaged with learning at home.

Signed:  
Governors)

Peter J. Nulty

(Chair of Board of

Donagh McNelis

(Principal)

Date:

17th Nov 2020



## APPENDIX 1

