



Attendance and Punctuality Policy

Cookstown High School

Reviewed: October 2018

Next Review: October 2021

Cookstown High School promotes good attendance in the context of the following factors:

- We seek the development of Character through Knowledge believing each individual has a duty to build a community, to strive to do their best and to take responsibility for their actions.
- A school ethos that promotes high standards.
- A curriculum that is relevant to pupils and is effectively delivered
- Parents’/Guardians’ awareness of school procedures: especially the need to provide advance notification of foreseen absence and a written explanation after an absence or period of absence.
- Pupils’ awareness of, and compliance with, registration procedures.
- The implementation of appropriate registration, monitoring and follow-up procedures by pastoral staff.
- The involvement of other agencies when appropriate e.g. Education Welfare Service and medical professionals.

AIMS

The Attendance Policy seeks to:

1. Promote regular and punctual pupil attendance at School
2. Promote and value high standards
3. Promote self-responsibility in pupils
4. Outline the responsibilities of pupils, staff, parents and the Education Authority/Educational Welfare Services with regard to attendance, absence and lateness.
5. Outline the procedures in place to promote good attendance and punctuality
6. Recognise and reward good attendance by pupils.

RATIONALE

Cookstown High School is committed to ensuring that all pupils achieve their full academic potential and are prepared for the world of work beyond school. We therefore acknowledge the correlation between good attendance and academic achievement, progress and involvement in school life, leading to pupils taking responsibility for their learning, feeling part of the school community and gaining in confidence and self-esteem. The school therefore places great importance on attendance and punctuality and acknowledges that good attendance and punctuality is an outcome of the partnership between school, parents/guardians and pupils.

The expectation is for full attendance each day and that students are present and prepared for their scheduled classes. The focus is on ‘presence’ rather than absence.

In order to reduce the amount of time students are not in class, either from sickness or other reasons, there will be high expectations and consistent processes to monitor, follow up and report on attendance.

However, we recognise that full attendance is not always possible, and that absence may be the result of circumstances beyond the control of the pupil such as illness, bereavement or other family circumstances. It is also recognised that underachievement may be the result of a number of interrelated factors of which poor attendance is only one.

We offer support to all pupils with particular medical or pastoral circumstances which prevent attendance at school and promote regular communication with parents/guardians and other involved external agencies, working to ensure a return to school that is appropriate for the pupil concerned.

It is however expected that pupils and their parents/guardians will attempt to keep non-attendance to a minimum.

WHY REGULAR ATTENDANCE AND GOOD PUNCTUALITY ARE IMPORTANT:

- It is required by law; The Education Act 1996 requires parents and guardians to ensure their children receive full time education by regular attendance at a school or by other arrangements. Parents/Guardians have the responsibility for making sure their children attend school and on time.
- The Department of Education's *Improving School Attendance Strategy* 2016 sets out clearly the importance of promoting good attendance at school and the responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in the process.

“Alongside the Department of Education, there are a number of groups of stakeholders that have responsibility for ensuring all pupils attend school. Schools, the Education Welfare Service, the Department of Education and a range of other bodies can affect pupil attendance levels.

However, no stakeholder can influence a child's attendance levels more than his or her parents. Parents have an opportunity to shape their child's views and instil an understanding of the importance of attending school parents should not underestimate how their child's attendance at school can affect their life chances”.

- Cookstown High School is responsible for recording student attendance twice a day, one at the start of the morning sessions and once during the afternoon session. Attendance at each class is also recorded through Lesson Monitor by class teachers.
- Learning – absence affects the pattern of a child's schooling and regular absence will negatively impact on their learning. Any student's absence disrupts teaching routines and may also affect the learning of others in the same class.
- Safeguarding – your child may be at risk of harm if they do not attend school regularly. Safeguarding the interests of each child is everyone's responsibility and within the context of Cookstown High School, promoting the welfare of your child will also draw on procedures highlighted in the following related policies:
 - Positive Behaviour Policy
 - Health and Safety Policy
 - Anti-Bullying Policy
 - RSE Policy
 - Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Attendance at school promotes social development, confidence and self-esteem.

- **Punctuality** is an important part of self-discipline and school life. It is the duty of parents to ensure their children attend school on time and for pupils to be punctual to class.
- Employers of school leavers may take into account the young person's school attendance and punctuality record before making a job offer.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Students

- Students must attend school every day.
- Pupils must be in their form class by 9:25am. Pupils arriving to school after 9:35am must report to the office, sign in and will be subject to school sanctions, if lateness persists.
- Pupils must make sure that they are in the appropriate classroom at the correct time throughout the school day.
- If a student needs to leave school early they must present a note in their homework diary from their parent/guardian to their Form Teacher and then for countersignature by a Vice Principal or a Senior Teacher (if VP is unavailable), who will sign it.
- Students will present their signed homework diary to the office and sign out.
- Students are expected to return to school promptly after an appointment.
- It is the responsibility of the student to catch up on all work missed through absence or lateness.
- Those Sixth Form students entitled to receive Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) should be aware that high levels of attendance and punctuality are essential if they are to qualify for the full payments. There are additional regulations regarding the administration of EMA.

Parent/Guardian

- Be familiar with the school procedures regarding absence and punctuality.
- Make every effort, where possible, to ensure that their child attends school and is punctual.
- Communicate with the relevant member of staff where pastoral issues exist which may impact on their child's attendance or punctuality.
- Support the school when sanctions are to be imposed due to truancy or persistent lateness. Truancy from school will merit a sanction. The level of sanction will be determined by the seriousness and extent of the absence from school. In the case where there is an underlying pastoral issue the school will make every effort to support to the pupil.
- Parents are obliged to contact the school by phone on the first day of absence.
- A written explanation for absence must be provided on the first day of return to school, using the corresponding page in the homework diary.
- Students leaving early must have written permission from a parent/guardian. This should be recorded in the appropriate section of the homework diary for the student to show to their Form Teacher and Vice Principal or a Senior Teacher (if VP is unavailable), and at the school office when signing out.

School Staff

- It is the duty of all staff in school to advocate the importance of high levels of attendance and punctuality to pupils attending the school.
- All staff should be familiar with the school procedures regarding absence and punctuality.

Subject Teacher

- Complete the register using Lesson Monitor at the beginning of every lesson.
- Raise initial discrepancies in class attendance with Attendance officer.
- Report occurring discrepancies to the Head of Year.

Form Tutor

- Ensure that all students are clear about the procedures regarding absence and punctuality.
- Apply the procedures outlined below fairly and consistently
- Monitor student attendance.
- Ensure reasons are supplied for absence.
- On-going concerns about student attendance will be reported to the Head of Year.
- Record persistent latecomers to Head of Year.
- Inform Head of Year if a student is absent for more than **three days**.
- Refer pupil to Head of Year if late three times in a half term.

Head of Year

- Conduct an audit every half term.
- Initiate contact with parents on third day of absence.
- Identify students with attendance figures below 90% in their Year Group, monitor and inform their parent/guardian if a satisfactory reason for the absence has not been established.
- Liaise with the Educational Welfare Officer regarding truancy, condoned absence or recurring short absences.
- Liaise with Form Tutors to clarify reasons for absence.
- Interview students giving cause for concern regarding attendance/punctuality.
- Monitor persistent latecomers; establish a reason then either offer support or initiate sanctions.
- Monitor the signing in book regularly in order to highlight persistent latecomers and early leavers from school.
- Promote and reward good attendance within the Year Group within a whole school approach.
- When students are late four times in one half term, without valid reason, issue an after school detention.
- When students fail to provide a reason for absence, after three days, issue an after school detention.

Attendance Officer

- Make contact with parents of absent students on request from Head of Year.
- Use Text messaging service on first day to clarify reason for absence.
- Ensure that reasons for individual pupil absences are well documented and recorded.
- Maintain SIMS attendance database and update on a weekly basis.
- Provide reports from SIMs to Governors, Principal, other school staff and other agencies.
- Manage and maintain the signing-in system, including the recording and monitoring of lateness following morning registration and reporting to the pastoral team.
- Ensure that all registers are taken, correct codes are used and registers closed at the appropriate time.

- Refer persistent latecomers to the Head of Year.
- Monitor systems to address lateness to Am and PM registration and to lessons.
- Provide attendance information for the awarding of the Educational Maintenance Allowance.

Education Authority/Educational Welfare Service (EWS)

The Education Authority's responsibilities in relation to pupil attendance are primarily delivered through the EWS. EWS primarily seeks to support referred pupils and their families to stay engaged with education by helping them to tackle barriers to attending school. They work in partnership with the young people, their families, schools, other education services as well as statutory and voluntary agencies. Alongside their caseload of referrals, the EWS carries out capacity building work with schools to enable schools to be more effective in their management of attendance issues. In cases where parents do not co-operate with the advice and guidance of the EWS and where a pupil's attendance remains a matter of concern, the EA may consider legal action.

Strategies for promoting good attendance

Cookstown High School is renowned for its very good quality of pastoral, academic and extra-curricular provision. Associated with this are other key strategies which the school applies to help promote good attendance:

- Positive school ethos and culture;
- Implementation of this attendance and punctuality policy and target setting;
- Designated staff with roles and responsibilities;
- Additional support for poor attendees;
- Strong relationship with staff and parents/guardians;
- Links with the wider community;
- Advice and Guidance from the Department of Education's *Improving School Attendance Strategy*
- Collaboration and capacity building with the EWS.

Strategies used to tackle absenteeism:

- Positive relationships between staff and pupils;
- Positive relationship with home;
- Extra-Curricular activities;
- Supportive atmosphere;
- Strong links with external agencies;
- Referral to EWS.

Key Contacts

- Your son's or daughter's Form Teacher
- Your son's or daughter's Head of Year
- Mr S Thompson – VP Pastoral
- Miss G Evans – Principal
- Miss E Henry – Attendance Officer
- Educational Welfare Services - Mrs C Kelly

Appendix 1

Planned Absence

*If pupils are not in school, they cannot avail of the teaching on offer and this will impact on their learning. It is the duty of parents to ensure that their children attend school as often as possible. **It is expected that parents and pupils will make medical and dental appointments outside school hours.***

If pupils have a medical or dental appointment before school, this should be recorded in their diary and shown to a member of the Office Staff when the pupil signs in. **If pupils must leave school during the day for any reason, their parent/guardian must complete the exeat form in their diary in advance.** This must be signed by the Form Tutor **and then by a Vice Principal (or Senior teacher if VP not available).** Pupils must sign out at the school office where their diary will be signed by a member of the office staff. The pupil must be collected from Reception. If a pupil returns to school later on the same day, they must sign in again. **The school cannot authorise absences which, in the school's judgement, are primarily for social reasons.** A pupil leaving school for any unauthorised reason will be marked absent.

In the case of a planned absence of one day or longer, pupils should present a letter, for the attention of the Principal and signed by their parent/guardian, at least one week in advance requesting approval for absence from school. Is one weeklong enough?

The nature of the absence will determine whether or not the absence is recorded as authorised or unauthorised. A list of what constitutes authorised/unauthorised absences can be obtained from the school.

Appendix 2

EMA GUIDANCE ON ATTENDANCE

EMA Guidance for Schools and FE Colleges (2008/09) states;

- 1 “Absences are unauthorised unless proven otherwise.”
- 2 “As a general guideline if the absence is authorised for school / college reasons then it would be an unauthorised absence for the EMA scheme.”
- 3 “EMA should correspond with your existing school / college rules for attendance / behaviour.”

Authorised Absences

- Medical appointments
- Bereavement
- Illness
- Participation in school trips
- Attendance at university interviews
- Other absences will be dealt with on their individual merits

The guidance offers advice on factors to be considered by School when deciding to authorise absences:

1. Was the absence reasonable?
2. Was it backed up with evidence?
3. Has the student had numerous absences prior to this one?
4. Has the student used the same excuse before?

Unauthorised Absences

The following WILL NOT be authorised for the purposes of EMA:

- Illness (of more than 3 days in one week)
- Visits to Universities (not arranged by school)
- Part – time employment
- Driving lessons, not organised by school
- Holidays taken in term time
- Unsanctioned study leave