



# **A Policy for Attendance**

**St Oliver Plunkett  
Primary School and  
Nursery Unit**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy provides a framework to address issues arising from attendance, in an open and consultative manner. It promotes high levels of attendance which enhances the quality of our service. It covers absence which is reported as sick leave and any form of unauthorised absence such as persistent, intermittent absence, and long term absence. Holidays, Education and Training courses, absence on public duties, trade union duties and activities, as well as ante-natal care and maternity absences are not covered in this policy. In most circumstances authorised absences can be anticipated and organised in advance to suit both the needs of the school and the individual teacher.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.2 This policy complies with the Teachers' (Eligibility) Regulations (NI) 1997 and has been developed in consultation with the recognised Trade Unions. The policy should be formally adopted by Boards of Governors prior to its implementation on 1 April 1999.
- 1.3 It should be noted that there is an Occupational Sick Pay Scheme (DENI) which sets out the conditions which must be met for the payment of salary during sickness absence.
- 1.4 The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and Boards of Governors recognise their responsibility under the Disability Discrimination Act (1996) and are committed to promoting equality of opportunity in employment.

## 2.0 COMMUNICATION

- 2.1 It is essential that schools have developed clear and open lines of communication to ensure that the Attendance Policy and Procedures document is clearly understood and implemented in a fair and consistent manner. The Principal will be responsible for ensuring that each teacher is provided with an individual copy. On commencement of employment all new teachers will receive a copy from the Principal.

<sup>1</sup> Teachers includes Principals throughout unless otherwise stated

## 3.0 Policy Statement

- 3.1 The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (hereafter known as the Council) is committed to promoting quality education by employing and supporting teachers who will work with a high degree of commitment and professionalism in a healthy environment. The Council and Boards of Governors are committed to providing a caring and supportive school environment which recognises that teachers are

individuals whose personal well-being is of value to the education of the pupils and the smooth running of the school; teacher health and welfare is an essential part of this and augments other aspects of school management.

#### 4.0 **Aims of the Policy**

- 4.1 To ensure that all staff are treated fairly, consistently and with sensitivity at times of illness.
- 4.2 To standardise the management of teacher attendance in all Catholic maintained schools.
- 4.3 To inform all teachers and Boards of Governors of the policy and procedures for managing attendance in the Catholic maintained sector.
- 4.4 To promote and enhance an 'attendance' culture which recognises that good attendance contributes to the improvement of the learning experience of children.
- 4.5 To raise awareness of the Council's Teacher Welfare Service and its supportive role during sickness absence.

#### 5.0 **Roles and Responsibilities**

- 5.1 It is the responsibility of **the teacher** to care for his/her physical and mental well-being in order to attend school whenever he/she is able to do so. Teachers are expected to familiarise themselves with this policy and procedure.
- 5.2 It is the responsibility of **the Principal** to implement this procedure in a fair and equitable manner in order to manage the attendance of all teachers in the school. The Principal should ensure that effective communication and consultation take place when applying this procedure and that due respect is given to the confidentiality of sensitive information.
- 5.3 It is the overall responsibility of **the Board of Governors** to ensure the effective management of the attendance of all teachers in the school and also to ensure that the Principal applies this procedure in a fair and equitable manner.
- 5.4 It is the responsibility of **the Council** to advise, assist and support Boards of Governors and Principals in managing attendance. The Council will identify trends and patterns which will help inform decision making and future policy. The Council may also assist in dealing with specific cases.

#### 6.0 **Patterns of Absenteeism Covered By This Policy**

In applying this procedure absenteeism will be categorised as follows:

- 6.1 Short-Term Absence: This is defined as frequent minor and usually unconnected illnesses which cause regular absence from school.
- 6.2 Persistent Intermittent Absence: this is defined as regular short and/or long term absence which may or may not arise from an underlying medical condition.
- 6.3 Long-Term Absence: this is defined as chronic or acute illness or injury which is likely to result in an absence of at least four weeks' duration or which might result in the teacher not being able to return to school.

## 7.0 **Notification of Absence**

- 7.1 It should be recognised that information relating to a teacher's health is of a personal and sensitive nature and must be treated as confidential. There will be many occasions in which the teacher wishes his/her reasons for absence to remain strictly private and confidential. Principals in receipt of such requests should respect these wishes and ensure that all such information remains confidential and is stored in a safe and private environment. It should also be recognised that the Principal may need to take advice and this should not be viewed as a breach of confidentiality.
- 7.2 If the teacher is absent from school due to illness, he/she must personally, or make arrangements to:
  - (i) (a) notify the Principal or designated person as early as possible in accordance with local school procedures or at least one hour before the beginning of the school day.

### **Notification must be received on the first day of absence**

- (b) in the case of the Principal, notify Vice Principal or designated person as per 7.2(i) (a) above, who in turn should inform the Chairperson of the Board of Governors.
- (ii) at the time of the initial notification give an explanation of the absence and if possible an estimate of its likely duration.
- (iii) provide the following documentary evidence of incapacity to the Principal or designated person (or the Chairperson of the Board of Governors in the case of a Principal's absence) as follows:
  - (a) if the absence extends beyond 7 consecutive days, the teacher on that day should obtain, complete and provide to the Principal or to the designated person, a National Insurance Medical Certificate. The Principal or designated person

should, on receipt, keep a copy and forward the original certificate to DENI.

- (b) in the event of an absence of over 3 and up to 7 consecutive days absence complete the Department's Evidence of Incapacity Form CCU67 and submit this to the Principal.
- (c) in the event of any other absence, on the day of return complete the school's Self Certification Form SA3.
- (d) notify the Principal or designated person as early as possible when he/she will be returning to work and, if the absence has extended beyond 14 consecutive days, submit a certificate from his/her doctor stating that he/she is fit to resume his/her duties.
- (e) in long term sickness absence i.e. 4 weeks or more, notice of one week must be given to the Principal (or the Chairperson of the Board of Governors in the case of the Principal) of when the teacher intends returning to school in order to assist in planning for substitute cover.

7.3 It is the responsibility of the teacher to meet and report to the Principal or designated person as early as possible on the first day of his/her return to advise of his/her return with a brief explanation of the reasons for his/her absence. This meeting should be informal in nature and provide an opportunity for the Principal to welcome the teacher back and discuss the teacher's welfare needs.

7.4 If the teacher does not follow the above notification procedures without satisfactory explanation, it may result in the absence being regarded as unauthorised and pay being withheld.

## 8.0 **Communications During Absence**

8.1 There is a responsibility on the management of the school and the teacher to maintain contact with one another whilst the teacher is on sickness absence. Such contact should be of a friendly, supportive and sensitive nature and mindful of the welfare needs of the teacher. The maintenance of such contact should enable effective communication between the parties and facilitate the teacher's return to work.

## 9.0 **Consultations**

9.1 Consultation Interviews are a means of maintaining formal contact between the school and the absent teacher and should provide the basis to both parties for informed decision making. Consultation Interviews will take place.

- (a) following identification of the following patterns:

- (i) more than 8 casual days absence in a 12 month rolling period
    - (ii) more than 3 periods of absence in a 12 month rolling period, each in excess of 3 days duration
    - (iii) continuous absence of 4 weeks or more
    - (iv) an individual member of staff with an absence rate of 5% or more.
  - (b) to consider possible solutions
- 9.2 During consultations with the teacher, his/her representative and the Council, the Principal/Board of Governors will, where practicable provide reasonable and appropriate accommodation in keeping with current disability legislation.
- 9.3 If, in the process of consultation and monitoring of teacher's attendance, it is determined that attendance is a conduct issue, this will be dealt with under the agreed Disciplinary Procedure.

## 10.0 **Monitoring Attendance**

10.1 Monitoring attendance is good management practice:

- (i) it aids early detection of problems (including welfare and work related problems) that can lead to prompt resolution.
  - (ii) it aids good practice in managing sickness absence and this increases attendance levels.
  - (iii) it contributes to contingency planning for substitute cover.
  - (iv) It contributes to the analysis of costs, good financial and budgeting and accountability.
- 10.2 It is the responsibility of the Principal to monitor and report regularly on the attendance of all teachers to the Board of Governors.
- 10.3 In carrying out this monitoring role the procedure advocates that standardised attendance measurements are used, for example, lost time rate, frequency rate, individual frequency rate as detailed in guidance material.

## 11.0 **Medical Information**

11.1 The Board of Governors may request a medical report on the teacher which will assist in assessing the circumstances and facts related to an individual teacher's sickness absence. This may be sought in one or more of the following ways.

- (a) seeking authorisation from the teacher to contact the medical practitioner who has been responsible for his/her clinical care (normally the teacher's GP) to obtain a medical report.
- (b) requiring the teacher to attend an independent medical appointment with an occupational health physician.
- (c) requiring the teacher to attend a medical appointment with an independent specialist.

11.2 Individual teachers have the right to see any medical report relating to them which is supplied by a medical practitioner where that report has been requested for employment purposes. Release of such reports will be subject to medical advice.

## 12.0 Termination of Employment

12.1 It may be necessary to consider the following final actions if, after a period of consultation and monitoring, attendance has not improved or is unlikely to improve.

- (a) **Retirement on the Grounds of Ill Health:** Retirement on the grounds of ill health and any subsequent pension entitlements will only be granted when it is the opinion of an Occupational Health Physician appointed by DENI, that the teacher is permanently incapable of carrying out his/her teaching duties due to a medical condition.
- (b) **Termination on the Grounds of Ill Health/Capability:** If all the available medical evidence indicates that the teacher is not fit to return to work within a reasonable period, the Board of Governors, following consultation with the teacher, his/her representative and the Council, may determine that a teacher's employment should be terminated on grounds of ill health. In such circumstances the appropriate procedure will apply.
- (c) **Termination on the grounds of some other substantial reason i.e. failure to provide a regular and sustained attendance:** If in considering all available information, and following consultation with the teacher, his/her representative and the Council, it is determined by the Board of Governors that the teacher can no longer fulfil his/her contractual duties, the teacher's contract may be terminated on the grounds of some other substantial reason i.e. failure to provide a regular and sustained attendance. In such circumstances the appropriate procedure will apply.

## 13.0 Evaluation

The Council will evaluate and review the operation of this policy and procedures. The first review will take place towards the end of the academic year 1992/2000 in consultation with representatives from Boards of Governors, Principals and the recognised Trade Unions.

