

# **METHODIST COLLEGE BELFAST**

## **PUPIL ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Methodist College is committed to ensuring pupils attend school regularly. It is a key factor in improving achievement. Staff work with pupils, parents/guardians and outside agencies to secure this aim. The College recognises the crucial importance of early intervention and staff respond to issues which might lead to non-attendance.

Parents/guardians of pupils of compulsory school age have a legal duty to ensure that their children receive full-time education at school or otherwise. The College believes that parents play a major role in ensuring high levels of attendance and punctuality and in reducing absenteeism.

### **1. Legal requirements**

It is a legal requirement that the College:

- maintains attendance registers (either manual or computerised) in accordance with the relevant regulations;
- accurately records and monitors all absences and lateness;
- clearly distinguishes between absence which is authorised and absence which is unauthorised according to criteria laid down by the Department of Education. The Principal has the final decision as to whether or not an absence is authorised;
- submits termly absence returns through School Census and publishes information relating to levels of attendance and absence e.g. in the Annual Report;
- sets annual targets to reduce absence and submits these targets in accordance with the relevant regulations.

### **2. Aims**

- To create a culture which places great value on and achieves high levels of attendance and punctuality;
- To ensure strategies are in place to address school-based causes of poor attendance and punctuality;
- To ensure effective contacts with parents/guardians and external agencies;
- To ensure compliance with all relevant statutory requirements.

### **3. Requests for absence of pupils from school**

Dental and/or medical appointments should be made outside school hours or during the school holidays. In the event of such an appointment being unavoidable during the school day, a request for a part-day absence, written by a parent/guardian, is made three days in advance to the Tutor who will supply an Absence Slip.

Pupils are encouraged not to take holidays during term time. In order to avoid this, the dates of the College's terms are communicated to parent/guardians well in advance. If a pupil

goes on a holiday during term time the absence is recorded as unauthorised, unless there is a significant pastoral reason. Requests for leave of absence for weekly religious observance go to the Head of Form.

A request for absence of one day is made in writing by a parent/guardian to the Head of Form well in advance. For more than one day the request goes to the relevant Head of Section. A Notification of Absence permission slip is issued, if appropriate. If not, the Head of Form phones the parent/guardian to explain why the College is not authorising the absence.

The College, in exceptional circumstances, sanctions limited absence for young carers until alternative arrangements are made. The Principal sets a time limit for such absences in consultation with the Head of Pastoral Care and/or advice from BELB or appropriate agency.

#### **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

##### **(i) The Board of Governors:**

- approves the Attendance Policy and any proposed changes;

##### **(ii) The Principal:**

- sets attendance targets in accordance with the School Development Plan and target-setting process;
- ensures the implementation of the policy throughout the College;
- liaises with BELB and PSNI when they wish to exercise their powers to enforce truants to return to school;
- provides an annual report, with statistics, to the Board of Governors.

##### **(iii) Vice Principal (Pastoral):**

- advises on strategies that could be initiated or improved;
- works with Heads of Section to ensure the efficient running of registration arrangements and the implementation of strategies to monitor and improve attendance and punctuality;
- arranges appropriate training for staff;
- liaises with Rolls and Records on the appropriate use of absence codes;
- authorises leavers' names to be removed from register.

##### **(iv) The Head of Pastoral Care:**

- meets regularly with and makes referrals, when appropriate, to the EWO;
- liaises with BELB over persistent absentees;
- ensures SENCO/Pastoral /Form staff follow up on and support pupils being home tutored;
- helps Pastoral/Form staff working with parents, external agencies and pupils with attendance issues;

- ensure there are strategies to help reintegrate pupils with long-term absences.

**(v) Heads of Section:**

- provide guidance for staff on the procedures for registration and monitoring attendance;
- deal with requests for more than one day of absence;
- supervise the day-to-day implementation of attendance arrangements by Form staff;
- oversee the follow up on unexplained absences and lateness issues by Form staff;
- ensure attendance and punctuality targets are being monitored;
- ensure attendance information is communicated regularly to parents/guardians;
- ensures issues of unsatisfactory registering are dealt with effectively.

**(vi) Heads of Form:**

- monitor records to ensure that all pupil absences are noted and absence notes received from parents/guardians, and initiate action by Form team when necessary;
- in collaboration with Form Tutors and Tutors identify poor attendees (90% or below from beginning of November onwards) or those who are considered to be at risk and ensure appropriate follow up by the Form team, including informing the Head of Pastoral Care, of all poor attenders;
- ensure that all suspected truancy is followed up;
- ensure parents/guardians are contacted about pupil absences/lateness when appropriate;
- ensure all registration issues are completed and up-to-date at the end of each year;
- ensure the parents/guardians of leavers confirm in writing their intentions to remove their children from the College (except for pupils leaving at the end of either Form 5 or U6);
- report to the appropriate Head of Section on the efficiency of the system;
- liaise with the appropriate Head of Section over training needs;
- notifies parents about the legal requirement for their children to attend school if a pupil of compulsory school age fails to attend regularly.

**(vii) Tutors:**

- ensure that pupils are registered accurately;
- ensure that every absence is accounted for by absence notes from parents/guardians, except if the absence is covered by a text message/email from a parent/guardian to Rolls and Records;
- send absence notes to Rolls and Records, ensuring the name of the pupil, code for absence and date(s) of absence are stated at the top of the note;
- if appropriate phone home, after consultation with relevant staff, when a pupil is absent for three consecutive days;
- follow up cases of unaccounted absence or unacceptable notes with pupils and/or parents/guardians;
- issue Absence Slips for absences and Permission Slips for part day absences;
- monitor records to identify ad hoc absences, truancy or unusual trends and, in consultation with Head of Form, carry out follow up. These absences may or may not be unauthorised.
- inform the Head of Form of any possible underlying problems which might account for absences and poor punctuality;

- inform Head of Form when attendance falls below 90% and agree follow up (Appendix A);
- discuss with pupils their attendance and punctuality record each term, or more frequently if issues emerge;
- implement action, in line with the Positive Behaviour Policy, when there are problems with punctuality or compliance with registration regulations.

**(viii) Heads of Department**

- use SIMs to monitor attendance and punctuality by pupils to classes in their department;
- oversee the follow up by staff in the department on unaccounted absences from class and lateness to class issues;
- ensure that all suspected truancy is followed up;
- work with subject teachers to report concerns to parents/guardians;
- liaise with Heads of Form about attendance and punctuality issues.

**(ix) Subject Teachers:**

- use Lesson Monitor to record accurately the attendance and punctuality of pupils;
- check that all pupils absent from their class produce a permission slip/absence slip, unless they are notified by a member of staff that a pupil has permission to be absent or Rolls and Records has entered an absence code;
- follow up on absences and lateness to class;
- agree with the Head of Department the appropriate action to take when pupils are absent without authorisation or persistently late, in line with the Positive Behaviour Policy;
- notify Rolls and Records and other relevant staff in advance if pupils will be absent from class due to a College activity.

**(x) Rolls and Records and Administrative Assistants:**

- use SIMS to maintain an accurate pupil database and provide timely management of information;
- use Schoolcomms or telephone to notify parents/guardians of absence of pupils if the College is not already aware of it from earlier contact by parent/guardian;
- check the day-to-day operation of Lesson Monitor and Biometric readers, and deal with issues of inadequate registration which arise, in consultation with the relevant Assistant Principal Teacher;
- ensure telephone calls, texts, voice messages, emails and written notes from parents/guardians are dealt with appropriately and SIMS updated;
- disseminate Attendance and Punctuality Reports to Tutors and to Heads of Form;
- assist Form staff with administrative tasks connected with attendance and punctuality issues;
- pass on to Heads of Form and/or Tutor all queries or pastoral and academic information from parents/guardians;
- follow up on attendance and punctuality issues to do with Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA);
- compile attendance returns for the Department of Education.

### **(xi) Parents/Guardians**

Parents/guardians are responsible in law for ensuring that their children attend the school at which they are registered regularly, on time, properly dressed and in a fit condition to learn. Parents/guardians are also responsible for ensuring that their children stay at school once they have registered.

Parents/guardians can support the regular and punctual attendance of their children by:

- taking an active interest in their child's school life and work;
- attending parents'/guardians' information evenings, consultation sessions and other school events;
- ensuring that their child goes to bed at an appropriate time;
- ensuring that their child arrives at school on time each day;
- ensuring that their child misses school only for reasons which are unavoidable or justified, such as illness or days of religious observance;
- notifying the College on each morning of absence;
- confirming absence in writing when the child returns to school, unless they have sent a text message via Schoolcomms;
- avoiding booking family holidays during term-time;
- talking to the Tutor about issues which might be affecting their child;
- contacting the Tutor if they are concerned that their child may be reluctant to attend school.

### **(xii) Pupils:**

- attend regularly unless they are ill or have an authorised absence;
- arrive in school between 8.25 and 8.40 am, unless attending an activity organised by a member of staff or the Canteen;
- arrive at Tutor Group by 8.45 am, unless using the biometric readers to register attendance before participating in an official early morning practice;
- bring an explanatory note, written by their parent/guardian, on the day of return to school, if the absence is not covered by a text or email from the parent/guardian;
- discuss with their Tutor/Head of Form any planned absences well in advance and bring in a written request from their parent/guardian;
- sign out and in at the Administrative Centre (or as directed) if leaving/ returning from/to the College due to an appointment outside school or late to the College.

## **5. Referrals to Education Welfare Officers (EWO)**

In most instances, before a referral is made to an EWO the Tutor, Head of Form, Head of Section and Pastoral staff take steps to address the pupil's attendance issues. These include interviewing the pupil and contacting the parent/guardian, initially by telephone. If there is no improvement a parental interview is arranged and/or letter is sent. If a referral to an EWO is made, written confirmation is sent home. It is envisaged that this process will take 4 to 6 weeks maximum.

Referrals may be made when:

- a pattern of irregular attendance develops;
- a pattern of persistent lateness emerges;
- a pattern of post-registration truancy persists;
- a period of entrenched non-attendance occurs;
- communication by the College to the parent/guardian meets with little or no response;
- there is a lack of parental co-operation in ensuring a pupil's regular attendance;
- a pupil is withdrawn from the College by a parent/guardian to educate him/her other than at school (Elective Home Education);
- a pupil is withdrawn from the College by a parent/guardian who is moving to another area and the school does not have a confirmed destination school/provider where the child will resume his or her education. Such pupils will be regarded as a "Child missing education";
- there are child protection concerns;
- there are specific and identifiable welfare issues which are preventing a pupil from accessing education.

Referrals to an EWO are made by the Head of Pastoral Care. All referrals to EWOs are recorded on SIMS.

## **6. Removal of a Pupil from the Register**

The Vice Principal (Pastoral) authorises the taking of a pupil's name off the register in accordance with current regulations. It is done only after written confirmation of a pupil's withdrawal is received from a parent/guardian or it is approved by an EWO. The proforma (Appendix C) is used to notify relevant staff in the College. The exceptions to the above are pupils who leave at the end of Form 5 and U6.

## **7. Links to other policies**

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Pastoral Care Policy
- Positive Behaviour Policy
- Code of conduct for Pupils
- Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers

## **8. Review and Evaluation**

The policy is reviewed at least once every three years by the Vice Principal (Pastoral) in consultation with pupils, parents and staff. The Vice Principal (Pastoral) keeps the Senior Leadership Team informed of any interim issues that arise.

## **Appendix A: Letters to Parents/Guardians about Attendance Levels**

Date xxx

Dear xxx

Attendance at School

Year Group xxx

On a regular basis Form staff in the College monitor the level of attendance and punctuality of pupils in the school. Currently the overall attendance rate for the College is 95%, with many pupils having a considerably higher percentage than this. We work with our pupils to ensure the highest possible level of attendance, and contact is made with parents when issues arise. We wish to support both pupils and parents in this important area.

It has been decided to write to all parents of pupils whose attendance is currently less than 90%. For quite a number of our pupils attendance below this level is due to an extended period of illness. If your child is in this category, please contact the relevant Tutor if help is required in catching up on missed work or pastoral support would help. Telephone the College on 02890 205205.

If your child's attendance is below 90% and there has not been an extended period of illness or another reason for absence authorised by the College, please have a look at the breakdown of the pattern of attendance on the information sheet enclosed. Once again, there may be wholly understandable reasons for the pattern, but if your child requires support to improve the attendance level, please contact the Tutor.

If you wish, you may contact the relevant Head of Form or the Deputy Head of Form. The latter, along with the Tutors, has a major pastoral role in the Year Group and can be of valuable assistance.

Thank you to all parents who contact the College on the first morning of absence and who supply absence notes when required. We hope the Schoolcomms texting system, used by the College to contact parents of pupils who are absent, has been useful to you.

The next few months are crucially important because your child and staff will be finalising preparation for the summer examinations. We hope all pupils will make a concerted effort to attend regularly. Please contact the Tutor if there are pastoral difficulties or subject teachers if academic issues arise.

**Yours sincerely**

June 2013

## **Appendix B: How to obtain attendance reports from SIMs**

The following are the instructions for accessing this information

- Log on to SIMs
- Click “Report”
- Click on “Run Report “ (it is in the drop down box)
- Click “Focus” (it is in the drop down box, not at the top left of the screen)
- Click “Student”
- A big list of information you can access appears in the central box. Scroll down to “Attendance 90%” (or 85% if you want it). Do not worry if the date appears wrong...once you click on “Attendance 90%” the system automatically updates the list so you get the most current information.

## METHODIST COLLEGE BELFAST PUPIL LEAVING: PROCEDURE PROFORMA

Please find below the proforma for pupils leaving the College.

**Parent must contact the Principal's Office in writing**

<b>NAME OF PUPIL:</b>	<b>YEAR GROUP:</b>
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<i>DESTINATION</i> (Name/address of School/College/Other)	<i>PROPOSED DATE OF LEAVING</i>
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<i>PERIOD OF NOTICE GIVEN</i> (If any)	<i>ANY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS</i> (i.e. fees)
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<b>Member of staff contacted</b>	<b>Name of contact</b> (mother /father /etc)	<b>Date</b>	<b>Reason(s) for leaving:</b>
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<b>Interview with Parent</b> Yes/No	<b>Date of interview</b>	<b>Comments:</b>
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<b>Name on Parent's Letter of Confirmation</b>	<b>Date of letter</b>	<b>Comments:</b>
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***On completion of this procedure the VP (Pastoral) will inform:***

*Head of Section (who will inform Head of Form)*

*Time-tabling*

*Principal's PA*

*Rolls and Records*

*Fees Office*

*SENCO*

*Dr Dempsie*

<b>FOR ADMIN USE ONLY:</b>	<b>DATE:</b>
Mark as Leaver on Sims.net	
Transfer CTF File	
Inform Francis Cassidy – IT Department	
Remove from Biometric system (if applicable)	

Remove from STAR	
File received from HM Office and Filed	