Woodbrook College
Bray, Co. Wicklow

Attendance Policy and Procedure 2024

"Learning together for a better future."

1. Introduction

1.1 Woodbrook College has a catholic tradition reflecting its origin within Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST) Charter.

1.2 Woodbrook College considers itself a pluralist community; it embraces inclusion in terms of social, cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity.

1.3 Woodbrook College is a co-educational school with a broad curriculum, which aims to meet the diverse range of academic, vocational, spiritual, and social needs of its students.

2. Rationale

2.1 The importance of regular school attendance and punctuality in the context of post-primary education cannot be overstated. In alignment with the strategic goals of Woodbrook College and underpinned by the Education Welfare Act, 2000, this policy recognises attendance as a key determinant of academic success and personal development.

2.2 Consistent attendance is critically linked to a range of positive educational outcomes. Research has demonstrated that regular school attendance significantly contributes to academic achievement, with absenteeism negatively impacting learning and performance (Gottfried, 2009). Moreover, it plays a vital role in social and emotional development during the formative years of adolescence (Rumberger, 2011).

2.3 The policy is informed by the legal framework established by the Irish government, specifically under the Education Welfare Act, 2000. This act mandates regular school attendance up to sixteen years of age or the completion of three years of post-primary education, whichever is later. The act further requires schools to maintain adequate records of attendance and report persistent absenteeism to the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS).

2.4 The school environment, as highlighted by Finn and Zimmer (2012), plays a crucial role in encouraging attendance. An inclusive, supportive, and engaging school climate, as advocated by the policy, is essential in promoting regular attendance and punctuality. This approach is consistent with the policy's aim to foster a positive ethos around school attendance and engagement among students, staff, and parents.

2.5 Interventions outlined in the policy target various factors affecting attendance. These include support for students with special educational needs, those experiencing socio-economic challenges, and those from marginalised communities. Such interventions are in line with recommendations by academic research which suggests targeted support can significantly improve attendance among these groups (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

2.6 The policy's comprehensive approach, involving all stakeholders – students, parents, teachers, and school management – ensures a collective and coordinated effort in promoting regular attendance. By setting clear roles and responsibilities, it aims to create a shared understanding and commitment to attendance as a key priority.

3. Purpose and Aims

3.1 The School Attendance Strategy is designed to create a supportive and structured environment that maximises student attendance and punctuality at Woodbrook College. Our approach is to foster an inclusive and engaging school culture that recognises and supports the diverse needs of our student body.

3.2 Aims:

a. **Maximise Regular Attendance:** To ensure all students comply with the legal requirement of regular school attendance until the age of sixteen or completion of three years of post-primary education, fostering a consistent educational journey.

b. **Cultivate a Punctual and Engaged School Community:** To highlight and reinforce the value of punctuality and engagement among students, staff, and parents, creating a respectful and orderly learning environment.

c. **Maintain Accurate Attendance Records:** To rigorously record and monitor attendance and absence data on VS Ware as per the Education Act 2000, ensuring a reliable and transparent tracking system.

d. **Facilitate Early Intervention and Support:** To identify and provide timely support for students at risk of poor attendance, deploying targeted intervention strategies based on individual needs and circumstances.

e. **Strengthen Home-School Collaboration:** To actively involve parents and guardians in the attendance strategy, promoting a collaborative approach towards improving student attendance and punctuality.

    f.   **To Promote Interagency Collaboration:** Work in partnership with relevant agencies and community groups to support students facing complex challenges that affect their school attendance.

    g.   **Recognise and Reward Consistent Attendance:** To acknowledge and reward regular attendance and punctuality, thereby encouraging a positive attitude towards school attendance.

    h.   **Continuously Review and Adapt Strategies:** To regularly evaluate and update our attendance strategy in response to changing needs and emerging educational research, ensuring its effectiveness and relevance.

    i.   **Development of Transferable Skills:** Foster consistent attendance and punctuality as key lifelong skills, essential for success in the world of work beyond the school system.

4   Roles in Implementing the Attendance Policy

4.1 **The Board of Management:**
- Ensure the ratification of pertinent policies and conduct routine reviews.
- Present a comprehensive Statement of Strategy for Attendance.
- Execute and periodically assess the DEIS Action Plan aimed at enhancing attendance.
- Diligently report all instances of suspensions, expulsions, and any alterations to standard timetables.
- Comply consistently with all instructions and circulars issued by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and Tusla's Educational Welfare Services (EWS) concerning attendance matters.

4.2 **The Principal and Deputy Principals:**
- Supervise DEIS plans and foster a comprehensive approach to school attendance, along with submitting referrals to the Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) at Tusla's Educational Welfare Services (EWS).
- Take an active lead in encouraging consistent attendance throughout the school.
- Implement and further develop the school's attendance policy and the accompanying statement of strategy.
- Engage as a member of various teams such as the care team, support team, and attendance meetings alongside the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and School Completion Programme (SCP).
- Coordinate with key personnel including SCP, HSCL, EWO, Support for Learning (SFL) coordinators, and the care team.
- Ensure the maintenance of precise attendance rolls and establish a system to effectively track student attendance.
- Oversee and implement Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) within the school framework.
- Provide and sustain an environment conducive to positive learning experiences.

4.3 **Subject Teacher:**
- Maintenance of Precise Attendance and Punctuality Records on VSware.
- Actively advocate for and communicate the importance of consistent attendance to the school community.
- Provide a welcoming and supportive atmosphere for students upon their return to school following absences.

4.4 **Tutor:**
- Check and verify notes provided for absences and report any concerns regarding attendance directly to the Year Head.
- Where possible, actively follow up on absence notes in supporting Year Heads to ensure all absences are accounted for and appropriately documented.
- Champion and actively promote attendance initiatives within their tutor classes, fostering a culture of regular attendance.

4.5 **Year Head:**
- Oversee and monitor the attendance records of designated class groups.
- Track attendance diligently to spot and analyse any emerging patterns or trends in student absences.
- Send emails to parents to inform and engage them about upcoming attendance meetings.
- Initiate phone calls to parents to discuss matters related to their child's attendance.
- Address and discuss attendance issues as part of the agenda in parent-teacher meetings.
- Refer cases to the care team, schedule attendance meetings, and liaise with the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and School Completion Programme (SCP) as necessary.

4.6 **HSCL (Home School Community Liaison):**
- Work closely with the salient adult in a student's life to foster their regular attendance, active participation, and ongoing retention in school.
- Forge and maintain strong relationships with parents as a fundamental part of supporting student attendance.
- Participate as a key member in care teams, support teams, and attendance meetings, contributing to student welfare.
- Champion the cause of comprehensive school attendance, promoting it across the school community.

- Facilitate ongoing communication with school staff, the School Completion Programme (SCP), and Educational Welfare Officers (EWO) regarding attendance matters.
- Organise and provide courses aimed at enhancing parental skills and capacity, contributing to improved student attendance.
- Oversee and regularly review the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) target list in collaboration with school staff, HSCL coordinators, SCP, and EWO.
- Conduct phone calls and home visits to parents on the HSCL target list, maintaining effective communication and support.
- Identify suitable support and make referrals to external agencies for families in need (e.g., Meitheal, Barnardos).
- Undertake preventative actions and interventions before referring a case to the Educational Welfare Officer.
- Actively participate in the Meitheal process, a collaborative support framework for children and families.
- Play a significant role in the development of relevant policies, such as DEIS and the Statement of Strategy for Attendance.

4.7 **School Completion Programme (SCP):**
- Actively engage with children and young people who are most susceptible to leaving school early.
- Be an integral member of care teams, support teams, and attend meetings focused on attendance.
- Specifically monitor the attendance of children who are on the identified target list for at-risk students.
- Deliver targeted support and conduct both one-on-one and group interventions for children on the target list, facilitated by School Completion Programme (SCP) project staff.
- Arrange and conduct holiday programmes during mid-term breaks, Easter, and summer to support continuous engagement.
- Oversee after-school clubs and organise educational trips to enhance the learning experience and attendance.
- Work in tandem with provisions for students who are outside the traditional school setting.
- Implement preventative measures and strategies before the potential referral of a student to the Educational Welfare Officer.

4.8 **Attendance Officer:**
- Aid the school in the development and refinement of effective strategies and procedures to enhance attendance.
- Monitor attendance through the VSware system, generate reports to identify students at risk of high absenteeism, and share this information with Year Heads for further action.
- Actively raise awareness about the significance of maintaining regular and consistent attendance among students.
- Lead and assist various initiatives, rewards, and incentives aimed at improving school attendance.
- Engage with parents to address and resolve issues related to continuous student absences.
- Organise attendance clinics in collaboration with the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) to address attendance issues.

4.9 : **Parent/Guardians:**
- Parents/guardians are expected to set and maintain high standards regarding their child's regular attendance and punctuality at school.
- Absences should be reported to the school in writing by parents or guardians, providing clear reasons for the pupil's absence.
- Parents/guardians should work cooperatively with the school and educational welfare services to address and resolve any issues related to attendance.
- Avoid, where possible, planning family holidays during the school term to ensure consistent attendance.
- Parents/guardians are encouraged to contact the school immediately if they have any concerns about their child's absence or other school-related matters.

5   Procedures To Be Followed If a Student Is Absent From School

5.1 In the event that a student is recorded as absent in the morning roll call, parents or guardians will receive an automated text message from the school indicating the absence. Should parents or guardians believe their child is present at school, they are encouraged to contact the school office immediately for clarification.

5.2 Following a student's absence, in accordance with the Education Welfare Act (2000), parents or guardians are required to provide a written explanation for the absence. This absence explanation should be submitted through the School's digital App, Alternatively, in particular instances it can be submitted through the 'Explanation for Absence' slips found in the student's journal and submitted to the class tutor upon the student's return to school in the morning.

6   Procedures To Be Followed If a Student Is Late For School

6.1 The school operates from 8:48 AM to 15:33 daily, except on Wednesdays when the school day concludes at 13.07.

6.2 Students arriving late must report directly to the office upon arrival.

6.3 In cases where a student arrives late but provides a note from a parent or guardian explaining the lateness or is accompanied by a parent or guardian who can explain, the student will be granted permission to join their class and will be marked as present on the attendance register.

6.4 Students who arrive late without a note from a parent or guardian, or without the parent or guardian present, will be demerited and tracked on the VSware system. Notes provided on the day following the lateness will not be accepted. After completing the necessary protocol with the administrative staff, the student will be allowed to enter their class and will be marked as present on the register.

6.5 In cases where a student deliberately evades registration or fails to adhere to the established procedure for managing lateness, disciplinary measures will be taken in accordance with the Relationships and Behaviour Policy of the school.

7   Procedures To Be Followed For Leaving School Early

7.1 It is essential that wherever possible appointments are made for outside of school time and students should only leave early in unavoidable circumstances. If a student needs to leave school early, the following steps must be followed:
   a. Students who need to leave school early are required to provide a note from their parent or guardian. This note should be submitted by the student's parent or guardian via the school's digital application. Alternatively, a written note in the student's journal may be presented to the class tutor or administrative staff for endorsement and signing.
   b. Prior to leaving, students must show the approved note to the administrative staff and complete the sign-out process at the school office. It is important to note that students departing the school without appropriate authorisation from the management may be subject to disciplinary action as per the school's Relationship and Behaviour Policy.
   c. When returning to school following an appointment, students are required to report back to the office to sign in.

8   School Absence Intervention Procedure

8.1 These procedures and actions will be uniformly applied, irrespective of whether the school has received a note justifying a student's absence. While there may be legitimate reasons for absence, this protocol is established to ensure that students at Woodbrook College have access to the highest quality of educational experience:

Number of days absent	Actions	Staff involved
5	• Email to parents by Attendance Officer • Students talk with Class Tutor for a wellbeing check and clarify a note has been provided. • Following a student's absence from the school, parents/guardians are legally obliged to provide a note explaining the absence. • If no note is provided, the attendance officer will follow up at home.	1. Attendance Officer 2. Class Tutor
10	• Email/letter sent home by attendance Officer. • Student to meet their Year Head with a view to identifying the issues impacting attendance – referrals made if required to Pastoral Care team which includes HSCL and School Completion Programme • Parent/Guardian may be asked to the school for a meeting should the year head deem this to be necessary.	1. Attendance Officer 2. Year Head 3. Pastoral Care team

15-20	• If there is still no improvement in attendance, actions will include: • Second letter/email sent home, and meeting arranged in the school with student and parent/guardian. • Contact will be made by phone or home visit by HSCL and if required, links with external agencies will be made for support (Tusla, Lucena, Jigsaw, CFSN) • HSCL will commence completion of the Education Welfare Services (EWS) Pre-Referral checklist as a precursor to referring a student to the EWS.	1. Attendance Officer 2. Year Head 3. Pastoral Care Team
20+	• Woodbrook college has a legal obligation to submit a referral when the total number of days a student has missed during a school year is more than 20. • A letter will be sent to the parent/guardian informing them of this. • SCP/HSCL will work closely with the EWO in trying to improve attendance of the student in school. • Parent/Guardian supported by HSCL and referral to be made to outside agencies for support where appropriate. • Parents/Guardians to be invited to an attendance clinic with HSCL and EWO. • EWO may serve a 'School Attendance Notice' on any parent who he/she concludes is failing or neglecting to cause the child to attend the school.	1. SCP 2. HSCL 3. Year Head 4. Principal

9 Interventions to Promote Attendance

9.1 Woodbrook College adopts a multi-tiered system of support to enhance student attendance. This approach emphasises early identification and intervention, aiming to diminish the 'wait to fail' scenario through a prevention-focused model. Within this framework, the school offers universal interventions for all students, targeted interventions for specific students, and intensive interventions for a select few who require additional support.

9.2 **Universal Interventions:**
   a. The school commits to maintaining a safe and structured environment, aligned with the Relationship and Behaviour Policy.
   b. All incidents of bullying will be managed in strict adherence to the school's anti-bullying policy.
   c. An induction programme will be provided for first-year students to aid their transition into the school.
   d. Students with exemplary attendance records will be acknowledged with awards during the annual awards ceremony.
   e. All students undertake an SPHE programme, supporting their overall development throughout their school years.
   f. Each morning, students have access to their class tutor as part of the pastoral care system.
   g. Breakfast is available and open to all students every morning.
   h. Homework club is available for all first- and second-year students providing a structured environment for learning.
   i. Supervised study periods are available for students preparing for examinations, providing a structured environment for learning.
   j. Implement study skills programmes to equip students with effective learning strategies.
   k. Offer Behaviour for Learning programmes within tutor groups for 1st and 2nd year, focusing on cultivating positive behavioural habits.
   l. The school offers a diverse range of extra-curricular activities in sports, music, drama, art, and other areas.
   m. Maintain and communicate high expectations for all students in terms of their learning, active participation, and consistent attendance.
   n. Encourage and develop supportive relationships between students and teachers to enhance the educational

experience.

o. Adopt Restorative Practice methods to address and resolve conflicts, promoting a constructive and empathetic school environment.

p. Parents will receive updates on their child's attendance, including days absent and late, in biannual report.

q. Parents are given unique usernames and passwords to access their child's attendance records on the VSware system.

r. The curriculum is designed to cater to the diverse talents and interests of all students.

s. Parents will receive a text message if their child is absent from school.

t. Conduct parenting courses aimed at fostering greater parental involvement, thereby promoting a collaborative partnership with parents.

9.3 Targeted Interventions:

a. The school introduces a 'Check and Connect' programme specifically for students who require additional attention in their school attendance.

b. Integrate specific attendance strategies into the School Support Programme for enhanced effectiveness.

c. Facilitate lunch clubs for students, providing engaging activities during their midday break.

d. The guidance counsellor is available to work with students whose absenteeism is related to anxiety or mental health concerns.

e. Families may receive support and guidance from the Home School Community Liaison Teacher, especially in matters related to school attendance.

f. Discussions may be organised involving the Year Head, class teacher, Deputy Principal, Principal, parents/guardians, and the students concerned, to address attendance issues.

g. The HSCL Coordinator may organise activities or courses for parents of targeted students to enhance their involvement and support.

h. Run attendance clinics under the guidance of the HSCL to tackle attendance issues.

i. Implement home visits by the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) as a means of direct support and engagement with families.

j. The SCP project worker and the HSCL Coordinator collaborate in assisting targeted students with their attendance.

k. Conduct summer programmes in collaboration with the School Completion Programme (SCP) to engage students during the holiday period.

l. The school actively works with external projects and organisations like Youth Diversion Projects, Foróige, disability support groups, Drugs Awareness groups, etc., to support targeted students.

m. Facilitate referrals to external agencies such as New Directions and Jigsaw through the HSCL for specialised support.

n. Direct parents towards appropriate support services, empowering them to assist their children.

o. Provide self-guided programmes from the ISPCC for parents and young people, focusing on issues like anxiety and school avoidance.

p. Assistance from external agencies such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the Health Service Executive (HSE), Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Barnardos, Tusla – The Child and Family Agency, and other relevant organisations may be sought to provide comprehensive support to students.

9.4 Intensive Interventions:

a. Students may be referred to the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) for support, and the school will collaborate closely with the EWO to aid the student.

b. Ensure that the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) completes a detailed pre-referral checklist prior to referring a student to the Educational Welfare Officer (EWO).

c. Students whose behavioural challenges are impacting their school attendance may be asked to engage in a Behaviour for Learning Programme in line with the school's Support for Learning Policy.

d. With the guidance of the Education Welfare Officer, students may be offered the option of reduced timetables or alternative educational programmes to better suit their needs.

e. Organise meetings with the HSCL to discuss and plan alternative education programmes for specific students.

f. Offer Parenting Plus courses to equip parents with additional skills and knowledge to support their children's school attendance.

g. Hold Meitheal meetings to provide wraparound services, ensuring a holistic approach to student support.

h. Conduct home visits as a means of direct support and engagement with students and their families.

i. Students who are temporarily out of school will receive support and assistance from the School Completion Programme Coordinator.

j. Send an Emotionally Based School Avoidance pack to parents, providing them with essential information and strategies.

k. Facilitate assessments by NEPS for students needing psychological evaluation and support.

l. Adopt a multi-agency approach to effectively support students in re-engaging with school following extended

absences.

References and Policy Documents:
1. Gottfried, M. A. (2009). Excused versus unexcused: How student absences in elementary school affect academic achievement. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis.
2. Rumberger, R. W. (2011). Dropping out: Why students drop out of high school and what can be done about it. Harvard University Press.
3. Finn, J. D., & Zimmer, K. S. (2012). Student Engagement: What Is It? Why Does It Matter? In Handbook of Research on Student Engagement (pp. 97-131). Springer. Education Welfare Act, 2000. Irish Statute Book.
4. Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2012). The importance of being in school: A report on absenteeism in the nation's public schools. Johns Hopkins University School of Education.
5. National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) guidelines.