

April 2019

Update regarding School Absence Reports and Attendance Referrals

Dear Principal,

I would like to take a few minutes of your time to update you and remind you of the deadlines for submitting school attendance referrals and absence reports. Firstly I want to remind you that there is a difference between school absence reports and attendance referrals.

Student Absence Reports: Schools are required to make two reports annually. All students who exceed 20 days cumulative absence *must* be included in the absence reports. The first report for Period 1, from school re-opening to December 31 should have been submitted online on or before March 31.

The second report for Period 2 from January 1 to the end of the school year should be submitted online on or before October 31.

For schools using either Aladdin or VSWare software these reports can now be submitted automatically.

Attendance Referrals: Attendance referrals should only be made where you, as school principal, have a concern in relation to a pupil's non-attendance at school.

I am aware that schools experience frustration when Tusla EWS are unable to respond promptly to school attendance referrals. We currently have 89 Educational Welfare Officers (EWO) serving 3,952 schools across the country (an average of 45 schools per EWO) which gives a sense of the challenge we face. On a positive note Tusla has committed extra resources annually which has enabled us to employ an extra 25 EWOs since 2016 and a further 8 EWOs will be recruited in 2019.

During the 2017/2018 academic year schools submitted 6,670 referrals to Tusla related to school attendance concerns. All referrals are screened by a Senior Educational Welfare Officer with referrals then being prioritised according to need. As demand regularly exceeds the capacity of the service to respond, some referrals are placed on a waiting list. With increased staff numbers in the coming years we are confident that our ability to respond to referrals will be enhanced.

In 2017/2018 Tusla EWS received 2,135 referrals from schools in the months of May, June and July often leaving no time to respond before the end of the school year. This led to a significant build-up of cases on our waiting list over the summer months, which in turn impacted our capacity when the new school year started.

This year in an effort to better manage referrals, schools are requested to submit attendance referrals by the following dates:

- **Post-Primary Schools by Friday May 3rd.**
- **Primary Schools by Friday May 31st.**

These dates will facilitate intervention where necessary before the end of the school year. Should it be necessary to make a referral after the dates outlined, schools are asked to hold off on submitting this referral until September 2019 and if the attendance concern still exists in the new school year to make that referral in September 2019.

Best wishes and thank you for your ongoing positive engagement with Tusla EWS.

Yours sincerely,



Noel Kelly,
Director of Educational Welfare Services.