



An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

DEVELOPING THE STATEMENT OF STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE:

Guidelines for Schools





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**Developing the Statement of
Strategy for School Attendance:
Guidelines for Schools**

**Educational Welfare Services
Tusla – Child and Family Agency
2015**

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CONTENTS

Foreword	vi
Acknowledgements	1
1. A Statement of Strategy for School Attendance: Introducing the guidelines	2
1.1 Why a Statement of Strategy for School Attendance?	2
1.2 What the Education (Welfare) Act requires	3
1.3 Purpose of the School Attendance Guidelines	4
1.4 Terminology: The links between Policy, Strategy and the Statement of Strategy	5
1.5 Content and structure of the School Attendance Guidelines	5
2. Understanding school attendance: Learning from research	6
2.1 The importance of research	6
2.2 Why students do not attend school	6
2.3 Engagement and attendance	8
2.4 What works?	9
2.5 Using the research to inform the Statement of Strategy	11
3. Principles underpinning an effective Statement of Strategy	12
4. A whole-school approach to attendance	13
4.1 A whole-school climate and culture	13
4.2 Reviewing aspects of school life that may influence attendance	13
4.3 Reviewing aspects of attendance from a whole-child perspective	14
5. Setting and communicating attendance standards	16
5.1 Setting and communicating standards	16
5.2 Procedures for notification of student absences to the school	16
5.3 School responses to absences	17
5.4 Procedures for notifying an absence due to illness	17
5.5 Policy for absences due to term-time holidays	17
6. Recording and monitoring school attendance	18
6.1 The importance of recording, tracking and monitoring attendance	18
6.2 The uses of attendance data	18

6.3	Approaches to recording attendance	19
6.4	Setting attendance targets	20
7.	Promoting good school attendance	22
7.1	Strategies to promote good school attendance	22
7.2	General awareness-raising strategies	22
7.3	Involving parents in setting high expectations	23
7.4	Providing support programmes to enhance attendance	24
7.5	Rewarding good attendance	26
7.6	Building linkages with other schools, youth organisations and local organisations	26
8.	Responding to poor attendance	30
8.1	Responses to poor attendance	30
8.2	Groups or individuals who may need additional support	30
8.3	Tailoring whole-school approaches to group or individual need	31
8.4	Early dialogue with parents and students	31
8.5	Using internal school processes to provide individualised supports	33
8.6	Using school-led multi-agency support process	34
8.7	EWO-led process: Referral to Tusla's Educational Welfare Service	35
8.8	Supporting re-engagement	35
8.9	Approach to suspensions	36
8.10	Reduced timetables	36
9.	Preparing the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance	37
9.1	Overview	37
9.2	Roles and responsibilities in preparing Statement of Strategy	37
9.3	Preparing Statement of Strategy	39
9.4	The written Statement of Strategy	41
10.	Implementing the Statement of Strategy	43
10.1	Implementation planning	43
10.2	Communicating Statement of Strategy	43
10.3	Clear roles in implementing Statement of Strategy	43
10.4	Having good ways to check how well Statement of Strategy is working	44
10.5	Staff support and development opportunities	45

Conclusion	46
Bibliography	47
Appendix: Relevant Legislation, Circulars and Statutory Guidelines	54



FOREWORD

The best gift that anybody can give a child is to offer a child the opportunity to fulfil his or her potential. Every day should be a day of wonder and of learning for a child.

Education, too, plays an important part in ensuring that children grow to independence and that they are in a position to benefit from life's opportunities. In Ireland education is a right that is prescribed and protected in Article 42 of Bunreacht na hÉireann. To parents falls the decision on how best to educate their child and for most parents their choice is to have children educated within the formal school system.

With regard to education, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out a number of statements including a state's role to 'take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates'.

This Statement of Strategy for School Attendance seeks to assist schools in setting the tone for a positive approach to the management of attendance. Schools are invited to consider the culture within their school, the learning environment offered to children and aspects of school life that may encourage attendance, participation and retention in school.

For schools, as for so many other bodies, bureaucracy is an increasingly necessary although unwelcome part of the day. It is the intention of this document to assist staff in preparing the systems required to monitor and record attendance.

For some families, despite the best efforts of everybody involved, poor attendance at school is a reality. In responding to these situations, which can be stressful for all concerned, Educational Welfare Services are available to assist. This Statement of Strategy also offers guidelines on addressing poor attendance and the support processes that can be used.

The Educational Welfare Services of Tusla hope that you find this document useful in the very busy and important role that your school and community play in the life of children. We are conscious of the many demands made on teaching staff and hope that this guidance will prove of assistance in supporting children to attend and participate in education, which is our shared goal.

Eibhlin Byrne

Director Educational Welfare Services

Autumn 2015

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Eibhlin Byrne, Director of Educational Welfare Services, Tusla – Child and Family Agency;

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Finally, we acknowledge the vital contribution of Carole Devaney, editor, who sadly passed away during the course of editing the guidelines. May she rest in peace.

1. A STATEMENT OF STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE: INTRODUCING THE GUIDELINES

1.1 WHY A STATEMENT OF STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE?

Under Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the Board of Management of each school must prepare and submit to Tusla – Child and Family Agency a Statement of Strategy for School Attendance. Section 22(1) of the Act states that:

‘The board of management of a recognised school shall, after consultation with the principal of, teachers teaching at, parents of students registered at, and the educational welfare officer assigned functions in relation to, that school, prepare and submit to the Board a statement of the strategies and measures it proposes to adopt for the purposes of fostering an appreciation of learning among students attending that school and encouraging regular attendance at school on the part of such students (hereafter in this section referred to as a “statement of strategy”)’.

Furthermore, Section 22(3) of the Act requires:

‘The board of management of a recognised school shall, in preparing a statement of strategy, have regard to such guidelines issued by Tusla regarding the preparation and carrying into effect of statements of strategy’.

Submitting Statement of Strategy for School Attendance

Each school’s Board of Management must submit its Statement of Strategy for School Attendance to Tusla’s Educational Welfare Services (see Section 9.3 for a template for the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance), once signed off by the school’s Board of Management. If the Statement of Strategy is changed after a review process, the Board of Management must re-submit the amended version to Tusla’s Educational Welfare Services.

Schools should submit the Statement of Strategy electronically to the following address: attendancestrategies@tusla.ie. Schools will receive an acknowledgement of their submission.

The school’s Statement of Strategy for School Attendance can be reviewed by Tusla’s Educational Welfare Services and must be available to an Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) on request. Equally, the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance must be made available to the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills for inspection.

For the purposes of data protection legislation, schools must ensure that no personal or sensitive information is included in the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance. Although schools are not subject to the Freedom of Information Acts, the Agency is subject to freedom of information (FOI) requests. Schools should expect their School Attendance Strategy to be released if an FOI request is made to the Agency for same.

1.2 WHAT THE EDUCATION (WELFARE) ACT REQUIRES

Section 22(1) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 describes the Statement of Strategy as:

‘a statement of the strategies and measures it proposes to adopt for the purposes of fostering an appreciation of learning among students attending that school, and encouraging regular attendance at school on the part of such students’.

The Statement of Strategy will give a strong focus to the school’s approach to attendance. It will gather together all the practices and interventions aimed at promoting and supporting school attendance, and express these as a clear and systematic framework of support for school attendance.

The Act sets out certain matters that must be included in the Statement of Strategy:

- a. the rewarding of students who have good school attendance records;
- b. the identification at an early stage of students who are at risk of developing school attendance problems;
- c. the establishment of closer contacts between the school concerned and the families of students to which paragraph (b) applies;
- d. the fostering, promoting and establishing of contacts by the school with —
 - i. other schools that provide primary or post-primary education,
 - ii. bodies engaged in the provision of youth work programmes or services related thereto, or engaged in the organising of sporting or cultural activities, and
 - iii. such other bodies within the area in which the school concerned is situated as the Board of Management considers appropriate;
- e. in so far as is practicable, the development, following consultation with the bodies referred to in paragraph (d), of programmes of activities designed to encourage the full participation of students in the life of the school;
- f. in so far as is practicable, the co-ordination with other schools of programmes aimed at promoting good behaviour among students and encouraging regular attendance at school by students, and the exchanging of information relating to matters of behaviour and school attendance with such schools;

- g. the identification of —
 - i. aspects of the operation and management of the school and of the teaching of the school curriculum that may contribute to problems relating to school attendance on the part of certain students, and
 - ii. strategies —
 - I. for the removal of those aspects in so far as they are not necessary or expedient for the proper and effective running of the school having regard, in particular, to the educational needs of students, and
 - II. that will encourage more regular attendance at school on the part of such students.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE GUIDELINES

The purpose of these School Attendance Guidelines is to assist schools to develop their Statement of Strategy for School Attendance so as to meet the requirements of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. The guidelines reflect these requirements. They take account of research findings relating to attendance and the experience of schools in promoting and supporting attendance. By adhering to the guidelines, schools will ensure that their Statement of Strategy is in keeping with the provisions of the Act.

Each school should apply the guidelines in ways that fit with and reflect the unique characteristics and circumstances of the school and its community of students, parents and teachers. The guidelines should be used in the preparation of the Statement of Strategy to:

- promote and support discussion, reflection and consultation about attendance within the school community;
- review the school's current policy and practice in relation to attendance;
- identify strengths, gaps and challenges in current policy and practice;
- develop new or additional measures needed to promote and support attendance in line with the guidelines;
- ensure that the school is observing all its obligations in relation to attendance, as set down in the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

Following the preparation and adoption of the Statement of Strategy, the guidelines should also be used to inform and support day-to-day management of attendance.

In drawing up their Statement of Strategy for School Attendance, schools must also adhere to any other legislative provisions and circulars that may apply. A list of the relevant legislation and circulars is provided in the Appendix of this document.

1.4 TERMINOLOGY: THE LINKS BETWEEN POLICY, STRATEGY AND THE STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

Different terms are used in the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 and in school practice to refer to how the school manages attendance. In the interests of consistency, these guidelines will adopt the following descriptions of these terms.

- As part of the School Plan, schools develop a **School Attendance Policy**. This sets out the school's overall goals and objectives in relation to attendance in line with its vision and mission. It sets out clearly for students, parents and staff the values, goals and objectives of the school in relation to attendance.
- The **School Attendance Policy** should also set out the strategies that the school uses to promote high levels of attendance in the school, to prevent poor attendance, to intervene where attendance difficulties emerge and to provide support to students whose attendance is a cause for concern.
- The **School Statement of Strategy for School Attendance** is the **written account** of the **School Attendance Policy** and the various actions that the Board of Management has adopted to support school attendance (see 'Submitting Statement of Strategy for School Attendance', page 2).

1.5 CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE GUIDELINES

Following this Chapter 1, these guidelines are organised as follows:

- **Chapter 2** gives an overview of the research context for school attendance.
- **Chapter 3** describes the principles underpinning a Statement of Strategy.
- **Chapter 4** describes a whole-school approach to school attendance.
- **Chapter 5** describes the attendance standards to be communicated to the school community.
- **Chapter 6** describes requirements regarding recording and monitoring of attendance.
- **Chapter 7** describes approaches to promoting good school attendance.
- **Chapter 8** describes responses to poor attendance.
- **Chapter 9** describes how to prepare a Statement of Strategy.
- **Chapter 10** describes how to implement the Statement of Strategy.
- A **bibliography** provides a range of relevant literature relating to research, policy and good practice in the areas of attendance and student engagement
- The **Appendix** provides information on relevant Legislation, Circulars and Statutory Guidelines in relation to school attendance.

2. UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE: LEARNING FROM RESEARCH

2.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

Research findings offer valuable insights into the reasons why students do not attend school, the complex links between a student's engagement in learning at school and the kinds of interventions that have been proven to work when a student experiences attendance difficulties. Research has also pointed to the benefits of good school attendance and the impact on students when school attendance is poor, for example:

- the positive impact of high levels of attendance on teaching and learning (McCoy *et al*, 2014; Claes *et al*, 2009);
- the established links between good attendance, student engagement and staying at school to complete the Senior Cycle (Smyth, 1999; McCoy *et al*, 2007; Byrne and Smyth, 2010);
- the well-established impact of poor attendance on a student's educational outcomes (McCoy *et al*, 2007);
- the research evidence that even when they stay at school to Leaving Certificate stage, those students with poor attendance do less well in the exam and are less likely to go on to further study (McCoy *et al*, 2007);
- the impact of poor attendance on wider aspects of a student's life, such as weak peer relationships, risks of engagement in anti-social activity and poor family relationships (Hibbett and Fogelman, 1990; Carroll, 2011);
- the pressures for students and their teachers when students miss out on classes and key parts of the curriculum (Lupton, 2004; Wilson *et al*, 2008).

This body of knowledge about the factors that help or act as barriers to attendance is the foundation of good planning for school attendance. As noted in research commissioned by the former National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), interventions that insist on attendance without an understanding of the barriers faced by students, or the supports and interventions that can help, are in danger of being ineffective (Morris and Parashar, 2012, p. 14).

2.2 WHY STUDENTS DO NOT ATTEND SCHOOL

Research shows that there is rarely a single factor at work when students miss school persistently or for lengthy periods. A young person's attendance pattern is bound up with what is happening in their lives – at school, in class, at home, with their peers, in their community and within themselves. In each of these settings, there are both risk and protective factors that can hinder or help the young person. Table 1 sets out some of the main research findings about the factors that can affect a student's attendance.

While the research highlights many factors that influence attendance, these School Attendance Guidelines reflect the research insights into the powerful influence of school. School culture,

ethos, curriculum, student-teacher relationships and the quality of teaching and learning – all these factors are central to the task of ensuring that students engage, participate and attend, and these critical influences are within the control of the school.

Table 1: Research findings on factors that impact on school attendance

The following are examples from the body of research around engagement and school attendance taken from ESRI reports (2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2013), NEWB (2008a). Further resources can be accessed in the Bibliography of these Guidelines.

School factors

School climate and classroom climate: Students who experience positive interaction, in the form of praise or being asked questions, are less likely to be absent from school on a regular basis than those who have not experienced such interaction or feel ignored.

Student–teacher relationships: A positive climate of student–teacher relationships, of mutual trust and respect, and where students have a voice in school matters are known in most educational research to have a strong influence on student engagement and attendance.

Teacher expectations: Attendance is significantly higher when teachers have high expectations of students – an effect that operates over and above the students’ own expectations of themselves.

School organisation: Poor attendance tends to be higher among lower stream classes in schools that use ability streaming; this may be the result of several factors, including a higher proportion of disaffected or weaker students in a class, and peer influences.

Personal factors or attitudes among students with persistent absenteeism

Age and stage of schooling: Disengagement with school, linked with poor attendance, can manifest itself even at pre-school level and can worsen across the course of the primary and post-primary cycles. Students in Second Year of post-primary school are more likely to disengage from school and have poor attendance.

Negative attitudes to school: Students who miss school are less likely to think school life is 'happy for them', see teachers as unhelpful or unfair, and to dislike school.

Academic self-rating: Students are more likely to miss school if they do not have belief in their academic ability, have low expectations for themselves, are fearful of the embarrassment of doing poorly at school or feel they have little control over their lives.

Peer influences: Peer influences can operate to 'pull' students away from attending school. Research shows they may also 'push' students away, where the student feels that peers have a low interest in education, are 'messing' and that school is not attractive as a result.

Health: Students are more likely to miss school if they have poor general health and/or emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties.

Special educational needs: Students with special educational needs have significantly higher absence levels than other students.

Socio-economic and family factors

Socio-economic and family factors can impact on attendance, such as being from a lone-parent family, parental education levels, housing conditions, maternal depression, parents with atypical or long working hours.

Parents' interest in education and their expectations for their child will impact on the student's educational outcomes.

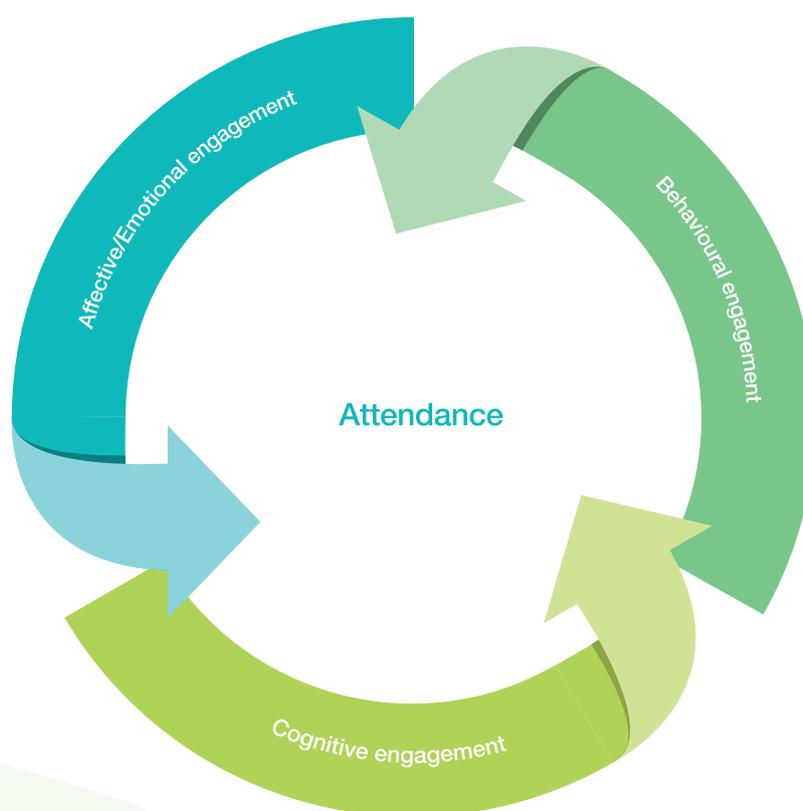
Traveller community: There are strong associations between poor school attendance and membership of the Traveller Community.

Students who have family carer duties are more likely to miss school.

2.3 ENGAGEMENT AND ATTENDANCE

The concept of engagement with school and learning is another important aspect of educational research linked to attendance. Figure 1 highlights the way attendance and a student's affective/emotional, behavioural and cognitive experiences are bound up together. Improving outcomes for students in these three spheres – affective/emotional, behavioural and cognitive – can contribute positively to the quantity and quality of students' school attendance (Lawson and Lawson, 2013).

Figure 1: The three spheres of engagement influencing school attendance



2.4 WHAT WORKS?

From research, we also have valuable insights into what works for school attendance.

Strategies to improve students' engagement

A study commissioned by the former NEWB that focused on identifying strategies to improve students' engagement with education provides key learning for the development of the Statement of Strategy (Morris and Parashar, 2012). The research highlights:

- the need to develop **supportive, positive and welcoming** school environments;
- the importance of **identifying the needs** of the individual child;
- the need to put in place the **appropriate strategies and combination of strategies** that will address identified needs;
- the importance of **intervening early**, offering personalised support and engagement with families and their children, both at transition points and when children are at risk of disengaging from education;
- the importance of **community interventions** that maintain connectedness with the school, the student, the family and the community, addressing both personal (including parent–child conflicts) and practical issues (such as access to health and mental health care) around disengagement;

- the efficacy of an **intensive case management** approach, working with families and children to address emerging problems of poor attendance and behaviour.

Response to Intervention model for school attendance and absenteeism

The Response to Intervention (RTI) model and absenteeism literature have both emphasised the need for early identification and intervention, progress monitoring, behavioural assessment, empirically-supported procedures and protocols, and a team-based approach.

A Response to Intervention (RTI) model to promote school attendance and decrease school absenteeism is an approach that can be taken in schools (Kearney and Graczyk, 2014). The model and framework can be used to support all students through a decision-making process using evidence-informed and evidence-based strategies based on student need, in conjunction with regular progress monitoring. As Table 2 and Figure 2 show, an RTI framework promotes regular attendance for all students at Tier 1, targeted interventions at Tier 2 and intense and individualised interventions for students with chronic absenteeism at Tier 3. This approach aligns with other approaches adopted in schools to promote well-being, suicide prevention and anti-bullying measures.

Table 2: Response to Intervention (RTI) model

Support for all	All schools should engage in universal and preventative work in supporting all students to attend, participate and achieve in school. The needs of the majority of students are met as a result of whole-school policies and practices, which include the full range of curricular and pastoral supports, incentives and awareness raising.
Support for some	Schools need to provide additional support for the students whose needs are not fully met under whole-school supports. These students require additional support, which might include such interventions as a curricular response, a targeted attendance chart, behaviour plan or mentoring. The support schools provide should be proportionate to the level of identified need. Schools should have clear protocols for identifying the students or groups of students needing more support.
Support for few	A small number of students in every school will present with more complex needs. They are likely to be in receipt of targeted support, but their needs are not being met. Where the situation has escalated, the school’s response should be escalated to provide proportionate support to these students and their families. It is likely that a multi-disciplined, tailored, cohesive and structured response is required. It is likely that these students will meet the threshold for a request for referral to Tusla’s Educational Welfare Services.

Figure 2: Response to Intervention (RTI) framework



Source: Kearney and Graczyk (2014). Framework reproduced with permission of Prof. Christopher Kearney, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

2.5 USING THE RESEARCH TO INFORM THE STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

An understanding of the personal and academic benefits of good school attendance, the impact of poor school attendance and the factors that influence attendance form the basis of good planning for school attendance. Research findings, along with the expertise and experience in the school community, can guide the approach to attendance and ensure that interventions have a solid evidence base.

Knowledge about the factors that influence the attendance of groups and individuals can help school staff, management, students and parents to:

- plan and implement a team approach to attendance;
- focus on what the school can change;
- select interventions that are known to work.

3. PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING AN EFFECTIVE STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

There are some basic principles that should guide the school in preparing and implementing its Statement of Strategy for School Attendance. These principles are built on core values, such as high expectations for every child, partnership, personal responsibility and respect for diversity, each described in more detail below. When the principles are endorsed by the school community, as part of the work on the Statement of Strategy, they will help to create a climate of support for attendance and help the school to achieve its attendance goals.

Attendance matters	The Statement of Strategy affirms the school’s commitment to attendance as an important aspect of school ethos and school policy.
High expectations for every student	The Statement of Strategy aims to build a culture of high expectations among all staff and with every student for the student’s learning, participation and attendance.
A whole-school approach	The Statement of Strategy recognises how all areas of the student’s experience at school impacts on their engagement and attendance.
A whole-child approach	The Statement of Strategy recognises the complexity of some students’ lives and difficulties. In response, the Statement of Strategy tries to secure the involvement and support of many agencies and community supports for the student’s overall well-being and welfare.
Working in partnership with parents and families	The Statement of Strategy places a premium on teamwork with parents to secure high levels of attendance, partnership in developing attendance policy and close working relationships with parents of individual students to address problems.
Valuing and responding to diversity	The Statement of Strategy affirms the school’s commitment to valuing the culture of every student and ensuring that every student will make the most of the learning opportunities provided by the school.
Recognising resilience and avoiding stereotypes	The Statement of Strategy will recognise every student’s capacity to attend school, learn well and achieve good outcomes. The school will challenge stereotypes that might assume that students from particular backgrounds or with particular experiences will always have a problem with attendance and learning.
Focusing on personal responsibility	The Statement of Strategy aims to build each student’s sense of personal responsibility for their own learning, and their responsibility to their peers and their teachers to be at school every day.

4. A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO ATTENDANCE

4.1 A WHOLE-SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

Research findings are clear that the overall school climate – where there is a welcoming atmosphere, positive teacher-student relationships and a supportive teaching and learning environment – is at the core of success in every aspect of school life and work, including attendance. The quality of the whole-school ethos and culture is the most important school influence on students' attendance and engagement in learning. A whole-school approach to attendance will mean that:

- school ethos, policies and practices work consistently together to support good attendance;
- attendance is a regular part of development planning and school self-evaluation;
- management and staff work as a team, with a consistent approach to attendance;
- parents and students are part of an inclusive school community and have opportunities to contribute to and take appropriate responsibility for attendance policy and strategy;
- opportunities are provided through which staff members as a team can focus on attendance, update their knowledge about effective practice and share experience and expertise on managing attendance.

4.2 REVIEWING ASPECTS OF SCHOOL LIFE THAT MAY INFLUENCE ATTENDANCE

Section 22(2)(g) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 requires, as part of its School Attendance Strategy, that each school will identify 'any aspects of the operation and management of the school and of the teaching of the school curriculum that may contribute to problems relating to school attendance on the part of certain students'. Each school should adopt strategies to remove these aspects insofar as they are not necessary or expedient for the effective running of the school.

Table 3 sets out some questions about key school policies and practices that have been shown to affect school attendance. As part of the work of preparing its Statement of Strategy, the school should review the policies and practices concerned in order to:

- identify ways in which this policy or practice could be used to promote good attendance or address poor attendance;
- identify any barriers to attendance arising from practice or policy and look at ways of addressing them.

Table 3: Aspects of school life that may influence attendance

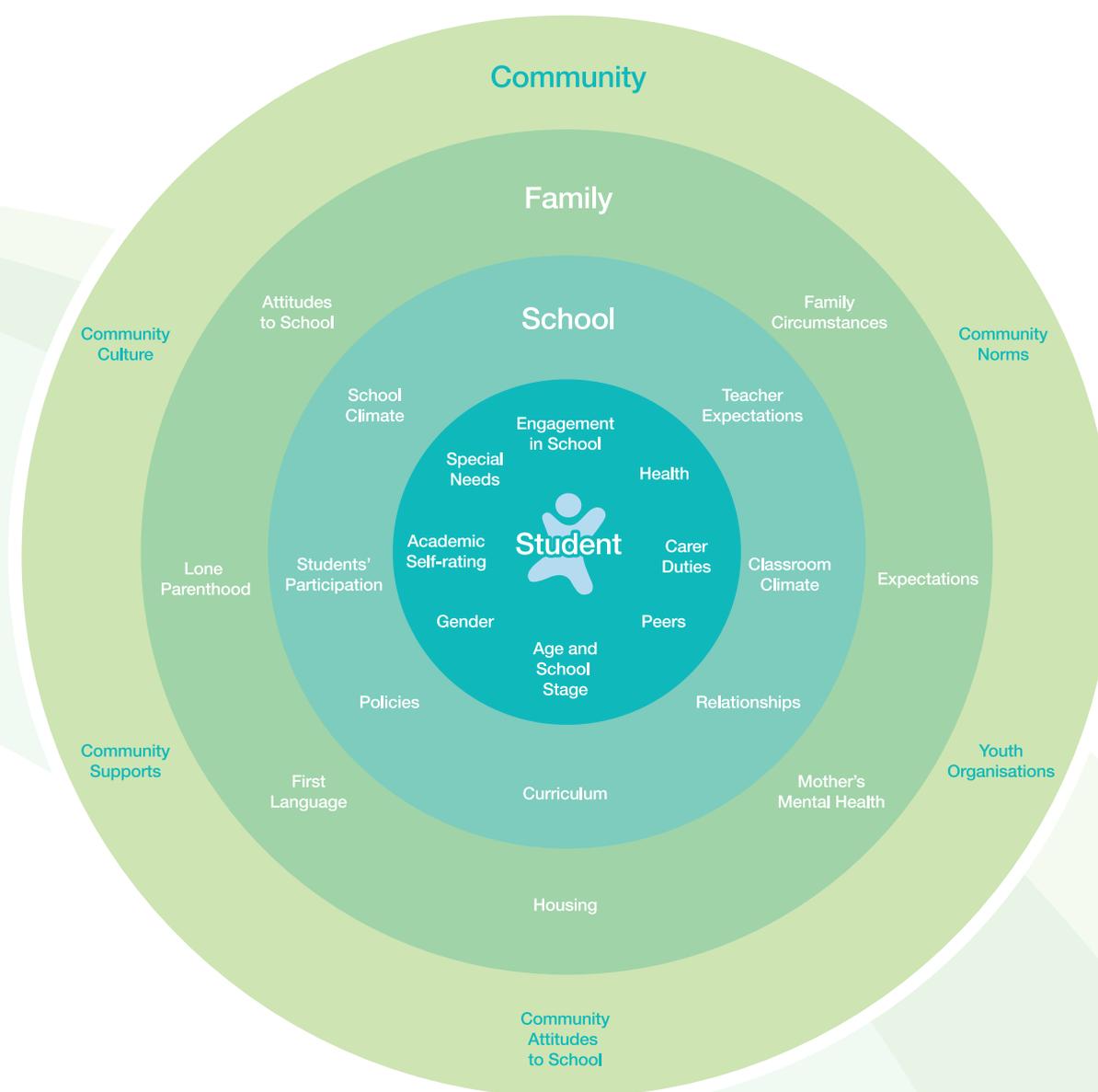
- Is the curriculum flexible and differentiated to meet diverse needs?
- Are the instructional practices differentiated to meet individual needs?
- Is the curriculum relevant to student lives and are different learning styles catered for?
- Is the quality of teaching having an impact on attendance?
- What is the impact of homework policy, literacy and numeracy policies, and SPHE policies on attendance?
- Is the policy on ability grouping affecting attendance?
- Does the Code of Behaviour affect attendance?
- How does the anti-bullying policy influence attendance?
- How do timetabling, lunchtime arrangements and school closures affect attendance?
- Are break-time and class transition arrangements and supervision affecting attendance?
- Does school policy on textbooks and school uniform requirements affect attendance?
- Does the school promote student partnership, partnership with parents and supportive student-teacher relationships?
- Does the school value diversity and have high expectations of all students?
- Are there robust pastoral care procedures in place, such as student support teams and student attendance teams?
- How do the Board of Management, school management and school planning support attendance?
- Does the school attempt to minimise reduced timetables, suspensions and expulsions? (See NEWB (2008) Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools, Chapter 10 ‘Suspensions and Expulsions: Legal and Procedural Requirements’.)
- Is it clear to parents and students what is required of them on return to school following a suspension?

4.3 REVIEWING ASPECTS OF ATTENDANCE FROM A WHOLE-CHILD PERSPECTIVE

As well as reviewing any policy and practices within the school that may influence school attendance, those working on the Statement of Strategy should be aware of the influence of family, community and the child's own characteristics that may have an impact on school attendance.

Figure 3 illustrates the spheres of a child's life that impact on school attendance and should be used when considering the whole-school approach.

Figure 3: Spheres of a child's life that impact on school attendance



5. SETTING AND COMMUNICATING ATTENDANCE STANDARDS

5.1 SETTING AND COMMUNICATING STANDARDS

The school should set down the standards expected in relation to attendance. These standards should be clear and aim to promote full attendance by all students. The school should ensure that the standards are communicated to all members of the school community. All written communication should be mindful of the needs of members of the school community with literacy difficulties or with English as an additional language.

Information should be provided in accessible and easy-to-read formats about the following:

- procedures for notification of a student's absence;
- how the school responds to absences;
- procedures for notifying absences due to illness;
- policy for absences due to term-time holidays.

Each standard is discussed in further detail below.

5.2 PROCEDURES FOR NOTIFICATION OF STUDENT ABSENCES TO THE SCHOOL

When a student is absent from school during part of a school day or for a school day or for more than a school day, Section 18 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 places a legal duty on parents to notify the principal about the reasons for the child's absence. Section 23 of the Act requires that the procedures to be followed by a parent for notifying the school about absence must be formalised by the school and form part of the school's Code of Behaviour.

Guidance regarding notification of absences should be put in writing and communicated to all parents and to other members of the school community, including students. Among the main requirements/procedures to be set out are:

- school opening times;
- when parents should advise the school about absence (e.g. on first day of absence or when the student returns to school);
- the person to be informed (e.g. Principal, class teacher/year head);
- the method to be used (e.g. journal, note, telephone call);
- the time students are expected to be in school/class;
- the time at which a student will be marked absent;
- procedures if a student arrives late for school;
- procedures if a student needs to leave school before the end of the school day.

5.3 SCHOOL RESPONSES TO ABSENCES

The school should describe clearly for parents and students what the response to absences will be, both on a daily basis and over time. The guidance should refer to the following:

- arrangements for early or same-day response to absences to ensure that parents are kept informed of their child's absences (many schools use a same-day texting response);
- at what level of absence the school will telephone and/or write to the parents to advise of their concern about the child's attendance;
- at what level of absence the school will request a meeting with the child and parent to try to identify and remove any barriers to attendance;
- what interventions may be put in place in the school to support students with poor attendance;
- the systems in the school that are used to support students with poor attendance (e.g. pastoral care, school support team);
- the school's obligations regarding reporting and referral of students to the Educational Welfare Services of Tusla – Child and Family Agency are clearly outlined at: <http://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services/information-for-schools-inc-absence-reporting/download-reporting-documentation>

5.4 PROCEDURES FOR NOTIFYING AN ABSENCE DUE TO ILLNESS

The school should give parents clear guidance about its requirements regarding absences due to illness. Any requirements the school has with regard to providing a doctor's certificate should be clearly stated.

5.5 POLICY FOR ABSENCES DUE TO TERM-TIME HOLIDAYS

Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their child who is attending a recognised school is at school on every day that the school is open, unless there is a genuine reason for him or her not to attend (Section 17 of Education (Welfare) Act 2000). Only absences relating to activities organised by the school or in which the school is involved can be authorised by the principal (Section 21(9) of Education (Welfare) Act 2000). Therefore, the school cannot give 'permission' for holiday absences during term time.

Schools should strongly discourage parents from taking students on holidays during term time and this should be documented in the school's communication to parents. If a parent decides to take a child out of school for holidays, the principal should request the parent to provide a letter to the school to say they are doing so and are aware of the implications. Where there are regular holiday absences, the school should remind parents of the educational and potential legal impact of removing students from school for periods of time.

6. RECORDING AND MONITORING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

6.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF RECORDING, TRACKING AND MONITORING ATTENDANCE

Research findings consistently show that a system for gathering and using accurate attendance data is a core part of effective attendance strategies (Inspectorate of Department of Education and Skills, 2011 and 2015; Morris and Parashar, 2012). Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 also requires that the school will have ways of identifying students who are at risk of developing school attendance problems. To comply with this requirement, schools are required to keep accurate records for all student absences and failure to attend.

Schools should capture, measure and analyse school-wide attendance, class or year group patterns and also track individual attendance patterns (see Chapter 7). Schools should be alert to emerging patterns of poor attendance and should be aware of students and groups of students whose attendance is of concern. Schools should be particularly mindful of students with additional vulnerabilities for poor attendance.

When patterns are probed, they may reveal times of the day, week or school year that are disproportionately affected by poor attendance. Identifying the pattern can also suggest the interventions that a school can take to reduce absences.

Arrangements for analysing data should be in place, within available resources, and all school personnel should be clear about who has this responsibility. It may be beneficial to create an attendance committee or designate a specific role to scrutinise and monitor attendance data.

6.2 THE USES OF ATTENDANCE DATA

General attendance monitoring

- To monitor overall attendance and punctuality levels;
- To identify trends and patterns in attendance;
- To identify specific times of school year, week or day when attendance levels are lower;
- To monitor the attendance of vulnerable groups or individuals;
- To track attendance for a specified period of time.

Early intervention with groups and individuals

- To set targets for improvement in attendance and reduction of absence;
- To trigger early interventions at whole-school, class or group level and individual level;
- To identify individuals with poor attendance and intervene accordingly.

Monitoring interventions

- To monitor attendance targets;
- To monitor the effectiveness of the School Attendance Strategy;
- To devise and monitor the impact of individualised attendance plans.

Planning

- To inform annual school planning;
- As part of the school self-evaluation process.

6.3 APPROACHES TO RECORDING ATTENDANCE

It is the responsibility of the school principal to keep an accurate record of the students' attendance at the school and the reasons for any failure to attend. Teachers should maintain accurate class rolls and take responsibility for student absences within their classes. Late arrivals and early departures should also be recorded.

Although schools are familiar with the methods of recording and reporting attendance, this section serves as a summary of key processes. Robust systems should be in place to ensure accurate and comprehensive attendance records are maintained. There are a number of computerised systems available that support and enhance a school's capacity to manage attendance data.

Primary level

Attendance should be accurately recorded at the beginning of each school day. As provided for in Rule 55 ('School Hours, School Meetings, Roll-Call') in the Rules for National Schools 1965 (Rules for National Schools under the Department of Education) 'Roll-call shall be completed not later than 40 minutes after the time fixed for the commencement of formal instruction at the school meeting'. Circular 0028/2013 and Circular 0033/2015 outline the Department of Education and Skills' requirements regarding attendance recording at primary level.

Department of Education and Skills Circular 0028/2013 outlines the simplified arrangements for the maintenance of pupil enrolment and attendance records in the Clárleabhar, Leabhar Rolla and Leabhar Tinrimh Laethúil.

Circular 0033/2015 advises that these arrangements have been further updated and simplified for those schools that have placed all their pupil enrolment data on the Department of Education and Skills Primary Online Database (POD).

Post-primary level

Attendance should be accurately recorded at the beginning of each morning. Some school attendance recording systems record after lunch attendance also. Schools should consider roll-calls in each classroom, where attendance and explanations for absence can be recorded and monitored.

Best practice in recording

- Ensure there is a standard system in the school for keeping records about arriving late, departing early, attendance and non-attendance.
- Teachers maintain accurate attendance records.
- Teachers record details of student non-attendance.
- Teachers alert relevant staff if there are concerns about student absences.

6.4 SETTING ATTENDANCE TARGETS

Schools should adopt attendance targets and should link the Statement of Strategy to achieving these targets. Attendance targets provide:

- a clear measure of improvements in attendance levels in the school;
- a way of checking the impact and benefit of attendance strategies;
- raised awareness about attendance among management, staff, students and parents;
- an ethos of continuous improvement;
- a sense of commitment to attendance and a sense of pride in the school's achievements.

Selecting attendance targets

Attendance targets should be meaningful, attainable and relevant for the particular school. One useful approach to setting targets is to use the school's previous year attendance data as a baseline. It may also be helpful to monitor performance against a comparable school elsewhere in the county.

The Annual Attendance Report (AAR) submitted by the school each year to Tusla – Child and Family Agency is a good source of baseline data (see http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Child_and_Family_Agency_Annual_Attendance_Report_2013-2014.pdf). AAR data is published and is available for:

- the total number of days lost through student absence in the entire school year;
- the total number of students who were absent for 20 days or more during the school year;
- total number of students expelled in respect of whom all appeal processes have been exhausted;
- total number of students who were suspended.

DEIS Attendance Targets

Attendance is one of the key themes of DEIS planning in both primary and post-primary schools. The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills evaluated DEIS planning processes in 18 schools in 2011 and in 26 schools in 2014 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011a, 2011b, 2015a, 2015b). Some of the key learning from the reports is highlighted below. This emphasises the need for quality data collection and monitoring, baseline data on attendance and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound) targets.

DEIS resources are available from the Department of Education and Skills' website (www.education.ie) and from the Professional Development Service for Teachers website (www.pdst.ie).

The theme of attendance featured as one of the priorities in the DEIS planning process in 2011 and 2015 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011a, 2011b, 2015a, 2015b). In all cases, targets for the improvement of pupil attendance were included in the school's DEIS action plan. In most schools, those targets were clear, realistic and measurable, and were based to varying degrees on the analysis of attendance records over previous years. Examples of such targets include:

- to improve attendance by 3% in Year 1, 7% in Year 2 and 12% in Year 3;
- to reduce the number of pupils absent on Mondays;
- to reduce absenteeism by 10% on an annual basis.

7. PROMOTING GOOD SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

7.1 STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE GOOD SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Each school should have a set of attendance practices and strategies that promote good attendance among all students. These will help to prevent poor attendance patterns from developing and can help to identify emerging attendance issues. They should include:

- general awareness raising and setting high expectations;
- involving parents in setting high expectations;
- providing support programmes to enhance attendance;
- reward systems;
- building community support for attendance through links with other schools and community groups.

Each strategy is discussed in further detail below.

7.2 GENERAL AWARENESS-RAISING STRATEGIES

A core part of the Statement of Strategy will be to raise awareness about the importance of attendance for a student's learning and school success, and to communicate high expectations for attendance. These expectations need to be shared by the Board of Management, the school management, staff and parents. They should form part of the overall school climate (ethos and culture) and should be clearly communicated to students. Approaches include:

Talking about attendance

- Discussion about attendance at meetings with the Parent Association, at the student council's meetings and at parent-teacher meetings.
- Regular updates on the school's attendance in the school newsletter or website.
- Highlight the importance of attendance during school assemblies.
- Positive affirmation of attendance when the roll is being taken.

Attendance in key documents and prominent places

- Records of attendance in students' school reports.
- Posters and displays of students/classes with good attendance.
- Distribution of Tusla's Educational Welfare Services' leaflet entitled *Don't Let Your Child Miss Out*.
- Records of attendance in a student's Education Passport (see Circular 0027/2015).¹

¹ Schools are required to use the NCCA Education Passport materials to support the reporting and transfer of pupil information at the end of 6th class. The Education Passport should be sent to the relevant post-primary school following confirmation of enrolment and, ideally, by the end of June before entry to second level. The passport includes information on a child's school attendance.

7.3 INVOLVING PARENTS IN SETTING HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Parents can have a huge influence on their child's school attendance. Parents who are engaged with the school and feel part of the school community will have a greater commitment to education. Therefore, parental involvement is of paramount importance to students' well-being and success in school generally and, in particular, their attendance at school.

- Parental involvement in all aspects of school life should be promoted and encouraged. Involvement leads to parents viewing the school in a positive way, which in turn leads to their children having a positive attitude towards the school and respect for policies. Maintaining regular contact with parents and involving them in all aspects of school life is essential to the building of trust and good relationships.
- The effective school involves parents and the school community in decisions. The school should create opportunities for parents to participate in and review proposed school policies and curriculum as part of parent councils or committees.

This partnership between parents and the school is underpinned by Sections 26 and 27 of the Education Act 1998, which place an onus on the school's Board of Management to promote parent and student involvement, keep parents and students informed about the work of the school and facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to parents who wish to establish a parent association and to a parent association when it is established and to students who wish to establish a student council and to a student council when it has been established.

Parents have a particular role in setting high standards for their child around attendance and punctuality, and in engaging with the school if there is a problem about their child's attendance. It will be helpful to:

- highlight how missed classes can have a negative effect on the student's achievement and thus cause stress for the student;
- draw attention to the impact on the whole class and the teacher, if the teacher needs to spend time helping students to catch up on missed lessons;
- raise awareness of the problem that lateness can cause for the student and teacher, particularly when a student misses the same class or subject on a regular basis or misses out on resource teaching due to poor punctuality.

Despite the best efforts by parents, in some circumstances they may be unable to ensure that their child attends school. In such circumstances, the school should seek advice from relevant professionals, e.g. Educational Welfare Officer, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), regarding appropriate referrals for the student. It is important that the school continues to communicate with the parents and is supportive in trying to re-engage the student in school.

7.4 PROVIDING SUPPORT PROGRAMMES TO ENHANCE ATTENDANCE

The school's approach to motivating and encouraging high levels of attendance among all students is at the core of the Statement of Strategy. Support programmes geared to the needs of the school's students and parents will enable the school to minimise poor attendance and prevent the need for interventions, which are costly in terms of staff time. Each school should give consideration to the scope for programmes that can enhance attendance, tailored to the needs of students in the school and the school's own experience.

The programmes that have been found to be beneficial for promoting attendance among all students can also be customised to provide support for individual students or groups of students when attendance problems are emerging. Among the support programmes that have been found to work well are:

- **Breakfast and after-school supports.** Before and after-school supports encourage school attendance and have a direct and indirect impact on school engagement (e.g. school-readiness, preventing hunger, punctuality, school organisation, homework completion, promoting good behaviour). Both types of supports can be set up to support all students in school. Identifying and encouraging the participation of students who may benefit from these types of supports in particular, and maintaining a record of their participation, can have a positive impact on school attendance. Breakfast supports in particular can support students who have difficulties with consistent attendance, punctuality and hunger, which may affect school attendance at different stages during the day². Homework support can be beneficial for students who are struggling academically or where space to complete homework in a home setting is challenging.
- **Art, music, drama and sporting activities.** Enrichment activities (such as art, music and drama) and sporting activities (both team and individual) can support students in both their academic achievements and their social and personal development. Enrichment and sporting activities can be extra-curricular or co-curricular. Both enrichment activities and sporting activities can support students in their school attendance, particularly when they cater to the particular interests of the students who are experiencing attendance difficulties and when they are scheduled for times of the school week when patterns of poor attendance are apparent (e.g. Mondays and Fridays).
- **Technology projects, particularly in the areas of IT creativity, digital film-making and music editing.** Like enrichment activities (see above), specific projects that are run for a short period of time (e.g. 6–8 week programmes) and that cater to the particular interests of a group or an individual can support school attendance. IT programmes with a technological component may appeal to some students who find it difficult to engage with the formal curriculum or where a combination of academic and vocational skills may provide a more appropriate skills mix for some students. Short

² The organisation Healthy Food For All (2012) has developed a resource called *The Good Practice Guide for School Breakfast Clubs* to support schools in developing breakfast supports. The School Completion Programme (2005) *Guidelines Towards Best Practice* provide points for consideration in the development of breakfast supports and after-school supports, as well as other supports that can encourage good attendance at school.

programmes or courses can be devised within schools or with support, for example, from the ICT division of Professional Development Services for Teachers (PDST).

- **Leadership development programmes.** These can involve participation in decision-making opportunities, leading group activities and progressing to roles of more responsibility (e.g. student councils at post-primary level, Green Schools Initiative, Comhairle na nÓg and youth organisations). Empowering students to have a say in their schools and in their communities can improve students' engagement with school life, with follow-on benefits for school attendance. All students should be encouraged to engage with leadership structures in their schools and communities. Students with attendance difficulties may feel disconnected from school leadership structures and should be given encouragement by school principals and teachers to participate. Cross-linkages between schools, youth services and community programmes could be particularly beneficial.
- **Building practical business and enterprise skills** through Young Social Innovators, Junior Achievement Ireland and enterprise programmes run by youth organisations (such as the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship in Foróige). Like technology projects (see above), projects and programmes that focus on building practical business and enterprise skills can support students who may find it difficult to engage with the formal curriculum or where a combination of academic and vocational skills may provide a more appropriate skills mix for some students. The acquisition of practical business and enterprise skills supports a student's life skills, which can have positive benefits for school attendance.
- **Skill programmes** in the areas of behaviour, confidence and self-esteem, motivational work, and programmes addressing relationship issues. The relationship between student well-being and positive school engagement has been well established. Students or groups of students presenting with poor patterns of school attendance may have associated difficulties with school behaviour, confidence, self-esteem, social and emotional challenges, health and hygiene, and relationship issues. Programmes to support young people in their social, emotional and personal development can be beneficial and have a favourable impact on school attendance. Programmes can be delivered within school during the formal school day or by engaging with small groups or in one-to-one work. Programmes such as Check-and-Connect³ and the Re-tracking Programme⁴ have been shown to be beneficial in supporting young people. Cross-linkages between schools, youth services and community programmes could be particularly beneficial.
- **Mentoring provided by a supportive and significant adult.** The relationship between one significant adult and a young person has been shown to have a number of benefits, including better engagement with school. Mentoring support to students who have emerging poor attendance can be beneficial, particularly where a period of dedicated support and attention can re-engage students who are experiencing challenges in their life. Mentoring support can be practised in a number of ways, including adult-to-student mentoring, buddy programmes (e.g. older students in the school supporting younger students) or peer mentoring between students and an adult volunteer or young person in

³ See <http://www.attendanceworks.org/what-works/multi-site-programs/minneapolis/>

⁴ See http://www.nbss.ie/sites/default/files/publications/emotional_lit_resources_proofed_cu.pdf

programmes such as Big Brother, Big Sister run by Foróige. Mentoring programmes can be short term or longer term, depending on the needs of the student.

7.5 REWARDING GOOD ATTENDANCE

Section 22(2)(a) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 requires each school to reward students who have good attendance records as part of their School Attendance Strategy. Celebrating and rewarding good attendance is an approach that is used internationally and is generally seen by schools as a useful way of promoting attendance. Reward schemes may be used to offer incentives to the whole school, class groups or individual students as part of a planned approach to preventing poor attendance or intervening early. Reward systems should be used thoughtfully to ensure that they do not become routine and ineffective. Included below are some tips on using rewards to motivate patterns of attendance:

- Attendance incentives are most effective when part of a comprehensive whole-school approach that includes targeted work with students with more significant challenges to attendance.
- Incentives should be part of creating a school-wide culture and emphasis on and valuing of attendance.
- Incentives do not need to be costly. Simple rewards can help to motivate students to improve attendance, including, for example, recognition from peers, parents and the school through certificates, attendance charts, a note home to recognise improved attendance and assemblies.
- Rewards are also highly effective in motivating students, such as attendance prizes at school prize-giving, entry into a raffle, extra break time or time off homework.
- Rewards should be adapted to the school's own cohort and be meaningful to the students.
- Schools should consider asking students what they consider a meaningful incentive.

7.6 BUILDING LINKAGES WITH OTHER SCHOOLS, YOUTH ORGANISATIONS AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Links with other local schools

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 requires schools to foster close links with other schools in their area and explore the scope for working together to encourage positive behaviour and attendance (Section 22(d), (e) and (f)). These provisions point to the possibilities of an **area-based approach to attendance**, through which schools, working together and with community organisations, reinforce the message to the community about school attendance, help to create a local focus on good attendance and share practice knowledge about both problems and solutions.

Examples of collaborations in which schools engage at area level include:

- primary and post-primary schools working together to support student attendance in the transition from primary to post-primary school;
- principals' networks working on joint approaches to raising awareness about the importance of attendance, promoting attendance and sharing practice experience;
- contacts with local businesses and services to raise awareness about the need to discourage school-age customers during the school day;
- collaborations around transport in rural areas;
- consultation and development of joint programmes with youth organisations and other relevant voluntary and community service providers to support school attendance (see below 'Local Community Action: A Case Study');
- engagement with local groups that support minority groups in the area;
- encouraging communities to be aware of the importance of school attendance and to do what they can to promote good attendance;
- joint school holiday planning to support attendance from families with children attending different local schools.

Links with local youth organisations and other local organisations

Boards of Management are also required to foster links with youth organisations and with any other local organisations whose work could encourage participation and attendance, and to consult with these bodies about possible joint programmes. It will be a matter for each school to explore what support can be mobilised from the local community.

Section 22(2)(d)(ii) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 explicitly requires schools to build links with their local youth services as a means of supporting good school attendance.

Youth services may be different in different areas. School personnel should develop links with the local youth service providers and be aware of what is available in the area for their students. For the most part, youth services are delivered to all young people, through group or individual provision.

- **All young people:** Local youth clubs provide generic youth services to all young people in the catchment area. Some areas will also have a youth café and leadership, citizenship or entrepreneurship programmes available to young people. Many areas also have a youth forum or facilitate involvement of young people in Comhairle na nÓg (the local youth council, under the aegis of the local authority and acting as a young people's consultative forum on local issues).
- **Group:** Youth services may work with groups of young people on specific topics, such as drug awareness, sexual health or offending behaviour. They can provide a safe forum for young people to acquire knowledge and discuss issues affecting their lives. Where schools are mindful of particular issues for their students, the local youth service may be in a position to develop a programme tailored to the need at a given time.

- **Individual:** Some young people may exhibit poor social skills or experience difficulty with particular areas of their lives, which can have a significant impact on their engagement in education and result in risk-taking behaviour, challenging behaviour or lack of motivation. Targeted youth work will support a young person to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and help them to develop new behaviours that will enable them to participate better in the life of their school and community.
- **Specific programmes** such as the Garda Youth Diversion Projects identify school attendance and attainment as a key indicator of risk in relation to re-offending. It can be very beneficial for these programmes to have close links with school personnel to ensure that the behavioural changes being developed in the youth work setting transfer across to the school setting.

Local Community Action: A Case Study

In 2008, Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership led a working group from across the community to develop a community action initiative to improve school attendance levels in Ballymun. The first meeting was attended by 48 individuals, representing 31 stakeholder organisations. The working group included representatives of schools in the area and a wide range of other community/voluntary and statutory agencies working in Ballymun, all of which accepted that school attendance was a shared problem that required a collaborative response.

The working group agreed a set of seven actions and lead agencies and partner organisations were assigned for each action, based on the most suitable skills and resource matches. Actions included:

- a community awareness campaign;
- in-school attendance promotion;
- consultation with young people;
- guidelines for parents on school absence arising from common childhood illnesses.

The initiative was evaluated by Burtenshaw Kenny Associates in 2012. The results so far clearly demonstrate that this initiative is working. Some of the key outcomes achieved after two years of the initiative include:

- Year-on-year comparison shows that the absence of more than 20 days indicating 'poor attendance rate' decreased from a baseline of 30.5% prior to the initiative to 26.6% following Year 1 and then to 24.7% following Year 2 of the initiative.
- More children in Ballymun are attending school more often, with fewer children falling into the 'poor attendance' category. This trend is likely to continue in the years to come, with the supports in place, as the increases have not yet levelled off.

- Children in Ballymun are attending school more often than their counterparts in other disadvantaged areas. Poor attendance rates in Ballymun after two years of the initiative are almost comparable with the rate for other disadvantaged schools (24.7% compared with 24.3%), having previously been far in excess of other disadvantaged schools (the baseline figure for Ballymun prior to the initiative was 30.5%). This reflects very positively on the achievements of the initiative over a two-year timeframe.
- There has been significant improvement in Traveller girls' attendance rates from Year 1 to Year 2 of the initiative.
- The poor attendance rate for Traveller boys has fallen considerably over the course of the initiative, from a very high base of 58.3% of Traveller boys missing school more than 20 days to 34.9% in Year 2 of the initiative.

8. RESPONDING TO POOR ATTENDANCE

8.1 RESPONSES TO POOR ATTENDANCE

Despite the best efforts of schools, some students will need extra attention to prevent patterns of poor attendance developing. The school's attendance monitoring system may draw attention to individual students, a class group or another sub-group of students with an emerging problem of poor attendance. These students will need interventions beyond those strategies that are geared towards promoting good school attendance for the whole school population. Timely and accurate information allows a school to act quickly to intervene before a habit of poor attendance takes hold. The response may be through participation in a particular support programme or through individual work, or through a combination of both.

Responses include:

- working with groups or individuals who may need additional support;
- tailoring whole-school approaches to group or individual need;
- engaging in early dialogue with parents and students;
- using internal school processes to provide individualised support;
- using school-led, multi-agency support processes;
- referral to Tusla's Educational Welfare Services;
- re-engaging students.

8.2 GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS WHO MAY NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Students who may be particularly at risk of developing attendance problems include:

- students with special educational needs;
- students with health needs;
- students who have experienced bullying⁵;
- students experiencing emotional or behavioural difficulties;
- students disengaged from the curriculum;
- students from the Traveller or Roma communities;
- students who are experiencing homelessness;
- students who are asylum seekers or living in direct provision centres;
- lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students;
- students in alternative care settings (e.g. residential home, foster care);
- young carers or young parents;
- students whose parents have not had a positive school experience;
- students from families where there has been a history of poor school attendance;
- students from socio-economically deprived family or community.

⁵ The *Action Plan on Bullying* from the Department of Education and Skills (2013) highlights the fact that some students have a higher risk of being bullied than the average student. The vulnerable groups include children and young people with disabilities, children from ethnic minority and migrant groups, children and young people from the Traveller community, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) young people, and those perceived to be LGBT, and children of minority religious faiths.

8.3 TAILORING WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACHES TO GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL NEED

Drawing on the Response to Intervention model and framework (see Chapter 2) and paying attention to the level of need, several aspects of the whole-school approach to attendance (see Chapter 4) should be tailored to support vulnerable groups or individuals. These include:

- **Transitions and milestones.** Paying particular attention to attendance among students making the transition to or from the school (e.g. from early education to primary, from primary to post-primary, from junior to senior cycle, or from year to year);
- **Attendance monitoring.** Using the school's attendance tracking and monitoring system to keep a regular check on the attendance of vulnerable students and to intervene if patterns of poor attendance emerge;
- **Targets.** The use of specific targets relating to attendance for individual students;
- **Timetabling.** The provision of more pupil-friendly activities (e.g. sport, music, drama) and timetabling activities (e.g. plays and school shows) during risk periods;
- **The rewards system.** Considering how the attendance reward and reinforcement system could be used to motivate and encourage individuals or groups of students;
- **Curriculum.** Possibilities for tailoring and differentiating curriculum offerings to the needs of particular groups or individuals;
- **Use of extra-curricular activities.** Identifying specific activities that may motivate and encourage engagement and attendance;
- **Links with youth and community groups.** Community resources such as Traveller support groups, migrant rights groups, church groups, community groups, disability organisations, support and welfare organisations – all may be able to offer supports for attendance. Schools should look to make maximum use of such community resources, in partnership with students and families.

8.4 EARLY DIALOGUE WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS

Early dialogue with parents

Section 22(2)(c) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 requires that schools make every effort to engage with parents when attendance problems emerge and work collaboratively with them to try to understand the in-school and/or out-of-school factors influencing attendance.

Factors that Affect Parents' Involvement with Attendance Issues

Parental attitudes or issues can make it difficult for parents to engage with the school and work in partnership to resolve emerging attendance problems. Some parents may need help to engage with their child's difficulty and schools should be aware of and sensitive to the factors that affect a parent's involvement.

Research by Dalziel and Henthorn (2005) has identified different levels of possible involvement by parents, including:

- Parents or carers who try hard to tackle poor attendance;
- Parents or carers who describe themselves as feeling powerless to tackle poor attendance;
- Parents or carers who appear to be over-protective or dependent on their child;
- Parents or carers who are either apathetic about tackling poor attendance or who appear not to engage with the school or other support professionals.

Early dialogue with parents is critical to ensure that non-attendance does not persist. Ways of doing this include:

- In cases where lateness or non-attendance is emerging, the class teacher/year head should talk to the parent to ascertain the cause, as well as emphasising the impact of lateness and non-attendance on the child's opportunities to learn. It may be helpful to inform a parent about what has been missed in class during their child's absence.
- Informal correspondence with parents should be initiated by telephone calls or letters, or by inviting the parents to a meeting to discuss matters of non-attendance and the parents' responsibility.
- Standard letters, with a response requirement, should be sent to parents following a set number of days' absence. All written communications should be mindful of parents' literacy and language challenges.
- Schools, through contact with parents, can gain an understanding of home situations affecting attendance. Knowledge regarding the home context will ensure that the school communicates in a positive manner to help with improving attendance.
- It is helpful for schools to ask parents what support they need to ensure that their child can attend school. If the family is supported in a meaningful way, this will foster increased confidence in the education system, leading to greater engagement with the school and improved attendance.
- Attendance targets for improved attendance should be set in collaboration with parents and monitored with them.

- Where improvements have been recorded, a letter or email should be sent to parents acknowledging the improvements. Where no improvements are noted, the school should follow up and seek to re-establish their commitment.

When there is no improvement in attendance, the school should advise the parents of their legal obligations under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 and the likelihood of a referral to Tusla’s Educational Welfare Services.

Early dialogue with students

Before attendance deteriorates, supportive engagement with students who have potential or actual attendance issues will help to prevent an attendance problem getting worse. School staff should do their utmost to understand and respond to the underlying reasons for non-attendance (e.g. sickness, bullying, teaching approaches, inappropriate curriculum). The class teacher/year head should listen to students’ concerns and respond sensitively to them, recognising the central part the students themselves play in finding solutions to their own attendance problems. This communication will be influenced by the age and understanding of the student.

8.5 USING INTERNAL SCHOOL PROCESSES TO PROVIDE INDIVIDUALISED SUPPORTS

As part of the response to ongoing poor attendance, it may be necessary to draw relevant school staff, student and parents together to develop an individualised plan for a student. This work may be undertaken as part of the work of the School Support or Student Support Team. Where schools have access to the Home–School Community Liaison and School Completion Programme, there will be additional opportunities to support parents and students.

Where the student’s needs are complex or where brief or one-off supports have not been successful, an individual planned approach should be adopted⁶.

The menu of programmes and interventions that the school has to promote good attendance among all students (see Chapter 7) can be adapted and tailored to address an individual student’s attendance problem. Finding an intervention that fits with the interests of a student will give a greater chance of success.

A **problem-solving framework** should be used to prepare an individual student’s attendance plan. An assessment framework is available on the Tusla website (see www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Educational_Welfare_Service_Assessment_Framework.docx) to support schools to form a deeper understanding of the presenting problems in relation to school attendance. Steps in such a framework include:

- **Understand:** Gather information. Understand the context and the factors that may be affecting attendance through discussion with the student (depending on age and

⁶ SESS guidelines and support provided to teachers and schools for planning for individual student needs are available at <http://www.sess.ie>. See also the NEPS Student Support File document at <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Student-Support-File-Guidelines.pdf>

maturity), the parents and members of staff.

- **Plan:** Generate ideas about possible solutions that take account of the reasons for the poor attendance. Prepare an agreed plan, tailored to the student's needs, with the student and parents.
- **Do:** Set individual attendance targets, agree a timeframe and agree responsibilities for the actions in the plan, including who will monitor and keep records to check the progress of the plan. Finally, implement the agreed strategy consistently.
- **Review.:** Review progress and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the intervention. Change the plan if necessary in the light of progress or further continued poor attendance.

8.6 USING SCHOOL-LED MULTI-AGENCY SUPPORT PROCESS

The causes of a student's chronic attendance problem may point to the need for support for the student, family and school from a range of agencies. In such circumstances, there is strong evidence to show the benefits and impact of support from agencies within and beyond the educational support services (Nevala et al, 2011; Kendall and Kinder, 2005; Thomas et al, 2011). The question of who will be involved in the plan will depend on the nature of the difficulties that the student and family are experiencing. It may be useful to consult with the support services of the Department of Education and Skills⁷, including the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), National Behavioural Support Service (NBSS), National Council for Special Education (NCSE) or external personnel who have particular expertise to bring to the situation.

Potential partners from the wider social and child support services, who may help the school when working with a student and family in need of this level of support, include Tusla – Child and Family Agency, the Health Service Executive (HSE), Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, as well as child welfare organisations such as Barnardos and the ISPCC.

Schools should be familiar with the local voluntary and community organisations that provide support to young people and their families across a broad range of needs. Where strong links have been established with local service providers, including youth organisations (see Chapter 7), the school will have additional expertise and support to draw on.

With a shared focus and an agreed plan in place, many students will be supported to achieve improved attendance. The plan can then be stepped down and the student can be supported through the whole-school approach that the school uses to promote attendance among the whole school population.

⁷ The Special Education Support Service (SESS), the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) and the Visiting Teacher Service for children who are deaf/hard of hearing and for children who are blind/visually impaired (VTSVHI) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) will be incorporated into the new Inclusion Support Service on its establishment.

8.7 EWO-LED PROCESS: REFERRAL TO TUSLA'S EDUCATIONAL WELFARE SERVICE

When the school has exhausted all efforts and there is no improvement in attendance, a referral should be made to Tusla's Educational Welfare Services (see <http://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services/information-for-schools-inc-absence-reporting/download-reporting-documentation/>). As part of the referral, a school will be asked to demonstrate the efforts already made to address the attendance problem through a Pre-Referral Checklist. This includes a requirement to have spoken with, written to and met with the student and parents to try and address the issue of poor attendance. All interventions by the school should be recorded on the Pre-Referral Checklist. For schools with DEIS supports, the added value of the Home–School Community Liaison and School Completion Programme interventions should also be documented as part of the integrated intervention plan.

On receipt of a referral from a school, Tusla's Educational Welfare Services will screen the referral and respond to the school. Where the student's case is allocated to an Educational Welfare Officer (EWO), he or she will lead a plan to try and resolve the presenting attendance issue. It is critical that the school remains involved in the plan since it will be key to the resolution of the situation. The focus at this point will be to exhaust all possible welfare interventions to address the attendance issues. When there is improved attendance, the plan can be stepped down and those involved can offer less intensive support, while ensuring that the gains made are maintained. When there is evidence that the parents are not making efforts to support their child's attendance, prosecution under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 will be considered. The Act requires that all welfare approaches be considered before legal action can be taken against a parent who is failing to ensure their child attends school.

8.8 SUPPORTING RE-ENGAGEMENT

Where a student has missed significant amounts of time, research findings underline the importance of helping a student to re-engage with learning and to catch up on missed material. When this does not happen, there can be further pressure on the student to disengage again and the good work done by the school in helping the student to get back to school can be undone. Good communication with the home will assist in this process. Utilising existing school structures to assist with a student's re-engagement after a prolonged absence is beneficial. In cases where a student has attended a hospital school or has been in receipt of home tuition the school should liaise with tutors to ensure the best possible re-engagement with school.

8.9 APPROACH TO SUSPENSIONS

Research points to a strong relationship between school sanctions (such as suspensions) and school attendance (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). The NEWB's Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools (2008b:74) clarify procedures regarding suspensions and expulsions. Schools should be aware that there are clear requirements for them in relation to suspensions. The guidelines also draw attention to the need for a school to consider the risk of any unwanted outcomes from suspension, including an increased sense of alienation from school as well as an escalation of attendance problems. The guidelines also indicate that students should not usually be suspended for poor attendance or lateness.

8.10 REDUCED TIMETABLES

It should be noted that any exclusion of a student for part of the school day can be deemed to be a suspension and should follow the guidance on suspensions outlined in the NEWB's Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools (2008b).

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 makes provision for a parent to take an appeal against a school in relation to suspension of a student. Schools should therefore be mindful that in certain circumstances reduced timetables could be appealed by a parent under this provision.

9. PREPARING THE STATEMENT OF STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

9.1 OVERVIEW

Preparing the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance gives schools the opportunity to strengthen work on attendance and ensure that the school's attendance policy and practice are in line with the requirements of Section 22 (1) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 (see section 1.1) and the Education Act 1998.

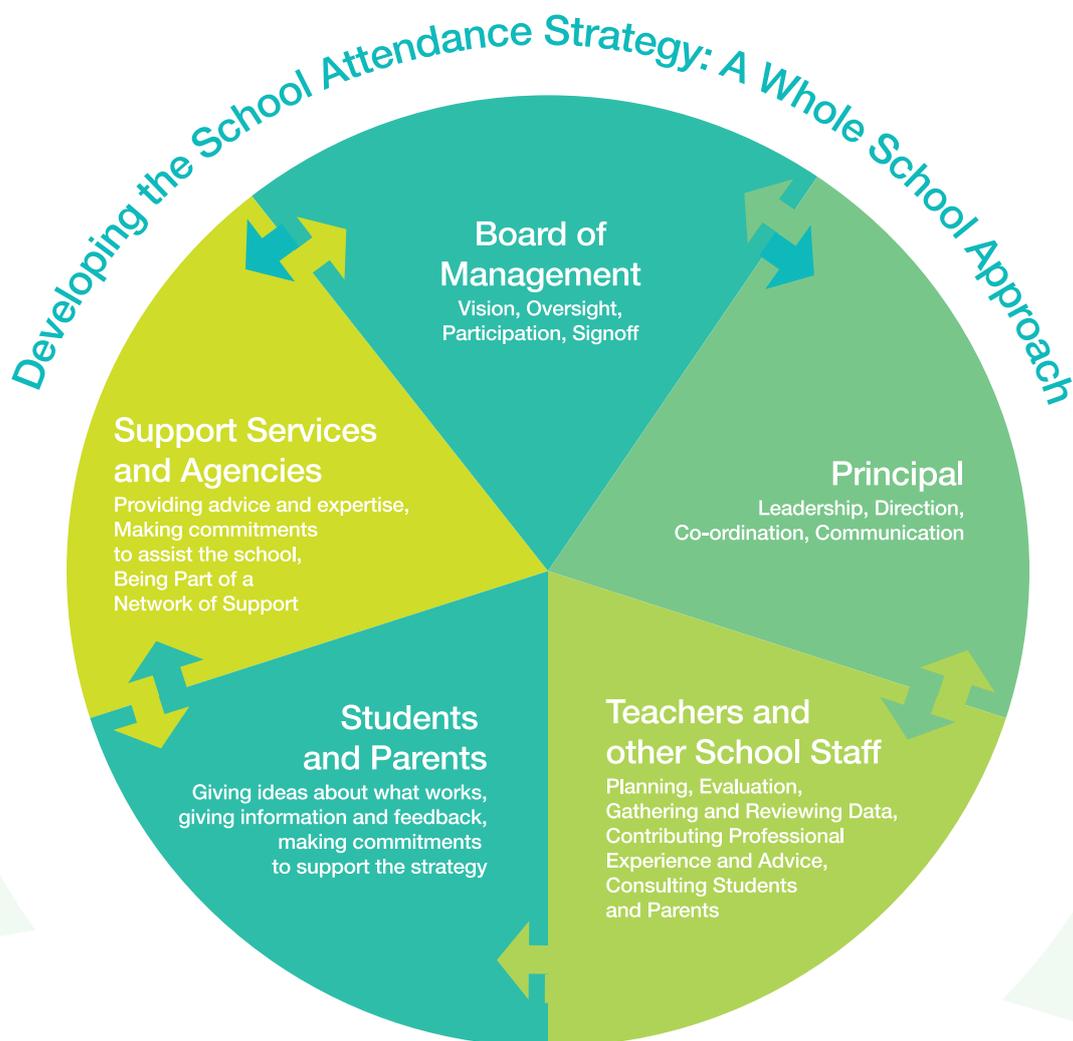
The task of preparing the Statement of Strategy is enriched when all the members of the school community have a chance to contribute their experience, skills and knowledge about attendance matters. Working together on the Statement of Strategy provides the school with an opportunity to:

- help to build a shared commitment to the values and ethos of the school;
- give all the partners in the school community a sense of responsibility for school attendance;
- create a consensus about how best to promote attendance and ensure a high level of support for school attendance.

9.2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN PREPARING STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

Figure 4 illustrates the various stakeholders involved in a whole-school approach to preparing the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance.

Figure 4: Whole-school approach to developing Statement of Strategy for School Attendance



Patron

The Board of Management is accountable to the patron and must keep them informed of its decisions and proposals (Section 15(d) of Education (Welfare) Act 2000). In order to comply with its responsibilities, the Board should submit its Statement of Strategy to the patron.

Board of Management

The Board of Management has the overall responsibility for the preparation of the school’s Statement of Strategy. As well as its oversight role in this work, the Board should play an active part in the work of reviewing and developing the Statement of Strategy. It is the responsibility of the Board to ensure that all of the measures required to promote and support

attendance, in line with the School Attendance Guidelines, are in place and set out in the Statement of Strategy. The Board should formally sign off on the Statement of Strategy before submitting it electronically to Tusla's Educational Welfare Services at the following address: attendancestrategies@tusla.ie.

School Principal

As instructional leader in the school, it is the responsibility of the principal, under the direction of the Board of Management, to lead and guide the work on the Statement of Strategy. The responsibilities of the principal would ensure, either directly or through delegation, that the work is appropriately communicated, co-ordinated and concluded.

Teachers and other staff members

Teachers, along with other staff members who are actively part of the school community, will bring their professional expertise and insight to bear on the preparation of the Statement of Strategy. Special needs assistants, members of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) or other school support personnel who have a close working connection with the school should also be asked to bring their expertise to the attendance work.

Students

Student participation work on the Statement of Strategy is a key way of engaging the support of students for high levels of school attendance, finding out their ideas about what they need to help them to engage and attend, enable them to understand better the importance of attendance and take responsibility for attendance seriously.

Parents

Parental involvement in work on the Statement of Strategy is essential in order to draw on their experience, reinforce their role and responsibility for attendance, and raise awareness about the importance of attendance.

Educational Welfare Officer

The Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) can advise the Board of Management about its responsibilities under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 and about good practice in drawing up the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance.

9.3 PREPARING STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

In preparing its statement of strategy for attendance, schools are advised to follow the school self-evaluation (SSE) process⁸. Figure 5 below identifies the key stages of that process and some of the key prompts that could be used to assist schools in examining ways in which

⁸ See <http://schoolself-evaluation.ie/> for more details

attendance could be improved. It is intended that schools will use the prompts in completing and submitting the Statement of Strategy for Attendance to Tusla.

Figure 5: Preparing the Statement of Strategy

<p>Involve all of the stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have we consulted with parents? ▪ Have we consulted with staff? ▪ Have we consulted with students? ▪ Have we consulted with EWO? ▪ Have we consulted community groups?
<p>Examine the evidence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is the current attendance rate? ▪ Are there patterns of non-attendance evident? ▪ Do we know why particular students have poor attendance rates? ▪ Are there concerns about pupil or student punctuality? ▪ Are there concerns about pupil learning experiences affecting attendance patterns?
<p>Set SMART targets, that is, Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Timebound</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are our targets SMART? ▪ Have we communicated our targets to our stakeholders? ▪ Are we making the best use of available technology to set our targets? ▪ How will we know if we have achieved our targets? ▪ Are there links between our attendance targets and our overall targets arising from SSE?
<p>Determine the actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are we going to do about overall attendance rates? ▪ What are we going to do about those pupils / students with very poor attendance rates/patterns? ▪ How will we improve pupil punctuality? ▪ Are there aspects of our teaching that need to be examined as a means of improving attendance? ▪ Are there things that we can do better to motivate the pupils / students to learn? ▪ Can we work closely with community groups / others to improve attendance? ▪ Have we written our strategy statement? ▪ What are our success criteria?

Monitor the actions

- How are they going to monitor them?
- How will they report on progress or challenges?
- Have we put in place the resources necessary for this to happen?
- How will we celebrate any improvements we might achieve?

9.4 THE WRITTEN STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

The school must document its Statement of Strategy for School Attendance as required by the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. The Statement of Strategy is a public document, which details the School Attendance Policy and attendance strategies. It should be written in accessible formats for the school community. The School Attendance Strategy should be reviewed and updated every year. Schools are encouraged to keep paperwork to a minimum and to build on existing work they have done on attendance. The following template may be useful for writing up the Statement of Strategy. It is available at: <http://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services/school-attendance-strategies/>

Template for the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance	
Name of school	
Address	
Roll Number	
The school's vision and values in relation to attendance	
The school's high expectations around attendance	
How attendance will be monitored	
Summary of the main elements of the school's approach to attendance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target setting and targets • The whole-school approach • Promoting good attendance • Responding to poor attendance 	
School roles in relation to attendance	
Partnership arrangements (parents, students, other schools, youth and community groups)	
How the Statement of Strategy will be monitored	
Review process and date for review	
Date the Statement of Strategy was approved by the Board of Management	
Date the Statement of Strategy submitted to Tusla	



10. IMPLEMENTING THE STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

10.1 IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING

Once the school's Statement of Strategy for School Attendance has been finalised, the Board of Management, together with the principal, should take steps to ensure the success and effectiveness of the strategy, as required by Section 22(4) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. Key tasks include:

- communicating the strategy;
- assigning clear roles in implementing the strategy;
- having good ways to review how well the strategy is working;
- providing staff development opportunities in relation to attendance.

10.2 COMMUNICATING STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

Members of the school community will have been actively involved in reviewing or developing the school's Statement of Strategy or consulted as part of the process (see Chapter 9). All staff, parents and students should be provided with copies of the updated strategy in user-friendly and accessible formats.

In order to raise awareness and remind people about the importance of attendance in the school and the seriousness with which the school views poor attendance, ways of communicating the strategy could include a formal launch with parents and students in the school and sending copies to prospective parents.

10.3 CLEAR ROLES IN IMPLEMENTING STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

The success of the Statement of Strategy depends on the people who can influence it. All the members of the school community have their part to play in ensuring that every student can get the benefits of good engagement with learning through being in school every day. Key roles include:

School Principal

- Provides leadership for the creation of a school ethos and climate that is supportive of high levels of engagement and attendance;
- Leads on the review and implementation of the school's Attendance Strategy;
- Puts arrangements in place for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the school's Attendance Strategy;

- Provides opportunities for staff to engage actively with the development and monitoring of the school's Attendance Strategy;
- Initiates links with other schools and relevant bodies on school attendance issues;
- Notifies Tusla's Educational Welfare Services and the relevant EWO of particular problems in relation to attendance and ensures support for the work of the EWO with students who have chronic attendance difficulties;
- Furnishes pertinent attendance documentation to officers of relevant government departments.

Teachers

- Provide a classroom climate and classroom management that support participation and engagement, especially with students who may be at risk of poor attendance;
- Actively use the school's Attendance Strategy to promote attendance;
- Set high expectations for punctuality and attendance in their classrooms;
- Agree punctuality and attendance standards with students as part of classroom rules;
- Set example by their own punctuality;
- Ensure attendance data are recorded accurately and reviewed in line with school procedures;
- Alert relevant staff if there are concerns about student absences;
- Support the attendance plan for students who have difficulty in attending school on a regular basis;
- Support students on return when they have missed periods of schooling.

Parents

- Set high standards for their child in relation to attendance and punctuality;
- Engage with the school if there is a problem about their child's attendance and support plans to address the problem;
- Ensure that their child regularly attends and arrives at school on time;
- Avoid taking their child out of class unless there is a serious reason;
- Avoid taking their child on holidays during term time.

10.4 HAVING GOOD WAYS TO CHECK HOW WELL STATEMENT OF STRATEGY IS WORKING

The Board of Management and the principal should make arrangements to check how the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance is being implemented on an ongoing basis and how well it is working. Ways in which this could be done include:

- opportunities for staff to share experience about how the strategy is working and to review progress towards attendance targets;

- update on attendance levels at each Board of Management meeting, with reference to the school's attendance targets;
- formal end-of-year review of the Statement of Strategy as part of preparation of the Board of Management's annual report on attendance (as per Section 21(6)(a)(b) of Education (Welfare) Act 2000) to Tusla's Educational Welfare Services and the Parent Association.

10.5 STAFF SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Whole-staff development opportunities will be needed that focus on:

- developing a shared understanding of the factors that influence a student's attendance and the strategies that are effective in supporting good attendance;
- familiarisation with the content of the School Attendance Guidelines;
- opportunities to engage in reflection and action learning as the strategy is implemented;
- ongoing discussion about strengthening whole-school approaches to attendance;
- feedback to staff on progress towards reaching attendance targets;
- inputs on the work of external agencies that may be able to provide support for staff, students and parents.

CONCLUSION

Ensuring that children achieve their potential in all areas of learning and development is one of the five national outcomes at the heart of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014). This framework will drive government policy and action for children and young people up to 2020.

This Statement of Strategy for School Attendance provides the backdrop for the preparation of the strategies of individual schools. It seeks to set out the legislative requirement for an Attendance Strategy as well as the research that should inform any such strategy. The principles of engagement and participation are particularly important in retaining students at school and these form the basis for the key principles underpinning an effective Statement of Strategy as outlined in the document.

Setting the tone for attendance and participation in school is important as is the communication of the key messages. Guidance is provided on the key notifications required, which will enable schools to adapt a strategy that best suits the particular needs of each school community.

The maintenance of good records for recording, tracking and monitoring attendance is critical to the monitoring of attendance and the recording of absences. Finally, it is important that a positive whole-school and whole-community approach is adopted to maximise supports available for those students most likely to struggle with school attendance, participation and retention.

Advice is offered on the preparation of a Statement of Strategy for School Attendance and a template provided for guidance.

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APPENDIX: RELEVANT LEGISLATION, CIRCULARS AND STATUTORY GUIDELINES

Education (Welfare) Act 2000	Relevant Sections of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000
Section 17	Section 17 requires the parent to send their child to a recognised school every school day, except in very limited and specified circumstances, such as when the child is registered as being educated in a place other than a recognised school.
Section 20	Section 20 sets out the duty of the school principal to set up and maintain the school register. It describes the information to be maintained in the register, the management of the register, and the transfer of information about a student between school principals when a student transfers from one school to another.
Section 21	Section 21 provides for the maintenance by the principal of attendance records in the school, the reporting of student absences to Tusla's Educational Welfare Services (EWS), duties of the Educational Welfare Officer regarding reported attendances, and the duty of the school Board of Management to submit a report on annual attendance levels in the school to EWS and the Parent Association.
Section 22	Section 22 requires each Board of Management to prepare the school Statement of Strategy in line with Tusla's Educational Welfare Services' 'School Attendance Guidelines' and to submit the Statement to EWS.
Section 25	Section 25 empowers Tusla's Educational Welfare Services to serve a School Attendance Notice (SAN) requiring a parent to send his or her child to school every day, and to prosecute for breach of the SAN.
Education Act 1998	Relevant Sections of the Education Act 1998
Section 26	Section 26 sets out the procedures for the establishment of a parents' association and the reporting arrangements between it and the principal or Board of Management of that recognised school.
Section 27	Section 27 provides for Boards of Management of recognised schools to establish and maintain procedures for the purpose of informing students of the activities schools. This includes the provisions for the establishment of student councils.
Section 29	Section 29 sets out appeals procedures for schools. Appeals procedures in relation to suspension and expulsions are further defined in the Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007.

Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools (NEWB, 2008)	Guidelines issued under Section 23 of the Education (Welfare) Act for the preparation by Boards of Management of a school Code of Behaviour.
Data Protection Acts	The main Irish law dealing with data protection is the Data Protection Act 1988, amended by the Data Protection Act (Amendment) Act 2003. See www.dataprotection.ie
Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011)	<i>Children First</i> sets out specific protocols for HSE social workers, Gardaí and other front-line staff in dealing with suspected child abuse and neglect. See www.dcyia.ie

Department of Education and Skills

Circular 0028/2013 Simplified arrangements for the maintenance of the Register (Clárleabhar), Roll Book (Leabhar Rolla) and Daily Attendance Book (Leabhar Tinrimh) and provided clarification in relation to the Register to be maintained under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000	Introduces new arrangements for management of rolls and registers in primary schools.
Circular 0034/2011 Standardisation of the school year	Standardises the dates for Christmas, Easter and mid-term breaks.
Circular M29/95 Time in School (post-primary schools)	Requires post-primary schools to be open for a minimum of 167 days per year, with a minimum of 28 hours of instruction per week.
Circular 11/95 Time in School (primary schools)	Requires primary schools to be open for a minimum of 183 days per year, and for not less than 5 hours and 40 minutes per day.
Rules for National Schools – Rule 55	Latest time for school opening and latest time for commencement of formal instruction.
Circular 0040/2012 Implementation of School Self-evaluation (post-primary)	Sets out rationale and purpose of School Self Evaluation, evaluation processes, suggested time allocations, actions and targets, and supports available to post-primary schools.
Circular 0039/2012 Implementation of School Self-evaluation (primary)	Sets out rationale and purpose of School Self Evaluation, evaluation processes, suggested time allocations, actions and targets, and supports available to primary schools.
Circular 0039/2012 Information in relation to actions under the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy Standardised Testing, Reporting, Library Support and Other Matters	Sets out rationale, purpose and use of the Education Passport to support the reporting and transfer of pupil information at the end of 6th class.

