



## ATTENDANCE POLICY

### **Section 1:**

#### **Introduction**

This policy is written within the framework of the school Mission Statement and ethos of the school.

#### **Mission Statement**

Sligo Grammar School aims to promote excellence in an inclusive and supportive community that reflects Christian values, where each member is enabled to achieve his/her full potential in life and in learning.

#### **Philosophy**

The main aim of the school is to create a challenging learning environment, to facilitate the all-round education of our students to the highest spiritual, moral and academic standard, and to prepare them for life itself.

#### **Ethos**

The ethos of the school reflects its Church of Ireland background. The Church of Ireland is part of the Anglican tradition. Like any school Sligo Grammar School values, the qualities of learning, justice, individual achievement and wholeness. But its Church of Ireland ethos means that it first is a Christian School which operates within and encourages Christian values and faith. The experience of sharing in the life of this community is itself an important part of the Christian education quite apart from the formal content learned in the classroom. Worship is part of the school life and the school has an assembly three times a week which includes an act of worship. Integral to the school calendar are regular Whole School Assemblies, a Prize Day Service, a Remembrance Service, a Carol Service and a final Valedictory Service for Form 6.

The Christian message is taught in RE programs with opportunities given for discussion of moral and spiritual issues and values. Understanding and tolerance of the sincerely held beliefs of those of other traditions is also taught. The aim is to equip the pupils to make informed choices about personal faith for their individual lives. In keeping with its Anglican background:

1. The school values unity in diversity. The school encourages tolerance and acceptance. It promotes an ethic of care and respect for others. Our identity together is not because we think alike but because we act together and because everyone is valued.

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2. The school encourages the use of informed reason. It values academic rigor and diligence whilst remaining open to and encouraging of ideas and debate.
3. The school has a long tradition both as a faith-based school and as a community. It values its religious and social heritage.
4. Anglicanism promotes social responsibility in its service ethic and consequently the school prides itself on its involvement in and contribution to the local community. The pursuit of justice is valued both within the school and the wider world.
5. The school expects an acceptance of personal responsibility. Self-discipline and an acceptance of personal responsibility for decisions and actions is cultivated. We recognize that these values while essentially Anglican are not unique to Anglicanism.

## **Section 2: Context for the Attendance Policy**

This policy outlines the approach and strategies used in Sligo Grammar School to fulfil the obligations of the school under section 22(1) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 which stipulates *‘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”)*’.

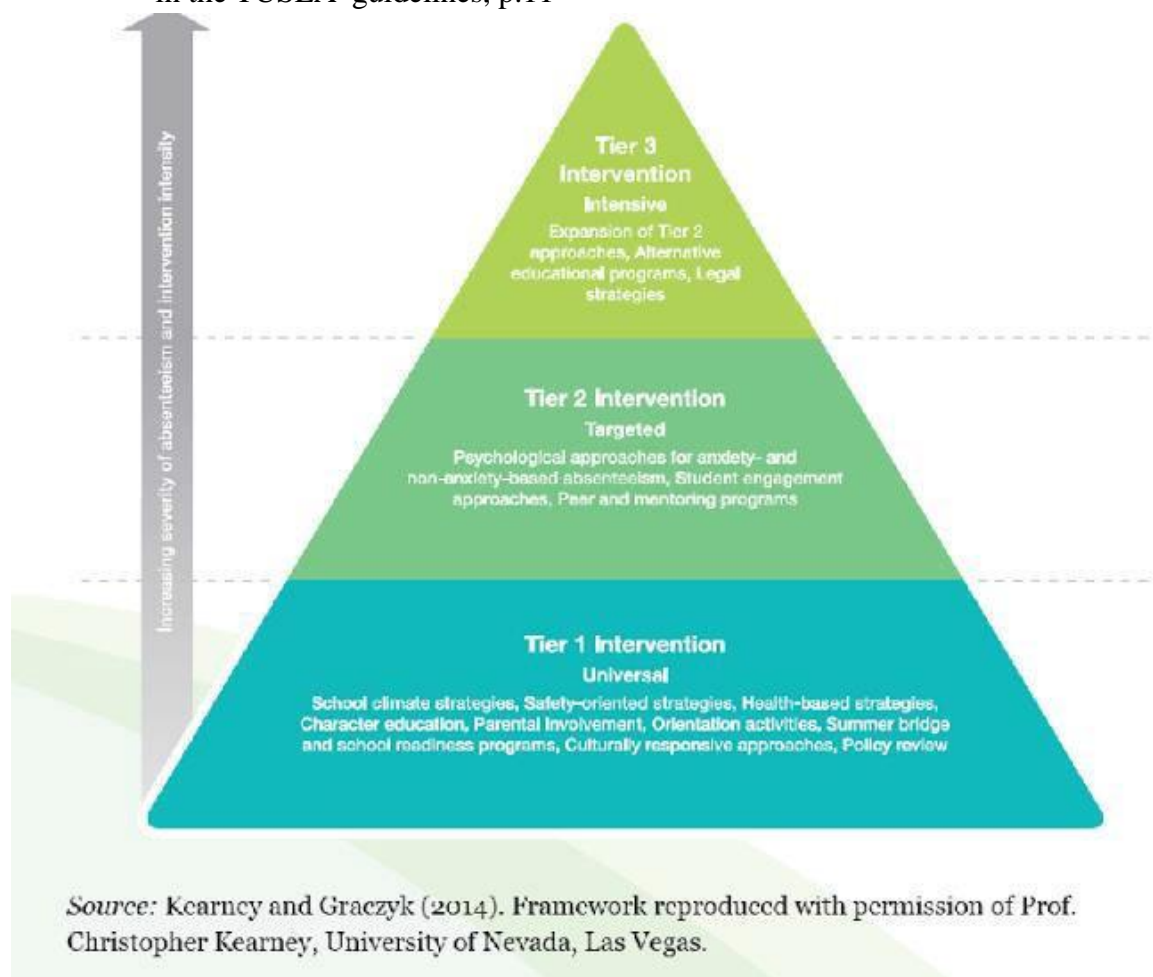
The context for this policy is set by the TUSLA publication *‘Developing the statement of strategy for school attendance: guidelines for schools 2016’*. This policy is written in accordance with these published guidelines; to comply with the directive the schools must submit a statement of strategy electronically to [attendancestrategies@tusle.ie](mailto:attendancestrategies@tusle.ie).

## **Section 3: Principles underpinning strategies for attendance in Sligo Grammar School**

The principles underpinning our approach to attendance in the school are:

- (i) It is our commitment to create a school community in Sligo Grammar School and it is an integral part of the philosophy that we create a sense of belonging for all our students in the school. They are part of our community and we are mindful that each student should feel welcome and have a sense of connection within the school community. Promoting engagement and attendance is a logical extension of this philosophy.

- (ii) Our mission statement emphasises the promotion of quality teaching and learning and it is our belief that attendance and engagement is a necessary basis on which to achieve this end.
- (iii) In realising these goals in our school our approach to supporting attendance is structured on the basis of the Response to Intervention Model (TRI) presented in the TUSLA guidelines, p.11



**Tier 1** intervention focuses on universal and preventative work in supporting all students to attend and participate fully in school activity. (Details of this tier are outlined in section 4 of this policy.)

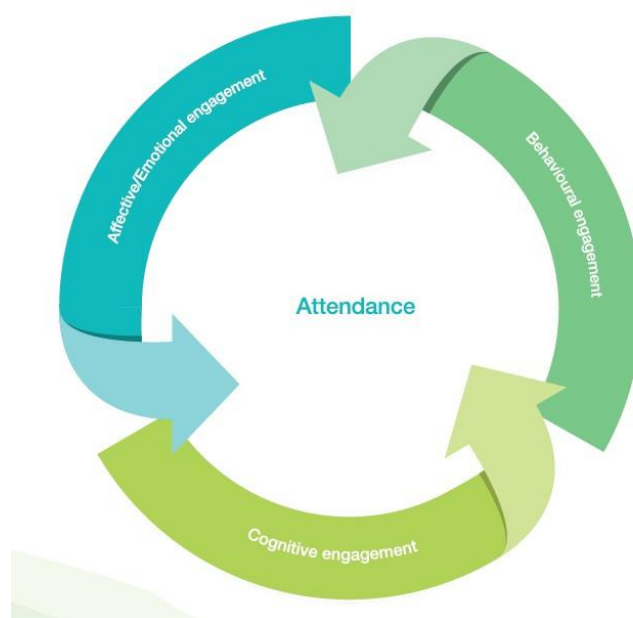
**Tier 2** focuses on additional intervention to support students whose attendance pattern shows the need for further support and encouragement in the school. (Details of this tier are outlined in section 7 of this policy.)

**Tier 3** focuses on targeted intervention for a few students who require significant support around attendance. (Details of this tier are outlined in section 8 of this policy.)

## 3.2 The principle of the connection between attendance, engagement and wellbeing

Following on from our emphasis on the importance of student engagement as a basis for success, our understanding of the concept of engagement is guided by the educational research which links engagement to attendance.

Taking figure 1. (*below*) from the TUSLA guidelines, we take on board as a school 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). This understanding and research serves to emphasise for us in Sligo Grammar School, the connection between attendance, engagement and the promotion of wellbeing.



*Figure 1: The three spheres of engagement influencing school attendance*

## 3.3 Working in Partnership and Equality of Access

The policy and strategy in Sligo Grammar School in respect of attendance recognises that addressing this agenda effectively requires a partnership, especially between home and school and between teacher and student. Our 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. In this context we also recognise the need to value the culture of every student and the latent messages within that culture that either promote or frustrate



attendance. The school will challenge stereotypes that might assume that students from particular backgrounds or with particular experiences will always have a problem with attendance. Sligo Grammar School is an inclusive community and promotes equality of access for all.

## **Section 4: Tier 1 – Whole school strategies for promoting good attendance for all**

Our school has 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 include

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

Each strategy is discussed in further detail below:

### **(i) General awareness raising and setting high expectations**

A core part of our 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 are shared by the Board of Management, the school management, staff and parents. They form part of the overall school climate (ethos and culture) and are clearly communicated to students and parents. The following approaches are adopted with parents:

#### *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 reports.
- Meeting parents in relation to attendance

#### *Attendance in key documents and prominent places*

- Records of attendance in students' school reports.
- Distribution of TUSLA's Educational Welfare Services' leaflet entitled *Don't Let Your Child Miss Out*. This is given to new students each year.

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In Accordance with Section 22 of the Education Welfare Act 2000, the following section outlines the strategies the school proposes to adopt to foster an appreciation of learning among students and those strategies to encourage regular attendance.

An appreciation of learning and the importance of good attendance will be fostered among students through the following strategies:

- Our main strategy in promoting good attendance in Sligo Grammar School is through the pastoral care class and Assemblies. These are an integral component of the new Wellbeing programme in the school as it focuses on the promotion and building of a sense of belonging and community in the school, which is integral to maintaining the engagement of students with the school.
- The role of the Coordinators, Form Teacher and Subject Teacher in monitoring and encouraging good attendance (see section 7 below) is another central strategy in Sligo Grammar School in maintaining and encouraging good attendance.
- Career guidance classes will endeavour to underline the opportunities that are opened to students through learning.
- Modules occur as part of S.P.H.E. in Junior Cycle to encourage learning among students and to support student learning through developing study skills.
- Students are encouraged in learning through regular feedback given through the correction of exercises by the teachers and the term reports. Students are best encouraged in their learning through a good relationship with their teachers.
- Form Teachers and Coordinators will endeavour to support and encourage students in their work.

*Regular attendance of all students is encouraged through the following strategies:*

- Attendance is monitored daily by the Form Teachers, who are in an immediate position to notice patterns of non-attendance and to speak to the students.
- Any pattern of non-attendance is notified to the relevant Coordinator who will communicate with the Senior Management team at the weekly meeting.
- Dialogue with parents is understood by the school to be of vital importance in addressing attendance issues.

## **(ii) Involving parents in setting high expectations**

Parents can have a major influence on a student's school attendance and research indicates that parents who are engaged with the school and feel part of the school community will have a greater commitment to education.

Therefore, in Sligo Grammar School, we view parental involvement as of paramount importance to students' wellbeing and success in school generally and their attendance at

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school. Involvement of parents in the life of the school 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.

As strategies in this regard:

- a) the school holds annual meetings for parents of each year group to discuss matters pertinent to that year group and their engagement in education. The importance of regular attendance is emphasised at these meetings.
- b) the school has an active Parents' Association with promotes the engagement of parents in the school and invites attendance and involvement of parents in school activities and events.
- c) The school keeps parents informed of activities in the school through the Christmas and summer newsletters, the school website, emails and texts.
- d) The school creates opportunities for parents to participate in and review proposed school policies and curriculum as part of Parents' Association. This partnership between parents and the school is underpinned by Sections 26 and 27 of the Education Act 1998,

Specifically, in relation to attendance, 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. In specific interaction between the Form teachers and Coordinators we

- 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, we seek advice from relevant professionals, e.g. Educational Welfare Officer, National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), regarding appropriate referrals for the student. The school remains committed to communicating with parents in trying to re-engage the student in school.

### **(iii) Providing support programmes to enhance attendance**

Central to the Attendance policy and strategy in Sligo Grammar School our core approach is to motivate and encourage high levels of attendance among all students. Support

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programmes geared to the needs of the school's students and parents enable the school to minimise poor attendance and prevent the need for targeted interventions. Among the support programmes in use are:

- **Art, music, drama, games and sporting activities.** Enrichment activities (such as art, music and drama) and sporting activities (both team and individual) support students in both their academic achievements and their social and personal development. In Sligo Grammar School, as part of our ethos in promoting holistic education, we encourage all students to engage in such enrichment activities. Both enrichment activities and sporting activities support students in their school attendance, particularly when they cater to the particular interests of the students who are experiencing attendance difficulties. Staff work with students and parents to support those students with poor attendance to engage in such activities and their continuing involvement is related to sustaining good attendance.
- **Leadership Development Programmes;** Sligo Grammar School has a commitment to developing leadership among students and to involving students in decision-making opportunities, in relation to life in their school (e.g. Student Council, Prefects, Mentors, Green Schools Initiative, YSI, Tidy Towns, Business Enterprise). Empowering students to have a say in our school and in their community can improve students' engagement with school life, with follow-on benefits for school attendance.  
Students with attendance difficulties can feel disconnected from school leadership structures and in this context cross-linkages between schools, youth services and community programmes are beneficial.
- **Building practical business and enterprise skills** through Young Social Innovators and business and entrepreneur projects and programmes that focus on building practical business and enterprise skills support students who may find it difficult to engage with the formal curriculum. In Sligo Grammar school the LCVP and TY programmes provide opportunities for the acquisition of practical business and enterprise skills supports a student's life skills, which can have positive benefits for school attendance.
- **Skill programmes** are provided in the areas of behaviour, confidence and self-esteem, motivational work, and programmes addressing relationship issues. The connection between student well-being and positive school engagement is outlined in Section 3 above and is a core principle of the Sligo Grammar School Attendance Strategy. 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.  
Initiatives to support the Wellbeing of young people in their social, emotional



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and personal development, are part of the SPHE, CSPE and Religious Education classes. Such students will be supported by the development of a mentor system in the school. Cross-linkages between schools, youth services and community programmes can be particularly beneficial especially sport.

- **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. In Sligo Grammar School such mentoring is coordinated by the pastoral Care team and is administered by the relevant Coordinators and Form Teachers.

#### (iv) **Rewarding good attendance**

In compliance with section 22(2)(a) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 which requires that schools reward students who have good attendance records as part of their School Attendance Strategy, Sligo Grammar School has a reward programme for attendance where students are rewarded annually as part of the school's annual Prize Day for perfect attendance.

#### (v) **Building linkages with other schools, youth organisations and local organisations**

##### **Links with other local schools**

In compliance with the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 which 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)), the following strategies are adopted by Sligo Grammar School:

In Sligo Grammar School we

- work together with local primary schools to support student attendance in the transition from primary to post-primary school. Through initial connections with the schools prior to transfer we identify any students who present with challenges in relation to attendance and this allows for early intervention and support.
- engage with the local principals' network working on joint approaches to raising awareness about the importance of attendance, promoting attendance and sharing practice experience;
- consult with youth organisations to support school attendance
- engage with local groups that support minority groups in the area

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## **Links with local youth organisations and other local organisations**

In response to section 22(2)(d)(ii) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 which requires schools to build links with their local youth services as a means of supporting good school attendance, our personnel develop links with local sporting clubs, such as Sligo RFC, Sligo Rovers and Strand Celtic. These clubs allow students to participate in sport after school and help to take our boarders to training – Hockey, Basketball, Rowing, Kayaking, Fitness Training, Youth and Church Groups.

- Sligo has a youth leadership, citizenship and entrepreneurship programmes available to young people. Sligo also facilitates 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).
- There are a series of local Youth Groups specific topics, such as drug awareness, sexual health or offending behaviour which provide a safe forum for young people to acquire knowledge and discuss issues affecting their lives. Where our school is mindful of issues for our students, we facilitate connection with these local youth service to support these students. We inform the students through Form classes and the Student Council of events taking place in the Youth Centre(the Crib), in Sligo town.
- We also link in with the local Garda Diversion programme which supports some of our students.

## **Section 5: Procedures around notification of absence**

This section of the policy is written in the context of the school Behaviour Code.

### **5.1 Absence from class or for a period of the school day**

The following procedures apply should it be necessary that a student be absent from class for a period during the day:

- Parents or guardians may, having notified the school by contacting the Form Teacher, collect a student(U16) from the school and return him or her to the school afterwards.
- Permission for absence from class must be recorded on VS ware and the student must be collected at reception and sign out with their Parent/Guardian.
- They will sign back in upon returning to school

Students who are involved in school based activities are marked present for the day and there is a process for staff who organise event and teams to register their attendance in advance

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under school activity. Parents/Guardians are required to inform the Form Teacher on the morning of their first absence.

## 5.2 Absence from school for a day or longer

The following procedures apply should it be necessary that a student be absent from school for a day or longer.

- On return to school after an absence of a day or more, the parent/Guardian must email the Form Teacher or the student must present a note, signed and dated by parents or guardians.

Procedures in this section are established to comply with the provisions of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. Section 18 imposes a duty on parents to inform the school of the reasons where a child is absent from the school during part of a school day or for a school day or for more than a school day. Under section 21(1) of the said Act, the school is obliged to keep a record of attendance for each student for each school day, which must specify the reasons for any absence. Pursuant to section 21(4) of said Act, where the aggregate number of school days on which a student is absent is not less than 20 or where a student, in the opinion of the Principal, is not attending school regularly, the Principal is obliged to so inform, by notice in writing, an Educational Welfare Officer.

## 5.3 Absence 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, Sligo Grammar School cannot give 'permission' for holiday absences during term time.

Sligo Grammar School discourages parents from taking students on holidays during term time. If a parent decides to take a child out of school for holidays, the school requests that the parent provide a letter/email to say they are doing so and are aware of the implications. Where there are regular holiday absences, the school will remind parents of the educational and potential legal impact of removing students from school for periods of time.

## Section 6: Recording and Monitoring of Attendance

On Dec 31 and June 30 of each year, the school makes a return to TUSLA reporting the names of students under the age of sixteen who have been absent twenty days or more. The names of students who have been suspended are also reported. The number of days that each student has been absent is entered.

At the end of the school year, the Annual Attendance Report (AAR) is filled in. This report identifies:-

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- The total number of days lost through student absence in the entire school.
- The total number of students who were absent for twenty days or more in the entire school.
- The total number of students expelled\_during the school year.
- The total number of students suspended\_during the school year.

Attendance data collected by the school is used for the following purposes:

- 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 and to direct 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.

In developing the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance:

- To monitor attendance targets;
- To monitor the effectiveness of the School Attendance Strategy;
- To inform annual school planning as part of the school self-evaluation process.

## **Section 7: Tier 2 – Intervention in response to poor attendance**

### **7.1 Strategies of intervention**

This section is based on Tier 2 of the RTI intervention model and identifies strategies for intervention with students who require additional support to encourage attendance.

The Coordinators collaborate with the HSCLO and SCP to engage with the strategies for intervention outlined in the TUSLA pre-referral form. All interventions by the school are recorded on the Pre- Referral Checklist.

### **7.2 In the context of the school's Code of Behaviour**

In relation to Truancy from school or unauthorised absence from class during the school day – the school response is as follows:

Truancy from school will warrant referral to the Pastoral Care Team and is regarded as a grave offence.

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- (i) Non-attendance at timetabled classes (though the student may still be in the building) is regarded as a serious offence, because of concern for student safety and the manner in which it impacts on a student's education and the health and safety of all.
- (ii) Being in restricted areas within school grounds will be considered a serious offence.
- (iii) Discipline up to and including suspension.

## 7.3 The Role of the Coordinators

In Sligo Grammar School, the centrality of attendance as a core building block in ensuring engagement and success of each student in the school has led us to introduce the role of the Coordinator to the school. The Coordinator in consultation with the Form teacher has specific responsibility in relation to the promotion of good attendance in school and with respect to Tier 2 intervention in relation to addressing the non-attendance of students.

**Leadership:** The Coordinator has the responsibility to help create a sense of community in the year group and to encourage a sense of camaraderie among the students. The Coordinator will meet and work with students to ascertain the reasons for absence and to encourage on an individual level better attendance. The Coordinator will have responsibility for contacting parents of students who do not return explanation notes for absence.

**Discipline:** The Coordinator will monitor attendance, punctuality, and uniform of students in that year, by liaising with Form Teachers on these issues and dealing with reported difficulties.

**Administration:** The Coordinator has responsibility for absenteeism in the school. As outlined in section 6 above, the Form Teacher will file the absentee notes from the students in their class group. He/she will keep a record of absence and inform the Coordinator of any patterns of concern that may emerge. The Coordinator will have responsibility for alerting the management team to any referral that is necessary to the Education Welfare officer in relation to students in their year group.

## 7.4 Intervention and the Pre-Referral Form

The management/pastoral care teams will tailor approaches to individuals who are presenting with attendance issues.

7.4.1. Initial intervention is between the Form Teacher, and the student to ascertain the difficulties and to engage in encouraging better attendance. This approach is based on the principle of encouraging the student to take responsibility for their own attendance and learning.

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7.4.2. The next strategy in the school is an early contact with home. Early dialogue with parents is critical to ensure that non-attendance does not persist. In Sligo Grammar School we adopt the following approaches:

(i) In cases where lateness or non-attendance is emerging, the Form Teacher contacts 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 is sometimes helpful to inform a parent about what has been missed in class during their child's absence.

(ii) Informal correspondence with parents can be initiated by telephone calls, emails, texts or letters, or by inviting the parents to a meeting to discuss matters of non-attendance and the parents' responsibility.

If such initial intervention is unsuccessful or avoided, standard letters, with a response requirement, are sent to parents following 10 days' absence. All written communications are mindful of parents' literacy and language challenges.

The purpose of such contact is to 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.

In the discussion with parents the following strategies can be used as appropriate to the specific situations:

- **Targets.** The use of specific targets relating to attendance for individual students;
- **Timetabling.** A reduction in timetable if absenteeism is related to school refusal or stress, such decisions are only taken in conjunction with the intervention of the NEPS psychologist.
- **A rewards system.** Considering how the attendance reward and reinforcement system could be used to motivate and encourage an individual;
- **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, migrant rights groups, church groups, community groups, disability organisations, support and welfare organisations – all may be able to offer supports for attendance.

In cases where there is a serious challenge in relation to attendance, an Individual Education Plan is developed. In this process the school uses the problem solving assessment framework provided by TUSLA as a tool to form a deeper understanding of the presenting problems in relation to school attendance. The team follows the four step framework: Understand, Plan, Do and Review

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## **Section 8: Tier 3 – Intensive Intervention**

This is an 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 is made to TUSLA’s Educational Welfare Services.

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.

The school will remain 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.

### ***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.

The school will engage with the home to assist in this process. In cases where a student has attended a hospital school or has been in receipt of home tuition the school will liaise with tutors to ensure the best possible re-engagement with school.

## **Section 9: Roles in relation to the attendance strategy**

In consultation with the partners, staff, management, students and parents, the school will develop a statement of strategy on attendance based on the process outlined in section 9 of the TUSLA guidelines.

### **Roles in the school in relation to the attendance strategy**

***The subject teacher:*** The teacher has specific responsibility for taking attendance of each class, checking absences without explanations, monitoring attendance in their class

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group and if concerned, liaising with the **Form Teacher** in relation to any patterns of non-attendance noted. The subject teacher is the first connection in intervention with a student in encouraging good attendance. This personal connection with the subject teacher is a central element of the attendance strategy in Sligo Grammar School.

**The Coordinator:** In Sligo Grammar School we have a Junior, TY and a Senior coordinator to co-ordinate the attendance returns and to liaise with the Deputy Principal on regular updates and referrals. They oversee the process and strategies in relation to attendance for their respective groups. They have responsibility for Tier 2 interventions and initiate any tier 3 interventions.

**The Headmaster and Deputy Principal:** Oversees and co-ordinates the development of this policy and its review, is responsible for the return of statistics to the EWO and TUSLA on attendance, engages with the Form Teachers and Coordinators and support the implementation of the attendance strategy and reports to the Board of Management monthly on attendance figures. The principal is also responsible for the implementation of the strategies outlined in the policy and for reviewing progress as part of the school self-evaluation process (SSE).

**The Board of Management:** Overall responsibility for the development of the Attendance Strategy and Policy of the school in the context of the school ethos and for the ratification of the policy and strategy.

## **Attendance Team/Management Team**

A meeting of the Attendance team will take place once a week. This meeting will be minuted. The minutes of each meeting will be forwarded to all staff and the Form Teachers will follow up as appropriate.

<b>Threshold</b>	<b>Days Absent</b>	<b>Action</b>
1	N/A	Common letter sent to all parents on the importance of attendance (Standard Letter 1)
2	5	Informal telephone call from Form Teacher and recorded by Form Teacher
3	10	Standard Letter 2 from Year Head and informal contact from HSCLO
4	15	Standard Letter 3 from Deputy Principal and meeting with Year Head.
5	20	Standard Letter 4 from Principal and formal meeting with Principal/Deputy Principal. Refer as needs be following meeting.



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It is essential that each subject teacher ensures that their roll is accurate and recorded in a timely fashion.

It is essential that each year head ensures accurate records regarding year groups are maintained.

If any staff member is taking a group of students away from the school for any period of time during a school day, the relevant form (**Standard Form 1**) must be accurately completed and submitted to the office a minimum of 24 hours in advance of leaving the school.

The Attendance team will also work on reviewing the school attendance policy and the school attendance strategy.

Records on VsWare must be accurate. It is the responsibility of each teacher to ensure that this is so.

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## STANDARD LETTER 1 INTRODUCTORY LETTER FROM SCHOOL TO ALL PARENTS CONCERNING THE EDUCATION (WELFARE) ACT 2000.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am writing to tell you a little about the Education Welfare Act, 2000 (amended by the Child and Family Agency Act 2013) and about some of the responsibilities we share under the Act.

A good education gives your child the best possible start in life. A good education helps young people to obtain secure employment and develop into mature and responsible citizens. The purpose of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 is to encourage regular school attendance and participation in education and training for as long as possible. It is desirable that every child stays in school and completes the Leaving Certificate.

Under the law, every child must attend school regularly up to sixteen years of age or complete at least three years education in a post primary school whichever comes later.

*As a parent, you must let the school know if your child is absent and the reason why. It is school policy that reasons must be given in writing before 8.45 on the first day of absence. The school is mandated to notify Tusla – Child and Family Agency if a child is absent for 20 days or more or where the absence gives rise to concern.*

*If your child is sick or is absent for other good reasons, no action will be taken by Tusla - Child and Family Agency. However, if there is concern about your child's attendance at school or about the reasons given, you may be visited by an Educational Welfare Officer who will discuss your child's education with you. The Officer will work with you and take full account of the circumstances of the child and the family before deciding what further action is necessary to ensure that the child receives his/her entitlement to an education.*

*Further information concerning the new service and about school attendance matters generally can be obtained from the national Lo-Call Education Helpline - 1890 36 36 66.*

Yours sincerely,

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Michael Hall  
Headmaster

# Sligo Grammar School



## STANDARD LETTER 2: LETTER TO PARENTS REGARDING A CHILD'S ABSENCE OF 10 DAYS

Dear Parents,

I am writing to you regarding <Insert name> attendance at school.

<Insert name> has been absent for 10 days in the current academic year.

Under the law, every child must attend school regularly up to sixteen years of age or complete at least three years post primary whichever comes later. When your child is absent, you as parent must let the school know the reason for this absence every time. It is school policy that you do this in writing.

Thank you for your co-operation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

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Form Teacher

# Sligo Grammar School



## STANDARD LETTER 3: LETTER TO PARENTS REGARDING A CHILD'S ABSENCE OF 15 DAYS

Dear Parents,

I am writing to you regarding <Insert name> attendance at school.

<Insert name> has been absent for 15 days in the current academic year.

Under the law, every child must attend school regularly up to sixteen years of age or complete at least three years post primary whichever comes later. When your child is absent, you as parent must let the school know the reason for this absence every time. It is school policy that you do this in writing.

Please contact the school to arrange an appointment to meet with <year head> as soon as possible to discuss < Insert name> attendance.

Yours sincerely,

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Jimmy Staunton  
Deputy Principal

# Sligo Grammar School



**SCHOOL IS CONCERNED ABOUT A CHILD'S NON ATTENDANCE AND THE CONCERN IS BEING PASSED TO THE NEWB.**

Dear Parents,

I am writing to you regarding <Insert name> attendance at school.

<Insert name> has been absent for 20 days in the current academic year.

The school has written to you about this matter previously. The school is now very concerned that < Insert name> is not receiving an education and we will be writing to the Educational Welfare Service of Tusla - Child and Family Agency to pass on our concern. An Educational Welfare Officer may therefore be in contact with you shortly to discuss the matter further.

Under the law, every child must attend school regularly up to sixteen years of age or complete at least three years post primary education whichever comes later. When a child is absent, you as parent must let the school know the reason for the absence every time. It is school policy to do this in writing.

Please contact the school to arrange an appointment to meet with Principal/Deputy Principal as soon as possible to discuss < Insert name> attendance

Thank you for you co-operation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

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Michael Hall  
Headmaster

# Sligo Grammar School



## **Section 10: Implementation of the strategy and review of this policy**

### 10.1 Data, consultation and identification of strategy goals for 2018/9

In accordance with the guidelines (section 9.3), the following process was undertaken in the development of this strategy statement.

- (a) An initial analysis of the absenteeism data recorded for 2017/18 through VSWare was conducted by the Coordinators. We found that the average attendance for our students ranked at 83.21%. We found that 32.81% of our students fell below average attendance. This initial analysis, identified students with high absenteeism. Strategies will be put in place to reduce individual absenteeism.
- (b) We also continue to examine our suspension numbers and refer these to each Board of Management meeting. No suspensions (totaling 25 days) resulted in permanent expulsions were implemented by the Board of Management. We continually examine our in-house suspension approach to reduce the number of days suspension in the year. We implement this approach in line with reviewing our Code of Behaviour and Pastoral Care Policy
- (c) Specific focus group meetings were held with the Coordinators to review the current strategies in the school and to write this policy document.
- (d) Based on the data collected in (a) and (b), consultation took place with the staff and with the parent body.

### 10.2 Implementation of the strategy for 2018/9

Based on the data analysis and consultation, the goal prioritised for attention in 2018/9 is to decrease the absence rate among students.

It was decided that strategies needed to focus on engaging students and parents in a preventative strategy that relied on partnership as outlined section 4 of this strategy document. An awareness raising strategy will be adopted with parents and students and specific attention will be focused on emphasising the importance of full. Teachers in all classes will be alert to absence patterns and in early intervention with students and parents will be made in order to raise awareness and to decrease absence. The minutes of the weekly Attendance Team meetings will be circulated to all staff.

This policy document and strategy will be made available to all in the school community through the school website and will be discussed with parents and students at suitable meetings. The strategy will be submitted, after ratification by the Board to TUSLA in compliance with the guidelines.

# Sligo Grammar School



## 10.3 Monitoring and review of the strategy

In general, the school attendance strategy will be fully reviewed on a tri-annual basis to correspond with the life-time of the Board of Management.

Over this three year time-scale, each year, the annual data will be reviewed in the light of the specific goal identified in the strategy that is current at the time to provide interim reports for the Board. Attendance data is monitored daily and a report on attendance levels will be made at each Board of Management meeting in accordance with section 10.4 of the guidelines.

The yearly interim review the policy/strategy will take place in a two stage process. (a) Initially, a review by the staff will take place in April/May of the year and report will be prepared for the Board. This review will be based on the attendance statistics in the light of the goal set. The Board will consider this report at the June meeting and feedback for the implementation of goals for the coming year will be returned to the staff at the August staff meetings. This end of year review will form part of the Board of Management's annual report on attendance (as per section 21(a)(b) of the Education (welfare) Act 2000 to TUSLA's EWO service and the Parents' Council.

Completed January 2019

Policy Reviewed and updated by Board of Management: \_\_\_\_\_ 09 May 2019 \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson, Board of Management

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal

Due for next review: \_\_\_\_\_