**Statement of Strategy for school attendance**

Name of school: Scoil Cholmcille

Address: Convent Road, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal

Roll number:18625Q

**Statement of Strategy for school attendance**

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7.3 Date the statement of strategy submitted to Tusla:

**SECTION 1: School’s Vision and Values**

Scoil Cholmcille values:

1. the positive impact that high levels of attendance has on teaching and learning;
2. the established links between good attendance, student engagement and staying at school to complete secondary cycle education participation;
3. the well-established impact of poor attendance on a student’s educational outcomes;
4. the research evidence that even when pupils 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;
5. 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 ;
6. the pressure for students and their teachers when students miss out on classes and key parts of the curriculum and
7. adheres to the statutory requirements of Section 22 (1) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 and the Education Act 1998 re. the provisions in the act regarding attendance.

**SECTION 2: The school’s high expectations around attendance**

 The school’s high expectations around attendance are manifested in our:

1. **School climate and classroom climate:** Pupils 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.
2. **Pupil-teacher relationships:** A positive climate of pupil- teacher relationships, of mutual trust and respect, and where pupils have a voice in school matters are known in most educational research to have a strong influence on pupil engagement and attendance.
3. **HighTeacher expectations:** Attendance is significantly higher when teachers have high expectations of pupils – an effect that operates over and above the student’s own expectations of themselves.

**SECTION 3: How attendance will be monitored**/ **Current Practices**

* Notes detailing absences are kept by the class teacher for the school year as part of the pre-referral requirement. Pre-referral forms require teachers to note dates when they communicated with parents including dates for meetings/ telephone calls/ informal conversations with parents at the gates etc. If/when a child misses 20 days these notes are used to inform the NEWB the reasons for absences. Notes are then kept in the child’s file.
* Each teacher records the roll on our electronic data base every morning before 10.30am. Once the roll is recorded it should not be changed (Rules for National schools under the Department of Education/1965). Pupils arriving after this time will be recorded as absent albeit late arrival.
* The school introduced a back up system on Monday 12th September 2016 when the school secretary/ designated volunteer will call to classrooms between 10.30a.m. and 11.00a.m. each day for the number of pupils present in each class. School secretary will then cross reference these with the input on the Aladdin system.
* Collective monthly attendances and percentages are available for analysis at the end of the month.
* NEWB forms reporting non-attendance (20 days or more) are collated by the Deputy Principal and returned to Tusla in October (Period 1/ Optional), Christmas (Mandatory) and end of March ( Period 3/ Optional) and End of Year (Mandatory) .

•     Collective and individual pupil yearly attendances are available for analysis on Aladdin. (see Section 4.1;target setting )

•     Arriving late at school is recorded on a daily basis by the class teacher and addressed on  ***School Report Card*** in June each year. Leaving school early, is recorded in a calendar log at the office for analysis and tracking purposes. Should a pattern begin to emerge, the class teacher transfers this information on the Aladdin system.

* A text to parents of a pupil who has missed 20 days will be sent automatically from the ***Aladdin Data Base*** informing parents that the school is obliged to report to Tusla after 20 days.

**SECTION 4: Summary of the main elements of the school’s approach to attendance**

* 1. **Target setting and targets**

In 2016-2017 it is hoped to:

1. complete a statement of strategy for school attendance for Scoil Cholmcille after consultation with staff on 22 November 2016 and 17th January 2017
2. submit it to the Board of Management on 20 February 2017 for ratification and
3. submit to Tusla before June 2017.

Using the school’s previous year attendance data as a baseline we discovered that:

- The average daily attendance for our school in the academic year 2015/2016 was 91%.

- 28% of pupils missed 20 days or more in the academic year 2015/2016.

- c.95% of the pupils come from the immediate area and live within 20 minutes walking distance of the school.

Consequently;

In 2017-2018; it is hoped to increase the average daily attendance from 91% to 93%.

In 2017-2018; it is hoped to decrease the percentage of pupils missing 20 days or more to 25%.

In 2016-2017; it is hoped to

(i)raise awareness about attendance among management, staff, pupils and parents.

(ii) sustain an ethos of continuous improvement and

(iii) provide a sense of commitment to attendance.

* 1. **Whole school approaches to promote good attendance/ current practices**

	•   **Early intervention**: A ***Welcome Information*** pack is prepared each year for new enrolments. Information from the NEWB about the importance of attendance is included. The INTO booklet on Primary Education is also included.

•    **Communication with parents**: A ***Beginning of Year Newsletter*** is sent home to parents each term outlining the importance of attendance and punctuality and stating the obligation on staff to report non-attendance. Parents are also informed, of their responsibility, to send a note explaining absences to the staff.  Where a pattern of non-attendance begins to emerge in the year, the class teacher should keep a copy of the parent notes for the pre-referral form.

•    **Phone Communications**: If a child’s attendance is of concern (even before the child has reached 20 days absence) the class teacher will contact parents to ascertain a reason for the child’s absence and if further support is needed.

•    **School Records of Attendance**: The staff is involved in keeping daily, monthly and annual records of attendance. The staff also keep notes received from parents re. absences where a pattern of non-attendance is emerging.
•   **School Reports**: Children’s individual attendances are recorded in the annual school report which is sent home to parents. In the cases of children transferring to secondary schools and/or other primary schools attendance records are also forwarded.

•    **NEWB**: Quarterly and annual returns are forwarded to the NEWB about attendance every year. The E.W.O. has meetings with parents in school and / or at home to discuss concerns re. attendance and to encourage pupils to attend. Mrs Donaghy needs to be informed by the class teacher once a child misses 20 days.

***Reward Certificates*** commenced in 2015 for these targeted pupils who have shown significant improvement in their attendance.

•    **SPHE**: As part of our Social Personal and Health Education Programme each class teacher teaches SPHE. This hopes to promote self-esteem and encourage attendance through areas such as “Making choices”.

•    **Homework**: Our school has a Homework Policy. Homework creates a good link between school and home and also helps to nurture life long learning. A copy of the content of the policy and the Code of Behaviour is available to parents on the school web site. Parents are free to approach the teacher if the child is experiencing issues with homework.

* **Lunches**: If a child comes to school with no lunch, the lunch policy is implemented. The class teacher contacts the child’s parents/guardians if a child has three occasions with no lunch.
* **Assessment**: Individual teachers make arrangements for their own class tests. If lack of attendance was due to fear of tests parents would be encouraged to talk to the class teacher. Tests would generally reflect class work and homework. Encouraging children to do homework will help alleviate their fears. In the case of children with special learning needs the teacher will make professional decisions as to whether the child needs to complete the full test
* **Awards/ Incentives**

- ***Hall of fame award*** recognising improved attendance will be awarded each month in each class.

- End of year award for full attendance to be incorporated in to the **Gold Star ceremony** in June each year.

- note home to recognise improved attendance

- pupils to be asked what they consider to be a meaningful incentive.

* 1. **Responding to poor attendance**

Early dialogue with parents is critical to ensure that non-attendance does not persist. In Scoil Cholmcille, the following ways of doing this are:

* At the start of each school year (and throughout the year), the Deputy Principal alerts teachers to children we are concerned about to monitor attendance.
* Informal correspondence with parents will be initiated by telephone calls or note in the diary by the class teacher inviting the parents to a meeting to discuss matters of non-attendance and the parents’ responsibility. Teachers to communicate with parents between 10 and 20 days missed.
* At these meetings the class teacher will try to ascertain the cause for the child’s lateness or non-attendance and inform the parent what has been missed in class during the child’s absence. The teacher may commence reward certificates or/and ***targeted attendance charts*** at this stage.

***- Reward Certificates*** commenced in 2015 for targeted pupils who have shown significant improvement in their attendance.

***- Targeted attendance charts*** will be targeted as an intervention to support pupils with poor attendance. Pupils will be involved in the incentives strategy and pupils in the senior end of the house may be invited to play a part in finding solutions to their own attendance problems.

* A standard school letter with a response requirement will be sent to the parent after the child misses 20 days.
* A text will also automatically issue from the Text A Parent electronic data base system for any child who misses 20 days or more.
* Attendance targets for improved attendance should be set in collaboration with parents and monitored with them.
* When there is no improvement in attendance, a referral to Tusla’s Educational Welfare Services will be activated by the Deputy Principal. A pre-referral checklist will be provided to Tusla demonstrating the efforts already made to address the attendance problem.
* The E.W.O. has meetings with parents in school and / or at home to discuss concerns re. attendance and to encourage pupils to attend.
* An individual planned approach may be considered that will involve staff, pupil and parents together if the needs of a pupil are particularly complex.
* Chronic attendance issues may point to the need for support from a range of agencies. In consultation with the Education Welfare Officer, National Educational Psychological Service, National Behavioural Support Service, National Council Special Education, Tusla- Child and Family Agency, the Health Service Executive, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, as well as child welfare organisations such as Barnardos and the ISPCC may be consulted.
* The school adheres to the NEWB’s Developing a Code of Behaviour: guidelines for Schools (2008b:74) that pupils will not be suspended for poor attendance or lateness.

**SECTION 5: School roles in relation to attendance**

**Principal (TBC post staff consultation on 17 January)**

**Deputy Principal (TBC post staff consultation on 17 January)**

**Class Teachers (TBC post staff consultation on 17 January)**

**SECTION 6: Partnership arrangements**

**6.1 PARENTS:**

1. A **Beginning of the School Year Newsletter** is sent out to parents every year. (See Appendix 1). This Newsletter informs parents of the following:

- Children should be in school every day the school is open for instruction.

- A **calendar** of the school closures and other school events is attached. This is also posted on the **website,** [**www.colmcillelk.ie**](http://www.colmcillelk.ie)

**-** Parents are notified of the schools opening and closing times. Parents are informed that children should arrive at school for 9.20 and be collected promptly at 2pm (infants) 3pm (all other classes).

1. Parents are asked in the Newsletter to send a written note to the class teacher when a child is absent. (This is an obligation under the Education Welfare Act). This note should be dated and explain the reason for absence. This assists the class teacher in completing returns about absences to the NEWB. When no note is sent to the school absences are recorded on the data base system as ***unknown reason***. If we are made aware of parents, who have a learning difficulty, procedures will be put in place to assist them in reporting absences.
2. The Newsletter is also available on the school web site.
3. It is the parents’ responsibility to inform the class teacher if a child is going to be late arriving to school or if the child has to leave school early.
4. A text to parents of a pupil who has missed 20 days will be sent automatically from the ***Aladdin Data Base*** informing parents that the school is obliged to report to Tusla after 20 days.
* Close contacts between the school and the families of (5) above will be established if non-attendance or poor attendance patterns prevail post letter from the school. Meetings between parents and school will try to identify and remove any barriers to attendance.
* The school strongly discourages parents from taking pupils on holidays during term time. If this does happen, parents are required to provide a letter to the school to say that they are doing so. This request is documented as a matter of priority in the start of year **Newsletter to parents**.

**6.2 Contacts with other schools**

•    If a parent hopes to enrol a child in our school from another primary school in the state the principal contacts the principal of the other school to inform them of the request. It is hoped that the principal would then pass on any concerns re. attendance. Once the child is enrolled in our school the principal will send a letter to the other primary school informing them that the child has now enrolled in the school.
•    If a child from our school transfers to another school details about the child are passed onto the other school. These details include attendance figures, results of standardised tests (where applicable) and any other relevant educational report.
•    When a child transfers to secondary school the school report showing attendance for the previous year and standardised test reports are passed on to the principal/senior post holder in that school.
•    Returns are made to the NEWB each quarter outlining the number of children who have missed 20 days. Annual returns are forwarded showing total attendance for all children and total absence numbers.
•    Pre-referral forms are also completed by the staff and returned to the NEWB when we have a concern about a child’s non attendance at school.
•    The NEWB will also be informed if a child has been suspended, for 6 days or more, and also if a child is being expelled.
•    The principal of the school may also contact Social Workers (if involved) to discuss children’s long term absences or repetitive absences in the best interest of the child.

**6.3 Youth and Community groups**

Scoil Chomcille links with the ***Donegal Youth Service*** who provide a transition to Secondary School programme for pupils in 6th Class in the Loft, Port Road, Letterkenny each year.

The School also participates in the ***Junior Achievement Ireland*** – ***Inspiring Young Minds*** programmes for 3rd and 6th classes in conjunction with ***Donegal County Council, and local companies United Health Group, Letterkenny Business Park and Pramerica, Windyhall, Leterkenny***.

**The Principal is also the *Donegal IPPN representative* on the *Donegal Children and Young People’s Services committee* that brings an inter-agency approach to respond to the national framework for children and young people titled “Better outcomes Brighter Futures”.**

**SECTION 7: Review/ Monitoring and Submission**

**7.1 Review process and date for review**

The policy will be reviewed in September 2018.

**7.2 Date the statement of strategy was approved by the Board of management:** 20th February 2017

**7.3 Date the statement of strategy submitted to Tusla:**24th March 2017