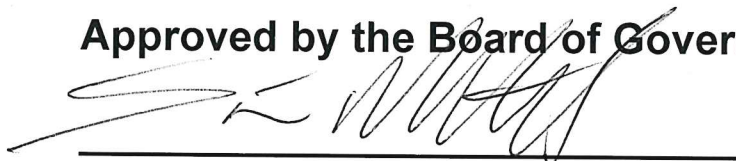


Coláiste Feirste

Attendance Policy

Policy Reviewed: 29 June 2022

Approved by the Board of Governors



29/06/22

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INTRODUCTION

This policy is one of a number of inter-related policies which are concerned with student welfare including, for example, the Child Protection Policy. Coláiste Feirste is committed to working with parents/guardians, students and outside agencies in order to support and encourage the attendance of students at school. Coláiste Feirste will seek to respond to difficulties or issues which might result in non-attendance.

The parents/guardians or guardians of students of compulsory school age have a legal duty to ensure that their children receive full-time education at school or otherwise. Coláiste Feirste believes that, by adopting a positive and proactive approach towards attendance and by encouraging parents/guardians to take an active role in the schooling of their children, the school may play a major role in improving levels of attendance and punctuality, and in reducing absenteeism.

RATIONALE

Coláiste Feirste has a safeguarding ethos; thus, it is recognised that, not only does the school have statutory responsibilities in relation to students' learning, but it also carries pastoral responsibility towards all students in its care. The school accepts that all students in its charge have a fundamental right to be protected from harm and will seek to do whatever is reasonable to safeguard and promote the safety and well-being of its students. Therefore, full attendance at school by students is an important aim of governors, staff, students and parents/guardians at Coláiste Feirste.

The curriculum for each year group is wide and challenging and extends through the whole school year. Therefore, in order to fulfil their potential, students must attend as fully as possible.

Improving attendance is an integral part of Coláiste Feirste's School Development Plan. The school's pastoral team and all staff have responsibility to ensure good attendance.

THE LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

"Every child of compulsory school age shall receive efficient full-time education suitable to age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational need they may have, either by regular school attendance or otherwise." (The Education and Libraries Order 2003)

There are legal requirements upon schools to:

- be open to all students for 380 sessions each school year;
- maintain attendance registers in accordance with the relevant regulations;
- record and monitor all absenteeism and lateness accurately;
- distinguish clearly between absence which is authorised and absence which is unauthorised according to criteria laid down by the Department of Education. (Schools should remind parents/guardians that it is the decision of the Principal as to whether or not an absence will be authorised);
- submit termly absence returns through school census and publish information relating to levels of attendance and absence and include details of these in the school's Prospectus and Annual Report to the Board of Governors; and

- set annual targets to reduce absence and submit these targets in accordance with the relevant regulations.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

- The Education and Libraries Order (Northern Ireland) 2003
- The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010
- The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
- The Education (2006 Order) (Commencement No 2) Order (NI) 2007
- Welfare and Protection of Pupils Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Health and Safety at Work Order (Northern Ireland) 1978
- The Children (NI) Order 1995
- The Education (NI) Order 1998/25

The Policy & Guidance Context

- DE Circular 2019/14 Attendance Guidance and Absence Recording by Schools
- DE: miss school=Miss Out: improving Pupil Attendance Strategy
- DE School Attendance Matters: A Parent's Guide
- DE Circular 2020/08 Addendum Attendance Guidance and Absence Recording (Recording during Covid)
- Pastoral Care in School: Promoting Positive Behaviour (DE, 2001)
- Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools: A Guide for Schools (DE, 2017)
- Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland (Dept. of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2016)

The International Context

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)- Section (A28) sets out every child's right to an education.

Safeguarding Ethos

Coláiste Feirste promotes a safeguarding ethos. Thus, the school aims to take appropriate preventative measures to protect the students in its care and to promote their emotional and physical safety. Such measures include efforts related to attendance.

AIMS

This Policy aims to ensure that there is an efficient and transparent system for registering attendance, recording reasons for non-attendance and responding to issues related to attendance.

This policy will:

- accord priority and value to attendance and punctuality, and ensure that specific strategies are in place to promote this;
- ensure compliance with all relevant statutory requirements (particularly with regard to the maintenance of attendance registers and setting of targets);
- ensure that clear attendance information is communicated to parents/guardians
- provide clear guidance to members of staff on the practice of registration and on related issues such as the appropriate categorisation of absence;
- recognise the crucial importance of early intervention and the provision of appropriate strategies;
- make provision for first-day-of-absence notification to parents/guardians of students who are known to be poor attenders (85% or below), or who might otherwise be considered to be at risk;
- identify a range of both proactive and reactive strategies to promote attendance and address absenteeism, especially in respect of persistent absenteeism;
- establish effective networks for working with other involved agencies and services;
- establish procedures for re-integrating long-term absentees and students who may, for specific reasons, have been on a reduced timetable; and
- help to sustain an ethos and culture which encourages good attendance, addressing potential school-based causes of poor attendance such as bullying.

The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and members of the Learning Support Team support students with Special Educational Needs.

All members of staff have pastoral responsibility towards young people in their charge.

SECTION 4: PROCEDURES

PUNCTUALITY

- Punctuality is essential to good time management. The school day begins at ----- a.m. and ends at ----- p.m. Each student is expected to remain in school for the duration of the school day.
- Students should be in school at ----- a.m. when the assembly bell rings. Registration takes place at ----- a.m. each morning in classrooms by the Form Teacher. Students arriving after ----- am will be marked 'late' by the Form Teacher. Any student who arrives later than ---- a.m. must report to the School Office and sign the late book.
- Throughout the school day, students are expected to arrive to class promptly.
- Students who become ill during the school day will be sent to the Form Teacher. If it is necessary for a student to go home, the school will make direct contact with the parent/guardian to make the necessary arrangements to collect the student from school. The Year Head must be informed of any pupil sent home ill. No student may go home without following this procedure and without obtaining permission from a relevant member of staff.

ATTENDANCE

- No student may leave school before the finishing time without obtaining appropriate permission from the school. Permission will normally be granted only at the request, in writing, of a parent. This request should be made via the student's planner.

ABSENCE

- If a student is going to be absent from school, parents/guardians should contact the school office on the first morning to inform the school of the reason for the student's absence.
- If a parent/guardian does not contact the school, the Year Head will, where possible, ring home on the first day of absence to ascertain the reason for the absence.
- In cases of anticipated absence, students must bring a written request one week in advance to the Form Teacher.
- If a student needs to leave school during the school day, the parent/guardian must write a note in the school planner giving the reason, date and time of the requested absence.
- Permission for absence will then be given by the Form Teacher who will sign the student planner. If students have permission to leave school during the school day, they must report to the main office before leaving school.
- Parents/guardians will be given notice of the dates of school terms at the beginning of the school year. Guidance from the Department of Education makes it clear that parents/guardians should not arrange holidays during term time. Consequently, approval will not be given for students to be absent from school to go on holiday.

- Other than emergencies, medical, dental and similar appointments should be arranged outside the school day. Permission will be granted for necessary hospital appointments.
- If a student is absent, they must bring a note from a parent/guardian in their planner to explain the period and cause of absence on the first day of their return to school. This should be presented to the Form Teacher who will sign the note. The Form Teacher will follow up on absence notes and record the absence on the SIMS register by entering the relevant code to explain the student's absence.
- If a student's attendance is less than 95%, the Year head will send a letter home detailing the attendance figures.
- If a student's attendance is below 90%, the Year Head will invite the parent/guardian for interview.
- If a student's attendance is below 85%, a referral will be made to the Educational Welfare Officer.
- Absence from school without permission is a serious breach of school regulations.

4.4 LONG TERM ABSENCE

- A student may be absent for a longer period of time due to illness or medical problems. If so, the school will liaise with parents/guardians, medical practitioners, the Educational Welfare Officer and relevant additional/special needs staff from the Education Authority to request the provision of peripatetic tutor support.

4.5 PARTIAL ATTENDANCE AND PHASED RETURN

- In certain circumstances, perhaps due to a diagnosis of illness or due to recovery from surgery, a student may be unable to attend school for a full day. Through negotiation between the parent and the Principal, such a student may be permitted to attend school on a partial basis only, signing in and out at reception. The student must be collected by a parent or other designated adult on leaving the building.

4.6 ABSENCE OF A STUDENT FOR WHOM THERE ARE CONCERNS

- On occasions, Coláiste Feirste may arrange to make contact with parents/guardians, the Educational Welfare Officer, Social Services or otherwise should a particular student fail to arrive in the morning. Likewise, should such a student be absent due to illness, the adult responsible for their welfare is asked to make contact with the school.

4.7 MEDICAL/DENTAL APPOINTMENTS

- Medical appointments should be arranged outside school hours when it is possible to do so. If an unavoidable appointment takes place during the school day, a written request in the student's planner should be given to the Form Teacher in advance.

Any student who misses registration for a medical or dental appointment will be marked with a special code and attendance may be affected.

CARERS

In exceptional circumstances, Coláiste Feirste may sanction limited absence for young carers until other arrangements can be made. The Principal will set a time limit for such absences in consultation with a Vice-Principal and/or Year Head and Heads of School. Advice may be taken from EA or other appropriate agency before arriving at a decision. In such circumstances, consideration will be given to the welfare of the young person.

REQUESTS FOR HOLIDAYS

The Governors, Principal and staff request that holidays for students are organised outside of the school term. If a student goes on holiday during term time, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents/guardians and students will take full responsibility for any work missed during that time.

APPROVED EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

If so approved by the Principal, absence from school due to participation in an educational activity may be recorded as an approved educational activity.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

Applications for absence due to Religious Observance Days should be made to the Principal in writing and well in advance. The Principal will review each application reasonably and in consultation with the Vice-Principals and/or Year Heads and Heads of School.

REMOVAL OF A STUDENT FROM THE REGISTER

The Principal will authorise the removal of a student's name from the Register in accordance with the current regulations.

ATTENDANCE RECORDS AND REFERRALS

Attendance and all forms of absence are recorded using the Attendance and Absence codes required by the Department of Education.

Coláiste Feirste works with Educational Welfare Officers (EWO) drawn from a range of Education Authority areas. Queries linked to poor attendance are channelled via the Vice-Principal to the relevant EWO.

Although the majority of referrals made to the Education Welfare Service are on the basis of non-attendance, some are occasionally taken in relation to child protection concerns, transport or school-age employment issues.

Before accepting a referral from a school, the Education Welfare Service will expect the school to have undertaken a number of steps to address the student's non-attendance. These may include:

- action by the class teacher/Form Teacher;
- action by the Year Head; and
- contact with parents/guardians by telephone or letter.

A referral will be made to the EWO in the following circumstances:

- (i) there is concern about an erratic pattern of absence;
- (ii) there is concern about a poor attendance record;
- (iii) a pattern of persistent lateness has developed;
- (iv) communication by the school to the parents/guardians has met with little or no response;
- (v) there is evidence of a lack of parental co-operation in ensuring a student's regular attendance;
- (vi) a pattern of post-registration truancy is persisting despite the school's efforts to prevent it;
- (vii) there is concern about the reason(s) for absence;
- (viii) a parent withdraws a student from school having expressed an intention to educate them otherwise than at school (Elective Home Education);
- (ix) a student is withdrawn from school by the parents/guardians who are moving to another area and the school does not have a confirmed destination/school provider where the student will resume their education (such students will be treated as 'students missing education');
- (x) there are child protection concerns; and
- (xi) there are specific and identifiable welfare issues which are preventing a student from accessing education.

Parents/guardians are always informed if a referral is being made to the Educational Welfare Service.

Following referral, the EWO will liaise with the parents/guardians, student and school staff (and external agencies, if relevant) to address the problem and agree a strategy to improve the situation.

SECTION 5: RELEVANT PERSONNEL

RELEVANT PERSONNEL

All Form Teachers and Class Teachers are responsible for registering students each morning and at the beginning of each lesson delivered throughout the school day.

SECTION 6: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

GOVERNORS

The Board of Governors will:

- Approve the Policy, consider future proposed changes to the Attendance Policy and, when agreed, approve the ratified Policy; and
- Receive reports on attendance from the Principal.

PRINCIPAL

The Principal, in consultation with the Senior Leadership Team and members of the Pastoral Team, will:

- set attendance targets in accordance with the School Development Plan and target-setting processes;
- monitor progress;
- ensure that strategies to promote and implement the Attendance Policy throughout the school are in place;
- determine whether to authorise any proposed absences requested by parents/guardians, or absences which have occurred for which no request was made;
- notify parents/guardians as appropriate that if a student of compulsory school age fails to attend regularly, her parents/guardians commit an offence;
- initiate appropriate staff strategies to improve attendance;
- liaise with the Education Authority regarding persistent absentees;
- liaise with the Education Authority and the PSNI when they wish to exercise their powers to enforce the return of truants to school; and
- make an annual report with statistics to the Board of Governors.

VICE-PRINCIPAL

The Vice-Principal will:

- oversee the work of Heads of School and Heads of Year, ensuring that the correct procedures are followed;
- enter into a Service Level Agreement with the Educational Welfare Service and meet with the EWO at agreed intervals;

- authorise referrals to the Educational Welfare Service when appropriate; and
- ensure targets are being monitored.

YEAR HEADS

The Heads of Year will:

- in collaboration with Form Teachers and the Heads of School, identify poor attenders (85% or below) or those who might otherwise be at risk;
- identify ad hoc absences or unusual patterns or trends and follow up on same;
- monitor Form Teachers to ensure that all student absences are noted and that absence notes have been received from parents/guardians;
- make checks on the efficiency of the registering;
- make checks on absence notes;
- ensure that all suspected truancy is followed up and dealt with;
- contact parents/guardians regarding student absences via letters generated by the administrative staff (and, when considered appropriate and necessary, by telephone or interview);
- report students who are giving cause for concern to the Head of School and Vice-Principal;
- insofar as is possible, make a phone call to a parent/guardian on the first day of a student's absence; and
- consider developing informal attendance incentive schemes which recognise student's attendance achievements e.g. provide attendance figures to recognise full attendance at Awards' Ceremonies.

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

The Administrative Staff will:

- make checks on the efficiency of the registering and alert the relevant Year Head when required;
- ensure that registers are completed and up-to-date at the end of each term;
- when authorised by the Year Heads, generate Absence Letters to be sent out to parents/guardians.

FORM TEACHERS

Form Teachers will:

- ensure that students are registered accurately and consistently;
- ensure that every absence is accounted for with a note from a parent;
- follow up cases of unaccounted for absence or unacceptable notes;
- inform the Year Head of any signs of suspected truancy;
- inform the Year Head of any possible underlying problems which may account for absences;
- inform the Year Head if a student is absent for three consecutive days; and
- employ the absence codes correctly, noting any changes to the system.

CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Classroom teachers will:

- check the attendance of students at their lessons using Lesson Monitor; and
- if concerned or suspicious regarding the absence of a student, inform the Tutor or Year Head at the earliest possible opportunity.

PARENTS/GUARDIANS

- Parents/guardians are responsible in law to ensure that their children attend the school at which they are registered regularly, on time, properly dressed and in a fit condition to learn. Parents/guardians are also responsible for ensuring that their children stay at school once they have registered.
- The school works closely and collaboratively with parents and guardians since it is they who have a significant impact on the attendance levels of children.
- Parents/guardians can support the regular and punctual attendance of their children by ensuring that:
 - their child arrives at school on time each day;
 - their child misses school only for unavoidable or justifiable reasons such as illness or days of religious observance;
 - they notify the school as soon as possible (preferably on the first morning) of any absence;
 - they do not book holidays during term time; and
 - they talk with the Year Head if they are concerned that their child may be becoming reluctant to attend school.

Every single day a student is absent from school equates to a day of lost learning. Attendance percentages can be misleading. Therefore, the school is guided by the following statement from the Department of Education table below when reporting to parents on student attendance.

100% Attendance	0 Days Missed	Excellent
95% Attendance	9 Days of Absence	
	1 Week and 4 Days of Learning Missed	Satisfactory
90% Attendance	19 Days of Absence	
	3 Weeks and 4 Days of Learning Missed	Poor
85% Attendance	28 Days of Absence	
	5 Weeks and 4 Days of Learning Missed	Very Poor

STUDENTS

Students are required to:

- attend regularly (registering before the attendance register for that session is closed) unless ill or excused through authorised absence;
- bring an explanatory note signed by a parent on the day of return to school;
- follow procedures for entry to the First Aid Office and leaving school due to illness; and
- make a request for any planned absences from their Form Teacher/Year Head well in advance of the event.

SECTION 7: CONSULTATION AND DISSEMINATION

DISSEMINATION OF THE POLICY

The policy is made available to the school community through the School Website. Hard copies are available, on request, from the School Office

Appendix 1
Absence Codes Used by Staff to Record Student Absence

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Absence Codes Used By Staff to Record Student Absence

Schools are required by the Department of Education to record details of attendance using the following codes:

CODE DESCRIPTION

/ \ Present: / = (AM): \ = (PM) Present
A Artistic Endeavour Authorised Absence
B Bereavement Authorised Absence
C Suspended Authorised Absence
D No reason provided for absence 5 days after return to school Unauthorised Absence
F Family Holiday (agreed) Authorised Absence
G Family Holiday (not agreed) Unauthorised Absence
H Other Absence Unauthorised Absence
I Illness (not medical or dental appts) Authorised Absence
L Late (before registration closed) Present
M Medical/Dental Appointments Authorised Absence
N No reason yet provided for absence (temporary code-Unauthorised Absence)
O Other Exceptional Circumstances Authorised Absence
P Approved Sporting Activity Approved Educational Activity
R Religious Observance Authorised Absence
S Study Leave Approved Educational Activity
U Late (after registration closed) Unauthorised Absence
V Educational Visit Approved Educational Activity
W Work Experience Approved Educational Activity
X Only staff should attend Attendance not required
Y Exceptional Closure Attendance not required
* Not on roll Attendance not required
Holiday for all Attendance not required
! No attendance required Attendance not required

Number Codes replacing “E” (Educated off site)

- 1** Alternative Education Provision (organised by the ELB)
- 2** Home/hospital tuition (organised by the ELB)
- 3** Elective Home Education
- 4** Pupil Referral Unit
- 5** Another mainstream school (under Entitlement Framework – EF)
- 6** Training Organisation (under EF)
- 7** FE College (under EF)
- 8** Intensive Support Learning Unit
- 9** CAMHS

**Absence Codes:
Guidance for
Schools CODE**

	DESCRIPTION	STATISTICAL MEANING
/\	Present: / = (AM): \ = (PM)	Present
A*	Artistic Endeavour	Authorised Absence
B*	Bereavement	Authorised Absence
C	Suspended	Authorised Absence
D	No reason provided for absence	Unauthorised Absence
F*	Family Holiday (agreed)	Authorised Absence
G*	Family Holiday (not agreed)	Unauthorised Absence
H*	Other Absence	Unauthorised Absence
I	Illness (not medical or dental appointments)	Authorised Absence
J*	Extended Leave	Attendance not required
L*	Late (before registration closed)	Present
M	Medical/Dental Appointments	Authorised Absence
N	No reason yet provided for absence (temporary code only)	Unauthorised Absence
O*	Other Exceptional Circumstances	Authorised Absence
P*	Approved Activity	Approved Educational Activity
R*	Religious Observance	Authorised Absence
S*	Study Leave	Approved Educational Activity
U*	Late (after registration closed)	Unauthorised Absence
V*	Educational Visit/Examination	Approved Educational Activity
W*	Work Experience	Approved Educational Activity
X	Only staff should attend	Attendance not required
Y*	Exceptional Closure	Attendance not required
#	Holiday for all	Attendance not required
!	No attendance required	Attendance not required
1	Community Providers/EOTAS (organised by the EA)	Approved Educational Activity
2	Exceptional Teaching Arrangement/hospital tuition (organised by the EA)	Approved Educational Activity
3	Elective Home Education	Attendance not required
4	Pupil Referral Unit	Approved Educational Activity
5	Another mainstream school (under Entitlement Framework)	Approved Educational Activity
6	Training Organisation (under Entitlement Framework)	Approved Educational Activity

7	FE College (under Entitlement Framework)	Approved Educational Activity
8	Intensive Support Learning Unit	Approved Educational Activity
9	CAMHS/Mental Health Support	Approved Educational Activity