POLICY on ATTENDANCE
Mercy Secondary School Mounthawk

SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PHILOSOPHY AND AIM OF THIS POLICY

This policy is written within the framework of the school Mission St atement and the Charter of our school Trust – CEIST.

Mercy Mounthawk Mission Statement

Mercy Mounthawk Catholic Voluntary Secondary School is a witnessing community which fosters:

- *The full potential of all staff and students*
- *A positive partnership between all members of the school and wider community.*
- *The highest standards of teaching, learning and performance.*

CEIST Charter

The core values of CEIST are intended to support and nourish the lives of the people at the heart of our school: students, staff and parents. Its key principles focus on:

- *Promoting spiritual and human development*
- *Achieving quality in teaching and learning*
- *Showing respect for every person*
- *Creating community*
- *Being just and responsible*

These core statements carry the philosophy of the school. Both statements allude to the development of the full potential of the individual as central to the work of this school.   The project to develop the full potential of all in the school community assumes and requires the wellbeing of each student, since a sense of wellbeing is essential to allow an individual to grow and indeed one purpose of such development must surely include the achievement of a sense of wellbeing.

In the light of these core values, the school is clear a Wellbeing curriculum must include a mental, physical, social and spiritual dimension. We are grounded in our reality as spiritual beings and, as such, the provision for the promotion human Wellbeing is rooted in human community. We thrive as individuals only in community and very often it is community that sustains us through the challenges of life.

Hence the emphasis of this policy on attendance is to promote the engagement of all students in the school community as a context for character development and formation and the realisation of a sense of wellbeing. For effective student formation to occur in mercy Mounthawk, students must be in attendance and be as engaged with the life of school community as fully as possible. This is the fundamental aim of this attendance policy and strategy.

SECTION 2.   CONTEXT FOR THE ATTENDANCE POLICY

This policy outlines the approach and strategies used in Mercy Mounthawk 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.

SECTION 3.   PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING STRATEGIES FOR ATTENDANCE IN MERCY MOUNTHAWK

3.1   THE PRINCIPLES OF THE CEIST CHARTER

The principles underpinning our approach to attendance in the school are based on the values outlined in the CEIST charter.

(i)   It is our commitment to create a school community in Mercy Mounthawk 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 charter 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. Therefore, section 5.3 of the school behaviour code outlines the principle that *'It is our expectation that each student will be aware of the importance of attendance at school and at each lesson as a fundamental requirement to achieving success in education. It is also our expectation that students understand that punctuality is critical in promoting a positive teaching and learning environment. (section 5.3)*

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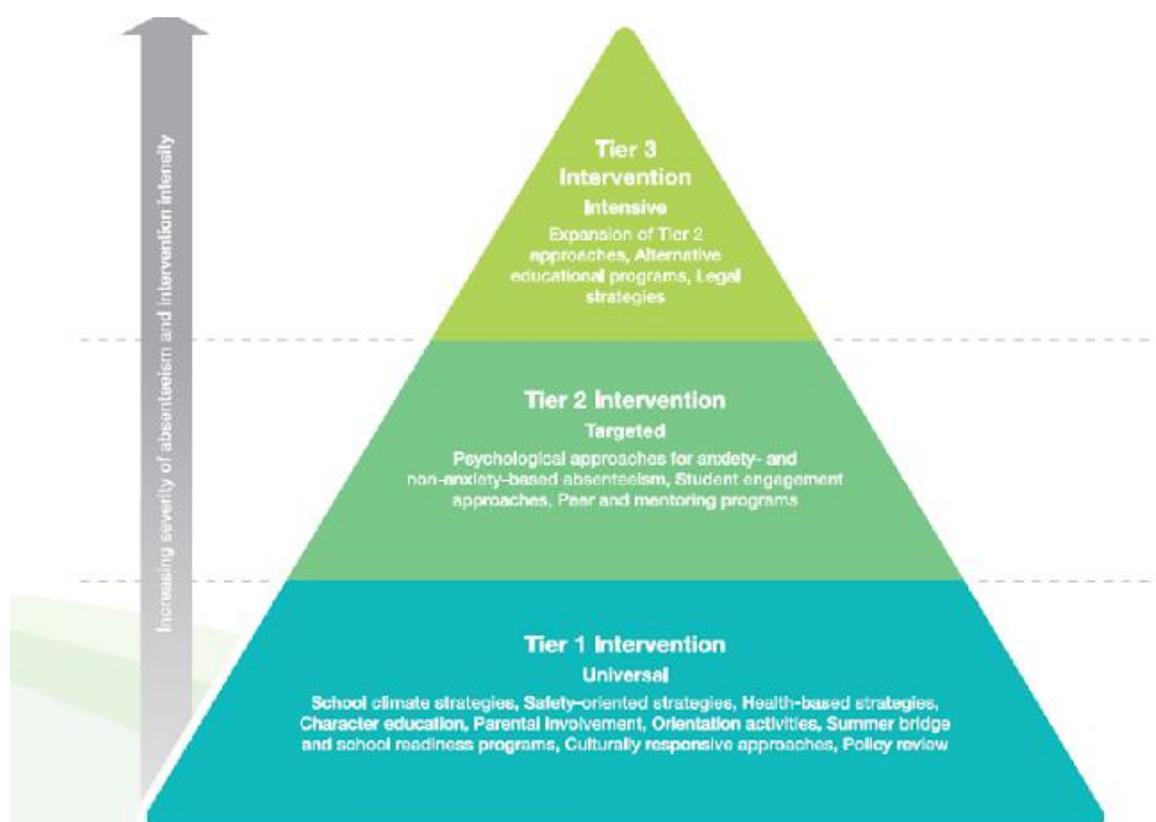
Source: Kearney and Graczyk (2014). Framework reproduced with permission of Prof. Christopher Kearney, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

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 Mercy Mounthawk, the connection between attendance, engagement and the promotion of wellbeing.

Figure 1: The three spheres of engagement influencing school attendance
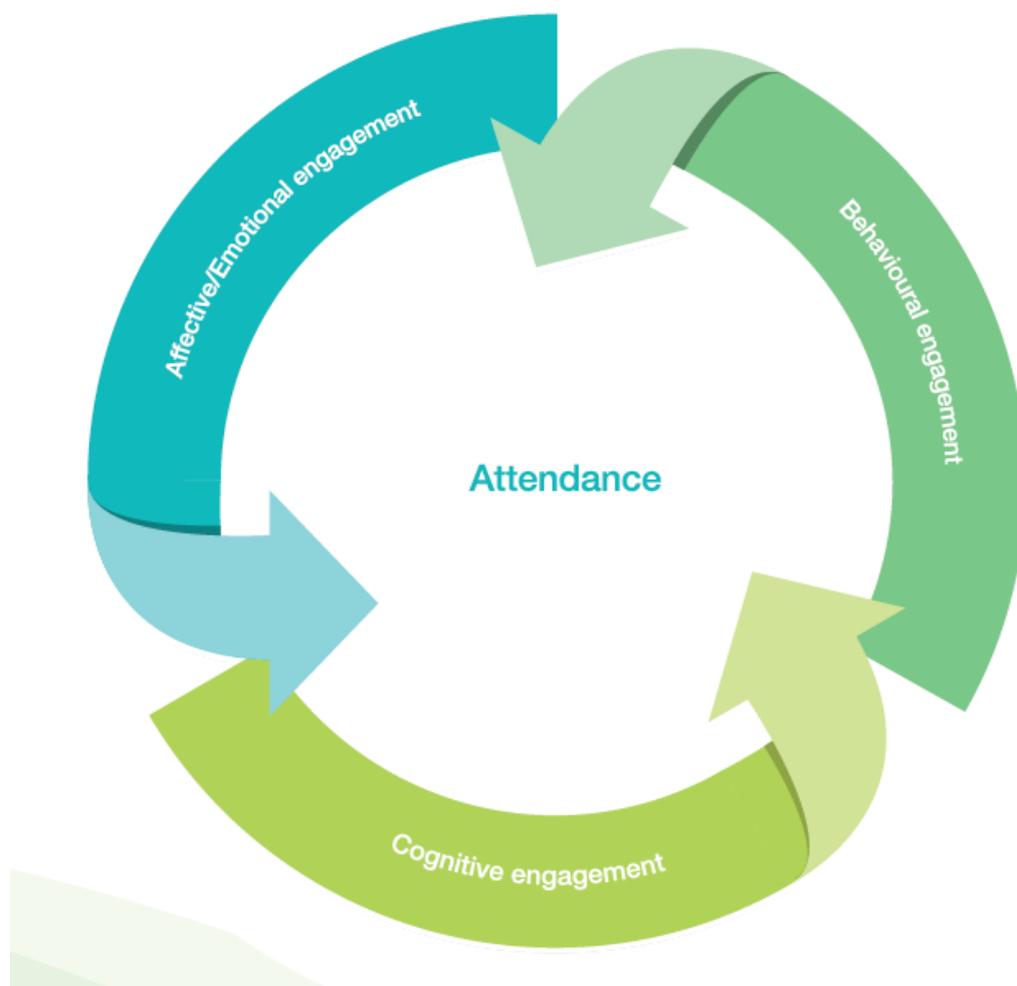
The policy and strategy in Mercy Mounthawk in respect of attendance recognises that addressing this agenda effectively requires a partnership, especially between home and school and between teacher and student. Our Statement of Strategy places a premium on teamwork with parents to secure high levels 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. Mercy Mounthawk is an inclusive community and promotes equality of access for all.

SECTION 4. TIER 1. - WHOLE SCHOOL STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING GOOD ATTENDANCE FOR ALL STUDENTS

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.
- Texting of 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*.

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 Mercy Mounthawk is through the Morning 10 minute assembly. In the discussions and consultation in the change of Timetable in 2017, it became clear that in the view of the school community - staff and management, the continuation of the morning Assembly (in tutor groups) was understood to be important and effective in ensuring and monitoring attendance. The morning Assembly is 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 Assistant Year head in monitoring and encouraging good attendance (see section 7 below) is another central strategy in Mercy Mounthawk 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.
- Tutors and Year Heads will endeavour to support and encourage students in their work.
- We highlight the importance of attendance during full year group assemblies.

Regular attendance of all students is encouraged through the following strategies:
- Attendance is monitored on a daily basis by the class tutors, 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 assistant year head who will communicate with the family at the earliest convenience.
- 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 Mercy Mounthawk we view parental involvement as of paramount importance to students' wellbeing and success in school generally and, in particular, their attendance at 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:

(i)   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 emphasises at these meetings.

(ii)   the school has an active Parents' Council with promotes the engagement of parents in the school and invites attendance and involvement of parents in school activities and events.

(iii)   The school keeps parents informed of activities in the school through the Christmas and summer newsletters and the school Website.

(iv)   The school creates opportunities for parents to participate in and review proposed school policies and curriculum as part of Parents' Councils. 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 Assistant Year Heads, Year Heads or Deputy principals 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 Mercy Mounthawk our core approach is to motivate and encourage high levels of attendance among all students. Support 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:

- **Breakfast Club**. The school runs a breakfast club based from a grant from the Department of Social Welfare. The provision of such basis support has a direct and indirect impact on school engagement by preventing hunger and promoting good behaviour and engagement. Identifying and encouraging the participation of students who may benefit from this type of support in particular, and maintaining a record of their participation, has a positive impact on school attendance. This intervention is undertaken by the year heads and the Deputy Principals.
- **Art, music, drama 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 Mercy Mounthawk, 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**. Mercy Mounthawk 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, Green Schools Initiative, Comhairle na nÓg, YSI, COSI and EYP). 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 e.g. the Shanakill projects.

- **Building practical business and enterprise skills** through Young Social Innovators, COSI (Centre of Social Innovation), 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 Mercy Mounthawk the LCA, 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 Mercy Mounthawk 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 young people in their social, emotional and personal development are part of the SPHE, CSPE and Religion 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. In this regard the school hopes to work with local bodies such as K.D.Y.S., the Shanakill Family Support Centre, Local study support groups and the I.T.T. outreach programme in the provision of specifically targeted courses to support these students.
- **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 Mercy Mounthawk such mentoring is co-ordinated by the Pastoral Care team in the school. Students have the opportunity to engage with members of the team and the partnership between the school and KDYS (Kerry Diocesan Youth Service) provides an adult mentoring support for students who are identified.

(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, Mercy Mounthawk has a reward programme for attendance where students are rewarded annually as part of the school's Award Night 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 in Mercy Mounthawk:

In Mercy Mounthawk 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;
- consultat with youth organisations e.g. K.D.Y.S, and Shanakill Family Support Centre and other relevant voluntary and community service providers to support school attendance
- engage with local groups that support minority groups in the area

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 the local youth service providers and are aware of what facilities are available in the area for our students.

- Tralee has a youth café and leadership, citizenship or entrepreneurship programmes available to young people. Tralee 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 particular issues for our students, we facilitate connection with these local youth service to support these students.

SECTION 5. PROCEDURES AROUND NOTIFICATION OF ABSENCE

This section of the policy is written in the context of the school Behaviour Code. Procedures in relation to attendance are covered under section 5.3.b of the school Behaviour Code as follows:

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, collect a student from the school and return him/her to the school afterwards.

(i)   Permission for absence from class must be sought from the class tutor
by presenting a written request from parents or guardians or an appointment card for a medical appointment. The Tutor will issue an Authorised Absence Pass docket to the student at morning assembly.

(ii)   On signing out of the school at the office, students must present the Authorised Absence Pass signed by the appropriate authority.

(iv)   On returning to the school, students must sign back in at the office.

Students who wish to attend funerals must be collected by their parents and returned to   school afterwards. Unaccompanied groups of students are not allowed to leave the school.

Mercy Mounthawk uses a same-day texting response to absences to ensure that parents are kept informed of their child's absences. This text is sent after the morning roll call at assembly. (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 under school activity).

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**, a student must present a note of explanation to the class tutor, 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, Mercy Mounthawk cannot give 'permission' for holiday absences during term time.

Mercy Mounthawk 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 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.

At the end of each term (i.e four times a 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 for six days or more are also reported. The number of days that each student has been absent is entered under the following categories:-

A- illness
B- Urgent family reasons (i.e. bereavement)
C- Expelled
D- Suspended
E-Other
F-Unexplained
G-Transfer.

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

- The total number of days lost through student absence in the <u>entire</u> school.
- The total number of students who were absent for twenty days or more in the <u>entire</u> school.
- The total number of students <u>expelled </u>during the school year.
- The total number of students <u>suspended</u> during the school year.

USES OF THE ATTENDANCE DATA

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 Assistant Year Heads together with the Year Heads and the Deputy Principals with responsibility for student support in Junior and senior cycle collaborate 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 behaviour code.

In relation to Truancy from school or unauthorised absence from class during the school day – the school response is outlined in section 5.3.e/s of the school behaviour Code:

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

> *(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.

7.3 THE ROLE OF THE ASSISTANT YEAR HEAD.

In Mercy Mounthawk, 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 Assistant Year Head to the school. The Assistant Year Head(AYH) assists the Year Head(YH) in the discharge of his/her duties in the school. The Assistant Year Head 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 A.Y.H. shares in the leadership role of the Year Head. He/she shares responsibility to help create a sense of community in the year group and to encourage a sense of camaraderie among the students. Along with the Year Head and relevant DP, the Assistant Year Head will meet and work with students to ascertain the reasons for absence and to encourage on an individual level better attendance.
>
> The Assistant Year Head will have responsibility for contacting parents of students who do not return explanation notes for absence.

DISCIPLINE: The Assistant Year Head will provide support for the Year Head in monitoring attendance, punctuality, and uniform of students in that year, by liaising with class tutors on these issues and dealing with reported difficulties.

ADMINISTRATION:

> The Assistant Year Head has particular responsibility for absenteeism in the school. As outlined in section 6 above, the Assistant Year Head will file the absentee notes from the students in that year group. He/she will keep a record of absence and inform the Year Head and Deputy Principal of any patterns of concern that may emerge.

The Assistant Year Head will have responsibility for alerting Management to any referral that is necessary to the Education Welfare officer in relation to students in their year group.

The attendance teams will tailor approaches to individuals who are presenting with attendance issues.

7.4.1. Initial intervention is between the Assistant Year Head, Year Head 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.

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 Mercy Mounthawk we adopt the following approaches:

(i) In cases where lateness or non-attendance is emerging, the Class Tutor/Assistant Year Head/Year Head 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 or letters, or by inviting the parents to a meeting to discuss matters of non-attendance and the parents' responsibility.

(ii) 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*. The provision of more pupil-friendly activities (e.g. sport, music, drama) and timetabling activities (e.g. plays and school shows) during risk periods; OR 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 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.

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(seewww.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Educational_Welfare_Service_Assessment_Framework.docx) 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

SECTION 8   TIER 3   INTENSIVE INTERVENTION

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 the 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/).

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 class tutor: The tutor has specific responsibility for monitoring attendance in their tutor group and for liaising with the AYH and YH in relation to any patterns of non-attendance noted. The tutor collects notes and the first connection in intervention with a student in encouraging good attendance. This personal connection with the class tutor is a central element of the attendance strategy in mercy Mounthawk.

The assistant Year Head: role defined in 7.3 above

The Post of Responsibility holder.   In mercy Mounthawk, we have a staff member with a post of responsibility at SD level to co-ordinate the attendance returns and to liaise with the EWO on regular updates and referrals.

The Year Head and Deputy Principals: 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 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 YHs, AYHs, DPs and support teams in 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.

SECTION 10   IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY   AND
                                    REVIEW OF THIS POLICY AND

10.1   DATA, CONSULTATION AND IDENTIFICATION OF STRATEGY GOALS FOR 2017/18

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 2016/17 through VSWare was conducted by the DPs. This analysis indicated a clear pattern of increased absenteeism on Fridays and in particular on Fridays before a break. Based on this initial analysis consultation took place with the partners. It was also clear from the analysis that greater absenteeism was occurring as student progressed through the school with the highest absenteeism rate occurring in 6th year. The average absence rate is between 5 to 8 percentage points higher in 6th year than in other year groups. There is variance through the year with a greater absence rate in the latter part of the academic year with March April and May especially high.

(b)   A focus group was conducted with the 6th years – selected from those who showed a significant absence pattern on Fridays and in particular Friday afternoons. This focus group yielded conflicting data save that it did seem to indicate the embedding of a culture of permission (whether parental and/or school) that it was ok to miss school on Fridays and it was the students own call as they were over 18 in many cases.

(c) Specific focus group meetings were held with the AYs and AYHs and DPs to review the current strategies in the school and to write this policy document.

(d) Based on the data collected in (a) and (b) above, consultation took place with the staff and with the parent body. The Parent Council was consulted meetings in September and the whole staff was consulted at the staff meetings in August and September 2018. Based on these consultations the priorities for 2017/18 were decided based on the data analysis.

10.2 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY FOR 2017/18

Based on the data analysis and consultation, the goal prioritised for attention in 2017/18 is to decrease the absence rate among 6th years and in particular to decrease that rate on Fridays and Friday afternoons.   The SMART goal is to reduce the average absenteeism rate in 6th year by 2% points in the coming year.

The following strategies have been agreed and will be used. Due to the nature of the goal and the focus on 6th year 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 the 6th year parents and students and specific attention will be focused on emphasising the importance of full attendance in 6th year. A second text to parents of 6th year will be sent home on Friday afternoon to alert to any further absence over lunchtime.   Teacher in all classes will be alert to absence patterns in 6th year and in early intervention with students and parents will be made in order to raise awareness and to decrease absence.

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.

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. *(This current strategy will be due for a full review in May 2018 as the current Board is terminating in October 2018).*

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 (Tutors, Assistant Year Heads, Tear Heads, post holders and DPs) 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. (b) 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 form 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 Parent Association.

10.4   Results of 2017/18 strategies - Review May/September 2018

To achieve improvements in attendance by 6th Years it was decided that teachers would take a roll call in every class. Patterns of absence, especially among senior students, were to be communicated to Year Heads and to assistant Year Heads.

To obtain a greater attendance on Fridays it was decided to take a roll call every Friday during the first class after lunch and to send a text home to the parents of those who were absent after lunch. Typically, the number of phone calls on Friday afternoons from parents as a result of this text numbered less than ten and often in single digits.

In 5th and 6th Years the attendance records for each class were examined on a number of occasions throughout the school year before the Easter break. Students with noticeable partial absences as well as those who had problematic general attendance were identified. Their parents were contacted by the Year Head and meetings were sought. If problems continued the parents were contacted by letter by the Deputy Principal and asked to come to school to discuss and remedy the particular attendance issue.

The strategy to tackling late comers in the morning was for Year Heads to consider a suitable sanction to put more emphasis on this issue. It was decided that this would involve lunchtime detentions where appropriate .It was also decided to have a management presence during the mornings at the school main entrance, this had the effect of reducing the number of late comers. It was found that if the member of the management team stayed until about 9.30 then the number of late comers dipped considerably.

Overall there was recorded an improvement in the attendance rate across senior cycle:

The 6th Year absence rate dropped from 12.7 % in the year 2016 – 2017 to 6.4 % in the year 2017 – 2018.

The 5th Year absence rate dropped from 10.6 % in the year 2016 – 2017 to 6.7 % in the year 2017 – 2018.

The 5th Year absence rate in 2016 – 2017 was 10.6 %, this groups absence rate when in 6th Year in 2017 – 2018 dropped to 6.4 % .

10.5   DATA, CONSULTATION and identification of strategy goals for 2018/19

Based on staff consultation at the August 2018 staff meeting, using a menti-survey, the goal prioritised for attention in 2018/19 is to decrease the absence rate among 2nd years and in particular to decrease that rate on Fridays.

 The following strategies have been agreed and will be used. Due to the nature of the goal and the focus on 2nd year 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 the 2nd year parents and students and specific attention will be focused on emphasising the importance of full attendance in 2nd year.
- A second text to parents of 2nd year will be sent home on Friday afternoon to alert to any further absence over lunchtime. Teacher in all classes will be alert to absence patterns in 2nd year and in early intervention with students and parents will be made in order to raise awareness and to decrease absence.

Next Review: October 2019