***Statement of Strategy for School Attendance.***

***Name of School***: Ballina Primary School.

***Address:*** Ballina, Killaloe, Co. Clare.

***Roll Number:*** 18207V

***Rationale:***

Under Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the Board of Management of each school must prepare and submit to Tusla – Child and Family Agency, a Statement of Strategy for School Attendance. If the statement is changed after a review process the Board of Management must resubmit the amended version. In drawing up this Statement of Strategy for School Attendance, the Board of Management of Ballina Primary School adheres to the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, School Attendance Guidelines 2015 and all other legislative provisions and circulars that may apply.

This Statement of Strategy outlines the measures to encourage regular school attendance and the systems used by the staff of Ballina Primary School to monitor and record attendance and the measures in place to develop a positive culture in our school where the learning environment offered to all pupils is based on a school life that encourages attendance, participation and retention in school. In cases where poor attendance at school is an issue this strategy will outline the support processes to be followed by the Board of Management, Principal and staff working in partnership with parents and where appropriate the Educational Welfare Services NEWB/ Tusla- Child and Family Agency and all other relevant outside agencies.

***Aims and Objectives of this Attendance Strategy:***

* Ensuring that pupils are registered accurately and efficiently.
* Ensuring that pupil attendance is recorded daily.
* Encouraging full attendance where possible.
* Encouraging punctuality.
* Raising awareness of the importance of school attendance.
* Promoting a school culture where every child feels valued, trusted and respected.
* Promoting a positive learning environment and fostering an appreciation of learning.
* Ensuring compliance with the requirements of the relevant legislation.
* Rewarding of students who have good school attendance records and improvements in attendance.
* Identifying pupils at risk as early as possible and identifying and removing, insofar as is practicable, obstacles to poor school attendance.
* The establishment of closer contacts between the school and the families of students who are at risk of developing school attendance problems.

***The school’s vision and values in relation to attendance:***

Ballina Primary School values every pupil in the school and wishes to give each child the opportunity to reach his/her full potential so that he/she may grow to be independent adults that may benefit from life’s opportunities. Ballina Primary School is guided by the basic principles as outlined in the Developing the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance: Guidelines for Schools (2015: 12). The Statement of Strategy affirms the school’s commitment to attendance as an important aspect of school ethos and school policy. The school aims to build a culture of high expectations among all staff to encourage student’s learning, participation and attendance. It recognises how all areas of the students’ experience at school impacts on their engagement and attendance. This Statement of Strategy recognises the complexity of some students’ lives and difficulties. In response, the Statement of Strategy tries to secure the involvement and support of many agencies and community supports. Ballina Primary School places a premium on teamwork with parents to secure high levels of attendance, partnership and close working relationships with parents of individual students to address potential problems. It affirms the school’s commitment to valuing the culture of every student and ensuring that every student will make the most of the learning opportunities provided by the school. The Statement of Strategy will recognise each student’s capacity to attend school, learn well and achieve good outcomes. The school will challenge stereotypes that might assume that students from particular backgrounds or with particular experiences will always have a problem with attendance and learning. The Statement of Strategy aims to build each student’s sense of personal responsibility for his/her own learning, and his/her responsibility to their peers and their teachers to be at school every day.

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

Pupils will experience positive interaction in our school through praise, encouragement or by being asked questions or completing activities which develop all areas of the curriculum pitched at an appropriate level for all students. Pupils’ natural strengths, talents and interests are encouraged, supported and nurtured. In Ballina Primary School a positive climate of student–teacher relationships, of mutual trust and respect is encouraged where students feel they have a voice in school matters. Teachers have high expectations of students – an effect that operates over and above the students’ own expectations of themselves. Research shows students are more likely to miss school if they have poor general health and/or emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties. In such cases staff will work closely with parents and relevant outside agencies to encourage and support regular attendance. Students with special educational needs will be supported to experience positive learning outcomes through the identification of the needs of the individual child. These students may require additional support, which might include such interventions as a curricular response, a targeted attendance chart, behaviour plan or mentoring. Where the situation has escalated, the school’s response may be escalated to provide proportionate support to these students and their families. It is likely that a multi-disciplined, tailored, cohesive and structured response is required. It is likely that these students will meet the threshold for a request for referral to Tusla’s Educational Welfare Services.

***How attendance will be monitored***

The Aladdin System is being used in Ballina Primary School for recording and monitoring attendance data and absences. Attendance is monitored daily by the class teachers and school secretary. The Roll is checked at 10am daily. Class teachers maintain accurate class rolls and take responsibility for student absences within their classes. Late arrivals are recorded on the Aladdin System also. Early departures are recorded by all parents in the sign-in/out book at the main front door of the school.

Notes/e-mails/medical certificates/telephone calls are requested from parents where a child has been absent from school. These communications are kept in the pupil’s file. A letter informing parents that their child has been absent from school on 11 and then 18 occasions is sent by the Principal. Pupils who have been absent from school on 20 occasions are reported to TUSLA.Parents are contacted by phone when pupils do not return to school as expected. Teachers alert the Principal if there are concerns about student absences.

***Summary of the main elements of the schools approach to attendance***

* ***Target setting and targets.***

The staff and Board of Management review the attendance each term and work to improve averages year on year by 1%. Currently our school average for attendance is 95.3% (20/06/2017).

* ***The whole school approach***

It is crucial that there is a welcoming atmosphere, positive teacher-student relationships and a supportive teaching and learning environment for all pupils in our school as this is at the core of success in every aspect of school life and work. A whole-school approach to attendance will mean that:

* School ethos, policies and practices work consistently together to support good attendance;
* Attendance is a regular part of development planning and school self-evaluation;
* Management and staff work as a team, with a consistent approach to attendance;
* Parents and students are part of an inclusive school community and have opportunities to contribute to and take appropriate responsibility for attendance policy and strategy;
* Opportunities are provided through which staff members as a team can focus on attendance, update their knowledge about effective practice and share experience and expertise on managing attendance.
* Close links will be fostered with other schools that provide primary or post-primary education in the area. Close links may also be established with outside agencies and/ or other bodies where the Board of Management considers appropriate to encourage the full participation of students in the life of the school. (e.g. youth work programmes/ services, sporting or cultural organisations)

***Whole school strategies to promote attendance.***

* Early intervention/ Communication with parents: The school sets down the standards expected in relation to attendance before the pupils begin school at a meeting with parents of new school entrants. These standards should be clear and aim to promote full attendance and good punctuality by all students. They are included in the school information booklet distributed to all parents and are communicated through the School Newsletter during the year. This Attendance policy will also be available on the school website. The school will ensure that the standards are communicated to all members of the school community and will state the obligation on staff to report non-attendance. Parents are also informed, of their responsibility, to send a note/e-mail/telephone call explaining absences to the staff.
* Letter Home: If a child’s attendance is of concern (even before the child has reached 20 days absence) the Principal of the school will contact parents by letter to highlight the number of days missed to date. A reminder will be given to parents that the staff are legally obliged to report absences of 20 days or more.
* School Records of Attendance: The staff are involved in keeping daily, monthly and annual records of attendance. The staff also keep notes received from parents re absences.
* School Reports: Children’s attendance 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.
* Promotion of Good Attendance: Certificates are presented at the end of the year to children who have had full attendance or to children who have only missed one day. Medals are also presented at the end of the school year to children who missed no days during the school year. The school certificates and medals are purchased from school funds.
* 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 Homework Policy and the Code of Behaviour Policy is given to parents on enrolment . Both documents are also available on our website. 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 efforts are made to contact the child’s parents/guardians. If this was to continue to happen records of this would be kept by the staff. Every effort would be made to ensure the child was not left hungry.
* Assessment: Individual teachers make arrangements for their own class tests. If non-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 SEN, the teacher will make professional decisions as to whether the child needs to complete the full test.
* Equality of Participation: In Ballina Primary School we strive to make education available to all. School book lists are kept to a minimum with the majority of books in the senior part of the school being part of a book rental scheme. Research is carried out annually to select school tours which are the best value for money. Bus charges for tours are supplemented by the Parents Association to reduce costs. Charges for swimming are paid by the parents. If parents had difficulty with funding for school tours/swimming they are free to talk to the Principal.
* Equality issues: Our school is an equal opportunities employer and while being a school under the Catholic Ethos we are open to children of all faiths and nationalities.
* Special Education Teachers: At present there are five Special Education teachers based in our school. Staff meet regularly to discuss pupils progress and to prioritise children who may be in need of learning support/ resource. Pupils with SEN have Individual Education Plans drawn up for them and regular review meetings take place with the SEN Team and parents.
* Holidays during Term Time: Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their child, who is attending a recognised school, is at school during term time unless there is a genuine reason for him or her not to attend. (Section21(9) of Education Welfare Act 2000). The school cannot give permission for holiday absences during term time. The school should however be informed in the event of such absences. As outlined in the Tusla Guidelines schools should strongly discourage parents from taking students on holidays during term time. Teachers in Ballina Primary School will not provide class work or homework missed out on by students while on holidays either before or on return from holidays. Where there are regular holiday absences, the school should remind parents of the educational and potential legal impact of removing students from school for periods of time.

***School roles in relation to attendance.***

The School Principal will:

* Ensure that the school register of pupils is maintained in accordance with regulations.
* Inform the Education Welfare Officer:
* If a pupil is not attending school regularly.
* When a pupil has been absent for 20 or more days during the course of a school year.
* If a pupil has been suspended for a period of six or more days.
* When a pupil’s name is removed from the school register.
* Inform parents of a decision to contact the Education Welfare Officer of concerns regarding a pupil.
* Insofar as is practicable, promote the importance of good school attendance among pupils, parents and staff

The class teacher will:

* Maintain the school roll-book (Aladdin System) in accordance with procedure.
* Keep a record of explained and unexplained absences.
* Encourage pupils to attend regularly and punctually.
* Inform the Principal of concerns s/he may have regarding the attendance of any pupil.

***Partnership arrangements and communication with other schools/other providers***

• 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 reports.

• 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.

• 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.

***Partnership with Parents:***

Parents/guardians can promote good school attendance by:

* + ensuring regular and punctual school attendance.
  + notifying the school if their children cannot attend for any reason.
  + working with the school and education welfare service to resolve any attendance problems;
  + making sure their children understand that parents support good school attendance;
  + discussing planned absences with the school.
  + Significant absences caused by ill health (i.e absences longer than ten school days) should be certified.
  + refraining, if at all possible, from taking holidays during school time
  + showing an interest in their children’s school day and their children’s homework.
  + encouraging them to participate in school activities.
  + praising and encouraging their children’s achievements.
  + instilling in their children a positive self-concept and a positive sense of self-worth.
  + informing the school in writing of the reasons for absence from school.
  + ensuring, insofar as is possible, that children’s appointments are arranged for times outside of school hours.
  + contacting the school immediately, if they have concerns about absence or other related school matters.
  + notifying, in writing, the school if their child/children, particularly children in junior classes, are to be collected by someone not known to the teacher.

***Partnership with pupils:***

* Pupils have the clear responsibility to attend school regularly and punctually.
* Pupils should inform staff if there is a problem that may lead to their absence.
* Pupils are responsible for promptly passing on absence notes from parents to their class teacher.
* Pupils are responsible for passing school correspondence to their parents which will be notified in school journal.

***Responding to poor attendance:***

Reasons for absence are recorded and reported to the NEWB five times during the school year through an online system. An annual report is submitted – not more than six weeks following the end of the school year - detailing the overall level of attendance at the school during that school year. This information will be communicated to the school community through the school’s newsletter.

***Evaluation:***

The success of this Attendance Policy is measured through:

* + Improved attendance levels.
  + Happy confident well-adjusted children
  + Positive parental feedback
  + Teacher vigilance

***Review process and date for review: June 2019***

***Date the Statement of Strategy was approved by the BOM***

***Date submitted to Tusla: June 2017***