# Introductory Statement and Rationale

**St. Francis Special School** is a special school which caters for pupils with Moderate and Severe to Profound Intellectual Disabilities. We endeavour to cater for the holistic needs of each pupil through Individual Education Planning. Life skills are a central element to the curriculum. It is in this context that our attendance policy is implemented within our school. This policy endeavours to set out the principals upon which the school attendance strategy will be implemented, sustained and evaluated by the whole school community.

# Characteristic Spirit of St. Francis Special School

The characteristic spirit of the school is encapsulated in our motto “Enable, Encourage, Enrich”. We, as a staff, are cognisant of supporting pupils to achieve their best ability. As our school is a special school, we understand that both pupils and staff need to persevere so that each pupil succeeds. It is also important for pupils to attend school so that they can receive the very best from their education.

# School Vision

St. Francis Special School is dedicated to providing the highest quality, care and education of pupils under our instruction. In partnership with the Parents/Guardians, Families and/or Residential Personnel of our Pupils, we seek to promote individual intellectual, emotional, social, physical and spiritual development. The dignity of each child is maintained at a premium, thus ensuring equality of provision. We believe that each child is entitled to an appropriate educational provision, regardless of individual levels of attainment and functioning. While enabling each Pupil to develop his/her potential to the full, we also want our pupils to be happy in school and to enjoy their time in our care.

# Aims of the policy

* To encourage better attendance in school and comply with the Education Welfare Act 2000
* To facilitate working collaboratively with NEWB in regard to school attendance
* To work in collaboration with parents, pupils and staff to develop a school environment which is conducive to teaching and learning
* To encourage an effective communication system between parents and staff with regard to attendance
* To ensure that procedures with regard to attendance and non-attendance at school are implemented
* To ensure procedures for brief absences of staff are outlined

# Procedures regarding school attendance and non-attendance

* Parents are obliged to ensure that their children between the ages of 6 and 16 attend school on each day, that the school is open for instruction at the times specified by the Board of Management.
* The school officially opens at 09:00 a.m. every morning and finishes at 14:40. Classes start at 09:20. a.m. and all pupils are required to be in their classes at this time.
* Individual attendance is recorded daily on the school administration system (Aladdin) and reasons for absences are noted.
* Parents are to provide a note or message on SeeSaw / Aladdin with reason for absence should their child be absent from school.
* After 15 days of non-attendance a reminder letter is sent to the parents of the student in question, stating the implications of missing 20 school days in accordance with the Education Welfare Act 2000.
* Quarterly and annual returns are forwarded to TUSLA as required.
* Punctuality is monitored by teachers and Principal.
* Teachers will speak to parents regarding attendance at the IEP/PPP meetings conducted each year as well as informing them through the end of year school reports.
* After 20 days of non-attendance, a report is made to the NEWB Officer.

# Whole school strategies to promote attendance

* St. Francis Special School strive to provide a welcoming and safe work environment for all our pupils, which is supported through our updated Code of Behaviour.
* If late arrival is a persistent issue the class teacher will raise it with the parent/guardian.
* Attendance is taken into account when giving out award certificates at the end of each term (as outlined in our Code of Behaviour).
* We endeavour to provide an active functional learning environment for all our pupils.
* Pupils receive pastoral care support through the individual tuition programme
* A school calendar is posted to all parents prior to the beginning of each school year.

# Strategies in the event of non-attendance

* Parents are required to explain non-attendance in the school journal or via phone call.
* If a child is absent for 15 days over the course of the year a letter is sent to the parents/guardians regarding the non-attendance.
* If the pupil is absent for twenty days a report in writing is made to the NEWB officer.
* A report is also made in writing to the NEWB Officer where a child is suspended for 6 days or more (please see Code of Behaviour in relation to suspension and expulsion).
* Referrals may also be made to the relevant agencies/individuals such as the NEWB, RTT, JLO or the HSE. The school will endeavour to inform the parents before contacting the agencies, where appropriate (with reference to the *Child Protection Policy and National Guidelines on Child Protection: available on school server*).
* Procedures in relation to brief absences of teachers have also been outlined in appendix 1.

# Procedures in relation to removal from register

* The school secretary will only remove a pupil’s name from the school register when the school has been informed that the pupil:
  + has been enrolled in another school
  + when the Welfare Board notifies them that the pupil has been enrolled in another school
  + that the pupil is in receipt of an out-of-school education.

# Transfer to/from another school

* Where parents wish to transfer their child to another school**,** they should first inform the principal in the current school. Details of attendance, which is

requested by the school to which the pupil is transferring, will be given to the principal of the proposed new school.

* If a pupil is transferring from another school a letter of application should be made to St. Francis Special School as well as other relevant documentation (please see Admissions and Participation Policy).

# Success Criteria

* Improved attendance will demonstrate the success of this policy.
* Positive feedback from the whole school community.

# Roles and Responsibilities

Principal and Deputy Principal

* The Principal provides leadership for the creation of a school ethos and climate that is supportive of high levels of engagement and attendance.
* Leads on the implementation and review of the school’s Attendance Strategy.
* Promotes good attendance at school assemblies and parent meetings.
* Updates Board of Management about school attendance. Keeps in regular contact with parents where attendance is a concern.
* Sends letters of 15- and 20-day absences to parents. Makes the quarterly and annual statistical return to TUSLA
* Makes referrals to TUSLA when necessary. Ensures children are rewarded for excellent attendance and for improving attendance.

Teachers

* Provide a classroom climate and classroom management that support participation and engagement, especially with students who may be at risk of poor attendance. Encourage and commend good attendance.
* Set high expectations for punctuality and attendance in their classrooms.
* Set an example by demonstrating punctuality themselves.
* Record roll-call electronically using Databiz administration system.
* Collect and file any notes regarding absence.
* Consult with parents regarding concerns around attendance or punctuality.
* Alert Principal and Deputy Principal of any concerns regarding attendance and punctuality.

Board of Management

* The Board work to provide and support a positive, welcoming environment by maintaining and resourcing the school to a high standard, which in turn promotes good attendance.
* The Board ensure that an end of year review of the Attendance Strategy is carried out.

# Ratification and Communication

This policy was ratified by the BoM on 01/12/10. It is available on the school server for all staff and for parents on our school website. This policy was reviewed and updated February 2019 and ratified by the BoM on the 04/04/2019.

# Review

# Review and Ratification

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management of St. Francis Special School on\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The policy will be reviewed regularly in the light of experience. It will be reviewed by the full staff and Board of Management every two years. Next review of this policy will occur during the school year of 2023/2024.

Signed:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_           Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Chairperson:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Principal: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix 1

# Procedures in relation to the brief absences of staff

* Application for brief absences will be made to the Principal.
* In the event of an unexpected absence, the staff member must inform the principal as early as possible.
* When appropriate a doctor’s certificate will be furnished.
* Where a teacher is absent, the Principal/ Deputy Principal/or designated person will ensure the teacher’s class is supervised and other responsibilities (such as yard duty) are covered.
* Where any other member of staff is absent, their duties will be reassigned if possible.
* Where yard/corridor/bus duties have be reassigned, these must be repaid as soon as possible.
* Where a teacher is absent and there is no substitute teacher employed, one of the following procedures will apply:
  + Students will be distributed amongst other classes

Other teachers will be reassigned to that class