**DEIS Plan 2023-2026**

 **Attendance Strategy for St Oliver Plunkett N.S. Navan**

**Aims**

* Encourage pupils to attend school regularly and punctually.
* Share the promotion of school attendance amongst all in the school community.
* Inform the school community of its role and responsibility as outlined in the Education Act.
* Identify and monitor pupils who may be at risk of developing school attendance problems, particularly those from priority families.
* Ensure that the school has procedures in place to promote attendance/participation.
* Develop, subject to available resources, links between the school and the families of children who may be at risk of developing attendance problems.
* Identify and remove, insofar as is practicable, obstacles to school attendance.
* To raise awareness of importance of school attendance and an awareness of forming good patterns of attendance. This is especially important in junior and senior infants so that good habits can be ingrained.
* To promote positive attitudes to learning.
* To comply with requirements as laid out by the Educational Welfare Act and NEWB guidelines.

**Responsibilities of Stakeholders**

**School**

* The importance of school attendance is promoted throughout the school.
* Pupils are registered accurately and efficiently.
* Pupil attendance is recorded daily.
* Parents or guardians are contacted when reasons for absences are unknown or have not been communicated.
* Pupil attendance and punctuality is monitored.
* The excellent attendance of children is acknowledged by certificate and rewarded by prizes at the end of each school year.
* School attendance statistics are reported as appropriate to: The Education Welfare Board (EWB) and The Board of Management
* The school day is from 9.00a.m. to 1.45p.m for Junior and Senior infants and 9.00 a.m. to 2.45 p.m. for all other classes. All pupils and teachers are expected to be on time.
* The school will contact parents/guardians in the event of pupils being consistently late. Names of children who are late are recorded each day by the class teacher on Aladdin.
* The Principal is obliged under the Education Welfare Act, to report children who are persistently late, to the Education Welfare Board.
* Children who reach 15 days absent are alerted by the school
* The school will operate an Attendance Committee that will work closely with the Care team monitoring attendance of all children but particularly the attendance of priority families.
* Section [(21) (9)] of the Act states that: “a pupil’s absence can only be authorised by the Principal when the child is involved in activities organised by the school or in which the school is involved”. The school principal cannot authorise a child’s absence for holidays during school time.
* In circumstances where a child is removed for class during the course of the school day the parent/guardian responsible will sign the register in the school office which will note the date and time the child leaves the school. This document will also record the date and time of the child’s return to class should the absence be for a brief period to attend an appointment.
* The onus is on parents to give an explanation explaining a child’s absence, otherwise no explanation will be noted as the reason for the absence and this will be returned to the EWB.
* In cases where there are unexplained absences a system exists within the school for addressing this through the HSCL teacher.

**Parents/Guardians**

* Ensuring regular and punctual school attendance.
* Notifying the School if their children cannot attend for any reason.
* Working with the School and NEWB service to resolve any attendance problems;
* Making sure their children understand that parents support and approve of school attendance;
* Discussing planned absences with the school.
* 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 (with dentists etc), 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.
* Reasons for pupils’ absences must be communicated in person or in writing, by parents/guardians to the school and will be retained by the school.
* If a child is absent, when the child returns to school s/he should give/send a written note to the class teacher, which contains the child’s name, the dates of absence and the reason for the absence.

**Pupils**

* 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, on the specified day.

**Strengths of the school in relation to attendance**

**HSCL**

* HSCL teacher Anthony McDonagh is in regular contact with the parent body and provides a very effective link between school and home.
* The HSCL teacher is a daily presence at our front gate meeting the parents as they arrive to school as well as being a visible figure at all school events.
* The role also involves dealing with attendance issues and ensuring that the lines of communication between home and school are open.
* Besides home visits courses are provided for parents to up skill in various ways such as IT, Literacy, Fitness, Diet and Parenting.
* There are many initiatives within the school which encourage parents to feel part of our school community.

**Navan School Completion**

Navan School Completion provide a Key Worker and other resources to the school and the Key worker works in tandem with our HSCL co-ordinator to

* Establish and maintain positive relationships with targeted children.
* Develop and deliver personal development programmes
* Help children express themselves through various mediums of art, drama, play relaxation, sensory play and music.
* Liaise with parents /guardians and all personnel involved with welfare of the child.
* Provide a homework club for the targeted children.
* Involve the school in the Garda Diversion programme which can help to divert young people away from any involvement in crime.
* Involve school in Garden Projects to improve self-esteem and give priority children a sense of belonging of the group.
* Involve the children in cookery, self-help life skills programme.
* Work in conjunction with the school to help improve literacy support.
* Take social skills groupings with targeted children.
* Work closely with other agencies in order to support families and children.
* Monitor and track attendance and develop incentive based programmes such as golden trophy in Senior Infants.
* Organise courses in conjunction with our HSCL teacher
* Organise a transition programme for transfer to secondary school.
* Organise breakfast club for needy children.
* Promote the Blazing saddles programme for children from priority families in 5th & 6th class
* Organise and oversee outings for priority families
* Provide for the Assessment and support for a child from a priority family each year.

**School Attendance System**

The Aladdin Student Management System makes it easier to track attendance throughout the school from the office desk. It allows for the collation of data in relation to attendance and punctuality. It also allows for efficient recording of notes for absence.

**Play Therapy**

The school employs a Play Therapist who works with children usually because of behavioural or emotional difficulties. These behaviours can also impact on attendance and as such the Play Therapy is a major plus in ensuring children are attending.

**Parents Association**

The school has a vibrant Parents Association that works with Principal and staff in the school. It is an excellent resource in tackling issues that relate to attendance and pre-empting difficulties before they arise.

**Literacy Programme**

The school provides a variety of literacy programmes that are detailed in our 3 year Literacy plan. These initiatives make the development of literacy skills more accessible and less daunting for priority families hence removing a barrier to attendance.

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**EAL Programme**

Dedicated teacher for support of EAL programmes in place in the school which makes settling in easier for children from families that do not have English as a first language. This makes attendance in the school easier as it helps to foster a link between home & school breaking down communication barriers.

**Assembly**

Senior Assembly is held every second Friday which rewards positive behaviour including attendance. Golden Trophy is held every other Friday for the children from Junior Infants to 1st Class. This is particularly important in communicating the message to younger children and their families regarding the importance of attendance

**Extra-Curricular Activities**

Sporting teams and activities are supported in the school with visiting coaches in Football, Athletics, Hurling, Rounders, Basketball, Soccer and Rugby. There is a vibrant sporting community in the school and participation is very much encouraged across the school community. Sport is a great diversion and children are encouraged to train with their friends having a knock on effect on attendance. Our school has now become renowned for our end of year musical which is a great source of fun for the children in 6th class. Christmas plays are an integral part of the school calendar also. School trips are encouraged and help to develop all the different aspects of the child. Extra clubs continue to develop to meet the interests of all children such as Science Club, Chess Club and Knitting Club.

**Learning Support and Resource teachers**

Our SET team of seven resource/Learning Support teachers, one EAL and 2 SNA’s are available to help any child who is experiencing difficulties be it academic or social. This agin increases that sense of School Community.

**A positive classroom environment**

St Oliver Plunkett Primary School is a welcoming place and prides itself in caring for children of all backgrounds. Children feel a sense of belonging and are encouraged to attend and participate, Children who have been absent or are late are welcomed with a smile

**Building Improvements**

We have recently made improvements around the school with additions such as Sensory gardens, a refurbished Library and an updated IT system. A walking track has been added since the last plan also which is a wonderful outlet for the school. An agreement is in place with the adjacent soccer club for continued shared use of the soccer grounds giving us a wonderful amount of space.

**Positive Anti Bullying**

There are a variety of strategies used within the school such as Friends First programme, Friendship Week and Kindness to all which enables children to continue to develop their sense of resilience ensuring that another barrier o attendance is removed.

**Challenges for the school in relation to attendance**

**Families from other countries**

A disproportionate number of our pupils with attendance issues come from non-English speaking families. Many of these pupils leave the school for the mother country at various times during the year. There are a variety of reasons for this. As a large number of our families are new Irish families this can impact greatly on our attendance.

**Language barrier**

When trying to implement strategies or communicate practice in relation to attendance many families might struggle to fully understand due to a language barrier. In some instances English is not spoken at home and it is only the children who can speak English

**Holidays**

A holiday culture is beginning to emerge in early September and June. Another worrying trend to emerge from data is that December is now our worst month for attendance. Many families go on their holidays for the Christmas break.

**Priority Families**

The repeated non-attendance of some pupils which has become an established pattern among some of our disadvantaged families. This is a cycle that is difficult to break

**COVID**

During the pandemic there was a very obvious knock on effect on attendance. School closures aside, there was a great emphasis on not coming to school if displaying symptoms. Outbreaks of Flu and Strep B in December 2022 exacerbated this. Many families continue to be cautious sending children to school with any symptoms. Also there are a cohort of children who struggled during lockdown and found it hard to re-adjust to normal school life.

**Recording and Reporting of Attendance and non-Attendance**

* The school attendance of individuals is recorded in the pupil information Aladdin system on a daily basis for each class. Class attendance data is automatically recorded daily in the leabhar tinreamh (Register). The annual attendance of each pupil is also recorded in the pupil information system.
* If a pupil does not attend on a day when the school is open for instruction, his/her non-attendance will be recorded by the class teacher. The Roll-call is taken before 10.20am each morning. Any pupil not present when the roll is called will be marked absent for the day
* Our school completion Key worker will track absences of children who have missed 3 days in a week and in this instance she may make a phone call to the parents.
* Parents/guardians of pupils who have missed 15-19 days are informed by text detailing number of days missed and the fact that NEWB will be informed of these absences. Our Home School Liaison teacher, Anthony McDonagh, will contact parents by phone to see if the school can be of any assistance in enabling the child to attend. Our HSCL teacher will provide information to parents about the community based services that are available.
* The school must inform TUSLA where a child has missed 20 days or more days in a school year, where attendance is irregular and/or where a child is suspended or expelled.
* Where there is an irregularity that is repeatedly causing concern the parents will be called in to meet with the Principal to discuss ways that we can help to improve the attendance of the child. An irregularity could be a pattern of Mondays or Fridays being days in which a student is absent from school. This meeting would follow on from a house call from our home school liaison teacher.
* The Principal will be notified once a child has missed 10 days and contact will be made by the school depending on individual circumstances.

**Data Findings**

* Overall school attendance in the year fell from 90.3% in 2018/2019 to 87.4% in 2021/2022. Currently in this school year it is at 90.1%.
* Attendance in December has fallen from 91% in 2018/2019 to 81.3% in 2021/2022. Currently in this school year it is at 80.7%
* December is the poorest month for attendance
* The ratio of boys missing more than 20days tends to be higher than the ratio of girls
* In 2019/2020 22 children missed more than 20 days, in 2021/2022 201 children missed more than 20 days. Currently in this school year it is a number of 19.
* 12% of absences in 2021/2022 are unexplained. In 2022/2023 that percentage is 33%
* Friday has been consistently above average for absences in the last 5 years. It reached a high of 25% in 2020/2021. Currently Friday absence is at 21% in this school year
* Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursdays are our best days for attendance

**Targets**

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| **What are our specific Attendance targets in the next 3 years?****Target 1** |
| **Focus Area**  | **Target 1** |
| One of the initial focus areas we had identified in October as a staff was in relation to Friday attendance. There was a feeling that Friday attendance was lower than average and this has been borne out by the Data we have collected. In every year bar one of the last five, Friday has witnessed the largest number of absences. In 2021 it made up 25% of the weekly total. | **June 2023**% of absences on a Friday would fall below 23% |
| **June 2024**% of absences on a Friday would fall below 22% |
| **June 2025**% of absences on a Friday would fall below 21.5% |
| **What are our specific Attendance targets in the next 3 years?****Target 2** |
| **Focus Area**  | **Target 2** |
| Another of area of focus identified by our initial staff discussion was in relation to taking holidays throughout the school year. We looked carefully at the absences month by month and noticed hat December is our worst month for attendance. COVID somewhat skewed the analysis in 2020 but in all bar 3 of the remaining years DecemberSaw the lowest attendance. | **June 2023**Attendance in December will be above 83% |
| **June 2024**Attendance in December will be above 85% |
| **June 2025**Attendance in December will be above 87% |
| **What are our specific Attendance targets in the next 3 years?****Target 3** |
| **Focus Area**  | **Target 3** |
| Another area of focus for us was in relation to the number of unexplained absences we were experiencing. As it stands in this school year we are on target for 33% of our absences being unexplained. | **June 2023**Less than 20% of our absences unexplained |
| **June 2024**Less than 18% of our absences unexplained |
| **June 2025**Less than 15% of our absences unexplained |

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| **What needs to be put in place to achieve those targets and by whom?** |
| **Initiative** | **Led by** |
| Fun Friday. On random Fridays a particular class would receive a fun surprise such as extra PE, extra time on yard, extra running track time, a trip to a local amenity, extra art, story-time etc. This might enthuse children to be in on Fridays and see Friday as an important day | Class Teachers |
| Priority family members singled out informally for praise on Fridays. These children being met with positivity and a special effort made by class teacher , HSCL teacher and Principal to communicate with them on a Friday | Class TeacherHSCL TeacherPrincipal |
| Targeting Friday as a day for in-school courses for parents. If they are coming into the school on a Friday their children will also attend on a Friday | HSCL Teacher |
| School attendance initiative based on the idea of an Advent Calendar. As each day goes by in December children who are present in school get an extra stamp which builds towards a reward on the last day | Class TeacherPrincipal |
| School Newsletter, Twitter and School Website focusing on the many activities happening in the month of December and building up an enthusiasm for the months activities. They all serve to remind children of Friday activities throughout the year | PrincipalHSCL TeacherMr Carley (IT) |
| Information communicated to parents at the start of each term in relation to entering absence reasons on Aladdin. | Principal |
| School certificates and medals in Infants classes focusing on early intervention for good attendance. It helps to develop good habits at an early stage. Golden Trophy Assembly is another manner in which this can be done | Class TeacherPrincipal |
| HSCL teacher tracking attendance of priority families. If a child from these families is absent for more than 3 days in a particular week the HSCL we call to the house in question to see if there is anything he/she can help with | HSCL Teacher |
| EWO referrals made in respect of children with whom the Principal has grave concerns regarding attendance | PrincipalHSCL Teacher |
| Attendance Committee meeting on the first Monday of every month to study attendance data | PrincipalHSCL teacherAttendance Committee |

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| **Where do the following areas play a role in the plan?** |
| **Continued Professional Development**Ongoing training for staff in relation to resilience programmes such as Friends for Life and Fun FriendsTraining in NEPS programme Incredible YearsUpdated training in Children First TUSLA training programmePDST DEIS training course | **Well-being**Sports activities within the school such as GAA, Soccer, Athletics, Rounders, Rugby & TennisExtra-Curricular activities in the school such as Comhairle na n-Óg, Chess Club, Knitting Club, Science Club, & Library CommitteeClass TripsParental Courses facilitated by the HSCL throughout the yearImportant Community days such as Grandparents DayPlay Therapy provided for children by the schoolInitiatives such as Active Schools Week, Friendship week etc | **Leadership**Attendance Committee in dealing with various attendance issues that arise from week to weekOrganisation of parents courses, Grandparents Day,etcOrganisation of events such as Active Schools Week & Friendship weekOpportunities or Comhairle na n-Óg and the students to have their voice heard at AssemblyDeveloping on online method to communicate with parents through Twitter, website and newsletterInitiatives such as Fun Friday and Advent stampsSpeakers on Junior Infant Induction day explaining the importance of good attendance |

**Success Criteria and evaluation**

* We will reflect on the success of our Attendance Strategy in a number of ways:
* Termly records and reporting of absences
* Termly awards for attendance
* Monthly percentage figures for attendance
* Annual attendance figures
* Feedback from Inspectorate, NEWB, parents and outside agencies.
* Analysis of NEWB reports
* Analysis of individual class roll books.