



**School Attendance Policy:
Statement of Strategy for School
Attendance
Coláiste De Lacy**

Version 2 (2022)



Introduction

Coláiste De Lacy is a co-educational, non-denominational post-primary school located in Ashbourne, Co Meath. The school operates under the patronage of the Louth Meath Education and Training Board (hereafter referred to as LMETB). As such, it operates within the regulations laid down by the Department of Education (hereafter referred to as the DE) and LMETB.

Under Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the Board of Management of each school must prepare the school Statement of Strategy in line with Tusla's Educational Welfare Services' 'School Attendance Guidelines' and submit same to the Educational Welfare Service (hereafter referred to as the EWS). This 'Statement of Strategy for School Attendance' of Coláiste De Lacy, together with the School Attendance Policy has been developed in accordance with the Guidelines issued by Tusla's Educational Welfare Service.

This School Attendance Policy has been drawn up in consultation with all the school partners, including the Board of Management, school staff, students and parents/guardians¹. It takes cognisance of the responsibility of the school to ensure that all of its students are educated in a happy, safe, respectful and optimal learning environment. Coláiste De Lacy endeavours, to the greatest possible extent, to provide an appropriate education for all students, that supports both their academic needs and, wellbeing.

School Ethos

Coláiste De Lacy is a school of academic excellence and as such, it implements a modern and innovative approach to teaching and learning. It aims to provide the best educational experience and developmental opportunities for its students. There is an incessant focus on teaching and learning within the school for everyone (*Ag foghlaim le chéile*). Students are encouraged to strive for excellence in a happy, supportive, positive, caring and challenging environment. The Coláiste De Lacy values include: effort, hard work, respect, positivity, personal responsibility, integrity and kindness. The Irish language and culture are extremely important throughout the school. The school fosters a spirit of support and collaboration among all educational partners.

Coláiste De Lacy Mission Statement

"Coláiste De Lacy is a community of learners and leaders working together in a safe and inclusive learning environment that fosters positive relationships, good learning habits, growth mind-set, respect, and personal growth for all.

¹ The term 'Parents' is used throughout the remainder of this document to mean both Parents and Guardians



Through the combined efforts of the whole school community, we aim to nurture curious minds, caring hearts and responsible citizens”.

Ár bhFís (Vision)

An overview of the vision for Coláiste De Lacy is outlined below:

- Student happiness, wellbeing and belonging are core
- Student pride and participation in their school
- Positive relationships and a positive school environment
- Safe and respectful environment supported by good order and organisation
- Valuing of hard work, effort and creativity
- Focus on positivity, responsibility, relationships and care
- All students achieve their individual best and experience success
- Centre of excellence and innovation for teaching and learning with a particular focus on BLP²

Suaitheantas Choláiste De Lacy (The Coláiste De Lacy Crest)



Although Coláiste De Lacy is a relatively new school, its philosophical foundations are strong. The philosophical principles of the school are as follows:

- *Fás* (growth as individuals and as a learning community)
- *Ag foghlaim le chéile* (a continual focus on learning for all)

² BLP stands for Building Learning Power.



- *Caidrimh dhearfacha* (positive relationships between all members of the school community will nurture its growth and ensure that it is a happy, safe and well-ordered place of optimal learning)
- *Solas agus Soirbheachas* (an emphasis on the positives and joy in life and learning).

Policy Content

Scope:

This School Attendance Policy applies to all students of Coláiste De Lacy. The priority of Coláiste De Lacy is to ensure a safe, positive, supportive, and optimal educational environment for all. The School Attendance Policy helps the school community to promote and support school attendance and minimise school dropout rates. The School Attendance Policy helps múinteoirí (teachers), other members of the foireann (staff), students and parents/guardians to work together to promote and achieve optimum school attendance.

Policy Context and Rationale

The Irish Constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann) identifies the parent as the primary educator of their child. Consequently, parents are free to decide how best to educate their child. However, in choosing to educate their child in a formal school setting, parents are therefore required to adhere to the legislative requirements regarding school attendance as set out in the Education Welfare Act (2000). To this end, parents must ensure that their child attends school regularly up the minimum school leaving age of 16 or have completed 3 years of second level education, whichever comes later.

The importance of good school attendance to support student engagement and educational outcomes is evidenced by a wide body of research (Smyth, 1999; McCoy *et al*, 2007; Byrne and Smith, 2010). Furthermore, research has shown that poor attendance can negatively contribute to a student's capacity to build and maintain peer relationships and put them at risk of engagement in anti-social activity (Hibbett and Fogelman, 1990; Carroll, 2011). Therefore, the purpose of this School Attendance Policy is to ensure that students attend school regularly to support personal development, maximise all learning opportunities, including those related to their physical, social and emotional wellbeing and to minimise the risk of school dropout. While there are a broad range of factors that influence attendance at school, this policy sets out the practices and interventions that will be implemented by the school to ultimately enable the school to promote and support the attendance and participation of every student in Coláiste De Lacy in compliance with the legislative requirements.



Factors that influence school attendance

Research undertaken by the ESRI (2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2013) highlights a myriad of factors that can impact on school attendance. Ultimately both Coláiste De Lacy and parents together in partnership play a crucial role in promoting good school attendance. While the below is not an exhaustive list, factors that can impact on school attendance include;

<i>School factors</i>	<p>Prevailing school ethos and culture</p> <p>Organisation of classes</p> <p>Student-teacher relationships</p> <p>Teacher expectations</p>
<i>Personal factors</i>	<p>Attitudes to school</p> <p>Age and stage of schooling</p> <p>Peer influences</p> <p>Health</p> <p>Special Educational Needs</p>
<i>Socio-economic and family factors</i>	<p>Parental interest in education</p>



Policy Implementation

Practices and Interventions to Support School Attendance

Students attend school every day in order to:

- ✓ Maximise their learning potential
- ✓ Build a continuous and cohesive understanding of subject content
- ✓ Help to nurture a sense of belonging and ownership of their school environment and culture
- ✓ Build confidence and self-esteem
- ✓ Promote positive and productive relationships with other students, teachers, parents and school management.
- ✓ Develop good attendance and active participation in school as a habit. This develops a good work ethic and prepares our students to be responsible employees/employers of the future.

As a result, promoting and encouraging good school attendance is one of the main goals of the school's School Attendance Policy. Strategies are used at both whole school and individual level to support good attendance and to nurture a positive attitude towards education and school among students.

It is recognised that the overall school climate, the ethos and culture of the school relating to the teaching and learning environment are fundamental to ensuring good school attendance among the student body. To this end, the school endeavours to create a positive and supportive learning environment for all students through its policies and practices.

Practices to Promote and Support School Attendance

- ✓ Setting and communicating clear, consistent and widely-understood standards/expectations regarding attendance and punctuality
- ✓ Maintaining a pleasant and well organised school and classroom environments e.g. lots of visual displays, displaying student work, keeping high standards of cleanliness and tidiness...etc.
- ✓ Promoting a sense of safety, calm and connectedness for students through provision of school support and organisational structures
- ✓ Facilitation of transition meetings between local primary schools and Coláiste De Lacy
- ✓ A flexible and differentiated student driven curriculum – First Year Taster Programme, L2LP, TY Modules, Leaving Cert Applied Programme
- ✓ A comprehensive *Wellbeing* programme to support the physical, emotional and social development of student wellbeing



- ✓ Creative and differentiated teaching and learning practices that engage students, supports their abilities and develops learning capacity
- ✓ Organisation of class – formation of classes based on mixed ability
- ✓ Book rental scheme – provision of school books
- ✓ Opportunities for collaboration and participation with students – promotion of student voice via the Student Council
- ✓ A broad range of extracurricular activities to support students’ physical and social needs
- ✓ Clann, Caomhnóir and Year Head structure
- ✓ Check and Connect Support
- ✓ Highlighting the importance of attendance during Clann time and Tionól
- ✓ Nurturing positive relationships (*Caidrimh dhearfacha*) and interactions between all members of the school community – Parent’s Association and Student Council
- ✓ Establishment of the *Ubuntu Team* and cultivation of Restorative Practice as a whole school practice to deal with and manage conflict - encouraging staff to use restorative questions when issues arise to identify harm and to seek resolutions
- ✓ Recognising and celebrating diversity – themed weeks, e.g. Stand-Up Awareness, Multicultural days etc.
- ✓ Student Support Team – to identify and support students at risk of poor attendance
- ✓ Antbullying Team – to educate about, and deal with bullying behaviour
- ✓ Commencement of updates on school attendance in the school newsletter
- ✓ Clann Attendance Challenges
- ✓ Identification of students at risk – individualised support plans, regular communication with home.
- ✓ Creation of links with local youth and other local youth organisations e.g. LAR, Youthreach
- ✓ Recognition and reward for good attendance (verbally, at Tionól/Clann Time, through positive awards system, writing a note in the Dialann, specific rewards, sending home a merit card...etc.)

Managing School Attendance

Poor attendance and non-attendance is a very complex issue, specific to each individual student. Recurring absences can have detrimental and long-lasting effects on a student’s learning, capacity to build and maintain peer relationships and puts them at increased risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour. Certainly, even infrequent absences can be disruptive to a student’s academic progress and social wellbeing. Coláiste De Lacy endeavours therefore to encourage students to attend school every day, on time and, where possible request that parents arrange for any non-school related appointments e.g. dentist, to be made outside of school time to minimise disruption to learning. Indeed, parents themselves play a significant role in promoting and encouraging good school attendance and punctuality with their children. Parents should reinforce the importance of attending school and being on time by highlighting the negative implications on their child’s academic and social



development and that of others, of not doing so. To this end, term-time holidays are also discouraged. Regular holiday absences may have both educational and potential legal implications for parents if students are removed from school for significant periods of time. Only absences relating to specific school activities e.g. extra-curricular events, Transition Year Work Experience can be sanctioned by the Principal as set out in Section 21 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

Monitoring Attendance and Punctuality

It is the responsibility of the school to maintain accurate records of school attendance. All teachers are required to take a roll call at the beginning of each lesson on E-Portal. Registration is taken every morning during Clann time at 8.45a.m.

The Child and Family Agency (Tusla)

The Child and Family Agency (hereafter, referred to as Tusla) is the government body with responsibility for ensuring that every child receives a suitable minimum education up to the age of 16 or until students have completed 3 years of second-level education, whichever comes later. Tusla collects and monitors data related to school attendance, maintains registers related to early school leavers and of those children not attending a formally recognised school setting and provides assistance and support to schools and families for those children who have poor school attendance through Educational Welfare Officers.

Every school is obliged to report attendance data to Tusla on a bi-annual basis. If a child is absent for more than 20 days in a school year, the school must report this data to Tusla. In this event, an Educational Welfare Officer may contact parents to request more information and provide further support.

Procedures for Notifying the Coláiste of a Student's Absence:

Under Section 18 of the Education Welfare Act (2000), parents are obliged to inform the school if their child is absent. It is the responsibility of every parent to notify the school as soon as is practicably possible.

- ✓ When a student is absent, a text message is sent to all parents. Regardless of whether the school has received prior notification or not, all parents must follow the link that parents receive by text message to explain the reason for the absence. Parents are requested to complete the Microsoft Form on the same day identifying the reason for absence. If the student is out for more than one day, parents are requested to repeatedly complete Microsoft Forms as they are issued on the subsequent following days.



- ✓ If a student is absent for medical reasons, the school may request a copy of a medical cert. Parents should email the school and attach a copy of the cert issued by the doctor upon request.
- ✓ If it is a planned absence, parents must email the school in advance outlining the reasons why their child will be absent from school, while simultaneously responding to text messages outlining the reason each day.

Leaving School During the Day

Coláiste De Lacy strongly discourages students from leaving lessons early as it can negatively impact on their learning and, that of others too. However, if a student needs to leave school early, parents should write a note to explain in the 'Permission to Leave' section of the Dialann outlining the reason and time (*See Appendix B*). The student should show this note to the teacher who's lesson they will be leaving and present to Reception to be signed-out by the ancillary staff. All students are required to be collected by a parent/guardian or their nominee. No student is permitted to leave the campus without permission or parental supervision.

Reluctance to Attend School

If a pattern of poor attendance occurs it may be an indication that the student is reluctant to come to school. There are many reasons why this may occur. Parents should communicate with the Caomhnóir and Year Head as soon as parents notice a change in their child's behaviour regarding school attendance. Early intervention to remedy the issue is essential to ensure that the student's reluctance does not develop into refusal.



Actions Parents Can Take to Support Students Reluctant to Come to School

Make sure that there is nothing medically wrong with the child, and that they are not being bullied or hurt.

Understand that reluctance to go to school is that they feel stressed about something that is real and important to them. Listen and understand the reasons they have for not wanting to go to school.

Help them to problem solve about their worries, what they can do, what might help but only do this when you and the young person are calm. No one can think rationally and have solution-focused conversations when they are highly stressed.

Reassure and remind them that they can cope and that you and their teachers will help them sort out any problems.

Talk positively about school and encourage them to think about things they like about school.

Remember the way you talk about the school, the teachers, their friends etc. is really important.

Stay positive- don't feel guilty about insisting they go to school! You are doing this because you love them. If you feel upset try not to show it. Believe they can cope and that you can cope. Remind them of other times when they have done something difficult and it turned out ok in the end.

Model how to cope - they are looking to you to show them how to do it. Tell them about times when you felt worried and coped with something difficult. Know that they can learn to cope with and manage this stress but this takes time and needs patience, understanding and support from you - stay hopeful. There may be set-backs but many pupils have successfully returned to attending school regularly with support to develop their skills and supportive relationships at home and in school.

Have a regular bedtime and morning routine before school. Get school bag and uniform ready the night before - help them be organised.

Ignore behaviour that is safe to ignore e.g. shouting, swearing, pleading.

Tell them you understand it is difficult and that they feel worried but do not get into long discussions about their feelings just before school.

(Source – DES National Educational Psychological Service)



School Refusal Behaviour

A student's initial reluctance to attend school may soon escalate to school refusal behaviour if the underlying issue is not acknowledged and supported. In some cases, there may in fact be no apparent reason for a student to refuse to attend school. However, it is essential that concerns are raised with the school as early as possible to allow for appropriate interventions to be actioned. School refusal behaviour can present as both externalising and/or internalising behaviours e.g. temper tantrums, refusal to move, anxiety, low mood, lethargy etc. Changes to a child's behaviour and attitude towards school attendance should be signalled at the earliest stage to try to minimise pro-longed absence that could be detrimental to the student's academic progress and social, emotional and physical wellbeing. As school refusal can be a complex, multifaceted issue it is essential that a collaborative approach to seeking a resolution is taken between both parents and school.

Dealing with School Reluctance/Refusal Behaviour

Interventions refer to the strategies used to help students maintain good school attendance and give specific help to those students who find it particularly difficult to attend school. Such strategies usually involve gathering information and consultation with school personnel, parents and others as appropriate. Specific interventions may need to be designed to suit individual needs depending on the reasons for poor school attendance. Broadly speaking, the following approach will be taken to help deal with and support students engaging in school reluctance/refusal behaviour.

- ✓ Identification of potential triggers/factors contributing to behaviour
- ✓ Communication between Caomhnóir, Year Head and parents to ensure a collaborative approach to dealing with issue
- ✓ Interventions and supports to be agreed and actioned – e.g. *Student Support Plan, Check and Connect, 'Buddy-System', home actions, workshops, attendance chart etc.*
- ✓ Follow-up communication
- ✓ Referral to Tusla Education Support Service



Managing Punctuality

The school day in Coláiste De Lacy commences at 8.45a.m. The morning register is taken at this time. If a student is late to school, parents are requested to write a note in the Dialann to notify the school for the reason why (See Appendix B). Upon late arrival, students are required to sign-in at Reception and present this 'Late Note'. Maintaining good punctuality is an important life habit that students should develop to prepare themselves for the responsibilities of employment later in life. Coláiste De Lacy recognises that poor punctuality negatively impacts, not just the student who is late, but also disrupts the learning of others in their class and creates a heavier workload for school personnel who must sign them in. As a result, students are encouraged to arrive to school by 8.30a.m. to allow themselves adequate time to prepare their resources for their day of learning ahead. Every step is taken to support and help students to manage their time effectively if they are late for school. The school will inform parents if their child has been late on three consecutive occasions over a three month period. This is to encourage parents to take a collaborative approach with the school to prevent a further recurrence. Further supports and interventions will be actioned if a student continues to demonstrate poor punctuality including a Rang Feabhas after school and/or a Saturday morning detention.

Whole School Approach

The School Attendance Policy in isolation, cannot create the environment that makes it possible for students to ensure good school attendance. The main elements of a whole school approach to managing school attendance and punctuality include:

- ✓ An ethos, policies and practices³ that are in harmony to create a positive school environment. Related policies include the schools Anti bullying, Code of Conduct and Pastoral Care Policies.
- ✓ A teamwork and consistent approach to the management of attendance and punctuality
- ✓ An inclusive and involved school community

³ Practices include the ability groupings in the school and Timetabling.



Clearly Defined Roles and Responsibilities

Coláiste De Lacy acknowledges the contribution of all members of the school community. Each member has responsibility for the promotion of good attendance and punctuality. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities allow for consistency among staff as well as ensuring that there is a planned approach to helping students to amend their own behaviour in the context of school attendance and time-keeping.

Students

The school expects that students will present to school every day and on time to maximise the learning opportunities for themselves and all others.

Parents/Guardians

The school acknowledges the critical role of parents/guardians in promoting and reinforcing the importance of good school attendance and time-keeping for their child.

Caomhnóirí and Muinteoirí

The school acknowledges the role of teachers in the development and implementation of the School Attendance Policy. They have a pivotal role to play in the management and promotion of school attendance and punctuality. Teachers themselves should model must practice and demonstrate same, by taking a register at the beginning of every lesson, being punctual for lessons and identifying any students that may be at risk of engaging in school reluctance/refusal behaviour.

Year Heads

Year Heads, in collaboration with Caomhnóirí monitor student attendance, identify vulnerable students and work with the Student Support Team to implement supports.

Other staff

The school acknowledges the contribution of ancillary staff in the day to day running of the school. Ancillary staff too have a part to play in the successful management of attendance and punctuality. In particular, ancillary staff have responsibility to sign students in late/out early, send text message to parents notifying them of their child's absence and to act as an intermediary between parents and teachers regarding issues relating to school attendance and punctuality.

Board of Management

The school acknowledges the role of the Board of Management in the development and operation of the School Attendance policy. All policies are developed in consultation with and are ratified by the Board of Management.



Success Criteria & Monitoring

This School Attendance Policy will be reviewed at the start of the next academic year as part of the normal Whole School Development Planning review cycle. If necessary, the School Attendance Policy may be reviewed at any time in light of changing circumstances and/or changing legislation. Any amendments which need to be made will be in keeping with the general philosophy of the school. Any suggested amendments/improvements will be communicated to the Principal or Deputy Principal(s) who will consult with all partners.



School Contact Details

Principal: Janice Uí Bheoláin

Deputy Principal(s): Barry O'Higgins & Stephanie Spillane

Address: Killemland, Ashbourne, Co Meath

Phone: 01 5241075

Email: colaistedelacy@lmetb.ie

Website: www.colaistedelacy.ie

Roll Number: 76196W



Appendix A

Procedures for Notifying the Coláiste of a Student's Absence:

- Coláiste De Lacy has developed a *Statement of Strategy for student Attendance*.
- Pages regarding attendance and punctuality are included in the student Dialann

Coláiste De Lacy



Student Journal 2021-2022

Attendance and Punctuality

Two of the most important elements of ensuring academic achievement are being punctual and attending school regularly. Being on time for school and ensuring regular attendance will contribute positively to your child's academic, emotional and social growth and development.

Monitoring Attendance

Under the law, every child must attend school regularly up to sixteen years of age or complete at least three years post primary education, whichever comes later. It is our responsibility to monitor absences and report this statistical data to Tusla Education Support Service bi-annually.

If your child accumulates 20 absences in an academic school year, regardless of reason, we are legally obliged to report this information to the Tusla Education Support Service. An Educational Welfare Officer may then subsequently contact you to discuss the matter further.

What happens when my child is absent?

When your child is absent from school, you as a parent/guardian must let the school know the reason for the absence every day. **When your child is marked absent from school, an automatic text message will be sent to the parent/guardian and they must complete the absence report linked in the message.**



Where possible, please attempt to minimise your child's school absences by making appointments for out of school hours e.g. dentist, doctor etc.

Monitoring Punctuality

As a school, we endeavour to encourage students to be on time for school as being late is not just disruptive to their learning, but to many others within the school community.

If your child is late for school, please communicate the reason by writing a note in the 'Late Section' of the Dialann.

Help your child get to school on time each day by ensuring that they are prepared the evening before.





Checklist for Being on Time

- ✓ I've packed my bag the night before,
- ✓ I've charged my iPad the night before,
- ✓ I've my uniform ready the night before,
- ✓ I've made my lunch the night before,
- ✓ I've had my shower the night before,
- ✓ I've set my alarm the night before,
- ✓ I get enough sleep the night before,
- ✓ And finally, I get up early and leave out the door,
- ✓ To be there, and ready on time, for sure.

Why is punctuality important?

- Missing a few minutes of class time every day can easily add up to a few hours over the course of a school year.
- Punctuality is a critical skill that will stand to students when they leave school and enter the world of work.
- Being on time, whether to school in the mornings or to class, demonstrates that you are reliable and that you can manage your time.
- Arriving late to class disrupts the flow of a lesson for everyone else in the room.
- Attending school and lessons on time is a vital habit as it will reduce stress. You will feel more confident and composed for your day if you have time to spare to get yourself organised etc.





Always Remember the Three "B"s

- ✓ **Be Respectful**
- ✓ **Be Ready**
- ✓ **Be Responsible**



Classroom and Campus Guidelines

Be in school, seated for clann time at 08:45am sharp.

Refer to school staff as Iníon (female) or Máistir (male)

At beginning of each lesson, take out all necessary equipment for class. Leave your iPad face down and your dialann opened on the weekly tracker.

Follow all your instructions and stick to your task. Raise your hand if you wish to speak to your teacher

Always try your best. Get "stuck" into your learning and don't be afraid to make mistakes

Take ownership of your learning and be accountable for your actions. Ensure you are productive and as positive throughout the day

Record Obair Breise when instructed to do so. Show your teacher that this has been done before putting your dialann away

Pack up, only when you are told to do so. Pick up any paper or rubbish and tuck your seat in

Moving from lesson to lesson, move promptly, keep to the left and use correct stairs for your year group



Appendix B

Pages from student Dialann that should be used to notify the school if a student needs to leave early or is arriving to school late -

Coláiste De Lacy		Student Journal 2020-2021
Permission to leave school		1
To whom it may concern _____ Date _____		
May _____ please be excused from school at _____ today.		
Reason: _____		

Person who will collect and sign student out from school office:		

Parent/Guardian Signature:	_____	
Permission to leave school		2
To whom it may concern _____ Date _____		
May _____ please be excused from school at _____ today.		
Reason: _____		

Person who will collect and sign student out from school office:		

Parent/Guardian Signature:	_____	



Late Note

1

Date _____

Dear _____ (Múinteoir)

Parent/Guardian Signature:

Processed by:

Late Note

2

Date _____

Dear _____ (Múinteoir)

Parent/Guardian Signature:

Processed by:



Appendix C

Explanation of Terms

“**Parent**” includes a foster parent, a guardian appointed under the Guardianship of Children Acts, 1964 to 1997, or other person acting in *loco parentis* who has a child in his or her care subject to any statutory power or order of a court and, in the case of a child who has been adopted under the Adoption Acts, 1952 to 1998, or, where the child has been adopted outside the State, means the adopter or adopters or the surviving adopter;

“**Principal**” means a person appointed under *section 23*;

“**School**” means an establishment which—

(a) provides primary education to its students and which may also provide early childhood education, or

(b) provides post-primary education to its students and which may also provide courses in adult, continuing or vocational education or vocational training, but does not include a school or institution established in accordance with the Children Acts, 1908 to 1989, or a school or institution established or maintained by a health board in accordance with the Health Acts, 1947 to 1996, or the Child Care Act, 1991;

“**Student**”, in relation to a school, means a person enrolled at the school and in relation to a centre for education, means a person registered as a student in that centre;