



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# **Guidelines on the appropriate use of the Attendance Campaign Support Grant for Primary and Post-Primary Schools**

**October 2023**



## **Introduction**

The **Attendance Campaign Support Grant** is a once-off payment to all schools to promote and support regular school attendance of children and young people. Schools are asked to target this funding to reach individuals and groups at risk of educational disadvantage as a result of poor attendance or whose attendance patterns may have been impacted by the disruption to school-based education during COVID 19.

The grant augments and supports the Department of Education (DE) and the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) National School Attendance Campaign which is running throughout the 2023/24 school year. For further guidance and resources, schools can refer to the National Attendance Campaign materials available on [gov.ie School Attendance Campaign](https://gov.ie/SchoolAttendanceCampaign).

To maximise the impact of the grant schools are encouraged, as appropriate, to form local clusters to work collaboratively to encourage regular school attendance. Clusters that include early year's settings, primary and post-primary schools could target supports for children at significant transition points.

Schools can use this grant in this academic year or can use it over a longer period.

To enable some measurement of the impact of the attendance campaign and the support grant, at system level, all schools are reminded to submit attendance data to TESS in the normal way in compliance with the requirements of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

## **Improving Student Attendance: Strategies and Interventions**

### **Deciding how to use the grant**

Schools are best placed to understand the needs of their own community and identify how best to address those needs at a local level. Therefore, this funding is being provided directly to schools to allow the flexibility of utilising the funding to best suit locally identified needs of the most at-risk children and young people and developing strategies and targeted measures to improve overall levels of school attendance.

### **A broad understanding of attendance**

In considering how best to promote attendance, schools have a rich data source in the information that they gather on the attendance levels of children and young people, with a particular focus on those most at risk of early school leaving. In gathering data on attendance, schools can combine data on lateness for school, morning and afternoon attendance and partial attendance as well as absence from school for a full school day. This can be important, as lateness and partial attendance are usually precursors to more significant attendance issues and can typically be part of a pattern that leads to early school leaving.



### **Devising interventions for improvement**

Once the attendance data has been gathered and analysed, schools should develop interventions designed to bring about improvements in attendance levels, particularly for those children and young people whose attendance levels are a cause of concern.

Root causes for any trends should be probed through engagement with families and other stakeholders. Based on these insights, schools should develop targeted interventions, such as awareness campaigns or partnership programs with parents.

These interventions should, where possible, be integrated into the School Self-Evaluation Report and Improvement Plan. In DEIS schools these interventions should be reflected in the DEIS Action Plan for Improvement and monitored for effectiveness in the normal way. An example of how this might work has been included in Appendix A.

### **Guiding Principles and examples of initiatives to improve attendance**

In considering appropriate interventions, it is critical that schools see promoting attendance as centrally linked to:

- School culture and environment.
- The quality of relationships between children and young people and their peers and between children and young people and school staff.
- The extent to which children and young people find classroom experiences engaging, interesting and relevant.
- The extent to which children and young people experience success in their learning.
- The extent to which children and young people experience high-quality and inclusive teaching and learning.
- The quality of the links between home and school.

**In general, therefore, this grant should be used to support the implementation of initiatives that will focus on one or more of the elements above and that have already proven successful in engaging children and young people in meaningful, challenging learning activities.**

Initiatives which have the potential to link closely with the learning programmes of children and young people and which have achieved positive outcomes when used in schools before, include:



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- Wellbeing focused initiatives consistent with the Department's Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice<sup>1</sup>. A range of wellbeing resources can be accessed at [gov.ie](http://gov.ie) - [Wellbeing in education \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)
- Creating a student-led initiative to address social issues in the community.
- Family focused initiatives, involving parents/guardians on school grounds such as the establishment of a school garden or other activities involving families.
- Partnering with local businesses to offer students internships, traineeships, apprenticeships, mentorships, and guest speaker sessions. Such activities as well as encouraging attendance can help to increase industry awareness and foster academic and career aspirations, to support retention through to Leaving Certificate.
- Purchasing additional equipment or engaging a local expert to offer activities that help engage children in music, sport, art, cooking etc. Some schools have engaged organisations or individuals who work with therapy dogs to encourage school attendance. The decision to introduce such supports should be carefully considered by the Principal and Board of Management in consultation with the school community.
- Schools that offered the summer programme in 2023 may also find that many of the learning activities that children engaged during the programme have potential to be adapted for use within the school during the year. These activities include, for example, the development of literacy and numeracy skills through cross-curricular activities.

Further information on examples on interventions that have proven to be successful to support attendance are contained in Appendix B.

### Consulting with children and young people

Schools should also bear in mind the importance in consulting with children and young people about their learning activities and their views should be taken into consideration in an appropriate manner, when decisions about the use of this grant are being made.

### Working with other schools

Schools are encouraged to cluster locally and work together to gain maximum benefit from the grant. This could involve, for example, early years settings, primary school and post-primary schools in a locality working together. Collaboration among schools can facilitate the development of impactful initiatives that address issues relating to attendance especially among children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage. It can

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<sup>1</sup> Inputs from external providers should be in accordance with Circular 0043/2018 and 0043/2017. Best practice guidelines for primary and post primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing.



also help build relationships which may ease the transition from early years to primary and to post-primary for children and young people.

For further collaborative opportunities, schools may also explore other Department-funded initiatives or whole-of-government funds that are pertinent to attendance. More information can be found in Appendix C.

### **Recording of interventions**

Schools should ensure that the use of the funding supports any targets for improvement that relate to attendance that may be set out in their School Self-Evaluation Report and Improvement Plan. Schools in the DEIS programme are asked to ensure that the use of the grant is reflected in the actions under the attendance themes in their three-year DEIS Action Plan for Improvement.

Schools have the flexibility to utilise this once off funding allocation either within the current academic year or to use it over a longer time period to align to their School Self-Evaluation Report and Improvement Plan or their DEIS Action Plan For Improvement.

### **Submitting attendance data**

All schools are obliged to submit an Annual Attendance Report under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. In the 2023/24 school year the Period 1 Annual Attendance Report deadline for submission is 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024. The Period 2 Annual Attendance Report deadline for submission is 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024.

If you have any queries about these returns, please contact [school.return@tusla.ie](mailto:school.return@tusla.ie) and a member of the TESS team will make contact as soon as possible.

### **Monitoring the Attendance Campaign Support Grant**

The Department of Education will gather information on the use of the funding and the effectiveness of the initiatives from schools to inform future policy in this area.

Schools are encouraged to submit best practices, case studies, or any other relevant information to Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) [tessattendancecampaign@tusla.ie](mailto:tessattendancecampaign@tusla.ie). To streamline the process, please include "School Attendance Campaign 2023/24" in the subject line of your email. The information submitted will inform the National School Attendance Campaign.

Submissions should focus on strategies, interventions, and programmes that have proven effective in improving student attendance. Please include any metrics or KPIs that demonstrate the impact of the initiatives. Please do not include any personal information



related to individual students in the submissions and please ensure that all shared data is anonymised and aggregated to comply with data protection regulations.

## **Management and oversight of the Grant**

### **Primary and Post-Primary Schools**

In accordance with Section 18 of the Education Act 1998, schools are required to keep records of all activities undertaken and materials and resources purchased with grants. Income and expenditure accounts should be retained in the school and be made available if, and when, required by officers of the Department of Education and/or the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Schools must ensure compliance with Circular: 13/2014, Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds.<sup>2</sup> Schools should be aware that accounts are subject to audit. Schools should make every effort to ensure best value for money and adopt best financial practices in order to be compliant with the Act and relevant circulars. The services of the Financial Support Services Unit ([www.fssu.ie](http://www.fssu.ie)) are available in this regard should you need their advice on such matters.

### **ETB Schools**

In accordance with Section 51 of the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 the Department requests that ETBs' accounts of income and expenditure should be retained and made available from time to time to officers of the Department of Education.

## **Further Supports for Schools**

### **National Attendance Campaign 2023/2024**

The National Attendance Campaign 2023/2024 launched a series of one-hour webinars on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2023. This will continue throughout the year and will cover topics that may provide inspiration for the use of this funding. Further information is available on [gov.ie School Attendance Campaign](http://gov.ie/SchoolAttendanceCampaign)

The webinar topics include:

- Evidence based strategies for promoting attendance – 7<sup>th</sup> November 2023
- Creating a culture of attendance – 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024
- Promoting Attendance to Parents – 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024

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<sup>2</sup> [gov.ie](http://gov.ie) - Government Accounting ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie))



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### **National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)**

NEPS psychologists work with both primary and post-primary schools and are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and emotional development. Each psychologist is assigned to a group of schools. [gov.ie](http://gov.ie) - [National Educational Psychological Service \(NEPS\) resources and publications \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

### **Oide**

Oide, the new integrated support service for teachers and school leaders, will continue to provide comprehensive support to schools including the DEIS Action Plan for Improvement and School Self-Evaluation (SSE) leadership programmes. These incorporate the theme of school attendance, amongst others.

### **SSE Advisory visits**

Schools that have specific attendance-related targets in their School Self-Evaluation Report and Improvement plan or their DEIS Action Plan for Improvement and who wish to seek advice from the Inspectorate on using the school self-evaluation process effectively to support their work on the review and promotion of attendance can apply for an SSE advisory visit via [SSE@education.gov.ie](mailto:SSE@education.gov.ie)

### **Queries**

Queries in relation this guidance document should be e-mailed to the Department of Education at the following address: [social\\_inclusion@education.gov.ie](mailto:social_inclusion@education.gov.ie).



## **Appendix A**

### **Attendance Campaign**

#### **An example of how data analysis can inform approach and linking attendance activities to planning:**

Following an analysis of attendance data in a school the team noticed that there was a very large difference between the yearly average from October to May and the average when September and June were taken into account.

Further analysis of the attendance data found that some children were absent in September and May.

Relationships have been proactively built between the Principal and HSCL Coordinator with the families in the school. Through discussions, attendance clinics, coffee mornings with the HSCL Coordinator and Principal, one on one interactions at the gates each morning and afternoon it was found that there were a number of reasons for these absences. Many of the absences were found to relate to particular family circumstances including caring and holiday arrangements.

The school targeted these families in their DEIS Action Plan for Improvement under the headings of Attendance and Partnership with Parents.

The school ran a campaign of awareness and also spoke to parents individually of the effect and consequences of their decisions. The school ran full class information sessions on the importance of the first weeks in school each year to aid in a child's socialisation, wellbeing, peer support etc. The school organised end and start of year celebrations, coffee mornings, information sessions, parental 'walk and talk' sessions all to encourage all to be in attendance at those times. The principal asked parents to formally write to the school if there were family circumstances that were impacting attendance and met individually with each family to discuss same.





### Appendix B

It is recognised that consistent praise and support of those with satisfactory attendance is important, but it is critical when running an attendance initiative, that it seeks to include and motivate students with unsatisfactory attendance in order to encourage improvement over time.

#### Post-primary School Ideas

##### Whole School Raffle/Attendance Lotto!



HSCL Coordinator purchased raffle tickets & prizes for each class. Every day a child was present in school they received a raffle ticket. This can be done for the required period of intervention or on a continuous basis. In our school at the end of the month a raffle took place. If a child was in school every day of the four-week period, then the child had twenty tickets. If they were absent one day, they still had nineteen tickets and so on. The more days a child was present in school the more tickets they accumulated. This inclusive strategy also encouraged children with higher levels of absenteeism as they acquired tickets for days attended and were part of the raffle. At the end of the period of intervention, a raffle took place and prizes were awarded e.g. homework passes/cinema tickets/stationery etc. The children responded well to the initiative.

##### Attendance Committee- in unity there is strength!



In our school, an attendance committee has been established. In this committee, we plan for attendance initiatives and review what we are doing well and what needs improvement. The committee comprises of ten members of staff across a range of areas in the school.

This year we ran a successful targeted programme aimed at eighteen students across the school that were profiled as mid-level in terms of poor attendance. We identified these students and their families as people we could support to turn around their poor pattern of attendance. We called the parents and outlined we would be working with their child. Each team member took two students. The initial student-teacher meeting involved reviewing the VSWare attendance data together using a work sheet and survey as a guide. This served to educate the young person on their pattern of attendance and allow them to reflect on what they might try to change going forward. We tracked the student for three weeks and did brief check-ins. At the end of the intervention, we completed a worksheet with the student again and contacted the home. The initiative was achievable as the additional workload for members of the attendance committee was reasonable and sustainable.

##### Making the Attendance Message Heard- multiple modes of delivery!



An edited version of 'Every School Day Counts' was sent home to all parents. Additionally, a Tik Tok was made and circulated, this was particularly effective for parents who may have literacy deficits in reading. For the period of the intervention which in our case was November and February, raffle tickets were given out to every student present and there were tickets for punctuality also. Each month concluded with a draw at our whole-school assembly, there were two prizes per class.



### Primary School Ideas:

#### Involving Parents and Families in Promoting Attendance Drives



Our school ran a drive to promote attendance for four weeks. To commence, students along with the help of their families designed a poster to help promote this drive. The top three winners received a family voucher for the local supermarket. These posters were displayed on social media and around the school. In tandem, the school approached local businesses to donate spot prizes for our attendance raffle. This proved very effective, and we gathered many prizes. These ranged from footballs to haircut vouchers to hot chocolate vouchers and Lego sets. There were also prizes for parents/families that showed improvement.

With the prizes on display, every morning the class teacher went out to their line at nine. Every student standing in the line for nine got a raffle ticket. They then wrote their name on the ticket, and it was kept in a class box for the four weeks. The class with the best attendance each week got a 'Bumper Breakfast' which consisted of toast, sausages and juice. The classes really loved this!

At the end of the four weeks, we had a big assembly where the prizes were raffled out. There was a great buzz around the school and students were so eager to be in school and on time.

Equally, it is essential to be mindful of students who had high levels of absenteeism and these students were targeted in a specific way. Students received raffle tickets for attending school and bonus tickets when a specified improvement target was reached.

#### Attendance Passport



For this attendance initiative each student was issued with an 'Attendance Passport'. Every day that they were in school their passport was stamped by the teacher. The initiative could be tailored to support those with poor attendance levels by issuing stamps for each day and bonus stamps for 3 in a row or a specific target. Parents of target students were supported to take part by the HSCL Coordinator. Students who met the targets set by the relevant school personnel were entered into the school draw which could be a whole school or class/year group specific event.

#### Assembly and Presentation of Attendance Certificates



Each month each class is given an attendance sheet to tick if present and put an x if absent. At the end of the month full attenders and those with improved attendance were presented with a certificate at assembly with the principal, class teachers, fellow students & HSCL. HSCL takes photos of all students who obtained a certificate. Photos are changed monthly & put up on our attendance notice board and circulated via school social media platforms where consent has been given.

The class with the highest percentage attendance in each of 3rd, 4th, 5th & 6th was awarded with popcorn and a Netflix movie in their classroom on a Friday for the entire class. Top attenders from all classes are individually rewarded with a lucky dip treat which might include school supplies such as pencils, rubbers, highlighters, rulers or sweet treats. Kids respond very well and love to fill out their attendance sheets & take ownership for it.



## **Appendix C**

### **1. Creative Ireland**

<https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/creative-youth/>

The Creative Ireland Programme is supported by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. It is an all-of-government culture and wellbeing programme and it is our ambition to inspire and transform people, places and communities through creativity.

### **2. Business in the Community Ireland**

<https://www.bitc.ie/>

Business in the Community Ireland is a movement for sustainable change in business. In a dynamic and changing environment, sustainable businesses are successful businesses.

The purpose is to inspire and enable businesses to bring about a sustainable, low carbon economy and a more inclusive society where everyone thrives. They act as trusted advisers in sustainability and corporate social responsibility..

### **3. Young Social Innovators**

<https://www.youngsocialinnovators.ie/>

Young Social Innovators (YSI) is a non-profit organisation that empowers young people to use their talents, insights, passion and creativity to come up with innovative solutions to social challenges. For the past 21 years, YSI has supported students to create team-based action-projects on issues they care about, putting their innovative ideas into action to bring about positive social change for the benefit of people, communities and the environment.



#### 4. The Big Idea

<https://thebigidea.ie/>

The BIG Idea is an exciting new creative education initiative that aims to put creative thinking at the centre of Ireland's second-level education system. The programme has harnessed the talents of some of the world's most successful industry professionals to work directly with 15-19 year old students to give them the skills to seek solutions to life's challenges by igniting their own creativity. The programme is supported by the Creative Ireland programme with additional support from key industry partners.