



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES,  
TERTIARY EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

STUDENT ATTENDANCE POLICY

November 2015

## **1. Introduction**

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research seeks to ensure that all students receive a full-time education that provides them with all opportunities to achieve their full potential and prepare them for life.

For students to gain the greatest academic and social benefit from their education, it is vital that they attend school regularly and on time, unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. It is, however, a matter of concern that over the last years, student absenteeism has been growing significantly, especially in the higher classes.

This phenomenon is known to start from the second term and to become more pronounced in the third term. Although more generalised among Form V and Upper VI students prior to July mock examinations and SC/HSC examinations, the problem also affects lower forms whereby students absent themselves prior to tests and examinations.

Various factors account for this tendency of students to stay away from school. These range from peer pressure, the need to prepare for examinations and heavy reliance on private tuition to boring classroom lessons and factors related to school climate and ethos. It is imperative that these issues be addressed and confidence restored in teachers at school. It will thus require all stakeholders to work together as well as with students and their families to ensure that each student attends regularly and punctually.

## **2. Aims of this policy**

- To have a common, manageable policy on attendance procedures that all schools implement.
- To provide a general framework for schools to elaborate their specific attendance policies
- To support measures towards maintaining a high percentage of student attendance and punctuality at school
- To reinforce the authority of schools in acting against chronic absenteeism
- To set down responsibilities at different levels in the controlling and monitoring of student attendance

### 3. General Principles

- This policy is based on encouraging high student attendance rather than inflicting punishment for absence from school.
- Regularity and punctuality are values that have to be learned as poor attendance habits might follow through into employment.
- Any absence affects the pattern of a student's education and regular absence will seriously affect their learning.
- The link between a student's attendance and attainment is irrefutable and much depends on enabling mechanisms put into place to boost positive attitudes of learners and students' wellbeing.

### 4. Types of absences

Every absence from school shall be classified by the school as either ***AUTHORISED*** or ***UNAUTHORISED***.

**4.1. Authorised absences** are days away from school for a reasonable and/or other urgent unforeseen causes. Absences shall **NOT** be authorised except for the following cases:

- a. Medical reasons
- b. Natural or other calamity
- c. Exceptional family circumstances e.g. death of a close relative
- d. Emergencies or other unavoidable causes
- e. Personal reasons limited to not more than 5 days in any academic year

**4.2. Unauthorised absences** are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no leave has been given.

This type of absence includes:

- a. Parents keeping children off school unnecessarily
- b. Truancy before or during the school day
- c. Absences which have never been properly explained

- d. Shopping, looking after other children or birthdays
- e. Absence from the country without prior approval
- f. Excessive illness without medical evidence
- g. Absences for revision purposes

## **5. Prolonged absences**

- 5.1.** Any unexplained absence from school for a period of more than 3 consecutive days will be considered as a prolonged absence.
- 5.2.** In case no explanation is received from the parent despite having been contacted by the school and the absence exceeds ten consecutive days, the case shall be referred to the Zone/PSSA for enquiry and follow-up at the level of the family by the Education Social Worker.
- 5.3.** A student resuming school after a period of prolonged absence shall be admitted only if accompanied by his Responsible Party.

## **6. Persistent absenteeism (PA)**

- 6.1.** A student will be classified as a 'persistent absentee' when he/she misses his schooling for a cumulative period of 20 or more days across the academic year, excluding medical leave or such other leave as duly approved by the Ministry. Absence at this level is considered as being damaging to any student's educational prospects and full parental support and co-operation is required to tackle this.
- 6.2.** Any case that is seen to have reached the PA mark or is at risk of moving towards that mark will be given priority and parents will be informed immediately and/or called at school for explanations.
- 6.3.** Should the parents of a persistent absentee not present himself at school as requested by the Head of School or should the explanations given not be deemed reasonable and acceptable, the student will be liable to being refused promotion to the next class and/or to other sanctions as may be defined under the School's Rules and Regulations.

**6.4.** All PA cases will also be automatically reported to the Zone Directorate/PSSA.

**6.5.** All PA cases concerning students in their last year of schooling will be systematically reported in their Leaving Certificate.

## **7. Absence Procedures**

The following are procedures to be followed in cases of absence. Schools shall make these procedures part of their Rules and Regulations and ensure strict compliance:

**7.1.** In case a student will not be able to attend school, the Responsible Party should on the first day of absence inform the school by phone or by way of a message.

**7.2.** A Responsible Party shall on the first day of resumption after an absence or period of absence, submit to the school a written note providing the reason(s) for the absence(s).

**7.3.** A medical certificate should be submitted for any absence in excess of THREE consecutive days.

## **8. Leave of absence**

**8.1.** Leave of absence may be granted to students for a prolonged period in given exceptional circumstances such as for travelling abroad.

**8.2.** To this effect, Responsible Parties of students of State Secondary Schools shall make an application in writing at least one month in advance to the Director of Zone through the Head of School. The existing policy regarding grant of leave of absence shall apply in such cases.

**8.3.** Responsible Parties of students of Private Secondary Schools shall address their request to the Rector/Manager of their school.

**8.4.** Parents are reminded that they should, as far as possible, avoid taking their children away during term time and that there will be no automatic entitlement to time off in school term time.

## 9. Limits to absences

**9.1.** Absences for personal reasons shall be authorised up to a maximum of 5 days in any academic year. Absences for personal reasons in excess of five days will be reckoned as being unauthorized.

**9.2.** The total number of authorised absences, including the absences for personal reasons, shall be limited to a maximum of 15 days in any academic year, excluding

- Approved absences where leave has been granted as per section 8 above.
- Periods of prolonged illness where medical leave has been recommended by a medical practitioner

## 10. Responsibilities

Strong commitment is required on the part of all stakeholders to achieve the highest possible level of student attendance.

### 10.1. Parents

- In accordance with Section 37 (3) of the Education Act, reproduced hereunder, ensuring regular attendance at school is a legal responsibility and condoning absence on the part of parents without a good reason creates an offence in law that may result in legal action.

*“Any responsible party of a child under age of 16 who, without reasonable cause, refuses or neglects to cause the child to attend school regularly in accordance with subsection (1) or (2) shall commit an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding 10,000 rupees and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years.”*

- Parents are therefore responsible for ensuring that their wards attend school regularly, punctually, properly dressed and in a fit condition to learn.
- They are also required to
  - Collaborate with the school to ensure that the attendance rate is maintained at the highest level.

- Comply strictly with the school's procedures as laid down in the school's Rules and Regulations.
- Monitor closely the attendance of their wards and, if necessary, contact the school for information.
- In case of a child being reluctant to attend school, parents should avoid covering up their absence or to give in to pressure. They are advised to contact the school and seek the required support.
- The PTA, as a major stakeholder, should endeavour to help the school in improving attendance rates.

### **10.2. Students**

- Students are responsible for making sure their own attendance is maintained at the highest level.
- Students who experience attendance difficulties should seek advice from their Form Teacher.
- Student Councils have an important role in the school's endeavour towards improving attendance.

### **10.3. School Staff**

- To encourage good attendance and punctuality through personal example
- To respond firmly and consistently to absenteeism

#### **Educators are expected to**

- Ensure that the syllabus is staggered over the whole year and that classroom activities are meaningful to the students so as to suit their needs
- Adopt an inclusive and attractive pedagogy with appropriate teaching strategies that cater for students of all abilities and sustain their interest in their studies
- Develop in students positive attitudes towards school and inculcate in them values of regularity and punctuality as well as the ambition to succeed through hard work
- Be supportive towards students and ensure a violence-free classroom atmosphere
- Collaborate fully with the school administration in the control and monitoring of students' attendance

#### **10.4. School Management**

The responsibility rests upon the Management of the School to

- Elaborate, after consultation with the staff, students and parents, an attendance policy specific for the school and based on the National Policy
- Introduce a reward system as part of the school's attendance policy
- Ensure firm and consistent response to absenteeism
- Investigate promptly all cases of prolonged and persistent absences
- Instil a culture of regularity and punctuality among students all throughout the year and across all classes
- Ensure effective mechanisms for control, monitoring and follow-up of absences
- Plan, implement and monitor strategies aimed at improving students' attendance
- Keep records of students' daily attendance and provide reports to parents and to the Zone/PSSA as required
- Monitor teaching and learning to ensure that needs and interests of learners are met

#### **10.5. Ministry**

The Ministry has responsibility for

- The legal and policy framework
- Sustaining collaborative partnerships and networking with relevant stakeholders to support its strategy
- Co-ordination and strategic management of teams and services to provide effective support to schools, staff, parents and students
- Capacity building of teams and services so as to achieve high quality, responsive support
- Facilitating follow-up of chronic absences cases

### **11. Monitoring**

Absences have to be monitored at individual, class and school levels and the management should set absenteeism rates as key indicators. This would require regular collection and analysis of attendance data that would help to inform decisions of the management.

Attendance rates of schools also constitute important statistics for the Ministry in view of policy orientations and determining additional support that need to be provided to the schools.