

Student Attendance Policy

Rationale

All children of school age must be enrolled at a registered school and attend school at all times when the school is open for instruction or seek enrolment for other approved tuition. Regular school attendance enables students to maximise their full potential and to actively participate and engage in their learning. School participation is important as it maximises life opportunities for children and young people by providing them with education and support networks. School helps people to develop important skills, knowledge and values, which set them up for further learning and participation in their community.

The Student Attendance Policy:

- Promotes partnerships with parents to ensure the regular attendance of students
- Ensures that school staff are provided with information on attendance requirements and their obligation to monitor and promote regular attendance at school
- Provides processes to actively monitor and support full student attendance.

1. Guidelines

- 1.1 In accordance with the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, schooling is compulsory for children and young people from 6-17 years unless an exemption has been granted
- 1.2 Parents/guardians must enrol a child of compulsory school age at a registered school and ensure the child attends school at all times when the school is open for instruction
- 1.3 Ensuring that students attend school each day is the shared expectation of all parents/carers and the school
- 1.4 Students are expected to attend normal school hours every day of each term
- 1.5 A student is considered to be in attendance at school when involved in an off-site curriculum program or other activity organised by the school (e.g. an excursion or camp) or where the student is engaged in a re-engagement program or at another school part time to make up full time attendance
- 1.6 The school must maintain an attendance records and develop processes to support and maintain attendance
- 1.7 Students who are regularly absent from school are at risk of missing out on fundamental aspects of their education and social development
- 1.8 A Principal or Regional Director (depending upon the circumstances) may authorise an exemption and provide written approval for student attendance or attendance and enrolment to be exempt or reduced to less than full time.

2. Implementation

Strategies to Improve a Student's attendance may include where appropriate:

2.1 Addressing individual student needs

- Early identification of risk factors
- Working in partnership with the significant adults in the students' lives
- Working in partnership with community agencies and services
- Attendance improvement strategies and interventions consistent with other supports and frameworks in place for the student and family

2.2 Engaging with the family

- Conducting effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications
- Providing volunteer opportunities to enable parents and students to contribute
- Involving families with homework and other curriculum related activities
- Involving families as participants in decision making
- Coordinating resources and services from the community for families, students and the school
- Providing opportunities where possible to enhance parenting knowledge and skills

2.3 Meetings with parents:

- Convening a meeting when the student's attendance is of concern to the school
- Development of improvement strategies to support the student and examining why non-attendance continues to be a problem
- Focusing on positive and proactive solutions
- Explaining the possible consequences of repeated non-attendance, including referral to a School Attendance Officer

2.4 Attendance Student Support Group:

- Convened when student attendance issues are identified and it becomes apparent that a student may require ongoing intensive support in order to remain engaged in school
- Existing Student Support Groups (for an individual student) should also be used for attendance issues
- Attended by the parent of the student, a parent' advocate (if required), a teacher, the Principal or their nominee (to act as chairperson), the student (where appropriate), relevant school based welfare staff (where appropriate)
- Appropriate professionals from other agencies may also be invited to attend with the permission of the parent

2.5 Attendance Improvement Plan and Return to School Plan

- To assist in the re-engagement of students with attendance issues and Attendance Improvement Plan **can** be introduced
- To assist in the reintegration of a student after a prolonged absence a Return to School Plan **can** be implemented
- Both plans should be developed with the student, parent and any support workers

2.6 Individual Education Plan -

An Individual Education Plan articulates a student's educational, social and behavioural needs and how the school and other support agencies will address these. The IEP should include:

- Long and short term goals

- Have high expectations of the student's capacity for educational achievement
- Be developed in consultation with the student, the school and members of the Student Support Group
- Ensure that the goals are measurable, achievable, supported and time-limited
- Contain a record of important decisions, actions, student behaviour and progress

2.7 Student Absence Learning Plan

Student Absence Learning Plans should be implemented to support the education of students who are absent from school for an extended period. They should be developed collaboratively by teachers, students and their parents. A Student Absence Learning Plan must be developed for students:

- Who are planning extended absences from school (e.g. a family holiday)
- Suspended for more than three days
- Subject to an expulsion appeal process

2.8 Referral to school or community based wellbeing professional where appropriate may include

- Specialist support available in the school or provided by the school sector including: Student Support Services, Koorie Education Support Officers and Primary Welfare Officers
- External Community Service Organisations where appropriate
- Assistance from the Department's regional offices

NOTE: Responding to the wellbeing needs of individual students is not the responsibility of schools alone. Other Government and community-based agencies can provide specialist support to children and families around a range of individual and family needs. Schools may work directly with local agencies to establish arrangements for referral and collaboration.

2.9 Re-engagement programs

Re-engagement programs operate outside mainstream school setting and provide tailored education and support for children and young people who are disengaged, or have been identified as at risk of disengaging from mainstream school. Re-engagement programs are only an option when:

- School-based strategies to improve a student's engagement in a mainstream school setting have not been successful
- A child or young person is not enrolled in a school and faces significant barriers to returning to a mainstream school environment

2.10 Reporting concerns: Referral to Child FIRST or report to Child Protection

Prolonged absence from school, patterns of absence from school, or the level of parental support for a child's attendance at school may raise concerns about cumulative harm to the child, or concerns that the child and their family need the assistance of family services.

In addressing and following up school attendance issues the school may need to consider whether they should report a concern to Child Protection or make a referral to Child FIRST.

2.10 Referral to a School Attendance Officer

- Should the school feel that strategies for addressing a student's unsatisfactory attendance has been exhausted further action may include a referral to a School Attendance Officer who may issue a School Attendance Notice

- The Principal will follow DET guidelines for making such a referral
- The Process for issuing the School Attendance Notices is set out by the provisions in the Education and Training Reform Act 2006

2.11 Whole-school strategies

- Articulate high expectations to all members of the school community
- Adopt consistent, rigorous procedures to monitor and record student absence
- Follow up student absences promptly and consistently
- Implement data driven attendance improvement strategies
- Create safe, supportive learning environments where all students experience success through active participation and engagement in purposeful learning
- Provide early identification of, and supportive intervention for students at risk of non-attendance
- Link with local community groups and agencies to maximize program and individual support
- Access specialist support for individual students with identified behavior health, or social issues
- Provide a staged response to student absence and support students return to school
- Whole school modeling of punctuality
- Regular discussions on student attendance in staff meetings
- Implementation of effective transition programs including transitions within the school
- Individual Student Education Plans (when appropriate) including attendance and punctuality and attendance goals
- Structures and activities encouraging parents/carers' involvement in the life of the school
- Collaboration with other schools, community groups and agencies

2.12 Monitoring Attendance

2.12.1 The school must record student attendance twice per day in order to:

- Meet legislative requirements
- Discharge the school's Duty of Care for all students
- Assist calculation of the schools funding
- Enable School Councils to report on attendance annually
- The school will use eCASES21 (or other DET approved software) to record student attendance
- The school will advise parents/carers promptly of unexplained absences
- For international students the school will monitor student attendance and implement a documented intervention strategy where attendance is at risk of failing to meet the minimum Student Visa requirement.

2.12.2 Parents/guardians are required to provide an explanation for their child's absence from school and the school must record in writing the reason (if any) given by the parent/carer

2.12.3 For absences where there **is no exemption** (from school) in place, the parent/guardian should provide an explanation on each occasion. The principal will determine if the excuse provided for an absence is reasonable for the purposes of the parent meeting their responsibilities under the Education

and Training Reform Act 2006. A Principal should use their discretion in making this decision

2.12.4 **The Principal or their nominee** must record:

- Student attendance twice per day in primary schools for every student enrolled at the school
- The excuse given for an absence and whether this is reasonable in accordance with the Education and Training Reform Act 2006
- An absence as unexplained if no excuse has been given and change the attendance record once an excuse is provided or established
- A student is present for a half day when the student has attended at least two hours of instruction.

2.12.5 **Attendance follow up**

- The school must advise parents/carers promptly of any unexplained absences
- The school should keep records of all attempts to contact parents/carers and any information obtained
- The school will take care to notify the parent who is responsible for ensuring the child's attendance on that particular day
- If contact cannot be made with the parent/carer the school should attempt to make contact with any emergency contact/s nominated on the student's emergency file
- If **within three days** of the initial absence, the parents/carers fail to provide an explanation, or the explanation is deemed unsatisfactory, the school must attempt to make contact with the parents/carers (e.g. by telephone, letter or email) requesting a satisfactory explanation
- If following contact via phone, letter or email, the parents/carers' explanation is deemed satisfactory the accurate cause of absence must be recorded and entered into eCASES21
- If **within 10 days** of the initial absence there has been no satisfactory explanation provided, the absence should be recorded as an unexplained absence in CASES21 and must also be noted in the student's file
- Attendance meetings with parents/carers should be convened following initial contact with the parents/carers, when a student's attendance pattern is of concern to the school

2.12.6 **No reasonable excuse provided**

For all absences where the Principal has determined that a parent has not provided a reasonable excuse, the school must notify the parent in writing that the absences have been recorded as such. Principals should take care to ensure that, wherever possible, this letter or email is addressed to the parent who has been deemed responsible for the child's absence on the relevant day(s).

If the Principal decides that no reasonable excuse has been provided for an absence, the absence must be recorded as such and the parent must be informed that this means:

- They may not have met their obligations under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006.
- An accumulation of these absences could lead to a School Attendance Notice from a School Attendance Officer Failure to comply with the School Attendance Notice may result in the issue of an Infringement Notice.

2.12.7 Exemptions from attendance:

Students are expected to attend normal school hours every day of each term. The Principal or Regional Director (depending upon the circumstances) may authorise an exemption and provide written approval for student attendance to be exempt or reduced to less than full time with reference to DET guidelines.

2.12.8 Home Schooling:

Home schooling in Victoria is a legally recognised alternative to attending a registered school. Parents who wish to home school their child must satisfy the requirements of the Victorian Regulation and Qualifications Authority

2.12.9 Year Level Movement:

The school will regularly promote students to the next year level with their peer group. The school will use professional expertise and judgment in relation to year level movement.

- Students will only be retained in exceptional circumstances where a school considers it is required for the long-term benefit of the student (e.g. considering their social, welfare and academic needs)
- The school will ensure that parents/guardians are fully advised of the options that the school considers to best meet individual student needs
- Students will not be retained without the consent of parents/guardians.

3. Resources

3.1 The School Attendance Policy is underpinned by:

- a Behaviour Management Policy
- b Duty of Care Policy
- c Mandatory Reporting Policy
- d Student Engagement and Wellbeing Policy
- e Student Welfare Policy

4. Evaluation

4.1 The Education Sub Committee and Weeden Heights staff will review the effectiveness of the school's School Attendance Policy on a cyclical basis in accordance with DET guidelines and priorities.