

Attendance Policy

Rationale

The Department of Education and Training requires that children of school age (six-seventeen years) are required to be in full-time attendance at a government or registered non-government school unless they are receiving approved home tuition, correspondence education, or have been granted an exemption by the Regional Director.

All students in government schools must attend on a full-time basis unless absent with the authority of the school. The policy acknowledges that attendance depends on active cooperation between the school, parents/caregivers and the student. The policy recognises that consistent student attendance is vital to maximising educational opportunity and that regular follow-up by the school and active interest in children's attendance assists to reduce non-attendance dramatically.

Aim

- To provide a school environment that promotes and actively encourages regular school attendance.
- To maximise student learning opportunities and performance by ensuring that children required to attend school do so regularly, and without unnecessary absences.
- That regular lateness is minimised as the cumulative effect of this has a major impact on learning and socialisation.

Implementation

Education is a sequential process. Absences often mean students miss important stages in the development of topics, causing them to find 'catching up' difficult. Absenteeism contributes significantly to student failure at school.

- All enrolled students are required to attend school unless reasonable and valid grounds exist for them to be absent.
- Parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children attend school everyday, and are only absent if ill or if absolutely necessary. Illness is reasonable grounds for an absence - shopping excursions or birthday parties are not.
- Parents have a further responsibility to provide a written note or return a completed absence form to the school explaining why an absence has occurred.
- The principal has a responsibility to ensure that attendance records are maintained and monitored at school.
- All student absences are recorded in both the morning and the afternoon by teachers, are aggregated on our database and communicated to the Department of Education.
 - The Department of Education and enrolment auditors may seek student attendance records.
 - The principal has a further responsibility to ensure that unexplained absences are investigated, and that high levels of absenteeism are adequately explained.
 - Students who have attendance concerns, will be flagged on Sentral and followed up by the school's leadership.

- The school will contact parents of students with high levels of unexplained or unapproved absences, with the view to developing and implementing strategies to minimise absences.
- Ongoing unexplained absences, or lack of cooperation regarding student attendance will result in a formal attendance conference being organised. Unresolved attendance issues will be referred to the Student Wellbeing Branch and Attendance Officers of DET. Further referral may be made to Child First and/or the Department of Human Services.
- Student attendance and absence figures will appear on student half year and end of year reports.
- Aggregated student attendance data is reported to the DET and the wider community each year as part of the annual report.

Research has indicated that there are given factors that facilitate effective student attendance and those that can lead to non-attendance.

Factors affecting student attendance

Factors that facilitate effective student attendance are:

- A supportive school environment.
- A curriculum that provides for all students.
- A stimulating curriculum and advance knowledge of timetabled activities.
- Structures and approaches that facilitate the success of all students.
- Effective record keeping.
- Prompt follow up of absences.
- Close liaison with parents/caregivers.
- Educating parents and caregivers of the importance of regular attendance.
- Guidance and support for those with attendance problems.
- A cooperative community/inter-agency approach to this area.

A range of factors associated with a student's personal and family experience can lead to non-attendance. These factors include:

- Transience and mobility.
- Lack of parent interest, support and recognition of the value of education.
- Low socio-economic status.
- Culture and cultural expectations.
- Unemployment.
- Family dysfunction.
- Substance abuse.
- Abuse of/by family members.
- Learning difficulties and underachievement, particularly illiteracy.
- Boredom and lack of motivation for learning.
- Disadvantage.
- Isolation and the ability to make friends.
- Low self-esteem and inappropriate anger responses.
- Bullying.

Responsibilities

While the principal has the overall responsibility for student attendance, particular groups have roles in monitoring student attendance and welfare in a cooperative manner.

Parents/guardians

Parents/caregivers must:

- Understand that it is their obligation to send their children to school.
- Notify the school of the reason their child is absent. If possible they should notify the school in advance of the absence.
- Notifications can be made by a written note sent to the classroom teacher, speaking with the classroom teacher, by leaving a voicemail message, speaking with the office staff or sending a message via Sentral's parent portal.
- Assist their child/ren to develop the habit of being at school each day by ensuring that students arrive on time and do not allow students to have absences for inappropriate reasons, e.g. shopping and birthdays are not reasons for absences.
- Students are not permitted to leave the school before 3.30 pm unless accompanied by a parent or delegate of the parent. The adult is to go the school office and have their child signed out on Sentral. A reason for the early departure must be provided. An early departure slip will be issued that parents need to pass onto the class teacher when collecting their child. Parents should make every effort to make appointments out of school hours so as to make minimal disruption to the schooling of their child.
- Be aware of the school's processes of monitoring student attendance.
- Be communicated to promptly and in a supportive manner if there is an issue with the attendance of their child.
- Be given suitable support, counselling, flexible options and assistance when solving the problem of frequent absences.

The school

The school will support the Best Start initiative of 'It's not Ok to be away, It's more cool to be at school'. This will include incentive awards for regular attendance promoted at assembly and via the school newsletter. The school will promote attendance at least once each term via the school newsletter and an attendance flyer will be sent home through the year. Incentives may include semester breakfasts for excellent attendance, certificates and awards.

Classroom Teachers

Classroom teachers need to:

- Maintain a record of daily student attendance (recording half days). Electronic rolls should be marked on Sentral by 9.05 am and 2.35 pm. Children not present at the time of marking should be recorded as absent – this may be altered to L (late) if the student arrives at school after the roll has been marked.
- Teachers are to make amendments to the roll throughout the week as notes arrive.
- Teachers have a Student Absence Note proforma to give to students who have not supplied a note. Teachers are to fill in student details and date/s of absence and send home with the child for a parent/guardian to sign and return.
- Notes arriving on a Monday for an absence in the previous week should be sent to the office (in the office pencil case) after the classroom teacher has amended the absence reason on Sentral.
- Verbal reporting of absences must be recorded by the teacher on Sentral
- Where there is any doubt about the whereabouts of a student, notify the leadership immediately.
- Send all absence notes to the office.
- Promote regular attendance in the classroom. This may include but is not limited to awards, prizes, daily sign-in charts, class rewards for whole class attendance, raffle tickets in class for returning absence notes.

- Follow up each child's absence or late arrival (an absence) with the parents and strongly encourage them to write a note explaining the absence. Staff may speak to parents at school or telephone them.
- If a student will be absent for a long period of time (eg. family holiday), ask the parents/caregivers to write a note indicating the dates they will be away and the date the child will return to school. This is critical at census time, as the school needs written evidence that a student will be attending the school in the future.
- If a child is absent and no explanation has been received through the office, teachers are required to contact the parents for a reason and to enquire as to the child's health. The teacher will endeavour to make contact with a student's parents after two consecutive days of absence.
- When a student's attendance is a concern and/or they have been absent or late for three consecutive days or more without explanation, report this to the school's leadership so it can be followed up.
- Promote the "Every Day Counts" message through daily classroom routines.
- Whilst marking the roll on Friday afternoon, emphasise student attendance and congratulate students who have had full attendance for the week.

Administrative Staff

- Record student absence amendments that come through the office on Sentral.
- Leadership or Administration will send SMS or email notifications to parents of absent students each school day.
- Archive absence notes and CASES 21 reports.
- Absence entries and attendance database may be destroyed after 6 years. Absence notes are temporary documents and may be destroyed after one year.
- Twice a term a CASES 21 computer generated letter will be sent to the parents of students who have been absent from school without explanation. This letter requests a reason for their child's absence from school and should be returned to school with explanations.
- Teachers are to discuss attendance concerns with the school's leadership.
- Students that are flagged as attendance concerns will be followed up daily by the school's leadership.
- Prepare attendance awards for distribution at assembly. Awards will be generated for:
 - Whole class- awarded to the class with the highest percentage of attendance for the previous fortnight,
 - Individual – awarded to those with 100% attendance for the semester.

Other Agencies

- Educational psychologists, social workers and consultants provide an important source of support and assistance and can help develop student welfare and curriculum strategies to enhance student attendance.
- The Regional Office, Senior Education Officers and the Student Wellbeing and Engagement Support Branch can assist with student attendance by documenting good practice and instigating meetings to share strategies in relation to school attendance by providing support to schools that feel they have exhausted all their strategies in relation to a particular case.
- Agencies such as the Office of Youth Affairs, Department of Justice, Child First, Victoria Police and the Department of Human Services have roles in investigating and maintaining student welfare that can impact on student attendance.

Processes for responding to unsatisfactorily explained student absences:

See Appendix 1

Processes for Responding to the absence of International Students:

See Appendix 2

Exemptions

There are exemptions to student attendance, which are outlined in detail in the Department of Education and Training's publication Student Attendance Guidelines 1997.

Evaluation:

This policy will be reviewed every 3-4 years as part of the school's regular review cycle to ensure it is updated inline with DET changes and guidelines.

Review

This policy was reviewed in June 2020 and will be due for review in June 2024.

Appendix 1

Processes for responding to unsatisfactorily explained student absences

The following steps can be seen as progressive and need to continue only where the preceding action has not resolved the attendance problem.

1. *Contact with the parents/guardians.* This could occur either by letter, telephone or an informal personal contact.
2. *Arranging an initial meeting.* This meeting may need to be documented as a means of indicating its importance. The purpose of the meeting is to:
 - Ensure that the parents/guardians are aware of the absence and fully appreciate its implication.
 - Examine the reasons for non-attendance.
 - Identify whether further assistance will be needed to re-establish attendance.The outcome of the meeting should lead to informal arrangements to improve the student's attendance.
3. *Creating a school plan to support attendance.* If the initial meeting cannot solve the attendance problem, a formal meeting with the principal, class teacher and parents should be arranged. The school may also seek support from other agencies. The plan should establish ongoing support for the student with cooperation from the parents/guardians and be documented. The plan could involve actions such as:
 - Modification of the curriculum.
 - Increased supervision of the student.
 - Personal support and counselling.
 - Referral to other support agencies.
4. *The attendance conference.* This should be attended by the school's leadership, parents/guardians, the student (if appropriate), parent advocate (if requested by the parent), appropriate staff member and outside consultant (as required). Although the conference has no disciplinary connotation it aims to:
 - Review strategies initiated to support the attendance of the student.
 - Examine why resolution for the non-attendance has not been possible.
 - Make recommendations to the school and parents/guardian on further action.

If absenteeism continues, the principal will officially inform the Student Wellbeing and Engagement Branch for referral to Attendance Officers of the ongoing concerns.

Appendix 2

Processes for Responding to the absence of International Students

Attendance Checklist
Date: Student ID: Student Name: School Name:
To assist the student to meet attendance requirements, the school undertook the following actions:
Stage 1 (If attendance falls to 90 per cent) <input type="checkbox"/> Student's attendance was monitored on a regular basis <input type="checkbox"/> Student reminded about the importance of maintaining visa conditions <input type="checkbox"/> Student counselling sessions organised to address issues affecting attendance <input type="checkbox"/> Parents advised of attendance issues in writing <input type="checkbox"/> Homestay hosts advised of attendance issues
Stage 2 (If attendance falls to 85-90 per cent): <input type="checkbox"/> Student placed on a School Contract <input type="checkbox"/> Intervention strategies implemented (i.e. after school help, counselling, sign in register etc.) which include: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> Parents advised of attendance issues in writing and a translated copy of the School Contract and intervention strategy sent to them <input type="checkbox"/> School Principal/Assistant Principal advised of attendance issues <input type="checkbox"/>
Stage 3 (If attendance falls to 80-85 per cent) <input type="checkbox"/> Student placed on a Final School Contract <input type="checkbox"/> Further student counselling sessions organised to address issues affecting attendance and intervention strategies implemented which include: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> Parents advised of continued attendance issues in writing and a translated copy of the final School Contract and intervention strategies sent to them
Stage 4 (If attendance falls below 80 per cent - DIBP visa requirements breached) School advises IED and attached the following evidence:

- ☐ Attendance record per Term (International Student Attendance Summary Report Template)
- ☐ Evidence of Academic Performance (if required)
 - Student Semester Reports
 - Interim Reports
 - Teacher statements
- ☐ Copies of letter(s) sent to parents (translated if necessary) notifying of impending student non-compliance
- ☐ Summary of intervention strategies implemented
- ☐ International Student Welfare and Compliance Record template
- ☐ Copies of school contracts
- ☐ Other _____

I _____ the Principal of _____ am satisfied that the student was afforded every opportunity to improve their attendance percentage above the minimum requirement. Thus having failed to respond to our compliance procedures, the student should now be reported to DIBP for visa non-compliance and an Intention to Report letter should now be issued (add when this form is sent to IED).

Principal's Signature: _____ Date: _____