



## Attendance Policy 2021

### Purpose

In accordance with the [Education Training and Reform Act 2006 \(Vic.\)](#) (the Act) and the [Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 \(Vic.\)](#), school attendance is compulsory for children and young people aged from 6 to 17 years unless an exemption from attendance has been granted (refer to **Appendix 1: Guidelines** for absence and [Exemption from School Attendance or Enrolment](#), Department of Education and Training (DET), 2021).

Whilst ensuring student attendance at school is a legal obligation of parents/guardians, supporting students to attend school each day is the shared responsibility of all parents, students, the school and the wider community.

School attendance is important as it maximises life opportunities for children and young people by providing them with education and support networks. Positive engagement with schooling enhances academic and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people ([eXcel: Wellbeing for learning in Catholic school communities](#)). Attending school every school day for the whole day enables students to participate in the school's educational program as well as develop their social skills. Regular attendance enables the school to:

- plan an organised educational program that is delivered in a consistent way and has continuity
- facilitate shared student learning experiences that support the educational program
- monitor student progress and adjust the educational program to meet student needs. All schools must maintain attendance records, identify and follow up unexplained absences and develop procedures to support and maintain student attendance.

### Scope

Details and procedure within this policy are applicable to schools and students enrolled in a Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic School (MACS).

All schools must have documented procedures for monitoring school attendance (**see Appendix 1**).

Principals should contact the Regional General Manager for assistance in addressing complex attendance and exemption matters.

### Definitions

#### Attendance

A student is considered to be in attendance at school when onsite and/or involved in an offsite curriculum program or other activity organised by the school (for example an excursion or camp).

A student is also considered to be in attendance when the student is engaged in a re-engagement program or another school part time to make up full time attendance and the schools or settings have agreed the time fractions, allocation of Student Resource Package (or other funding) and the educational plan for the student (see **Appendix 2: Guidelines for absence**).

## **Parent/guardian**

The term 'Parent/guardian' includes 'a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for the child including parental responsibility under the *Family Law Act 1975 (Cwlth)* and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides'.

## **Unexplained or unapproved absences**

A principal can approve or not approve any absence, based on the requirements of the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)*, an individual school policy or on a case-by-case basis.

The Act provides some examples of what a reasonable excuse is for the purposes of explaining a school absence and includes, amongst other considerations:

- o Illnesses and accidents
- o Unforeseen and unexplained circumstances
- o If the absence was a result of complying with another law
- o The child is receiving distance education through a registered school
- o The child is undertaking approved education, training and/or employment
- o The child has been suspended or negotiated transfer/expelled
- o The child is attending or observing a religious event or obligation.

## **Unexplained Absence**

A principal will record an absence as 'unexplained' if no explanation about the absence is given to the school by the parent or carer of the student.

If the parent/guardian does not contact the school to provide an explanation on the day of the student's absence, the school must attempt to contact the parent or legal guardian either by phone or in writing and seek a clarification for the absence.

If no contact can be made with the parent or other carers of the child within 10 days, the absence will be recorded as an unexplained absence and a note will be made in the child's file. A parent or legal guardian can contact the principal at any time after the recorded absence to provide an explanation.

## **Unapproved Absence**

In general, a principal may record an absence as 'unapproved' when no reasonable explanation has been given for the student's absence. If the reason given for a student absence is not approved by the principal then the school will notify the parent or legal guardian in writing.

## **Exemption**

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)* allows exemptions from school attendance and enrolment to be granted in certain circumstances, where the student is a child who turns 6 (compulsory school age) while attending kindergarten

An exemption from school attendance and enrolment may also be granted where leaving school is in the best interests of the student.

All applications for exemptions are considered on a case by case basis, with the student's best interests as the guiding principle for decision-making. In making a decision, the potential benefits or negative consequences of granting the exemption to the student's educational progress, wellbeing and

development are also considered. **A student must continue attending school until an exemption is granted.**

Note: No exemption is required if a student is not of compulsory school age (6 to 17 years of age).

**Exemptions, including written approval for student attendance and enrolment to be exempt or reduced to less than full time, can only be authorised by the Regional General Manager in conjunction with the school principal.**

- refer to the Department of Education and Training (DET) [Exemption from school attendance and enrolment](#) guidance for further information.

### **School Attendance Officers**

In the context of attendance, DET School Attendance Officers are empowered through the Act to issue School Attendance Notices, School Enrolment Notices and Infringement Notices.

- Refer to DET [infringement notices](#) guidance for further information.

## Principles and Procedures

### Responsibilities for school attendance

#### Parent/guardian

Parents/guardians must enrol a child of compulsory school age at a registered school and ensure the child attends at all times when the school is open for instruction, unless exemption from attendance has been granted. For absences where there is no exemption in place, the parent/guardian must promptly provide an explanation on each occasion to the school.

#### Students

Students are expected to attend the school in which they are enrolled during normal school hours every day of term, unless there is an approved exemption from school attendance for the student, or the student is registered for home schooling or has partial enrolment.

#### Principal

The principal must ensure:

- daily attendance of each student enrolled at the school is recorded at least twice a day in primary schools
- any absences of a student from school are identified
- reasons for each student's absence are provided and recorded in writing
- explanations for absences that are provided, are a reasonable excuse for the purposes of their responsibilities under the Act
- follow up any unexplained absences of a student by **contacting the parent/guardian of the student as soon as practicable on the same day**
- parents/guardians are notified promptly regarding a student's unsatisfactory school attendance. If, upon being notified of their child's absence or contacted to seek an explanation, a parent reports that the child was not living with them on that day, the school should ensure they notify another parent who was responsible for ensuring the child attended school on the relevant day/s
- if contact cannot be made with the parent, contact should be made with the emergency contact/s nominated on the student's file held by the school

- o information regarding a student's unsatisfactory attendance at school or classes is recorded on their student file
- parents/guardians are informed of their responsibilities around attendance and initiatives aimed at promoting parental awareness of the importance of children attending school every day are implemented
- attendance improvement strategies, interventions and levels of adjustment are implemented where the absence is having a significant impact on a student's educational achievement and development, including an Attendance Student Support Group, Personalised Learning Plan, Student Absence Learning Plan and Return to School Plan
- strategies for supporting attendance of students in out-of-home care, experiencing homelessness, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) families, overseas students, students with disabilities, students with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and newly arrived families are implemented
- **MACS is to be advised prior** to a referral to a DET School Attendance Officer when a student has been absent from school on at least five full days in the previous 12 months without a reasonable excuse for absence
  - refer to the '**Everyday Counts**' flowchart on the CEVN webpage: <https://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au/Melb/Student-Support/Attendance>)
- referral processes are implemented to Child FIRST or Child Protection, MACS and the School Attendance Officer where required.
  - refer to Child Protection and Child Safe Standards (PROTECT)

## List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Procedures for monitoring school attendance

Appendix 2: Guidelines for absences

## References

- Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2021. [School attendance guidelines](#)
- Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2020. [Exemption from School Attendance or Enrolment](#)
- Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2020. [Seven attendance improvement strategies](#)
- [Education and Training Reform Act 2006 \(Vic.\)](#)
- [Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 \(Vic.\)](#)

## Resources

Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2021. Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines

'Everyday Counts' on the CEVN webpage:

<https://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au/Melb/Student-Support/Attendance>

## Related MACS policies

- Enrolment Policy
- Student Behaviour Policy and related CECV Positive Behaviour Guidelines
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Duty of Care Policy

## Appendix 1: Procedures for monitoring school attendance

1. Notification of an absence can be made by using the ABSENCES function on the school website or by using Updat-ed app.
2. Parents, guardians and/or carers are required to notify the school of the reason for any absence from school on the day of absence **before the commencement of the school day** .
3. Where the reason for absence is known, it is recorded by the office staff and the teachers are notified of the absence and reason for this.
4. Attendance at the school is checked by the supervising teacher twice daily on the nForma interface or, if unavailable, by a paper roll/class list. This checking is completed at 8.55 am and at 2.20 pm. If a CRT is responsible for the checking of attendance they will use a paper roll at the above times and return it to the office for staff to update the class records.
5. The attendance reports are accessed by the Principal to follow up students who are absent without explanation.
6. If a student is absent without explanation, a text message prompting parents to advise the office is sent out. This message is automatically generated once the roll is marked. If there is no response received that morning a subsequent phone call will be made to seek an explanation. In the event that contact is still unable to be made the school will attempt to communicate with emergency contact/s nominated on the student's file. **Where there is no response and there are concerns for the safety and welfare of the child, contact may be made with Victoria Police (000).**
7. Information about the number of days of absence are recorded and placed into student files by the administration staff. This information is also recorded on student reports at both mid year and end of year.
8. Where the rate of absenteeism is of concern, the matter will be referred to the Intervention Committee for discussion. Teachers can also raise concern with the Student Wellbeing leader if they notice concerning absence patterns. After either referral from the Intervention Committee or a homegroup teacher, the Student Wellbeing Leader will follow up with the parents/guardians by organising a meeting to identify the issues related to the non-attendance and to formulate improvement strategies.
9. Parents are required to provide up-to-date contact details and notify the school of any changes to contact details or address as they occur.
10. The attendance reports are accessed by the Principal to follow up students who are absent without explanation.

### Procedure for late arrival at school

If a child arrives at school after 8.45 am, office staff will mark their attendance record as LATE. It is the parent/guardian's responsibility to walk the child/ren into the office area, sign in using the ipad at the kiosk in the foyer, collect the printed sign in slip, then direct their child/ren to their learning space.

### Procedure for leaving school before the normal departure time

If a child goes home early, the office staff will alter the Afternoon Roll to state the reason for the absence.

## **Procedures for communicating about attendance expectations to parents/guardians**

At St Mary of the Cross Catholic Primary School the families of students are informed of the school's expectations and procedures for attendance at regular times. This includes at the time of enrolment, at the beginning of the school year in the newsletter and then in regular newsletter updates. The school will also send personal letters to parents and make calls to check in with families if the attendance of their child is considered an issue.

## **Attendance record keeping**

St Mary of the Cross Catholic Primary School keeps daily records about the attendance of the students at the school. This is done through the online roll process. The Principal checks these records each week and notes those students who have been absent from the school without reason.

## **Attendance improvement strategies**

Where attendance concerns are identified the school will meet with the parent/guardian to formulate improvement strategies.

- o attendance improvement strategies, interventions and levels of adjustment are implemented where the absence is having a significant impact on a student's educational achievement and development.
- o an Attendance Support Group, Personalised Learning Plan, Student Absence Learning Plan and Return to School Plan could be included.

The improvement strategies will be considered where:

- o there has been a significant number of parent approved health related issues;
- o the absence is having a significant impact on the student's educational attainment, achievement and development;
- o the student has been truanting (absent without parent consent);
- o the parent reports that a student refuses to attend school;
- o there has been no explanation for the student's absence;
- o the parent repeatedly fails to provide a reasonable excuse for their child's absence.

Improvement strategies will be implemented as an early intervention approach to identify any underlying issues affecting attendance and the support the school can offer to assist the student's ability to attend school.

At St Mary of the Cross Catholic Primary School it is acknowledged that managing issues of non-attendance could be difficult, particularly in circumstances where there are apparent stress factors within families. Therefore the school will endeavour to work with a family in a way that can build school-family relationships using open and effective communication. In analysing patterns of non-attendance and follow up with parents the school will therefore consider details of student and family circumstances. Contact with families will be made with the view to developing and implementing strategies that minimise absences and build positive family-school relationships.

Attendance meetings with parents and students will be convened when a student's attendance is of concern to the school. The purpose of the meeting will be to develop attendance improvement strategies to support the student and to examine why non-attendance continues to be a problem.

At the meeting, the principal and the Student Wellbeing Leader will focus on:

- establishing a shared understanding of accountability and strategies for improving attendance
- ensuring parents are aware of the absences and fully appreciate the educational implications for the students
- identify the reasons for the absences
- exploring any factors preventing attendance or participation
- requesting parents engage with alternative strategies to improve attendance
- identifying appropriate attendance improvement strategies
- documenting which improvement strategy has been selected, with clear discussion about the ways in which it will be monitored and when it will be reviewed
- explaining the possible consequences of repeated non-attendance including referral to the Wellbeing Team at the Regional Office.

Meetings with parents and students with attendance issues will be supportive rather than disciplinary, with the focus on positive and proactive solutions.

When exploring attendance concerns, behavioural, health or social issues such as anxiety, depression or bullying may be identified for an individual student. In those cases, The Intervention Committee will access specialist support available in the school or those provided by The Catholic Education Office.

## Appendix 2: Guidelines for absences

A student who is participating in one of the following activities must be recorded as not physically present at the school site but **will not be considered absent from school**:

### **School activity**

A student will not be considered absent when they are participating in an authorised activity for school purposes. The activity may be off school grounds. Activities may include students performing in the school choir, band or dance group, students participating in a youth parliament or council or a student undertaking community service.

### **Excursion**

A student will not be considered absent when they are participating in an excursion which occurs outside the school grounds and is conducted, organised and/or approved by the school. Excursions could include part-day, day or multi-day class visits to venues outside the school or school camps.

### **Natural Disaster**

A student will not be considered absent if they are unable to attend school due to an extreme weather event or other natural disaster. This code may be used whether or not the student is continuing with school work while absent from school, and may be used for full or part-day absences.

### **Sport**

A student will not be considered absent when they are representing their school, district, region, state or country at a sporting event approved by the school

**In the following circumstances 'absences' will be considered reasonable where an excuse has been given:**

### **Illness**

It is reasonable that a child may be absent from school when they are genuinely too ill to attend.

On any single day of absence due to illness, or within two days of the student's return to school, a parent should provide the school with an explanation for the absence, in line with the school's agreed processes for notification of student absence. This may take the form of a written explanation note containing the student's name, date/s of absences and reason for absence, a verbal explanation through either a phone call or visit to the school, or a medical certificate.

If a child who is prevented by illness from attending school for a period longer than 10 consecutive school days, the Regional General Manager (or delegate) has the power to grant an exemption from compliance with the requirements of compulsory schooling or compulsory participation.

### **Infectious or contagious disease**

It is a reasonable excuse for a child to be absent from school if the child is, or is a member of a class of persons, that is subject to a direction or order given about an infectious or contagious disease or condition.

### **Medical or dental treatments or procedures**

It is reasonable for a student to be absent to attend a medical or dental appointment. This should be documented through the provision of a written or verbal explanation from a parent.

## Sport

Principals should use their professional judgement to determine if it is reasonable for a student to be absent from school to participate in a sporting event where they are not representing their school, district, region, state or nation, taking into consideration the type of event and the organising sporting body.

**Suspension** a suspension is a reasonable excuse for absence and the following applies:

- if a student is **suspended for five days or less** the school's principal must take reasonable steps to ensure the student is given school work to complete during the suspension
- if a student is suspended for **more than five days**, the school principal must arrange for the student's access to an educational program that allows the student to continue with their educational program during the suspension
- if the student is **suspended with a recommendation for negotiated transfer or expulsion**, the school principal must arrange for the student's access to an educational program that allows the student to continue with their educational program during the suspension.

## Funeral

Attendance at a funeral or to attend to Sorry Business or Sorry meetings may be considered as a reasonable excuse for absence. Parents should be encouraged to ensure their child misses as little school as possible.

There may also be circumstances where a child is kept out of school due to grief of a close family member. In such circumstances, the school should work with families to encourage them to have the child attend school to maintain a sense of normalcy. These situations should be handled with respect and sensitivity and should be underpinned by the interests of the child.

## Legal

It is a reasonable excuse for a child to be absent from school where the child is required to attend court or fulfil other legal requirements.

## Holiday

Parents should be encouraged to plan holidays for students during gazetted school holiday periods and pupil free days. Principals should use their professional judgement in determining whether a holiday is a reasonable excuse for a student absence, taking into consideration family circumstances, distance to be travelled, length and frequency of holidays. A principal has the delegated power to grant an exemption from the requirement of attendance at a state school where the exemption will apply for less than one school year.

The following circumstances will be considered **absences for which there is NOT a reasonable excuse given**:

### Unexplained absence

When no explanation for a student absence has been offered to the school by the parent/guardian.

**Leisure activities**

Undertaking a leisure activity such as shopping, visiting friends and relatives, fishing or camping, is not considered a reasonable explanation for an absence from school.

**Any other reason for absence**

The principal should use their professional judgement in determining whether other reasons given by the parent/guardian are reasonable explanations for a student's absence. If the reason given is not a reasonable excuse the principal should document the decision and record the student as absent.