



# Student Attendance

## POLICY

### 1. Rationale:

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2
- To promote in partnership with parents, the regular attendance of students.
  - To ensure that school staff are provided with information on attendance requirements and their obligation to monitor and promote regular attendance at school.
  - To provide processes to actively monitor and support full student attendance.

### 2. Implementation

- 2.1 Guidelines:
- In accordance with the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 and Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017, schooling is compulsory for children and young people from 6-17 years unless an exemption has been granted
  - 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.
  - Ensuring that students attend school each day is the shared expectation of all parents/carers and the school.
  - Students are expected to attend the school in which they are enrolled, during normal school hours every day of each term, unless there is an approved exception from school or the student is registered for home schooling and has only a partial enrolment in a school for particular activities.
  - 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.
  - The school must maintain an attendance records and develop processes to support and maintain attendance.
  - Students who are regularly absent from school are at risk of missing out on fundamental aspects of their education and social development.
  - 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.

## 2.2 **Whole School Strategies to Promote Attendance:**

- Articulate high expectations to all members of the school community
- Regularly communicating with parents about expectations for attendance
- Promoting awareness that absence result in lost learning time and opportunities
- Modelling punctuality across the whole school
- Adopting consistent, rigorous procedures to monitor and record student absence
- Following up student absences promptly and consistently
- Implementing data driven attendance improvement strategies
- Creating safe, supportive learning environments where all students experience success through active participation and engagement in purposeful learning
- Providing early identification of, and supportive intervention for students at risk of non-attendance
- Linking with local community groups and agencies to maximize program and individual support
- Providing a staged response to student absence and support students return to school
- Regular discussions on student attendance in staff meetings
- Implementation of effective transition programs including transitions within the school
- Individual Education Plan (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.

## 2.3 **Creating safe, supportive learning environments where all students experience success through active participation and engagement in purposeful learning by:**

- Focusing on prevention and early intervention by creating a positive school culture
- Developing collaborative and empowering relationships between teachers, students and parents
- Implementing effective and supportive transition programs, including student transitions between different learning areas and levels within the school
- Developing class and group structures and environments that enable opportunities for increased connectedness to individual teachers and peers
- Immediately following up any problems identified by students and parents in a transparent manner.

## 2.4 **Strategies to Improve a Student's attendance may include where appropriate: Addressing individual student needs:**

- Identifying early warning signs (e.g. frequent lateness, leaving school early, missing lessons)
- Early identification of risk factors
- Working in partnership with the significant adults in the students' lives
- Working in partnership with community agencies and services
- Special consideration may need to be given to procedures for students and families from particular backgrounds or particular living circumstances (Aboriginal students, students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD))

backgrounds including students with refugee backgrounds, students in out-of-home-care and overseas students

- Attendance improvement strategies and interventions consistent with other supports and frameworks in place for the student and family.
- **NOTE:** While cultural and other circumstances of students and families should be acknowledged and sensitively considered, they should not compromise the expectations for the student's full attendance at school.

## 2.5 **Engaging with the family:**

- Conducting effective school-to home and home-to school communications
- Addressing and celebrating cultural diversity in relation to attendance strategies
- 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.

## 2.6 **Meetings with parents:**

- Convening a meeting when the student's attendance is of concern to the school
- At first meeting establishing a shared understanding of accountability and strategies for improving attendance
- Identifying the reasons for the absences
- Exploring any factors preventing attendance or participation
- Requesting the parent engages with alternative strategies to improve attendance
- Development of improvement strategies to support the student
- Focusing on positive and proactive solutions
- Explaining the possible consequences of repeated non-attendance, including referral to a School Attendance Officer.
- Meetings with parents of students with attendance issues should feel supportive rather than disciplinary, with a focus on positive and proactive solutions.
- Appropriate supports (e.g. interpreters, advocates) should be provided where appropriate to facilitate the involvement of parents.
- Consideration should be given to cultural and language differences and translated material or an interpreter be provided if required.

## 2.7 **Attendance Student Support Group:**

- Convened by the Principal 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, and appropriate supports
- Appropriate professionals from other agencies may also be invited to attend with the permission of the parent.

2.8

**Supporting students to return to school after absences through:**

- Setting individual student goals and data driven improvement plans through Attendance Improvement Plan
- Positive and flexible support and follow-up with students on their return to school, including the use of a Return to School Plan
- Both plans should be developed with the student, parent and any support workers
- Formal procedures for supporting the learning of a student absent for a long period.

## 2.9 **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
- Outline a meaningful education program
- Clearly articulate individual and shared responsibilities for the student and members of the Student Support Group

## 2.10 **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.

## 2.11 **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.

## 2.12 **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.

## 2.13 **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.

#### 2.14 **Referral to a School Attendance Officer**

Should the school feel that strategies for addressing a student's unsatisfactory attendance have 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.

#### 2.15 **Monitoring Attendance**

Schools must maintain attendance records and develop policies to support and maintain attendance.

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
- Ensure school attendance data is regularly monitored and analysed to identify student absence patterns on a school, class and individual basis.

#### 2.16 The school will use CASES21, 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.

The Principal or their nominee must record:

- Student attendance twice per day
- 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

To meet the duty of care responsibilities, the school attendance records should indicate whether the student was physically present in a classroom, or not present but attending a school-approved activity. In the situation of a school approved activity the teacher or staff member in charge of the activity should record attendance and ensure parents are notified of any absences in the same manner as for regular absences from school.

All students enrolled in the school are required to have their attendance recorded, even if they only attend the school premises part time. Absences for the times the student is not expected to attend should be recorded so it does not count as absences for the school.

The attendance of students at curriculum programs as well as re-engagement programs outside school premises needs to be recorded by the provider and reported back and recorded by the school.

## 2.17 **Attendance follow up:**

- Most absences will be excused and require no further follow-up.
- If a parent does not contact the school to provide an explanation on the day of the student absence, the school must attempt to contact the parent (e.g. by telephone) of the student within 3 days of the absence. If a satisfactory explanation is received, the accurate cause of the absence must be recorded.
- The school must advise parents/carers promptly of any unexplained absences.
- The school should take care to notify the parent who is responsible for ensuring the child's attendance on that particular day. If the 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 the child on the relevant day/days.
- 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.
- 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 (letter or email) that the absences have been recorded as such. The Principal 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/days.
- If, following contact by letter or email, no explanation has been provided **within 10 days** the absence should be recorded as an unexplained absence and also noted in the student's records.
- If the Principal decides that no reasonable excuse has been provided for an absence, the parent must be informed that the recording of an unexplained absence 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.
- Where absences are of concern due to their nature or frequency the school will involve the parents and the student as appropriate in developing strategies to improve attendance.
- The school should keep records of all attempts to contact parents/carers and any information obtained as well as documentation of all attempted and implemented intervention strategies aimed at restoring a student's attendance.

## 2.18 **Parents/guardians and carers:**

- 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.
- For absences where there **is no exemption** (from school) in place, the parent/carer should provide an explanation on each occasion.

## 2.19 **Excusing and not excusing absences:**

The Principal will consider the excuse given for an absence and use their discretion to decide if the parent has a reasonable excuse for not meeting their legal obligations ('excused absence') or does not have a reasonable excuse ('unexcused absence'). In exercising their discretion, the Principal should take into account

whether the absence is explicitly covered in section 2.1.3 of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006. Clause 2.1.3 (f) of the same Act allows Principals to formally excuse absences in special circumstances where no other reasonable excuse exists. However, it remains at the Principal's discretion to decide whether the excuse provided is reasonable.

**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 and Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017
- 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.

**2.20 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

**2.21 Home Schooling:**

In Victoria home schooling is a recognized alternative to attending government or non-government school. Parents interested in home schooling must register with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA). The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 requires that all children of compulsory school age (6-17) are enrolled in a school, or registered for home schooling.

Students registered for home schooling are eligible to partially enrol at their local government school for specific activities agreed on by the school and the student's family.

**2.22 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/carers 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. Evaluation:**

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

#### **4. References:**

##### **School Policies which underpin this policy:**

- Behaviour Management Policy
- Child Safe Policy
- Duty of Care Policy
- Mandatory Reporting Policy
- Student Engagement and Wellbeing Policy