



## 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

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:

- Illnesses and accidents
- Unforeseen and unexplained circumstances
- If the absence was a result of complying with another law
- The child is receiving distance education through a registered school
- The child is undertaking approved education, training and/or employment
- The child has been suspended or negotiated transfer/expelled
- 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 contact the school to provide an explanation on the day of the student 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 noted 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 a reason is 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
- will be participating in approved education or training, or employment, or both, on a full time basis
- is employed or seeking employment during school hours in the entertainment industry

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 and 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 and for every class in secondary schools
- any absences of a student from school, including classes, 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 or class 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
- 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 cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and newly arrived families are implemented
- **MACS is to be advised prior** 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 [insert method – include the email address / telephone number / school attendance officer details]
2. Parents, guardians and/or carers are required to notify the school by [insert time] of the reason for any absence from school on the day of absence.
3. Where the reason for absence is known, the reason is recorded [insert the person responsible and process for recording this information] and the teachers are notified of the absence and reason for this.
4. Attendance at the school is checked [add frequency – primary schools: twice daily; secondary schools: each lesson] by [insert method of recording attendance].
5. The attendance reports are accessed by [insert person responsible for this task] to follow up students who are absent without explanation.
6. If a student is absent without explanation, the school will contact the parent/guardian for an explanation as soon as possible on the day of absence by [insert who is responsible for this task].
7. Information about the number of days of absence are recorded on student files and on student reports by [insert person/team responsible for this task]
8. Where the rate of absenteeism is of concern, the school will follow up with the parents/guardians by [insert the person/process].
9. Parents are required to provide up-to-date contact details and notify the school of any changes to contact details or address

### Procedure for late arrival at school

St Mary's School employs the following procedures for students who arrive at school later than the scheduled starting time:

- Parent/carer to sign student in at the Administration Office
- Parent/carer will be asked for an absence reason which is entered into SIMON.

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

A parent/carer must notify the administration staff of the intent to collect their child/ren from school or for students who leave at school prior to the scheduled finishing time.

Parent/carers must sign out student by either using the iPad at reception or by notifying administration staff. Students must not be collected by parent/carers from the school yard during break times.

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

St Mary's School employs the following procedures for communicating with families about the expectations for attendance at school:

- Explanation of attendance requirements stated in Parent Handbook
- Correspondance in newsletters about procedures (i.e. how to lodge an absence, acceptable reasons for absenteeism)

### Attendance record keeping

St Mary's School processes for maintaining records about attendance, including records about students who have been absent from school without reason for long periods of time:

- The Principal will ensure all student absences are recorded each period by teachers, are aggregated on our SIMON database and communicated to the Department of Education.
- The Department of Education and enrolment auditors may seek student attendance records.

- Student attendance and absence figures will appear on student half year and end of year reports.
- Aggregated student attendance data is reported to the Department of Education and the wider community each year as part of the Annual Report.

### **Attendance improvement strategies**

St Mary's School procedures for working with families and students where school attendance is irregular, including strategies to re-engage students, contact with external departments and agencies: St Mary's School regularly monitors attendance and absence patterns, and reviews the explanations to determine students at risk of poor attendance or who may be becoming disengaged.

Where attendance concerns are identified, the school will meet with the parents to formulate improvement strategies.

Improvement strategies will be considered where:

- There has been a significant number of parent approved, health-related issues;
- The absence is having a significant impact on a student's educational attainment, achievement and development;
- A student has been truanting (absent without parental consent);
- A parent reports that a student refuses to attend school;
- There has been no explanation for the student's absence;
- A 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 issue affecting attendance and support the school can offer to assist the student's ability to attend school.

To ensure the appropriate improvement strategies are identified the school will:

- Further investigate the reasons for the student's absence (the actual reason may differ to the explanation initially provided);
- Organise a meeting with the parent and a relevant teacher or other staff member at the earliest opportunity to identify the issues related to the non-attendance and to plan for improvement;
- Ensure they notify a parent in writing each time the school considers they have not provided a reasonable excuse for the absence.

The impact of absences on a student's educational attainment, achievement and development will depend on a number of factors. The following factors will be considered when identifying appropriate improvement strategies for individual students:

- Number of days of absence;
- Number of consecutive days of absence;
- Reason for the absence;
- Time of year;
- Age of the student;
- Type of learning that will occur outside school.

## 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.

### Off campus activity

A student will not be considered absent if they are participating in an authorised activity that is away from the school campus. These activities may include flexible arrangements, attendance at a TAFE or other training provider course, or participation in a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship. These activities will be regular and ongoing in nature.

### 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

### Work experience

A student will not be considered absent when they are participating in a work experience program approved and organised by the school. Work experience programs are available for students 14 years or older. Schools must ensure the appropriate work experience agreements have been completed before students undertake work experience.

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 schools agreed processes for notifying 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.

### **Apprentice or trainee through *Vocational Education Training/VCAL program***

It is a reasonable excuse for a child to be absent from school if an arrangement has been made through the VET/VCAL program

### **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, or the student if they are living independently.

### **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, or the student if they are living independently, 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.