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STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Rationale

Schooling is compulsory for children and young people aged from 6 – 17 years unless an exemption from attendance or enrolment has been granted. 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.

Purpose

- 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 support full student attendance.

Guidelines

- Ensuring that students attend school each day is the shared expectation of all parents/carers and the school.
- Students are expected to attend normal school hours every day of each term.
- 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.

Implementation

Monitoring Attendance

The school must monitor attendance and absences at least half daily 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 CASES21 (or other DEECD approved software) to record student attendance.

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** in place, the parent/guardian should provide an explanation on each occasion and 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.

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.

To meet 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 latter situation, 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. Attendance for the times the student is not expected to attend should be recorded so it does not count towards the absences for the school (government schools should use code 602 Exempt in CASES21).

The attendance of students at curriculum programs outside school premises needs to be recorded by the provider and reported back and recorded by the school. Schools manage absences in conjunction with the provider of re-engagement programs or approved education provider.

Strategies to Improve a Student's Attendance

- Addressing individual student needs
- Engaging with the family
- Meetings with parents
- Attendance Student Support Group
- Attendance Improvement Plan and Return to School Plan
- Individual Education Plan
- Student Absence Learning Plan
- Referral to school community based wellbeing professional
- Re-engagement programs
- Reporting concern: referral to Child FIRST or report to Child Protection
- Referral to School Attendance Officer

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
- Provide a staged response to student absence
- 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 Learning 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

Attendance follow up

- The principal must advise parents/carers promptly of any unexplained absences.
- Schools should keep records of all attempts to contact parents and any information obtained.
- The school should 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, the school should attempt to make contact with any emergency contact/s nominated on the student's file held by the school.
- 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 **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 contact the parents/carers (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 CASES21
- 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 should be convened following initial contact with the parents/carers, when a student's attendance pattern is of concern to the school.

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.

Attendance meetings with students, parents/carers – are intended to:

- Review strategies initiated to support the student's attendance and examine why non-attendance has not been resolved.
- Establish a shared understanding of accountability and strategies for improving the attendance of the student.
- Focus on proactive solutions (rather than disciplinary)
- Initiate transparent and immediate action (if appropriate) in response to any problems identified by the parents/carers or the student.

Student Support Group

For on-going intensive support of students a student support group should be convened by the Principal (or nominee) and attended by relevant school support staff, relevant teachers, relevant school student service support staff, parents/carers and the student if appropriate. Professionals from other agencies may also attend as appropriate with the permission of the parents/carers.

The purposes of this meeting are to:

- Ensure that the parents/carers are aware of the absences and fully appreciate the educational implications for the student
- Identify the reasons for the student's absences and fully appreciate the educational implications for the student
- Develop a Student Attendance Improvement Plan and/or Individual Learning Plan

The Student Support Group may also initiate referrals to community support agencies for specialist interventions delivered in partnership with the Student Support Group

A Return to School Plan can be implemented to assist in the reintegration of the student after a prolonged absence. This plan should be developed with the parents/carers and student (if appropriate)

Student Attendance Exemptions

An exemption should be sought by parents if the attendance expectation is reduced for a particular child. Exemptions from school attendance may be granted in some circumstances. All applications for exemptions are granted on a case by case basis with the child's best interests as the guiding principle.

The Principal or Regional Director (depending upon the circumstances) may authorize an exemption and provide written approval for student attendance to be exempt or reduced to less than full time with reference to DEECD guidelines.

Home Schooling

Home schooling in Victoria is a legally recognized alternative to attending a registered school during the compulsory years of schooling. Parents/carers who decide to educate their child from a home base assume overall responsibility for their child's educational program.

Principals should inform parents/carers in such situations of their legal responsibilities and ensure that the information about the child/children is recorded on CASES21 as an exit destination.

School Policies which underpin this policy:

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

Date approved by School Council: 28.04.14

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed by the school council at least every 5 years, or earlier in special circumstances, and is scheduled for review in **2019**.