

## 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 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/carers, supporting students to attend school each day is the shared responsibility of all parents/guardians/carers, 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.

Principals should contact the MACS 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.

## **Parent/guardian/carer**

Includes a guardian/carer 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/guardian/carer of the student.

If the parent/guardian/carer 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/guardian/carer 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/guardian/carer 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 than the school will notify the parent/guardian/carer 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 (six 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 MACS 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/carer**

Parents/guardians/carers 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/carer 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/carer of the student as soon as practicable on the same day
- parents/guardians/carers 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/guardian/carer reports that the child was not living with them on that day, the school should ensure they notify another parent/guardian/carer 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/carers are informed of their responsibilities around attendance and initiatives aimed at promoting parental/guardian/carer 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
- The MACS Regional General Manager 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)

## 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

**Reviewed by the St Christopher's School Leadership Team March 2022**