

Attendance Policy

North Melbourne Primary School

Issue Date: 1/12/17

Review Date: 1/12/19

SCHOOL NO 1402



Table of Contents

Rationale:	3
Purpose:	3
Guidelines:	3
The Importance Of Full Time Attendance:	4
Responsibilities:	4
Parents:	4
The School:	5
Principal	5
Students	6
Monitoring attendance:	6
Unexplained Absences:	7
If Whereabouts Of A Student Is Unknown:	7
Intervention:	7
Tools to improve attendance:	8
Engagement Strategies:	8
Meetings With Parents:	8
Attendance Student Support Group:	9
Unsatisfactory Attendance:	10
Special circumstances:	10
Reporting Concerns:	11



Rationale:

North Melbourne Primary School believes that student success is determined by good attendance and active engagement at school. Students need to attend school regularly in order to participate fully and gain maximum benefit from their schooling. Regular attendance enables students to access a full education, enabling them to reach their full potential. Student attendance is dependent on a supportive school environment, a curriculum that provides for all students and structures and approaches that facilitate the success of all students.

We acknowledge that monitoring of student attendance enables identification of students at risk and the early implementation of intervention strategies. We also acknowledge our obligation to monitor the legal requirement for all students under fifteen years to attend school, and that we have a duty of care for all students including those over the compulsory school age. School staff should set an example for students, encouraging and emphasising attendance and punctuality.

Purpose:

- Maximise the attendance of all students and support families in achieving regular attendance for their children
- Provide organisational structures which support the early detection and identification of causes of student non-attendance
- Identify and support all students at risk of non-attendance
- Support staff in monitoring and following up all absences
- Ensure the efficiency and accuracy of data collection for school, legal and audit requirements

Guidelines:

Attendance depends on active cooperation between the school, parent/carers and the student. Whilst the primary responsibility for meeting the legal requirement for student attendance rests with the parent/carer, the school has the responsibility to record and monitor attendance and take appropriate action to rectify problems of non-attendance.

Within the school the principal has the overall responsibility for student attendance, and certain staff have particular designated duties in monitoring student welfare and attendance. As student attendance is fundamental to the role of teachers, all staff need to be actively and cooperatively involved in its maintenance.



The Importance Of Full Time Attendance:

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

Daily school attendance is important for all children and young people to succeed in education and to ensure they don't fall behind both socially and developmentally. Children and young people who regularly attend school and complete Year 12 or an equivalent qualification have better health outcomes, better employment outcomes, and higher incomes across their lives. It is important that children develop habits of regular attendance at an early age.

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.

Responsibilities:

Parents:

Parents are required to ensure their child attends school and to provide an explanation for their child's absence from school. The principal must be able to determine from the records if the excuse given was reasonable in terms of the parent meeting their legal obligations.

Parents should inform the school of the reason for their child's absence so that the school can:

- Determine if the child's absence needs to be excused by the principal, in line with school policy and these guidelines
- Determine the appropriate follow up to ensure the child's education and wellbeing is supported
- Record if the parent has a reasonable excuse for not meeting their obligation to ensure their child attends school each day

Where possible, parents should inform the school in advance of upcoming absences.

To ensure a child's education and wellbeing are supported, parents are encouraged to communicate openly with the school where a child has an ongoing medical condition that may result in ongoing absences or medical appointments during school hours.



The School:

The school must record student attendance twice per day in primary schools.

This is necessary to:

- Meet legislative requirements
- Discharge schools' duty of care for all students
- Assist calculation of the school's funding
- Enable school council to report on student attendance annually

Accurate and comprehensive student attendance records, including the reasons for any absences, also allow schools to monitor the effectiveness of attendance improvement strategies and measure achievement against attendance targets. It also provides evidence for any further enforcement proceedings including issue of an Infringement Notice (and any appeal) and court proceedings if it appears a parent may not have met their legal obligations to ensure their child attends school.

All schools must report the annual rates of student attendance for the year to the school community at least once a year. Schools are also required to report information about student enrolment and attendance for funding

Principal

The principal is responsible for determining 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:

- 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

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.

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.



In general, it is expected that principals would excuse absences for:

- Medical and dental appointments, where out of hours appointments are not possible or not appropriate
- Bereavement or attendance at the funeral of a relative or friend of the student, including a student required to attend Sorry Business
- School refusal, if a plan is in place with the parent to address causes
- Cultural observance, if the parent notifies the school in advance
- Family holidays, where the parent notifies the school in advance and the student completes any Student Absence Learning Plan agreed by the school, student and parent

In general, principals would not be expected to excuse absences, where:

- Approval had not been sought in advance or in accordance with school policy
- The student was absent due to participating in leisure or social activities without approval
- The conditions of approval have not been met (e.g. Student Absence Learning Plan for a family holiday not completed)
- The parent has provided no explanation for the absences

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

Students

- Attend and be punctual for the school day
- To pass on notes between teachers and parents

Monitoring attendance:

Through regular monitoring of attendance and absence patterns, schools may identify that a student or cohort is at risk of poor attendance or becoming disengaged.

Principals and teachers are best placed to recognise attendance patterns that may be an indication of other stress factors. Students can be absent from school for a range of reasons, depending on the age and circumstance of the student and their family. The reasons for a student's absence may be complex and interrelated.



Unexplained Absences:

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 (for example by telephone) of the student within three days of the absence. If an explanation is received, the accurate cause of the absence must be recorded.

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, following contact by letter or email, no explanation has been provided within 10 school days, the absence should be recorded as an unexplained absence and also be noted in the student's file.

If Whereabouts Of A Student Is Unknown:

If, from multiple attempts to contact with a parent, it becomes apparent that a student will not be returning to the school, the principal may make a referral to a School Attendance Officer if:

- No alternative education destination can be found for the student
- The student has been absent for 10 consecutive school days

In the referral form, schools should provide information of all attempts to contact parents, students and emergency contact people and any information obtained. They must also ensure they keep written records of these attempts.

The School Attendance Officer will then:

- Enact procedures to locate the student
- Send a School Attendance Notice if the student cannot be located at another registered school or training provider

Until notification from the School Attendance Officer is received, a school should continue to record the absences for that student as unexplained and advise the School Attendance Officer if they receive any information about the whereabouts of the student.

Intervention:

The school has a limited influence over many of the factors that impact student attendance, understanding the cause of absences is critical to identifying the appropriate intervention.

Responding quickly by working in partnership with students and their families is the most effective way to manage absences and disengagement so that patterns do not become entrenched.

The school may consider implementing improvement strategies when a student has been absent more than five days in a term for any reason including parent-approved health-related absences.



The school will follow up and implement improvement strategies where:

- The absence is having a significant impact on a student's educational attainment, achievement and development - this will depend on number of days absent, number of consecutive days, reason for the absence, time of year, age of the student and the type of learning that will occur outside school
- The 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

Tools to improve attendance:

When schools have exhausted strategies for addressing a student's unsatisfactory attendance, further action may be appropriate including:

- Pursuing an intensive intervention approach
- Reporting a concern through the child and family services system
- Referring to a School Attendance Officer who may issue a School Attendance Notice

The avenue to pursue will depend on a variety of factors including:

- The underlying cause of the absences
- The history of engagement with the student's parents
- Any precedent set by the school

Engagement Strategies:

The School can have a positive influence on student attendance by increasing student engagement. The school will adopt an active role in fostering positive, open communication with students and parents.

Promoting school attendance, building a positive school climate, monitoring attendance, and supporting students and families to address barriers that influence school attendance are all key elements in helping students to improve their attendance and maximise their educational attainment.

Meetings With Parents:

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



At the first meeting, the principal or nominee should 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 student
- Identifying 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 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.

Principals need to ensure that appropriate supports are provided at the meetings (for example, interpreters, advocates) in order to facilitate the involvement of parents.

Consideration should be given to cultural and language differences, and translated material or an interpreter should be provided if required. The family should be given the opportunity to discuss cultural practices, or to invite a cultural leader to discuss cultural practices on their behalf if relevant to the meeting. Meeting times should also be negotiated in order to ensure a mutually agreeable time is decided on with necessary support provided.

Schools may need to enact a combination of strategies in responding to the needs and circumstances of individual students. More targeted approaches may be needed for individual students facing multiple issues.

Attendance Student Support Group:

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, an Attendance Student Support Group should be convened by the principal (or nominee). The Attendance Student Support Group should be attended by:

- The parent of the student
- A parent's advocate (if required)
- A teacher (primary) or teacher(s) nominated as having responsibility for the student (secondary)
- The principal or nominee (to act as chairperson)
- The student (where appropriate)
- Relevant school based welfare staff (where appropriate)



The Attendance Student Support Group may invite input from any other person with knowledge of the student or with information relevant to the educational or social needs of the student. Appropriate professionals from other agencies (such as youth workers or counsellors) may also attend with permission of the parent.

All students in receipt of Program for Students with a Disability funding and students living in out-of-home care should already have a Student Support Group established. The existing Student Support Group should be used for attendance issues.

The Attendance Student Support Group meetings should focus on:

- Ensuring the parent is aware of the absences and understands the educational implications for the student
- Identifying the reasons for the student absences
- Working collaboratively to develop a Student Attendance Improvement Plan, and/or an Individual Education Plan

Unsatisfactory Attendance:

When schools have exhausted strategies for addressing a student's unsatisfactory attendance, further action may be appropriate including:

- Pursuing an intensive intervention approach
- Reporting a concern through the child and family services system
- Referring to a School Attendance Officer who may issue a School Attendance Notice

The following tools and supports may be used for students with unsatisfactory attendance:

- Attendance Support Group
- Individual Engagement Plan
- Return to school plan
- Student Absence Learning Plan
- Referral To School Or Community Based Well-Being Professional

Special circumstances:

Special circumstances are those situations in which a person should not be criminally liable for his or her conduct. Special circumstances exist if the person suffers from:

- A mental or intellectual disability, disorder, disease or illness resulting in the person being unable to understand or control the conduct that constitutes the offence
- A serious addiction to drugs, alcohol or a volatile substance (chroming) resulting in the person being unable to understand or control the conduct that constitutes the offence
- Homelessness, where this results in the person being unable to control the conduct that constitutes the offence



Exceptional circumstances cover less serious and less enduring circumstances than special circumstances. Exceptional circumstances cover cases where a person has enough awareness and self-control to be liable for his or her conduct, but has a good excuse. This category can encompass other areas of disadvantage, which do not fall within the narrow definition of 'special circumstances'.

Reporting Concerns:

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 a child, or concerns that the child and their family need the assistance of family services. In addressing and following up school attendance issues, schools may need to consider whether they should report a concern to Child Protection or make a referral to the Child FIRST intake service for referral to family services.