Attendance Policy

Context
Regular attendance at school is essential if students are to maximise their potential. Schools, in partnership with parents, are responsible for promoting the regular attendance of students. While parents are legally responsible for the regular attendance of their children, school staff, as part of their duty of care, monitor part and whole day absences.

This document supports the ‘School Attendance Policy (2010)’

These procedures should be read in the context of ‘The Enrolment of Students in Government School: A Summary and Consolidation of Policy (2010)’

Attendance Records
The school must keep:
- Class Rolls on a Sentral Register or OASIS for a period of 3 years.
- The Register of Admission permanently.
- Student Record Cards until the student turns 25.
- Record of Transfer.
- Notes explaining absences for 2 years. The Act specifies that absences must be explained within 7 days of the occurrence.
- Details of Partial Absences.

Responsibilities
Parents are responsible for:
- Enrolling their children of compulsory school age in a Government or registered Non-Government School or registering them with the Board of Studies for Home Schooling.
- Ensure that their children attend school regularly.
- Explaining the absences of their children from school promptly to the school.
- Taking measures to resolve attendance issues involving their children.

School staff are responsible for:
- Providing a caring teaching and learning environment which fosters students’ sense of belonging to the School Community.
- Recognising and rewarding improved student attendance and excellence in attendance.
- Maintaining accurate records of student attendance.
- Implementing programs and practices to address attendance issues when they arise.
- Providing clear information to students and parents regarding attendance requirements and the consequences of unsatisfactory attendance.
The Principal is responsible for ensuring:

- Students are enrolled in line with the requirements set out in ‘The Enrolment of Students in Government Schools: A Summary and Consolidation of Policy (2010).
- Attendance records are maintained in a approved format and are an accurate record of the attendance of students.
- All attendance records including details of transfer and exemptions are accessible to the Regional Director, Home School Liaison Officer and other personnel.
- The Director of School Education is informed of attendance problems and issues.
- The School Discipline Policy addresses attendance issues, including truancy. It should provide strategies of encouraging good attendance and establish structures and procedures that support teachers in addressing issues of student non-attendance. In addition, in schools with attendance rates below regional primary and secondary averages, Principals will develop and implement a School Attendance Action Plan that includes attendance targets, strategies, resources and timeline.
- Parents and students are regularly informed of attendance requirements.
- All cases of unsatisfactory attendance and part or full day absences from school are investigated promptly and that appropriate intervention strategies are implemented.

The Principal or delegate will undertake measures to contact parents promptly, within two days of an unexplained absence occurring.

Principals may grant:

- Sick Leave to students whose absences are satisfactory explained as being due to illness.
- Leave to students of compulsory school age totalling not more than 15 days per school year in addition to Sick Leave.
- Exception for students on holidays, if carers apply.
- Absences for periods totalling significantly in excess of 15 days should be treated as exemptions from school attendance.

School Attendance Record Requirements

School Attendance records must include:

- Notes and records of verbal explanations for absences from parents. This advice is to be retained for two (2) years from the date of receipt.
- Attendance Register to be retained for three (3) years. In a case where a student has an accident necessitating an accident report, all attendance records should be retained until the year the student reaches the age of 25 years.
- The student’s record card listing the number of absences year to be retained for seven (7) years after the student has left. In the case of a student who has had an accident necessitating an accident report, the record card should be retained until the students 25th birthday.
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES

Roll Marking

- Each classroom teacher marks the class roll at the beginning of each school day. All absent students are recorded on the roll by the classroom teacher.
- The roll is a print out from Sentral of each class, completed as required by SASS personnel.
- Classroom teachers keep and any notes from parents explaining absences in an envelope which is sent to the Administration Office at the end of each school year.
- Students late to school must stop off at the Administration Office and collect a late note to be completed by member of the SASS personnel and care-provider where possible.
- Any students leaving school early require an early leavers pass, which is completed by SASS personnel and the care-provider before the student is able to leave the school grounds prior to the 3.00 p.m. bell.
- All information is recorded on Sentral throughout the day.

ATTENDANCE MONITORING PROCEDURES:
The method used to keep the record of attendance is:
- Absences recording within Sentral.
- Hard copies of attendance records become the Attendance Register.

ATTENDANCE MONITORING:
- All notes returned to the school by students to explain absences are signed and dated by the roll teacher. The explanation for the absences are recorded in the roll, according to the legitimate explanation, by the roll teacher. The roll teacher is the one who marks the attendance and is the person legally responsible for the accuracy of that attendance record.
- The class teacher will generate an Absentee Notice: Compulsory School Attendance for those students who fail to bring in a note for the absence within 7 days of a return to school.
- If the student is still absent and, therefore, unable to take the note home, the note may be mailed to the student's address.
- The Principal may discuss the reason for the absences with the parents to enable to parents or carers to complete the note explaining the absences.
- The Principal may give assistance to the parents or carers where assistance is required.
- Absences are noted on the student’s report card identifying Explained, Partial and Unjustified absences. These are noted on the student's report at the end of each semester.
- Week 5 & 10 of each term an 85% report will be generated from Sentral. The students who are on this report will have a letter sent home.
  If attendance is still a concern a meeting will be arranged with the Principal, Home School Liaison Officer (HSLO) and the parent/carer. Minutes of the meeting will be recorded and kept in Students Record Card.
  If attendance does not improve a HSLO Referral form is generated and a letter advising the parents/carers of the referral. Copies of both referral and letter to be sent to Student Welfare Consultant of Callaghan/Port Stephens Network Area.
Marking Codes
Class rolls contain directions for marking which standardise procedures and satisfy the requirements of the Act.

Attendance is denoted in the box next to the student’s name. The following symbols are to be used:-

**X** to denote the first day and last day that the student attended for each term.

**a** to denote that the student was absent on that day.

**A** to denote an unjustified absences. This symbol is written above the ‘a’ in cases where:-

1. no notice is provided by parents/carers within 7 days of the occurrence of the absence;
   or
2. the absence is explained, but the reason provided is not accepted by the Principal (eg shopping, hairdresser’s appointment).

**S** to denote an absence due to sickness. This symbol is written above the ‘a’ where the Medical certificate or notice provided by the parent/carer is a reasonable explanation of the student’s sickness. In cases where the sickness is in excess of three school days, the teacher may request a doctors certificate, detailing the nature of the sickness and the duration of the sickness. The Principal may request a medical certificate at any time if there are concerns about notes provided by parents/carers. Absences for visits to dentists, physiotherapists, optometrist, or other specialist services should be dealt with on the same basis as absences due to sickness. Where possible students should be encouraged to make such appointments out of school hours.

**L** to denote leave approved by the Principal. This symbol is written above the ‘a’ for situations as specified in the Act:-

i. Misadventure and unforeseen events, eg: fire, floods.
ii. Industrial disputes (absences recorded as leave in this situation should not effect a student’s attendance record);
iii. Family holiday which have not been applied for through an exception form.
iv. Domestic necessity which may include serious illness or death of an immediate relative, recognised religious holidays and festivals or ceremonial occasions.
v. Short time employment in the entertainment industry.

**B** to denote participation in special events not on school grounds, eg: sporting events, excursions, Star Struck etc.

**E** to denote that the student was suspended.
P to denote an absence for part of the day.

Absences on an occasion (ie: part of the day) or lateness or fractional truancy are shown by placing ‘P’ next to ‘a’ when the part-absence is determined. When the reason for the part-absence is determined, either an ‘E’, ‘A’, ‘S’ or ‘L’ is placed above the ‘Pa’. The Principal may request a written notice from a parent/carer if the student is absent for part of a day.

Recording absences for part of a day.

i. For statistical purposes, with the exception of a student who is absent for a substantial part of a day (ie more than 3 hours), the student should be counted as present, and

ii. For legal purposes, a record detailing the date and specific times the student was absent must be maintained by the school.

Strike Days/Industrial Disputes
If the Attendance Register is marked on a strike day and a student is absent, ‘L’ is to be recorded above the ‘a’. Such an absence is not to affect the student’s attendance record.

If industrial action prevents the marking of the Attendance Register for that day, a broken line should be ruled through the day’s column and the notation ‘Roll not marked – Industrial Dispute’ recorded within. A record should be kept of any students who attend on that day.

If industrial action prevents the school from being open for a half day, Attendance Registers are to be marked for the half day the school is open. Student who are absent for the half day the school is open should be recorded as ‘A Pa’ unless parents/carers have notified the school of the student's absence.

School Development Days
On School Development Days the Attendance Register should show in the column for that day a broken line and ‘Roll not marked – School Development Day’. A record should be kept of any student who attended on that day.

Off-Site School Activities
Students involved in school organised educational excursions, sporting and other visits are to be marked ‘B’ for school business.

ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES:

S.A.S.S. Staff

i. Ensure that Principal and Assistant Principals are notified of any fractional truancy and consistent absenteeism of students.

ii. Support teachers if required for any incidences from interviewing student to roll marking procedures.

iii. Liaise with the Principal by both recommending students of concern and the monitoring of students already on the caseload. Parents are to be notified if their child has been placed on the HSLO caseload.
Class Teacher

i. Be fully conversant with roll marking procedures.
ii. Carefully mark the roll each day. Be aware it may be subpoenaed.
iii. Initial the roll each day it is marked.
iv. Make a written record of verbal explanations from parents/carers
vi. Inform parents of any unexplained absences as soon as possible.
vii. Inform Executive of any students of concern.

Principal/Executive

i. Regular staff in-service.
ii. Assign a staff executive to monitor all rolls regularly.
iii. Invite the parents/carers into the school to discuss any problems related to non-attendance and fractional truancy.
iv. Encourage parent/carers to contact the school when their child will not be attending for a period of time due to crisis, eg: illness in the family, family holidays, legal requirements, funeral or cultural obligations.
v. Make referrals to the HSLO team when necessary.
vi. Monitor the introduction and implementation of the Attendance Policy.
vii. Inform staff of changes to Attendance Records and regularly update staff on attendance issues.
viii. Address students regularly with regard to the importance of regular attendance.

HOME SCHOOL LIAISON PROGRAM

Notification to the Home School Liaison Program
If Principals and teachers are unable to resolve individual cases of unsatisfactory attendance, the HSLO should be notified.

This referral may be based on any one incidence of unsatisfactory attendance, long term absence or patterns of recurring short term absence.

As a guide for notification, the principal should bear in mind that it is a valid defence to any prosecution for non-attendance that the student has not been absent of more than 3 days in the preceding 3 months during which the school was open. When the Principal/Executive reports cases of unsatisfactory attendance to the HSLO, the report should be on the Referral Form: Unsatisfactory School Attendance. A record of all notifications to the HSLO must also be kept at the School.

The HSLO will visit the school twice termly in an effort to aide the school community with attendance problems deemed too difficult for school resolution alone. The team works closely with the Principal and Learning Support Team in an effort to foster in the wider community a commitment to the regular school attendance of all students who have a legal responsibility to attend school.
FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH POOR OR NON-ATTENDANCE
Factors that may contribute to attendance problems include:-
   i. Problems at home – family dysfunction. This can include criminality in the home, drugs, child abuse and neglect.
   ii. Low self esteem, lack of confidence.
   iii. Problems with peer relationships.
   iv. Fear of humiliation (sarcasm from teacher and other students).
   v. Feelings of alienation (increase by further absences).
   vi. Cultural factors (differing parental attitudes, religion, language etc)
   vii. Personality/emotional disorders.
   viii. Family breakdown resulting in them living alone or in a refuge.
   ix. Poor health eg. Increasing incidence of asthma, lack of food in the home.
   x. Pregnancy.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The following recommendations are suggestions that the school may choose to adopt, adapt or incorporate into the Attendance aspect of the Student Discipline and Welfare Policy. This will need to be completed in consultation with students, staff and parents/carers.

Strategies for Parents:
   i. Set up a routine for the child, ie: time to get out of bed, breakfast, dress for school, send the child off to school.
   ii. Stress the importance of the child regularly attending school and remaining there.
   iii. Be aware of the School Attendance Policy and Procedure.

Strategies for Students:
   i. Students make themselves aware of the School Attendance Policy and Procedure.
   ii. Take responsibility to organise oneself for school with minimum parental support.

Strategies for School:
   i. Implement a breakfast program everyday for students to start school on a full stomach.
   ii. Have food available if a child comes to school without lunch or recess. This includes fruit for fruit break.
   iii. Plan a variety of lunchtime activities eg: sport, computer lab, etc.
STATEGIES FOR ENCOURAGING GOOD ATTENDANCE.

Student attendance at school requires the encouragement from all members of the school community. Students need to know that attendance is not only a legal necessity for those children within the age limit, but is vital for the successful completion of their education. This encouragement may be fostered in various ways by the whole school community.

i. Providing a warm and positive learning environment for both staff and students.

ii. Setting the example of a well organised cohesive school structure, where the welfare of students and staff is paramount in the planning and implementation of school policy.

iii. Have the executive staff actively involved in the interviewing and follow-up of students of concern reinforce the value the school places on attendance.

iv. Consistently stress to students the importance of coming to school and staying there. Remind teachers and students of the importance of students’ attendance their obligation and responsibilities.

v. Stress flexibility for students with special needs.

vi. Ensure that the relevant letter proformas are easily accessible by teachers and that they are clear of their role in reporting to parents/carers. This is the responsibility of the executive.

vii. Respective teachers follow-up fractional truancy, lateness and reasons for absence, and remind students of their responsibility to bring notes in for absences.

viii. Be aware of the school’s resources in assisting with poor-attenders such as the School Counsellor and HSLO.


x. Teachers mark the rolls as per Policy.

xi. Teachers notify the Executive of any fractional truancy and consistent absences to that interviews and home visits may take place.

(Reviewed November 2013)