

Mernda Hills Christian College

Academic Attendance Policy



Document Control

| Revision Number | Review Date | Implementation Date | Description of Changes | Prepared By | Approved By |
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| Gilson College – Mernda Campus | | | | | |
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| Mernda Hills Christian College | | | | | |
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Rationale

The Academic Attendance Policy is designed to ensure compliance with legal requirements of school attendance. The processes enacted by this policy provide a framework of monitoring and support for students and their families to enable maximum attendance at school, and the benefits that provides.

Student absence from assessments is dealt with consistently and fairly whilst always maintaining a high academic standard. Parents and students must understand that there may be an academic consequence for absences from school, excursions and camps. The Policy also enables at risk students to be identified due to extended absences.

Implementation

Definitions

1. **Attendance** – When a student **is** present on campus (or virtually) for prearranged classes or educational activities.
2. **Absence** – When a student **is not** present on campus (or virtually) for prearranged classes or educational activities.
3. **Planned Absence** – An absence that has been organised in advance. Examples of planned absences include holidays, visits to family and sporting or other events.
4. **Unplanned Absence** – An absence that has not been organised in advance. Unplanned absences include illness, accidents, and family difficulties/trauma.
5. **Principal** – For the purpose of this policy the principal may refer to the principal or a designated replacement, usually a senior secondary leader.
6. **Class/Homeroom teacher** – a teacher who is responsible for a particular roll class. Class teacher in the primary (e.g. Year 4 teacher) Homeroom teacher in the secondary (e.g. Year 8b Homeroom teacher). These are distinct from classroom teachers who are responsible for a class in a particular subject area (e.g. Year 2 French or Year 9 English).
7. **VCE** – Victorian Certificate of Education.

General

1. School attendance is seen as a high priority at the College and students are always encouraged to achieve maximum attendance.
2. Accurate records of all student attendance are kept on SEQTA and updated daily.
3. Office staff endeavour to investigate all unexplained/unexcused absences in a timely fashion with verifying documentation being kept on file in SEQTA.
4. As much as practicable, unexplained absences should be eliminated from College records. More than five (5) unexplained absences within a 12-month period is considered an offence and may lead to prosecution of parents/guardians.
5. This policy relates to both planned and unplanned absences.
6. Students/parents must apply for permission for planned absences. See procedures for planned absences below.
7. Students/parents who request permission for planned time away from school (including during excursions and camps) must be provided with a copy of this policy and made aware that absence will be recorded and long absences from school may negatively impact the student's grades.
8. This policy will be communicated to parents via the newsletter and will be available on SEQTA and the website.
9. Families of VCE students will be reminded that the VCAA requires a 90% attendance, and an extended absence is likely to result in the non-completion of their course (i.e. and N grade).
10. In circumstances where depression or psychological distress are the reasons for the absence (such as being a victim of bullying) the College's Welfare personnel should be notified.
11. A key result of this policy is increased confidence in the processes of the College of the parents and the community generally.

Key principles of all absences

1. Teachers are not to be burdened with extra work due to student absences.
2. Teachers are not obliged to, but at their discretion may, provide extra work for the student during their absence.
3. Students who are absent during assessments are never to be advantaged for their absence and students who are present during assessments are never to be dis-advantaged.
4. It is the student's responsibility to communicate with teachers regarding work that has been or will be missed and complete that work. Some extra time may be provided for this purpose, at the teacher's discretion.
5. Absent students will be assessed on all the material covered by the rest of the class.
6. Where authorised absences take place during major assessments the College will endeavour to accurately reflect the student's academic learning in reports.

Responsibilities

1. The Principal is responsible for ensuring that:
 - The principles and processes of this policy are met and maintained,
 - The attendance register is maintained accurately and monitored regularly,
 - Long, frequent, or repeated absences are dealt with effectively and consistently, · School attendance is reported to parents at least once a year,
 - In the event of an ongoing attendance concern the School Attendance Officer is notified.

NOTE: Department of Education and Training Regional Directors act as School Attendance Officers for all schools, including non-government schools.
2. Administration staff are responsible for ensuring that attendance data is monitored daily, and patterns passed onto the principal.
3. Parents are responsible for ensuring their child(ren) attend(s) school. If their child is absent, they are required to provide an explanation for the absence.
4. Classroom, homeroom and subject teachers are responsible for keeping accurate and timely attendance records for their individual classes.
5. Class/Homeroom teachers are responsible for keeping accurate and timely attendance records for the day (e.g. morning roll marking). The Class/Homeroom teachers have more of a welfare focus in regard to attendance and may conduct some follow-up actions relating to the student within their class/homeroom.
6. Students are responsible for attending their scheduled classes.

Procedures for unplanned absences

1. Unplanned absences are those that occur with little or no warning or notice. Preparation cannot usually be made for these.
2. Unplanned absences usually occur on a single day basis but sometimes extend into longer-term or consecutive absences.

Daily absences

1. Students who have an unplanned absence (such as due to illness) will be flagged when marked absent on the roll, or in advance by parents/guardians contacting the College regarding an absence.
2. Parents/guardians may inform the Administration staff of an absence via SMS, email or in person.
3. Parents/guardians may also inform the teacher of an absence. In this case it is the responsibility of the teacher to inform the Administration staff as soon as practicable.
4. Class rolls are checked 3 times each day (morning, recess and lunch) by Administration staff for updated absences.
5. At 10 am each morning the following SMS is sent to parents/guardians when their child is marked absent on the roll:

{Student} has been marked absent from school on {Date}. Please reply reason so the roll can be amended. Thanks, MHCC

6. After lunch parents are contacted via phone to confirm any remaining unexplained absences.
7. All absences are automatically recorded on SEQTA. Any accompanying documentation (such

as medical certificates) is scanned and added to the student's file.

8. In situations when students are absent for a part day (for example, the afternoon only) the investigation of their whereabouts is conducted by their teacher and/or Head of School. Calls are made directly to parents from reception to verify student location.

Consecutive unplanned Absences

1. If parents/guardians have notified Administration staff that a prolonged absence is expected (either via, SMS, email, direct message or in person) the absence is updated in SEQTA.
2. If the absence is longer than expected, Administration staff notify the relevant Head of School, sending them a screenshot of the student and their absence data.
3. Class/homeroom teachers should contact home for a welfare check and to determine a return date if possible. Relevant information is to be passed back to Administration staff so that SEQTA can be updated accordingly.
4. Subsequently, an absence list is generated weekly by Administration staff and phone calls made for continued extended absences.
5. All contacts with parents/guardians regarding absences are recorded on SEQTA.
6. If the reason for the absence is serious it should be shared with the staff for wellbeing/chaplaincy support, being mindful of student privacy and confidentiality.
NOTE: the details of personal circumstances should only be shared with relevant staff, and only with parental permission.

Procedures for planned Absences

1. Planned absences from school will be categorised as consecutive or non-consecutive absences. Consecutive absences include anything more than 3 days absent in a row. Non-consecutive absences may be repeated, but not consecutively, such as a sporting event a number of times throughout the term.
2. The parent/guardian must complete the Application for Exemption from Attendance from School form for planned absences of more than 5 days (one school week).
3. Completed forms are passed to the relevant Head of School, discussed with the leadership team or Academic Committee as required, and either approved or not approved.
4. The above form must be submitted to the Office at least 4 term weeks prior to the date of the absence.
5. If the application is approved, parents/guardians are notified, the detail of the absence is shared with staff and the absence recorded in SEQTA.
6. If the absence is not approved parents/guardians are notified, and the reasons explained. There is no appeals process to this decision.
7. If the application is approved the absence is recorded as an approved absence. If the application is not approved the absence is recorded as an unapproved absence.
8. In both cases copies of the completed application form are attached to a note in SEQTA.

Unexcused/Unexplained Absences

1. According to legislation more than five (5) unexplained absences within a 12-month period is considered an offence and may lead to prosecution of parents/guardians.
2. Efforts will be made by both office staff and teachers to contact the parents of students with unexcused/unexplained absences to determine reasons.
3. After 1-2 weeks the names of students with unexcused/unexplained absences are passed to the Head of School for follow-up. See Following up Absence below.

Following up Absences

1. The main focus of attendance improvement strategies should be to support improved attendance or a return to a mainstream school setting.
2. The follow-up of absences is recommended as an early intervention approach that may identify underlying issues affecting attendance.
3. The nature of the follow-up will be dependent upon the following:
 - a. Number of days absent (and whether they are consecutive),
 - b. Reasons given for the absences,
 - c. The time of year,
 - d. The age of the student,

- e. Whether the parent(s) have been consenting to the absences,
 - f. The impact the absence has had on the student,
 - g. Whether learning has taken place outside of school.
4. Follow-up actions may include:
 - a. Emails being sent,
 - b. Calls being made,
 - c. Meetings being arranged,
 - d. Pastoral care visit to the student's home being arranged,
 - e. Student's details being provided to the School Attendance Officer,
 - f. Student's details being passed onto DHHS/police personnel if student's welfare is in question.
 5. Identifying risks of student disengagement from education needs to happen early so that actions can be taken to reduce or avoid these risks. In order to effectively address these risks, work should be done in partnership with the significant adults in the students' lives, including families, as well as with community agencies and services where applicable.
 6. When identifying risks, the Child Information Sharing Scheme and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme can be used to request and share information with authorised organisations. This scheme is used to promote the wellbeing or safety of children or to assess or manage family violence risk. Authorised organisations include Victorian government and non-government schools, Child FIRST, Child Protection, Victoria Police, Youth Justice, community health and family violence services.

Meetings with parents

1. Attendance meetings with parents and students should be convened following initial parental contact 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.
2. At the first meeting, the Head of school should focus on:
 - a. establishing a shared understanding of accountability and strategies for improving attendance,
 - b. ensuring parents are aware of the absences and fully appreciate the educational implications for the student,
 - c. identifying the reasons for the absences,
 - d. exploring any factors preventing attendance or participation,
 - e. requesting parents engage with alternative strategies to improve attendance,
 - f. identifying appropriate attendance improvement strategies,
 - g. 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,
 - h. explaining the possible consequences of repeated non-attendance, including referral to a School Attendance Officer/ Reception.
3. Meetings with parents of students with attendance issues should feel supportive rather than disciplinary, with a focus on positive and proactive solutions.
4. Leaders need to ensure that appropriate support is provided at the meetings (e.g. interpreters, advocates, well-being personnel, etc.) in order to facilitate the involvement of parents.

Attendance improvement plans and return to school plans

1. An Attendance Improvement Plan may be introduced to assist in the re-engagement of students with attendance issues.
2. To assist in the reintegration of a student after a prolonged absence, a Return to School Plan may be required. This may also be used following other strategies if these strategies have not had the desired outcome.
3. Attendance Improvements Plans and Return to School Plans may be appropriate for students who are:
 - a. involved in the youth justice system,
 - b. experiencing, or who have experienced a period of homelessness,
 - c. experiencing mental or physical illnesses (Return to School Plans are vital if they have experienced prolonged absence from school).
4. Ideally, both these plans should be developed with the student and the parent and any support workers, and include information such as:
 - a. the work the student has missed and needs to complete,
 - b. the student's class timetable, including bell times,

- c. school term dates, student free days and non-school periods,
 - d. smart goals to improve the student's attendance, including an attendance target,
 - e. nominated staff that can support the student if they need assistance,
 - f. the process to be followed if the student is absent,
 - g. contact details for the student's parent.
5. If it has been difficult to engage with the parent of a student, a School Attendance Improvement Plan or a Return to School Plan can be developed directly with the student. Any support services the student may be accessing or may have been referred to (such as a youth worker or psychologist) should be consulted and the plan should outline key responsibilities and parties to be involved.

Referral to school or community-based well-being professional

1. When exploring attendance concerns, any behavioural, health or social issues (such as anxiety, depression or bullying) need to be identified for the student.
2. Responding to the wellbeing needs of individual students is not the responsibility of the College alone. Other government and community-based agencies can provide specialist support to children and families around a range of individual and family needs.
3. Engaging services or making referrals to services could be employed as a strategy to improve attendance, and to address emotional and social needs in order to improve attendance.

Referral to a School Attendance Officer

1. Referring a student attendance matter to a School Attendance Officer may be appropriate where the principal determines that:
 - a. intervention strategies have been unable to secure parental engagement and improvement in school attendance (or engagement in another educational program) and,
 - b. requiring the parent to respond to the notice will convey the seriousness of the matter and is likely to elicit an improvement in attendance.
2. Principals should be certain they have evidence to demonstrate the parent has not been meeting their responsibilities under the Act. This will be important in the event the School Attendance Notice leads to an Infringement Notice being sent to the parent and the parent wishes to appeal the decision or elect to have the matter heard in court.
3. The process for issuing the School Attendance Notice, requiring the parent to respond and the further steps if the parent does not comply with the notice is very clear and is set by the provisions in the Ed. and Training Reform Act.
4. To make a referral to a School Attendance Officer the Principal needs to establish that:
 - a. the student has been absent from school on at least five full days in the previous 12 months and the parent has not provided a reasonable excuse for these absences,
 - b. measures to improve the student's attendance have been undertaken and been unsuccessful, or are inappropriate in the circumstances,
 - c. a parent responsible for the absences can be identified (a single person to be the addressee of the School Attendance Notice).
5. These minimum requirements to be met before sending a School Attendance Notice are set out in the Act. In addition to the minimum requirements, before making a referral the principal should:
 - a. be satisfied that the reasons for the failure to comply with attendance requirements have been explored, including any social, cultural, linguistic, economic, geographic, or learning difficulties,
 - b. ensure that if a Student Support Group has been established for the student, or another support mechanism exists for the student, that group has been consulted about the particular attendance issue or that mechanism utilised before making a referral to a School Attendance Officer,
 - c. consider the particular circumstances of the student and family in deciding to make a referral, including likely consequences if the parent does not respond adequately to a School Attendance Notice,
 - d. have attempted to contact the parent in question by telephone to advise of the situation and confirm their awareness of the seriousness of the issue.
6. If the Principal (or delegate) decides to refer the matter, they should complete and forward the referral form Referral to School Attendance Officer. If there are any concerns about

disclosing private information in the referral form, he or she can contact the School Attendance Officer for advice.

7. The Principal (or delegate) must provide any information requested by the School Attendance Officer in order to issue a School Attendance Notice.

VCE Expectations

1. A student must achieve a 90% attendance record to satisfy the course requirements. Students who do not meet the 90% attendance, may be awarded an 'N' result for the unit. 2. If this occurs the student will be interviewed by the VCE Coordinator or the Head of Secondary. The details will be discussed with the Academic Committee and a recommendation as to the most appropriate course of action.
2. Excessive approved absences may also count against the 90% attendance requirement. The definition of 'excessive' will be determined by the Executive Leadership team.
3. Students should not arrange scheduled work placement during timetabled class time. Any absences may lead to an inability to authenticate work. Failure to attend a minimum of 90% of lessons for a subject may result in an unsatisfactory result.
4. Consistent lateness will result in a meeting with parents/guardians.

Following up Absences

1. The main focus of attendance improvement strategies should be to support improved attendance or a return to a mainstream school setting.
2. The follow-up of absences is recommended as an early intervention approach that may identify underlying issues affecting attendance.
3. The nature of the follow-up will be dependent upon the following:
 - a. Number of days absent (and whether they are consecutive),
 - b. Reasons given for the absences,
 - c. The time of year,
 - d. The age of the student,
 - e. Whether the parent(s) have been consenting to the absences,
 - f. The impact the absence has had on the student,
 - g. Whether learning has taken place outside of school.
4. Follow-up actions may include:
 - a. Emails being sent,
 - b. Calls being made,
 - c. Meetings being arranged,
 - d. Visits to the student's home being arranged,

Types of Absences and Responses

| Reason for Absence | Parental Notification Required | Documentary Evidence Required | Principal Approval Required | Follow-up Process | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| | | | | Documentary evidence recorded | Form completed |
| Illness/Health | ✓ | ✓ * Required for VCE only | | ✓ | |
| Accident/Injury | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Serious personal/Family circumstances | ✓ | ✓ * Required for VCE only | | ✓ | |
| Medical appointment | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Religious/Cultural Observance | ✓ | ✓ * Required for VCE only | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Bereavement | ✓ | ✓ * Required for VCE only | | ✓ | |
| Family Holiday | ✓ | ✓ * Required for VCE only | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Employment | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Other | ✓ | ✓ * Required for VCE only | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Related Policies and Processes

- VCE Handbook (current year)

Related Legislation

- Education and Training Reform Act (2006)
- Education and Training Reform Regulations (2017)