
Student Attendance Procedural Information

PURPOSE

To support and enforce the College's Student Attendance Policy

MANAGING ABSENCES

Excusing and Not Excusing Absences

The decision to excuse or not excuse absences is at the discretion of the principal. It is based on whether the parent has a reasonable excuse for not meeting their legal obligations ('excused absence') or does not have a reasonable excuse ('unexcused absence'). Before reaching a decision, the principal or delegate considers the following:

- Whether the absence has a reasonable excuse or is entitled to an exemption, under the Education and Training Reform act 2006 (Vic).
- Whether the student should do some learning activities during the absence.
- Whether this kind of absence is covered in the school's policy.
- Whether or not the length of absence will affect the student's learning.
- Whether the parent has requested this kind of absence before, and if so how recently and how many times.
- Whether or not the principal has approved this kind of absence before.
- Cultural factors or details of the student and family's circumstances.
- The implications for not approving the absence.
- Whether an exemption would be appropriate, whereby the school should assist the parent to apply for an exemption.

At Mt. Hira excused absences fall under the categories listed below:

- 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.

FOLLOWING UP ABSENCES

If the absence is excused there will be no further follow up. Where absences are of concern due to their nature or frequency, we involve the parents and the student as appropriate in developing strategies to improve attendance with the support of the wellbeing team. In the case of repeated absences without a reasonable excuse or explanation, the parents may be issued a school Attendance Notice from the Principal.

Parents should be informed that if a student has repeated absences without a reasonable excuse or explanation, the parent may be issued with a School Attendance Notice from the principal or delegate.

a) No Reasonable Excuse Provided

For all absences where the principal or delegate has determined that a parent has not provided a reasonable excuse, the school notifies the parent in writing that the absences have been recorded as such. We ensure that, wherever possible, we address the letter or email to the parent who has been deemed responsible for the child's absence on the relevant day or days.

If the principal decides that no reasonable excuse has been provided for an absence, the absence is recorded as such and the parent are informed that this means:

- They may not have met their obligations under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)
- An accumulation of these absences could lead to a School Attendance Notice from the principal or delegate.
- Failure to comply with the School Attendance Notice may result in the issue of an Infringement Notice.

b) Unexplained Absences

In the event that the parent fails to contact the school to provide an explanation on the day of the student absence, the parents are contacted by SMS as soon as practicable on the same day. When the parents provide an explanation the accurate cause of the absence is recorded in our system. When contact cannot be made with the parents, the school contacts the emergency contact/s nominated on the student's file held by the school. When following contact, the student's safety has been established, but no explanation has been provided within 10 school days, the absence is recorded as an unexplained absence and also be noted in the student's file.

c) If Whereabouts of a Student is Unknown

In the case of the whereabouts of a student is unknown after multiple attempts to contact the parents the principal may make a referral to a School Attendance Officer if:

- no alternative education destination can be found for the student, and
- the student has been absent for 10 consecutive school days

The following is the contact person for Mt. Hira College:

Regional Director of the DET's Dandenong Office

Phone: 1300 338 738 / Fax: (03) 8765 5784

Postal Address: PO Box 5, Dandenong, VIC 3175

Location: 165-169 Thomas Street, Dandenong, VIC 3175

Until we receive notification from the School Attendance Officer, we record the absences for the student as unexplained and advise the School Attendance Officer if we receive any information about the whereabouts of the student.

When a resolution is reached (e.g. student located, a response to a School Attendance Notice gives additional information, or no response is received to a School Attendance Notice), we follow the process recommended by the School Attendance Officer. The College ensures that the listed below procedure is followed:

- All records of all contact or attempts to make contact, with the student's family, are kept on record for a minimum period of one year.
- Documentation is maintained of all attempted and implemented intervention strategies aimed at restoring a student's attendance.
- Attendance records (electronic and hardcopy) are managed in accordance with standards set by the Public Record Office Victoria and relevant Commonwealth privacy legislation (non-government schools).

ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

A) Addressing Individual Student Needs

The College strives to provide support to students who are at risk of disengagement early on to minimize the negative impact of student absences on the student and to their families. We also work closely with the families of students who are at risk and agencies like Child FIRST, Child Protection, Victoria Police, Youth Justice, community health and family violence services.

These attendance improvement strategies and interventions are consistent with other supports and frameworks in place for the student and family like students in out-of-home care, experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, students with cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and newly arrived communities.

B) Engaging with the Family

We value our families and ensure that our relationship with them is always positive. We are very much aware that the issues of non-attendance can be difficult, particularly in circumstances where there are apparent stress factors within families. At Mt. Hira, we value open and effective communication. In analysing patterns of non-attendance and following up with parents, we always consider cultural factors and details of student and family circumstances. Our main goal is to minimise absences and build positive family-school relationships.

C) Meetings with Parents

Attendance meetings with parents and students are convened following initial contact with the parents when a student's attendance is of concern to the school and generally not meeting College expectations. 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, our main focus is 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; and
- Explaining the possible consequences of repeated non-attendance, including referral to a School Attendance Officer.

The meetings with parents of students with attendance issues are supportive in nature and are not disciplinary, with a focus on positive and proactive solutions.

D) Individual Education Plan (IEP)

We design Individual Education Plan's (IEP) for each student that articulates a student's educational, social and behavioural needs as well as how the school and other support services will address these needs. The IEP is designed as follows:

- Articulate the student's learning style, interests, goals and support needs;
- Be based on an assessment of the student's specific learning needs and capabilities;
- Establish short-term goals that will lead sequentially to the achievement of long-term goals;
- Consider key long-term goals that reflect learning outcomes in social, academic and life skills development;
- Reflect high expectations of the student's capacity for educational achievement;
- Outline a meaningful educational program, linked to learning outcomes under an appropriate curriculum or qualification framework (VCE and VET);
- Be developed in consultation with the student, the school and members of the Student Support Group;
- Ensure that the goals are measurable, achievable, supported, and time-limited;
- Clearly articulate individual and shared responsibilities, for the student and members of the Student Support Group; and
- Contain a record of important decisions, actions, student behaviour and progress.

E) Student Absence Learning Plan

We design, Student Absence Learning Plans to support the education of students who are absent from school for an extended period. They are developed collaboratively by teachers, students and their parents.

Student Absence Learning Plan are developed for students:

- who are planning extended absences from school, for example for a family holiday
- suspended for more than three days
- subject to an expulsion appeal process

F) Referral to school or community-based wellbeing professional

When exploring attendance concerns, we identify behavioural, health or social issues such as anxiety, depression or bullying for an individual student. We have two counsellors on board and a head of wellbeing in addition to other support staff, we report students to. We also work with external agencies and we refer students to them when necessary.

REPORTING CONCERNS: REFERRAL TO CHILD FIRST OR REPORT TO CHILD PROTECTION

We refer to Child FIRST, after consideration of the available information the school has on the basis of the degree of seriousness of each case. If the College considers the situation has a low to moderate impact on the child, and where the immediate safety of the child is not compromised, we refer to child first. The purpose is to connect vulnerable children and their families to the services they need to protect and promote healthy development.

A referral to Child FIRST is deemed suitable in situations where families are exhibiting or report the following factors that may impact on the child's attendance at school:

- significant parenting problems;
- family conflict, including family breakdown;
- families under pressure due to a family member's physical or mental illness, substance abuse, disability or bereavement;
- young, isolated and/ or unsupported families; and
- significant social or economic disadvantage that may adversely impact on a child's care or development.

On receiving a referral from a school, the Child FIRST team conducts further assessment of the family and may consult an experienced community-based child protection worker who is based in each Child FIRST team. This assessment may lead to the involvement of a local family services organisation. Child FIRST informs the College of the outcome of investigation.

REFERRAL TO A SCHOOL ATTENDANCE OFFICER

After exhausting all strategies for addressing a student's unsatisfactory attendance, The College may decide to take further action to restore attendance because they formed the belief that:

- Intervention strategies have been unable to secure parental engagement and improvement in school attendance (or engagement in another educational program) and
- Requiring the parent to respond to the notice will convey the seriousness of the matter and is likely to elicit an improvement in attendance.

This may mean pursuing an intensive intervention approach, reporting a concern through the child and family services system, or referring to a School Attendance Officer who may issue a School Attendance Notice to the family. After making a referral or report, the College continues to record, monitor and follow up the student's attendance in line with normal procedure. All the evidence is recorded and demonstrates that the parent has not been meeting their responsibilities under the Act. This process is 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.

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 Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic).

When we make a referral to a School Attendance Officer we ensure the following:

- 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;
- Measures to improve the student's attendance have been undertaken and been unsuccessful, or are inappropriate in the circumstances; and
- A parent responsible for the absences can be identified (a single person to be the addressee of the School Attendance Notice).

We ensure that the minimum requirements are met before sending a School Attendance Notice are set out in the Act. In addition to the minimum requirements, before making a referral we ensure that we do the following:

- 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;
- 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;
- 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; and
- 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.

This process applies to students of compulsory school age (6-17). Where a student is under 18 but their maturity is such that they may be considered a 'mature minor', the College focuses on attendance improvement strategies that do not include referral to a School Attendance Officer for a School Attendance Notice.

RELATED POLICIES

Mt Hira College School Attendance Policy

Mt Hira College Enrolment Policy