

School Attendance

Introduction:

St Mary's Catholic Primary School acknowledges that education is compulsory for children and young people between the ages of 6 – 17 years, in accordance with Part 2.1.1 of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, unless an exemption has been granted.

Parents & Guardians (Parents) must enrol their child/children, of compulsory school age, in a registered school and ensure the child attends school at all times when the school is open for instruction.

Students are expected to attend the school, during normal school hours every day of each term, unless:

- There is an approved exemption from school attendance or enrolment for the student;
- The child is registered for home schooling and is only partially enrolled for particular activities;
- There is an explained absence such as illness, appointments, bereavement, family holidays etc....

St Mary's Catholic Primary School are required to record every student's attendance twice, daily. The schools must maintain attendance records, identify and follow up unexplained absences when they occur.

Parents must provide an explanation if their child is absent where there is no exemption in place. St Mary's Catholic Primary School Principal will determine whether the reason for the absence is acceptable and ensure that the reason for the absence is recorded in writing.

Purpose:

The purpose of this Policy & Procedure is to define the school's method of monitoring student attendance and reporting processes. The school acknowledges that daily school attendance is important for all children and young people to succeed in education and to ensure that their social, emotional and educational development is not compromised. It is also understood that 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.

Scope:

This policy & supporting procedure applies to all parents, guardians, students enrolled at St Mary's Catholic Primary School and all teaching and administrative staff responsible for the care of students.

Implementation:

Parent & Guardian (Parents) Responsibilities:

Parents are required to ensure their child attends at St Mary's Catholic Primary School every day, during normal school hours of each term.

Where their child is unable to attend school it is the parent's responsibility to contact the school on that day to inform them and to provide the school with an explanation for their absence.

The principal will then determine if the explanation provided is a reasonable excuse for the purpose of the parent meeting their responsibilities under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006.

Parents should inform the school in advance of any planned absence to gain approval from their classroom teacher and the Principal. Sufficient notification must be given where the absence is anticipated for greater than 2 weeks to enable teaching staff to prepare a learning plan for the student during this absence. Correspondence can be emailed to principal@smhastings.catholic.edu.au.

Note: Long periods of absence are discouraged. Parents are expected to plan family holidays during school holiday periods where possible.

Parents are responsible for ensuring they contact the school if they anticipate their child attending school after commencement. A call to the office may be made from 8:30am on (03) 5979 1959 or a message left on the school answering machine.

Where a student is late for school it is the parent's responsibility to sign in via the iPad & collect a late pass at the front office.

Accepted Absences:

The following are generally acceptable explanations for student absence:

- » Sickness or accident, where the child is not well enough to attend school;
- » 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 (indigenous bereavement);
- » School refusal (by the child), if a plan is in place with the parent to address cause/s;
- » Cultural observance, where the parent notifies the school in advance;
- » Family holidays, where the parent notifies the school in advance and the student completes a Student Absence Learning Plan agreed by the school, student and parent;
- » When the child is suspended from school;
- » When the child is employed in the entertainment industry and has an approved exemption.

Unaccepted Absences:

The following are generally unacceptable explanations for student absence:

- » Participating in leisure or social activities without approval;
- » The conditions of approval have not been met (for example if a learning plan was not followed during a family holiday).
- » Absence where the parent/ guardian did not provide an explanation.

Truancy:

Truancy is when a child chooses to miss school without a parent's permission. Such absences are due to the child's disobedience and not due to any fault of the parent. Therefore they may be considered a reasonable excuse for a parent.

In deciding to accept this explanation, the principal will consider:

- » The age of the student;
- » Previous attendance records for the student;
- » The parent's capacity to influence and control the student's behaviour.

In the case of truancy or school refusal, the parents and the school will work together on a plan to address the cause/s.

The School's Responsibility:

In accordance with the Victorian Education and Training Reform Act 2006 requirements and the school's moral obligation to ensure the safety & welfare of students under its care, the school must:

- » Record every child's attendance twice per day via ICON.
- » This will be completed by the classroom teacher before 9:15am & 2:15pm;
- » Record reasons for absence, and record the absence as "unexplained" if no reason has been provided (update the records once a reason is established);
- » Determine if the explanation provided for a student's absence is reasonable for the purposes of the parent meeting their responsibilities under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006. The Principal will use their discretion in making this decision;
- » Determine if the reason for the student's absence is acceptable and any follow up is needed to support the child's education and wellbeing;
- » Notify the parent/guardian if the absence has not been approved;
- » Keep records of all attempts to contact parents/ guardians in relation to attendance;
- » Record attendance of any student who only attends half a day (two hours or more);
- » Monitor attendance and develop improvement strategies for attendance where necessary;
- » Take further action (at their discretion) if a student reaches five days of unapproved or unexplained absences within a school year;
- » Report the annual rates of school attendance.

Unexplained Absences:

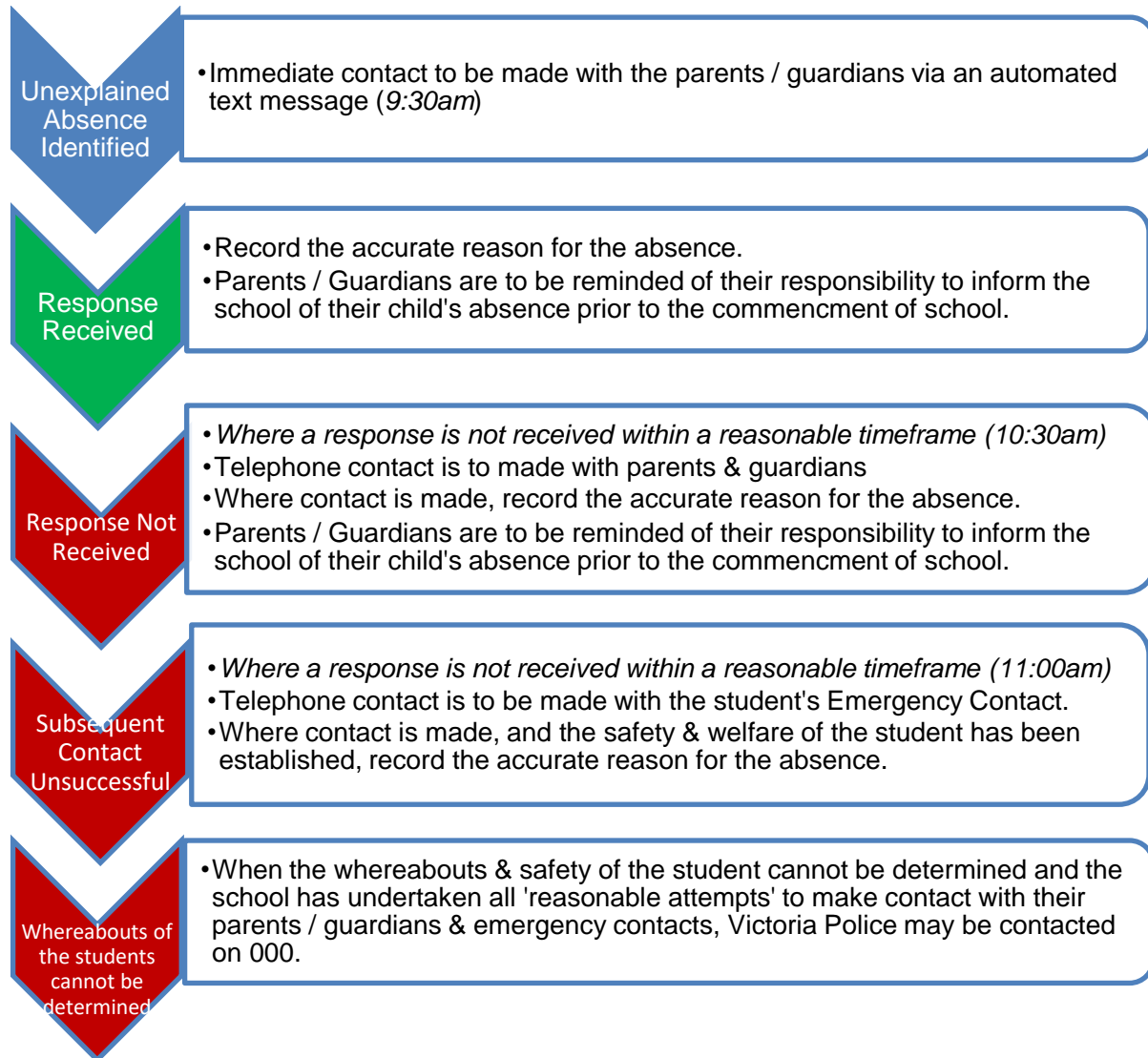
Parents are responsible for contacting the school when their child is unable to attend the school on any given day. This can be done by calling the office from 8:30am on (03) 5979 1959 or by leaving a message on the school answering machine.

In the event that contact is not made with the school on the morning of the absence and the absence is reflected in the daily attendance records, the school will make immediate contact with the parents to inform them of this occurrence. Contact will be made with parents via the school's chosen application and a request made for an immediate response to explain their absence. This will be sent to parents prior to 9:30am. Where a parent fails to respond to the initial contact by the school within 1 hour, a second attempt to contact them will be made via direct contact. In the event that this communication remains unsuccessful, a subsequent attempt to contact individuals identified as the student's emergency contact will be made. The school will make all reasonable attempts to determine the location and wellbeing of the student.

Where an explanation is received, the accurate cause of the absence must be recorded.

If, following contact, the student's safety has been established, but no explanation has been provided within 10 school days, the absence will be recorded as an unexplained absence and will also be noted in the student's file.

Unexplained Absence Flow Chart:



FOLLOWING UP ABSENCES:

Most absences will be excused and require no further follow up.

In the event of an unexplained absence where contact has been made and the student's safety established, but no written explanation has been provided within 10 school days, the absence will be recorded as unexplained and noted in the student's file. The parents will also be notified that if their child reaches five days of unapproved or unexplained absence in the preceding 12 months then the school and principal will work with the parent or legal guardian to implement the

appropriate support or intervention to assist the child attend school every day and remain at school during school hours.

Where this support and intervention does not improve their child's attendance, the principal may decide to refer the matter to relevant Catholic Education Office.

Parents will 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 a School Attendance Officer.

No Reasonable Excuse:

In the event that St Mary's Catholic Primary School has determined that a parent has not provided a reasonable excuse, the school will notify the parent in writing or via email to inform them that the absences have been recorded as such. The school will take care to ensure that, wherever possible, this letter or email is addressed to the parent who has been deemed responsible for the child's absence on the relevant day(s).

Where the school considers that no reasonable excuse has been provided for an absence, the absence will be recorded as such and the parent will be informed. This correspondence will inform them that:

- » They may not have met their obligations under the Victorian Education and Training Reform Act 2006.
- » An accumulation of these absences could lead to a School Attendance Notice from The Education Department.
- » Failure to comply with the School Attendance Notice may result in the issue of an Infringement Notice.

Attendance Improvement Strategies:

St Mary's Catholic Primary School regularly monitors attendance and absence patterns, and reviews the explanations to determine students at risk of poor attendance or who may becoming disengaged.

Where attendance concerns are identified, the school will meet with the parents to formulate improvement strategies.

Improvement strategies will be considered where:

- » There has been a significant number of parent approved, health-related issues;
- » The absence is having a significant impact on a student's educational attainment, achievement and development;
- » A 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 for their child's absence.

Improvement strategies will be implemented as an early intervention approach to identify any underlying issue affecting attendance and support the school can offer to assist the student's ability to attend school.

To ensure the appropriate improvement strategies are identified the school will:

- » Further investigate the reasons for the student's absence (the actual reason may differ to the explanation initially provided);
- » Organise a meeting with the parent and a relevant teacher or other staff member at the earliest opportunity to identify the issues related to the non-attendance and to plan for improvement;
- » Ensure they notify a parent in writing each time the school considers they have not provided a reasonable excuse for the absence.

The impact of absences on a student's educational attainment, achievement and development will depend on a number of factors. The following factors will be considered when identifying appropriate improvement strategies for individual students:

- » Number of days of absence;
- » Number of consecutive days of absence;
- » Reason for the absence;
- » Time of year;
- » Age of the student;
- » Type of learning that will occur outside school.

References:

[Victorian Education Reform Act, 2006](#)

[Victorian Department of Education & Training – School Attendance Guidelines](#)

[Victorian Attendance Legislation 2017](#)