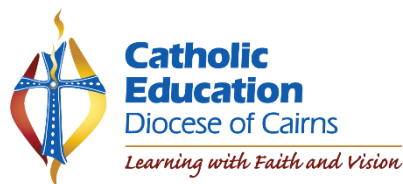


# Guideline/Procedure



Guideline/Procedure no:

Approval date: SLT (05/03/18)

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Author: MG&E

## School attendance and truancy

### Purpose

The background to this guideline recognises the strong correlation between school attendance and student achievement, and later success. The guideline recognises the complexity of the issues involved. Similar to strategies applied by other government and non-government education systems, the approach is based on positive cultural changes at school and family level and behavioural change at an individual level. It is consistent with the principles adopted elsewhere of 'Every Day Counts' and 'Every Day Every Child'.

### Application

This will be applied in all schools and colleges in the Diocese of Cairns.

### Guideline or Procedure

The preferred approach is to address the causes of truancy as a preference to having to manage the consequences.

The reasons for non-attendance at school can be complex (See Attachment 1: Elements Impacting Attendance). They can involve long term recidivist behaviour involving disengagement from school which often has serious underlying emotional and behavioural issues that are beyond a family's capacity to manage. In other cases it can involve patterns of behaviour which indicate a family and the student concerned are not placing a high value on school education. The cumulative effect of such behaviour can significantly affect student performance (See table in Attachment 4). For example missing one day a fortnight, on average, over a 13 year education span is equivalent to 1.5 years of full time education.

The consistent message for all school communities is 'Every Day Counts'.

The goal of every school in the diocese should be:

- A school culture based on 100% attendance;
- Every student absence explained;
- Every student absence for an acceptable reason;
- Early intervention and action where absences are becoming habitual.

The system Business Intelligence (BI) Tool measures student school attendance in four bands – less than 85% attendance, 85-90%, 90-95%, and 95-100%. Individual students whose attendance falls below 85% without acceptable reason, should receive focused follow-up attention to address disengagement issues. Cancellation

of enrolment may also be an option for ongoing unexplained absences (see Cancellation of Student Enrolment guideline).

In assisting schools to manage attendance Attachment 2 provides a Student Attendance Profile (Education Queensland) which is a template to assist school staff to better understand the underlying causes of individual student truancy. Attachment 3 (Attendance Improvement Plan, also sourced from Education Queensland) provides a framework for schools to develop a plan to enhance student attendance.

## Improving Student Attendance<sup>1</sup>

There are ways to improve attendance in schools. The following suggestions provide a starting point for schools to develop strategies:

- Create a positive, inclusive and welcoming school environment, an atmosphere where students want to come to school and parents feel welcome to be involved. Plan activities that children look forward to participating in. It is also good to greet students by name as they arrive.
- Promote the importance of attendance at the beginning and throughout the year to students and parents.
- Keep a high profile on attendance within the school through newsletters and other face-to-face meetings and events.
- Be consistent in the handling of student absences. It can be very confusing for students when staff follow different processes for managing absenteeism.
- Recognise and reward students who have regular attendance or have improved their attendance.
- Be alert to early warning signs of irregular attendance or poor engagement of students. It is much easier to work with students at this time than wait and have an entrenched non-attendance issue to deal with.
- Look for the underlying reasons for non-attendance and put in place strategies to assist the student. Have sensitivity for students who have long term medical/psychological issues.
- Develop and deliver an engaging curriculum that provides for individual learning styles.
- Utilise available support from Government and non-Government agencies and provide better access and links to support programs for families.

<sup>1</sup> Sourced from Department of Education (WA) – *Better attendance – brighter futures*

## Legal Position

Education in Queensland is compulsory if the child is at least 6 years and less than 16 years, unless that child has completed Year 10 (s9 Education (General Provisions) Act 2006).

A parent, if a child of compulsory school age, must ensure the child is enrolled in a school and attends school on every school day unless the parent has a reasonable excuse. Note that a reasonable excuse may be that the parent is unable to control the child's behaviour. (s176 *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*).

Secondary colleges will also be aware of the Compulsory Participation Phase identified in s231 of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*. Compulsory participation continues:

- for two years after the young person completes compulsory schooling (ie two years after they complete year 10 or turn 16 years of age) or
- until they turn 17 years of age or
- until they complete a Queensland Certificate of Education or a Certificate III (or higher level) vocational qualification.

Exceptions and exemptions apply such as provision for employment (25 hours a week or more), traineeships and apprenticeships. But parents have similar responsibilities to those parents with children of compulsory

school age, to ensure their child participates full time in an eligible option, unless that parent has a reasonable excuse (s239).

In cases of ongoing non-attendance or non-participation Catholic schools should remind parents of their legal obligations, and where possible seek a meeting with parents to discuss an attendance strategy. Templates for letters are contained in the Department of Education, Training and Employment weblink in Reflection below. In the event that these measures are unsuccessful Principals should refer the matter to the Office of Non-State Education (ONSE) (contacts in Enquiries below) after consulting the relevant DSE. Principals may also seek assistance from Education Queensland regional offices (addresses below). Attachment 5 provides a flowchart for actions relating to the management of ongoing truancy by non-State schools.

S180 of the Act provides for the Education Queensland chief executive to seek information from a non-State school Principal about the enrolment or attendance at the school of a child who is of compulsory school age. Principals should comply with such requests.

## What is a reasonable excuse for non-attendance?

Acceptable reasons might include illness or significant medical treatment, doing approved work experience, participating in a school or regional sporting or other event, or attendance at a significant family event such as a funeral.

Unacceptable reasons might include birthdays, shopping, visiting family and friends, sleeping in, looking after other children, minor medical checkups or procedures, haircuts or leaving early for travel on school holidays (or returning late from school holidays). There will always be circumstances where some discretion on the part of the school is required but the school should actively discourage non-attendance at school for such unacceptable reasons. Where there is a pattern of non-attendance for unacceptable reasons schools will remind parents of their legal obligations and the possible consequences (both legal and loss of learning opportunities) for non-compliance. Attachment 4 contains suggested content for school newsletters and letters to parents outlining the school's position.

## Enquiries

Directors – School Effectiveness or Student Protection Officer, CES.

Office of Non-State Education (ONSE) 07 3224 5536 or email [OfficeOfNonStateEducation@dete.qld.gov.au](mailto:OfficeOfNonStateEducation@dete.qld.gov.au)

Contact details for Education Queensland District Offices in Far North Queensland:

### Cairns Office

PO Box 6094  
Cairns Qld 4870  
Phone: (07) 4046 5222  
Fax: (07) 4046 5200

### Atherton Office

PO Box 1366  
Atherton Qld 4883  
Phone: (07) 4091 0800  
Fax: (07) 4091 4957

## Reflection

Bond, G. (2004). Tackling student absenteeism: Research findings and recommendations for schools and local communities, Hume Whittlesea Local Learning and Employment Network and the Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network.

Department of Education, Western Australia. (2010) Better attendance – Brighter Futures. Attendance Improvement Measure – a resource pack to support attendance in schools.

Wheatley, S. & Spillane, G. (2001) Home and away: A literature review of school absenteeism and non-engagement issues, Victorian Statewide School Attachment and Engagement Planning and Interest Group.

The following link provides access to the Department of Education, Training and Employment's webpage dealing with school attendance. This includes templates for letters to parents:

<http://ppr.det.qld.gov.au/education/management/Pages/Managing-Student-Absences-and-Enforcing-Enrolment-and-Attendance-at-State-Schools.aspx>

### **See also (Related Policies and Guidelines)**

Guideline/Procedure: Cancellation of Enrolment (for ongoing unexplained absences)

## ***Attachment 1: Elements Impacting Attendance***

Sourced, with thanks, from Wheatley & Spillane, 2001 as cited in Bond, 2004 (see references in Reflection above)

There are many inter-related factors that can affect a child's attendance at school. Schools need to be aware of and have strategies to deal with these factors if they are to engender positive long term improvement in student attendance and engagement.

### **Health**

Ongoing student absences from school due to physical or social/emotional/mental health issues will seriously impact on a student's ability to keep pace with school work. It is vital that schools provide assistance to these students and encourage their parents to engage in the student's educational program, eventual return to school and successful re-integration back into the classroom.

### **Personal**

A student's own experiences and attitudes which affect attendance may include:

- a lack of attachment to teaching staff;
- frustration or difficulty with the curriculum;
- inadequate social support;
- dislike of subjects/disengagement;
- learning difficulties;
- inadequate peer relations;
- being bullied, threatened or involved in fights;
- illness and attention deficit disorders;
- abuse of/by family members;
- transition from one class/school to another; and/or
- boredom with schoolwork.

### **Family**

Family factors that may have implications on student attendance include:

- a lack of parenting skills such as time management and discipline;
- resistance to pressure from schools;
- poor communication between parents and staff regarding attendance;
- transience/mobility/homelessness;
- geography (isolation);
- low parental value of/interest in education;
- low socio-economic status/unemployment;
- differing cultural expectations; and/or
- substance abuse.

### **School**

Factors which often relate to students' experiences in the school environment include:

- inconsistent or poor engagement practices;
- poor quality teaching;
- differences in the commitment of teachers;
- teachers who may have difficulty balancing the needs of absentees with the needs of the broader group;
- irrelevant or a restrictive curriculum;
- inadequate student/teacher relations;
- inadequate school support and welfare;
- inflexible school structures; and/or
- poor transition practices.

'All of the above factors are inter-related in many instances, and may be similarly combined with school factors in increasing the likelihood of non-attendance. Whilst the effects of transience and homelessness are perhaps readily apparent in consistent school attendance, parents placing a low value on education may be equally

important. In this instance parents may be more likely or willing to keep students out of school, less likely to participate in communication with the school and less likely to promote links between school and later success. Low incomes, unemployment and welfare dependency limit a family's ability to meet the costs associated with schooling, a difficulty which may also lead to embarrassment and/or disciplinary consequences for students. Such families might also require child care and other tasks of students, and be willing to keep students from school for this purpose. Similar examples and extrapolations may be drawn for each of the listed personal and family factors above and, whether in isolation or combination, each presents a problem for attendance.'

## **Attachment 2: Student attendance profile**

Adapted, with thanks, from Education Queensland Student Attendance Profile which is based on: Government of South Australia, Department of Education and Children's Services. *Attendance improvement package.*

# Student attendance profile

This student profile can assist schools to clarify the current attendance situation for an individual student. The profile can be developed when staff members have reason to believe a student's non-attendance or lack of punctuality is likely to be ongoing and a cause for concern. A plan can be developed recording how the student, parents and school staff agree to work together to resolve the situation.

### **Student information**

Student name:

Year level:

### **Frequency of absence, lateness and early leaving**

- Date, absence reason code, notes

### **Patterns of non-attendance**

- When did the absence start?
- How long has the absence been occurring?
- Has it been on particular days or when particular subjects are being taught?
- Is the student absent alone or in the company of others?
- Have parents explained absences?

### **Contact with student**

- Are there any unresolved disagreements at school?
- Does the student feel he/she is being given a fair hearing?
- Do outside interests compete with school as a priority? Any part-time job issues?
- Is the student isolated from peers?
- Is the student a victim of bullying or harassment on the way to or from school or while at school?
- Is there a particular staff member who the student identifies with or has a good relationship with?
- What are the reasons provided for the student's absences?

### **Contact with parents**

- Telephone calls/SMS – details and response from parents and outcome
- Letters home – details and response from parents and outcome

- Home visits – details and response from parents and outcome

### ***Family information***

- Sibling attendance patterns – any similarities?
- Does the student act as a carer at home?
- Are there any other family circumstances or pressures that may be affecting the student's attendance?

### ***Learning support***

- Does the student require any learning support?
- Would the student benefit from an alternative program? Why and what program?
- Has the student been referred to Counsellors, psychologists or other support worker?
- Are there any other agencies involved in assisting the student?

### ***Student progress***

- Does the student experience difficulty with particular subjects?
- How is the student progressing overall?
- Have there been changes in the student's work or attitude that coincide with the absenteeism?
- What are the student's own expectations of his/her ability?



## Attachment 3: Attendance Improvement Plan

Source: Department of Education, Training and the Arts (Qld). Gratefully acknowledged.

# Attendance Improvement Plan

This plan identifies a five step model for improving attendance. It is intended to be used as a broad framework and would be planned in greater detail on the **Attendance Improvement Plan template**.

Develop a school attendance policy	Record and follow up student absences	Monitor student non-attendance and patterns of non-attendance	Develop a positive school culture	Collaborate with other agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboratively develop a clear, inclusive and simple policy</li> <li>• Promote high expectations</li> <li>• Communicate to students and school community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and document consistent and effective follow-up processes for unexplained absences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyse attendance data</li> <li>• Investigate relationships to factors such as day of the week, class/subject/year level, timetable, gender/cultural groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure a safe and supportive school environment</li> <li>• Develop positive home-school relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement appropriate strategies/support mechanisms</li> <li>• Liaise with Queensland Police, Local government, business community including local shopping centres, youth groups and facilities and other schools</li> </ul>

### Attendance Improvement Plan Template

Step	1. Develop a school attendance policy	2. Record and follow up student absences	3. Monitor student non-attendance and patterns of non-attendance	4. Develop a positive school culture	5. Collaborate with other agencies
Actions					

## Attachment 4: Content for school newsletters or individual letters to parents

Our school has a policy of encouraging 100% student attendance – all day, every day. Every student absence requires a valid reason. Compulsory education is required by law but it is also our concern that regular absences can significantly affect student learning.

The law requires students to attend school up to the age of 16 years, or the completion of year 10, unless there is an acceptable reason for not attending. In addition, attendance every day is a condition of enrolment for all students at a Catholic school in the Diocese of Cairns, regardless of age.

Acceptable reasons for non-attendance include illness or significant medical treatment, participating in a school or regional sporting or other event, or attendance at a significant family event such as a funeral.

Unacceptable reasons include birthdays, shopping, visiting family and friends, sleeping in, looking after other children, minor medical checkups or procedures, haircuts or leaving early for travel on school holidays (or returning late from school holidays). It is also unacceptable to miss school on a sports day or on a day when the school is celebrating a liturgy or Mass. These are normal school days and students and their parents must treat them as such – opting out is not an option.

The cumulative effect of ongoing lateness and absence is shown in the table below:

<b>If a student misses...</b>	<b>This equals...</b>	<b>Which equates to...</b>	<b>Over 13 years of schooling...</b>
<b>10 minutes a day</b>	33 hours a year	More than a week's school	More than 15 weeks
<b>20 minutes a day</b>	67 hours a year	More than 2 weeks' school	31 weeks
<b>1 day a fortnight</b>	20 days a year	4 weeks a year	Nearly 1.5 years
<b>1 day a week</b>	40 days a year	8 weeks a year	More than 2.5 years

We ask that parents and carers actively support our policy for 100% student attendance.

## Attachment 5

### Enforcement of Compulsory Schooling and Compulsory Participation Provisions at Non-State Schools. Process for Persistent Truancy or Absenteeism for Children of Compulsory School Age at Non-State Schools.

