

PURPOSE

In accordance with the *Education Training and Reform Act 2006 (Vic.)* (the Act) and the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic.)*, school attendance is compulsory for children and young people aged from 6 to 17 years unless an exemption from attendance has been granted (refer to **Appendix 1: Guidelines** for absence and *Exemption from School Attendance or Enrolment*, Department of Education and Training (DET), 2021).

Whilst ensuring student attendance at school is a legal obligation of parents/guardians, supporting students to attend school each day is the shared responsibility of all parents, students, the school and the wider community.

School attendance is important as it maximises life opportunities for children and young people by providing them with education and support networks. Positive engagement with schooling enhances academic and well-being outcomes for children and young people (*eXcel: Well-being for learning in Catholic school communities*). Attending school every school day for the whole day enables students to participate in the school's educational program as well as develop their social skills. Regular attendance enables the school to:

- Plan an organised educational program that is delivered in a consistent way and has continuity
- Facilitate shared student learning experiences that support the educational program
- Monitor student progress and adjust the educational program to meet student needs. All schools must maintain attendance records, identify and follow up unexplained absences and develop procedures to support and maintain student attendance.

SCOPE

Details and procedure within this policy are applicable to schools and students enrolled in a Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic School (MACS).

All schools must have documented procedures for monitoring school attendance (**see Appendix 1**).

Principals should contact the Regional General Manager for assistance in addressing complex attendance and exemption matters.

DEFINITIONS

Attendance

A student is considered to be in attendance at school when onsite and/or involved in an offsite curriculum program or other activity organised by the school (for example, an excursion or camp).

A student is also considered to be in attendance when the student is engaged in a re-engagement program or another school part time to make up full time attendance, and the schools or settings have agreed on the time fractions, allocation of Student Resource Package (or other funding) and the educational plan for the student (**Appendix 2: Guidelines for absence**).

Parent/guardian

Includes 'a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for the child including parental responsibility under the *Family Law Act 1975 (Cwlth)* and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

Unexplained or unapproved absences

A principal can approve or not approve any absence, based on the requirements of the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)*, an individual school policy or on a case-by-case basis. The Act provides some examples of what a reasonable excuse is for the purposes of explaining a school absence and includes, amongst other considerations:

- Illnesses and accidents
- Unforeseen and unexplained circumstances
- If the absence was a result of complying with another law
- The child is receiving distance education through a registered school
- The child is undertaking approved education, training and/or employment
- The child has been suspended or negotiated transfer/expelled
- The child is attending or observing a religious event or obligation.

Unexplained Absence

A principal will record an absence as 'unexplained' if no explanation about the absence is given to the school by the parent or carer of the student.

If the parent/guardian does contact the school to provide an explanation on the day of the student absence, the school must attempt to contact the parent or legal guardian either by phone or in writing and seek clarification for the absence.

If no contact can be made with the parent or other carers of the child within ten days, the absence will be recorded as an unexplained absence, and a note will be made in the child's file. A parent or legal guardian can contact the principal at any time after the recorded absence to provide an explanation.

Unapproved Absence

In general, a principal may record an absence as 'unapproved' when no reasonable explanation has been given for the student's absence. If a reason is given for a student absence is not approved by the principal, then the school will notify the parent or legal guardian in writing.

Exemption

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)* allows exemptions from school attendance and enrolment to be granted in certain circumstances, where the student:

- Is a child who turns 6 (compulsory school age) while attending kindergarten
- Will be participating in approved education or training, or employment, or both, on a full-time basis
- Is employed or seeking employment during school hours in the entertainment industry

An exemption from school attendance and enrolment may also be granted where leaving school is in the best interests of the student.

All applications for exemptions are considered on a case by case basis, with the student's best interests as the guiding principle for decision-making. In making a decision, the potential benefits or negative consequences of granting the exemption to the student's educational progress, well-being and development are also considered. A student must continue attending school until an exemption is granted.

Note: No exemption is required if a student is not of compulsory school age (6 to 17 years of age).

Exemptions, including written approval for student attendance and enrolment to be exempt or reduced to less than full time, can only be authorised by the Regional General Manager in conjunction with the school principal.

- Refer to the Department of Education and Training (DET) [Exemption from school attendance and enrolment](#) guidance for further information.

School Attendance Officers

In the context of attendance, DET School Attendance Officers are empowered through the Act to issue School Attendance Notices, School Enrolment Notices and Infringement Notices. Refer to DET [Infringement notices](#) guidance for further information.

PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES

Responsibilities for school attendance

Parent/guardian

Parents/guardians must enrol a child of compulsory school age at a registered school and ensure the child attends at all times when the school is open for instruction unless an exemption from attendance has been granted. For absences where there is no exemption in place, the parent/guardian must promptly provide an explanation on each occasion to the school.

Students

Students are expected to attend the school in which they are enrolled during normal school hours every day of the term unless there is an approved exemption from school attendance for the student or the student is registered for home-schooling and has partial enrolment.

Principal

The Principal must ensure:

- Daily attendance of each student enrolled at the school is recorded at least twice a day for every class in secondary schools
- Any absences of a student from school, including classes, are identified
- Reasons for each student's absence are provided and recorded in writing
- Explanations for absences that are provided are a reasonable excuse for the purposes of their responsibilities under the act
- Follow up any unexplained absences of a student by **contacting the parent/guardian of the student as soon as practicable on the same day**
- Parents/guardians are notified promptly regarding a student's unsatisfactory school or class attendance. If upon being notified of their child's absence or contacted to seek an explanation, a parent reports that the child was not living with them on that day, the school should ensure they notify another parent who was responsible for ensuring the child attended school on the relevant day(s)
- If contact cannot be made with the parent, contact should be made with the emergency contact/s nominated on the student's file held by the school
- Information regarding a student's unsatisfactory attendance at school or classes is recorded on their student file
- Parents/guardians are informed of their responsibilities around attendance, and initiatives aimed at promoting parental awareness of the importance of children attending school every day are implemented
- Attendance improvement strategies, interventions and levels of adjustment are implemented where the absence is having a significant impact on a student's educational achievement and development, including an attendance student support group, personalised learning plan, student absence learning plan and return to school plan
- Strategies for supporting the attendance of students in out-of-home care, experiencing homelessness, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) families, overseas students, students with disabilities, students with cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds

- and newly arrived families are implemented
- MACS is to be advised prior to a referral to a DET school attendance officer when a student has been absent from school on at least five full days in the previous 12 months without a reasonable excuse for absence
 - Refer to the **'every day counts'** flowchart on the CEVN webpage: <https://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au/melb/student-support/attendance>)
 - Referral processes are implemented to child first or child protection, MACS and the school attendance officer where required.
 - Refer to child protection and child safe standards (PROTECT)

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Procedures for monitoring school attendance

Appendix 2: Guidelines for absences

REFERENCES

- Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2021. School attendance guidelines
- Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2020. Exemption from School Attendance or Enrolment
- Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2020. Seven attendance improvement strategies
- Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic.)
- Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic.)

RESOURCES

Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2021. Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines **'Everyday Counts'** on the CEVN webpage: <https://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au/Melb/Student-Support/Attendance>

RELATED MACS POLICIES

- Enrolment Policy
- Student Behaviour Policy and related CECV Positive Behaviour Guidelines
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Duty of Care Policy

APPENDIX 1: PROCEDURES FOR MONITORING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

1. Notification of an absence can be made by texting, PAM, or calling 9795 8100
2. Parents, guardians and/or carers must notify the school by 9.00 am of the reason for any absence from school on the day of absence.
3. Where the reason for absence is known, the reason is recorded by relevant staff member and the teachers are notified of the absence and reason for this.
4. Attendance at the school is checked each lesson] by recording attendance.
5. The attendance reports are accessed by relevant staff to follow up students who are absent without explanation.
6. If a student is absent without explanation, the school will contact the parent/guardian for an explanation as soon as possible on the day of absence by relevant staff.
7. Information about the number of days of absence are recorded on student files and on student reports by relevant staff
8. Where the rate of absenteeism is of concern, the school will follow up with the parents/guardians by relevant staff.
9. Parents are required to provide up-to-date contact details and notify the school of any changes to contact details or address

MANAGEMENT OF NON-ATTENDANCE - IMMEDIATE

College absenteeism is monitored closely to identify students who are failing to attend school as required. To avoid suspicion, parents/guardians are required to contact the College before College commencement time to explain their child's absence, late arrival or request for early leave. All teachers are required to take a roll call in every class. The class teacher records any student absences.

Where a student is absent, the College reviews absentee notifications to identify any absent students where no notification of absence has been received from a parent/guardian.

Where a student is absent without explanation and cannot be located by 9.30am parents/guardians are forwarded a text message to their mobile phones in the following terms:

SMS Message sent out daily by the office at 9.30am - wording '(Student Name) in (Pastoral group) has been absent today. Please respond via SMS, 03 9795 8100, or studentservices@nazareth.vic.edu.au

Where parents repeatedly fail to notify the College of legitimate absences, the College will write a letter to parents requesting that they comply with the College's notification procedures.

In cases of serious non-compliance, the College may request that the parents/guardians attend a meeting with the Principal to discuss the importance of parental notifications in ensuring the safety of all students.

PROCEDURE FOR LATE ARRIVAL AT SCHOOL

1. Notification of lateness can be made by texting, PAM, or calling 9795 8100
2. Where the reason for lateness is known, the reason is recorded.
3. When the student comes to school, they are to sign in at the kiosk or present to Student Services and their note and make their way to the appropriate class
4. If a student is continually late, this will be followed up by relevant staff. The school may also follow up with the parents/guardians

PROCEDURE FOR LEAVING SCHOOL BEFORE THE NORMAL DEPARTURE TIME

1. Students should have a signed note from the parent which they show their Pastoral Teacher or Head of House and have it signed by them.
2. At the time that they are supposed to leave, they show the note to the relevant subject teacher, come to Student services, show the note and then they can sign out
3. If they don't have a note, the parent/ guardian should come into Student Services and the student will be called from class and then the student can sign out.
4. Parents can also enter that students are leaving early on PAM

PROCEDURES FOR COMMUNICATING ABOUT ATTENDANCE EXPECTATIONS TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Following Up Unexplained Student Absences

Nazareth College has implemented the following systems and procedures to follow up unexplained absences from the College:

- Where an absence has not been explained by 9.30 am, an SMS Text message is forwarded to the student's parents, notifying them of the absence and requesting that they immediately contact the College. This notification is made on the same day, as soon as practicable, including for post-compulsory aged students.
- Where the absence remains unexplained, the matter will be reported to the Wellbeing Team for investigation and follow up. The requirement to follow up unexplained absences is included in the Role Descriptions of Student Services Officer (Absences) and the Directors of Wellbeing.
- All information in relation to unsatisfactory attendance is recorded on students' files, and information with respect to attendance is provided in each student's school report.

Notification of Parents and Guardians of Unsatisfactory Attendance

Nazareth College has implemented the following systems and procedures in order to notify parents and guardians of unsatisfactory attendance:

- Where a student is unsatisfactorily absent from College, the College will contact the parents directly to seek an explanation and to remind parents of their child's obligation to attend school.
- Where parents repeatedly fail to inform the College of absences, the Pastoral Teacher will contact the parents directly seeking an explanation and remind them of their obligation to report absences.

Records of the Register of Daily Attendance

The Register is retained indefinitely, and copies of information in the Register are stored off-site at regular intervals. The Register is kept for each calendar year and shows the daily attendance checks and any reasons for absence

ATTENDANCE RECORD KEEPING

SOURCE OF OBLIGATION

The Victorian Registration Standards (Sch 4 Cl 10) (CECV Guidelines Ref 4.9) require that Nazareth College must make provisions to:

- Monitor, the daily attendance of each student, enrolled at the College;
- Identify any absences of a student from College, including classes;
- Follow up any unexplained absences of a student from the College or classes;
- Notify any parent or guardian regarding a student's unsatisfactory College or class attendance;
- Record information regarding a student's unsatisfactory attendance on their student file.

The Victorian Registration Standards (Sch 4 Cl 11) (CECV Guidelines Ref 4.10) require that Nazareth College maintain a student Attendance Register in which the attendance at the

College of any child of compulsory school age is noted at least twice on each school day, and any reasons given or apparent for the absence of the child from the College is noted.

Daily Attendance Register

Nazareth College keeps a register of the daily attendance of all students at the College in print / electronic form derived from our LMS - SIMON. The Register of daily attendance records the following information for each student:

- Daily attendance;
- Absences;
- Reason for absence;
- Documentation to substantiate the reason for absence;
- Attendance is checked five times a day at 8.40 am (during Pastoral Group and at the start of each class).

Monitoring Daily Attendance

Nazareth College has implemented the following systems and procedures in order to monitor the daily attendance of students and identify absences from College or class:

- Parents are responsible for ensuring that they notify the College to explain the absence of their children on any school day. Notification may be provided via email, SMS or by telephoning the College and should be made prior to the start of College.
- Subject teachers take the class roll promptly at the commencement of the school day and at the start of each class (4 periods per day).

All absences are recorded absences using LMS - SIMON. They are then notified to Student Services Officer (Absences) and cross-checked against the absentee notifications that have been provided to the College that day.

Management of Non-Attendance - Parental Notifications

Where parents repeatedly fail to notify the College of legitimate absences, the College will write a letter to parents requesting that they comply with the College's notification procedures. In cases of serious non-compliance, the College may request that the parents/guardians attend a meeting with the Principal to discuss the importance of parental notifications in ensuring the safety of all students.

ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

Nazareth College adopts several prevention strategies in line with the Victorian Government's Everyday Counts Program. The following Table provides strategies proven to reduce student absence and lateness. Nazareth College adopts the strategies that are appropriate for the College's environment.

Everyday Counts - Strategies to reduce student absence and lateness

Culture	Information	Monitoring	Rewards/ Incentives	Other targeted activities
Creating an environment where children want to be demand to be on time.	Informing parents about current research that links attendance with student achievement levels and reporting absence rates through the school newsletter and comparing them with state norms.	Ensuring parents are called on the day by the to check on the well-being of absent students.	Providing a term award, for example, a sausage sizzle or extra sports activity, for all students who have attended every day.	Introducing a walking school bus.

Showing concern for absent students - ask them where they were, and supply work missed.	Providing information to parents on the sequential nature of lessons and learning and how their child's learning can be severely disrupted if they miss crucial learning points.	Insisting on explanatory notes to explain all absences.	Presenting weekly 'class on-time' awards at assembly.	Offering a breakfast program, which provides an organised start to the day for many students and engages parents who stay on for a tea/coffee.
Creating a school culture that views being punctual to school as important.	Providing regular flyers with current research on the importance of being at school and on time every day.	Using late and absence data to identify and target students.	Providing a special excursion once a year for the top 20 per cent of attendees for the year.	Arranging special interest lunchtime activities each day to target students with high absence rates.
Linking student attendance to individual teachers for appraisal and review.	Making presentations at information evenings for prospective Prep parents to ensure they clearly understand the importance of being at school and on time every day.	Acting in response to observed trends, for example if it has been identified that absences are high on Fridays, scheduling special events for this day of the week.	Introducing attendance prizes each term, for example basketballs, footballs and tennis racquets, for 100 per cent attendance for the term and a smaller prize (cinema ticket) for 90 per cent or greater attendance.	Implementing an Early Morning Fitness Club for targeted students from 8:10 am –8:35 am. Maintaining records of student attendance at the fitness club and hosting a pancake breakfast reward for high attendance.
Promoting to parents that the school has the capacity to care for students while at school.	Weekly profiling of attendance with a regular reminder in the school newsletter that attendance is not optional but compulsory.	Following up ongoing lateness.	Issuing raffle tickets to students with good attendance. At the end of each week, the raffle for a showbag is drawn.	Working closely with families and support agencies when families are suffering hardships or are in crisis to ensure that students are at school in an environment that has order and routine.
Ensuring that all classrooms are motivating and stimulating and have high interest areas.	Making announcements at weekly assemblies about the need to be on time at school every day.	Continuing to phone parents of high-absence students for each absence.	Organising a friendly competition between rooms or sections of the school based on attendance for the term, for example having a free BBQ sausage sizzle lunch for the 'winning' group.	
The Principal and Assistant Principal undertaking yard duty every day to provide a consistent approach to dealing with playground problems.	Emphasising compulsory school attendance requirements and that Monday-Friday during term are school days, not days that students may go to school.	Standing at the front gate and handing out late passes to parents.	Introducing attendance prizes each month (certificates and some fun stationery) that are awarded for full attendance.	
	Letting parents know that some school activities, such as working in groups, are rendered ineffective by the absence of one or more group members.	Writing to all parents at the end of each term informing them how many days their child has been away.	Sending reminders to students at the end of each school day about the exciting things they can expect to happen at school the following day.	
	Publishing attendance and 'late' figures as well as targets in the school newsletter.	Sending home information for unexplained absences.		

	Emphasising that teachers plan sequential lessons, which can be severely disrupted by regular non-attendance.			
--	---	--	--	--

Staff Responsibilities for Student Engagement

Teaching Staff are expected to:

- Encourage all students in the class to take responsibility for each other's safety;
- Model and develop a culture of trust;
- Model effective timekeeping practices, for example returning work promptly, arriving and finishing classes on time;
- Communicate and promote the College's attendance expectations regarding the importance of attending school every day and arriving on time and discussing the College's Attendance Policy (P6.5);
- Talking positively about regular attendance;
- Ensure that parents are contacted to follow up student attendance - use agreed protocols for parent contact;
- Raise concerns about non-attendance with the student's Head of House;
- Provide for long-term absences by organising meaningful work as required;
- Ensure accurate records are kept of student attendance.

SIGNAGE

Everyday Counts poster displayed throughout the College.

IMPLEMENTATION

This is implemented through a combination of:

- Development and implementation of a whole College strategy to encourage regular attendance and to reduce non-attendance;
- Implement strategies to address specific needs of each individual student, according to their reasons for non-attendance;
- Development and promotion of positive relationships within the College by implementing programs that develop social and emotional skills, peer tutoring, mentoring and anti-bullying strategies;
- Establishing positive Home-College relationships to assist parents/guardians to support their child's attendance;
- Effective incident notification procedures;
- Effective communication procedures;
- Effective record keeping procedures; and
- Initiation of corrective actions where necessary.

APPENDIX 2: GUIDELINES FOR ABSENCES

A student who is participating in one of the following activities must be recorded as not physically present at the school site but **will not be considered absent from school**:

School activity

A student will not be considered absent when they are participating in an authorised activity for school purposes. The activity may be off school grounds. Activities may include students performing in the school choir, band or dance group, students participating in a youth parliament or council or a student undertaking community service.

Excursion

A student will not be considered absent when they are participating in an excursion which occurs outside the school grounds and is conducted, organised and/or approved by the school. Excursions could include part-day, day or multi-day class visits to venues outside the school or school camps.

Off campus activity

A student will not be considered absent if they are participating in an authorised activity that is away from the school campus. These activities may include flexible arrangements, attendance at a TAFE or other training provider course, or participation in a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship. These activities will be regular and ongoing in nature.

Natural Disaster

A student will not be considered absent if they are unable to attend school due to an extreme weather event or other natural disaster. This code may be used whether the student is continuing with schoolwork while absent from school and may be used for full or part-day absences.

Sport

A student will not be considered absent when they are representing their school, district, region, state or country at a sporting event approved by the school

Work experience

A student will not be considered absent when they are participating in a work experience program approved and organised by the school. Work experience programs are available for students 14 years or older. Schools must ensure the appropriate work experience agreements have been completed before students undertake work experience.

The following circumstances 'absences' will be considered reasonable where an excuse has been given:

Illness

It is reasonable that a child may be absent from school when they are genuinely too ill to attend. On any single day of absence due to illness, or within two days of the student's return to school, a parent should provide the school with an explanation for the absence, in line with the schools agreed processes for notifying of student absence. This may take the form of a written explanation note containing the student's name, date/s of absences and reason for absence, a verbal explanation through either a phone call or visit to the school, or a medical certificate.

If a child who is prevented by illness from attending school for a period longer than 10 consecutive school days, the Regional General Manager (or delegate) has the power to grant an exemption from compliance with the requirements of compulsory schooling or compulsory participation.

Infectious or contagious disease

It is a reasonable excuse for a child to be absent from school if the child is, or is a member of a class of persons, that is subject to a direction or order given about an infectious or contagious disease or condition.

Medical or dental treatments or procedures

It is reasonable for a student to be absent to attend a medical or dental appointment. This should be documented through the provision of a written or verbal explanation from a parent.

Sport

Principals should use their professional judgement to determine if it is reasonable for a student to be absent from school to participate in a sporting event where they are not representing their school, district, region, state or nation, taking into consideration the type of event and the organising sporting body.

Suspension a suspension is a reasonable excuse for absence and the following applies:

- if a student is **suspended for five days or less** the school's principal must take reasonable steps to ensure the student is given schoolwork to complete during the suspension
- if a student is suspended for **more than five days**, the school principal must arrange for the student's access to an educational program that allows the student to continue with their educational program during the suspension
- if the student is **suspended with a recommendation for negotiated transfer or expulsion**, the school principal must arrange for the student's access to an educational program that allows the student to continue with their educational program during the suspension.

Apprentice or trainee through Vocational Education Training/VCAL program

It is a reasonable excuse for a child to be absent from school if an arrangement has been made through the VET/VCAL program

Funeral

Attendance at a funeral or to attend to Sorry Business or Sorry meetings may be considered as a reasonable excuse for absence. Parents should be encouraged to ensure their child misses as little school as possible. There may also be circumstances where a child is kept out of school due to grief of a close family member. In such circumstances, the school should work with families to encourage them to have the child attend school to maintain a sense of normalcy. These situations should be handled with respect and sensitivity and should be underpinned by the interests of the child.

Legal

It is a reasonable excuse for a child to be absent from school where the child is required to attend court or fulfil other legal requirements.

Holiday

Parents should be encouraged to plan holidays for students during gazetted school holiday periods and pupil free days. Principals should use their professional judgement in determining whether a holiday is a reasonable excuse for a student absence, taking into consideration family circumstances, distance to be travelled, length and frequency of holidays. A principal has the delegated power to grant an exemption from the requirement of attendance at a state school where the exemption will apply for less than one school year.

The following circumstances will be considered **absences for which there is NOT a reasonable excuse given:**

Unexplained absence

When no explanation for a student absence has been offered to the school by the parent, or the student if they are living independently.

Leisure activities

Undertaking a leisure activity such as shopping, visiting friends and relatives, fishing or camping, is not considered a reasonable explanation for an absence from school.

Any other reason for absence

The principal should use their professional judgement in determining whether other reasons given by the parent, or the student if they are living independently, are reasonable explanations for a student's absence. If the reason given is not a reasonable excuse the principal should document the decision and record the student as absent.