

Attendance, Absenteeism and School Refusal Policy



St Columba
College

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Policy Title	Attendance, Absenteeism and School Refusal Policy
Ratified by Leadership Team	October 2021
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Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to articulate the policy position of St Columba College in relation to attendance, absenteeism and school refusal of students.

Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all students enrolled at St Columba College.

Rationale

At St Columba College we believe that students need to attend school regularly and participate fully in order to gain maximum benefit from schooling. Regular and on-time attendance enables students to access a comprehensive education, enabling them to reach their full potential.

Student attendance is the responsibility of the whole College community. In South Australia the Education Act requires that children between the ages of 6-17 years are required to be in full-time attendance at a government or registered non-government school unless they are receiving approved home tuition, correspondence education or have been granted an exemption by the Education Department.

Monitoring school attendance enables the identification of students requiring support, as does the early implementation of intervention strategies. All school staff and parents/caregivers have a responsibility for the detection and assessment of the causes of school non-attendance. Research shows that students who are absent for more than 10 days per year are disadvantaged both educationally and socially. Some of the effects experienced by these students include:

- Gaps in knowledge and understanding, resulting in discrepancies in learning and fundamental concepts.
- Lack of continuity and familiarity resulting in students feeling less secure within the school environment.
- Loss of opportunities for interaction with peers which improves social, emotional and cognitive development.
- Missed opportunity to become familiar with societal standards, such as class rules and behavioural norms.
- Lack of understanding of the importance in attendance and punctuality.
- Inability to maintain friendships, resulting in isolation and possibly leading to being bullied/victimised.
- Loss of self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Increased likelihood of leaving school early.
- Decline in mental health, particularly for students experiencing school refusal.

Role of the Principal

- Develop clear procedures in relation to attendance records and monitoring students who are absent from school.
- Coordinate and support the Heads of School to monitor and support students at risk of not attending school regularly.
- Support families to ensure that all students attend school regularly.

Role of Parent and Caregiver

Parents/caregivers have a responsibility to ensure their children attend school and are punctual every day. They have the responsibility to communicate with the College the reasons for their child's absence.

- Parents/caregivers are asked to notify the school of any absence before 8:50am on the day of the absence.
- Students should arrive at school by 8:35am and be on time to start the day. When a student is late for school (after 8:40am) it is a requirement that the student reports to Student Services to sign in. Junior School students need a parent to accompany them.
- Students are required to attend school unless reasonable and valid grounds exist for them to be absent which include:
 - Sickness
 - Danger of being affected by an infectious or contagious disease
 - Temporary or permanent infirmity
 - Events of significance, such as births, deaths and cultural events
 - Attending a school-organised activity, for example, excursion, camp, work experience
 - Unavoidable and sufficient cause.
- Parents/Caregivers must provide the school with an appropriate explanation for the student's non-attendance. A diary note, letter, phone call or medical certificate is required for each day of absence. A written explanation is required after 3 days' absence. Parents are asked to phone the College Absentee Line by 8:50am if a student will be absent.
- If students are missing from school for more than 10 consecutive days (due to illness or holidays) parents are required to apply for a temporary exemption from compulsory schooling. These application forms are available from Student Services and are to be completed and returned to the College to be processed.

College Procedures for Absenteeism

- All student attendances/absences are recorded in the morning and afternoon in the Junior School by class teachers, and for each lesson in the Middle and Senior School by subject teachers.
- At approximately 9:30am once all absentee notifications have been processed Student Services contact parents of students with unexplained absentees via SMS.
- Unexplained lateness or absenteeism will be investigated by a follow up phone call and/or sending an email or letter home to families requiring an explanation of the absence.
- Unacceptable absenteeism will be addressed in the first instance by the Class teacher /House Tutor when a student is absent for 5 days in a term (90% attendance).
- Continued or high-level absenteeism will be followed up by Heads of School. Chronic absenteeism, as defined by the Education Act, is considered 10 days per term (80% attendance). Meeting with families will involve a documented school attendance plan. Reporting to Child Protection and DECD Attendance Officer will occur at this stage.
- The Principal will meet and review attendance plans with families where improvement has not occurred. Reporting to agencies will take place.
- Student attendance, absence and late figures will appear on a student's College Semester report.

Role of Teacher

- Maintain electronic record of student attendance and absenteeism each day.
- Monitor student absenteeism and contact parents/caregivers when a concerning pattern arises.
- Consult with Head of School for concerning absenteeism that remain unresolved or ongoing.

Role of Head of School and Social Worker

- Oversee and analyse attendance and absenteeism data.
- Support teachers to monitor and support students not attending school.
- Support families to ensure all students attend school regularly.
- Respond directly to families for a student's chronic absenteeism from school.
- Oversee the use of a case development approach to school refusal.

Assistance

- Parents who have concerns about their child attending school should immediately contact the College to seek help. The following staff members can assist:
 - Class Teacher / Kinship Teacher
 - Social Worker
 - Head of School
 - Director of Wellbeing
 - Deputy Principal
 - College Principal

Resources

- Attendance Matters at St Columba College brochure.
- Further information can be accessed from the following resources:
 - Parent Hotline: 1300 364 100
 - Parenting and Child Health: <http://www.cyh.com>
 - Child Adolescent Mental Health Services - Northern Region: 8252 0133
 - Centacare: <http://www.centacare.org.au>
 - Headspace: Understanding School Refusal <https://headspace.org.au/>

Flowchart: Procedures - Attendance and Absenteeism

